

Not because you are numerous than all the peoples did Hashem desire you and choose you, for you are the fewest of all peoples. (7:7)

Toward the end of the *parsha*, the Torah describes Hashem's relationship with *Klal Yisrael*, claiming that it has nothing to do with our being numerous – because we are not. We are a minority among nations. Because we are the fewest of peoples, however, Hashem has decided to bestow His love on us. *Rashi* explains that size does not actually play a significant role in determining our relationship. Rather, “fewest” means we minimize ourselves, like Avraham *Avinu* who said, *V’Anochi afar va’eifar*, ‘I am but dust and ashes” (*Bereishis* 18:27) and like Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen*, who said, *Va’anachnu mah*, “What are we?” (*Shemos* 16:8).

This explanation does not appear to be consistent with *Rashi's* earlier commentary on, “not because you are numerous – because you do not aggrandize yourselves when I provide you with goodness.” This means that the subdued nature of *Klal Yisrael*--their lack of aggrandizement, their ability to minimize themselves--was not the reason that Hashem chose them to be His People. How are we to understand these two seemingly contrasting interpretations?

The question that confronts us is: was *Klal Yisrael* chosen due to their humility or not? The **Shem MiShmuel** analyzes the various aspects of humility and their application, thus allowing us to unravel the meaning of the *pasuk* in light of *Chazal*. Clearly, Jewish thought frowns on one who is filled with self-pride. Self-image is important, but self-enoblement and obsession with one's self is far from the humble nature with which Judaism wants a person to be inculcated. On the other hand, allowing oneself to become the world's stepping stool does not coincide with the Torah's idea of humility either.

In *Shir HaShirim* (2:14), Shlomo *Hamelech* compares *Klal Yisrael* to a dove. “My dove in the cleft of the rock.” *Chazal* say, “To Me (Hashem) they are like a (gentle) dove, but, to the nations of the world, they are like wild beasts.” The *Midrash* in *Shemos* 21:15 explains, “To Me they are like a dove, for everything which I decree upon them they do, but when the nations of the world attempt to disway them from *mitzvos*, by undermining their observance, they make themselves as tough as wild beasts in their response.”

The *Shem MiShmuel* derives from here that every *ben Yisrael* must possess two simultaneous contrasting self-views – with each one dependent upon varying circumstances. In respect to Hashem's awesome power, we maintain an almost puny, gentle and bashful self-image, because we are acutely aware of our limited abilities. Our attitude changes diametrically when we must stand up for ourselves against the opposing nations of the world. When our Torah and *mitzvos* are maligned, our observance impugned, we respond like fierce beasts, demonstrating our commitment to the Almighty. Successful Jewish life demands that a Jew maintain a synthesis of these two character traits: strength and resolve in the face of our enemies; a gentle, dovelike, and

bashful nature with regard to our interaction with Hashem.

Sur meira va'asei tov, "Turn from evil and do good" (*Tehillim* 34:15). When turning from evil, one must be tough and inflexible, while maintaining softness and humility in his quest to do good. The **Maharal** explains that the *mitzvos lo saaseh*, prohibitive *mitzvos*, are intended to ensure that we remain within the parameters of humanness. When we breach these *mitzvos*, we have fallen into the abyss; we have descended below minimum standards and must now take strong, but essential, steps to recover our essential humanity. The positive *mitzvos* are intended to elevate us beyond this level, developing us into spiritually inclined, holy people. As such, we receive a reward for carrying out a *mitzvas asei*, positive *mitzvah*, but no reward for abstaining from a prohibited act. Perhaps, the fact that we maintain our humanity is in itself the greatest reward.

We may now return to our original difficulty. When Hashem says that He chose us not because of our size, this could not have been due to our inherent humility in contrast to the other nations. Such a comparison remains within the framework of "turn from evil" and is no reason for a reward, since it only preserves our essential human dignity. That is not a sufficient reason to warrant chosenness. To be chosen, one must elevate himself to be worthy of establishing that special Heavenly bond with Hashem. This is achieved through the "do good" aspect of life, which we accomplish through positive *mitzvah* performance and by "minimizing ourselves," realizing our true smallness in our relationship with Hashem.