

# INSIGHTS

## Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Boruch Tzvi ben Reuven Nossou, Brian Galbut. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VA'ESCHANAN

## An Eternal Present

### I beseeched Hashem at that time... (3:23)

This week's *parsha* opens with Moshe recalling when he implored Hashem to allow him to enter Eretz Yisroel, and how Hashem became angry with him and rejected his request. Rashi (ad loc) points out that the word for implore in Hebrew is a derivation of the word "*chinun*," which means to ask for a gift. Rashi goes on to explain that, while the righteous could ask Hashem to give them what they deserve based on their good deeds, the righteous request that Hashem give them "gifts for free" instead. However, this notion requires further clarification.

Shlomo Hamelech writes, "*he that abhors a gift will live*" (*Mishlei* 15:27). This principle is further clarified by Chazal who deride receiving gifts by saying, "When those who receive gifts became numerous, the days became few and years short, as it is written, 'He who hates gifts shall live'" (*Sotah* 47b). Several Talmudic sources likewise indicate that one must be careful not to receive gifts. Therefore, asking for a gift seems to go against the very nature of what Judaism stands for! So why does Rashi say that the righteous ask Hashem for a gift?

In truth, Shlomo Hamelech's principal of abhorring gifts needs to be more fully understood. Are we to believe that a person shouldn't accept a gift from his parents or spouse? Should he really abhor the pen holder that his child will inevitably bring home from kindergarten and proudly present to him as a gift?

Like every part of the Torah, the explanation lies in a close reading of the verse. Shlomo Hamelech says that abhorring a present will enable a person to

"live." What did he mean?

As Ramchal explains in the beginning of the *Derech Hashem*, the Almighty created the world in order to give man the ultimate "good." The very essence of this structure requires us to earn this "good" through a system of making decisions that will result in reward or punishment. Ramchal goes on to explain that the reason Hashem didn't just bestow this "good" on mankind is because that would be akin to receiving charity. Therefore, Hashem gives the opportunity to earn this reward, so that we feel it is truly ours and a product of our efforts. This "product of our efforts" is what gives our existence meaning; thus, it allows us to feel that we exist.

When a person receives a gift it takes away from his feeling of existence, and this is why it is embarrassing; it is as if we are not able to provide for ourselves. This is why Shlomo Hamelech said, "he who abhors a gift will live." Providing for oneself is what affirms that our existence is justified.

The only exception to this is receiving gifts based on a relationship. There is no issue when receiving gifts from one's parents, spouse, or children because those gifts are an expression of love. In fact, receiving this expression of love is an incredible validation of oneself. This is what the righteous are asking for; "Hashem please give me a gift as an expression of our close relationship, not merely because I have earned it like a paycheck." Receiving a gift from Hashem is an incredible affirmation of the relationship, which is what every *tzaddik* desires – a close relationship with Hashem.



### Did You Know...

This coming Wednesday is Tu B'Av. The Mishna (*Ta'anis* 26b) records that this was the day when men and women used to go into the vineyards to look for a mate. Understandably, nowadays this has become a traditionally desirable day for weddings as it is considered one of the most festive days in the Jewish calendar. The reason that Yom Kippur is so festive, as the Gemara explains (*Ta'anis* 30b), is because it is the day of forgiveness for the Jewish people and it is the day that we received the second set of the *luchos*. But what makes Tu B'Av such a festive day? Here's a list of several reasons recorded by Chazal that make Tu B'Av special:

1. On this day, the tribes were once again permitted to intermarry, as the sages ruled that the prohibition on intermarriage was only pertinent to the generation that entered Eretz Yisroel (*Gemara Ta'anis* 30b).
2. Similarly, on this day, the tribe of Binyamin was allowed to marry into the rest of Israel. This was after Binyamin had been ostracized because of the incident with the concubine of Givah (*Melachim* 21:1).

(Continued on reverse)

# Wholly-ness

## Hear, O Israel: Hashem our God, Hashem is One (6:4)

Toward the end of this week's *parsha*, we have perhaps the most famous *possuk* in the entire Torah: "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad" (6:4). This verse constitutes what amounts to the Jewish pledge of allegiance, as it were, and is recited (at least) twice daily.

Rashi (ad loc) interprets this *possuk* in a novel way; "today Hashem is **our** God and not the God of the other nations of the world, but in the future He will be recognized by all the nations of the world. This is in accordance with the *possuk* 'On that day, Hashem will be One and His Name One'" (Zecharia 14:9). Seeing as the *shema* is a Jewish affirmation of faith it seems a little odd that we place such an emphasis on what the rest of the world does or does not believe.

Meaning, declaring that Hashem is our king fulfills the requirements of a pledge of allegiance. But why should "our" *shema* focus on the prophetic vision regarding the future religious beliefs of the rest of the world?

Ramchal, in his introduction to what is probably his most famous work, the *Messilas Yesharim* (*Path of the Just*), makes a remarkable statement: "The essence of all this (i.e. cultivation and correction of character traits) is that a person conforms all his actions and traits to what is just and ethical. Our sages have summarized this idea: 'All that is praiseworthy to the doer and brings him praise from others' (*Avos* 2:1). That is to say – all that leads to the essence of the true good, namely strengthening of Torah and

repairing the brotherhood of nations."

We see from here a very fundamental element of Jewish philosophy, and one that people often overlook. One of the major reasons that we have to instill in ourselves proper character traits and conduct ourselves in an ethical and just manner is to impress upon the rest of the world the value of Hashem's way of life as proscribed to us through the Torah.

The reason for this, as explained by Ramchal in the *Messilas Yesharim*, is to bring unity to the world. In other words, when there is a recognition that "our" God's way of living is the proper way to live, we bring recognition to the world of the One True God. Recognizing that we (i.e. the entire world) are all children of Hashem will bring unity to the world. That is, all the nations will then know that the entire world is really just one large "family."

This is why the *shema* contains the prophetic vision of the future. We must certify daily that we accept this responsibility to make Hashem known to the rest of the world. We cannot merely focus on ourselves; we have to undertake the mission of unifying the world with the recognition of the One True God. This will herald in the time of the ultimate redemption and this is why this *parsha* is read following Tisha B'Av. May we be *zocheh* to achieve this redemption speedily in our days.

3. This the day that the people who were destined to die in the desert stopped dying. Interestingly, they figured this out because each eve of Tishah B'Av everyone in the targeted age group (any male that was over 20 when he left Egypt) dug themselves graves, and slept in it. In the morning, those who survived got up and covered the dead. However, in the 40<sup>th</sup> year, everyone got up. Fearing they were mistaken of the date, they continued until laying in the graves until Tu B'Av. Once they saw the full moon, they realized the decree was over and they celebrated. Additionally, because the decree was over, the quality of Hashem's communication with Moshe returned on this day, as it was diminished until the people ceased dying (*Gemara Ta'anis* 30b).
4. On this day, Hoshea ben Elah removed the guards that Yaravam ben Nevat (an evil king of the Jews) placed there, which prevented the Jews from going to the Beis Hamikdash during the festivals.
5. Also on this day, the days begin to get cooler, this prevented the Jews from cutting more wood for the altar (because it wouldn't dry properly) (*Talmud Bavli, Ta'anis* 31a). Rashbam (*Bava Basra* 121b) explains that it is joyous because they completed their *mitzvah* of cutting the wood. Rabbeinu Gershom (ad loc) presents a dissenting opinion, and explains that it's joyous because once they stopped cutting wood there was more time for Torah study. Alternatively, a complete opposite view holds that on this day the days actually got hotter, allowing them to cut wood for the altar, which is a great *mitzvah* and a reason to celebrate (*Talmud Yerushalmi, Yeffeh Mareh*).
6. The final reason recorded in the Gemara is that on this day the slain Jews of Beitar were finally allowed to be buried. These were the Jews who were killed during the Roman conquest of Beitar, a consequence of Bar Kochba's ill fated revolt. These bodies weren't allowed to be buried throughout the seven years of king Hadrian's reign. Miraculously, the bodies didn't decompose at all during this entire time, which is why the fourth blessing in *benching* was instituted (*Gemara Ta'anis* 31a).



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