

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Shlomo Ben Avraham,
Cyrus Adler Neuman by his wife Rachel Neuman.
"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS EIKEV

It's the Little Things that Count

Therefore it shall come to pass, if you fulfill these laws, and keep, and do them, then Hashem your God shall keep with you the covenant and the kindness which he swore to your fathers (7:12).

This week's *parsha* begins with outlining the basis of our relationship with Hashem; if we keep the *mitzvos*, Hashem will keep the covenant and kindnesses promised to our forefathers. Rashi (ad loc), surprisingly, says that the *mitzvos* that are being referred to here are those that we trample underfoot – in other words, this refers to *mitzvos* that we feel are insignificant.

Mizrachi (ad loc) wonders why Rashi is limiting the fulfillment in the verse to those types of *mitzvos*. In fact, it seems contrary to the simple reading of the verse! What compelled Rashi to explain the *possuk* in this manner?

Imagine for a moment, that you received a call from your neighbor at two in the morning begging you to come over because his wife had unexpectedly gone into labor and they need someone to come over right away to stay in the house with the other young children. Undoubtedly, you, like most people, would respond in the affirmative and immediately make your way over there.

Now imagine receiving a call at two in the morning from this very same neighbor, but instead he asks you to go to Walgreens to pick up a jar of pickles and then go to 7-11 to get some ice cream for his wife who suddenly has an intense craving for pickles and ice cream. In this scenario you would hardly be as accommodating. You might just begin to

wonder whether or not your friend had lost his mind, and you would surely question the long term viability of this friendship.

Yet, for some inexplicable reason, a wife has no qualms about asking her husband to get out of bed at two in the morning and pick up items that would satisfy her cravings. Why? The answer, of course, lies in the nature of the relationship. When you are closely connected to someone you might ask things of them that seem insignificant because they know if the situation were reversed you would do the same for them.

This applies to our relationship with Hashem as well, and particularly in how we fulfill the *mitzvos*. Obviously, it is crucially important to fast on Yom Kippur, but does that really comment on the strength of the bond as it relates to fulfilling all that Hashem desires of us? Not really. In fact, there are many marginally connected Jews who fast on Yom Kippur, but otherwise do very little else that Hashem asks of us throughout the year.

Observing, in particular, the *mitzvos* that one would tend to see as trivial are the real indicators of the strength of our bond with Hashem. That is why it is the observance of these *mitzvos* that guarantee that Hashem will fulfill the covenant that he promised our forefathers.



Did You Know...

In this week's *parsha*, it says that Hashem will send (according to Rashi) a flying insect known as "*tzirah*" to attack our enemies, so that even those who are hiding will be destroyed. Rashi (ad loc) explains that the venom that these insects discharge can cause impotency and blindness.

1. Some authorities identify the *tzirah* here with the hornet, *Vespa Orientalis* (see *Living Torah* by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan).
2. It was a species known to multiply in times of war.
3. It was a honey-producing insect (*Makh'shirim* 6:4).
4. In Talmudic times, it was also known to be dangerous (*Shabbos* 80b; *Taanis* 14a).
5. According to others, *tzirah* denotes a kind of plague (Saadia; Ibn Janach; Radak; Sherashim).
6. It's possibly related to leprosy (Ibn Ezra).
7. The Gemara (*Shabbos* 80) relates an incident whereby one of these wasps stung a certain Galilean and he died from it.

(Continued on Reverse)

Living for Martyrdom?

And it will come to be, if you diligently listen to my commandments which I command you this day, to love Hashem your G-d... (11:13)

Rashi (ad loc), quoting the Sifri, explains that the rewards bestowed upon one who follows all of the *mitzvos* come as a result of loving Hashem. In other words, one is not supposed to do the *mitzvos* in order to receive reward, but rather to fulfill the *mitzvos* out of love for Hashem. Rashi continues, “One should not say ‘I will study Torah in order to become rich; I will study in order to be called a Rav; I will study in order to receive reward...’ but rather all that one does should be done out of love.” Rashi is clearly articulating that we do the *mitzvos* because we have a relationship with Hashem, not because of the reward.

This is akin to what Chazal teach in Pirkei Avos (1:3), “Antignos of Socho used to say: ‘Do not be as servants who serve the Master to receive reward. Rather, be as servants who serve the Master not to receive reward.’”

The trouble is that Rashi ends his comment on this verse with a very perplexing statement, “and in the end the honor will surely come...” Therefore, even though one isn’t supposed to focus on the reward for doing the *mitzvos*, one shouldn’t worry as the reward will surely follow. Rashi is seemingly undoing the lesson that he just taught! It’s almost as if we are supposed to do all the *mitzvos* “altruistically” – wink, wink – knowing all the while that, ultimately, we really are receiving reward.

If we aren’t supposed to do the *mitzvos* in order to receive reward, then what’s the point of making assurances that in the end you will receive reward? Aren’t we supposed to grow to the level where you aren’t doing the *mitzvos* for the reward?

The answer lies in understanding why people commit acts of martyrdom and self-sacrifice. Why, to a lesser extent, do so many people practice hero worship, create fan clubs, and walk around dressed as comic or movie characters? The answer is they all seek recognition. There is a gnawing emptiness in their lives that they seek to fill, and being recognized in such a way gives meaning to their lives. True, this meaning is pretty shallow, but it does create a fleeting moment where the person feels relevant.

In an extreme situation, one may actually commit self-destructive acts to fill this void. In fact, the more seemingly altruistic and self-sacrificial the act is, the more recognition they receive. Paradoxically, it seems that it is the survival instinct that drives this bizarre behavior. In other words, how does someone become immortal and live forever in the hearts and minds of others? By becoming a sacrifice for the cause.

Judaism abhors this behavior (a clear reason why Christianity was a nonstarter alternative). Our whole understanding of why the world was created is based on the bestowal of good on mankind. The highest

level of good is an immortal relationship with the Almighty. Therefore, everything that we do is out of love for Hashem, not out of compulsion to achieve recognition for ourselves. The word *korban* is commonly translated as sacrifice, but this is not really an accurate translation. The word *korban* comes from the root word “*karov*—to be close.” Meaning, the highest level of service to Hashem is a way to achieve a closer relationship.

How does one know that we are in a relationship with Hashem and that it isn’t merely a master ordering his slaves to be obedient? How do we know that Hashem doesn’t want us to act in a self-sacrificing way? Because, as Rashi points out, the motivation for the *mitzvos* must be our love for Hashem. Still, you might ask, but who’s to say that this is a two way relationship, perhaps it is like idol worship which is entirely one way?

Because, Hashem assures us that the reward is going to come in the end. Just like in a healthy marriage we (hopefully) don’t act in a quid pro quo way, that is, we don’t expect the wife to make dinner for her husband because he did the shopping and now she feels obligated. We all want our spouses to do things for us out of love, not obligation. That is why Rashi finishes with “in the end the reward will come.” Knowing that Hashem is interested in rewarding us tells us we are in a loving relationship, and not in an altruistic self-sacrificial one.

Did You Know Continued...

Additionally, the type of hornet thought to be the *tzirah*—the *Vespa Orientalis*—is very interesting:

1. Their stings are very painful to humans, and their stingers can be used multiple times. Because of this, a person can die from just one hornet, if stung multiple times.
2. They can transmit some serious diseases, which can also affect fruits and plants.
3. They have specialized antennas that enable them to harvest solar energy and store it in their heads, which helps them work during the day so that they can burrow and build their nests (underground).



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