

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS ACHAREI MOS-KEDOSHIM

The Essential Torah

You should not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you should love your fellow as yourself; I am Hashem (19:18).

Rashi (ad loc) quotes the well-known statement of the Tanna R' Akiva regarding the end of this verse ("you should love your fellow as yourself"); "This is a great rule of the Torah" (see *Toras Kohanim* 4:12). The implication of R' Akiva's statement is that this *possuk* somehow encapsulates the very essence of the message of the Torah. R' Shimon Ben Azzai, one of R' Akiva's students, poses a stunning question to R' Akiva's teaching: What if one does not like himself?

Meaning, if one allows himself to be embarrassed and treated poorly by others is he now permitted to treat others in the same manner? Ben Azzai therefore uses another verse in the Torah (that of Hashem creating man) as his "great rule of the Torah" (see *Bereishis Rabba* 24:7).

Before we enter into a discussion of these two philosophic principles of Torah, let us digress for a moment and marvel at the breathtaking analysis of human psychology of our great Torah scholars from two thousand years ago. While many continents were filled with depraved and downright disgusting cultures of human behavior (cannibalism, for example, springs to mind), our ancestors were carefully considering the effects of low self-esteem on societal behavior. It is truly remarkable.

In order to begin to approach a suitable answer to Ben Azzai's question on R' Akiva, we must first examine a very enigmatic statement of Hillel. The Talmud (*Shabbos* 31a) relates the well-known

story of the gentile who came to Hillel and asked that he be converted to Judaism with the sole caveat that Hillel teaches him the entire Torah while he stands on one foot. Hillel taught him the now famous statement, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow" and then converted him.

On the surface, Hillel's statement is quite problematic; clearly, Hillel is basing his teaching on the verse in this week's *parsha*: "You should love your fellow as yourself." But why did Hillel feel obligated to restate the Torah's clear instruction of how we must treat someone? Furthermore, (and quite incredibly) he chose to make it a negative mandate! In other words, reinterpreting this obligation of how to treat a fellow Jew as what one may **not** do seems to be extremely limiting. What compelled Hillel to make this modification on "a great principle of the Torah"?

Not surprisingly, Hillel's interpretation is actually quite brilliant. Anytime we do something for someone else, for example, an act of kindness or compassion, we have an innate feeling of satisfaction. Thus, doing something for someone makes us feel good. On the other hand, if we have a juicy piece of gossip about someone that we want to share or if we wish to insult someone who has hurt us, exercising self-restraint doesn't give us any pleasure — quite the opposite, in these cases holding our tongue makes us feel like we want to explode.



Miami Edition

Hillel is telling us that the true barometer for loving your friend isn't what we are willing to do for him, because usually doing something for him is also doing something for ourselves. The true barometer of "loving your fellow" is treating him as we would want to be treated (e.g. just as we don't want people saying gossip about us we shouldn't gossip about others). That is a much harder plateau to achieve.

This insight also answers Ben Azzai's question on R' Akiva — "what if a person has low self-esteem?" The essence of low self-esteem is a person's perception of themselves vis-a-vis others. This *possuk*'s obligation of doing for others is based on the principle of being God like. This is why the end of the verse states, "I am Hashem."

Hashem's purpose in the creation of the world was to do kindness for mankind by creating the world and giving mankind a reality of existence. The key to resolving one's own issues of low self-esteem is in becoming God like and doing for others — solely for their sake. Recognizing that one has the ability to give a sense of reality to others by helping them, innately gives one a sense of fulfillment and establishes self worth. This *possuk* is precisely the antidote to low self-esteem!

Cold or Compassionate?

Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons [...] Speak to Aharon your brother – he may not always come into the Kodesh within the Paroches [...] and he will not die [...] (16:1-2).

Rashi (ad loc) explains that Hashem is likened to a doctor that is giving advice to his patient: “Do not eat cold food, sleep in a damp chilly place, so that you will not die like so and so perished.” This is the reason the Torah gives the context of Hashem speaking to Moshe “after the death of Aharon’s two sons.”

In other words, Hashem asks Moshe to instruct Aharon that he must carefully abide by the rules of entry into the *Kodesh* or else he will die in the same manner that his sons died.

This is difficult to comprehend. Losing a child is among the most traumatic experiences a person can ever endure. Aharon lost not one, but **two** children; men who were the incoming leaders of the generation (they were considered greater than Moshe and Aharon – see *Midrash Tanchuma*, beginning of *Parshas Shemini*).

Aharon’s loss was obviously profound. It hardly seems necessary to remind

Aharon to be careful not to perish in the same manner that his children died. This would be akin to telling a person who lost his children to a drunk driver to be mindful of drunk drivers. In fact, it seems rather heartless to bring it up at all. What message is Hashem trying to convey?

A careful reading of the verses and Chazal statements gives us the answers. Hashem doesn’t tell Moshe to tell Aharon that if he doesn’t obey the rules of entering the *Kodesh* he is going to die. Rather, Hashem tells Moshe to instruct Aharon **his brother** not to enter the *Kodesh* improperly so that he doesn’t die.

Therefore, Hashem isn’t telling him that if he doesn’t obey Him he’s going to die; rather, Hashem is almost pleadingly with Aharon not to go in there at the wrong time so that he **doesn’t die**. Hashem is expressing compassion for Aharon, and essentially telling him not

to do something that is harmful to himself.

This is why Chazal compare Hashem to a doctor. This seems rather unusual as Hashem is our king, and if we don’t obey him he has every right to punish us. Practically speaking, it makes more sense to compare Hashem to a king. So why do Chazal compare Hashem to a doctor?

Chazal are teaching us that Hashem is telling us what is good for us, just as a doctor who cares about his patient would advise him. This isn’t about disobeying Hashem’s commandments, this is about Hashem showing us that he cares about us. So too, by Aharon, Hashem is asking him to behave properly so that he won’t die. He isn’t telling Aharon not to behave like his sons, Hashem is telling Aharon, “I care about you and I don’t want you to die.”

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