

Parshas Ki Seitzei

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1. How Does One Live The Akeidah Every Moment of His Life?

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 Talmud in Tractate Sanhedrin explains that the only way a child can be classified as the “rebellious” child is if he steals from his parents to buy meat and wine to satisfy his desire. If his parents should become aware of this behavior, they take him to the Court (Bais Din) and subject him to lashes. If he becomes a repeat offender, they take him to the Court and declare “our son has become a glutton and a drunkard.” The Court then condemns him to die by stoning. The Talmud explains that although he has only stolen (which does not carry the penalty of death), he nevertheless is put to death because “It is better that he should be put to death at this point of his transgression rather than later when his addiction to gluttony would cause him to commit murder to support his habit.”

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 asks – the Torah could have simply said, “the rebellious son does not hearken to his voice” (referring to the father). Why does the Torah state **“the voice of his father and the voice of his mother”**? He explains based on the Zohar that the “father and mother” mentioned in the verse are not referring to his parents but rather to Hashem - his “father in heaven” and “mother” - “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,” – he will ultimately become unreceptive to heeding the words of Hashem and the Chachamim. This is proven by the fact that although he received lashes, he nevertheless repeated his gluttonous behavior. This 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 liable state as a result of his advanced addiction.”

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that the case of the “rebellious son” never actually happened and would never come to exist in the future because it is virtually impossible to meet all of the criteria that are necessary to be classified as a rebellious son. The Gemara asks that if the case of the “rebellious son” is a law that has no relevance to be implemented, then why does the Torah present it at all? It answers that the purpose of presenting this case is for the sake of studying it and receiving reward for its study.

Rabbeinu Bachya asks, if the purpose of this portion is for the sake of pure study, then why is it necessary for the Torah to present the case of the “rebellious son” and all of its details? One could have studied any portion and received reward for its study. Rabbeinu Bachya cites Rashbah (Rabbeinu Shlomo Ben Aderes) who explains that there is a special lesson to be learned from this case. It is unheard of that parents should take their own child (when he committed a crime) to the Court to be put to death (especially when it is not a capital crime). A parent usually tries to put the behavior of his own child in the most favorable light and to dismiss his unruly behavior to something other than it really is. However, the Torah tells us that in this instance they suppress their conflict of interest (as parents) and recognize what needs to be done. The Will of Hashem is the overriding factor. Rashbah explains that the case of the “the rebellious son” is the equivalent of the Akeidas Yitzchak (The Binding of Isaac).

We know from the Akeidas Yitzchak that although Avraham Aveinu (Abraham Our Patriarch)

loved his only son Yitzchak (who was destined to be the Patriarch) more than anything in the world, he nevertheless obeyed the Commandment of Hashem to bring him as an offering. As difficult as it was, Avraham subordinated his love for his son in favor of his love for Hashem and without hesitation he attended selflessly to his obligation. Similarly, the lesson to be learned from the case of the “rebellious son” is that every Jew’s love for Hashem should be so great that he should be willing to sacrifice his own son, as Avraham was willing to do. This is the meaning of “delve into it and receive reward” for studying the case. Through its study we will understand to what degree he must love Hashem, just as we learn from Akeidas Yitzchak.

We say in the Shema that you must love Hashem “with all your soul - B’Chol Nafshecha”. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that a Jew’s love for Hashem must be so great that even if his life is at stake he must forfeit it for Hashem. There are Commentators who explain that included in the words “B’Chol Nafshecha - all your soul” one must suppress all of his desires for the sake of Hashem.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that during the time of drought, before Rebbe Yehudah would pray for rain, it would start raining as soon as he removed one of his shoes in preparation for prayer. The Gemara tells us that although the generation of Rebbe Yehudah was not proficient in all the six sections of the Talmud, nevertheless, when he would take the initiative to prepare for prayer, it was sufficient to cause it to rain. The Gemara asks – why was this generation so unique that they merited rain with such a minimal amount of initiative while other generations, who were seemingly greater (because they were proficient in all the sections of the Talmud), did not merit rain despite their initiatives and efforts?

The Gemara answers that the generation of Rebbe Yehudah gave their lives to sanctify the Name of Hashem. It relates an example of this where Rebbe Yehudah had taken action to correct a serious breach in modesty at the expense of his own reputation. He negated his sense of self to sanctify the Name of Hashem. If one is willing to forgo his own glory and compromise his acceptance in a community for the sake of Hashem’s Glory, then Hashem considers this as the sacrifice of all of one’s being - “B’Chol Nafshecha”.

The lesson of the “rebellious son” teaches us to what degree one’s love of Hashem must supercede all conflicts of interest. If one does sacrifice his own ideals and tendencies in order to serve Hashem, then by doing so, He will respond to our prayers as if we were giving up our own lives to sanctify His Name.

2. The Power of Choice

The Torah tells us that if a man is attracted to a non-Jewish woman in battle, he is permitted to convert her and take her as a wife. Some Commentators say that prior to returning from battle he is permitted to cohabit with her. The question is why does the Torah permit this? Additionally, how is the woman’s conversion valid since it comes about through duress? Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the Torah is dealing with the Evil Inclination of man and if it would not permit this relationship in battle, the man would succumb to his temptation and transgress. Therefore it is better that the man have the relationship in a permitted state rather in a forbidden state. How do we understand this?

Firstly, it is difficult to understand that the Torah is discussing a person who is a tzaddik, on an advanced spiritual level, who is engaged in battle. Even so, Chazal tell us that if the Torah would not permit this type of relationship with the non-Jewish woman, he would transgress. If the man is truly a tzaddik, then why can’t he resist the temptation? Why is it inevitable that he will transgress? The answer is - when one is in battle he is totally preoccupied with his own survival and self-preservation. His sense of security does not exist. When a man loses the focus of his responsibility to himself as a Jew, he loses control over his spiritual destiny. Therefore, even the tzaddik could not control his lust under these circumstances. Thus the Torah permits it because the man’s freedom of choice has been lost.

The Torah is citing the case of being attracted to a woman in battle to teach us that this is the *only* exception in which one is in a state of non-control. In all other circumstances, despite what one believes, he is in a position to take control of himself and is therefore held liable if he does not.

The Gemara in Tractate Kesubos tells us, **“that Chananiya, Meshael, and Azarya, if they would have been beaten they would have bowed to the idol.”** Nebuchadnezer (the Babylonian Emperor who destroyed the Bais HaMikdash (the temple)), constructed an image of himself as an idol and all of his subjects had to bow to his image. These three individuals were the only subjects who would not bow, although defying the order was punishable by death. They were thrown into a fiery kiln and miraculously came out alive. The Commentators ask – how is it possible to say that such outstanding devout individuals would have bowed to the idol if they would have been beaten? The Chasam Sofer z’tl explains that the Gemara states, **“if they would have been tortured they would have bowed.”** However they were not tortured but cast into the fiery kiln. Since Chananiya, Meshael, and Azarya, would have not been able to withstand the pain of torture, they were not put into that situation. Hashem only puts a person in a situation to be tested if he has the capacity to withstand that test. However, if the test is too difficult to overcome, then the test is not a test.

When one finds himself in a tenuous situation, such as confronted with temptation, one must understand that he has the ability to take control of himself and not succumb. Being confronted with this situation is only an indication that he has the ability to deal with it.

Once, a person said to the Chazon Ish z’tl that it would have been easier to observe the laws of the Torah had we been born in earlier generations because we had many more Torah Sages. The Chazon Ish responded to him by saying that the reason why Hashem caused us to be born during this generation (and not any other) is because we have the capacity to observe the Torah laws despite not having a special spiritual environment. Hashem would not put us in a generation that we would not be able to meet the challenge.

If a person would not have the power of choice then there would not be reward and punishment. Hashem only presents us with situations in which we have the ability to choose. However, if through our own choice we put ourselves in precarious situations, there is no guarantee that we have the ability to succeed. This is because we (and not Hashem) put ourselves in that situation.

3. What is the Meaning of Chesed?

The Torah tells us that it is forbidden for the Moabites and the Ammonites to marry into the Jewish people even if they were to convert (this prohibition only applies to the male and not the female). The Torah states the reason for this prohibition is because, **“they did not greet you (in the desert) with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt...”** Since the Moabites and Ammonites did not demonstrate the attribute of chesed (kindness), they are condemned forever and therefore cannot marry into the Jewish people.

The Midrash in the Portion of Vayeira explains that for every act of chesed performed by Avraham when he hosted the three wayfarers (who were in fact angels), the Jewish people merited great gifts in the desert. In the merit of Avraham offering the shade of his tree, Hashem rewarded the Jews with the Clouds of Glory, which protected them for forty years in the desert. In the merit of Avraham offering his bread, the Jews merited the Mann (Manna) for forty years. In the merit of offering his water, the Jews merited the wellspring of Miriam, which followed us through the desert for forty-years. The Midrash explains that although Avraham performed chesed with individuals who were not in need of chesed (because they were angels), we merited endless blessing. If someone performs chesed for one who is truly in need, then how much more so will he be deserving of reward for his act.

The Midrash continues, in the desert the Jewish people were not in need of bread and water from the Ammonites or Moabites. They had the Mann and the wellspring of Miriam. Nevertheless, the Ammonites and Moabites are castigated forever because they did not offer their bread and water to

the Jews. The Midrash states, if we see that chesed is denied to one who *does not need it*, the repercussions of such behavior are severe. If chesed is denied to someone who is *truly in need*, the consequences of that behavior are much more serious.

How do we understand Hashem's claim against the Amonites and Moabites for withholding their bread and water from the Jewish people? The fact is that they truly were not in need of the bread or water. If this is so then what is the basis of the condemnation of these two peoples? The answer is - offering one's bread and water to another individual is not only in a context that the other person has nothing to eat. It is a means of showing one's hospitality to the other individual. Hospitality goes beyond giving someone food and drink – it is an acknowledgement of the existence of another individual. When a Jew does an act of chesed for another it is a recognition of the existence and importance of the other person. Thus, the fact that the Moabites and Amonites withheld their bread and water from the Jews was an indication that their understanding of chesed was limited to only providing for one's physical needs. Their concept was deficient compared to the caliber of Avraham's chesed. Therefore people of such limited understanding are not permitted to marry into the Jewish people because they will undermine the inborn characteristic of chesed, which is unique to every Jew.

The Torah tells us that one must give charity in accordance with a person's needs. The Torah states, "Dai Machsoro (according to what the poor man lacks)." The Gemara in Tractate Kesubos explains that if a person was wealthy at one point and subsequently falls on hard times and is in need of charity, he must be given sufficient support to accommodate all of his needs. If, at one time, the wealthy person had runners who would go before him to honor him, the community is obligated to underwrite the cost of these runners. Charity goes beyond the physical needs of the individual. The Torah demands that a person's individualized needs are provided for.

We are told by the Torah that if a corpse is found outside of a community and it was determined that the victim (who was murdered) had come from this community, its elders must bring a calf to a valley and break its neck. They must declare at that time, "We are not responsible for this individual's death. We provided him food, drink, and we escorted him out of the community (levaya)." The Gemara in Tractate Sotah asks - why must the elders of the community (who were tzaddikim and Torah Sages) disclaim responsibility for the person's death? Why would we think that they were at all involved? The Gemara explains that the elders proclaim that their community not only provided food and drink but even escorted the person out of the city (levaya) to indicate that their hospitality and chesed extended beyond the physical needs of the person to give him a sense of value. If a Jew gives his fellow a sense of self-esteem and value, then he is able to weather every storm. However if a Jew is only provided for to satisfy his physical needs, then he is being treated no better than an animal whose needs are only physical.

Therefore the standard of chesed of a Jew goes beyond the physical and encompasses the totality of the person. This was the failure of the Amonites and Moabites.

4. How do we Guarantee our Existence?

The Torah tells us that a Jew has an obligation to return a lost article to his fellow. This Positive Commandment applies to any lost article whether it is animate or an inanimate. The Torah states, **"You shall not see the ox of your brother or his sheep or goat cast off, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely return them to your brother."** The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that this verse is not only referring to the obligation of returning lost items, but also the return of Jews. The Ohr HaChaim says that tzaddikim are referred to as "brothers" because of their spiritual level. The "ox and the sheep" which are mentioned in the verse refer to Klal Yisroel. Thus, he explains that the verse is telling us that the tzaddikim have the responsibility of bringing back Klal Yisroel to the proper path and returning them to Hashem, their Father in Heaven.

He continues by saying that we are currently in the last great exile, which has extended over many centuries and it is uncertain when it will end. As a result of this lengthy exile many Jews have strayed from the path of Torah and have become alienated from their Judaism. Therefore the

Torah states that a Jew has an obligation to “gather-in his brothers into his house and instruct him how to lead a proper life and walk the path in which light will dwell with him.” He explains that the “house” is the Bais HaMidrash (House of Torah Study), and teaching him the “way of life...” is referring to the study of Torah. It is through the study of Torah that a Jew will bring light and clarity into his life and he will not stray from the path. The light of Torah will protect the Jew from being attacked by the enemy who will approach him with false philosophies and perspectives. One is obligated to continue to bring his fellow Jew into the study halls to be close to Hashem until this exile comes to its conclusion or until the person returns his soul to Hashem.

The Torah tells us that Yaakov Aveinu fled from the house of his father (Yitzchak) because of his brother Esav. He was separated from his father for over twenty years and when he was returning he was attacked by an angel, whom Chazal tells us was the archangel of Esav. Yaakov was pure and steeped in Torah, Esav was the antithesis. Reb Elchanan Wasserman zt'l asked— why did the archangel of Esav only attack Yaakov? Why did he not attack Avraham, who introduced chesed (kindness) and monotheism into the world? Why did he not attack Yitzchak who introduced Avodah (the Service of Hashem through prayer) to the world?

Reb Elchanan Wasserman zt'l answered - the archangel did not attack Avraham was because satan understood that chesed alone was not sufficient to keep the Jews attached to Hashem. Satan understood that regardless of how many hospitals or charity organizations the Jewish people would establish, it would only be a matter of time before the Jews would assimilate. The reason why satan did not attack Yitzchak (who introduced prayer to the service of Hashem) was because he understood that prayer alone would not be able to sustain the Jewish people. Despite the number of synagogues that Jews would build, he knew that the Jews would eventually assimilate and abandon their Judaism. The reason why the satan attacked Yaakov was because he was the person who represented Torah. As it is stated in the Torah, “He was the man who dwelled in the tent” – meaning the tent of Torah. The Torah gives clarity and guarantees the perpetuation of Judaism. Satan understood that if he could eliminate Yaakov he would eliminate Torah and thus guarantee the demise of the Jewish people.

Therefore in order to return one’s brother to the path of life, he must be returned to the study hall, the Bais HaMidrash to study Torah. It is the only way that he will be able to gain the proper perspective and clarity to become attached to Hashem. Prayer and acts of kindness alone are not sufficient to sustain one’s Judaism. As Chazal tells us, the only way to combat satan is to see him for what he is and that is only accomplished through the study of Torah.