

RABBI JACK'S MESSAGE IN A MINUTE



V'etchanan, is the first word and name of this week's Torah portion. It means, "I beseeched" or "I entreated". This is how Moses began the continuation of recounting his life experiences. He recalls the way he begged the Almighty to let him into the land of Promise before he died. Moses goes on with his impassioned farewell address chronicling the physical and emotional journey with his people through the wilderness. The iconic biblical figure mixes advice with chastisement, remembering negative episodes and what could be learned through them. Moses also happily recollects events of joy, celebration and proximity to the God that delivered the Hebrews from Egypt and slavery. And then Moses says something that at first blush seems difficult to understand.

"And the Lord has established this relationship with the children of Israel because they are the smallest of nations."(Deut. 7:7) What?

We previously read on several occasions in our holy text just the exact opposite. The imagery of the language is as beautiful as it is clear. The descendants of Abraham and Sarah shall be "countless like the stars in heaven" , as "numerous as the grains of sand on the shore". So which is it, are we a large or tiny group?

One of the ways the ancient sages and Talmudists resolved this apparent conflict is instructive and inspirational. We were both. According to our original census we were but a clan of seventy souls that sojourned to the Goshen region of the land of the Pharaohs.

Now as Moses stands and looks out over the encampment of the twelve tribes we were indeed a great number compared to then. However in relation to the populations that the Israelites were about to encounter when they crossed over the River Jordan- Hittites, Canaanites, Edomites, Jebusites and so on, they would be accurately described as the "smallest of nations". Yet, somehow our diminutive stature, Moses maintained , will not prevent us from achieving the ideals expressed in our belief system.

What an amazing message. A small committed group can change the world. Moses was predicting our very own Temple. We may not be the largest congregation--though we continue to grow--and still we are determined to transmit our heritage and make a difference in our community. This underscores the value of each and every member of our Emanu-El family and reminds us that you can make the vision of Moses come true.

L'shalom,
Rabbi Jack

P.S. Come to Beach Shabbat this Friday night, 7:30 on the sand at Neptune Blvd. Bring friends, invite neighbors!