

Connecting To His Oneness

Going through high school in Israel, we are expected to learn a lot of Torah. We take many Torah Bagruyot, have chavrutot in our free time, and engage in peulot on NCSY Israel Shabbatonim. We spend hours of our lives delving into all the different and diverse outlooks in Judaism. One of the few things that everyone seems to agree on is that learning Torah is a very crucial part. Why is learning Torah so important?

A profound answer lies within a special-well known text from this week's parsha. SH'MA YISRAEL... "Hear oh Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem is one." This isn't just a statement championing monotheism over polytheism, but is also declaring our belief in the philosophical concept of the singularity of God. God is One that cannot be split, that is incomparable and unlike any other single thing in existence, which are all made up of smaller particles. God is truly one, He is infinite, and ultimately out of our ability to really comprehend.

The very next pasuk states

V'AHAVTA... We must love this single God with all of our heart and soul. Isn't it fascinating that this pasuk follows the declaration of 'Hashem echad'? Shouldn't it come in a different context? Perhaps after telling us that Hashem is our father or that he took us out of Egypt? How in the world are we supposed to love this 'Hashem echad', an abstract philosophical concept that one can't even really define?

The midrash (Sifri D'varim 6) suggests that the very next pesukim answer this question.

"All of which I am commanding you today should be on your heart. And you should teach it to your children and speak it in your households, while you travel, in the mornings and evenings..."

God gave us a way to peer into his "soul". Through learning and internalizing God's Torah we have a chance to understand just a bit about Him. We can start to comprehend the ways He sees and relates to the world, how He defines good and bad. This understanding leads to connection, and through this connection we can ultimately come to love this philosophical concept we call God.

By Teens, for Teens

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Preparing For The Test

At the very beginning of this week's Parsha, Moshe recounts the story when he prayed to Hashem to let him enter Israel. Interestingly, while explaining why Hashem said no, Moshe blames Bnei Yisrael in a way that throws them under the bus. "And Hashem became angry at me because of you and he did not listen to me." This isn't a normal characteristic of Moshe Rabbeinu. Why is he blaming them? It was Moshe's sin, and even if they had a part in it, is it really appropriate to place the blame on others? Shouldn't he be encouraging them as they are about to enter into Eretz Yisrael?

Perhaps we can suggest that we must translate L'MAANCHEM literally; that it means "for your sake". Moshe was actually telling the people that Hashem didn't let him in for Bnei Yisrael's benefit.

To understand this we can use an analogy, a teacher only helps you before the test, but the actual test needs to be done alone. A true teacher prepares his students with the skills to pass the test. That is why

Moshe couldn't join Bnei Yisrael entering the land. It was their time to shine and prove to God that they can pass the test of entering Eretz Yisrael.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank NCSY for the great times and giving me the skills to make it on my own in the world - and pass my own tests!