

Parshas Ki Seitzei

This week's Parsha- Ki Seitzei – where Moshe recounts for the Jews that in the event of a voluntary war, you will have captives and what to do if you fall for a woman on the excursion. The Torah elucidates another example of an empathic and moralistic approach to power dynamics. If you go on a voluntary war, as Rashi explains, you will see a woman and fall for her; you must leave her be to become repulsive to you and then decide whether you still want to marry her. And if you decide against it, you must set her free unencumbered (i.e., you made her suffer enough, don't sell her).

The Torah recognizes a truth of human nature, but with its guidance, the Torah ensures that we have the tools to make morally aligned decisions. (That is, don't cause additional suffering to another person).

Then, the next part of the introduction to the Parsha is if a person has two wives, one he loves, the other he hates, and the bechor (eldest with certain financial and inheritance rights) is eligible for those rights even if he hates the mother. In some ways, the Torah tells us that the child should not suffer based on their parents.

According to Rashi, the sections are further juxtaposed with the wayward son to tell us that a woman he marries from abroad (whom he may come to hate, i.e., the second wife) may bear a wayward child. Rashi explains that these are connected in that the outcome of the 'sinful' war relationship is a wayward child. The subtext of this explanation is that if the parents

create a tumultuous home, the result may be a disobedient child (this is NOT a cause-and-effect type of statement; instead, it is a possible explanation for the child's waywardness). Interestingly, the child's waywardness is so far gone that the community is willing to kill him. At the same time, he is righteous (on the basis that his addiction will cause him to reach a point of committing a sin that will result in an inevitable, possibly worse punishment).

It should be noted that according to the Gemara, there was never a wayward son killed by the Beis Din. The whole episode is about the Torah, showing us human nature. Rashi explains that the son's addiction to meat and wine will need to be fueled, and he will drain the parents of their resources and turn to stealing at a crossroads; as such, his behaviour should be ended in his youth before that happens. Because it never happened, we can say that the type of behaviour should be eradicated through (possibly extreme measures). But one may ask, why would the Torah allow for someone to be killed if we believe in the power of Teshuva? Now that we know (Sanhedrin 71a) that no wayward son was ever killed, we see that the power of Teshuva does exist, mainly because no matter how bad a person gets, there is a chance of return (recognizing it will take a lot of recovery and healing).

Furthermore, based on Rashi's explanation of the connection of the three topics, taking a captive woman as a wife was considered sinful. As an adult acting this way, the Torah shows the inevitability of bad behaviour as more likely to happen if it's not eradicated early. Regardless of how a parent tries to bring their child back on the path, one cannot convince themselves that they will

be alright; it takes discipline to stay on the course.

The connection to Rosh Hashana is that we can review our lives and paths as outcomes of our earlier decisions. As such, we know that the outcome is that we can repent and return. As the Gemara explains in Pesachim, two people can eat from the Korban Pesach; one person eats it with the right intention, and the other the opposite. The Torah also highlights that drinking wine and eating meat excessively can result in a holy experience or the opposite (the outcome can also be decided early in a child's life). Let us try and stay on the righteous path for all our outcomes to be positive and in the service of Hashem.

Good Shabbos!