

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Yehudis bas Meir Moshe, Yehudis Janowski. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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5 TISHREI

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VAYELECH

Bringing Torah Down to Earth

I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I can no longer go out and come in, and Hashem has told me you shall not cross this Jordan (31:2).

This week's *parsha* opens with Moshe addressing all of Bnei Yisroel on the last day of his life. Rashi (ad loc) explains "I can no longer go out and come in" as referring to "[going out and coming] in the words of the Torah. This teaches us that the knowledge handed down and the wellsprings of wisdom had become closed to him."

In other words, on the last day of his life Moshe was no longer "connected" to the source of the Torah and its wisdom. The question is, why? Why was it necessary for Moshe to be closed off to the wisdom and wellsprings of Torah on the last day of his life?

In last week's *parsha* we find a remarkable statement, *"This commandment that I command you today is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in the heavens [for you] to say, 'who will go up to the heavens and bring it down for us...'"* (30:11-12). While many commentators (Ramban ad loc etc.) understand this verse to be referring to the *mitzvah* of repentance, Rashi (ad loc) explains that this is referring to the Torah itself. Meaning if it was up in the heavens someone "would have to go up after it, and learn it" (Rashi 30:12).

What does Rashi mean by, "if the Torah was up in the sky somebody would have to ascend after it and study it to bring it down"?

Here we learn a fascinating lesson about our Torah: So long as Moshe was alive the Torah was literally in the heavens. That is, the domain of Torah remained with Hashem and his heavenly court. Moshe was "connected" to the source. He had learned all the *mitzvos* and the deep meanings that Hashem intended for us to know. If there was a question as to what the proper course of action Hashem wanted from us, we merely had to ask Moshe. If Moshe was unclear (like in the story of the person who gathered wood on Shabbos) or if he forgot a *halacha* (such as in the case of the daughters of Tzelaphchad) Moshe could go directly to Hashem to clarify.

On the last day of his life the Torah was gifted to the Jewish people. The Torah became our domain. Our sages were now the final authority as to what the proper *halacha* was in any given situation. Therefore, even if Hashem disagreed with the sages' interpretation, we would still follow their interpretation (see the Talmudic dispute between R' Eliezer and the other sages wherein Hashem seemingly sides with R' Eliezer but we follow the ruling of the sages, *Talmud Bavi Baba Metzia* 59b).

On the last day of his life Moshe finished writing the entire Torah and gave it to the Jewish people (see 31:9).



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In order for him to properly give over the Torah, so that it could become the domain of Bnei Yisroel (and no longer in the heavens), Moshe could no longer have access to the secrets and wellsprings of the Torah. Thereby, on Moshe's final day, the Torah became wholly ours, and our responsibility to properly define.

Power of Speech

The *Kol Nidre* service is essentially an annulment of oaths and vows; a shortened version of the *Hatoras Nedarim* that is performed after Shacharis on Erev Rosh Hashanah. Why is our most solemn day of the year ushered in with the concept of vows and oaths?

Rambam (*Yad Hilchos Teshuvah* 1:1) implies that the primary aspect of repentance is "*Vidui*" – the verbalized confession of one's sins. Why is verbalization of sins such an important component of the process?



What Are Kids Good For?

Gather together all the people – men, women, small children [...] so that they will hear and so that they will learn and they will fear Hashem [...] (31:12).

This week's *parsha* contains the *mitzvah* of *hakhel* – the gathering of the entirety of the Jewish people on the holiday of Sukkos following the *shemitta* year. The king at that time would read from different sections in the Chumash of Devarim from an elevated platform. The Gemara (*Bavli Chagiga* 3a) explains that the men came to study and the women came to hear. The Gemara then asks; "Why did the very small children come? To give reward to those that brought them" (ibid).

Maharsha (ad loc) explains that the Gemara wonders why the Torah discusses the children in this verse and then mentions the children again in the very next verse. In fact, the next verse clearly explains that the children are coming to learn from the experience. So, explains Maharsha, the first verse must be talking about children that are too young to gain from the experience. Therefore the Gemara explains they are only coming in order "to give reward to those that bring them."

Simply understood, the Gemara seems to be saying that the extra strain of bringing the very young children will bring some kind of reward to their much beleaguered parents. Perhaps this can be understood along the lines of the Talmudic dictum (*Avos* 5:26) "commensurate to the pain is the reward." But notwithstanding the fact that children can inflict exquisite discomfort on their parents, this cannot be the sole reason for bringing them. First of all, older children can be even more painful to drag to a speech that they can hardly understand. Second, if it is simply to make the experience more difficult, why shouldn't even people without young children have to do something to make the experience more trying? Why are only parents of very young children worthy of this added aggravation?

Obviously, there has to be another reason why we bring very young children to such a gathering. Have you ever noticed that some sports crazy fans bring their one year old children to baseball and football games decked

out in baby sized team jerseys and other team themed items? What possible purpose can there be in such an effort? Clearly the child will have no recollection of the event or of his parents' single-minded obsession; so, why would someone go to all that effort?

The answer has to be that it is an internalization, for ourselves and our children, that we want our legacy to be connected to this ideal. There are families that take great pride in being multigenerational fans of certain teams. So too, by the *mitzvah* of *hakhel* we are expressing the ideal, that our deepest desire is for our children to be connected and bound to the values of the Torah and the Jewish people. The reason these parents earn special reward isn't because of the added aggravation; it is because they are making the greatest expression of their personal commitment to Hashem and his Torah. They want their children to follow in their footsteps and the legacy of the Jewish people.

Power of Speech cont.

Targum Onkelos (*Bereishis* 2:7) explains the *possuk* "And he blew into [Adam's] nostrils a living soul" that Hashem imbued Adam with the ability to speak. This was a replication, as it were, of Hashem's power of speech given to man. In other words, just as Hashem created the world with words (see *Avos* 5:1), man was similarly endowed with the ability to create new realities through speech.

This is the essence of how a prohibition of a *neder* can take effect and become a binding commitment. Man can transform the reality of an object from being permitted to prohibited. So too is the process of repentance. Essential to the *teshuvah* process is the verbalization of a sincere heartfelt confession along with the commitment to sin no more. Through speech alone,

man can transform his reality from being a sinner to being penitent.

This is the message of *Kol Nidrei*; through our speech we effectuate our transformation. The concept of oaths and vows, then define the nature of Yom Kippur. This is the day we use our speech to beseech Hashem to transform us through his forgiveness.



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