

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Yaakov Dovid ben Nochum Binyamin, Professor Bierman. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS METZORA

A Deconstructive Criticism

Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon saying: When you arrive in the land of Canaan that I will give you as a possession, and I will place an affliction of tzora'as upon the house [...] (14:33-34).

This week's *parsha* continues the theme of divine retribution in the form of the punishment *tzora'as* and the process of purification and recovery from it. Chazal teach us that this affliction came in progressive waves; first *tzora'as* appeared on one's home and when the person continued to ignore the message it appeared on the person's vessels and finally on the person's skin.

The Talmud (*Arachin* 16a) says that *tzora'as* was a heaven sent punishment for seven types of sins, but chief among them *loshon hora*. In fact, the word מצורע (the name given to a person afflicted with this ailment) is a contraction of the words מוציא רע — one who brings out evil." As discussed in prior editions of INSIGHTS, the sin of *loshon hora* is quite serious and thus the punishment quite severe.

Yet Rashi comments on this *possuk* regarding *tzora'as* afflicting one's home: "This was good news, because the Amorites hid treasures of gold in the walls of their homes during the forty years that Bnei Yisroel were in the desert and as a result of the *tzora'as* (in the process of the purification) a person would dismantle the home and find (these treasure hoards)."

One must wonder what as to the logic of this punishment. The divine retribution for a heinous sin actually leads to a person finding a treasure of gold? What

is the message that Hashem is trying to convey?

Punishment is a message of criticism from Hashem that one is not behaving properly and that one must change his ways. But criticism is very difficult for a person to accept. The knee-jerk reaction upon hearing criticism from someone is to get defensive because the person feels that he is being personally attacked.

In most situations, this analysis of being attacked is actually true. Consider the person who "shushes" someone in shul for speaking loudly or talking during *davening*; 99% of the time the person who gives the criticism is merely annoyed at being bothered or distracted during *davening*. Criticizing another person's behavior because you are annoyed by it is almost never effective.

Proper criticism is only to be delivered if a person has a genuine concern for the person he is criticizing – because that is the only way the criticized person could possibly feel that he is *not* being personally attacked. At that point, the person being criticized can try to dispassionately look at his own behavior and see if corrective measures are in order.

A person who receives *tzora'as* on his home is getting a very public rebuke from Hashem. After all, it's hard to hide



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having to dismantle one's home. This is obviously very embarrassing and debilitating to one's psyche.

The reason that a person who gets the first level of rebuke (*tzora'as* on one's home) receives an almost instantaneous reward is because Hashem is sending him a message: "I love you and care about you; I am rebuking you for your own good, so please change your ways."

In this way, a person is likely to receive the criticism from Hashem in the most positive manner and consider what changes to make in his life in order to correct his errant behavior. The reward showing Hashem's love allows a person to honestly reflect on the message and react in a positive manner to the criticism.

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Follow the Leader

And Bnei Yisroel went and did as Hashem had commanded Moshe and Aharon, so they did (Shemos 12:28).

This week is known as *Shabbos Hagadol*. According to Chazal, this was the Shabbos that Bnei Yisroel set aside a lamb to be brought as a *Korban Pesach*.

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by the seemingly repetitious conclusion of the *possuk*. In other words, the beginning of the verse clearly states that Bnei Yisroel did as Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon, therefore why did the Torah find it necessary to conclude with the words “so they did”? Rashi goes on to explain that the words “so they did” is referring to Moshe and Aharon; they too did the *mitzvah* of *Korban Pesach*.

Maharal in the *Gur Aryeh* (Shemos 12:28) wonders; why is it assumed that Moshe and Aharon would not have had to bring a *Korban Pesach* and thus the Torah had to tell us otherwise?

Additionally, if the Torah meant to tell us that “so they did” is referring to Moshe and Aharon, why doesn’t the it expressly state such, leaving no room for confusion?

Very often, when telling our children to do something that we feel will improve

their lives greatly (e.g. they should commit to studying Torah an hour a night), they silently wonder (and sometimes not so silently) why we ourselves are not modeling that very same behavior?

Of course they don’t realize all the obligations that we are under (work, business meetings, school board meetings, home repairs, etc.), so how can they possibly understand why we aren’t able to make that very same commitment to Torah study?

In fact, our kids are actually right. Of course, there are myriads of excuses we can make as to why we ourselves don’t do what we are asking our kids to do, but that’s exactly what they are – excuses. Of course, when one has many responsibilities there are conflicts that cannot be avoided. But our children aren’t fooled, they know when we are serious about an ideal and when we are merely paying lip service to an ideal. Our kids also know that we have unavoidable conflicts, but they will absolutely judge what we consider to be important in our lives by how we choose

to spend our free time.

Leadership follows some of the same rules. Obviously a leader has many responsibilities and obligations, after all, that is what leadership is all about – taking responsibility to get things done. Yet some leaders see themselves as above following certain laws that everyone else must adhere to. They forget that they too have a responsibility to follow the rules.

The Torah is teaching us a remarkable lesson about what kind of leaders Moshe and Aharon were. On the night that Bnei Yisroel left Egypt, undoubtedly, there were a multitude of things to do and Moshe and Aharon could easily have been forgiven for not fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *Korban Pesach*. But that’s not the type of leaders they were – they did exactly what everyone else did. That’s what the Torah is telling us by not mentioning their names: They fulfilled the *Korban Pesach* like everyone else – as ordinary members of Bnei Yisroel about to leave Egypt.

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