

Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation. Ask your fathers and they will tell you... when the Supreme One gave the nations their inheritance... He set the borders of the peoples according to the numbers of the Bnei Yisrael. (32:7,8)

In recounting Jewish history, Moshe notes that after the *Mabul*, flood, surviving generations attempted to build the Tower of Babel. Hashem scattered them, dividing them into seventy nations. Each nation had its own distinct language, corresponding to the number of *Bnei Yisrael*, the seventy members of Yaakov *Avinu*'s family who later went down to Egypt. The **Shem M'Shmuel** remarks that the correspondence between the seventy souls in Yaakov's family and the seventy nations of the world is significant in Jewish thought. Although today there are certainly more than seventy nations, after the *Mabul* initially seventy nations emerged. Likewise, when Yaakov's offspring were first considered to be a nation, his family consisted of seventy members. The implication is that each primary world nation corresponded to one root member of *Klal Yisrael*. If that member of *Klal Yisrael* optimized his spiritual potential, he had the ability to elevate his parallel nation. At some spiritual level the two were linked, resulting in a spiritual improvement for that nation, regardless of the behavior of its individual members.

As time wore on, the nations multiplied and increased in number, growing beyond the original seventy. In parallel, *Bnei Yisrael* increased far beyond the original seventy souls. The various components in the relationship between the Jewish People and the nations of the world became increasingly complex. The soul of an individual Jew was now linked to many more gentile nations. Thus, the ripple effect engendered by the actions of each Jew reaches out to affect the spiritual welfare of many people.

With this idea in mind, the *Shem M'Shmuel* observes that the *mitzvah* of "*zechor yemos olam*," "*remember the days of yore*," is much more than a dry intellectual imperative. It is similar to other *mitzvos* that require remembrance and reflection, such as *Shabbos* and *Amalek*. It should be an emotional experience in which we recall not just the concept, but also its ramifications. We are to understand that our actions affect the rest of the world. As a nation, our collective spiritual plateau, our level of *mitzvah* performance, our acts of *chesed* and good deeds influence the entire world. This remembrance requires us to realize that what we do, or neglect to do, can change the world. This *mitzvah* imposes upon us an incredible responsibility, but we do not expect that being a Jew is an easy endeavor.

In an alternative interpretation of the *pasuk*, the *Shem M'Shmuel* cites *Ibn Ezra* who observes that the root meaning of "*shanah*," which means year, is the same as "*shinui*," which means change. Thus, we read the *pasuk* of "*binu shnos dor v'dor*," to mean, "Understand the changes of each generation." We are thereby enjoined to consider the changes that occurred throughout history.

When one compares two opposing entities to one another, their respective differences are much more apparent. Darkness stands out as a result of our awareness of the advantages of light -- and vice versa. Indeed, this idea applies equally to spiritual strengths and weaknesses. It is a given that the Jewish People have digressed spiritually throughout history. The best tool for measuring our spiritual digression is comparison to previous generations. By "*remembering the days of yore*", and understanding the changes of each generation, we are better equipped to accept our own deficiencies and attempt to correct them. When we observe the spiritual plateau attained by Jews of previous generations, we are able to acknowledge our own needs. Indeed, our future is based upon the lessons we learn from the past.