

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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3 SHEVAT

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VA'EIRA

A Privilege to Serve

And Elazar son of Aharon took from the daughters of Putiel as a wife (6:25)

The Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 7:5) by offering some of his crops. observes that the plural Unfortunately, he chose from the and he points out that we learn “daughters” indicates that she lowest quality. Hevel - who really this approach from Hevel (in fact, came from two families; she was was only inspired to give by his he says “one should control his evil the daughter of Yosef’s family (who brother Kayin - also brings a gift to inclination and be generous to conquered his evil inclination) and Hashem but he chooses from the bring the best”). a daughter of Yisro’s family (who best of his animals. Hashem fattened calves for idol worship). While it is true that all the forefathers married women from families of avowed idol worshippers, the Torah always gave them their own identity and indicated how righteous they were. Yet here, the only information we have is

one should control his evil inclination and be generous to bring the best

on the families; we don’t even have the name of Elazar’s wife. Clearly the Torah is informing us that the reason he married her was because of the qualities in these two families. Yosef’s strength of character is obviously a virtue. But why did Elazar seek to marry someone whose father fattened calves for idol worship?

The first family disagreement in the Torah is about how to serve Hashem. Kayin initiates the concept of giving back to Hashem

and he points out that we learn this approach from Hevel (in fact, he says “one should control his evil inclination and be generous to bring the best”). Ultimately, Elazar married a woman who learned self-control from both sides of the family. He admired and even wished to

The difference between the two perspectives is significant: Kayin feels that he owes Hashem and Yisro had, that of serving a deity wants to pay off his obligation. Since the intention is to pay off an obligation the quality doesn’t make

a difference as long as the obligation is now resolved. On the other hand, Hevel understands that Hashem isn’t looking to be paid off, rather Hashem desires a relationship. He gives his best to show that he wants to be close to Hashem and considers it a privilege to serve.

Maimonides (*Hilchos Issurei Mizbeach* 7:11) says that when one is serving Hashem, one should always strive to bring the best or build the highest quality available,



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Attitude of Gratitude

Hashem said to Moshe, "Say to Aharon, take your staff..." (7:19)

Rashi (ad loc) quoting the Midrash core values of Judaism as we must Tanchuma, explains that Aharon appreciate everything that Hashem needed to enact the first two has done for us. We constantly plagues, which directly affected the affirm this through *teffilos* and Nile River. This is because the Nile *brachos*; thinking we do so because had protected Moshe from we "owe" gratitude. Yet this cannot be the sole reason for giving appreciation and thanks. If that were the case, then why couldn't Moshe strike the Nile and the land?

Similarly, we find that by the third plague, in which the ground became infested with lice, that Moshe wasn't the one to bring it about because the earth had protected him when he buried the Egyptian that he had "illegally" executed. As the Midrash points out: Reb Tanchum said, Hashem told Moshe "the sand that protected you when you struck the Egyptian could not be struck by you" (*Shemos Rabbah* 10:7). In other words, the ground hid his *hatov* is to recognize within misdeed, therefore it wasn't appropriate for Moshe to inflict the earth with a plague of lice.

We find another instance of "*hakoras hatov*," recognizing a kindness done for you, toward the end of Moshe's life. Hashem had commanded Moshe to attack the Midianites for their seduction of Bnei Yisroel into immorality and idol worship, yet Moshe sent Pinchas to lead the charge. The Midrash Tanchuma (*Bamidbor Matos* 3) explains that it wasn't fitting for Moshe to lead the charge against the Midianites because he "grew up" in Midian and "one should not cast a stone into a well he has drunk from."

Gratitude and *hakoras hatov* are

It is a well-known tenet of Jewish philosophy that Hashem created the world to give mankind the ultimate good; a relationship with Him. This relationship is an expression of Hashem's love for us. The real purpose in giving *hakoras* is to recognize within ourselves that someone cares about us and loves us. That tangible feeling of being loved affirms who we are and gives us strength. In other words, the greatest beneficiary of giving thanks is the one giving it because you are recognizing the value of your very existence. The reason we don't throw stones into a well that we benefited from and why Moshe couldn't hit the Nile or ground is because they were all acting as agents of Hashem and his love.

Recognizing the good that is done for us is the beginning of understanding the very reason why we were created; for our own good.

Question to Contemplate

In this week's *parsha* we find a rather unusual passage:

And Moshe and Aharon did as Hashem commanded them...And Moshe was eighty years old, and Aharon eighty three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

(7:6-7)

Aside from the fact that it seems like a VERY random place to cite their ages, it is also seemingly very problematic. Moshe and Aharon are appearing here before Pharaoh prior to the plagues. Our Rabbis teach us that each of the plagues lasted from three to four weeks including the warning, actual plague, cleanup in the aftermath and a short respite between the plagues.

This means that the plagues took the better part of a year to unfold. The Jewish people left Egypt on the 15th of Nissan and we know that Moshe's birthday is the seventh of Adar (the month prior to Nissan). This means Moshe was eighty one years old when they left Egypt. The Jewish people wandered in the desert for forty years and Moshe died on his birthday of that fortieth year. By our calculation Moshe would have been 121 on the day of his death. Yet the Torah says that he was 120! How is this possible?

