

The later generations will say, your children who will arise after you and the foreigner who will come from a distant land. (29:21)

The Jew and the *nachri* - foreigner from a distant land - will both be shocked when they see Hashem's destruction. What seems to be an innocuous verse is tragically a curse that critiques the behavior of *Klal Yisrael* in the days preceding the advent of *Moshiach*. *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl*, bemoans the bitter prophecy, the tragic portent for the "*acharis ha'yamim*", the prediction that in the end of the days, the *yedias ha'Torah*, *Torah* knowledge, of many Jews will be equivalent to that of a "*foreigner from a distant land.*" How tragic it is when the non-Jew knows more about our religion than some of us! How heart-breaking it is when the gentile on the street knows more about Jewish laws and customs than many of our Jewish brothers.

Rav Chaim was, unfortunately, far from wrong. The *am ha'aretz*, illiterate Jew, that existed seventy-five years ago was versed in Jewish basics, had a love of *Torah*, was devoted to his religion and took great pride in everything Jewish that he did. He simply was not a great *lamden*, deep-thinking, erudite scholar. Most *shtetlach*, villages in Europe, did not have their own *yeshivos*; boys went to work at a young age to help support large, poverty-stricken families. They simply did not have the opportunity to study *Torah*. They were not, however, estranged from their religion. Today we see the effects of nearly a century of assimilation in which grandparents - who immigrated to these shores - feared the "influence" that orthodox day schools might have on their children's future, opting for the "less demanding", public schools. Many parents sought to erase the memories of Europe in their hope to achieve acceptance in American society. Others were simply too busy trying to earn a living to "worry" about their children. Thus, we are encountering a new form of illiteracy – total illiteracy. We frequently find fine, well-meaning Jewish adults who are totally ignorant of their heritage. They are easy prey for anyone who seeks to turn them away from their religion – because they have no familiarity with it.

Many people who know little at least ask questions; they are aware that there is some type of Providence. The fire of the *Yiddishe neshamah*, Jewish soul, cannot be extinguished. It is our job to reawaken this fire, returning it to its original glory.