

# PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Ki Seitzei

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Today's Learning:

Tanach: Ezra 9-10

Pe'ah 5:7-8

O.C. 529:1-3

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Avodah Zarah 7

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Terumot 6

The Midrash Rabbah cites the verse in our parashah, "If a bird's nest happens to be before you," and asks: What is the halachah regarding a boy who is born circumcised? Must he be circumcised? The midrash answers: Our Sages taught, "If a boy is born circumcised, blood must be let from the place of circumcision because of the covenant with Avraham Avinu." The midrash continues: Why is a baby circumcised on the eighth day? Because Hashem has compassion on him and waited until the baby has gained some strength. And, just as Hashem has compassion on mankind, so He has compassion on animals, as it is written (Vayikra 22:27), "When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall remain under its mother for seven days." Further, it is written (Vayikra 22:28), "An ox or a sheep, you may not slaughter it and its offspring on the same day." And, just as Hashem has compassion on animals, so He has compassion on birds, as we read here, "Send away the mother and take the young for yourself."

Why is a halachah regarding brit milah mentioned here? R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Yadler z"l (1843-1917;

Yerushalayim) explains: Since the midrash is going to expound at length on the mitzvah of sending away the mother bird before taking her offspring, the midrash wanted to open by mentioning Hashem's compassion on humans, i.e., that He instructs us to wait until the baby gains some strength before circumcising him.

Why is the midrash uncertain whether a boy who was born circumcised requires further circumcision? R' Yadler explains that the inquiry is whether the purpose of brit milah is simply to remove the impurity of the orlah / foreskin--which this child does not have--or to perform an affirmative act to enter the covenant. The midrash answers that the latter is correct. (Tiferet Zion)

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"If a man takes a wife . . ." (22:13, 24:1 and 24:5)

Our Sages frequently use a "wife" as a metaphor for the Torah. R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver z"l (1789-1852; rabbi of Suvalk, Lithuania, and a prolific author in all areas of Torah study) explains that just as one creates physical progeny together with his wife, so one creates spiritual progeny - Torah novellae and good deeds - through his Torah study. Moreover, just as one's wife is an "ezer k'negdo" - i.e., she is supportive when her husband is meritorious and is an obstacle when her husband is not meritorious - so the Torah is an "elixir of life" to those who study it with pure motivations, but a poison to those who misuse it.

Shlomo Ha'melech wrote (Mishlei 5:18), "Rejoice with the wife of your youth." R' Chaver comments: The real wife of one's youth is the Torah, for it was his companion in the womb. The Gemara (Sotah 2a) teaches that forty days before a child is conceived, a heavenly proclamation announces, "The daughter of so-and-so is destined for so-and-so." This also is a metaphor for Torah. Just as the Torah was given to Moshe Rabbeinu over a period of forty days, so preparations are made for forty days to give each person his true portion - the Torah that he will learn over his entire lifetime. (Quoted in Otzrot Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Chaver p.9)

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"You shall not see the donkey of your brother or his ox falling on the road and hide yourself from them; you shall surely stand them up, with him." (22:4)

Rashi z"l explains the last two words of the verse to mean that you are not obligated to assist the falling animal if its owner sits idly by. You are only obligated to help "with him." R' Yehoshua Horowitz z"l (the Dzikover Rebbe; died 1912) explains this verse and Rashi's comment allegorically as follows:

The future redemption will be brought about as a result of our teshuvah / repentance. It will come about through what kabbalists refer to as "Itaruta de'le'tata" / "awakening from below." On the other hand, our Sages teach that if Hashem did not help us to overcome our yetzer hara, we could never do it on our own.

Our Sages say there will be two meshichim (messiahs) to herald the redemption--one from the tribe of Yosef, the other from the family of King David. The ox in our verse alludes to Mashiach ben Yosef (see Devarim 33:17); the donkey to Mashiach ben David (see Zechariah 9:9). "You shall surely stand them up," our verse says. Do your part to support the arrival of Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben David.

However, your actions must be "with Him." Hashem must help us overcome the yetzer hara, thus doing His part to bring mashiach. (Ateret Yeshuah)

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"Beware of a tzara'at affliction . . ." (24:8)

R' Yisrael Isser of Ponovezh z"l (Lithuania; mid-19th century) writes: One of the forms of tzara'at is manifested by skin that appears healthy on the surface, though underneath the area is full of pus. The Torah (Vayikra 13:11) says of a person who has such a blemish, "The kohen shall declare him contaminated." This teaches that a person who acts as if his motivations are pure, though in reality they are not, is tamei. For example, when one is offended and he reacts negatively, he may say, "I am not angry for my honor, but rather for the honor of the Torah that I have studied. Of course, I am not so vain as to think that I am a Torah scholar, but compared to the person who offended me . . ."

How can a person who lashes out "for the Torah's honor" measure whether his motivations are pure? Let him examine how he reacts when he sees a Torah scholar other than himself being offended. Also, how does he react when he sees a volume of a Torah work being treated disrespectfully? Finally, does this person who considers himself a minor Torah scholar defame the honor of the Torah by acting inappropriately himself? (Menuchah U'kedushah p.83)

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"[W]hen you were faint and exhausted, and did not fear G-d." (25:18)

R' Yitzchak Eliyahu Landau z"l (Vilna; 19th century) writes: One who truly has yirah / fear and awe of G-d is happy to perform mitzvot. The more the effort that is required and the greater the expense, the greater pleasure he feels from the mitzvah. Such a person does not feel faint or exhausted from doing G-d's Will.

On the other hand, if a person does feel faint or exhausted from performing mitzvot, this is a sure sign that his yirah is incomplete. Thus, when Bnei Yisrael started complaining about their circumstances in the desert and asking (Shmot 17:7), "Is Hashem among us or not?" - it was a sign that their yirah was lacking. [Ed. The quoted verse from Shmot and our verse are parallel accounts of the same event - the attack by Amalek.]

R' Landau continues: In this light we can understand the verses in Yishayah (58:3-4), "Why did we fast

and You did not see? Why did we afflict our souls and You did not know? Behold! On your fast day you seek out personal gain . . ." The Jewish People ask Hashem: "'Why did we fast and You did not see? Why did we afflict our souls and You did not know?' We fasted on Yom Kippur. Why did You not answer our prayers?"

Hashem answers: "Your own words prove that you did not fast for the sake of Heaven, for you say, 'Why did we afflict our souls?' Clearly, 'On your fast day you seek out personal gain,' rather than to serve Me, for if your motives were proper, you would not feel afflicted." (Chumash Patsheggen Ha'dat: Kiflayim Le'Tushiah)

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Come Early, Stay Late!

"Seekers of Hashem, seed of Avraham His beloved, who delay departing from Shabbat and rush to enter." (From the Friday night zemer, Kol Mekadeish)

The phrase, "offspring of Avraham His beloved," is an allusion to the verse in Yeshayahu (41:8), "But you, Yisrael, My servant, Yaakov, whom I have chosen, offspring of Avraham who loved Me." Rashi z"l explains that Avraham did not seek Hashem as a way to escape suffering, nor because his parents taught him about G-d. Rather, Avraham sought G-d because he loved Him.

R' Nachum Eisenstein shlita (Lakewood, N.J.) quotes R' Yaakov Emden z"l (died 1776), who writes that our zemer is teaching us how we can earn the title "Seekers of Hashem, seed of Avraham His beloved." One who strictly observes the laws of Shabbat, lighting candles at exactly the right moment and reciting havdalah at exactly the right moment has fulfilled his legal obligation, but he is not a "Seeker of Hashem." One who loves Hashem as Avraham did will delay departing from Shabbat and will rush to bring Shabbat in early.

Why does the author of the zemer mention the end of Shabbat before the beginning? R' Eisenstein suggests that bringing Shabbat in early is less of an indication that one loves Hashem than is ending Shabbat later. This is because a person might bring in Shabbat early for his own convenience, as many people do in the summer. (Rinat Yaakov Al Zemirot Shabbat p.80)

Our Sages teach that the mitzvah of Shabbat was originally taught to Bnei Yisrael before the Torah was given, at a place called "Marah" (literally, "bitter"). R' Aharon Perlow of Karlin z"l (1802-1872) writes in the name of his father, R' Asher of Stolin z"l that when one first experiences Shabbat with all of its restrictions, it may very well be "bitter." With time and experience, however, one comes to know the sweetness of Shabbat, and then he will hurry to bring it in and delay in leaving it. (Quoted in Zemirot Shirin Ve'rachshin p.151)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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