



“Your Life Is Not A Statistic”
Drasha by Rabbi Goldstein

If I were to ask you what is the most important mitzvah in the Torah- what would you say? Idolatry... Torah Study... Tzedakah... VaAhvat Lereacha KKamocha- Love your neighbor like you love yourself. Great answer! No one less than Hillel the Elder felt the same way. And its true. Its beautiful. Love your neighbor as you love yourself. Follow the Golden Rule, do unto others as you would do unto yourself. But listen to this incredibly politically incorrect question and answer posed by one of our all time greatest Rabbis- Nachmanides that call us all out. He asks how is it possible to love your friend as you love yourself? Everyone knows that you love yourself the most? And he answers that's true. One cannot love their friend as much as they love themselves, but rather it refers to seeking their welfare in all regards. Because often you may like someone but begrudge them in one aspect says the Torah love them in all aspects. But be that as it may- think about the Ramban's observation. One cannot love anything more than they love themselves. Our love of self, our focus on our self-advancement according to the Ramban is an immutable part of human nature, that even G-d didn't feel he could command us to go against.

Now, of course we know all the problems that this can bring about. While the Torah commands us to love other like we love ourselves, the basic fact of human nature, that we are self-loving, creates all sorts of problem. It can make us self absorbed. Self centered. Deceitful. Etc. But I was wondering the other day, if there's anything positive to this? Why would G-d make us love ourselves so much? What could the message possibly be?

And as I was thinking about the Chanuka story it occurred to me. You see there are many messages that are essential to the Chanukah story. The need to stand up for Judaism, embodied in the courage of the Maccabees. The need to reject secular Hellenism and accommodate, Greek wisdom in its appropriate proportions. The ideal to perform mitzvot optimally. But if you look at Al haNissim, there is one aspect that struck. “Masarat Giborim BYad Chalashim,



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Rabim BYad Meatim"- The prayer emphasizes that G-d delivered the mighty in the hands of the weak. The Greek Army was the powerhouse of the day, and contrary to popular imagination- the prayer refers to the Maccabees as weak. The Many in the hand of the few. And the point is that if you would have taken bets on who would have won, if you would have asked an actuary who will emerge victorious- hands down the Jews should have lost. But the as the prayer says, that HaShem delivered us from their hands. HaShem performed a miracle that the weaker army won. And there is an important lesson in here. That we as Jews, are not statistics. We are not numbers. We are in G-d's hands and G-d's hands alone. And it doesn't matter who rises against us to destroy us, we must believe that if we remain true to HaShem he will remain true to us.

In our time we have seen this in the modern state of Israel. While in the previous generation we have seen unbelievable military victories. In our day, we have seen unbelievable diplomatic victories. This past week once again Israel made peace with Morocco. But what was astounding was some of the pictures on my Facebook feed. There was a picture of a public Menorah in the UAE. Jason Greenblatt the former US negotiator, shared greeting from Saudi Arabia for a Happy Chanukah. What is happening now defies all odds. Imagine asking the Jews who lives in these countries in 1948 if this was possible-they would have said you're dreaming! And it was and is a dream. But HaShem isn't bound to the normal laws of nature- and the Jewish state is not a statistic or a number.

And this is perhaps one take on the question I posed a few minutes ago. You see the very same way that we believe this about the Jewish People as a whole, we must believe this in our own lives as well. We must believe with every fabric of our being that our lives are not statistic. Our lives are not simply data point to be mined by tech companies. Our lives are not simply facts and figures. But Chanuka reminds us that we are in HaShem's hands and his



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alone. And that there is a concept of Ein Mazal LYisrael- that Jews are not bound by the laws of nature. And I would humbly suggest that perhaps this is the reason that G-d endowed us all with such a strong love of self. Because he was communicating to us in the most powerful and profound way possible that you matter! That what you do makes a difference! That in the same way we love ourselves HaShem loves us that deeply! The Maccabees weren't defined by numbers and odds and neither are we.

Realize that whatever we are doing in our lives, whether we are facing a health challenge, Relationship challenge or a financial challenge- or whether we are trying to figure out a direction or a cause- HaShem put us here for a reason. We are not a number, were a Maccabee. Were not a stastic , but rather were a Jew. And the same way we have unshakable, unlimited love for ourselves – so does HaShem.