

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Malka bas Rav Kalman.
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20 SHEVAT

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS YISRO

The Lure of Martyrdom

You shall not have the gods of others before me (20:3).

Rashi (ad loc) clarifies that the verse cannot be explained according to its simple translation ("You shall not take other gods before me") because it would be denigrating to Hashem to even refer to them as gods in the same context. Rather the word "*acheirim*—other") is to be translated as "*gods who act as 'other' to the ones that worship them.*" In other words, gods who act as "strangers" to those who worship them; no matter how much the worshipers pray they will never be answered.

For thousands of years, much of mankind worshiped powerless idols; but what is the pathology of serving a god who doesn't answer? The answer is—and herein lies the difference between Judaism and the other major

religions—the allure of self-sacrifice is very attractive. Whether it's a vow of poverty, celibacy, or the jihad of suicidal bombing, becoming a martyr is a very self-serving way of elevating oneself. Worshiping a god who ignores you allows one to feel that the worship

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is 100% genuine.

In Judaism we are supposed to understand that Hashem loves us and cares about us and only wants what is good and best for us. While we aren't supposed to serve Hashem in order to get a reward, it is critical that we



understand that there will be one because we have a relationship with Hashem. Similarly, in a marriage we don't do things quid pro quo for our spouse, we do it out of love – all the while knowing that our spouse does the same for us. Self-sacrifice is antithetical to all we believe because being in a relationship with a god who ignores you is akin to being in an abusive relationship. The rare occasions that Judaism calls for self-sacrifice is only to preserve the integrity of the relationship, never as an avenue of serving Hashem.



Ever wonder why so many hospitals are called Mount Sinai? The answer lies in a Chazal based on this week's *parsha*. On the *possuk* "[...] in the sight of the people on Mount Sinai" (19:11), Rashi quoting the Mechilta comments

that from here we learn that everyone was able to see Hashem because at Mount Sinai everyone was healed. It is therefore very logical to call hospitals Mount Sinai. But why did Hashem perform this incredible miracle? What is the message that we are to learn from this?

There is a well-known criticism of religion being "the opiate of the masses." Cynics claim that religion only has value for someone who is in pain and looking to find some relief, much

like a drug. This misguided theory argues that there is no innate value in religion other than dulling the pain of everyday living. It is for precisely this reason that Hashem cured all the infirmities. The message that Hashem wanted to give the world was that the Torah, first and foremost, is for healthy people and that the true benefits of our Torah are most readily available to someone who is of sound body and mind.

Shabbos...Day of Rest?

And the seventh day is the Shabbos of Hashem your G-d; you shall not do any work... For in six days Hashem made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day... (20:10-11)

There are two versions of the *Aseres Hadibros* (Ten Commandments) in the Torah. In the one that appears in this week's *parsha*, it indicates that the reason one must not do any work on Shabbos is because Hashem "rested on the seventh day." Yet in the second version of the *Aseres Hadibros*, in *Parshas V'eschanan*, the Torah states the reason as "remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and that Hashem your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and with a stretched out arm; therefore Hashem commanded you to keep the day of Shabbos." Seemingly, there is a contradiction as to why we are commanded to keep Shabbos.

Additionally, both versions of the *Aseres Hadibros* begin with "I am Hashem your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery." One must wonder why Hashem didn't describe himself as "Hashem creator of the world." Would that not be a much better verification of His omnipotence and the ultimate reason we must follow His commandment?

On the *possuk*, "And the locusts went over all the land of Egypt, and alighted on all the borders of Egypt" (10:14), the Bal Haturim comments that the word "*vayanach*—alighted" appears only twice in the Torah; here and in this week's *Aseres Hadibros*. What is the similarity between the two occurrences?

Clearly, the Torah is telling us that the word doesn't mean that Hashem

rested on the seventh day, it means Hashem alighted, or came down, on the seventh day. Just as the locusts came down on Egypt so too Hashem comes down to our world on Shabbos. The reason Shabbos is a day on which work is prohibited is because on Shabbos Hashem comes down to this world to be with us.

With this we can understand that there is no contradiction between the two versions of the *Aseres Hadibros* concerning why we keep Shabbos. When Hashem took the Jewish people out of Egypt He Himself came down to take us out, as the Torah states: "For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgement; I am Hashem" (12:12). In other words, the two times that Hashem came into this world for the benefit of the Jewish people are the reasons that we must keep Shabbos. This is why Hashem describes himself as "the one who took you out of Egypt." It isn't to verify His omnipotence, rather it is a lasting description of His love of the Jewish people. He begins the *Aseres Hadibros* with this to set the tone; He doesn't just want us to follow his rules, we are meant to have a relationship with Hashem. This is why we constantly quote "*zecher l'yitzias Mitzrayim*," because it is a reminder of the ultimate manifestation of Hashem's love for us.

Did You Know...

The *Mishna* in *Tamid* (1:1) states that there was a public reading of the Ten Commandments by the *kohanim* in the Beis Hamikdash along with the daily recital of the *shema*. The Gemara (*Brachos* 12a) relates that Sages initially instituted this practice outside the Beis Hamikdash but soon abolished it because it would falsely indicate that the *Aseres Hadibros* were more important than other parts of the Torah.

Based on this Gemara, Rashba (*Teshuvah* 1:184) forbids the recital of the *Aseres Hadibros* during the morning prayers. The Tur (*Orach Chaim* 1), however, rules that it is proper to recite the *Aseres Hadibros* daily – seemingly contrary to the Gemara. The Beis Yosef (ad loc) clarifies that the recitation was abolished in public, though in private there is no restriction. Yet, the Kaf HaChaim (*O.C.* 1:32) quotes the Arizal that one should not say it at all. Maharshal in his responsa (64) writes, "I have resumed the practice of reciting the Ten Commandments aloud before the *baruch she'amar* because it seems to me that the Decalogue should be given a set place as part of the *yotzer*, the same as the *shema*. As for saying the Ten Commandments every morning in honor of the Torah and in honor of the Creator Who inscribed these words in heavenly script on the two tablets of stone – this seems to me to be a great *mitzvah*. The Tur, Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher, wrote that it is a good thing to repeat them."



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