
Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series

Portion of Ki Seitzei

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Portion of Ki Seitzei

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita
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1. The Innate Holiness of a Mitzvah

Rambam writes in the Laws of Repentance, “Before one repents he is despised, abominable, and detestable in the eyes of G’d. However, after one repents he is beloved, pleasant, and precious to G’d.” Rambam continues that before one repents, when that individual performs a mitzvah, G’d rejects it and throws it back before him. The text of the blessing that precedes the performance of a mitzvah states, “...He has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us...” G’d gave the Jewish people the capacity to become sanctified through the performance of mitzvos. This opportunity to become sanctified and holy comes about due to the special relationship between G’d and the Jewish people. When G’d is associated with anything, it assumes a state of holiness. When one is close to the source Sanctity and Holiness, which is G’d Himself, then the conduit to bring about sanctity is the performance of mitzvos. However, if the Jew were to become distant from G’d due to becoming tainted with sin, although the mitzvos that he performs are inherently G’d’s Will, he will not become sanctified through them because his relationship with G’d has been diminished. Thus, it is only after one has repented and has been reinstated, will he become worthy of that special relationship. It is only then that he will be sanctified by his mitzvah performance.

One can only be reinstated and spiritually rehabilitated through the gift of repentance. However, for the repentance process to be effective it must be performed with complete sincerity and true introspection. If one does not repent sufficiently then his mitzvos and his prayers may continue to be rejected by G’d, since he has not sufficiently cleansed himself from sin. Rambam writes in the Laws of Repentance that one needs to recognize the wrong that he had done, have remorse for the wrong, and make a commitment not to repeat it every again. It is only then that the repentance process is considered to have begun. If one is able to achieve through his repentance a reinstatement regarding his relationship with G’d, then his

mitzvos will be a conduit to bring about sanctity and holiness.

The Torah states in the Portion of Shoftim regarding when the Jewish people will go to war, “**Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house...**” Rashi cites an argument among Chazal regarding the cause of the individual’s fear. Is he fearful because of the battle itself? Or is his fear rooted in something else? Reb Yossi HaGlili states, “He is fearful of the sins that he has committed.” The individual is afraid that because of his spiritual failings, he will not merit the special Divine Protection and Assistance that one needs to be protected in battle. He is thus concerned and fearful that he will die in battle as a result of his sins.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh cites a verse from Yeshaya, “‘The ones who are fearful among Zion are the sinners....’ The Gemara states, ‘Whoever has sin in his hand possesses fear....’ Even if one is not aware that he has sinned, if he were to become fearful when entering into battle, it is an indication that he is tainted with sin. Had he been free of sin, his heart would understand that he will be protected by G’d. Our Rabbis of blessed memory tell us that if one has sinned, his heart will become fearful, even though his sin may be as minor as having spoken between ‘Yishtabach’ and ‘Yotzeir.’ When one goes into battle one needs a great amount of Divine Protection. If one is tainted by sin and evil to any degree, he will not be worthy of G’d’s miracles and his ‘soul (mazal)’ will detect this unworthiness and he will become fearful.” We see regarding Nachum Eish Gamzoo (the teacher of Rebbe Akiva) that regardless of how frightening his circumstances may have been, he never was concerned about the outcome and did not become fearful. Any other individual in his same circumstances would have been paralyzed by fear. He would say, “This is also for the good (Gam zu l’tovah).” It was only due to the purity of his soul that he feared no physical encounter.

There is a principle that is stated in the Mishna in Ethics of Our Fathers “One mitzvah brings about another

mitzvah (*mitzvah goreris mitzvah*).” Why does the performance of a mitzvah bring about the performance of another mitzvah? Reb Chaim of Volozhin in his work *Nefesh HaChaim* explains that when one performs a mitzvah it creates a spiritual holy force that engulfs the individual and draws him to perform another mitzvah. The spirituality that is generated by one mitzvah engenders another mitzvah. Due to the worthiness of the individual, G’d will embrace the mitzvah, causing the spiritual force to come about, thus bringing about the opportunity to perform another mitzvah.

The Torah states in the Portion of Ki Seitzei, “**If a bird’s nest happens to be before you on the road...You shall surely send away the mother...and you will prolong your days. If you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof....You shall not sow your field with a mixture, ...You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey...**” The Midrash tells us that based on the principle of “*mitzvah goreris mitzvah*” that through the performance of one mitzvah G’d brings about the circumstances and the means to be able to perform another mitzvah. For example, in order for an individual to be able to fulfill the mitzvah of building a parapet on his roof, G’d will provide the individual with the means to build a house so that he may fulfill the mitzvah of building a parapet. Although this is true, we see that often when one performs a mitzvah it does not necessary engender other mitzvos or the material means to fulfill them. Why is this so? It is because if one is tainted by sin or does not perform the mitzvah with a proper intent, although the deficiency slight, because the innate value of the mitzvah is diminished it will not generate a sufficient level of holiness. Thus, the principle of “*mitzvah goreris mitzvah*” is impaired and limited.

During the month of Elul and continuing through the Ten days of Repentance, there is special Divine Assistance for the Jew to be able to properly repent. The Jewish people should merit G’d’s Mercy to be able to repent sufficiently and become sanctified through the performance of their mitzvos, so that they may cleave to Him.

2. Maintaining a Continuous State of Clarity

The month of Elul, is referred to as the “days of mercy.” G’d’s Mercy is more accessible to the one who calls out to him regarding one’s spiritual predicament. Chazal tell us that in order to merit this special Divine

Assistance to repent and advance oneself spiritually, the individual must first take the initiative. As it states regarding the month of Elul, whose letters are an acronym which allude to the essence of the month, “I am to My beloved as My beloved is to Me (*Anee l’dodi v’dodi Li*).” During this month, one need only to take a slight initiative in order to bring about full repentance. The Midrash tells us that one needs only to take the slightest degree of initiative, which is no more than the point of a needle then G’d will open for him an opening the size of a large chamber.

The Torah states in the Book of Devarim, “**Moshe said to the Children of Israel: And Now (v’atah), O Israel, what is Hashem, your G’d, asking of you? Only to fear Hashem, your G’d, to go in all His ways and to love Him, and serve Hashem, your G’d will all your heart and with all your soul, to observe the commandments of Hashem and His decrees...**” Chofetz Chaim in his work *Ahavas Chesed* cites a Sifri that explains that the term “*v’atah - now*” is referring to repentance. He asks, “How does the word ‘now’ allude to ‘repentance’?” He explains that a Jew must live his life in a specific and deliberate manner. One must not procrastinate in his introspection to address the issues that need to be corrected regarding his service of G’d. If a Jew is continuously cognizant of his spiritual obligation, then he will not delay and repent immediately.

In addition Chofetz Chaim writes, that the word “and now” also alludes to another important mindset that one must maintain. One must continuously throughout his life ask himself, “What does G’d want from me now?” A Jew must be continuously cognizant of the value of the moment. He must consider if his behavior is in conformance with the Will of G’d or not. If one’s mindset is preoccupied with the question of “what is my responsibility to G’d at this moment?” he will always evaluate the moment based on the principles of the Torah. For example, when one awakes in the morning, he may be confronted with a situation in which he must decide to either first attend to an urgent business matter or fulfill his obligation of prayer before attending to the business issue. If the Jew asks himself at that moment of quandary, “What does G’d want from me now?” then he will understand clearly that he must first address his spiritual obligation before engaging in the business matter. If one continuously evaluates the moment based on this question in every aspect of his life, then he will live his life fully dedicated to serving G’d.

If one lives his life being cognizant of what G'd wants from him at that moment, then even the most mundane activity becomes elevated to something of holiness. As Rambam writes in the Laws of Deos that if one engages even in a physical act such as eating, sleeping, cohabitating, etc. for the sake of G'd then it will be considered the equivalent of performing a mitzvah.

3. Addressing the Negative Momentum in our Lives

The Torah tells us that a son who does not heed the rebuke of his parents after he had stolen from them the means to purchase meat and wine to satisfy his gluttonous desire is considered to be a "rebellious son." This young man who had just entered into adulthood, will eventually become consumed and addicted to a need to be indulgent until he is condemned to die. Why is the rebellious son liable for the death penalty if he had only stolen from his parents to satisfy his gluttonous cravings? Ramban explains, "The rebellious son is liable for punishment for two reasons. Firstly, he acted disrespectfully towards his mother and father by defying them by his wayward behavior. Secondly, he is liable for his gluttonous behavior which violated the positive commandment of '**You shall be holy... (Kedoshim t'hue)**'" Ramban writes in his commentary on the portion of Kedoshim that a person can behave in the most detestable manner within the context of everything that is permitted within the Torah law. A person can live as a hedonist and be fully indulgent in everything that is permitted and simultaneously have no relevance to holiness. If one should live his life in this manner, he will be in violation of the positive commandment of "You shall be holy..." Thus, the rebellious child not only violated the negative commandment of stealing, but he also violated the positive commandment of "You shall be holy..." Thus, causing the rebellious son to be deserving of the death penalty. Ramban continues, "The Jew must also serve G'd and cleave to Him. One who has violated the positive commandment of 'You shall be holy' will not be able to do so."

The Torah states in the Portion of Shoftim regarding the cities of refuge, "**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...**" Rashi cites Chazal, "Because of the initial hate that he had for his fellow, he waited in ambush for him to commit murder. From this we see, that if one transgresses a less severe mitzvah, it will cause him to transgress a more

severe mitzvah. Since he was in violation of the negative commandment which forbids one to hate one's fellow Jew in his heart, it ultimately caused him to shed blood." We see from this the principle of "One sin leads to another sin (*aveira goreres aveira*)."¹ When one transgresses it causes and draws one to violate at an even more severe level. This is the reason the Torah predicates the act of murder by the one who lay in ambush, with the background information of '**a man who hates his fellow**'."

Similarly, the rebellious son who initially violates the commandment of disrespecting his parents and "Thou shall not steal..." is drawn to gluttonous behavior by a momentum that will ultimately lead him to commit murder. The rebellious son being condemned to death at an early stage of transgression is based on the principle of "*aveira goreres aveira*" although he had not yet reached the most severe level of transgression (murder); nevertheless because of the cycle that has been put into motion, he is put to death.

Chofetz Chaim writes that when one speaks lashon hara (negative speech) he is in violation of multiple positive and negative commandments. Over time, one will be in violation of seventeen negative commandments and fourteen positive commandments. One of the positive commandment that one violates when he speaks lashon hara is "neglecting Torah study (*bitul Torah*)."² The Mishna in Ethics of Our Fathers states, "You need to consider three things and you will not come to sin...(one of them is) Ultimately one will need to come to judgment and computation (*din v'cheshbon*)."³ Vilna Gaon asks, "One would think that computation and the audit of one's record should precede the judgment? This is because it is only after one's record has been scrutinized could judgment be rendered. Nevertheless, Chazal state that first there is "judgment" and then "computation."

Vilna Gaon explains that it is understood that a judgment is predicated on a prior computation and evaluation of one's past record. However, the "computation" that is mentioned in the Mishna is another level of computation. It is to evaluate and determine what mitzvah could have been fulfilled at the particular moment that one had transgressed and sinned.

Chofetz Chaim cites the Jerusalem Talmud and explains it based on Vilna Gaon's interpretation that for every word of Torah that one studies, one fulfills a positive commandment. If one studies for a period of time that is no more than a half an hour for example, one can fulfill the

positive commandment of the study of Torah thousands of times. However, if one engages in forbidden speech then one is not only liable for the negative speech, he is also liable for all the words of Torah that he could have studied during the time that he was sinning when he spoke something that he was not permitted to say.

The intensification of one's attraction to sin is based on the principle of *aveira goreres aveira*. Because one previously had violated, he is drawn to violate again and possibly at an even more serious level. When one repents for the sins that he remembers that he had committed and feels remorse for them, one must also understand that he is simultaneously liable for the Torah that he could have studied when he transgressed. If one does not address this, he will be continuously subject to the application of the principle of *aveira goreres aveira*.

4. Prioritizing One's 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...**” The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin explains that the child assumes the status of the “rebellious” son only after he steals from his parents to buy a measure of meat and wine to satisfy his desire. When his parents become aware of his errant behavior, they take him to the Court and he is given lashes. If he should repeat this behavior, and his parents take him again to the court, he is judged as a “rebellious” son and is put to death by stoning.

The Mishna in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that the incident of the “rebellious son” never actually happened and will never come to be. It is because it is not possible to meet all the criteria that are set forth by the Torah to establish the child as a “rebellious son.” The Mishna asks, “If this is so, why is the portion of the rebellious son stated in the Torah?” The Mishna answers, “It is for the purpose to delve into it and to receive reward for its study.”

Rabbeinu Bachya asks, if the purpose of this portion is to provide the individual with the opportunity to study Torah, then why is this subject matter chosen regarding the mitzvah of studying Torah? One could study any portion of the Torah and be worthy of 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. It is a lesson for one to learn to what degree one must be dedicated to G’d and demonstrate one’s love for Him, as was demonstrated by Avraham, our Patriarch in the test of the Akeidah (binding of Yitzchak).

The Torah describes in detail a situation in which a mother and father take their son to the Rabbinic Court to be prosecuted and reprimanded for his glutinous and defiant behavior. They take their son to receive the punishment of lashes, despite the fact that it is severe and debilitating. They also understand the consequence of their decision - that he will be put to death if he repeats this behavior. Although their child’s errant behavior could have been dismissed and attributed to immaturity or a phase in his life, they chose to heed the directive of the Torah. The parents understood that if their child’s behavior should continue he will ultimately consume their assets and he will resort to murder to support his habit.

In the case of the rebellious child, the parents take their child to be put to death and thus suppress their natural love for their child because of their love for G’d. Their love for G’d supersedes everything else that they value and cherish. Rashbah explains that the parents’ initiative regarding their child is the equivalent of Avraham’s demonstration of his love for G’d through the Akeidah (The Binding of Yitzchak). Just as Avraham was willing to sacrifice his son as an offering for the sake of G’d, because of his overwhelming love, so too do these parents give up their son because of their love of G’d.

The Binding of Yitzchak was the most difficult of the ten tests that were presented to Avraham our Patriarch. The test was meant to see if Avraham’s love for G’d would surpass his love for his most beloved child Yitzchak, who was born to him in his old age. As difficult as it was, Avraham was able to subordinate his own understanding and conflicts of interest to do the Will of G’d. Similarly, the lesson to be learned from the “rebellious son” is that every Jew must be willing to sacrifice for the sake of G’d by submitting to His Will despite the personal consequences. Whenever the Torah dictates a certain course of action, then one must adhere to it. This is the meaning of the statement in the Mishna “to delve into it, to receive reward.” It is not referring to the general mitzvah of Torah study.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that during the time of Reb Yehudah there was drought and it

had not rained for an extended period of time. Part of the procedure of prayer to address this problem, one must fast and remove his (leather) shoes. When Reb Yehudah would remove only as much as one shoe, it would begin raining immediately. However in later generations, regardless of how much they prayed and fasted the rains did not necessarily come. The Gemara asks, “Although the Torah sages in the generation of Reb Yehudah were proficient in only two sections of the Talmud (there are six); nevertheless, they were worthy of the rains coming. In later generations, although the Torah sages were proficient in all six sections of the Talmud, regardless of their supplications, the rains did not come.” The Gemara explains that the difference between the generation of Reb Yehudah and the later generations is that they were willing to sacrifice for G’d. Even with a small initiative they merited rain. However, other generations who did not sacrifice for G’d did not merit rain despite their efforts to bring it about.

The Gemara tells us about an incident in which a woman was dressed immodestly. Reb Yehudah witnessing this, he reacted to correct the breach of modesty, regardless of the consequence to himself. He had believed that it was a Jewish woman who was behaving inappropriately; however, after he had reacted it was revealed that she was a non-Jewish woman. He was financially penalized and disgraced for his behavior. The Gemara refers to his action as “he gave his soul to sanctify G’d.” One does not necessarily need to literally give his life for the sake of G’d. When one is willing to compromise on his own honor and negate himself for the sake of G’d it is considered to be sacrificing oneself to G’d. This degree of personal negation is the lesson to be learned from the study of the portion of the rebellious son.

5. *Redemption from Egypt, Setting the Context of Free Choice* (from Shoftim)

The Torah states regarding the false prophet, “**If there should stand up in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of a dream... he spoke to you saying, ‘Let us follow gods of others that you did not know and we shall worship them!’...He (the false prophet) shall be put to death, for he has spoken perversion against Hashem your G’d, Who takes you out of the land of Egypt, and Who redeems you from the house of slavery...”** One would think that it would be sufficient reason for the Torah to state that the false prophet deserves punishment of death because he had attempted to seduce the Jewish people to engage in idolatry. However, the

Torah qualifies the seriousness of his behavior and thus deserves to die because “**he has spoken perversion against Hashem your G’d, Who takes you out of the land of Egypt...”** It seems that this element is the basis for the severity of his transgression.

The Torah continues, “**If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter....will entice you secretly, ‘Let us go and worship the gods of others...you shall pelt him with stones and he shall die, for he sought to make you stray from near Hashem, your G’d Who takes you out of Egypt from the house of slavery.’**” We see again that the individual who attempts to seduce another to do idolatry deserves the most severe level of punishment, death by stoning, because he has “spoken against G’d Who takes you out of the land of Egypt.” Again we see that the severity of idolatry is linked to the fact that G’d had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt.

The Torah presents another example of idolatry in which the majority a city is seduced to worship idols as the Torah states, “**If in one of your cities...lawless men emerged from your midst and the cause the dwellers of their city to go astray saying, ‘let us go and worship the gods of others....’ You shall smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword; lay it waste (everything including its animals)...you shall gather everything from the city and burn it upon the fire....so that Hashem will turn back from His burning Wrath and He will give mercy and be merciful to you...”** Rashi cites Chazal, “As long as there is idolatry in the world, G’d’s Wrath is upon existence.”

Why does the Torah quantify the severity of idolatry in these particular applications to G’d who had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt? Ramban states in his commentary on the Portion of Bo regarding the revealed miracles of Egypt that until the time of the plagues, G’d’s Hand was cloaked in nature. His Presence in existence was not obvious and concealed. However, with the ten plagues that were brought upon Egypt He openly displayed His Mastership and involvement in creation by altering the natural order.

Ramban explains that the objective of Creation is that man should be able to believe in G’d and serve Him through his free choice. However, this is only possible if there are those in existence who believe in a Creator and in an Omnipotent Being who dictates existence. Since there is a context of representation of G’d’s Presence in the

world, one has the ability to choose to be a believer in the Omnipotent One or to be an idolater. Prior to revealed miracles of Egypt, the world had regressed to a level that humanity had come to believe that nature was controlled and dictated by deities (the hosts of heaven). Thus, the context of choice no longer existed. If so, the world no longer had any purpose at that time. G'd for the sake of reinstating a context of free choice chose to bring about supernatural events that were contrary to nature to indicate that the world is not limited to the natural order and dictated by the deities, but rather the Omnipotent G'd continuously Wills existence. It was to indicate that just as G'd is present and involved regarding the altering of nature through the plagues, nature itself (the natural order) is a manifestation of G'd Willing and controlling existence. Thus, nature in its essence is a concealed miracle. Since not every generation merits revealed miracles that would remind them of G'd's continuous involvement in existence, the Jewish people are obligated to remember exodus of Egypt in many contexts – whether it is through the festivals (specifically Pesach) or the mentioning of the redemption from Egypt through the recitation of the Shema twice a day. There are also many other instances in which the Jew is obligated to mention the exodus from Egypt.

The Prophet tells us that the sole purpose of existence is to bring glory to G'd by recognizing and serving Him. As is states, "For My Glory I created it..." The false prophet and others who entice people to stray from G'd and do idolatry deserve the most extreme death penalty because G'd chose to alter nature with revealed miracles in Egypt with the specific intent that people should not believe that the world is controlled by deities. This is so that mankind should have a context of free choice. The behavior of these individuals such as the false prophet or the community that worships idolatry is a direct affront to G'd especially when we see to what extent G'd went to establish His Presence in existence. This was through the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt.

The reason idolatry evokes the Wrath of G'd as we see regarding the city that serves idols, is because if this behavior should be tolerated, existence would have no purpose of value.