

# INSIGHTS

## Into The Weekly Parsha

JANUARY 13, 2024

*This week's Insights is dedicated with deepest gratitude & in memory of the 10th yearzeit of my beloved & missed father Isaac Sterental z'l - Yitzchak ben Moshe. His intellectual curiosity, sense of responsibility, exemplary work ethic, enjoyment of learning & discovery, & selfless generosity will always be our inspiration. Above all, his deep love of family & dedication to each one of us will forever live in our hearts. Elena Salomon & Family. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"*

VOLUME 14, ISSUE 14

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) observes that the plural "daughters" indicates that she came from two families; she was the daughter of Yosef's family (who conquered his evil inclination) and a daughter of Yisro's family (who 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 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 by offering some of his crops. Unfortunately, he chose from the lowest quality. Hevel — who really was only inspired to give by his brother Kayin — also brings a gift to Hashem but he chooses from the best of his animals. Hashem chooses to accept Hevel's offering

while rejecting Kayin's.

The difference between the two perspectives is significant: Kayin feels that he owes Hashem and 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, 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 incorporate the innate respect that Yisro had, that of serving a deity with the best that you have, because of the indication that service is a privilege.



**Miami Edition**



**Looking for a warm and caring environment for your motivated high school son?**

**Mechina of South Florida is now accepting applications for Elul 5785!**

Contact [office@mechinasf.com](mailto:office@mechinasf.com) for more information on enrollment or teacher applications.

**Rabbi Nisson Friedman, Menahel**  
**Rabbi Pesach Shifman, Sgan Menahel**

# Attitude of Gratitude

*Hashem said to Moshe, 'Say to Aharon, take your staff [...]'* (7:19).

Rashi (ad loc) quoting the Midrash Tanchuma, explains that Aharon needed to enact the first two plagues, which directly affected the Nile River. This is because the Nile had protected Moshe from Egyptian slaughter when he was child and set adrift in a basket.

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 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 core values of Judaism as we must appreciate everything that Hashem has done for us. We constantly affirm this through *teffilos* and *brachos*; thinking we do so because 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? You cannot owe thanks to an inanimate object. Furthermore, Hashem doesn't "need" our gratitude; so what is the purpose?

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 hatov* 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 the 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.



Need someone to say Kaddish for a loved one?

Unable to attend shul for Yizkor?

Worried about forgetting a Yahrzeit?

*Let us help perpetuate the blessed memory of your loved one.*

**Visit [GetKaddish.com](http://GetKaddish.com)**



4000 Alton Road  
Miami Beach, FL 33140

Create a lasting legacy with a gift in your will, trust, retirement account, or life insurance policy.  
Contact [melissa@talmudicu.edu](mailto:melissa@talmudicu.edu) for more information.

To dedicate an issue of Insights please email:  
[info@talmudicu.edu](mailto:info@talmudicu.edu)  
or contact us at: (305) 534-7050



Scan to subscribe and  
receive Insights via email