

Mussar HaTorah

ת"סב

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Matos – Masei

“THE TORAH SCHOLARS DID NOT KNOW ME...” (YIRMIYAH 2:8)

**They did not make
Hashem's worship known
to others**

THIS WEEK'S *haftorah* is the second of a series of three “*haftoros* of misfortune” which we read during the three weeks, our period of national mourning for the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. In the opening verses, Yirmiyahu bemoans the state of affairs in which he finds the Jewish nation. He tells us that the *kohanim* did not teach the nation about Hashem and even the Torah scholars did not “know Hashem.” R. Yonason ben Uziel translates the last phrase to mean that the teachers of Torah no longer taught the Jewish people – they did not make Hashem's worship known to others. The straightforward translation of the words states that these teachers, these Torah scholars, did not know Hashem. The Targum apparently re-interprets these words, so that they don't refer to the scholars “knowing Hashem,” but rather to their making Hashem known to others. The two concepts seem separate and different – wouldn't the Targum be taking great liberties with, and even distorting the plain meaning of the verse by changing the translation from “knowing” to “making known?”

**We will try our best to
share that precious
treasure**

R. Yonason ben Uziel had a profound understanding of what it means for a Jew to have that close relationship with Hashem described as “knowing” Him. In our limited perspective, we feel that a Jew's personal observance, his Torah study and general *mitzvah* performance, define his religiosity and his relationship with Hashem. Whether or not he tries to teach others, and influence them towards serving Hashem, is an unrelated, extra bonus area, and does not affect his basic relationship with Hashem. R. Yonason ben Uziel is teaching us otherwise. If we truly love and fear Hashem, if we care about Him and his Torah, we will try our best to share that precious treasure with our fellow Jews. If we don't make that effort, something is lacking in our “knowing” Hashem – it's simply not genuine love and fear of Hashem.

We must realize that when Yirmiyahu prophesied, in the years leading up to the destruction, there were certainly many Jews who had strayed from Hashem. However, the Torah scholars of Yirmiyahu's time were on an amazingly high level. They scrupulously kept the Torah and its laws. They were righteous and learned. The only criticism leveled at them, according to the Targum, is the single flaw of not teaching the Torah to other Jews. Nevertheless, Hashem – through Yirmiyahu's prophecy – takes them to task, saying, “[they] did not know Me.” Picture a great scholar, a *tzaddik* who is meticulous in his personal observance of every other *mitzvah* and even diligent in his own Torah study – being held accountable for not knowing Hashem, merely for laxity in sharing his Torah knowledge with others!

**It is our obligation and
privilege**

Not everyone has the gifts of pedagogy, public speaking or articulate writing. Some of these abilities can be acquired and some require training to develop them fully. If we can hone these talents and use them to spread Torah to our fellow Jews – it is our obligation and privilege. Even if we have no talent whatsoever, we can still connect with and enlighten our Jewish brethren – over our Shabbos table, or with a smile and a warm hello in *shul*. May we reach out and guide our fellow Jews to follow the ways of Hashem, so that we merit to truly “know” Hashem and earn unimaginable reward in this world and in the world to come.