

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Rabbi Gershon Sostchin, Gershon Ben Yakov. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS

ACHAREI-KEDOSHIM

Only Following Orders?

And the Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aharon... (16:1)

Moshe is told by HaShem to warn Aharon not to enter the Kodesh Hakedashim at the wrong time lest he suffer the same consequences as his two sons who also approached HaShem improperly.

Rashi (ad loc) explains this through a parable given by the Tanna R' Elazar Ben Azaryah: A sick person was visited by a doctor for treatment. The doctor advised him, "Do not eat cold food, do not sleep in a damp and cold place." He was then seen by a second doctor who gave him the exact same advice but added "do not do those things so that you will not die like so and so died."

Rashi goes on to explain that the second doctor is more effective in conveying his message than the first. So too, HaShem gives Moshe the warning for Aharon with the context of the death of his sons so that he will not die the way his sons died.

The parable of R' Elazar seems a little odd. Everyone knows that some doctors think they are gods, but it is a little unusual to have G-d wanting to be a doctor! HaShem is our king, he makes the rules and we need to follow them. Why is the parable about a sick person who was advised by a doctor what to do? Why isn't it a story about a subject who was ordered by the king what to do under penalty of death?

The difference between what a doctor tells you to do and what a king orders

you to do, is that a king punishes you for not listening to him while a doctor only informs you of what is good/bad for you. While a king's command is about what the king desires for himself, a doctor's orders are about what he desires for you. If a doctor tells someone not to smoke because it leads to death, dying isn't a consequence of not listening to the doctor; it's a consequence of not taking his advice and thereby causing injury to oneself.

In other words, a king's command is really all about listening to the king. A doctor's order is about the wellbeing of the patient. Similarly, when a father tells his young child not to go into the street because it's dangerous, of course the father will get angry when his child doesn't listen to him, but the reason he is angry isn't because he is insulted that he was ignored; he's angry because his child is acting so cavalierly with his life.

When HaShem tells Moshe to make sure that Aharon doesn't go into the Holy of Holies, it isn't because it is an affront to HaShem to enter without permission. The reason Hashem is telling Moshe to tell Aharon is for exactly the same reason that a doctor gives a patient orders; going there at the wrong time is dangerous to one's health. HaShem cares about us, the laws aren't about Him, they are in place for our own wellbeing. HaShem is compared to a doctor because He only wants what's good for us.

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Did You Know...

This week's *parsha* discusses the *avodah* of Yom Kippur. One element of this *avodah* is to pick two identical goats and cast lots for which one is offered to Hashem and which one is thrown off a mountain in the desert as a vicarious atonement for the collective sins of B'nei Yisroel: In other words, this goat takes the "blame". In fact, this is where the term "scapegoat" comes from.

On Yom Kippur, a Cohen is chosen to walk the goat to the mountain, passing ten huts with food and water, however, as long as he is strong enough, he fasts. Actually, the Gemara says that no Cohen ever partook in the food or water. A group of people accompany him until the tenth hut but from there he continues on alone. When he reaches the mountain top, he splits a red thread in two, tying one to a rock there, and one to the goat's horn. He then throws the goat off the cliff, where it tumbles down and is destroyed by the rocks. If B'nei Yisroel's sins are forgiven, the thread on the rock turns white. Originally, this thread had been hanging in the entrance to the Beis Hamikdash.

(Continued on reverse)

All About Me?

Speak to the people of Israel, and say to them, I am the Lord your God. Like the practices of the land of Egypt where you dwell, you shall not do; and like the practices of the land of Canaan, where I bring you, you shall not do... (18:2-3)

These aforementioned verses are the introduction to the list of forbidden intimate relationships. This comprehensive list, which oddly enough is read on Yom Kippur by *mincha*, also includes a seemingly VERY random law; that of the *molech* ritual. According to Rashi (18:21) this consisted of handing over your child to the *molech* priests who would then pass them through the fires. According to Ibn Ezra and Rashi's and Ramban's commentaries (*Yirmiyahu* 7:31) this initiation ritual sometimes resulted in death. While certainly a heinous and abominable practice, what is this law doing in the middle of the list of forbidden relationships?

We must begin by examining the root cause for having forbidden relationships in the first place. Ramban in this *parsha* posits that it would only be natural for people to choose their closest relatives as mates. For example, a lot of the complications of trying to merge two disparate families, or disparate cultures, or dealing with inheritance issues would dissipate if a man were to marry his sister. Why are we forbidden to marry our closest relatives?

In *Bereishis* (2:18) HaShem said, "it is not good for man to be alone, I will make a compatible helper for him." Rashi there explains that if man were self-sufficient he would be comparing himself to God. Just as God is one above, man is one below. In other words, man would consider himself more or less equal to God on the plane below. This would cause man to become totally egocentric and self-centered.

Therefore HaShem created a partner for man, someone he would have to merge with to balance him out and become a helpmate and an opposing opinion. This "merger" requires a true partner, one who is a totally separate entity and would not be swallowed up by the merger. Our closest relatives are ones that we are overly familiar with, if we go into our sister's home we feel perfectly comfortable opening the fridge and helping ourselves to whatever we want. That is, we would always take what we want because it is just an extension of ourselves. The same is true, of course, with parents, children, and aunts and uncles etc.

The purpose of marrying someone other than a relative is to leave this comfort zone

and become one with an entity with whom you must make an effort to restrain yourself and learn to negotiate within another person's space. This is what HaShem wanted to accomplish; the deconstruction of the personal ego of man through a partner (of course some wives have zealously taken this mandate to an extreme, but that is a discussion for another time). This is also why for two weeks out of every month we are reminded that we cannot relate to our spouse merely as an object of our desire, we must relate to them as an equal partner in our merged identities.

Now we understand why these *pesukim* are read on Yom Kippur: To remind us that even in our most powerful drives and desires we must recognize our place in the universe as subjects of the almighty. Finally, this also explains why *molech* is included right in the middle of these laws. A person may begin to feel that his closest relatives, i.e. his children, are his chattel, with whom he can do as he pleases – even going as far as offering them as service to his god. Therefore, HaShem reminds us that our children are not owned by us, they are separate beings that we are responsible for, not an extension of our self-centered world.

Did You Know Continued The Gemara relates that they discontinued the practice of hanging the thread by the entrance to the Beis Hamikdash because it became a great source of sorrow when it remained red. At that point the custom became to tie it to the rock on the cliff (*Yoma* 67a).

So how far did he walk? That mountain is today accepted as Jabel Muntar ("Mountain of the Watchman") the tallest mountain in that area of the Judean desert (about 1600 feet above sea level). This mountain is almost ten miles southeast of Yerushalayim and today is overlooked by the city of Ma'alei Adumim. The Cohen walked ten miles into the desert, then back, fasting the whole time!

Additionally, The Gemara states (*Yoma* 39a) that during the forty years that Shimon Hatzadik was the Cohen Gadol, the thread actually turned white as soon as the goat was thrown over the cliff: a sign that the sins of the people were forgiven. Also, the lot that said "*le'Hashem*" would always come up in the right hand. However, after he died, both of these things didn't happen as regularly: a proof of the people's moral and spiritual deterioration, which gradually increased, until forty years before the destruction of the Second Temple, when it didn't change color at all.

There are many interesting legends as to the source and meaning of *azazel* – one of the simplest is that it comes from the Aramaic - *wz-azal* means "the goat went away", referring, of course, to the sending the goat to the desert on Yom Kippur. We will leave the more esoteric explanations for another column, because after all, we will need material for next year's "Did You Know..." as well.



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