

# INSIGHTS

## Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Reb Avigdor Ben Eliezer Chanoch z"l. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS KI SISA

## Analyze This

**And the Almighty passed by before him, and proclaimed, Hashem, Hashem... (34:6)**

Rashi (ad loc) explains that the name "Hashem" refers to the Almighty's attribute of mercy. Rashi goes on to quote the Gemara in Rosh Hashanah (17b) which explains why the Torah mentions the name "Hashem" twice in the *possuk*: "The first name 'Hashem' refers to the attribute of mercy before a person sins, and the second one refers to the attribute of mercy after one sins."

The Ohr HaChaim (34:6) quotes Rosh's comments on the Gemara: "Why does one need the attribute of mercy before one sins; 'Because Hashem knows that a person is going to sin.'" The Ohr HaChaim understands this to mean that even though Hashem knows that a person is going to sin He takes no action because of his attribute of mercy.

The Ohr HaChaim asks; "I do not understand this answer, for if Hashem would punish someone before that person sins (knowing that a sin is going to be committed), then what is the point of someone being born? Hashem, with His omniscience, can hold every soul accountable to their future actions and judge them right away."

In other words, since Hashem knows what a person is going to do, He can hold him responsible prior to him actually sinning. Therefore Hashem, in His benevolence, initiates the attribute of mercy and withholds punishment. As the Ohr HaChaim points out, this approach presents a philosophical dilemma; what is the point of living if Hashem has already begun judging you before you actually act?

A careful reading of Rosh's actual words can, perhaps, give us a different understanding of

what he really means. The exact language of Rosh is, "Even though He knows that a person will eventually come to sin, He treats each person with the attribute of mercy." Rosh never says anything about Hashem's right to punish which, in turn, is being restrained by the attribute of mercy.

Perhaps Rosh means to say something entirely different. Very often when a person knows that he is being carefully evaluated or analyzed, such as on a first date or when a mother in law comes to visit, he is very uncomfortable and feels as though he is navigating landmines; every step has to be carefully considered before being made.

Similarly, when one is driving next to a state trooper on the highway, there is always a feeling that the trooper is just waiting to pounce and give you a ticket for some infraction.

Unfortunately, many people also feel this way about their parents or spouse; "they are just waiting for me to make a mistake so that they can criticize me." This leads to a terrible family dynamic because there is an inherent discomfort of being around that person. No one likes to feel like they are being judged every second of every day.

Thus, Rosh is teaching us a fundamental lesson in Hashem's benevolence. Of course Hashem judges us and there is accountability; that is a basic tenet of life. But He does so in order help us make decisions that are good for us and the world around us. The point of creation is for Hashem to bestow good upon us, therefore, even when mistakes are made He initiates His attribute of mercy to lessen or eliminate the punishment.



Just as one would feel more comfortable driving next to a state trooper with a "get out of jail free" card in one's pocket, so too does Hashem provide a cushion by letting us know that there is an attribute of mercy even before we sin. Hashem displays His mercy first to demonstrate that He isn't looking to pounce on us for mistakes.

Hashem is also demonstrating the delicate balance that we must strive to achieve with our families. Of course there must be accountability in a family, but we must always convey that it is coming from a place of love; we support each other, even when one makes a mistake, because we care much more about what is done right than what is done wrong.

## Did You Know...

In this week's *parsha* we are commanded to make the *Ketores*, a special spice mixture that was offered on the Golden Altar. Here are some of the more interesting facts about the *Ketores*

1. While the Torah only mentions four of the spices, Chazal note that there are actually eleven: balsam, onycha, galbanum, frankincense, myrrh, cassia, spikanard, saffron, costus, cinnamon, and cinnamon bark. Other minute ingredients were used, like salt, *Maaleh Ashan* (a secret ingredient which made the smoke travel straight up in a column), vetch lye (to soak up smell), and caper wine.



# Eternally Yours

**Let my anger burn against them and I shall annihilate them...Moshe pleaded with Hashem...why should Egypt say, "With evil intent did He take them out...to annihilate them from the face of the earth" (32:10-12).**

*Parshas Ki Sisa* details the unfaithfulness of Bnei Yisroel through their sin of the Golden Calf, and Hashem's threat to totally wipe out the Jewish people. Moshe begs Hashem to reconsider with the argument that if Hashem annihilated Bnei Yisroel then the Egyptians would say that Hashem took them out of Egypt with the intention of destroying them. Seemingly, Moshe is saying that it reflects poorly on Hashem to destroy Bnei Yisroel.

On the face of it, this argument seems nothing short of ludicrous. First of all, Hashem made such incredible miracles on the Jewish people's behalf: the ten plagues, the splitting of the Red Sea, and the delivery of food and water in the desert – where is the intent to destroy them? But even more compelling, Bnei Yisroel actually committed a capital offense by being unfaithful to Hashem. Clearly, Hashem is well within His right to utterly wipe them from the face of the earth.

In order to understand what Moshe is really saying, we have to consider the state of Bnei Yisroel when they were about to leave Egypt. During the time that it took for the ten plagues to play out (close to a year) there was a dramatic shift in the status of the Jews in Egypt. In fact, Chazal teach us that a full eighty percent of the Jews didn't leave Egypt. During that year of plagues, Egyptians had developed a whole new

respect for the Jews who now had a powerful ally that was punishing the Egyptians for their misdeeds. Jews also began to accumulate wealth because they were impervious to the effect of the plagues. Furthermore, the Egyptians began to build friendships with members of Bnei Yisroel.

Consider for a moment an individual who has a guaranteed job with a generous salary and an employer that will guarantee his future. He enjoys the city he lives in and the friendships he has built over time. What do you think would happen if this person were to be offered a new job with a salary that is five times what he is currently earning but with two stipulations; 1) he has to move to a new city 2) the new job carries no guarantees – that is he can be fired "at will." Clearly this individual would be crazy to leave his comfortable guaranteed first job and an environment he loves.

This was the situation Bnei Yisroel faced after the ten plagues. For all intents and purposes the Egyptians were accepting them as friends and doing business with them. This is why so many stayed behind. The only possible reason that Bnei Yisroel could rationalize leaving Egypt is that Hashem is promising them a guaranteed permanent relationship. Of course the destination was mostly unknown to them,

but their desire to enter into a permanent relationship with Hashem propelled the remaining twenty percent to leave Egypt and follow Hashem.

This is Moshe's argument, "Hashem, the reason Bnei Yisroel left Egypt is because of the guarantee of a permanent eternal connection. If you wipe them out, the Egyptians will laugh and say Hashem never intended to have a permanent relationship with them; the Jews were fooled!" By redeeming us from Egypt Hashem guaranteed that we would survive as a nation – His nation. This is what Bnei Yisroel bought into when they decided to leave Egypt. Hashem agrees with Moshe's argument and the threat of annihilation is removed.

This is also what is said in the *Haggadah*; "In every generation someone rises up to annihilate the Jewish people – and every time Hashem saves us from their hands." This, perhaps, is the greatest miracle of all. Every empire that sought to destroy the Jewish people is long gone and mostly forgotten. Yet, the Jewish people not only survived, we have thrived and succeeded under the bleakest of circumstances. This is a testament to Hashem's promise of our continued existence because of our eternal relationship with Him.

**(Did You Know Cont.) 2. Different opinions exist as to what exactly onycha is; from the majority of people (Mossef HeArukh, Ramban) saying it comes from certain snails, to a minority saying it comes from actual human fingernails (cf. Arukh s.v. Tziporen).**

3. They only made this mixture once a year, and strangely, it was divided equally based on the solar calendar into 368 parts. The extra 3 parts were for the Kohen Gadol's offering on Yom Kippur.

4. Since it was needed every day of the year, huge quantities had to be made. The total weight of all of these ingredients was a little over 1,840 pounds; thus 5 pounds was used each day (*The Living Torah*, Ki Sisa).

5. Only one group of people made the incense, a family named Avtinas. They were the only ones who knew exactly how to prepare this mixture, including how to use *the Maaleh Ashan*. Since they refused to teach it to anyone else (they were concerned

that the secret recipe would fall into the hands of idol worshippers), the Chachamim once fired them and tried to get experts from Alexandria to duplicate it. But they were unable to make the smoke travel straight up; it would just dissipate like ordinary smoke. Seeing this, they hired the Avtinas family back, doubling their pay.

6. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (*The Living Torah*, Ki Sisa) notes that *Maaleh Ashan* is probably the plant *Leptadenia Pyrotechnica*, which contains nitric acid. Interestingly, nitric acid reacts violently with organic material, which is a basic component of TNT and rocket fuel.

7. The smoke needed to travel straight up so it would cover the Aron, and hide the Shechina from the Kohen Gadol (*Me'em Loaz*, Ki Sisa 4).



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