

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Avraham ben Ephraim z"l,
by Harry Zubli. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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6 TISHREI

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VAYELECH

What's Mine is Yours

For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly, and you will stray from the path that I have instructed you (to remain on) and evil will befall you at the end of days if you do what is evil in the eyes of Hashem [...] (31:29).

At the end of this week's *parsha*, Moshe ominously predicts that Bnei Yisroel will stray from Hashem and His Torah, and he informs them of the consequences of this betrayal.

Rashi (ad loc) points out that in all the days that Yehoshua, Moshe's successor, led Bnei Yisroel they did not sin, as it says (*Joshua 24:31*), "*Yisroel worshipped Hashem all the days of Yehoshua.*" Rashi goes on to explain that we see from here that a person's student is as dear to him as his very self. In other words, Moshe includes Yehoshua's reign over Bnei Yisroel as his very own, and his prediction of when they would begin to sin only begins after Yehoshua's leadership ends.

Yet we find in the *Yalkut Shimoni* on this week's *parsha* (section 941) a story that belies this principle. The *Yalkut* relates that Moshe pleaded with Hashem that Yehoshua replace him as leader and that he himself be allowed to live. Hashem responded that it would be acceptable only if Moshe would agree to become Yehoshua's student and that Moshe would treat Yehoshua with the same deference and service that Yehoshua had for Moshe. Moshe readily agreed.

Moshe rose early and went to Yehoshua's tent (startling Yehoshua,

who was a little shocked that his Rebbe had come to him) to explain the new arrangement. They walked to the *ohel moed* with Moshe walking to the left of Yehoshua (the position of deference). Yehoshua went in to receive a communication from Hashem and the cloud of glory separated them. When Yehoshua exited, Moshe asked him, "What did Hashem tell you?" Yehoshua responded, "Whenever Hashem spoke with you I was never privy to your conversation." Meaning that Hashem was speaking to him and him alone and Moshe was not entitled to know the contents of the conversation. Moshe cried out, "I would rather die a thousand deaths than suffer this pang of jealousy!"

Based on Rashi's principle that a teacher considers his student as his very self, why did Moshe feel such a torrent of jealousy towards Yehoshua? To put this in perspective; Moshe's jealousy was so intense that he preferred actual death than to suffer it. How are we to understand this?

We find a very interesting description of the pain of jealousy (*Shir Hashirim 8:6*), "*jealousy is as difficult as the grave.*" Meaning that jealousy is actually the experience of being dead. As explained in prior editions of



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INSIGHTS, jealousy isn't the same as envy. Envy is wanting what someone else has, while jealousy is the feeling that I have been replaced — it's what a person feels when there is an attack on one's very existence. This is why Moshe prefers dying to suffering jealousy; a person who dies merely passes to another existence, but experiencing jealousy, which is the feeling of being supplanted, that is nearly intolerable.

When a person gives someone a gift, he doesn't become jealous of the recipient because he knows that he is the source for what the recipient has. Similarly, we find in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin 105a*) that a person is never jealous of his son or his student. The reason is because a son or a student gets everything he has from his parent or his teacher. But in this *Yalkut Shimoni* Hashem asks Moshe to become the student of Yehoshua. That meant that Moshe was no longer the source for Yehoshua and that Yehoshua was replacing him; something that was too painful for Moshe to bear.

The Yom Kippur Gift

This shabbos, the one between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is known as *Shabbos Shuva* – the shabbos of repentance and “returning” to Hashem. This time of year is known as the *aseres yemei teshuvah* and it culminates with the most solemn day – Yom Kippur. This is the final opportunity for one to plead his case before the Almighty and earn the right to live another year. This “life or death” court case before Hashem rightfully puts one in a very somber state of mind.

On Yom Kippur, when we ask Hashem for forgiveness, we always seem to be apologizing, year in and year out, for the same sins. How can an honest person come back with the same litany of apologies and requests for forgiveness and hope to be forgiven? What are we truly trying to accomplish on Yom Kippur?

Furthermore, we find a rather curious description of Yom Kippur in the Gemara. The Mishna (*Ta’anis* 26b) states: “Rabban Shimon Ben Gamliel said, ‘Bnei Yisroel had no joyous days as the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur, for on those days the young women used to dress in borrowed white gowns (so as not to embarrass those of lesser means) and dance in the vineyards [...] (the Baraisa adds that they were joined there by eligible young men).’” The Mishna goes on to explain that the women used to try to convince the assembled men that they were the right match for them. Meaning Yom Kippur was one of the two days a year that

shidduchim were made and this was a cause for great happiness.

Aside from the fact that they obviously didn’t spend all day in *shul* on Yom Kippur, how can we possibly reconcile this custom with our current view of Yom Kippur? How can Yom Kippur be an appropriate day to be forming *shidduchim* and thereby redefining Yom Kippur as one of the two happiest days of the year?

Yom Kippur is the one day of the year when we must focus on becoming who we really are as well as who we want to be. In other words, we shouldn’t try to merely change negative behaviors; they are simply symptomatic of deeper core issues. As long as we are only trying to change behaviors, instead of focusing on the core issues, we will be unsuccessful. Behavior modifications only work for a limited time at best. This is why people say that it is easy to stop smoking, they have done it a hundred times. Without getting in touch with the “real you” and resolving to be that person, trying to effect permanent change is nearly impossible.

The real work on Yom Kippur isn’t about repetitively repeating the sins you have committed. The real work is internal, that of committing yourself to being a person who expects to lead a different type of life. Of course, you have to be open about the current wrong doings and accept responsibility; by both regretting those sinful acts and vowing to never repeat them. However, if we want those

commitments to stick with us, we must perceive ourselves differently and define ourselves in that manner.

Similarly, it has been said that within every fat person there is a thin person trying to get out. Meaning that if we connect to who we really are, then we will understand that we don’t want to behave in this manner again.

This isn’t to say that we will be perfect in the future, after all we are still human. But our mistakes of the future won’t be because we are resigned to our sinful existence and therefore sin yet again. Rather, each event that we face will be a test of resolve with our new self-definition. Some tests (hopefully most) we will pass, while others will make us stumble. It is for these new “stumbles” that we will once again apologize to Hashem for on Yom Kippur and resolve to work on ourselves to eliminate those mistakes in the following year.

This is the reason that Yom Kippur is the most appropriate day for *shidduchim*. Yom Kippur is a day when we are supposed to get in touch with the real person within us, i.e. the highest quality and best person that we can be. If we are successful in connecting to that higher level within ourselves, then that is the ultimate time to go find and choose a mate. Choosing a mate that matches with the best possible version of yourself helps lock in that self improvement change for the rest of your life.

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1. Tehilim 104:15



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