

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated I'zecher nishmas Tovia ben Yitzhak a"h.
"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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20 SHEVAT

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS YISRO

In-laws and Outlaws

And her two sons: whom the name of one was Gershom, for he had said, 'I was a stranger in a strange land'; and the name of the other was Eliezer, for 'the God of my father came to my aid and he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh' (18:4-5).

Moshe named his two sons after experiences in his life. Presumably, his son Gershom was named for the events of his life in Midian; having arrived as an Egyptian immigrant and settling there to marry Tziporah the daughter of Yisro - one of the chieftains of Midian. His second son, Eliezer, was named after the miraculous event sparing him from Pharaoh's decree and the resulting executioner's sword (see Rashi ad loc).

Many of the commentators are bothered by the fact that according to the chronological order of events in Moshe's life, he should have named his first child Eliezer because he was saved from Pharaoh's sword many years prior to his arrival as an immigrant to Midian. So why did he choose to name his first son after events that took place later in his life?

In addition, the name Gershom itself is rather perplexing; it definitely seems to slant toward the negative. Why should he express that he felt as a stranger in a strange land after being so warmly welcomed (albeit years later) by Yisro and his family? What kind of appreciation is this to his wife, father in law, and extended family who gave him a home and family in Midian?

Targum Yonasan ben Uziel (18:4) translates the verse similarly, but with a subtle addition; "I was a stranger in a strange land, **that was not mine.**" Why does the Targum add those words to the end of this verse? Remarkably, with those few words, Targum Yonasan ben Uziel refocuses our attention and tells us what Moshe Rabbeinu is really saying.

In the *Bris Bein Habesarim*, the covenant that Hashem made with Avraham Avinu, Hashem decrees that Bnei Yisroel will have to go down and be "*strangers in a land that is not theirs*" (*Bereshis* 15:13). Of course, we later learn that this land is Egypt. According to the Targum, Moshe, in naming his first Gershom, is not referring to Midian but rather to how he felt growing up in Egypt! Even though he grew up as a prince in Pharaoh's house, knowing who he really was caused him to feel like an undocumented Mexican living next door to the Trumps.

With this understanding, the questions raised by the commentators fade away. Moshe named his children specifically in chronological order: his first child describes his life growing up in Egypt, and his second child describes his exit from Egypt. Moreover, he was letting his new



adopted family know that he didn't pine for the land or home in which he grew up.

Perhaps most significantly, we learn from Moshe Rabbeinu that growing up in a place with many privileges and comforts shouldn't obscure the vision of living in our own land and on our own terms. If history has taught us anything, it has taught us this: We can never confuse being comfortable in a country with actually being in our **own** country.

Did You Know...

In this week's *parsha*, Hashem gives us the *Aseres Hadibros* (Ten Commandments) on Mount Sinai:

1. Belief in G-d.
2. Do not worship idols.
3. Do not take Hashem's name in vain.
4. To keep the Shabbos.
5. Honor one's parents.
6. Do not murder.
7. Do not commit adultery.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not bear false witness.
10. Do not covet what another person has. →

Seeing is Believing

...Hashem shall descend before the eyes of all the people on Mount Sinai (19:11).

Rashi (ad loc) tells us a fascinating occurrence that took place prior to the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai: Everyone was miraculously healed. In other words, all the sick, infirm, and handicapped were cured at Mount Sinai. Obviously, this explains why almost every Jewish community with a hospital names it "Mount Sinai."

Yet, we must wonder why Hashem saw it necessary to perform such an incredible miracle. What was the purpose of healing everyone? What was the message that we were meant to take away from this incredible revelation of Hashem's power and the departure from the physical norm?

In a famous paraphrasing of Karl Marx, critics have called religion "the opiate of the masses." Marx believed that religion had certain practical functions in society that were similar to the function of opium in a sick or injured person. Opiates reduce people's immediate suffering and provides

them with pleasant illusions, but no meaningful long term benefits. (As a side note, Marx was actually referring to religion as an opiate for the sickness and suffering brought on by the soulless and heartless suffering caused by rampant capitalism.)

We all know how well his philosophy worked out for the communists; and yet, Marx's criticism of religion persists even after his ideas for a new world order have been shown to be abject failures.

This is the message that Hashem wanted us to learn at Mount Sinai: Everyone was cured to teach us that the optimal way to receive the Torah is when we are in perfect health, both physically and emotionally. Of course the Torah also has the answers when we are suffering and/or not operating at our ideal level, but we can only fully appreciate all that the Torah has to offer on a personal and communal level when we are completely healthy.

When a person is ill or otherwise distracted by pain for physical or emotional issues, one's focus becomes distracted by the personal issues at hand. Of course the Torah can be helpful in addressing those issues, but at that moment all that one can see is a very limited perspective of what the truths of Torah contain. This is because a person in a state of pain sees everything through the lens of that suffering.

But when one is at 100% strength, both physically and emotionally, the Torah can be seen for what it is really meant to be; a blueprint of Hashem's wisdom for the world and a guide for having the most fulfilling life that Hashem has bestowed upon us. Hashem cured everyone at Mount Sinai so that each person could fully appreciate the infinite wisdom that the Torah offers and connect to Hashem's truths contained therein without the slightest distraction.

Did You Know Continued

Moshe delivered them to Bnei Yisroel on two tablets (stone, not on iPads) with five on each. The question is, why specifically two tablets? Why not one or five or even ten tablets?

The *Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael* (Chapter 8) explains that the *Aseres Hadibros* are arranged in this way so that they can also be read horizontally (1-6, 2-7, etc.) as well as in the standard order. Each of the horizontal pairs of the Ten Commandments reinforce each other as follows:

First and sixth: Everyone is made in

the image of God; therefore one who commits a murder is also attacking the image of Hashem (*Mech. d'R. Ishmael* Ch. 8).

Second and seventh: One who worships a false god is considered to be violating his sacred relationship or "marriage" with Hashem (*Mech. d'R. Ishmael* Ch. 8).

Third and eighth: Someone who steals will end up swearing falsely - i.e. will come to be using Hashem's name in vain (Rashi on *Shir Hashirim* 4:5).

Fourth and ninth: One who does not observe Shabbos is falsely testifying

that God did not create the world in six days and rest on Shabbos (*Mech. d'R. Ishmael* Ch. 8).

Fifth and tenth: Those who fail to honor their father and mother usually fail to do so because they feel that they are the center of the universe and their parents were fortunate to have them as a child. They don't feel any sense of obligation towards their parents, rather they feel whatever they have is owed to them, because everything is about them. This attitude will inevitably lead them to feeling entitled and coveting that which others have.



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