

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

FALLEN IDOLS

"...and on their gods, G-d had inflicted punishments." (33:4)

Is idol worship a thing of the past? We tend to look down on cultures that rush to bow down to over-sized dollies. It's all a bit ridiculous to our well-manicured culture of self-empowerment. But don't we still have idols?

Doesn't society place the rich, the slim and the famous on pedestals and bow to them? Are the epithets "teenage idol," "Hollywood idol," "Rock and Roll idol," mere hyperbole?

I'm not sure.

An idol expresses the belief that there are separate powers in creation. The belief that there may be a G-d, but He doesn't control everything. A quick libation to the 'wheat god' will make sure I get a good harvest. A couple of lambs to the "sun god" will make sure the sun shines. It's like slipping a fiver to the doorman to make sure you get a good seat. Idolatry says that I can control the world.

Nowadays, the idols enshrined by society are those individuals who seem to be a law unto themselves, who seem to be able to get away with almost anything. Once in a while they overstep the mark to the opprobrium of society and the press and they become "fallen idols" — but that's no different than finding out that your favorite "rain god" isn't quite up to the task.

In Parshat Bo, (Shemot 12:12) it says, "And with all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment. In our parsha, however, the Torah leaves out the word "all" and says only, "...and on their gods, G-d had inflicted punishments (33:4)".

Rashi explains in Parshat Beshalach that G-d destroyed

all the gods of Egypt save one – ba'al tzafon. This was to lure the Egyptians into relying on ba'al tzafon and plunge headlong into the sea after the Jewish People, since it was there they were destined to receive their punishment. It emerges from this that ba'al tzafon was destroyed only after the destruction of the Egyptians in the sea.

Thus it is in Parshat Bo that when G-d announces, prior to the fact, that he will exact punishment on all the gods of Egypt He is referring to the entire process of the redemption, including the emergence of the Jewish People from Yam Suf. In our parsha, however, the Torah is speaking only about the events as they transpired, as it says, "And on the fifteenth day of the first month... and on their gods, G-d had inflicted punishments." Here the Torah leaves out the word "all" because as yet the Jewish People had not crossed the sea and ba'al tzafon was still in existence.

It was for this reasons that Yitro said, after witnessing the splitting of the sea, "Now I know that G-d is the greatest of all the gods." (Shemot 18:11)

Yitro was originally a priest of idolatry and when he saw that ba'al tzafon had survived from the night of Pesach, he started to suspect that ba'al tzafon may have some power after all.

After Yam Suf, however, he saw that nothing, not even ba'al tzafon had survived. At that point he said, "Now I know that G-d is the greatest of the gods."

One day soon, all the modern idols will seem as powerless as ba'al tzafon, and the whole world will say, "Now I know that G-d is the greatest of the gods."

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah names all 42 encampments of *Bnei Yisrael* on their 40-year journey from the Exodus until the crossing of the Jordan River into *Eretz Yisrael*. G-d commands *Bnei Yisrael* to drive out the Canaanites from *Eretz Yisrael* and to demolish every vestige of their idolatry. *Bnei Yisrael* are warned that if they fail to rid the Land completely of the Canaanites, those who remain will be “pins in their eyes and thorns in their sides.” The boundaries of the

Land of Israel are defined, and the tribes are commanded to set aside 48 cities for the *levi'im*, who do not receive a regular portion in the division of the Land. Cities of refuge are to be established: Someone who murders unintentionally may flee there. The daughters of Tzelofchad marry members of their tribe so that their inheritance will stay in their own tribe. Thus ends the Book of *Bamidbar/Numbers*, the fourth of the Books of The Torah.

TALMUD Tips

ADVICE FOR LIFE

Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the *Daf Yomi* cycle

MEGILLA 16 - 22

“This nation (Israel) is compared to dirt (of the ground) and is compared to the stars — when they fall, they fall until the dirt; and when they rise they rise up to the stars.”

Rabbi Yehuda bar Iluy teaches this “dual potential” of the Jewish People based on the word “fall” appearing twice in the Book of Esther, 6:13. The significance of this theme in the Purim story is as follows: At first, before the Jewish People repented, it looked like they were going to be ruled over and treated like dirt by the evil Haman, who was in reality the slave of Mordechai. However, at the end, when they returned to the way of G-d, they were above the rule of any nation, and lofty as the highest stars above (Maharsha).

• *Megilla 16a*

“Torah study is more important than the building of the Beit Hamikdash.”

This statement on our *daf* was made by the Sage Rav — others say it was Rav Shmuel bar Marta — to explain the seemingly strange behavior of Ezra the Scribe. When Koresh was king and finally allowed the building of the Second Beit Hamikdah, Ezra remained in Bavel instead of going up to the Land of Israel to take part in the rebuilding. Why? Because his Torah teacher, Baruch ben Neriah, was still alive and teaching him Torah in Bavel. Only after the passing of his teacher did Ezra go up to Israel in the days of King Daryavesh the latter (Rashi).

• *Megilla 16b*

Please Join Us...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

“Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon.”

אחינו כל בית ישראל

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why does the Torah list the places where the Jewish People camped?
2. Why did the King of Arad feel at liberty to attack the Jewish People?
3. What length was the camp in the *midbar*?
4. Why does the Torah need to specify the boundaries that are to be inherited by the Jewish People?
5. What was the *nesi'im*'s role in dividing the Land?
6. When did the three cities east of the Jordan begin to function as refuge cities?
7. There were six refuge cities, three on each side of the Jordan. Yet, on the east side of the Jordan there were only two and a half tribes. Why did they need three cities?
8. To be judged as an intentional murderer, what type of weapon must the murderer use?
9. Why is the *kohen gadol* blamed for accidental deaths?
10. When an ancestral field moves by inheritance from one tribe to another, what happens to it in *yovel*?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to This Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 33:1 - To show G-d's love of the Jewish People. Although it was decreed that they wander in the desert, they did not travel continuously. During 38 years, they moved only 20 times.
2. 33:40 - When Aharon died, the clouds of glory protecting the Jewish People departed.
3. 33:49 - Twelve *mil* (one *mil* is 2,000 *amot*).
4. 34:2 - Because certain *mitzvot* apply only in the Land.
5. 34:17 - Each *nasi* represented his tribe. He also allocated the inheritance to each family in his tribe.
6. 35:13 - After Yehoshua separated three cities west of the Jordan.
7. 35:14 - Because murders were more common there.
8. 35:16 - One capable of inflicting lethal injury.
9. 35:25 - He should have prayed that such things not occur.
10. 36:4 - It remains with the new tribe.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

CHEFTZIBAH – HOME OF THE MAGNIFICENT MOSAIC

One of the most interesting relics of ancient times can be found in Kibbutz Cheftzibah at the foot of Mount Gilboa. It is the magnificent mosaic that decorated the floor of a synagogue built some 1,400 years ago on the site where nearby Kibbutz Beit Alpha is located.

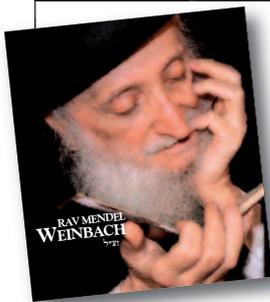
It was back in 1928 that the discovery of this mosaic came about while a tractor was digging in the fields of Beit



Alpha. Archeologists who rushed to the scene uncovered the floor of the ancient synagogue with a mosaic showing the sun encircled by the twelve signs of the zodiac (the *mazalot* in Hebrew).

The government has erected a building over the mosaic to protect it at the kibbutz to which it was moved and it is now a popular tourist attraction.

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Proceeds will be used for the Gemach Charity Fund established by Rav Weinbach, zt"l.

Abarbanel

ON PARSHAT MASEI

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

This Parsha begins with a listing of the nation's encampments during the forty-year sojourn in the Sinai desert. Since each of these encampments had already been mentioned previously, Abarbanel questions the necessity of mentioning them again in this parsha. Abarbanel cites several reasons for G-d's commandment to Moshe to repeat the list of encampments.

Firstly, the listing is a demonstration of G-d's kindness to the nation, in that during the entire forty-year period there were only forty-two encampments. The nation was not required to be constantly on the move.

Secondly, G-d wanted to emphasize that the Sinai desert that they encountered in their travels was unlike other desert environments which can support human habitation either because they are close to settled areas or have sources of water which can also support agriculture. Later on, in Sefer Devarim, Moshe emphasizes this point, "...the L-rd, your G-d... who leads you through the great and awesome wilderness of snake, fiery serpent and scorpion, and thirst where there was no water." (Devarim 8:15).

Thirdly, since each and every one of these places was utterly barren and uninhabitable, it was only due to G-d's miraculous Divine intervention that such a large population of men, women and children could be sustained for such a long period of time. The prophet Jeremiah succinctly describes this miraculous reality, "...G-d... Who brought us up from the land of Egypt, Who led us into the wilderness, in a land of desert and pit, in a land of waste and a shadow

of death, in a land through which no man passed and where no person settled (Jeremiah 2, 6)".

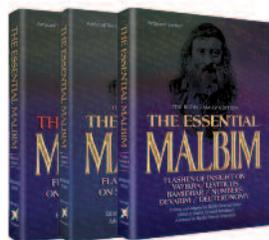
Finally, by repeating the list of the encampments the Torah is hinting at G-d's presence throughout the various sojourns of the Jewish People in their future exiles. As the prophet Micah states, "As in the days you left the land of Egypt, I will show it wonders (Micha 7:15)." Furthermore, just as when they were taken out of Egypt they were brought into the wilderness, so too Yechezkel prophesies that in the final redemption from exile G-d says, "I will take you out from the nations and gather you from the lands to which you were scattered, with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath, and I will bring you to the 'Wilderness of the Nations', and I will contend with you there, face to face; just as I contended with your forefathers in the wilderness of Egypt (Yechezkel 20:35-36)."

This may explain the repetitious phrase at the beginning of the parsha, "...and these were their journeys according to their goings forth" — i.e. "from their final exile." Another interpretation is that the phrase "their goings forth" could refer to the generations to come in the exile. Sometimes they will follow the crooked path — symbolized by the encampment at Marah (bitterness) — and sometimes they will follow the straight path — symbolized by the encampment at Mitkah (sweetness). This summarizes the experience of the Jewish People while they are in the "Wilderness of the Nations."

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ORPHANS' JOY

From: Annie

Dear Rabbi,

There is an organization in our community that collects money for orphans or children from broken families for the purpose of helping pay wedding costs. I don't think anyone would deny that this is a good cause, but the weddings this organization provides for are, in my opinion, overly-lavish – often exceeding the weddings normally held in our community. I'm wondering whether this is right, whether one should be less generous in donating to this cause, and whether the money might be spent better to afford more such weddings, or at least to give these underprivileged couples more tangible help after the wedding. Am I correct?

Dear Annie,

This is a very difficult and complex question.

There's no doubt that the Torah places tremendous importance on caring for, and being especially sensitive to, the needs of widows and orphans. It also places great importance on the mitzvah of helping facilitate marriage, *hachnasat kallah*. Therefore, one would be hard-pressed to find a more important cause than this double mitzvah of aiding in the marriage of orphans or young people from broken homes.

I understand your reservations, and on a certain level they certainly make rational, monetary sense. But, at the end of the day, these unfortunate young people have been deprived in so many ways and have led lives so different from children from regular homes that it seems acceptable to go beyond what's normal in order for these people to have a truly amazing and beautiful wedding.

I'm sure it is extremely touching and meaningful to these young people that, via this organization, the community embraces and rejoices in their union as much as, and in certain ways even more, than of their own children. What a wonderful way to start such a couple on their journey to building the family life they were deprived of!

Regarding the actual finances of the organization, you may not be aware of the actual details. It is probable that they have enough funding to aid all eligible candidates equally

without needing to turn some away, and they probably also give couples a choice to have a simpler wedding in order to receive help in other ways. This would seem to be a common sense approach for those who obviously care for the needs of these orphans.

There was a great rabbi named Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sasow. He was known as the rabbi of orphans since he spent great effort in collecting funds to marry off orphans, which he did in a grand fashion, providing the best food and music, and he made a point of attending each wedding and dancing personally with the groom to the great joy of the couple and the community.

During one wedding which was particularly joyous and overflowing with energy, at the pinnacle of which Rabbi Moshe Leib was dancing fervently with the groom to the point of ecstasy, the rabbi suddenly shouted out, "May it be the will of G-d that on my last day on earth I be buried to the tune of such music played for orphans' joy".

After some years, at the death of Rabbi Moshe Leib, while he was being escorted to the grave by communities far and wide, a horse-drawn wagon came rolling toward the funeral procession, seemingly out of control. When it suddenly stopped, the mourners saw it was manned by a group of travelling musicians, and the mourners demanded to know what business they had barging into a cemetery in the middle of a burial.

The musicians explained that they had no idea about the funeral and had been on their way to a wedding in another town when the horses suddenly broke loose from the reins and led them off the road toward the cemetery. At that point, one of the disciples of Rabbi Moshe Leib recognized the musicians as the very band which had been playing at the wedding where the rabbi made his very peculiar exclamation.

At that point all realized that the band's arrival at the burial of Rabbi Moshe Leib was orchestrated by G-d in order to fulfill the wishes of that great rabbi who sacrificed so much for the joy of poor orphans. After deliberating for some time as to whether the band should actually play the orphans' wedding music at Rabbi Moshe Leib's funeral, it was decided that his last earthy journey should be accompanied by the merit of that great mitzvah!

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Sons and daughters tell of their devotion, challenges, and successes in honoring their parents

BY RABBI AND MRS. YEHUDA SAMET

Excerpts from the newly-published best-seller "My Father, My Mother and Me", published by ArtScroll-Mesorah

THE GIFT OF LIFE

“One should recognize that his parents are the reason he exists in this world. For this reason alone it is truly proper for a son and daughter to give his parents any honor and benefit he can, because they brought him into this world.” (Sefer HaChinuch 33).

A person who is drowning and is pulled out of the water will always be thankful to his rescuer.

The accused is forever grateful to the judge who found him innocent and set him free.

A patient who was hovering between life and death is overwhelmed with gratitude to the doctor who cured him.

Our parents have given us the gift of life. Yet do we feel overwhelmed with gratitude to them?

As G-d has commanded

Sefer HaChinuch explains that it is proper for a child to acknowledge the benefits done for him, the toil and sacrifice day-in and day-out. But what if that was not so? What if his parents did not meet his needs? What, then, is his obligation to his parents?

The answer is found in the wording of the mitzvah itself. The fifth commandment on the Tablets instructs:

“Honor your father and mother as the L-rd, your G-d, commanded you.”

What do we learn from the addition of these words: “as the L-rd, your G-d, commanded you”? Isn’t every mitzvah done because we are commanded?

Its placement here is stressing that the primary, compelling reason for our fulfillment of this mitzvah is because it is G-d’s command.

Kibbud av va’eim is not based on how much my parents gave me, or how much time they spent with me. It’s not dependent on how supportive they were — physically, mon-

etarily, or emotionally. We honor them “as G-d commanded.”

How do we know this is so? Let’s consider the following:

The commandment to honor parents was given to the generation that lived in the desert, where parents were not responsible to provide for their children’s needs. In the wilderness, food, the manna, was provided straight from Heaven. No cooking, serving or stacks of dishes! Water came from the *be’er* (well) — no lugging heavy bottles! Clothing never wore out (no shopping!) and never needed laundering; they were cleaned by the *Ananei HaKavod*, the Clouds of Glory — no piles of laundry, folding, ironing, or running to the cleaners. Not even any carpooling. Against this backdrop, where parents were not caring for their children’s basic needs, G-d introduced this mitzvah.

A child might think, “I’ll evaluate my parents on a scale of one to ten and decide my obligations to them.” But this mitzvah is not contingent on a child’s judgment of his parents’ worth or upon their having given him anything other than life. We are here in the world because of our parents, and that alone obligates us.

Yes, it’s true, most parents give their children many reasons to be devoted, but the basic reason we keep this mitzvah is because it is G-d’s Will.

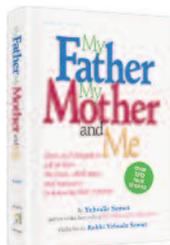
Parents who don’t meet our spiritual needs

Our *mesorah*, our Jewish tradition, is based on a parent-child, teacher-student chain of transmission. G-d created man, of all His creations, with the longest nurturing period, with enough time for values to be transmitted and deeply absorbed.

But what if these values weren’t transmitted by our parents?

Even if we did not get spiritual guidance from our parents,

continued on page seven



My Father, My Mother & Me

*Sons and daughters tell of their devotion, challenges,
and successes in honoring their parents*

BY RABBI AND MRS. YEHUDA SAMET

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MY FATHER, MY MOTHER & ME

continued from page six

even if we did not receive our *mesorah* from them, we are still commanded to honor them — “as G-d commanded.”

Where do we learn this? In the Wilderness, where we were first commanded to honor parents, it was Moshe Rabbeinu who instructed the nation. Spiritual guidance was not the realm of parents. Later, when we stood at Mt. Sinai, every individual received the Torah firsthand from Moshe Rabbeinu. In neither instance did parents pass on the tradition to their children. Yet, it was then — under those very circumstances — that we were commanded to honor and revere parents.

Here’s a story to illustrate this concept:

I CAN’T SAY MY RELATIONSHIP WITH ESTELLE has always been an easy one. When your child turns her back on everything you raised her to value — on everything you yourself stand for — well, it’s a slap in the face; that’s the only way to put it.

Not that Esther — that’s what she goes by now, not the name I gave my baby girl — is ever disrespectful. No, she’s always polite, and the truth is she really does make an effort to steer clear of controversial topics. But it’s there, it always is. In the words she doesn’t say, in the pictures she sends, everyone buttoned up in black and white, in the packages of food she brings when they come to visit — because Heaven forbid she should actually eat in her own mother’s house!

No, it’s always there. And though she calls me nearly every day, chatting about anything and everything, that elephant in the room — this new lifestyle — drives a wedge between us. There’s only so much we can share, after all. Our lives are so very different.

It’s always made me wonder — though of course I’d never tell this to her — just how much she really loves me. You know what I mean? If all those endless laws are so important that they push away everything I value, everything I raised her with, everything I am, then is there any love left? Is there any left for me?

But I’ve stepped back. I try not to be imposing, try not to make demands, let her live her life the way she wants to, swallowing the sting of knowing that I do — and always will — come in second.

At least, that’s what I thought. For a long time, too.

But last week... Well, last week something happened that left me speechless. Left me wondering. And left me feeling very loved.

We were on the phone, in the middle of our daily call. I was in the middle of telling her about the trouble my gardener was giving me over that rosebush out back. But I heard the other line ringing in the background, so I told her to take it.

“It’s okay, Mom,” Esther said. “Danny” — that’s her husband — “will get it.”

So I went on, telling her about how he’d insisted it was dead even after I told him it wasn’t, and he went and dug it up, when I heard Danny saying something to her.

“Just a second, Mom,” she told me. Then, to Danny, “Tell Avi I’ll call him after I finish speaking to Mom.”

Now, Avi is her son, and he lives in South Africa. I know Esther doesn’t get to talk to him that often, what with the time difference being so big. On top of that, his wife Chani is expecting their first baby any day now, and if he was calling in the middle of the week like that, there was a good chance it had something to do with the baby. Esther must have been dying to speak with him and see what was going on.

“No, no,” I told her. “You take Avi’s call; that’s more important.”

“It’s okay, Mom,” she said. “I’ll call Avi when we’re finished.”

But I didn’t want her to stay on the phone with me just to be polite. I knew she must really want to talk with Avi, so I told her again that I didn’t mind, that she should take his call. “I’m sure you have important things you want to discuss,” I said.

But again, she said no. “It’s really fine, Mom,” she told me. “It can wait. I’m talking with you right now.”

And then I couldn’t say a word. I was too choked up to speak.

Because she meant it. I could tell that she meant it. Here her son — who she rarely gets to speak to, let alone see — is on the verge of becoming a father, of making her a grandmother for the very first time, and he’s asking to speak to her... and she’d rather stay on the phone with me.

I was totally, utterly, speechless.

“Mom? Are you still there?”

Esther thought we’d been disconnected!

“I can’t believe you did that for me,” I whispered.

I was so choked up I wasn’t sure if she could hear me. But she did. And when she answered me, there was such tenderness in her voice that I had to reach for the tissues.

“Of course, Mom.” I was pretty certain she was crying, too, on the other end of the line. “You are so important to me.”

Don’t ask me what we spoke about for the rest of that call, because I can’t remember a single word of it. But I will remember those six words as long as I live. And I know, now, that it’s true what she said. I am important to her. So very, very important to her.

And it means more to me than she could ever imagine.

Honoring parents is something that can be arrived at intellectually, something that logic can process and grasp. Therefore, we see outstanding examples of devotion toward parents in many cultures, men and women reciprocating with devotion to those who were devoted, caring for those who cared, responding with good for good received — all stemming from a sense of human decency. But if the devotion to our parents would be because logic dictates it, what happens when, one day, our logic tells us the opposite?

While the nations of the world may act out of ethical considerations, *Klal Yisrael* honors their parents not primarily because decency demands, but because the Almighty commands.

THE SHEMONEH ESREI - THE FOURTH BLESSING (2)

“You graciously endow man with wisdom.”

What would man be without wisdom and knowledge? Indeed, it is only the gift of comprehension and discernment that distinguishes him from the animals of creation. In yet a deeper sense, without the faculty of knowledge man would forever be lacking the most basic ability to perceive his own existence, not to mention the ability to realize any of the other gifts of life. Regarding this the Sages teach: “He who has knowledge, has everything. He who does not have knowledge, has nothing.” What’s more, without the faculty of knowledge man would not even be able to pray. Hence, it is fitting that the first of our requests be for wisdom.

Growing Wisdom

When a child is asked what he wants he responds with a list of his favorite toys and sweets. So too, a fool who lacks understanding and foresight, when asked what he would like, will ask for foolish things. In contrast, when a wise man is asked he will answer in accordance with his wisdom, taking into account tomorrow’s outcome of today’s requests.

What’s more, all of one’s experiences are ultimately influenced by his perception. When one’s knowledge is twisted and perverted, then all that he encounters in life will be gauged by his warped views. However, someone with true wisdom will evaluate all things through a lens of truth.

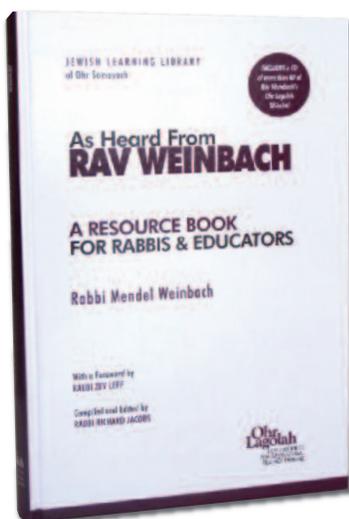
It is therefore necessary to *first* acquire true wisdom in order to view both the world and one’s own life correctly, and only *afterwards* ask for one’s needs. In this way one will beseech G-d to endow him with the wisdom to ask for the right things, and for the understanding to use them only in a proper and beneficial manner.

To be Deserving of Mercy

According to the above we can understand a difficult teaching in the Talmud which states that it is forbidden to have mercy on someone devoid of understanding, such as a fool, in accordance with the verse: “Because it is a nation devoid of understanding, therefore, its Maker will not show it mercy, and its Creator will not be gracious unto it”. (Isaiah 27:11)

To show grace and mercy to someone devoid of the necessary understanding to perceive and appreciate G-d’s goodness would be a waste. In fact, our appreciation of G-d’s mercy is part of what helps us merit G-d’s blessings.

Another explanation: The Ben Ish Chai explains that it is certainly permitted to help someone who lacks understanding. Rather, the grace and mercy referred to here is the giving of undeserved power and authority. A person lacking the basic level of understanding will likely misuse whatever power he is given — in some cases even causing him and others harm.



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