

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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*This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Sora Bas Avraham,
Selma Daniel. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"*

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS BEHA'ALOSCHA

Not for Profit

Two men remained in the camp, the name of one was Eldad and the name of the other was Medad, and the Holy Spirit rested upon them [...] and they prophesied in the camp (11:26).

After a series of difficult incidents in which Bnei Yisroel acted improperly and were subsequently punished by Hashem, Moshe pleads with Hashem that he was unable to bear the burden of the entire nation by himself (see 11:14). In fact, upon seeing the punishment that Bnei Yisroel were about to receive, he begs Hashem to kill him first (see 11:15 and Rashi ad loc).

Hashem responds that Moshe is to gather seventy men from the elders of Bnei Yisroel who will receive a measure of his increased prophecy and they will share the burden along with him (see 11:18 and Rashi ad loc).

Moshe recognizes that seventy does not divide evenly by 12 and is concerned that there will be some jealousy among the tribes who receive less representation among these seventy elders. Therefore, Moshe devises a lottery to pick who the chosen elders will be (see Rashi 11:26). Eldad and Medad were actually among those who were chosen to join the seventy elders, but they remained in the camp, eschewing this appointment for they felt unworthy of it.

Moshe's son Gershom ran to inform his father that Eldad and Medad were in the camp prophesying. There is some discussion in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 17a) as to what exactly the prophecy was that they were relating. In any event, Moshe's longtime student-attendant Yehoshua Bin Nun was outraged and demanded, "My master Moshe, destroy them!" (see 11:28). Rashi (ad loc) explains that Yehoshua was not asking that they be killed (they hadn't seemed to commit any offense worthy of capital punishment), rather Yehoshua

wanted them to be given responsibility to tend to the needs of the community, which would cause them to be obliterated. In other words, the responsibilities of leadership would cause them to self-destruct.

Yet when Bnei Yisroel sinned with the golden calf, "Hashem spoke to Moshe, 'Go, descend, for your nation has become corrupted'" (*Shemos* 32:7) and Rashi (ad loc) explains that Hashem told Moshe, "descend from your greatness, for I have only made you great on their account."

Does leadership cause one to self-destruct or is it a source of greatness?

The answer, of course, is that there are two types of leaders. There are those leaders who seek positions of leadership primarily as a way of helping others; for whom no sacrifice is too great because their quest for leadership is borne out of a love for the people and community. Given the opportunity to do more they shine and achieve greatness. Not that the course of their leadership will be easy and without frustration. In fact, leadership can be very

painful (as mentioned above, Moshe asks Hashem to kill him before He punishes Bnei Yisroel – presumably so that Moshe won't have to endure the pain of watching Bnei Yisroel suffer). Nevertheless, at the end of the day, these leaders are fulfilled by being able to help others.

By contrast, there are others who seek positions of leadership primarily as a means to fulfilling their own ambitions. Yes they agree to serve the people, but their personal agenda is always in the foreground. This kind of leader will be



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destroyed when accepting the yoke of communal responsibility because being a servant of the people is exactly that – servitude not lordship (see *Talmud Horayos* 10a).

To fully understand Yehoshua's concern about Eldad and Medad and why he reacts so violently, we must consider the current events at the time. According to Ibn Ezra (and others), the whole sad chapter of Korach and his uprising took place in the weeks before this incident. Rashi also states that the reason Korach was so infuriated was that he felt personally cheated by the appointment of his cousin (instead of him) to head the tribe of Levi – an event that happened in the prior month. Although Rashi seems to hold that the parts of the rebellion took place after the story of the spies, he also states that Korach's rebellion began in Chatzeiros (right after the story of the quail).

Yehoshua must have known about Korach's dissatisfaction and rabble rousing. Perhaps, Yehoshua thought that Eldad and Medad were also trying to undermine Moshe Rabbeinu (one of the opinions in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 17a) holds that they were prophesying the death of Moshe). Yehoshua understood that the only way to deal with these types of personalities is to give them exactly what they desire. That would ensure their destruction and put an end to their challenge of Moshe.

Free for All

Moshe heard the people weeping by their families, each one at the entrance of his tent [...] (11:10).

This week's *parsha* lists various complaints that Bnei Yisroel leveled at Hashem/Moshe. One of the issues that they complained bitterly about was the miraculous *manna*. Remarkably, one of the *pesukim* (11:10) that seemingly describes the depths of their unhappiness with the *manna* is actually interpreted by Chazal in an entirely different direction.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 130a) states: "Any *mitzvah* that Bnei Yisroel accepted in a quarrelsome manner, such as the prohibition against incestuous relationships, as the Torah (*ibid*) states, 'Moshe heard the people weeping by their families' (they were weeping because they had been prohibited to marry their family members) is likewise still fulfilled while quarreling; for there is no *kesuvah* (marriage contract) that doesn't cause the parties to quarrel."

This seems to be a little odd. After all, a wedding is a time of great happiness. Why should a *kesuvah* cause quarreling more than any other financial arrangement? Furthermore, what does this have to do with the fact that they were bitter about the prohibition against incestuous relationships?

We must begin by examining the root cause for having forbidden relationships

in the first place. Ramban in *Parshas Achrei Mos* posits that it would only be natural for people to choose their closest relatives as mates. For example, many of the complications of trying to merge two disparate families, disparate cultures, or dealing with inheritance issues would dissipate if a man were to marry his sister. Why are we forbidden to marry our closest relatives?

In *Bereishis* (2:18) Hashem said, "it is not good for man to be alone, I will make a compatible helper for him." Rashi there explains that if man were self-sufficient he would be comparing himself to God. Just as God is one above, man is one below. In other words, man would consider himself more or less equal to God on the plane below. This would cause man to become totally egocentric and self-centered.

Therefore, Hashem created a partner for man, someone he would have to merge with to balance him out and become a helpmate and an opposing opinion. This "merger" requires a true partner, one who is a totally separate entity and would not be swallowed up by the merger. Our closest relatives are ones that we are overly familiar with, if we go into our sister's home we feel perfectly

comfortable opening the refrigerator and helping ourselves to whatever we want. That is, we would always take what we want because it is just an extension of ourselves. The same is true, of course, with parents, children, aunts, uncles, etc.

On the face of it, completing the *kesuvah* at a wedding is a very odd custom; imagine if at every non-Jewish wedding there would be a public reading of a financial arrangement (such as a prenup) between the bride and groom. All of the guests would feel uncomfortable and it would be inappropriate. Why is the *kesuvah* such a central part of the Jewish wedding?

The ultimate expression that we are merging with an outside party is the *kesuvah*. It is a reminder that the husband cannot just be a taker, like one living in a parents' home. The *kesuvah* is a testament to the fact that the husband has real responsibilities as a giver. It's a reminder that the husband is merging with someone who isn't just an extension of himself; he now has to negotiate his life within someone else's space. Every *kesuvah* is a reminder of this concept, and can easily become a source of conflict. In this way, the *kesuvah* becomes the de facto definition of a Jewish marriage.



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