

Parshas Ki Seitzei

This week's Parsha is Ki Seitzei, which begins with additional laws for running a country, including going out to voluntary war, captives, and people who commit a sin punishable by death (by hanging and cleaning up the body).

This Mitzvah is interesting because the Torah wants the body not to be desecrated, even though the punishment was due to desecrating Hashem (as explained in Rashi on 21:22). This is important because it shows that Hashem gives dignity even to people punished by death for desecrating Hashem, which could illicit a reaction in people to desecrate the body out of protecting Hashem, the same way someone may take extreme measures to do extra harm to someone who did something to them personally. Now, the word used is "Killala¹," which Rashi explains in 23: why they remove the body. There is a reference there to the phrase with Shimmy Ben Geira, which is quoted from the Haftorah and is also for Parshas Vayechi (Malachim 1 Perek 2). This Haftorah is read for Vayechi, as it relates to the passing of David Hamelech, who, like Yakov of Vayechi, passed away and gave his sons the torch to continue the nation. David Hamelech was telling his son Shlomo how to be and how to act,

that, as Steinzaltz translates, "You must be brave and act with maturity and wisdom. The instruction to be a man may also refer to the capacity of self-restraint." In addition to giving us perspective on the translation, Rashi connects this to Vayechi (Bereishis) and the way to act. In this case here about not desecrating a dead body, which would seem justifiable. But there is a Torah way to act, as this Parsha relays, with Moshe's message to the Jews ahead of going into Israel, similarly drawing from David's words to Shlomo, which connect to Vayechi, when Yakov was imparting his final wisdom to his sons, and the imparting of strength on how to be a Jew, even when the environment is tough.

The next Perek after this law discusses compassion for your neighbour, especially when you see his donkey under an extreme load. The next laws address upholding certain purity laws through the clothes we wear and treating animals with dignity, which results in a long life. Rashi explains that we are blessed with long life. According to Rashi and some Mepharshim, the reason is that just as the reward for a simple Mitzvah is long life, so too for harder ones, all the more so (the investment made is the investment you get back). But there is another angle: if you take care of life, you will gain long life. For example, taking care of your parents

¹ This is the word for desecrate, insult and curse, meaning respect for Hashem is not given. This also applies to earlier perspective in Parshas

Re'eh, that the "curse" is the desecration, and being in the world that is insulting and cursed, i.e. a dark place.

(the other Mitzvah that gives you long life). It may seem obvious that you would give honour to your parents, but that isn't necessarily true; not all parents may be deserving of honour, and yet, if you do so, you will get long life. Similarly, when getting eggs from a bird, there may not seem to be any measure of what you are doing when being mindful of the mother bird. Yet, Hashem tells you to be mindful even of an animal, and in this way you will also gain long life. The next Mitzvos relate to how you must also protect your neighbours who visit your house, by having a roof with a fence, etc. Many of the next Mitzvos are about upholding purity and sanctity and for the protection of being different from the nations of the world. One perspective on enforcing the law and/or relating to one another is how the law dictates, but there is also a social perspective on how people relate to one another. The Torah, and Moshe Rabbeinu in multiple places in this parsha, refer to a subtext that there is a Torah way to live and a Torah way to relate to your neighbours.

This Parsha builds off some of the laws of Shoftim, such as the reference to a person who built a new house (and is exempt from fighting) going out to war, and betrothing a woman, which also has specific laws in those categories.

The Parsha concludes with 24:15, which addresses paying a worker's wages on time. Earlier in the Parsha, the worker's responsibilities to his boss are

outlined, and here the Torah outlines the boss's responsibility to his workers. That is, they must be paid on time; otherwise, it is like death, as the worker was relying on the payment to eat (unless there is a prearranged pay cycle, which is why Rashi explains it as a contract worker who does a one-off job for you). This law connects to the earlier entrapment and enslavement of a person; that is, if you withhold or deceive a person about payment, you are liable, and breaking a Jewish law (as the Gemara in Bava Metzia 112a) is likened to killing the person, as they needed the wages to survive. This law applies to people (not necessarily Jewish) among you, again highlighting the Torah's compassion for people. Many more laws address interpersonal relationships between Jews and others. The underlying theme is that there is a Torah way about everything: how to live.

The parsha concludes with a reminder to forget Amalek, who are the antithesis of the Jewish people; they represent everything we have the power not to be by following the edicts of the Torah. That is, by looking at Rashi and the repetition of Moshe of the laws, we are given perspective on how to live in every facet of our life; in this way, maybe it is merit not to fear our enemies, and Mashiach will be revealed now.

Good Shabbos!