

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

APRIL 29, 2023

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Shaindel bas
HaRav Yosef. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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8 IYAR

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig PARSHAS ACHAREI – KEDOSHIM

Only Following Orders?

And the Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aharon [...] (16:1).

Moshe is told by Hashem to warn Aharon not to enter the *Kodesh Hakedashim* at the wrong time lest he suffer the same consequences as his two sons who also approached Hashem improperly.

Rashi (ad loc) explains this through a parable given by the Tanna R' Elazar Ben Azaryah: A sick person was visited by a doctor for treatment. The doctor advised him, "Do not eat cold food, do not sleep in a damp and cold place." He was then seen by a second doctor who gave him the exact same advice but added "do not do those things so that you will not die like so and so died."

Rashi goes on to explain that the second doctor is more effective in conveying his message than the first. So too, Hashem gives Moshe the warning for Aharon with the context of the death of his sons so that he will not die the way his sons died.

The parable of R' Elazar seems a little odd. Everyone knows that some doctors think they are gods, but it is a little unusual to have God wanting to be a doctor! Hashem is our king, he makes the rules and we need to follow them. Why is the parable about a sick person who was advised by a doctor what to do? Why isn't it a story about a subject who was ordered to do

something by the king under penalty of death?

The difference between what a doctor tells you to do and what a king orders you to do, is that a king punishes you for not listening to him while a doctor only informs you of what is good/bad for you. While a king's command is about what the king desires for himself, a doctor's orders are about what he desires for you. If a doctor tells someone not to smoke because it leads to death, dying isn't a consequence of not listening to the doctor; it's a consequence of not taking his advice and thereby causing injury to oneself.

In other words, a king's command is really all about listening to the king. A doctor's order is about the wellbeing of the patient. Similarly, when a father tells his young child not to go into the street because it's dangerous, of course the father will get angry when his child doesn't listen to him, but the reason he is angry isn't because he is insulted that he was ignored; he's angry because his child is acting so cavalierly with his life.

When Hashem tells Moshe to make sure that Aharon doesn't go into the Holy of Holies, it isn't because it is an affront to Hashem to enter without permission. The reason Hashem is telling Moshe to tell Aharon is for



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exactly the same reason that a doctor gives a patient orders; going there at the wrong time is dangerous to one's health. Hashem cares about us, the laws aren't about Him, they are in place for our own wellbeing. Hashem is compared to a doctor because He only wants what's good for us.

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All About Me?

Speak to the people of Israel, and say to them, I am the Lord your God. Like the practices of the land of Egypt where you dwelt, you shall not do; and like the practices of the land of Canaan, where I bring you, you shall not do [...] (18:2-3).

These aforementioned verses are the introduction to the list of forbidden intimate relationships. This comprehensive list, which oddly enough is read on Yom Kippur by Mincha, also includes a seemingly VERY random law; that of the *molech* ritual. According to Rashi (18:21) this consisted of handing over your child to the *molech* priests who would then pass them through the fires. According to Ibn Ezra and Rashi's and Ramban's commentaries (*Yirmiyahu* 7:31) this initiation ritual sometimes resulted in death. While certainly a heinous and abominable practice, what is this law doing in the middle of the list of forbidden relationships?

We must begin by examining the root cause for having forbidden relationships in the first place. Ramban in this *parsha* posits that it would only be natural for people to choose their closest relatives as mates. For example, a lot of the complications of trying to merge two disparate families, or disparate cultures, or dealing with inheritance issues would dissipate if a man were to marry his sister. Why are we forbidden from marrying our closest relatives?

In *Bereishis* (2:18) Hashem said, "it is not good for man to be alone, I will make a compatible helper for him." Rashi there explains that if man were self-sufficient he would be comparing himself to God. Just as God is one above, man is one below. In other words, man would consider himself more or less equal to God on the plane below. This would cause man to become totally egocentric and self-centered.

Therefore Hashem created a partner for man, someone he would have to merge with to balance him out and become a helpmate and an opposing opinion. This "merger" requires a true partner, one who is a totally separate entity and would not be swallowed up by the merger. Our closest relatives are ones that we are overly familiar with, if we go into our sister's home we feel perfectly comfortable opening the fridge and helping ourselves to whatever we want. That is, we would always take what we want because it is just an extension of ourselves. The same is true, of course, with parents, children, aunts, uncles, etc.

The purpose of marrying someone other than a relative is to leave this comfort zone and become one with an entity with

whom you must make an effort to restrain yourself and learn to negotiate within another person's space. This is what Hashem wanted to accomplish; the deconstruction of the personal ego of man through a partner (of course some spouses have zealously taken this mandate to an extreme, but that is a discussion for another time). This is also why for two weeks out of every month we are reminded that we cannot relate to our spouse merely as an object of our desire – we must relate to them as an equal partner in our merged identities.

Now we understand why these *pesukim* are read on Yom Kippur: To remind us that even in our most powerful drives and desires we must recognize our place in the universe as subjects of the Almighty. Finally, this also explains why *molech* is included right in the middle of these laws. A person may begin to feel that his closest relatives, i.e. his children, are his chattel, with whom he can do as he pleases – even going as far as offering them as service to his god. Therefore, Hashem reminds us that our children are not owned by us, they are separate beings that we are responsible for, not an extension of our self-centered world.

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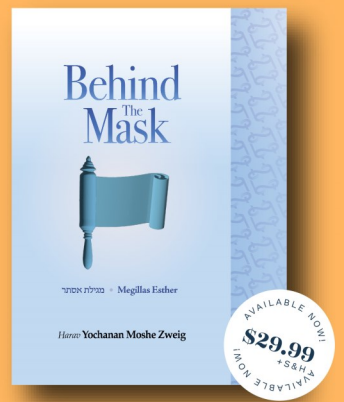
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