

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

SEPTEMBER 19, 2026 This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Shoshana Konigsberg.
"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

VOLUME 16, ISSUE 47

8 TISHREI

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS HA'AZINU

From Finite to Infinite

The deeds of the Mighty One are perfect, for all His ways are just. He is a faithful God, never unfair; righteous and moral is He (32:4).

This week's *parsha* discusses Hashem's attribute of justice and His ultimate system of reward and punishment. Rashi (ad loc) quoting the *Sifri* (307) explains; "Hashem is faithful to pay the righteous for their righteousness in the World to Come. Even though He postpones their reward, in the end He makes His words trustworthy." Rashi continues, "And for the wicked as well, He pays the reward for their righteousness in this world." Meaning, Hashem is trustworthy to pay everyone what they are owed for their good deeds; the righteous receive it in the World to Come and the wicked receive their full payment in this world.

This is difficult to understand. The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 39b) quotes Rava as saying, "The reward (for fulfilling *mitzvos*) is not given in this world." The reason for this is based on the understanding that man's ultimate purpose in this world is to earn a relationship with Hashem, which is the ultimate good that Hashem intended to bestow on mankind. Man can create a relationship with Hashem by doing *mitzvos*, thereby enabling himself to connect to the infinite.

But we live in a finite world with a finite existence. Any reward earned for an infinite act by definition cannot be paid in this finite world because it would be woefully inadequate. This is similar to trying to pay your mortgage with Monopoly money. For this reason, the true reward for *mitzvos* is only available in the World to Come.

Imagine for a moment that a person who knows nothing about precious stones goes

to a jeweler to buy a diamond. The jeweler sizes him up immediately and realizes that if he gives this customer a big sparkly cubic zirconia "diamond" he will be just as happy, never knowing the difference. Does this mean that the jeweler can deceive this customer? Of course not. Just because the customer would be satisfied doesn't entitle the jeweler to cheat him by taking full price for a diamond but only delivering a cubic zirconia.

Similarly, how can Hashem, who is the ultimate judge and creator of the ultimate system of justice, cheat wicked people by giving them a finite reward for an infinite act? It seems grossly unjust. To answer that Hashem rewards individuals based on what they perceive as valuable seems as wrong as the jeweler delivering a cubic zirconia instead of a real diamond.

What's the difference between a person who is a millionaire and one who isn't? Ultimately, it may be only one penny; if a person has \$999,999.99 he simply isn't a millionaire. Likewise, Rambam teaches us that the difference between a wicked person and a righteous one may be that one single *mitzvah* or *aveirah* that puts one over the edge.

We see from here that more often than not a label isn't the complete picture of what something is. Most designations are generally an amalgamation of different forces. One of the great kindnesses of Hashem is that a person who has slightly more *mitzvos* than *aveiros* is considered a "tzaddik." Whereas a 51% score on a test in school is a failing grade, Hashem



Miami Edition

nevertheless still credits this effort as having "passed." This "tzaddik" designation means that Hashem, in His boundless mercy, considers good deeds eternal acts if they simply outnumber a person's *aveiros*.

People have conflicting forces within their psyche. Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 9:1) explains that wicked people are motivated by lust for physical pleasures, while righteous ones are motivated to act for the sake of heaven. While the vast majority of *mitzvos* can be physically and/or emotionally satisfying, we must never lose sight of the fact that the reason we do them is because Hashem requires it and doing those *mitzvos* draws us nearer to Him.

The reason that wicked people are paid for their righteous acts in this finite world is because their motivation for doing *mitzvos* isn't to be drawn nearer to Hashem; this is evidenced by the fact that the majority of their acts are *aveiros*. Thus, even when they do *mitzvos* they are not infinite acts, as their motivation isn't a relationship with Hashem but rather they are driven by personal desires. They may deserve reward because they acted properly, but when the majority of their actions are *aveiros* they do not deserve an infinite reward. Hashem therefore pays them in this world – a finite reward for a finite action.

For Me or For You?

Like an eagle arousing his nest hovering over his young, he spreads his wings and takes it and carries it on his pinions (32:11).

In this week's *parsha* the Torah describes the kindness and mercy of Hashem by likening it to an eagle. Rashi (ad loc) explains: An eagle is merciful toward his children in that he doesn't enter the nest suddenly and startle his sleeping young; rather he flaps his wings and goes around them from branch to branch to gently rouse his young and not overwhelm them. In addition, he gently touches them and then withdraws and touches them again, without ever putting the full force of his weight on them.

Rashi goes on to explain a second attribute: An eagle carries its young on its wings because it is unafraid of winged predators for it flies higher than any other birds. The only danger that it fears is man's arrows, and the eagle's rationale is, "Better that the arrow should enter me and not strike my children."

So too, Rashi explains, when Bnei Yisroel left Egypt they were being pursued by the Egyptians who caught up to them and proceeded to shoot arrows and catapult stones at them. However, an angel of Hashem came and acted as a shield between the Egyptians and Bnei Yisroel, absorbing the full force of the assault. Then, when giving Bnei Yisroel the Torah, Hashem was careful not to overwhelm them.

While we can clearly see the analogy, this verse still requires further explanation. The end of the verse demonstrates that an eagle is willing to suffer pain and even sacrifice itself for the sake of its young, as it is willing to take the blow of an arrow to protect them. This is understandably an incredible commitment on the part of the eagle. But how are we to understand the greatness of the virtue that it gently wakes up its young? If an eagle is willing to sacrifice itself for its children, what does the fact that it gently wakes its young add?

The Torah is teaching us an incredible life lesson here, one that will surely be appreciated by anyone who ever had to rouse children in the morning. Usually, when parents come into their children's room to wake them up in the morning, they speak loudly to get them up. In addition, when the children are slow to get out of bed, parents tend to raise the volume of their voices. Pretty soon they start yelling at them to hurry up, get dressed, etc.

Why do we yell at our children in the morning? Is it because the parent really cares if their children get to school on time or is it that if the children are late and miss their bus or car pool then the parent has to drive them? Alternatively, the parent takes their children to school on the way to work, and when the children are late the parent is also now late, which creates other pressure. Almost always, the stressful morning experience isn't for the children's sake, it's about the parent's frustration at being inconvenienced by their children's dawdling.

What many parents don't realize is that a child always knows when a parent is acting in the interest of the child or in the self-interest of the parent. The Rosh HaYeshiva illustrated this with the following story.

About midnight on a *Motzei Shabbos* the Rosh HaYeshiva received a call from a member of the community who was very distressed. The man explained that for the last four hours he had been in a yelling match with his teenage son and he was beside himself.

"What happened?" asked the Rosh HaYeshiva. The man explained that he and his son were in shul *davening Ma'ariv* and his son left early to go home. One of the other congregants in shul turned to him and asked him where his son was. The

man then noticed that his son was no longer in shul and when he got home he confronted his son about leaving shul early. That led to huge argument and much yelling that lasted for hours. So the father was now calling the Rosh HaYeshiva for advice about what to do.

The Rosh HaYeshiva said, "Let me ask you a question. On Sunday night do you take your son to shul?" The man replied that he does not. "Do you know if he even *davens Ma'ariv*?" The man once again replied that he does not.

The Rosh HaYeshiva explained to him that the reason he was upset wasn't because his son left shul early and missed part of *davening*, inasmuch for the rest of the week he doesn't even know if his son *davens*. He was upset because his friend embarrassed him by asking him where his son was. The reason he was yelling at his son wasn't about educating him on *davening*, it was because he himself was embarrassed and he was venting frustration for being embarrassed. The reason this led to a huge fight is because children are very perceptive; they know when a parent is criticizing them for their own good and when they are not. This is perhaps the major point of conflict between parents and children.

That is what the Torah is teaching us. Of course the eagle does everything it can to protect its young. But is it protecting its young because that is the eagle's own continuity and it is preserving its species? Or is its devotion and commitment because it cares for its young and what's in their best interest? The verse therefore tells us that an eagle gently wakes up its young; that concern for the "psyche" of its young teaches us that an eagle's protection of its young is motivated by what's good for the offspring, not in the self-interest of the eagle itself.



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