



JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES

THE SECRET POWER OF JEWISH UNITY

SOURCE AND DISCUSSION SHEET



Every creation begins with a vision and a purpose. So too, when God created the world, there was a purpose, and it was encoded into the first line of the Torah:

SOURCE 1: BEREISHIS (1:1) AND RASHI COMMENTARY IN THE BEGINNING - "WITH PURPOSE"

In the beginning, God created Heaven and Earth..... בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

The Commentator Rashi explains the term **"In the beginning" – b'raishis** – literally, **"with (two things called) firsts" in mind**. (Both the Jewish People and Torah are called raishis – firsts - in the Scripture.)

Based upon Rashi's commentary, the verse could be read: "With Torah and Israel in mind, God created heaven and earth." That was the purpose and the plan, to find a People that would be fitting to accept the Torah and use it (e.g. The Chosen People), to unite Heaven and Earth together.

Consider the following source driving this connection home on a deeper level:

SOURCE 2: ZOHAR PARSHAS ACHAREI MOS (73A) UNITY OF GOD, TORAH, AND ISRAEL

God, Torah, and Israel are all One. קוֹדֶשׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא, אוֹרֵייתָא, וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל חַד

Question: What do you think it means that God, Torah, and Israel are all One?

God created the world as an act of kindness (love) to share His Goodness with the world. The vehicles for this expression are the **Torah, which is One with "God's Mind,"** while **Israel is unified with God through our souls**. To bring the Oneness of God to the world is the job of the Chosen People.

Each of these vehicles, Torah and the Jewish People, reflect God's essence:

SOURCE 3: DEVARIM (6:4) THE SHEMA – "GOD'S BUSINESS CARD"

Hear Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד

If a Jew knows one Hebrew phrase, it is likely to be the Shema. It's our national anthem, our credo, and expresses our purpose in the world both individually and as a People.

Question: What do you think the Shema means, and why is it so important?

The Torah was introduced in a world of paganism where there were multiple gods and opposing forcing of good and evil. So, on a simple level, the Shema comes to dispel this notion.

Yet, a deeper meaning is that God, unlike everything else in this finite world of parts (minimum of two), is uniquely ONE – infinite and perfect, not subject to any of the inherent limitations of our physical world.

The implications of this are staggering. **A perfect being, without limitations, that creates a world, does so as an act of unconditional love!** So, the creation of this world was the original love story, the gift of the Creator to His Creation, publicized to the world through the Jewish People!

The Shema is the mantra that God is One, perfect and imbedded within everything and in everyone in this world.

If you look at the Shema, in every Torah and in every Siddur, there are two large letters, an **ו** and a **י**. (See the bold letters in Source 3). **וי** in Hebrew spells witness.

Question: Why do you think the word “witness” is coded into the Shema?

The Jewish People are tasked with bearing witness to the Unity of God within our lives and through our Torah – to show the world that underneath the surface, Godliness is expressed everywhere and in everything.

WHY WE NEED TO KNOW THAT GOD IS ONE?

This idea of bearing witness to the Unity of God seems very philosophical. What does Oneness mean to us in our lives?

All human beings pursue pleasure, or at least their self-interest (including avoiding pain), every moment of their lives.

List as many pleasures as you can in life, from ordinary to deeper pleasure in the next minute:

Question: Go over your list and see if you can determine a common denominator that threads through most, if not all, of the pleasures on the list? What is it?

Some common pleasures probably on your list include, love, intimacy, food, music, sports, the arts, nature, ideas, spirituality, though there are many more.

If you look at the common denominator in all these things, most if not all come back to unity – Oneness!

Love and peace bring people/nations together as one. Music, nature, and art all express the exquisite harmony (Oneness) of diversity, as well as the great taste of food - for example, as in a delicious recipe combining varied ingredients in perfect combination. The pleasure that one experiences in meaning, ideas, and morality is also rooted in unity, whether expressed in the coherence of an idea (within the context of the whole), or the absolute truth which gives rise to morality.

Not only are pleasures an experience of Oneness, but success is based upon it as well! Synergies in business, collaboration of all sorts in life, the unity of championship sports teams all attest to the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. Unity is the jet Stream of life. **Pursue it and you will find pleasure, happiness, and success!**

We are all seeking pleasure, happiness, and success in life.

Question: What are we really seeking?

If you answered Oneness, you are half right! 😊

What all human beings are really seeking is God, the source of all pleasure and the embodiment of ONENESS!

You see, pleasure-seeking is really a Jewish occupation – a game of hide and go-seek meant to discover God. But to sort out the various pleasures in life and how to balance them to achieve this goal, one needs a user's manual. In essence, that is the function of the Torah.

JEWISH UNITY – THE FINAL STEP:

The Jewish People are the conduit to bring Oneness and God to the world, and must first be unified ourselves to achieve this mission.

Consider the preamble to the Giving of the Torah as described in the Chumash:

SOURCE 4: PARSHAS YISRO (19:2) - ISRAEL CAMPED AT THE MOUNTAIN

Having journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped (plural) in the wilderness. **Israel encamped (singular) there in front of the mountain.** (The singular usage prompts Rashi to make the following famous comment below)

וַיִּסְעוּ מִרְפִּידִים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְבַּר סִינִי
וַיַּחֲנּוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר וַיִּחַן שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל
נֶגֶד הָהָר:

Commentator Rashi K'ish echad, b'lev echad...one man with one heart. כָּאִישׁ אֶחָד בְּלֵב אֶחָד.

This unity was the precondition for God to give the Jewish People the Torah.

And not only was this the basis for our receiving the Torah, but it is also the reason why we succeed, flourish, and are protected from our enemies throughout our history:

SOURCE 5: GOD PROTECTS AND SAVES WHEN WE ARE ONE - PURIM (3:8 AND 4:16)

Haman said to King Achashverosh, "There is one People **scattered and separate** among the Nations...It is not in the interest of the King to tolerate them."

וַיֹּאמֶר הָמָן לְמֶלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ יֵשֶׁנּוּ עַם־אֶחָד
מִפְּזָר וּמִפֶּרֶד בֵּין הָעַמִּים

Esther tells Mordechai, "**Go and assemble all the Jews** found in Shushan to fast on my behalf..."

לֵךְ כְּנוֹס אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוּשָׁן
וְצוּמוּ עָלַי

The Rabbis explain that Haman's opening to destroy us was that we were disunited – scattered and separate – and the precursor to our salvation was unity, "Go and assemble ALL the Jews."

Every Purim we give gifts to one another and the poor to increase friendship, and to remind ourselves that Jewish Unity is our secret weapon.

Has there ever been a time in our lives when this is more apparent and necessary than post-October 7?

It is no accident that our enemies attacked us when we were so divided as a people in the year leading up to the massacre, and since then, we have seen an unprecedented wave of Jewish Unity.

Jewish Unity goes beyond caring and being nice to one another. It also means each Jew doing their part to bring God into the world.

There is a well-known statement from the book of Kabbalah, the Zohar, that there are 600,000 letters in the Torah parallel to the 600,000 Jews (souls) that received the Torah at Mt. Sinai.

SOURCE 6: MIGALEH AMUKOT YISROEL (SECTION 186) - THERE ARE 600,000 LETTERS IN THE TORAH.

The word **Yisroel** - יִשְׂרָאֵל is an acronym for, **Y**esh **S**hishim **R**ibo **O**sios **L**aTorah -- There are 600,000 letters in the Torah.

This means that every Jew, all members of the Nation of Israel, has a letter in the Torah corresponding to them.

Question: What do you think that means?

Each one of us has a part to play in bringing about the Destiny of the Jewish People, to add our letter to the Torah. Part of Oneness is Completeness, and the Jewish People aren't complete until we are all on the same page, "one man with one heart," adding our letters to the Torah.

God is waiting for all of us to step up and bring our unique talents and wisdom to strengthen and the Jewish People and bond us together and to our Heritage.

Consider the following analogy:

We are like 600,000 jigsaw puzzle pieces. Only if each piece is present and whole (with its full contribution), can the image of the puzzle emerge. And in this case the image that emerges is that of God Himself.

This is what it means to be a **light onto the Nations** (Isaiah 42:6) -- reflecting the light of God into this world.

Only through Jewish Unity can we achieve this mission.

Question: What personal steps can I take to add my own piece to the jigsaw puzzle of the Jewish People?

Question: How can I share this gift and this mission with other Jews?

Questions: What can I do personally to strengthen Jewish Unity and what can we do as a group to bring Jews together?