

***Yad Avraham Institute***  
**Weekly Torah Commentaries Series**  
**Portion of Ki Seitzei**

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**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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## **Ki Seitzei**

*Presented by*

**Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

**Dean**

### **1. G'd the Provider**

In the portion of Ki Seitzei the Torah delineates a number of commandments that are presented in succession. The Midrash explains that the reason the Torah presents these mitzvos in succession is to teach us the principle of “the performance of one mitzvah draws one to perform another mitzvah (*mitzvah goreres mitzvah*).”

When one performs a mitzvah it creates a dynamic that draws the individual to perform another mitzvah, which G'd will present to him. The Midrash tells us that in addition to the spiritual dynamic caused by “*mitzvah goreres mitzvah*,” it is also the mechanism through which G'd provides the individual with the material means to perform the next mitzvah. Many mitzvos that a Jew performs requires a physical context in order to actualize it. The Torah states, **“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 not sow your field with a mixture...You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey...”**

The Midrash explains that if one performs the mitzvah of sending away the mother bird to take its young (or its eggs) one will merit prolonged days. The juxtaposition of the next mitzvah teaches us that the previous mitzvah will draw and encourage another mitzvah to come about, namely, the building of a parapet on one’s roof (which is a positive commandment). How is one to fulfill this mitzvah if one does not have the means to build a new house? G'd will provide him with the means to build a house so that he may fulfill the mitzvah of building a parapet. We see that the performance of a mitzvah not only presents the opportunity for one to perform another mitzvah but G'd also provides the material means to perform that mitzvah. There is a negative commandment of not planting two species of plants next to one another such as planting a wheat field next to a vineyard. If one does not own a vineyard or a wheat field, how can one perform the mitzvah of refraining from its planting? G'd will provide him with the context, the field and the vineyard, to allow him to fulfill the

mitzvah. There is another negative commandment that one is not permitted to plow a field by working two species of animals together such as a donkey and an ox. If one does not have a donkey or an ox, G'd will provide him with the ox and donkey to fulfill the mitzvah. We see from the juxtaposition of the various mitzvos the principle of “The performance of one mitzvah draws one to the performance of another.” At each juncture of this process, G'd will provide the material need to facilitate the fulfillment of that particular mitzvah.

The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states, “One transgression (even of a minor nature) will lead to another transgression (that is more severe) *aveira goreres aveira*.” When one sins, it gives rise to a negative force that encourages the individual to sin again. The Torah states in the Portion of Shoftim, **“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, 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.’**” Otherwise, this would be considered superfluous.

Chazal are extrapolating from the verse that there is something innately negative when one harbors hatred in one’s heart against his fellow. It is because of this intense negative spiritual energy that the individual will be drawn to commit murder based on the principle of “*aveira goreres aveira (one sin brings to another)*.” This tragic consequence is not because of any natural progression that the one who hates will ultimately kill, but rather it is something based on the innate negative energy that is created when one hates his fellow.

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*).” Vilna Gaon

z'tl asks that one would think that computation and the audit of one's record should precede judgment because it is only after one's record is scrutinized evaluated could judgment be rendered. Nevertheless, Chazal state first there is "judgment" and then "computation."

Vilna Gaon z'tl explains that it is understood that judgment is predicated on a prior computation and evaluation of one's 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 accomplished at the particular moment that the sin was committed.

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. Based on the principle "The study of Torah is the equivalent of all of the mitzvos combined (*talmid Torah keneged kulom*)," by studying for that short period of time, that individual's spiritual accomplishment is the equivalent of fulfilling the entire Torah multiple times. However, if one engages in *lashon ha'rah* (negative 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 said something that he was not permitted to say. Thus, the magnitude of the transgression of speaking *lashon ha'rah* is spiritually catastrophic.

When one reflects upon the concept of *aveira goreres aveira* he perceives it within the context of overt transgression and not within the context of passivity such as not choosing to perform a mitzvah that is incumbent upon him such as the study of Torah. Although when one engages in mitzvos, G'd provides the physical means and spiritual motivation to perform other mitzvos; nevertheless, if one does not study Torah because he was engaged in doing something that was not permitted, simultaneously because of his state of passivity regarding positive commandments, there is also a negative dynamic that is at work at the same time. This will undermine and interfere with the dynamic that would allow him to advance spiritually.

## 2. The Value of the Unfathomable

The Torah states, **"If a bird's nests happens to be before you on the road...you shall surely send away the mother bird and take the young (eggs) for yourself, so that it shall be good for you and will prolong your days."** The Midrash cites a verse from Proverbs, "Your heart must be cognizant of everything that is a protector because from it all life emanates." Reb Ada says, "There are 248 positive commandments that correspond to the limbs of a human being. Every day the mitzvos cry out to man saying, 'Please perform us so that you shall live through our merit and so that you should have prolonged days. There are 365 negative commandments which correspond to the days of the solar year. Every day the sun screams out from the time it rises until the time it sets, 'I decree upon you that he who has lived to this day should not transgress. You should not sway the balance for yourself and the world to the negative.'"

The Midrash continues, "The Torah discusses the mitzvos of sending away the mother and honoring one's father and mother. What is the reward for these mitzvos? One will have prolonged days. These are the only two mitzvos that the Torah reveals their reward. The reward for the other mitzvos remains concealed. This is similar to a king who sends workers to plant his field and he did not reveal to them the fee they would receive for their work. When the evening came, each worker who planted a tree received the same reward. Regardless of what type of tree was planted, each of them received the same golden coin. However, we who have planted many trees, how much more golden coins should we receive? What is the reward for performing the mitzvah of sending away the mother bird? It is prolonged days. If for a mitzvah that has no monetary cost or physical strain, one receives such a precious reward, how much more so is one deserving of reward for performing mitzvos that require one to incur costs and effort? The reason G'd did not reveal the reward for performing the mitzvos of the Torah is so that the Jewish people should do them not for the sake of reward but for the sake of the Master. As we learned, 'One should serve the Master not for the sake of receiving reward.'" If the Torah had revealed the reward for the mitzvos, one would be motivated to perform them for the sake of the reward and not for the sake of G'd. If one were to perform the mitzvos for self-interest it would cause them to be deficient.

The true value of a mitzvah is based on the level of selfless dedication that is infused into its performance. Thus, by concealing the reward for mitzvos, the Torah is allowing the Jewish people the opportunity to be

beneficiaries of the greatest degree of reward, which is performing the mitzvah for the sake of one's Maker. Through the mitzvah of sending away the mother bird, G'd only allows one to have an inkling of the value of a mitzvah. However, the thrust and perspective of the Jew must be to perform the mitzvos for the sake of the Master.

### **3. The Jewish People's Responsibility for Existence**

The Torah states, **“Remember what Amalek did to you, on the way when you were leaving Egypt...”** It is a positive commandment to remember what Amalek had done to the Jewish people after the Exodus and to recite the verses of the Torah that recall this event. Malbim, in his commentary, writes that all the detailed information that is stated regarding the mitzvah of remembering Amalek is to give an understanding and appreciation for the evil of the Amalekites. He explains that there are a number of reasons a nation goes to war. It is either for the acquisition of territory, or for defensive reasons when one nation is threatened by another. It can also be for the sake of religion (holy war). The Torah tells us that all of the reasons one nation goes to war have no relevance to the Amalekites. As the Torah states, **“They were attacked on the way...”** Meaning, the Jewish people at that moment had no land of their own, and thus they were not attacked for territorial reasons. The Torah continues, **“They were fatigued and weary...”** clearly indicating, that the attack was not for defensive reasons because the Jewish people were not a threat. The verse continues, **“And they (Amalek) did not fear G'd.”** The Amalekites were an atheistic people. Their motive for attack was not for religious reasons. Nevertheless, they attacked the Jewish people only because they were G'd's people, His representation in the world. Their attack was an expression of their defiance and intolerance of G'd's existence. Thus, when they attacked the Jewish people it was an affront to G'd. Therefore, there is a positive commandment to remember what Amalek had done to the Jewish people in order to understand why they must be obliterated from the face of the earth.

The Midrash tells us that the attack of the Amalekites against the Jewish people after the splitting of the Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian armies is analogous to a fool jumping into a scalding bath that others are afraid to approach because of the intensity of its heat. Although the fool who entered into the bath is burnt; he nevertheless cools down the water for others to enter. They are no longer afraid to approach the bath.

After the nations of the world witnessed the awesome miracles of the splitting of the Sea and the destruction of Egypt by G'd on behalf of the Jewish people, stood in fear and awe of the Jewish people because an aura had been created. They would not consider approaching them with a sinister intent. However, after the Amalekites had attacked them, the special aura was removed. The Jewish people were no longer seen as extraordinary. G'd therefore said, “My Throne is not complete until the Amalekite people are obliterated from under the heavens.”

The attack of the Amalekites against the Jewish people took place in Rephidim as the Torah states, **“Amalek came and battled Israel in Rephidim.”** The Midrash explains that the reason the Torah identifies the location (*Rephidim*) of the battle against Amalek is the it is giving an understanding why they were vulnerable to attack at that moment. It is because their degree of Torah study was deficient and thus they forfeited their protection from G'd. The only way the Jew can merit protection from Amalek is by engaging in Torah study. Why is Torah study the only protection for the Jew against Amalek?

The Torah states regarding the blessing that Yitzchak our Patriarch had given his son Yaakov, **“The voice is the voice of Yaakov, the hands are the hands of Esav...”** The Midrash in Echah states that what Yitzchak had actually said to Yaakov was, “As long as the voice is the voice of Yaakov – as long as the Jewish people utilize their voice as Yaakov had done for Torah study and prayer, they will be protected.” Yaakov is known as the Patriarch who represents Torah study as it states, **“He was the perfect man who dwelt in the tent (of Torah).”** If this is so, then “the hands will not be the hands of Esav.” However, if the Jewish people do not properly utilize their voice for Torah study and prayer, then the hands will be the hands of Esav. Meaning the Jewish people will fall prey to the cruelty of Esav. Since the Amalekites are the descendants of Esav, when the Jewish people were not sufficiently engaged in Torah study, they were vulnerable to their attack.

The Prophet Yermiah states, “If not for My covenant, which is in effect day and night, the statutes of heaven and earth would not be put in place.” The Gemara in Tractate Nidarim explains that “the Covenant” is referring to the study of Torah, which must be in effect continuously in order to maintain existence. Thus, the Jewish people are responsible to maintain existence through their study of Torah. If they should fail in their

responsibility, they are putting existence into jeopardy. Thus their culpability is that they will be vulnerable to the attack and hatred of Amalek.

#### ***4. Demonstrating One's Love for 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 individual assumes the status of the “rebellious” son only 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 Court and he is given lashes. If he should repeat this behavior, and his parents again 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 purchase an amount of meat and wine that is inconsequential to satisfy his desire, he is put to death because as Chazal explain “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 Mishna in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that the incident of the “rebellious son” never actually happened and will never come to be 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 does the Torah discuss all the aspects pertaining to the rebellious son that ultimately lead to his death?” 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 an opportunity for the individual to study Torah, 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 for its study. 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 for one to learn to what degree one must demonstrate his love for G'd.

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 do this despite the fact that they understand the consequence of their initiative- that ultimately he will be put to death if he repeats the behavior. Although their child's errant behavior could have been dismissed and attributed to immaturity or a phase of his life, they chose to heed the directive of the Torah, appreciating the gravity of their son's state, and thus bring him to justice. They as parents were able to suppress their natural love for their child because of their love for G'd, which 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). Just as Avraham was willing to sacrifice for the sake of G'd so too should every Jew be willing to sacrifice.

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. If 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 its reward.”

Very often in life, one may be confronted with situations in which he must make a decision; however, because of his own conflicts of interest it is difficult to choose the proper path. One may need to choose to forfeit material gain or comfort because of what is dictated by the Torah. The Torah states (in the Shema), **“You shall love Hashem, your G'd with all your heart, with all your soul...”** Chazal explain that “all your soul” means that one must be willing to sacrifice his life for G'd. However, Sforno explains that when the Torah states, “with all your soul” it does not necessarily mean that one can fulfill this

mitzvah only when one sacrifices his life for G'd, but rather one need only sacrifice his desire. When one has a desire for something and at that moment chooses to suppress it for the sake of G'd it is considered a significant sacrifice, because his love for G'd surpassed his love for himself.

If one were to observe an evil person succeeding in all aspects of his life, one could consider becoming his partner to be a beneficiary of his financial gain. However, the verse states regarding positive predicament of the evil person in this world, "G'd compensates His enemies in order to destroy them." The good fortune that the evil one receives is actually the basis of his destruction. The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states, "Distance yourself from a bad neighbor; do not attach yourself to an evil person; and do not despair from tragedy." Chazal explain if one attaches himself to the evil even for the sake of personal gain, because ultimately the individual evil one will be destroyed, all those associated with him will suffer a similar fate. Although the material opportunity is at hand, the Torah tells the Jew that he must not be associated with the evil person, he must thus suppress his desire for material success to do the will of G'd. One may have many rationales to justify not adhering to the dictates of the Torah, because of his conflicts of interest, the lesson that one must learn from the parents of the rebellions son, is despite one's desire one must sacrifice for the sake of the truth that is being communicated through the Torah.

## ***5. 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 tovah, 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.