

THE POWER OF TORAH

SOURCE SHEET AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



We live in the era of the “big Idea.” We have crossed the threshold from a manufacturing economy to an information economy. No longer are the real estate magnates at the top of the Fortune 500, it is now the founders of Microsoft, Google, and AI companies. Even a company like Tesla fuses cutting edge information and technology throughout its manufacturing process. Consider the perspective of Paul Romer, Chief Economist of the World Bank and Nobel Laureate:

SOURCE 1: *PAUL M. ROMER, NOBEL LECTURE, 2018; INTERVIEW, 1996; CITED IN QUOTLR.COM*

Human material existence is limited by ideas, not stuff: people don't need copper wires; they need ways to communicate. Oil was once a contaminant, then (through applied knowledge) it became fuel. Ideas are nonrival in the sense that they can be used by many people at the same time without being depleted. Every generation has underestimated the potential for finding new ideas ... possibilities do not add up, they multiply. The real driver of growth and progress is discovering, sharing, and applying new ideas.

In generations past, might and power seemed to be sourced in the marshaling of physical resources – armies, raw materials and means of production.

Now in the 21st century the real seat of power has been revealed: wisdom!

Consider a quote from the Zohar, the book of Jewish mysticism that was always enigmatic but now resounds with a startling fresh clarity:

SOURCE 2: *ZOHAR – BOOK OF MYSTICISM (TERUMAH 161A)*

God looked into the Torah and created the world.

הַשְּׁתַקֵּל בְּאוֹרֵי סֵפֶר וּבְרָא עֲלֵמָא

Q: How do you understand this cryptic statement? How can the physical world come from something spiritual and non-material?

The Zohar is teaching us that the Torah was God's blueprint for creation. Each thing in the physical world is based upon an essential idea, which was revealed as a physical reality.

For example, in the Torah (Breishis 1:3), “God said Let there be light and there was light.” The idea, “light” was “thought” by God, and then “spoken” into existence, clothing the idea with physicality.

Q: That's very powerful and mystical, but what does it imply about Torah?

All reality, all truth, all the keys to success and power in this world already exist and can be found in the Torah.

This concept gives new meaning to the famous teaching found in *Ethics of Our Fathers*, “Ben Bag Bag said, turn it over and over, for everything is in it.” (5:22)

It’s all there. You just need to know where and how to look for it!

Q: Great thinkers throughout the ages have wondered why the Jewish People have had such an outsized impact on human history, particularly given our small numbers. With these sources in mind, how would you answer their question?

Our success stems from our commitment to Torah.

- Our dedication to Torah is not just a general commitment to education. Other cultures also exhibit that commitment. What makes us special is the Torah itself. It’s like having a **user’s manual for how the world really works!**
- But it goes even further than that: Since the physical world was created through Torah – literally bringing Heaven and Earth together, it is the **unique divine source of unity and peace in this world.**
- Through Torah, man achieves inner harmony, society achieves peace, and the world achieves oneness with God — the true meaning of **shalom**, completeness.

With this perspective, let’s see how the Torah can impact our lives, on a personal, communal and world level.

PERSONAL UNITY AND PEACE:

SOURCE 3: MAIMONIDES FROM MISHNA TORAH HILCHOS DEOS (1:1-6)

“A person is commanded to shape his character according to the way of the Torah... when he studies Torah, his actions become aligned with his thoughts.”

אדם מצוה לעשות את מדותיו בדרך התורה... כשהוא עוסק בתורה, מעשיו נשתלבים עם מחשבותיו.

Q: How does learning Torah shape one’s thoughts and heart?

Study aligns our actions with noble ends. Learning about kindness, charity, loving your neighbor as yourself and many other Torah directives, shapes our actions and hearts in line with these ideas and practices.

Yet, learning is also a deeply spiritual process:

SOURCE 4: MAN: A UNIQUE SYNTHESIS OF BODY AND SOUL

God formed man of **dust from the earth** and breathed into his nostrils the **breath of life**, and man became a living soul” (Bereishis 2:7).

The Zohar adds that the soul is a “breath from above” placed in a body “from below,” so that through man, the upper and lower worlds may become one.

Humanity is the microcosm of creation — a living junction of body and soul, heaven, and earth.

Q: How is man expected to keep these opposing tendencies – spiritual and physical - operating in harmony together, particularly in a world so weighted towards the physical?

The only answer is the Torah. It was given as a guide to show us how to harmonize these forces: how the soul can elevate the body, and how the physical can reveal the spiritual.

That is the mechanism behind the “making of a mensch!”

UNITY AND A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

SOURCE 5: A CONDUIT FOR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. (ZOHAR III 73A)

Israel, the Torah, and the Holy One, blessed be He — יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֹרֵייתָא, וְקוּדְשָׁא־בְרִיקָהּ הוּא —
they are all one. בְּלֵהוּ חֵד הוּא:

Q: Why do you think it means and how does it impact us?

The Torah and the Jewish People were made for each other. We resonate with Torah because we are made in God’s image. **We are One with Him and Torah is the interface that connects us together.**

So, it’s no accident that Torah resonates so deeply within us and draws us close to God.

UNITY WITH OTHER JEWS

When the Zohar mentions the word “Israel” above in source 6, it not only refers to Jews as individuals, but is also alluding to the Jewish People.

Q: Do you think the Zohar is suggesting that the Jewish People are inherently one, or at least has the capacity for such unity?

Torah is our common spiritual DNA. Just as organs function harmoniously when connected to one heart, the Jewish Nation becomes one organism through the shared source of Torah.

Beyond this mystical reality, the Torah practically brings Jews together:

SOURCE 6: TORAH OF PEACE. (MIDRASH RABBAH, VAYIKRA 9:9)

The entire Torah is peace, as it says: ‘Her ways are **ways** שְׁנֵאֲמַר דְרָכֶיהָ דְרָכֶי
of pleasantness, and all her **paths are peace.** נַעַם וְכָל נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם.

Q: In what ways can you see the Torah increase peace and unity among the Jewish People?

Probably the easiest way to see this is to realize that the Torah spends little time talking about our rights, while spending a lot of time detailing our responsibilities to one another.

Peace and harmony are built into every aspect of Torah – from respect for our neighbor’s property, privacy, and his livelihood to myriad laws of speech prohibiting us from gossip and character assassination to a plethora of directives to take care of one another under all kinds of circumstances.

And finally, how does Torah unify the world?

UNITY – THE MESSIANIC ERA

We all want to live in a world where true peace and harmony exist between all peoples, “when the lion will lie down with the lamb, when nations will fight no more, turning their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”

Q: But how does God expect us to bring this about?

SOURCE 7: TORAH: THE KEY TO REDEMPTION. (MIDRASH TANCHUMA, NOACH 3)

“The Torah is the light of the world... when Israel studies it, the world is illuminated; when they abandon it, darkness spreads.”

Q: Why do you think Torah learning has a direct and automatic impact on the world?

Keep in mind our first source: God looked into the Torah and Created the world.

When we study Torah, we are gazing into the same blueprint God used to create the world — effectively bringing the world into harmony with God’s plan.

Every word of Torah continues this process of creation and revelation. The more Torah in the world — the more truth, clarity, and holiness. In short, the more God!

The messianic era as described by the Prophet Isaiah: “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea.” (11:9)

There is one more piece to the puzzle:

EVERY JEW HAS A ROLE IN THIS PROCESS:

**SOURCE 8: EVERY JEW HAS A LETTER IN THE TORAH.
RABBI GEDALIA SCHORR (PARSHAS VAYERA)**

The word **ישראל** (Israel) is an acronym:

“**יֵשׁ שְׁשִׁים רִיבּוּא אֲוֹתוֹת לְתוֹרָה**” — There are 600,000 letters in the Torah.

(Corresponding to the original 600,000 Jewish souls.)

Each Jewish soul corresponds to a letter in the Torah.

When the Jewish people engage in Torah study, those letters are reunited and the Torah becomes

whole — and through that unity, **God’s Presence is fully revealed in the world.**

כָּל נִשְׁמָה וְנִשְׁמָה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהּ אֶת מִיְחָדָת
בְּתוֹרָה, וְכָל יְהוּדִי עַל־יְדֵי לְמוּדוֹ וְעִבּוּדוֹ מְאִיר
אוֹתָהּ אֶת.

וְכִשְׁכָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל מְאַחְדִּים אֶת כָּל הָאוֹתוֹת יַחַד,
נִגְלִית הַתּוֹרָה בְּשִׁלְמוֹתָהּ וְשׁוֹרָה הַשְּׂכִינָה בְּעוֹלָם.

Q: What message does this send to all Jews, regardless of background and Jewish affiliation?

Without each and every one of us contributing our unique letter to the Torah, the messianic era cannot be achieved!

God is waiting for the Jewish People to **realize the power of Torah and harness it** to transform the world, once and for all!