

Parshas Ki Seitzei

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1. The Progression of Negative Behavior

The Torah states, **“But if there will be a man who hates his fellow, and ambushes him and rises up against him, and strikes him mortally and he dies, and he flees to one of these cities...”** On a superficial level, the Torah seems to be saying that if one hates his fellow and allows that hate to fester within himself it will ultimately lead to murder. However, Chazal explain the intent of the Torah differently.

Chazal explain that when the Torah makes the point that we are dealing with a person who hates his fellow it is to teach us that when one transgresses a seemingly unimportant mitzvah (such as hating one’s fellow) he will come to transgress a more serious mitzvah (i.e. murder). Meaning, the reason an individual ultimately comes to murder his fellow is not because he left his hate unchecked but rather because he initially transgressed the prohibition of hating one’s fellow. This evolution from the less severe to the more severe is based on the concept of *“aveira goreres aveira-* one transgression (even of a minor nature) will lead to other transgressions (of an even more severe nature).”

When one hates an individual who he is obliged to hate; such as a person who is unquestionably classified as evil (*rasha*), this intense negative feeling towards the individual will not lead to murder because the initial hate is categorized as a mitzvah. Thus, it does not lead to murder. As Dovid HaMelech (King David) states in Tehillim, *“Those who hate You (Hashem), I will hate.”*

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos cites a verse, *“There should not be in you a false god. You should not worship strange gods.”* The Gemara explains that this verse is referring to an individual who destroys vessels in a fit of anger, which will ultimately cause him to become an idolater. The Gemara asks- How is this possible? The Gemara answers that the *“false god within you”* mentioned in the verse is referring to the *yeitzer haRa (evil inclination)*. Meaning, one should not follow the evil inclination which is within us because initially it will persuade the individual to transgress a prohibition of lesser consequence only to ultimately influence him to transgress something of greater consequence – such as idol worship. The Torah is actually telling us that it is not merely a natural progression when one is out of control to go from a level of anger (which only causes him to break vessels) to a greater level of anger which leads to idolatry; but rather, the evolution from the lesser transgression to the more severe transgression is based on the principle of *aveira goreres aveira*.

Reb Chaim of Volozhin z’tl explains in his work *Nefesh HaChaim* the principle of *“aveira goreres aveira-* a transgression leads to other transgressions” and *“mitzvah goreres mitzvah – a mitzvah leads to other mitzvos”* based on the Zohar. He explains that when one transgresses a contaminated spirit comes into being which engulfs the individual and encourages him to do more of the same –which is to transgress to a greater degree in an addictive manner. Conversely when one performs a mitzvah, a positive energy engulfs the individual and motivates the individual to do more of the same – which is mitzvah.

This is the reason one must be careful even regarding a seemingly less severe prohibition because it will lead to something of a more severe nature.

2. Seeing Life as a Debt of Gratitude

The Torah states, **“You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and Hashem, your G-d, redeemed you (*vayifdecha*) from there; therefore I command you to do this thing.”** Whenever the Torah mentions the redemption from Egypt it usually states, “you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt” or “I am your G-d who took you out of Egypt.” However in this case the Torah makes it a point to add, **“Hashem, your G-d, redeemed you (*vayifdecha*) from there.”** Meaning, Hashem is not only commanding the Jew to remember that he was a slave in Egypt but also to know that since Hashem redeemed him, the Jew owes a debt to G-d for that redemption.

Rashi explains that the Torah is saying that because Hashem redeemed the Jewish people from Egypt they must obey the Statutes even when it constitutes a financial loss. According to Rashi’s interpretation the verse is referring to what follows: **“When you reap your harvest in your field, and you forget a bundle in the field, you shall not turn back to take it...”** Despite the fact that it would be a financial loss for the individual not to go back and gather the sheaves that he had forgotten, the Torah commands us that one is not permitted to go back to gather in what was forgotten. These bundles are to be left in the field for the poor.

(However Ramban explains this verse differently than Rashi. He explains that the verse **“You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt...”** is referring to the previous verse which states: **“You shall not pervert the judgment of a proselyte or orphan, and you shall not take the garment of a widow as a pledge.”** Thus the Torah is not obligating one to incur a financial loss because we were redeemed from Egypt.)

We say every morning in the *Ezras* (the lengthy paragraph which precedes the Amidah in the morning service), “From Egypt You redeemed us (*gealtanu*), Hashem, our G-d, and from the house of slavery You liberated us (*pideesanu*).” Malbin in his commentary on Tehillim explains that the terms of “geula” (redemption) and “pidyon” (liberation) are referring to two aspects of redemption. “*Geula*” is the term that refers to the spiritual redemption of the Jewish people. In Egypt the Jewish people were spiritually shut down (desensitized) and had no capacity for spirituality. Because Hashem brought about *geula* they had a capacity to relate and process spiritual matters. The term “pidyon” refers to the physical liberation of the Jewish people from bondage. Hashem released the Jewish people from physical slavery.

In the verse, **“You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and Hashem, your G-d, redeemed you (*vayifdecha*) from there; therefore I command you to do this thing”** the Torah uses the term “pidyon” regarding the physical redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt. Thus, according to Rashi one can understand the verse to mean that since Hashem redeemed the Jewish people in a physical sense from Egypt – giving us our freedom, they must obey G-d’s statutes even in a context of taking a financial loss.

It is interesting to note that regarding the prohibition of charging interest the Torah juxtaposes the verse “I am your G-d who took you out of Egypt” – with no mention of “redemption.” Similarly we find regarding the prohibition of partaking in rodents and crawling creatures, there is only the mention of G-d taking us out of Egypt with no mention of “redemption.” How do we understand this?

Regarding the laws of usury, which is a profit which is not permitted to the lender, or the prohibition of partaking of forbidden species (which is the suppression of a desire), one has the ability to refrain from transgressing because – “G-d took us out of Egypt.” However regarding the laws which do constitute a financial loss one has difficulty relinquishing what is rightfully his unless he sees it within the context of repaying a debt. Thus, the Torah stresses the aspect of physical redemption, in order to give us an appreciation for the debt that we owe G-d for granting us our physical freedom.

The Gemara in Tractate Taanis tells us that one is not permitted to test G-d except regarding the tithing of one's crops. The Torah tells us that if one tithes his produce as prescribed he is guaranteed by G-d to become wealthy. Initially one is permitted to tithe his crops with the intent to become wealthy as the verse states, “*aseir t'aseir*” which is explained to mean, “tithe to become wealthy.” Why does G-d allow one to test Him specifically in the area of tithing one's crops and produce? Because it is so difficult for one to give away something which is rightfully his, Hashem gives one an incentive to do so. Rather than seeing it as something being taken from the individual and experiencing it as a loss, the individual sees it as something that he gives only to experience a gain. If one sees giving charity as something that insures his own wealth then it would not be difficult to give charity. One must appreciate the benefit of giving away something that belongs to him.

If one views life as a gift of Hashem and that he possesses is a blessing, he will continuously feel obliged to Hashem and his service to G-d will be experienced as a debt of gratitude. Thus he will not find it difficult to adhere to any of the mitzvos of the Torah.

3. The Setting for Good Fortune

The Torah states, “**If you build a new house, you shall make a parapet (fence) for your roof, so that you will not place blood in your house if a fallen one falls from it (to his death).**” What is the meaning of the term “if a fallen one falls”? One would think that that one is considered to have “fallen” only after he actually falls; however, the Torah refers to the person who falls as “the fallen one” even before he falls. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the individual who falls from the roof actually was destined to die through falling because he deserved to die. His death did not come about because the owner of the house did not build a fence to protect one from falling. Nevertheless Chazal tell us that the Torah is communicating the principle that negative events that are meant to take place come about through people who are undeserving of reward or culpable. Good things that are meant to take place come through one who is meritorious. The Torah is stating regarding the parapet that one should not be the medium through which the death of this individual should come about. Thus, although the individual deserved to die, the tragedy of his death came about through the individual who violated the law of not constructing a fence on his rooftop, causing him to be classified as one how is culpable.

Rambam states in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (Laws of Repentance), “If one believes that one's status as a tzaddik (righteous) or rasha (evil) is predetermined, he is considered foolish for believing so. Every human being is in a position to be able to choose between good and evil.” The concept mentioned by Rambam is found in the Gemara that states, “All things are predetermined with the exception of one's fear of Heaven.” Rambam asks that there are several verses in the Torah which seem to contradict the concept of free choice in the area of righteous and evil. The Torah states, “Hashem hardened the heart of Pharaoh.” How could the evil that Pharaoh perpetrated against the Jewish people be attributed to him if it was something that he was compelled to do? Nevertheless Pharaoh was held culpable for all his actions despite his inability to choose. How do we understand

this?

Rambam explains that initially every human being has the power of choice; however, it is possible for one to forfeit and lose that ability through one's extreme level of evil deeds. It is considered an abuse of this privilege, when one behaves in such an extremely evil manner. Hashem withdraws the gift of free choice. Thus, if one is no longer in a state of not being able to choose, he is nevertheless held culpable for his actions because it was only through his own choice of evil did he lose his power of choice.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk z'tl contemplates the question if Moshe Rabbeinu had the ability to choose to become a heretic after he had received the Torah at Sinai. Reb Meir Simcha explains that Moshe's choice to become a heretic was not possible because if it were possible it would then undermine the basis for Torah which was given through Moshe. Since this is the case then why would Moshe be deserving of reward for not becoming a heretic if he had no choice to do so? Reb Meir Simcha answers that Moshe was fully deserving of reward because it was only through his own actions and choices that he was chosen to be the one to receive the Torah at Sinai. Thus, he put himself in a position that he could not become a heretic.

Similarly, the principle that "good things come through one who is meritorious and tragedy (negative events) comes through one who is liable" – although the opportunity which comes to the one who is meritorious is not by choice, it nevertheless comes about because the individual chose to be meritorious through his actions/choices.

We say every morning in the paragraph of "*l'matzeiyach*" which follows *ashrei*, "May Hashem fulfill all that your heart desires." What are our aspirations and desires? If one desires and aspires to become a better Jew, Hashem will assist him in doing so by providing him opportunity to do good – he will assume the status of one who is "meritorious". However if one's desires are not in line with the Torah perspective (or even contrary to Torah), then he classifies himself as one who is "not meritorious". Thus Hashem will provide him with other situations that are not necessarily in his best interest.

4. The Value of Forgoing One's Personal Interest for the Sake of G-d

The Torah states, "**If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son, who does not hearken to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother, and they discipline him, but he does not hearken to them, then his father and mother shall grasp him and take him out to the elders of his city and the gate of his place. They shall say to the elders of his city, "This son of ours is wayward and rebellious; he does not hearken to our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard." All the men of his city shall pelt him with stones and he shall die.**" The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin explains that this child only assumes the status of a "rebellious" child when he steals from his parents to buy meat and wine to accommodate his desire. When his parents become aware of his behavior, they take him to the Court (Bais Din) and is given lashes for his unruly behavior. If he should become a repeated offender, and the parents should take him to the Court and declare again: "our son has become a glutton and a drunkard", the Bais Din condemns him to die by stoning.

The Gemara explains that although he has only stolen to satisfy his desire (which does not carry the death penalty), he is nevertheless put to death because "It is better that he should die in a (relatively) innocent state rather than in a liable state (for the death penalty)." Because if this behavior should continue it will become addictive and ultimately the "rebellious child" will commit murder to support his addiction.

The Torah states that the rebellious son “**does not hearken to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother**”. The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks – the Torah could have stated, “the rebellious son does not hearken to his voice” (referring to the father who had been previously mentioned in the verse). Why does the Torah feel it necessary to state “**the voice of his father and the voice of his mother**”? He explains based on the Zohar that the “father and mother” that are mentioned are not referring to his parents but rather to Hashem - his “father in heaven” and “mother” refers to the “Chachamim (the Rabbis)”.

Initially the child did not heed the words of his parents because they did not discipline him properly. As Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon) states in Mishlei (Proverbs), “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” Since he initially was not conditioned to heed the words of his parents, he ultimately will not be receptive to heeding the words of Hashem and the Chachamim. This is confirmed by the fact that although he had received lashes, he continued his gluttonous behavior. This only indicates that he is beyond the point of rehabilitation. Therefore, the Torah tells us that it is better for him to die in an “innocent state (less guilty) than later in a (more) liable state (murder) as a result of his advanced addiction.”

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that the procedure relating to “rebellious son” never actually happened and will never come into existence because it is virtually impossible to meet all the criteria that are necessary to being about the proceedings of the rebellious son. The Gemara asks - if the case of the “rebellious son” is a law that has no relevance because it cannot be implemented, then why does the Torah discuss the legal procedure and criteria that lead to the conviction of the rebellious son? The Gemara answers that the value of presenting the case of the rebellious son is for the purpose of studying and elucidating it and receiving reward for its study.

Rabbeinu Bachya asks, if the purpose of this portion is purely for the sake of study, meaning to receive reward for study of Torah study, then why is it necessary for the Torah to present the case of the “rebellious son”? One could have studied any portion of the Torah to receive reward for its study. Rabbeinu Bachya cites Rashbah (Rabbeinu Shlomo Ben Aderes) who explains that there is a special lesson to be learned from the portion of the rebellious son.

The Torah is describing a situation in which two parents take their son to Court to be prosecuted for his errant behavior, despite knowing that he will be ultimately put to death by the Court. Although the child who had just entered adulthood had not committed a capital crime (and only stole to support his desire) this does not deter the parents from acting because they understand the serious potential of this kind of behavior. A parent usually, because of his love for his child (which is a basis for a conflict of interest), tries to dismiss the unruly behavior of his child as something other than what it really is. The Torah tells us in this instance that the parents suppress their conflict of interest (as parents) and accept the Torah’s evaluation of the future of their child. Thus, they act as the Torah prescribes. Their love for Hashem becomes an overriding factor and supercedes their love for their child. Rashbah explains that this is the equivalent of the Akeidas Yitzchak (The Binding of Isaac).

The Akeidas Yitzchak was the most difficult of the ten tests which were presented to Avraham our Patriarch. The test was to see if Avraham’s love for G-d would surpass his love for his only child Yitzchak who was destined to be the future Patriarch. As difficult as it was, Avraham subordinated his love for his only son because of his greater love for Hashem. Similarly, the lesson to be learned from the case of the “rebellious son”

is that every Jew's love for Hashem must be so great that he should be willing to suppress the love for his own, as Avraham was willing to do. This is the meaning of the Gemara "elucidate it and receive reward." It is only through its study and elucidation will one appreciate and realize to what degree one must love Hashem.

It is stated in the Shema (the declaration of one's believe in the Unity of G-d) that you must love Hashem "with all your soul - *B'chol nafshecha*". The Mishna in Tractate Berachos tells us that a Jew's love for G-d must be so great that even if he must forfeit his life for Hashem he must do so. There are some Commentators who explain, that included in the words "*B'chol nafshecha* - all your soul" that one must also suppress all of his desires for the sake of Hashem.

The Gemara tells us that during the time of drought it would start raining when Rebbe Yehudah would only remove one of his shoes in preparation for prayer. Although the Talmudic Scholars of Rebbe Yehudah's generation were not proficient in all the six sections of the Talmud, when he would take the initiative to pray for rain it would begin raining. The Gemara asks – what was so unique about Rebbe Yehudah that his minimal initiative should cause Hashem to respond with rain? Sages of other generations, who were greater than the Sages of Rebbe Yehudah's generation, could not cause it to rain despite the degree of effort and initiative taken.

The Gemara answers that the generation of Rebbe Yehudah gave their lives to sanctify the Name of G-d. It relates an incident in which Rebbe Yehudah had taken action to correct a serious breach of modesty at the cost of compromising his own reputation. He negated himself despite the consequences of his action to sanctify the Name of G-d. If one is willing to forgo his own glory for the sake of Hashem, then this level of sacrifice is a fulfillment of one serving Hashem - "*B'chol nafshecha*".

The lesson of the "rebellious son" teaches us to what level of love one must aspire - that one's love for Hashem must supercede everything including that which is most dear to himself. If one is willing to sacrifice and forgo his own interests and aspirations for the sake of G-d, then by doing so, G-d will respond to his prayers because he demonstrated a very special level of love that he was willing to love Hashem "with all his soul - *B'chol nafshecha*."

5. The Importance of Reflection and Contemplation

The Torah tells us that there is a Negative Commandment for one to remove a leprous lesion, "***H'Shomer b'negah haTzaraas... Beware of a tzaraas affliction (leprous lesion), to be very careful and to act; according to everything that the Kohanim, the Levites, shall teach you – as I have commanded them – you shall be careful to perform. Remember what Hashem, your G-d, did to Miriam on the way, when you were leaving Egypt.***" Ramban states that it is a Positive Commandment for one to remember what Hashem had done to Miriam after leaving Egypt. Although Miriam was devoutly righteous, since she had spoken inappropriately (*lashon hara*) about her brother Moshe she was afflicted with leprosy. The leprosy mentioned in the Torah is a consequence of *lashon hara (evil speech)* and not a degenerative disease. Thus, if one finds himself afflicted with this type of lesion, it should be clear to him that he has failed seriously in this area.

The Gemara tells us that when the Torah expresses a Negative Commandment it uses a number of terms to indicate that it is negative: "*h'shomer* (be watchful/beware)", "*pen* (Maybe/you will consider)" or "*al/lol* (do not)". Regarding the prohibition of

removing the leprous lesion the Torah uses the term “*h’shamer*”. If the Torah wanted to communicate that one is not permitted to remove the leprous lesion why did it not simply state, “Thou shall not (*al/lo*) remove the tzaraas”? Why does the Torah in this particular situation use the term “*h’shamer*” (beware/be watchful)?

The Torah uses the term “*h’shamer*” (beware/be watchful) regarding the removal of the leprous lesion to indicate that not only is one not permitted to remove the lesion but also one must understand why the lesion must be left in place. For example, regarding the prohibition of partaking of meat that was not ritually slaughtered the Torah simply states, “Thou shall not...” because the Torah only wants to communicate the prohibition regarding that particular food item. However, tzaraas which only is a consequence of speaking *lashon hara*, the Torah wants the afflicted individual to reflect and understand why he is in this predicament. After the Kohen pronounces him as a leper, he is sent outside of all of the camps where he must remain alone to reflect and introspect on his spiritual state. Thus, the Torah prohibits the removal of the leprous lesion so that one could reflect on the cause of his affliction and do proper teshuvah (repentance). This is the reason the Torah juxtaposes the Positive Commandment of remembering what Hashem had done to Miriam immediately after the Negative Commandment of “***H’Shamer b’negah haTzaraas Beware of a tzaraas affliction (leprous lesion)...***”

Sforno explains in the Portion of Tazria that the reason the leper must go to the Kohen to evaluate the lesion is because he is the keeper of the faith and the individual who is assigned by the G-d to instruct and counsel the Jewish people regarding spiritual matters. As the verse states, “The lips of the Kohen are the keepers of knowledge... You shall seek Torah from his mouth (the Kohen).” Since the affliction of tzaraas is emanates from one’s spiritual failing, he must be instructed by the Kohen on how to deal with his spiritual rehabilitation.

Regarding the mitzvah of Shabbos, the Torah in the first set of commandments expresses itself in the positive and in the second set in the negative. In the first set of commandments the Torah states, “Remember (*zachor*) the Shabbos to sanctify it.” In the second set of tablets the Torah states, “Keep (*shamor*) the Shabbos to sanctify it.” The Torah uses the term of “watchfulness” regarding the Shabbos to indicate that one must appreciate and understand why the Jew is not permitted to do creative activity on the Shabbos (the seventh day of the week). G-d was creative for a six-day period and refrained from creative activity on the seventh. The Jew who is G-d’s representation in existence must emulate that behavior to be the testament to the nations of the world that Hashem is the Creator. It is not enough that the Jew should refrain from creative activity on the Shabbos. G-d wants the Jew to contemplate why he is refraining from creative acts on the Shabbos.

The Torah by using the term “*Shamor*” regarding Negative Commandments is communicating to us that it is essential to have a sense and appreciation for importance of the Negative Commandment. It is through this sensitivity that one will not only adhere to the Negative Commandment of refraining from creative activity on the Shabbos but will also have a greater appreciation for the Positive Commandment of “Remember the Shabbos to sanctify it.”