

3e God Beyond Compare

Read Isaiah 40:12-31



A. W. Tozer wrote: "*The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of him.*" We all have unworthy thoughts about God—especially during times of stress or difficulty. Does God care? Has he given up on me? Can he really help me out of this mess?

"Your God is too small!" Isaiah tells us. In this passage he challenges our puny thoughts, overwhelming us with the majesty, wisdom, grace and power of our incomparable God.

1. There are many times for all of us when God seems distant or uncaring. How do you respond when God feels far away?

- **James 4:7-10 HCSB** Therefore, submit to God. But resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. (8) Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, double-minded people! (9) Be miserable and mourn and weep. Your laughter must change to mourning and your joy to sorrow. (10) Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.

God is holy and He is repulsed by human pride. If we want God to draw near to us we must:

1. Submit to God.
2. Resist the Devil.
3. Draw near to God.
4. Cleanse our hands. Change our behavior or carefully choose our actions.
5. Purify our hearts. Check our motives.
6. Become single-minded.
7. Show remorse for our sins and sorrow for the separation.
8. Humble ourselves before God. This differs from submitting to God. Submitting to God is obeying His mitzvot. Humbling ourselves before God entails formal, ritualistic ways of demonstrating our need for Him like fasting, public celebrations like Pesach' or Simch'at Torah or public confession and contrition like at Yom Kippur.

Consider the following passages.

- **Luke 19:8-10 HCSB** But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord! And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay back four times as much!" (9) "**Today salvation has come to this house,**" Jesus told him, "**because he too is a son of Abraham.**" (10) **For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."**

It was not when Zacchaeus was a "seeker"; when he showed interest or curiosity in Jesus that he was saved. It is not when he invited the Lord into his home to eat that he was saved. It was not until he realized his sin, confessed it publicly and took steps to demonstrate true contrition by making restitution that finally Jesus said "Today salvation has come" and Zacchaeus truly became a son of Abraham. When we are feeling distant from the Lord we need to take a careful look at our lives and determine whether or not we are doing someone wrong. If we are we need to confess it and do something about it.

In Halakha we discover the following command:

- **Leviticus 19:18 HCSB** Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

Jesus, who carefully told us that His coming did not abrogate the Law He had given to Moses, approved of and amplified this law.

- **Matthew 19:18-21 HCSB** "Which ones?" he asked Him. Jesus answered, **Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; (19) honor your father and your mother; and love your neighbor as yourself. (20)** "I have kept all these," the young man told Him. "What do I still lack?" (21) "If you want to be perfect," Jesus said to him, "go, sell your belongings and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me."

He put His stamp of approval on the Law and then defined it as care for the poor. Perhaps if Hashem does not feel close it is because we are not taking to heart His love for social justice?

When He was asked,

- **Matthew 22:36-40 HCSB** "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" (37) He said to him, **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. (38) This is the greatest and most important commandment. (39) The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. (40) All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments."**

Note: cp Mark 12:31-33; Luke 10:25-28

Jesus responded by saying that all of Halakha depends on two underlying principles,

- a. Ahavat Adonai – love of Adonai and
- b. Ahavat Olam – love for the world, for humanity.

Later, the Apostle Paul affirmed that principle.

- **Romans 13:8-10 HCSB** Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. (9) The commandments: **You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,** and if there is any other commandment--all are summed up by this: **You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (10)** Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.

Where Jesus defined Ahavat Olam positively (care for the poor), Paul defined it negatively (doing one's neighbor no harm). Later Paul affirmed,

- **Galatians 5:14 HCSB** For the entire law is fulfilled in one statement: **You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**

The entire Law, all of God's mitzvot can be summarized in the principle of avahah - love. That is why the Mashiach's half-brother referred to it as the Royal Law; the Law of Freedom.

- **James 2:8-13 HCSB** If you really carry out the royal law prescribed in Scripture, **You shall love your neighbor as yourself,** you are doing well. (9) But if you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (10) For whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of *breaking it all.* (11) For He who said, **Do not commit adultery,** also said, **Do not murder.** So if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you are a lawbreaker. (12) Speak and act as those who will be judged by the law of freedom. (13) For judgment is without mercy to the one who hasn't shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

If I am not feeling close to Adonai I must consider that perhaps my relation with other humans is in the way. So I ask myself the following ten questions:

1. Am I caring for the poor?
2. Am I doing what I can to bring about justice in the world?
3. Is anything I am doing or saying harming any of my neighbors?

4. Do I owe anyone anything?
5. Are my motives toward any of my neighbors covetous, jealous or angry?
6. Am I stealing anything from my neighbor? Time? Credit? Labor? Honor?
7. Am I showing favoritism to anyone? Am I bigoted or prejudices against anyone?
8. Am I being judgmental?
9. Have I truly forgiven those who have transgressed against me?
10. Am I demonstrating or withholding mercy?

2. Read Isaiah 40:12-31. What do the vivid images of God in Isaiah 40:12 emphasize?

- God's hand being larger than all the oceans or the heavens themselves.
 - God capable of measuring all the dust of the earth is a measuring cup.
 - God weighing whole mountain ranges on a scale.
 - God not beholden to anyone for counsel or instruction.
 - All the world's empires being a drop in a bucket; a speck of dust on God's scales.
 - All the island chains being fine dust sprinkled from His hand.
 - All of Lebanon's trees and all the animals of the world being insufficient to make an adequate sacrifice.
 - All the people's of the world being like grasshoppers under His feet.
 - All of space being just a tent He set up for us.
 - Him knowing every star in space by name and number and sustaining them all.
- All of these emphasize that His strength, knowledge and wisdom are without limit.

3. Even small problems can seem overwhelming while we are experiencing them. How can God's portrait in Isaiah 40:12 encourage us at such times?

- **Isaiah 40:12 HCSB** Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand or marked off the heavens with the span of his hand? Who has gathered the dust of the earth in a measure or weighed the mountains in a balance and the hills in scales?

After going through a long list (see above) of images declaring His supremacy, omniscience and omnipotence, the prophet tells us...

- **Isaiah 40:29-31 HCSB** He gives strength to the weary and strengthens the powerless. (30) Youths may faint and grow weary, and young men stumble and fall, (31) but those who trust in the LORD will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint.

All that vast power and wisdom is ours for the asking. He is willing to share it with us.

4. What aspect of God's character is stressed in Isaiah 40:13-14?

- **Isaiah 40:13-14 HCSB** Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or who gave Him His counsel? (14) Who did He consult with? Who gave Him understanding and taught Him the paths of justice? Who taught Him knowledge and showed Him the way of understanding?
 - a. The greatest minds in the universe are nothing to Him.
 - b. The universe is an expression of Himself. Consider how vast the universe is and then realize that the heavens, even the heaven of heavens themselves cannot contain Him.
 - c. His laws are a revelation of Himself. No one counseled Him in their legislation. He is not right because He conforms to some standard. He IS the standard. If He does it or thinks it – IT IS RIGHT.
 - d. He is answerable to no one. His omniscience and omnipotence imply complete independence from humanity.

- e. The greatest institutions in human society are nothing to Him.
- f. The greatest products of human labor are nothing to Him. The greatest works of our greatest geniuses or even the product of the combined minds of all the geniuses of the world together are nothing in contrast to the most average, commonplace star.

5. When are you most likely to tell God how to run the universe—especially when it relates to your life?

When tragedy strikes, whether personal, national (like this whole Haitian debacle), or global (like the global push for transnationalism or globalism), I sometimes catch myself wondering how God could allow such things to happen. What can He be thinking? Is God really in control? Can we trust him to run the universe if He would allow *this*? At those times I must remember:

- **Isaiah 55:7-9 HCSB** Let the wicked one abandon his way, and the sinful one his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, so He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will freely forgive. (8) "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways." *This is* the LORD's declaration. (9) "For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are they even *like* ours. We aren't even in the same neighborhood.

We're thinking, *Preserve the body*;
He's thinking, *Save the soul*.

We dream of a pay raise.
He dreams of raising the dead.

We avoid pain and seek peace.
God uses pain to bring peace.

"I'm going to live before I die," we resolve.
"Die so you can live," He instructs.

We love what rusts or rots.
He loves what endures.

We rejoice at our successes.
He rejoices at our confessions.

We show our children the Nike star with the million-dollar smile and say, "Be like Mike."
God points to the crucified carpenter with bloody lips and a torn side and says, "Be like Christ."

Our thoughts are not like God's thoughts. Our ways are not like His ways. He has a different agenda. He dwells in a different dimension. He lives on another plane. When what He does or allows seems to contradict what I consider to be reasonable or even helpful, I need to remember that I am no more than a vapor that soon dissipates.¹ I am a worm² that is

¹ Psalm 39:5, 11; 62:9

² Job 25:6; Psalm 22:6; Isaiah 41:14

blissfully ignorant of the grand scheme of things. I must humble myself before His vastly superior world view and obey my Master.

6. Why in Isaiah 40:15-17 does Isaiah start talking about the insignificance of nations in comparison to God?

We usually feel small and powerless before the might of kings, presidents or corporate giants. The prophet reminds us of how mind-boggling Hashem's power and influence is. He agrees with the Psalmist who says.

- **Psalms 62:9 HCSB** Men are only a vapor; exalted men, an illusion. On a balance scale, they go up; together they *weigh* less than a vapor.
- **Psalms 146:3-6 HCSB** Do not trust in nobles, in man, who cannot save. (4) When his breath leaves him, he returns to the ground; on that day his plans die. (5) Happy is the one whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, (6) the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them. He remains faithful forever,

7. Why is an idol a pitiful substitute for God (Isaiah 40:18-20)?

1. God is self-existent. He is eternal and thus beholden to no one for His existence.; idols must be fabricated.
2. God is personal (possessing mind, will and emotions); idols are mindless.
3. God is the Creator of all things; the Prime Mover; the First Cause; idols are thus dependent upon Him for their existence.

Compare this to:

- **Psalms 115:3-8 HCSB** Our God is in heaven and does whatever He pleases. (4) Their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. (5) They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. (6) They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. (7) They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk. They cannot make a sound with their throats. (8) Those who make them are just like them, as are all who trust in them.

At what point do people or things become substitutes for God?

Whenever anything begins to take precedence over our love for and obedience to God that thing becomes an idol. An idol is anything that takes the focus off of God and puts it on something else.

The amazing plasticity of this concept; our minds' incredible capacity to turn nearly anything into an idol demonstrates Moshe's wisdom in warning us "*Be extremely careful, for your own good – don't make an idol for yourself in any shape at all!*"³

8. People with authority and power (political leaders, supervisors, teachers) can exert significant control over our lives. Why can we trust God to overrule the world's rulers (Isaiah 40:21-24)?

He reduces princes to nothing and makes the judges of the earth to be irrational.⁴ The wicked can neither tell the future nor thwart any of Hashem's plans. They're foolish; deceived; mixed up and confused. They're only good at leading their people astray and making them stagger and vomit like drunkards.⁵

³ Deuteronomy 4:15-16

⁴ Isaiah 40:23;

⁵ Isaiah 19:12-14

On the great Day of the Lord, He will not only punish the earthly kings who have harmed His people but even the heavenly hosts will not escape His wrath.

- [Isaiah 24:21-22 HCSB](#) On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven above and kings of the earth below. (22) They will be gathered together like prisoners in a pit. They will be confined to a dungeon; after many days they will be punished.
- [Job 12:16-25 HCSB](#) True wisdom and power belong to Him. The deceived and the deceiver are His. (17) He leads counselors away barefoot and makes judges go mad. (18) He releases the bonds put on by kings and ties a cloth around their waists. (19) He leads priests away barefoot and overthrows established leaders. (20) He deprives trusted advisers of speech and takes away the elders' good judgment. (21) He pours out contempt on nobles and disarms the strong. (22) He reveals mysteries from the darkness and brings the deepest darkness into the light. (23) He makes nations great, then destroys them; He enlarges nations, then leads them away. (24) He deprives the world's leaders of reason, and makes them wander in a trackless wasteland. (25) They grope around in darkness without light; He makes them stagger like drunken men.

9. Traveling at the speed of light (186,000 miles per second), it would take 137,000 years to reach the nearest galaxy. How does this help us feel the impact of Isaiah 40:26?

According to our current measurements the universe is approximately 156 billion light years wide. Let's see why the size is a number you've never heard of before.

The universe is about 13.7 billion years old. Light reaching us from the earliest known galaxies has been travelling, therefore, for more than 13 billion years. Therefore, one might assume that the radius of the universe is 13.7 billion light-years and that the whole shebang is double that, or 27.4 billion light-years wide.

However, the universe has been expanding ever since the beginning of time.

- [Isaiah 42:5 HCSB](#) This is what God the LORD says--who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and life to those who walk on it--⁶

All the distance covered by the light in the early universe gets increased by the expansion of the universe. Think of it like compound interest.

Need a visual? Imagine a movie hero who is crawling along the top of a racing train, desperately trying to get to the locomotive to stop the runaway machine or kill the bad guy or rescue the damsel in distress or whatever. While he is crawling along the roof, the train is rolling at 60 miles an hour. In the time he covered 100 feet of train, he may have covered 30 miles of ground!

In a similar vein, the light that travels through the expanding space/time ends up traveling far, far further than it would in a static universe.

Imagine the universe just a million years after it was born; a batch of light travels for a year, covering one light-year. At that time, the universe was about 1,000 times smaller than it is today; thus, that one light-year has now stretched to become 1,000 light-years.

All the pieces add up to 78 billion-light-years. The light has not traveled that far, but the starting point of a photon reaching us today after travelling for 13.7 billion years is now 78 billion light-years away. That would be the radius of the universe, and twice that -- 156 billion light-years -- is the diameter. That's based on a view going 90 percent of the way back in time, so it might be slightly larger.

Now – in the face of all this vastness we are told:

⁶ Cp Isaiah 44:24; 45:12; 51:13; Zechariah 12:1

- The highest heaven cannot contain Adonai (1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chronicles 2:6; 6:18; Acts 7:48-49)
- Heaven is God's throne and earth nothing more than His footstool. (Isaiah 66:1) The implication is that God "sits on" the universe. He is outside the universe, greater than the universe.

10. Why do you think God challenges us to compare him to counselors, nations, idols, princes and rulers?

11. Israel complained that God seemed distant and uncaring (Isaiah 40:27). How does Isaiah 40:12-26 answer this charge?

The context is relationship and thus the text must be interpreted from this point of view. He indignantly asks "Why do you say this?"

Also consider:

- **Deuteronomy 4:7 HCSB** For what great nation is there that has a god near to it as the LORD our God is *to us* whenever we call to Him?
- **Jeremiah 23:23-24 HCSB** "Am I a God who is only near"--*this is* the LORD's declaration--"and not a God who is far away? (24) Can a man hide himself in secret places where I cannot see him?"--the LORD's declaration. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?"--the LORD's declaration.
- **Matthew 10:30-31 (cp Luke 12:7) HCSB** **But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. (31) Don't be afraid therefore; you are worth more than many sparrows.**
- **Acts 17:28 HCSB** For in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'

12. What even richer encouragement does God give us when we feel weary and without strength (Isaiah 40:28-31)?

- **Isaiah 40:29 HCSB** He gives strength to the weary and strengthens the powerless.
- **Isaiah 38:14 HCSB** I chirp like a swallow *or* a crane; I moan like a dove. My eyes grow weak looking upward. Lord, I am oppressed; support me.
- **Isaiah 41:10 HCSB** Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with My righteous right hand.

Conclusion:

I would like to bring this to a close with a brief illustration of how the Adonaic mindset and theology is relevant to this issue. In Isaiah 41 we read:

- **Isaiah 41:8-10 HCSB** But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, descendant of Abraham, My friend-- (9) I brought you from the ends of the earth and called you from its farthest corners. I said to you: You are My servant; I have chosen you and not rejected you. (10) Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with My righteous right hand.

Most interpreters will say that the prophet was simply comforting the Jewish people by saying that their exile would not be forever. I too believe that this is one level of interpretation. However, using the "near-far" method that the prophets often use, I believe that it also looks forward to when Yahweh Ra'ah would bring His flock back to Canaan from the Great

Diaspora. Furthermore, I believe that it alludes to the Adonaic concept of Ezrach'. Only when we realize that when we claim Christ as King and are adopted into His family, His people, do we fully realize the beauty of the promise here. All those who belong to Christ are Jews – sons of Abraham. Thus God has literally brought a people (that were not previously a people) from the farthest corners of the earth. Combined, we, His people, His servant, have been chosen. We need not fear for Hashem is our God. He will strengthen us. He will help us; He will hold on to us with His righteous right hand.

With that in mind, turn now to:

- **Matthew 16:17-19 HCSB** And Jesus responded, "Simon son of Jonah, you are blessed because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father in heaven. (18) And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it.

Each passage sheds light on the other. Isaiah 41:8-10 helps us identify the rock in verse 18. Some claim that it is Peter. Others say that it is the truth to which Peter just alluded. From an Adonaic standpoint and with the light of Isaiah 41 shining upon it, I must say point out that the Church stands on the rock and that this rock renders it immovable and unbeatable. What is then that rock? It has to be the unconquerable truth of the Gospel. We are Isaiah 41's unconquerable Israel brought together from the four corners of the earth. We are the victorious Church, laughing as Hades futilely rages at the door. This is Hashem's gift to His people. Most kings receive gifts on their coronation day. Ours gave gifts. What King! What a God!