

# PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

*by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky*

## 1. Negative Causality

The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states, "aveira goreres aveira- one transgression (even of a minor nature) will lead to another transgressions (of more severe nature)." When one sins, it gives rise to a negative force that encourages the individual to sin again. 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..." Rashi cites Chazal, "As a result of the initial hate for his fellow, this individual waited in ambush for him. From here we learn that if one transgresses a less severe mitzvah, it will cause him to transgress a mitzvah of greater severity. Since he was in violation of the negative commandment which forbids one to hate one's fellow Jew, it ultimately caused him to transgress the commandment, 'Thou shall not commit murder.' This is the reason the verse predicates the act of murder with the mention of 'a man who hates his fellow.'

One would think that if one hated his fellow and allowed that hate to fester and intensify, it would naturally lead to a severe and tragic conclusion. If murder would be a natural consequence of hating one's fellow, the Torah would not need to predicate the act of murder upon what preceded it to teach us this lesson. The Torah only mentions the precursor to the premeditated murder, the man waiting in ambush, in order to teach us the principle of "aveira goreres aveira." For example, since there is no prohibition for a Jew to hate a non-Jew, the natural consequence which would lead to murder may not necessarily take place since there is no chain of transgression from less severe to more severe.

The Torah tells us that if a man is attracted to a non-Jewish woman in battle (aishis yefas tohar), he is permitted to take her with the intent of converting her and taking her as his wife. However, based on the juxtaposition to the law that pertains to the "rebellious son," the Torah is teaching us that the likelihood of this union will bring about the "rebellious son." The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin explains that a child assumes the status of a "rebellious son" 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 transgression. If he should become a repeated offender, and the parents should take him again to the Court and declare: "our son has become a glutton and a drunkard", the Court condemns him to die by stoning. The rebellious son is the negative consequence of the man being attracted to a non -Jewish woman in battle, despite the fact that his intent was to convert her. The Midrash tells us that the child that came from this initiative

manifests itself as an offspring who is inclined to become the "rebellious son." Chazal tell us that this is based on the principle of "aveira goreres aveira."

The Midrash states, "King David desired Maacha when saw her in battle. (She was a non-Jewish princess). He had taken her captive in battle and married her. Ultimately, she bore for him Avshalom who rebelled against his father King David and wanted to kill him. He also had raped ten of his father's concubines." This is a manifestation of "aveira goreres aveira." Although the Torah permits one to convert and marry the non-Jewish woman that one desires in battle, it is discouraged because the initial interest is of an inappropriate nature. Thus, the result is the "rebellious son."

There is a positive commandment for every Jew to love his fellow as himself. Why is this so? Reb Moshe Cordavero writes in Tomar Dvora that every Jewish soul is intertwined with the soul of his fellow. Therefore, one must be concerned for the welfare of his fellow because his fellow possesses part of his own spirituality. In essence, all Jews are united as one in the spiritual realm. This is the reason one must be concerned for the spirituality of his fellow as himself. There is a positive commandment to rebuke one's fellow so that he should follow the proper path and not transgress. If that person were to transgress he would not only damage his own spirituality, but he will also damage his fellow's. This is because he possesses part of his fellow's spiritual essence, which is the soul. Just as there is a chain of negative consequence for doing the wrong, which is the principle of "aveira goreres aveira," the same is true regarding the positive which is the principle, "mitzvah goreres mitzvah." When one performs a mitzvah, a positive energy engulfs the individual and motivates and draws that person to do more of the same, which is another mitzvah at an even more advanced level. When one loves his fellow he creates the beginning of a dynamic which continues to have a series of positive consequences that will ultimately cause G'd to bring that individual to a more advanced level of spirituality. This is because the one who is performing the mitzvah of rebuking his fellow is not only affecting the soul within himself, it is even affecting the portion of his own spirituality which is contained in the other individual. Consequently, the other individual will be a beneficiary of the rebuke.

## **2. Sensing Another's Need**

The Torah states, "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of Hashem, to eternity..." One who descends from the Ammonite or Moabite nations, even if he should convert to Judaism is not permitted to marry into the Jewish people because his status is considered to be illegitimate until the end of time. The Torah continues, "This is because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt..." The Jewish people had been wandering the desert for forty years. Rather than offering them hospitality, the Ammonites and Moabites had commissioned Bilaam to curse the Jewish people. Nations with such corrupted characteristics should not be allowed to marry into the Jewish people. This is the reason G'd denied them from ever intermarrying into His Holy people. Although they may convert to become Jews, they are always kept apart from the rest of the people.

The Torah tells us that after the third day of Avraham's circumcision (at the age of 99) which was the most difficult day of his recovery, G'd had taken the sun out of its sheath (to cause it to be the hottest day in the history of existence) so that Avraham should have a respite from wayfarers and not be preoccupied with hosting them. When he saw three men approaching from a distance he ran towards them and offered his hospitality. The Midrash tells us that G'd valued every aspect of Avraham's hospitality and rewarded the Jewish people in kind during their 40-year trek in the desert. In the merit of Avraham offering the shade of his tree, the Jewish people merited to be protected by the Clouds of Glory. In the merit of offering the water to the wayfarers, the Jewish people were provided with the wellspring of Miriam which traveled with them in the desert. In the merit of offering them bread, the Jewish people merited to have the Manna.

The Midrash states, "How great is the reward for one who does kindness (chesed) with the one who does not need kindness..." The wayfarers who had visited Avraham were actually angels. Since they were not physical beings, they were not beneficiaries of Avraham's hospitality because did they need it. Nevertheless, it was because of Avraham's act of loving kindness that the Jewish people merited great reward in the desert. The Midrash continues, "How much more is one deserving of reward for one who does chesed with one who is truly in need of chesed. What is the punishment for one who does not do chesed for the one who is not in need of chesed? Who were those who denied chesed to those who were not in need of it? It was the Ammonites and Moabites who did not offer their bread and water to the Jewish people. The Jewish people were not in need of the bread and water of the Ammonites and Moabites because G'd had provided them with the Manna and the wellspring of Miriam. How much more severe is the punishment for the one who denies chesed from the one who is truly in need of it." If in fact the Jewish people were not in need of the bread and water of the Ammonites and Moabites, why were these nations condemned forever for withholding their hospitality from the Jewish people?

Kindness is not necessarily providing one with food, drink, or any kind of material amenity. Rather it is understanding the needs of another. The Jewish people had been wandering in the desert for forty years. The offer of bread and water by the Ammonites and Moabites was not an end unto itself but rather, it would have been a means to acknowledge and welcome the Jewish people. By not making this gesture, it was a confirmation that the Ammonites and Moabites had no capacity to sense the higher and more advanced level of chesed, which is the internalization of what the other is lacking. They were therefore disqualified from intermarrying with the Jewish people whose quality and standard of chesed is on an exemplary and advanced level because they descend from Avraham who was the personification of chesed. Every Jew, being a spiritual heir of Avraham, thus possesses the special level of kindness that goes beyond satisfying the material need of another. If the Ammonites and Moabites were allowed to marry into the Jewish people, they would have corrupted and diluted the standard and quality of chesed, which G'd did not want to happen.

### **3. The Importance of Being Perceived in a Proper Light**

The Torah states, "Remember what Amalek did to you...you shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heaven- you shall not forget!" The Midrash cites a verse from Psalms, " 'May the iniquity of the forefathers be remembered by G'd, and may the sin to the mother not be blotted out.' To whom is King David referring? The holy Patriarchs, who were the forefathers of Esav, were devoutly righteous.... How then will the sins of the forefathers be remembered before G'd? King David is referring to the sin committed by Esav against his forbearers. What did Esav do? Each of the Patriarchs was destined to live 180 years. Yitzchak had lived 180 years. Similarly, Avraham was meant to live 180 years; however, because of what Esav was destined to do and become, five years were taken from Avraham's life. G'd had promised Avraham that he would pass away in a 'good old age'. In order to keep this promise, Avraham could not witness his grandson pursuing an evil path. Therefore, G'd shortened his life by five years. On the day that Avraham passed away, Esav, the evil one, committed five cardinal sins. King David is referring to the sin of Esav, that he had caused the life of his grandfather to be shortened. This is the iniquity that will be remembered by G'd."

Avraham, our Patriarch had introduced G'd as the Supreme and Omnipotent Being to the world and thus gave meaning to existence. Every moment of his life was fully dedicated to espousing monotheism to dispel paganism. If Avraham had lived an additional five years, all of existence would have been impacted in a profound manner. The fact that Esav's evil behavior, had denied Avraham an additional five years, had limited the spiritual advancement of the world until the end of time.

The Midrash continues, "Had Avraham lived to witness Esav's going out to pursue a career of perpetrating evil, he would have been anguished. G'd said, 'I have promised Avraham that he would come to his forefathers in peace and he would be buried in a good old age. However if he were to go out and see his grandchild choosing to follow the path of evil and hear what people would say about his grandchild, Avraham would be anguished. Thus, My promise to him would not be fulfilled.'" Why should hearing what others have to say about Esav's evil behavior of Esav, have a greater devastating effect on Avraham? It was certainly not concerned for his personal honor.

Avraham's objective and mission in life was to espouse G'd's Mastership of the world. Through his teachings and interactions with the masses, Avraham succeeded to a degree to purge the world of paganism. G'd was an known entity in existence. Avraham had achieved renown and acclaim by the nations of the world to be designated as "the father of all nations." Through this glory, his effect as a disseminator of truth became more profound. However, if it were to become known that Avraham, the devoutly righteous prophet of G'd had an evil grandson such as Esav, the impact and effect of Avraham's own standing would have been diminished. His image would have been tainted by Esav. Hagar had perceived Sarah, our Matriarch in a negative light because she did not bear a child to Avraham after all the years she had been married to him. Hagar thought that if in fact Sarah was a holy woman, why did she not conceive? Hagar concluded that it must be that Sarah was not actually as devout and holy as it appeared to be. Similarly, it could be perceived that Avraham, having a grandchild such as Esav, indicated that he was not as holy and pure as initially believed to be.

Understanding that his spiritual accomplishments would be so drastically undermined because of this perception would have anguished Avraham to no end. Therefore, G'd shortened his life by five years so he should not witness this reality.

The Mishna in Ethics of Our Fathers states, "A person who has these three characteristics: a good eye, a humble spirit, and a minimal need for the material (ayin tova, ruach nemucha, and nefesh shefelah) is considered to be a student of Avraham, our Patriarch. A person who has these three characteristics of: an evil eye, an inflated spirit, and an insatiable desire for the material (ayin raah, ruach gevoha, and nefesh rechava) is considered to be a student of Bilaam the evil one." Why does the Mishna discuss the "students" of Avraham and Bilaam regarding these characteristics and not Avraham and Bilaam themselves? If one were to actually see Bilaam, despite the fact that he was a personification of evil, he would have appeared to be a person radiating holiness because he was in fact a prophet. However, if one would focus on his students, then one would understand the true nature of their mentor. The student's development and values are only a reflection of the teacher/mentor. Thus, the characteristics of Avraham's and Bilaam's students, whom they had mentored, are a clear reflection on their teachers. Similarly, Esav's evil behavior would reflect negatively upon Avraham and thus undermine the truth of his essence as the holy prophet of G'd. Consequently, his effect and impact upon all mankind would be minimized. Similarly, Chazal tell us that Yitzchak, our Patriarch became blind so that he should not see the evil of his son Esav. This was so that he would not go out and hear from others about the evil that Esav his son was perpetuating.

The verse in Psalms concludes, "...and may the sin to the mother not be blotted out." To what is this referring? The Midrash tells us that when Rivka, our Matriarch had Esav in her womb, and she would pass places of idolatry, he would bolt to escape the womb. Before Esav was born, he had destroyed the reproductive organs of his mother so that she should not be able to conceive and give birth to a child that may be holy. Thus, this sin will always be remembered by G'd.

#### **4. Learning from History**

The Torah States, "When you go out to the battle against your enemy, and you see horse and chariot- a people more numerous than you- you shall not fear them, for Hashem, your G'd, is with you, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt." Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains on an allusionary level that from the moment one enters into this world, one is engaged in an ongoing battle with his evil inclination. When one sees the "horse" it is the evil inclination who is the equivalent of a man of war who has the capability of out-strategizing and overwhelming him. It is impossible for one not to be ensnared by the machinations of his evil inclination without Divine Assistance.

The Gemara in Tractate Eruvin cites an argument between the House of Shamai and the House of Hillel regarding the question, "Would it have been better if man had not been created or created?" After two and a half years of debate there was a consensus between them that it would have been

better if man would not have been created. As we see the result of man, is that in most situations he does fail and becomes a victim of his own inclinations. Man coming into existence has only perpetuated failure and spiritual regression.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues, " 'a people more numerous than you' is alluding to the overwhelming number of spiritual transgressions that one commits during the course of one's life." Reb Chaim of Volozhin writes in Nefesh HaChaim that whenever one sins, he creates a negative spiritual force that seduces him to continue to do more evil. As one continues on this evil path, the negative force intensifies to a point that it is impossible to control and subordinate. The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states, " aveira goreres aveira- one transgression (even of a minor nature) will lead to other transgressions (of more severe nature)." Regardless of how overwhelming the evil inclination may seem and how insurmountable one's sins may be, the verse states, "You shall not fear them, for Hashem, your G'd, is with you, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that one should not fear the evil inclination to the point of despair because G'd is with him. Despite the fact that the Jewish people had descended to the forty-ninth level of spiritual impurity in Egypt, G'd nevertheless rehabilitated their spirituality to become His people at Sinai. Therefore, if a Jew has a sincere interest to overcome and subdue his evil inclination to advance his spiritually, G'd will assist him to succeed. As the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states, "One who attempts to purify himself will be assisted. However, the one who attempts to contaminate himself, the path is open before him (to do so)." Regarding one's ascent in spirituality, G'd will assist the individual; however, regarding one's diminishment and regression, G'd will not participate. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh cites the Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin that cites a verse from Psalms that tells us that the evil inclination is continuously lurking to destroy the devoutly righteous; however, G'd will not allow this.

The month of Elul, is a time of special Divine Mercy. G'd's Mercy is more easily available to the one who sincerely calls out to him, to assist him in advancing himself spiritually and to defeat the evil inclination. Chazal tell us that in order to merit this special Divine Assistance from G'd, one 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)," one needs only to take the slightest degree of initiative, which is the equivalent of the point of a needle, and then G'd will open for him an opening the size of a large chamber.

## **5. The Lesson to be Learned From the Rebellious Son**

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 individual only assumes the status of the "rebellious" son when he steals from his parents to buy a small measure of meat and a half a pint of undiluted wine to satisfy his desire. When his parents become aware of his errant behavior, they take him to the Bais Din (Court) and he is given lashes. If he should repeat the behavior, and his parents choose to take him again to the court, he is judged as a "rebellious" son and is put to death by stoning.

The Gemara explains that although this child had only stolen a small amount of money to satisfy his desire (If this errant behavior repeats itself), he is put to death because as Chazal explains "It is better that he should die in an innocent state than in a more liable state." If this addictive behavior should continue he will ultimately consume the assets of his father and resort to murder to support his habit.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that the case of the "rebellious son" never actually happened and will never come to being because it is not possible to meet all the criteria that are set forth by the Torah. The Mishna asks, "If the case of the 'rebellious son' is a law that is not relevant because it cannot be implemented, then why does the Torah discuss all the aspects pertaining to the rebellious son that lead to his death?" The Mishna answers "It is for the purpose of study in depth and to receive reward for its study."

Rabbeinu Bachya asks, if the purpose of this portion is purely for the sake of being meritorious for its study, then why is this subject matter chosen regarding the mitzvah of studying Torah? One could have studied any portion of the Torah and have been worthy of reward. Rabbeinu Bachya cites Rashbah (Rabbeinu Shlomo Ben Aderes) who explains that there is a special lesson to be learned from this portion. It is a lesson of to what degree one must demonstrate his love for G'd.

The Torah describes 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 do this despite the fact that they understand he will ultimately be put to death because of their initiative. Although their child's errant behavior could have been dismissed and attributed to immaturity, they chose to heed the directive of the Torah, recognizing the state of his predicament, and bring him to justice. They as parents were able to suppress their natural love for their child because their love for G'd supersedes all. Rashbah explains that the parents initiative regarding the "rebellious" son is the equivalent of Avraham's demonstration of his love for G'd through the Akeidah (The Binding of Yitzchak).

The Binding of Yitzchak (for the sake of being a burnt offering) 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 love for Yitzchak because of his greater love for G'd. Similarly, the lesson to be learned from the "rebellious son" is that every Jew's love for G'd must be primary. This is the meaning of the statement in the Mishna "to delve into it to receive

reward."

There is another lesson to be learned from the case of the "rebellious son." The timeframe for one to be convicted as a "rebellious son" is only from the time when he becomes 13 years old (when he enters into adulthood) until the age of 13 and three months. If the parents do not bring their son before the Court within this timeframe, he can no longer be prosecuted. After the Torah discusses the case of the "rebellious son" it states, "If a man shall have committed a sin whose judgment is death, he shall be put to death...and you shall not leave his body overnight on the gallows..." The Torah juxtaposes the portion of the person who is put to death to the portion of "rebellious son" to teach us that even if the person was not put to death as the "rebellious son" his evil ways would intensify thus causing him to be liable for the death penalty - such as one who commits murder. This intensification of evil is rooted in the concept of "aveira gororis aveira - a sin encourages another sin." When one commits a sin (even a minor infraction), it causes a negative influence to come upon the individual which encourages him to commit further sins. Therefore, as Chazal tell us, one should be as careful to adhere to even the seemingly less severe mitzvos as to the more severe.

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