

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

MAY 18, 2019

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of
Yitu bas Rafael. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

VOLUME 9, ISSUE 27

13 IYAR

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS EMOR

In Pursuit of the Pursued

When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born... (22:27)

Sefer Vayikra is known as *Toras Kohanim* – laws of the *kohanim* – and *Parshas Emor* truly exemplifies this name. This week's *parsha* opens with the many specific laws that only apply to a *kohen* including how they are to conduct themselves during their service in the *Mishkan* and *Beis Hamikdash*. The Torah goes on to give specific examples of physical shortcomings that would disqualify a *kohen* from serving in the *Mishkan* and *Beis Hamikdash*.

The Torah then informs us as to which animals are acceptable as offerings in the *Mishkan* and *Beis Hamikdash*: *When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born it must remain by its mother for seven days. Then, after the eighth day, it shall be acceptable as a fire offering to Hashem (22:27).*

The *midrash (Vayikra Rabba 27:4-5)* endeavors to explain why these specific animals are precious to Hashem and therefore He is desirous of their use as *korbanos*. The *midrash* begins by quoting a very cryptic verse in *Koheles (3:15)*: *That which is, already has been; and that which is to be has already been; and God seeks what has been driven away.*

The *midrash* interprets this enigmatic *possuk* with a fascinating extrapolation. The *midrash* begins, "If anyone asks how is it possible that had Adam Harishon not sinned he would have lived forever? It can be proven from Eliyahu Hanavi who never sinned and lives forever (i.e. thus fulfilling the words 'That which is, already has been'). If one ever doubted that man will ultimately be resurrected from the dead, it can be proven from both Eliyahu and Elisha (each of whom had resurrected a dead child and thus fulfilling 'and that which is to be has already been')."

The *midrash* then finishes the thread with the

end of the verse, "and God seeks what has been driven away." This means that Hashem is always sympathetic to those who are being chased. The *midrash* goes on to give several examples: Hashem chose to side with Avraham Avinu who was being chased by Nimrod; Hashem chose to side with Yitzchak who was being chased by the Philistines; Hashem chose to side with Yaakov who was being chased by his brother Eisav; Hashem chose to side with Yosef who was being chased by his brothers; Hashem chose to side with Moshe who was being chased by Pharaoh; Hashem chose to side with Dovid who was being chased by King Shaul. So too, Hashem desires animals who are pursued (bulls are pursued by lions, goats are pursued by leopards, and sheep are pursued by wolves).

This *midrash* is mind boggling. According to the interpretation of the *midrash*, how are we to understand the connection between the beginning of the *possuk* and end of it? What does resurrection and immortality have to do with Hashem desiring sacrifices only from the pursued?

In addition, what is this special connection that Hashem has to those who are being pursued? Weren't our forefathers and King David chosen for their righteous merit? Why are we implying that they were chosen because they were the underdogs?

Imagine you're standing in line at the supermarket and all of the sudden you feel someone kicking you from behind while hissing "move out of my way!" You turn around and you see that it's a 5 year old child that is trying cut in front of you. More likely than not, you smile and let him pass because you understand that a 5 year old doesn't have the emotional maturity to understand what he's doing. But if you turn around and



see that it's a 25 year old man, all of the sudden you feel like your personal space is being invaded and you slowly begin to get angry or even belligerent.

In order for the world to be created, Hashem had to constrict Himself, as it were, to allow another reality to exist without Hashem's reality overwhelming it. Thus we live in a space that Hashem "vacated" so that we could perceive our own existence. Hashem therefore gave up His space for the benefit of mankind.

Avraham Avinu was strong enough to defeat Nimrod (in fact he defeats him in the war with the four kings); Yaakov is stronger than Eisav (see *Bereishis 27:45* and Rashi there); Yosef becomes king but never retaliates against his brothers; Dovid was a more powerful warrior than Shaul; yet in all these situations each one gave up something from his own space to the one who was pursuing him. This is why Hashem chooses those who give up their own space, because they are actually emulating Him.

If the world was only supposed to be for six thousand years, this vacating of space would not be so significant to Hashem who is an eternal being. But as the beginning of the *possuk* in *Koheles* reminds us, Hashem created man immortal and even once man sinned Hashem pledges to bring all the meritorious dead back to life. Thus these acts are in effect an **eternal** vacating of His space and that's why it's so significant. Therefore, anything pursued, which by definition is giving up of its own space, is very precious to Hashem and that's what He desires to be connected to through the sacrifices.

Want to be Happy?

You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of the citron tree, a palm branch, myrtle branches, and brook willows; and you shall rejoice before Hashem your God for a period of seven days (23:40).

This week's *parsha* discusses, quite extensively, the holidays on the Jewish calendar. The verse above describes part of the holiday of *Sukkos*, what we are obligated to bring in terms of the four species, and how we are supposed to feel (happy).

This is a little hard to understand. After all, everyone seems to be in the pursuit of happiness, yet many do not seem to achieve it. How can the Torah legislate that one must be happy on *Sukkos*? Or, to put it another way, what are the steps that we must take in order to become happy?

In addition, as the Torah goes through the holidays on the calendar one would think that there would be some logical progression to the holidays that are in a given month. In other words, holidays that are celebrated in close proximity to each other should follow a path that explains why they follow one another.

Yet in the month of *Tishrei* we begin with a very somber day of judgement (*Rosh Hashana*), continue with the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* culminating in a day of purification and holiness and separation from all materialism (*Yom Kippur*), and finally on to the big celebration of *Sukkos*. Most of us just feel such a sense of relief at the end of *Yom Kippur* that in reality *Sukkos* is often perceived as the "after party," a kind of celebration that we survived the "Ten Days of Awe." But that's hardly a progression, in actuality that would be a regression. What is *Sukkos* actually all about?

When we consider what it takes to connect to something we usually think of this as a question of proximity. In fact, one of the ways we describe a

relationship of connection is "we are close."

This is what happens on during the ten days of repentance culminating with *Yom Kippur*. As a matter of fact, we are enjoined to "call out to Him when he is close" (*Yeshaya* 55:6) in reference to the Ten Days of Awe.

But there is an even higher level of connection with the Almighty; that of emulating him and becoming God-like in deeds and actions. We learn this out from *Avraham Avinu* who actually abandons Hashem while Hashem is visiting with him to go and take care of some potential guests whom he spots on the road. Avraham teaches us that acting in a God-like manner is a much closer connection to Hashem than even being in His presence. As the expression goes, "imitation is the most sincerest form of flattery."

Even though we achieve a closeness with Hashem during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva*, culminating in a most intense such as *Yom Kippur* that we eschew all forms of materialism, *Sukkos* is an opportunity to reach a higher level of a relationship: that of being God-like.

Consider what Maimonides says, "The following was the custom in Jerusalem. A person would leave his house with the *lulav* in his hand. He would enter the synagogue with the *lulav* in his hand. He would pray with it in his hand. He would go visit the sick and comfort the mourners with it in his hand" (*Yad Hilchos Shofar Sukkah V'lulav* 7:24).

Now this specific focus on visiting the sick on the *yom tov* of *Sukkos* might be considered a little unusual. But comforting the mourners is really very

hard to understand as there is no public mourning on holidays and therefore no obligation to comfort mourners on *yom tov*.

While it's true that we don't have an obligation to do it, there are still individuals who lost a close family relative and are in a state of sadness. We visit the sick and comfort mourners because we want to help others, whether or not we have the obligation to do so. This is what causes us to follow in His ways and become God-like. This is why *Sukkos* is a further progression of *Yom Kippur*, because we are now emulating the Almighty. On *Sukkos* there is a special obligation of kindness to others. According to the *midrash*, we learn the proper way of treating guests in our home from the decreasing number of the bulls that are brought on *Sukkos*. It is no coincidence that *Sukkos* is the only holiday that we invite the *Ushpizin* to our meals.

It is this act of doing for others that creates the greatest sense of happiness within ourselves. When we do something that is not only not self-serving but also helps someone else, that is the ultimate sense of achievement.

Likewise Maimonides says (*Yad Hilchos Megilla* 2:17) that on *Purim* giving charity is a **much** higher priority than any of the other *mitzvos* of the day (having a feast or *mishloach manos*). **"Because there is no greater joy than bringing happiness to the poor, the orphan and the widow and the stranger. Because anyone that brings joy to these depressed individuals is God-like..."** If you want to be happy focus your life on doing for others.



4000 Alton Road
Miami Beach, FL 33140

To dedicate an issue of Insights please email:
info@talmudicu.edu
or contact us at: (305) 534-7050



Scan to subscribe and
receive Insights via email