

## Torah Thoughts – August 29, 2019

In one of my recent Torah classes on Shabbat morning we had a discussion about God, and we specifically discussed God's meaning and intention behind certain phrases. At the end of this discourse the participants asked me: "Rabbi, what do you think God meant?" I simply responded, "I don't know".

Shakespeare wrote in his comedy *As You Like It*, that "a fool thinks himself to be wise, but a wise man knows himself to be a fool." Sometimes you should start from the assumption that you don't know the answer. What I discovered in my years as an educator and a rabbi is that people really appreciate this fact. They are so used to hearing canned responses and answers, that they jump at an opportunity to discuss something which even a Rabbi considers to be "unknowable". Of course I had some thoughts about the topic, but there would have been a tremendous loss if I shared those thoughts under the pretense of being the "correct" answer. Had I done this, I would have missed the opportunity to learn from other people, and to observe different perspectives on the topic. People think differently. I am sure we can all remember situations in which we created an illusion of knowledge because we did not want to admit to not knowing, or not knowing enough.

For me as a Rabbi, admitting that I do not know something can be a real opportunity to engage people in conversation. Responding "I don't know, what do you think?" or "I don't know, but I would like to. Let's figure it out together," allow for a more collaborative discussion, and an honest one at that. I think that my willingness to admit that I do not have all the answers and my curiosity to find them will lead me to a better understanding of the text, a desire to explore commentary and scholarly opinions, as well as the excitement and joy of cultivating an attempted answer with other Torah learners. I believe that this authentic approach will speak to all, because it is the asking of a good question which inspires people to search for an answer.

After the class some people came to me and said "Thank You Rabbi for saying I don't know." So I put this challenge forth to all of you: The next time you are asked something that you think you immediately know the answer to, try starting with "I don't know..." as you will be amazed as to where the discussion goes.

I am curious to know what you think; do you see the power of saying "I don't know"? Is it okay for a Rabbi to not know certain things in text study? Can we understand God and the way he acts? What does it mean to have the "right" answer? Do you ever stop and think about it? Please share your thoughts with me!

Shabbat Shalom!  
Rabbi Koas