

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Devorah bas Yisroel Dovid.
"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS SHEMINI

Learning to Listen

[...] And Aharon fell silent (10:3).

This *possuk* is referring to the tragic incident of Aharon's two sons being put to death for their transgression on the inaugural day of the Mishkan. The Torah implies that Aharon would have had an argument to make before Hashem but chose to be silent.

Rashi (ad loc) informs us that Aharon was rewarded for his silence. Hashem spoke with him alone to deliver the section of the Torah that deals with *kohanim* who are in a drunken state being prohibited from entering certain areas of the Mikdash. What was the quid pro quo of his silence being rewarded with Hashem directing His words to him alone?

The Talmud (*Gittin* 36b) has very high praise for those who suffer in silence: "Our Rabbis taught, those that suffer an insult but do not insult in response, those that hear their disgrace but do not reply, those that do the will of Hashem out of love and are joyful in their suffering; on them the verse states 'Those that love Hashem will go forth like the sun in its full strength.'" While it is true that these lofty souls are exhibiting an unusual level of self-restraint, what does the Talmud mean by "they are joyful in their suffering"? Doesn't this seem masochistic?

The reason these individuals are able to achieve a very high level of restraint

and are actually joyful in their suffering is because they are fully cognizant that nothing in this world happens by accident. If they suffer insults and other indignities they realize it is coming directly from Hashem and it is a message for them. While it is true that the individual delivering the insult is doing a terrible thing, the fact remains that the pain it causes is really coming from Hashem. In other words, they have something within their behavior that needs to be rectified. They are joyful because they realize that Hashem cares about them and wants them to improve. On this point, the Talmud is teaching us that if they have learned this lesson ultimately they will not be diminished – just as the sun is powerful at its full strength.

Aharon was silent for he understood that every tragedy that happens is a message for those who are affected by it. He understood that this wasn't merely a punishment for his sons, he was being punished as well (perhaps for his role in the Golden Calf?). Aharon controlled himself as he understood that Hashem was speaking to him. He is therefore rewarded by Hashem delivering the next portion of the Torah directly to him.



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The Problem with Blanket Liberalism

The Tinschemes, the Kaas, and the Racham (11:18).

This week's *parsha* contains a complete list of birds that Bnei Yisroel are prohibited from eating. One of these birds is called "*racham*." The Talmud (*Chullin* 63b) explains why it was given that name: Once the *racham* descends it brings compassion ("*rachamim*") to the world. This would seem like a positive attribute. Yet Ramban (11:13) in describing why these birds specifically are prohibited from being eaten gives the reason that these birds exhibit cruelty and consuming them could lead to absorbing some of their characteristic cruelty. Does this contradict the Talmud's description of the *racham*?

The Midrash (*Koheles Rabbah* 7:16) states that R' Simon ben Lakhish says: One who becomes merciful instead of

cruel will ultimately become merciful, as it is written, "And Nov, the city of priests, he smote with the edge of a sword" (*I Samuel* 22:19). This Midrash is referring to King Shaul who was compassionate on Agag the cruel king of Amalek, and spared his life while blithely murdering the *kohanim* of the city of Nov.

What is the meaning of this Midrash? Why does being compassionate on a cruel person lead one to being cruel to someone who deserves compassion?

The answer lies in understanding the negative trait of the bird known as *racham*. In Aramaic, the word *racham* means to love. Love is a recognition of a commonality and this creates a

desire to be connected to the object of our love. The *racham* descends into the world with blanket compassion, bestowing compassion even on an object that is not deserving of compassion. The *racham* is therefore compassionate even on cruel beings, even though it recognizes the cruelty. In other words, it contains within it a desire to be connected to cruelty and that is why it is compassionate even on the cruel. This means it has within it a characteristic of cruelty and that is why it is forbidden to eat.

King Shaul also contained an element of cruelty within him. That is why he was able to be compassionate to the cruel king of Amalek. This cruelty was revealed in his terrible actions towards the *kohanim* of Nov.

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