

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd for having listened to these laws, and keeping and doing them, Hashem your G-d will keep - with *you* - the covenant and the kindness that He had sworn to your forefathers” (Devarim 7:12). Although you can't tell from the English translation, there is a grammatical inconsistency in this verse. The words "listened," "keeping" and "doing" are all in the plural form (i.e. the collective "you") while the rest of the verse ("your G-d," "with you" and "your forefathers") uses the singular "you." This is not a rare occurrence in Sefer Devarim, and it behooves us to try to understand in each instance why a switch is made.

This verse presents theological issues as well (see Toldos Yitzchok and Chizkuni, and the Rashbam on 7:9). If G-d had already promised our forefathers (Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, and - by extension - Sara, Rivka, Rachel and Leah) that he would bless us, why is it dependant on our keeping the mitzvos too? And if we do keep the mitzvos, and are therefore worthy of these blessings, why is His promise to our forefathers relevant?

The truth is, though, that no matter how praiseworthy it is for us to do G-d's will, it cannot be compared to the accomplishments of the Avos (forefathers). Aside from the level of righteousness that they attained, and how attached to G-d they were, they were the trailblazers. Avraham reintroduced monotheism to the world. There wasn't a community to latch onto that shared his beliefs; he had to create such a community. Yitzchok maintained what Avraham started, despite not having the sense of accomplishment that accompanies being an innovator. Yaakov had to maintain these ideas in hostile environments (living with Lavan, dealing with Eisav and then moving to Egypt), while building a family of 12 sons to fulfill the mission started by his father and grandfather. Whereas they were able to focus on transmitting the mission to one son (or, at the most,

attempt to transmit it to two), Yaakov knew he had to bring up all of his children to continue it.

This is not to downplay the difficulties we face going against the tide, keeping kosher even when co-workers go out to eat (or order in), making sure to be home in time for Shabbos, and not partaking in so many other "normal" activities. But we have a community to come home to, draw strength from, and feel a part of. We don't have to invent the wheel, just hop on and do our share of the peddling. It is our job to fulfill the mission whose foundation was built by the Avos.

The promises were only made to the Avos, because of their accomplishments. However, they are not blanket promises, and will only be fulfilled to those that continue their mission - that follow in their ways. Just as the generation that came out of Egypt never made it to Israel, there was no guarantee that the second generation would either. G-d's promise to the Avos could have been fulfilled with the third generation, or subsequent generations, even if it took 1,000 generations until there was an appropriate group to keep the promise with. It was not a guarantee that the blessings would fall on every descendant of the Avos; only that it would apply to anyone that continued their unique mission of monotheism. The blessings came about only because of the Avos, and apply only to those that follow in their footsteps. Therefore, the Torah says that because of your keeping the mitzvos, you qualify to take part in the bounty that stems from the blessings promised to your forefathers.

Some of the blessings are only relevant to the nation as a whole (such as inheriting the land), while others can apply to select individuals. Even if the nation is not deserving of the blessings, those that create a connection with the Avos through their actions include themselves in their blessing as well. And the amount of blessing that each one receives varies, depending on the strength of the connection. This may be why the part of the verse that discusses keeping the mitzvos uses the plural form, as we are all required to keep them, but the applicability of the blessings, which differs from person to person - and can be attained by individuals even if the nation is not worthy - is mentioned in the singular.

May each of us be worthy of inclusion in all of G-d's blessings, and - together - of the collective blessings, culminating in the rebuilding of our Holy Temple in Jerusalem. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

Mazel Tov to Izzy & Miriam Salomon of Teaneck, NJ
and Ed and Brenda Parver of Great Neck, NY
on the occasion of the marriage of their children
Aliza Salomon and Andrew Parver
A special Mazel Tov to the grandmothers Mrs Lea
Salomon and Mrs Sylvia Parver

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As a child I attended Yeshiva Torah Vodaath. Every day when coming to morning services I was mesmerized by an older man named Rabbi Chaim Gelb. I can still remember Reb Chaim calling out "Amen." Sometimes he'd give me a candy and ask me to recite a blessing so that he could mightily respond "Amen."

At Yeshiva University rabbinical school years later, I was deeply influenced by the saintly Rav Dovid Lifschitz. I can still remember Rav Dovid on Simchat Torah surrounded by his students leading us in the niggun "ve-taher libeynu"- words in which we call out to G-d to purify our hearts. It seemed to me whenever Rav Dovid would pray it would be in the spirit of that niggun.

This week's portion offers a halakhic base that enhances the meaning of both of these stories. The torah states "u'leavdoh bekhil levavkhem." "And you shall serve G-d with all your heart." (Deuteronomy 10:13) Maimonides concludes that this is the source of prayer. U'leavdoh means that every day we are obligated in prayer.

It would seem that Rambam believes that prayer is a religious obligation. I may not feel like praying-still there is a religious imperative to serve G-d daily.

This was my sense of Reb Chaim Gelb's prayer. Standing before G-d he would call out "Amen." One could sense the great joy he felt in fulfilling the mitzvah of prayer.

There may be another way to understand Maimonides. Without G-d many people feel a deep sense of loneliness. For these individuals, life has no meaning if G-d is absent. Like a lover who constantly longs for his beloved, so does one feel constant despair without G-d. From this perspective, one prays daily as one is in constant search of the Lord without whom life is impersonal, void and empty.

This latter approach to Rambam fundamentally differs with the first. In the first, the desire to pray does not emanate from the petitioner but from G-d. We, therefore, have an obligation, whether we feel it or not, to serve G-d daily. In the second approach the need to

pray comes from the petitioner as an expression of constant angst if G-d is not present.

This was the feeling behind the fervent prayer of Rav Dovid Lifschitz. In his heartfelt "ve-taher" I sensed a tzaddik who felt ongoing emotional spiritual pain if he was not in rendezvous with G-d. Like a fish seeking water, Rav Dovid sought the ongoing presence of G-d.

My father-in-law, Zalman Aryeh Hilsenrad, was a deeply devout Jew. He named his first book (a compilation of articles he wrote for the Jewish Press) "Tzam'ah Nafshi, My Soul Thirsts." Years later he penned a second volume. He called it "My Soul Thirsts Still," nothing less than our second approach to Rambam.

The challenge is to realize that during prayer both approaches are necessary. Solely praying to G-d without listening to our souls minimizes our individual worth. At the same time, expressing only our individual needs to G-d is selfish. May we be blessed to find the balance of listening to G-d and listening to ourselves.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The word ekev, which is the name of this week's parsha, and is translated as "since" or "because," is associated with another Hebrew word, akeiv, meaning "heel." Rashi already comments that this association indicates the Torah's warning against treating any of the mitzvot lightly, stepping upon them with one's heel in disdain, so to speak. The word akeiv in the sense of "heel" appears in the Torah regarding the birth of Eisav and Yaakov. There the Torah records that when the twins were born, Yaakov grasped the heel of Eisav as they emerged into the world. The symbolism there once again conforms to the idea that Rashi conveys to us in the parsha of this week. Eisav steps on things with his heel. He destroys people and civilizations, holiness and lofty spirituality, by denigrating them, treating them as being insignificant and inconsequential, grinding them into nothingness with his heel. Yaakov's task in life is to hold onto Eisav's heel, preventing him by his efforts from accomplishing that destructive goal. Apparently, he who controls the "heel" controls the fate and destiny of humankind. This is also the implicit message of this week's parsha - that listening to G-d's word and not treating it with scorn or indifference is the key to maintaining a more human and peaceful society. Stepping on any of the values of Torah, no matter what the seeming ideological justifications for such behavior at that time, leads to untold societal and personal harm. Be careful what one steps upon. It eventually rises up to bite back in return.

The parsha deals with the basic idea of Judaism, that of cause and effect. There are no acts of life that remain truly insignificant. Small things

sometimes later assume almost cosmic importance. For the want of a nail, a kingdom can be lost. The rabbis of Avot warned that one should not measure the value or significance of mitzvot. The "light" mitzva may be of vast importance not only because of the unknown systems of G-d's rewards, but also because the "light" mitzvah may also have heavy consequences of cause and effect. This is in line with the further idea expressed in Avot that one mitzva leads to the accomplishment of another mitzva thereafter. The consequences of a mitzva are inevitably good while the consequences of trampling upon a mitzva - again, no matter what the ideological justification may be - inevitably are detrimental to the individual and to society. The entire chumash of Dvarim pleads for Jews to see the big picture, the vision of a just and caring society. In order for such a vision to take on the flesh of reality, the small things in society must be accounted for favorably. We all like to talk about the big things in our world - peace, security, democracy, etc. - but as long as we continue to step with our heels on the small things - courtesy and compassion to others, respect for our traditions and Torah, and a sense of satisfaction with our lives - little progress towards the accomplishment of the great goals will take place. So, let us all step carefully in life.

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MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

The passage "Vehaya im Shamo"- "If you listen to G-d's mitzvot"-(Devarim 11:13-21) is almost a word for word repetition of the passage of "Shema"- "Listen, Yisrael..." -- (6:4-9). The main difference between the two is the subject of reward and punishment. While in the Shema, there is no mention of reward, the second passage of Vehaya has an additional section discussing the reward for serving G-d ("And I will give the rain of the land in its proper time..." [11:14]) and the punishment for turning away ("And He will block heaven, and there will be no rain... And you will be lost quickly from the good land" [11:17]). This difference is typical of the Torah portion of Eikev, which has a central theme of reward and punishment.

There is also another difference between the two passages. In the Shema, there is a clear difference between the mitzva of loving G-d and the observance of the other mitzvot. Love of G-d is described in terms of three separate phrases, "Love your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your possessions" [6:5]. Performing the mitzvot in general, on the other hand, is mentioned in connection with only one key phrase, "Let these things which I command you remain on your heart" [6:6]. In the second passage, the

situation is different. It begins with both mitzvot, the requirement to love G-d and to serve Him. "And it will be, if you listen to my mitzvot which I command you today, to love G-d and to serve him" [11:13]. The accompanying phrases are also more balanced in this passage. There are two phrases for each of the mitzvot:

"To love your G-d and to serve Him with all your hearts and all your souls" [11:13] (note that the third phrase, "with all your possessions" is missing);

"Place these things on your hearts and on your souls" [11:18]. Thus, in this passage, the love of G-d and the memory of Egypt are given equal treatment.

Thus, it would seem that two different approaches to the mitzva of love for G-d can be seen in these two passages. In the first passage, Shema, the love of G-d is presented as a value in itself, while observing the mitzvot is a way of expressing this love, based on the assumption that love leads to a desire to do the will of the object of the love. The second passage, Vehaya, is based on the approach that loving G-d and serving Him are one and the same. This can help us understand the following well known Mishna:

"Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Karcha asked, why is Shema written before Vehaya? The reason is in order to accept the yoke of heaven first and then to accept the yoke of performing the mitzvot" [Berachot 2:2]. At first glance, this is hard to understand, since both passages discuss the two elements of the yoke of heaven and the yoke of the mitzvot. The above explanation clarifies the matter, since the Shema relates to the yoke of heaven as an independent value, while Vehaya treats the yoke of mitzvot in a special way as being similar to the love of G-d.

In the end, of course, both approaches correspond to the word of G-d. There is a value to loving G-d as an independent mitzva, while at the same time love of G-d is not possible without observing the mitzvot.

Settlement: A Command and a Promise for Generations to Come by Rabbi Chaim Steiner, *Yeshivat Merkaz Harav, Jerusalem*

"Every place where the sole of your foot stands will be yours, from the desert and Levanon, from the Perat River to the far sea, your borders will be" [Devarim 11:24]. This verse contains an apparent contradiction between "every place," evidently without any limits, and the boundaries at the end. The Ramban quotes the Sifri, that the boundaries are the minimum "which must be captured and destroyed, from the seven nations." But once the minimum has been taken over, Eretz Yisrael can be expanded, broadening the sanctity to include a larger area. The Ramban also quotes this verse as part of his comments on the Sefer Hamitzvot (Mitzva 4), and he rules that this is a commandment for all generations. We have been commanded to conquer the land and establish our sovereignty over the entire land. In any case, there is no other possibility of

sovereignty over Eretz Yisrael except for that of the nation of Yisrael.

Our mentor, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, the head of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav and the father of the renewed settlement of Yesha and the Golan, would regularly repeat these words of the Ramban, and he quoted holy sources as a basis of our ownership of the land. He personally went to a settlement in the Shomron and took possession of a piece of the land in an act of self-sacrifice, at the age of eighty-three. He repeatedly noted the mitzva of conquering the land, even in the face of mortal danger, and the prohibition of retreating from any part of Eretz Yisrael, as is written, "Do not make a covenant with them and do not favor them" [Devarim 7:2], and "the land shall not be sold permanently" [Vayikra 25:23].

Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda showed that no surrender of any part of Eretz Yisrael is valid, even if it is the result of a democratic decision. He based this ruling on the Tanach, the Talmud, and the later sages. He never considered reasons of security or threats of terror. In this matter, he would quote the words of his father. "It is not the fact that a hated nation has decided to seek a safe haven from its pursuers that justifies such a world movement, it is rather that a holy nation, the choice one among the nations, a young lion of Yehuda, has awoken from the long sleep, and it is now returning to its heritage, to the pride of Yaacov, who the Almighty loves." [Grot Hare'iyah volume 2, 571].

The words of the respected rabbi gave birth to a great movement of hundreds of thousands of people, spread out today in all the areas of Eretz Yisrael. We must adopt this method of persuasion and base our possession of the land on the foundation of the mitzva of settling the land. The security reasons for being in the land are secondary. What we must do is to become more and more involved within our own camp in the study of Eretz Yisrael, from the point of view of halacha and agadda, and increase the number of settlements with yeshivot, schools, and houses of learning. By doing this, we will become attached to more and more communities, so that we will be able to fulfill for all eternity the words of the Torah, "Every place where the sole of your foot stands will be yours."

THE SALANT FOUNDATION

Parsha Insights

by Rabbi Zvi Miller

The heart is our spiritual center. The Torah instructs us to cut away the barrier of your heart (Devarim 10:16). The Ramban explains: "Your hearts should be open to know the truth...and you should not err to think that there is any benefit in serving intermediate forces, i.e., angels, idols, planets, etc."

After Klal Yisrael experienced the miracles of the Exodus from Egypt why would they give any

credence to any power other than HaShem, the Master of the Universe?

In this material world in which we live the radiance of Hashem is hidden. No matter how clearly HaShem reveals Himself, once the revelation has passed, the soul is cast in darkness. The nature of this 'blackout' makes it impossible for humans not to err. The heart is vulnerable to all seductions and grasps at any force that seems attractive or powerful enough to help him.

Klal Yisrael, because of the special favor that we found in the eyes of HaShem have been endowed with the clarity to recognize the worthlessness of non-Elokim forces. Despite the deceptive comfort of placing our faith in planets, angels, or superstars-HaShem has instilled a consciousness within the Jewish soul. We know that all these deceptive powers are unconditionally and totally subject to the Divine Will.

Hence, Klal Yisrael has an inner light, a sensitivity that enables us to distinguish between truth and falsehood. We acknowledge this gift everyday in our morning prayers-"Blessed is HaShem...Who separated us from those who stray from the truth."

Deep in our soul we know the truth. However, we must open our hearts to connect with this innate awareness. Therefore, the verse instructs us- cut away the barrier of your heart. Meaning, the people of Israel must see beyond the smoke-screen and reject the false persuasions. Then we will be free to embrace the eternal Torah and its everlasting truth and good.

Implement: Envision the gate of your heart opening and HaShem bathing your heart in light. [Based on Da'as Torah of Rav Yerucham HaLevi] © 2005 Rabbi M. Goldwicht and Yeshiva University

RABBI MORDECHAI WOLLENBERG

Weekly Thoughts

This week's Parsha begins with the statement "Vehaya Eikev Tishme'un". The literal translation is 'because of your listening to these Commandments...' (you will merit the blessings which the Torah goes on to enumerate).

The word Eikev can also mean a heel. The Commentator Rashi explains that the verse is alluding to the 'light' commandments, the seemingly less important mitzvot which a person 'tramples with their heels'. The type of things which all too easily fall by the wayside. We all know about the 'major' mitzvot, such as keeping Kosher, or Yom Kippur, things like that. What about the smaller details? Are we as careful?

This idea applies across all aspects of our lives. The quietest child, do we too easily ignore him/her precisely because they are quiet and shy?

What about all those big multi-million dollar campaigns for this or that cause? It is very good that some causes get such high publicity - but what about

the causes nobody hears about? The 'little' things which fall by the wayside?

What about the workplace? Obviously I would never dream of embezzling from my employer. That is clearly immoral and not right. On the other hand, I need to make a quick international personal call - surely nobody will mind, it's only a few dollars, right? Are we taking advantage of someone else, even in a small, seemingly insignificant manner?

Then there is my relationship with G-d, my behavior as a Jew, charged with maintaining high standards in all aspects of my life. Obviously I would never do anything REALLY terrible, but what about the 'small details'? Are they as important to me?

These and many other examples come to mind in our everyday lives, at home and at work, in our business, financial and personal dealings. It is all too easy to rationalize and justify a small-scale violation of our principles, much more so than a 'major' violation. Besides which, a large number of small quantities add up to a much larger quantity, even if they are seemingly insignificant by themselves.

There is an additional reason why the 'small details' are so important. A person has two inclinations - the 'good inclination' and the 'evil inclination', the yetzer hara in Hebrew. The yetzer hara is very smart. It does not come to a person and say 'go on, rob a bank' or a similarly large-scale misdeed. Why not? Because it knows no decent person will fall for such a suggestion. So it comes to a person and suggests a much more reasonable sounding idea - why not add a few dollars to the expenses claim, after all you worked hard, you deserve to get paid more anyway, right? Once we fall for the lighter temptation, our resistance has been eroded and it will be much easier to become ensnared in worse and worse behavior until we find ourselves falling into large-scale violations of our principles. This is why the seemingly little things are so important - they must not be trampled on, allowed to fall by the wayside. By withstanding the small temptations we avoid the slippery slope that leads to greater transgressions and remain true to our principles.

Let us not forget the little things © 2005 by Rabbi M. Wollenberg & Torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"For the Lord your G-d brings you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, and underground springs gushing out in valley and mountain. It is a land of wheat and barley and vines and fig trees and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you shall eat bread without scarceness; you shall not lack anything in it. A land the stones of which are iron, and out of whose hills you will quarry brass."(Deut. 8:7-9)

The eternal relationship between G-d and the Jewish people involves three covenants. The first and most obvious is the eternity of the nation, which began with Abraham even before the birth of his son Isaac.

The second covenant is Torah, the eternal relationship between the descendants of Abraham and the wisdom of G-d in law and history, prose and poetry. This was made immediately following the Revelation at Sinai, after the Israelites declared: "We shall do, and we shall obey." The third covenant, much less known, is the unique relationship between the people of Israel and the Land of Israel.

Professor Yisrael Eldad, in his masterful work on the Bible, *Hegyonot Hamikra* (Thoughts on the Bible), demonstrates how each of the Five Books embraces a specific relationship to the land. In Genesis, the first command to Abraham deals with leaving one land and going up to the Promised Land. The Book ends with Joseph making the Israelites swear that his bones will be brought up to Israel. Exodus is the journey from slavery to freedom, symbolized by the move from Egypt toward Israel. Leviticus deals with the Sanctuary, the laws of the priests and sacrificial rituals, all bound up with Jerusalem. The Book of Numbers, which deals with the Israelites in the desert, recounts the great sin of the Israelites in refusing to fight for the Land of Israel.

And Deuteronomy contains the promise of ultimate return, after all exiles: "The Lord thy G-d will once again gather you from among all the nations, where He scattered you. Even if you be scattered to the ends of the heavens, the Lord thy G-d will gather you up from there and He will take you back." (Deut. 30:3-4)

Three songs in the Bible correspond to the three covenants: the Song of Torah, Ha'azinu (Deut 31:19ff); the Song of the Nation of Israel (Deut. 7:7-11); and the Song of the Land of Israel, quoted above (Deut. 8:7-9).

The late Ya'acov Hazan, a kibbutz movement pioneer who lived into his nineties, loved to tell of the time he apprenticed himself to a Polish farmer. From time to time, the farmer would bend down and cup his ear to the earth.

Asked to explain, he said he was listening to the song of the land. The young Hazan followed suit, but could hear nothing. The farmer said: "Yankel, it's not surprising. After all, this isn't your land."

When he finally arrived in Israel, Hazan claimed he actually could hear the song of the land. What is it that we hear when we put our ears to the land? A unique song, one which only we, the Jewish people, can hear.

This week's portion, Ekev, speaks of the land in loving, glowing language. The fruits are indeed special, the bread is necessary. But wouldn't it have made more sense for us to have been mining for gold and silver?

The answer to this question points to the heart of what we're doing in this land. Iron and brass are

implements of labor, of agricultural tools. We take from the land in order to replant and harvest once again.

Remember that in other lands, the field is the sole domain of the farmer. Rare is the city person who feels himself part of the agricultural experience.

But in Israel, even the city dweller has an intimate relationship with the land because of his involvement - direct or indirect - with the laws of sanctity that relate to it: the tithes, the fruits of the first three years, the sabbatical year, the jubilee year.

The Jews are compared to land. Says the Tzemah Tzedek: You look at earth and see dirt; dig into it, and you'll find precious gold and oil. Similarly, even a Jew who appears a little crass masks spiritual treasure, if you only dig deeply enough into his soul.

Dig into the Torah as well, say our Sages. This week's portion tells us to plumb the depths of our land. Use the tools of iron and brass which you derive from the land, share your produce with the needy, give G-d His due and the land will serve as a most precious link with the Divine.

Moreover, when a Jew cups his ear to his ancestral plot, he hears the song of creation itself. If we count the number of times the word *eretz* (land) appears in the Torah verses cited above, we come up with six, paralleling the six days of creation. This idea is entrenched because the seventh time the word *eretz* appears, it is in the context of the commandment to say Grace After Meals: "You shall eat, and be satisfied, and bless the Lord your G-d for the good land which He has given you" (Deut. 8:10), recalling the blessing of the seventh day of creation, when G-d rested.

Thus, the six "eretzes" may actually parallel the six days of creation, days when we work for our sustenance. This is most blessed when it emanates from our own toil, our own soil, our own homeland. And that homeland has an eternal relationship to its people.

Reb Nahman of Bratslav may have been correct when he said: "Wherever a Jew travels, he's traveling to the Land of Israel." He is on his way home.

The song of the Land is unique, a gift from G-d as part of His eternal covenant. Listen, and return.

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RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Fear is the Key

A his week Moshe asks the Jewish people for one small thing. It turns out, however, to become a litany of requests. He begins, innocuously enough, by saying he has one request. He even says that it is the *only* thing that G-d asks of us. (Deuteronomy 10:12): "Now, Israel what does G-d ask of you? *Only* to fear him." However, Moshe goes on to list additional spiritual obligations -- "to walk in all his ways -- to love him -- to serve him with all your heart." What begins with a simple request for fear, becomes a salvo of

obligations in every aspect of life. It sounds like the age-old adage, "give him a finger he wants the whole hand."

Actually, Moshe was not the only one who seemed to use this methodology. King David follows suit as he requests "*just one thing*" from the Almighty and goes on to list a plethora of requests. (Psalms 27:4) "Just *one thing* I ask from Hashem -- that is what I desire. [Let me] sit in the house of the L-rd my entire life, allow me to grasp the pleasantries of Hashem, and to visit his Sanctuary. Hide me in shelter on a day of destruction." In fact, as the verses continue, David asks one request after another. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni*) notes this irregularity and relates the following. "When Hashem heard the one request that multiplied, he chides King David. 'David,' Hashem asks, 'you said that you have *one* request. However, you really have quite a number of petitions!' David replies, 'I learned this trick from You! In the portion of Ekev, Moshe says that You *only* want a little fear from the people. By the time three verses pass, in addition to your request to fear G-d, there is a list of many more obligations You request from us!"

Obviously, the Midrash, along with the explicit verses it expounds upon, require an explanation. What did Moses mean? What did David mean? And how did they both manage to use a *bait-and-switch* tactic, in order to sell and buy more than the originally advertised request?

Reb Eizel Charif¹ was looking for a proper suitor for his daughter. He approached the Dean of the Volozhin Yeshiva and asked him if he could pick an aspiring Talmudic scholar from amongst his elite. He was looking for a brilliant Talmudic mind, a young man filled with character and humility as well as a deep concern for others. He decided that he would pose a complicated question and the student who would offer the best answer, would be chosen. What turned out, however, was something unexpected. No one had an answer. Whatever solution that was offered was easily rejected by Reb Eizel's superior wit.

Two days past and Reb Eizel decided to seek leave Volozhin and seek a son-in-law elsewhere. As all the students gathered to bid the great sage farewell, one of the young men nudged forward. "Rebbe," he whispered. I am sorry for my insolence, but I am truly troubled. In fact I couldn't sleep the last two nights. Daughter or no daughter, what is the correct answer to the question you posed?"

Reb Eizel's smile broadened. "What is your name young man? You, have many of the qualities that I am looking for. It is not the quick wit that interests me, but the desire for knowledge. If you have that fine

¹Reb Eizel Charif, was the Rav of Slonim in the latter part of the 1800's. He acquired the name *Charif* which means "sharp" for his lucid mind and brilliance in Torah. This story was adapted from "The Magid Speaks" by Rabbi Paysach Krohn ©1987 Mesorah Publications.

quality, you probably have them all. You are the young man I want for my daughter."

Moshe and David both taught us an eternal lesson in spirituality. If you attain a proper foundation, the rest will come naturally. Moshe asked the Jews only to truly fear Hashem. He knew that if his nation develops a true fear of Hashem, a state of total spirituality will develop. Jews will automatically walk in G-d's ways, love him, and serve him wholeheartedly. His original wish list is not comprised of four or five new items. It is comprised of only one item -- fear of Hashem. The rest is only natural.

Perhaps that is what King David meant "I learned the method from Moshe." All I need is one fulfilled request. Let me dwell in the House of Hashem. The rest are not new requests. If the first request is fulfilled, the rest will come naturally. Some Mitzvos are the keystone to commitment -- just do one -- the rest will fall in place. This week the Torah tells us to start the chain of commitment -- Fear is the key. © 1995 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

And you shall write them on the doorposts of your homes and your gates. (Devarim 11:20)

The Mezuzah stands like a sentinel at the door, we pass it whenever we enter or leave the room. What are we to think as we look upon the mezuzah? What are we to contemplate when we see the letter shin on the case and are reminded of the holy scrolls within?

The Rambam, at the end of his presentation of the laws of mezuzah, tells us to think about the eternal nature of the Almighty. This will inspire us to awaken from our slumber and come to the realization that nothing in this world is permanent other than the Almighty, His Torah.

Why does the mezuzah remind us of these concepts?

Perhaps it is because the mezuzah is a silent witness to the ebb and flow of history and human events. Think about the mezuzah of an old shul or some other venerable edifice. It has been hanging there for decades if not centuries. It has seen infants brought into the shul to be circumcised, and it has seen these same people grown old brought into the shul to be eulogized and buried. It has seen generations come and go. It has seen empires rise and fall. It has seen the birth of ideologies and their demise.

In the last century alone, our hypothetical mezuzah would have seen humanism, capitalism, materialism, existentialism, each embraced as life philosophies and then discredited. It would have seen the rise of the Soviet Union and Communism and their ignominious collapse. It would have seen the creation of the Third Reich, the Thousand-Year Reich, its

perpetration of the Holocaust against the Jewish people and its ultimate defeat and destruction. It would have seen the birth of Israel and its growth to maturity.

When the railroads were introduced in the 19th century, people thought the new technology was so perfect that it would never change. The railroad companies sold corporate bonds for centuries in advance. And where are they all today? On the scrap heap, along with their rusting trains.

Human beings are always seeking immortality. This invention, this idea, this building, this book, this one will capture that elusive immortality, this one will stand the test of time, this is one for the ages, this one will make me immortal. But it doesn't work.

The Torah tells us (Bamidbar 32:42), "And Novach went and captured Kenas and its suburbs, and he named it (lah) Novach in his name." According to the rules of Hebrew grammar, the word lah should end with a mappik heh, a mark of emphasis, but it doesn't. It ends with a weak heh. The Midrash tells us that the weak heh lets us know that the city did not last. It was eventually destroyed.

Why does the Torah consider it important to let us know this information? It is meant to teach us the futility of immortalization. Novach wanted to immortalize himself by creating something permanent - an entire city, no less! - and crowning it with his own name. But he failed. The city was destroyed, and his name would be forgotten if it were not mentioned in the Torah.

Everything constantly changes. Nothing is permanent. Only the Almighty and His Torah are permanent. The mezuzah can bear witness. © 2005 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

For (aikev) listening to these laws, safeguarding and keeping them, G-d your L-rd will keep in mind the covenant and love with which He made an oath to your fathers. (Devarim 7:12)

The word "aikev" in the first line of this week's parshah (spelled: ayin, kuf, bais), inspires many divrei Torah on the usage of this unusual word. Rashi derives mussar from the usage of this word, whereas the Ba'al HaTurim finds an allusion to the first set of Tablets. However, the following goes much deeper in trying to decipher the message being conveyed by Moshe to all the generations to follow:

Within [the name] "Ya'akov" (yud, ayin, bais, kuf) is the mystery of "Yabok," whose letters (yud, bais, kuf) stand for the words, "ye'anainu v'yom kareinu" ("on that day He will answer us"); the mystery of "Yabok" is very, very deep, because three names [of G-d] numerically equal "Yabok"... Therefore, it mentions with respect to Avraham, "Because (aikev) Avraham listened to My voice"... and this is why it is written here, "For listening to these laws..." (Yaikut Reuveini, Aikev, 2)

Let me explain a little of what is being referring to here.

First of all, the "Yabok" is an eastern tributary of the Jordan, about half-way between the Kinneret and the Dead Sea. What makes this river so significant is that it is in the one that Ya'akov crossed over to enter Eretz Yisroel, after being away from home for 34 years (Bereishis 32:23). And it was the crossing of this river that led to his all-night struggle with the angel of Eisav, and his crucial name change from "Ya'akov" to "Yisroel," the name of the entire Jewish people.

The rabbis teach that Ya'akov's battle through the night symbolized the long exile his descendants would be forced to endure until the time of Moshiach. Hence, the Yabok River is a symbol of confronting exile, and becoming Yisroel symbolized spiritually surviving exile, all of which is an intrinsic part of Ya'akov himself, which is why three out of four letters of his name spell the word "yabok." Hence, "Within [the name] "Ya'akov" is the mystery of "Yabok," Now, whenever we refer to "the day" that G-d will answer us, it means "the day," that is, the day that Moshiach will come and reveal himself and redeem the Jewish people. Therefore, again, there is a hint to messianic times in Ya'akov's struggle with the angel of Eisav, and the earning of his identity, "Yisroel"—the struggle of every Jew since.

Interestingly enough, when it comes to Avraham's name change from Avram to Avraham, the Talmud warns us not to revert back to "Avram." However, when it comes to Ya'akov's name change, Yisroel remains interchangeable with Ya'akov (Brochos 13a). Why? Because Avram's transformation to Avraham was completed in his day; however, the struggle to remain Yisroel forever is an ongoing one, fought over the long, arduous exiles we continue to endure, and which threaten our very identity as a nation. It is a struggle that Ya'akov began back at the Yabok River, and one which the last generation before Moshiach will have to complete.

Therefore, the first posuk of this week's parshah can really be read as follows: For (aikev) struggling throughout exile to maintain your identity of living by Torah and mitzvos, then G-d your L-rd will keep in mind the covenant and love with which He made an oath to your fathers. (Devarim 7:12)

Whether we do or not, either way, the time will come when we will have to confront the "Yabok" of our time, and, on that day, "He will answer us." We are, after all, close to the end of the period referred to by the Talmud as, "The Heels of Moshiach."

Now, Israel, what does Hashem your G-d, ask of you, but to fear Hashem your G-d and to walk in His ways... (Devarim 10:12)

The issue of fear of G-d is one of the most discussed in the world of Torah. And it should be, because, as Moshe says, this is what G-d is really asking of us.

As we have mentioned before, the Mesillos Yesharim ("Path of the Just," Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto) explains that fear of G-d is basically two concepts: fear of punishment for going against the will of G-d, and, a feeling of awe in G-d's presence, evoked by contemplating G-d's greatness and our own lowliness; the latter is the ultimate level.

Interestingly enough, in the above verse, the Ba'al HaTurim finds reference to a halachah that, seemingly, has as much to do with fear of G-d as any other halachic matter. The verse itself contains 99 letters, but can be said to contain 100 letters when the word "ask" (shoel) is written as it should be written, that is, with its "vav." Hence, says the Ba'al HaTurim, a Torah reference to the rabbinical ordinance (established by King David) to recite 100 blessings daily (Menachos 43b).

What is the special connection?

As the Nefesh HaChaim teaches in the Second "Gate," the concept behind a blessing is to draw down spiritual light from Above into our very mundane, physical world, in order to make the presence of G-d more "palpable" in creation. This is how we elevate creation and make it "holy to G-d," and become closer to Him.

Many think that we make a blessing, for example over food, in order to gain Divine permission to eat. And this is correct, because the Talmud says that one who eats food or enjoys any part of This World without making the appropriate blessing is like one who has stolen and benefited from Divine property (Brochos 35a)—a serious violation!

However, the deeper explanation is that one eats an apple, for example, in order to make a blessing! This is because the purpose of creation is not to eat, but to increase awareness of G-d's providence in creation, and it is the blessing, not the food, that does this best. When we make blessings, especially with the proper understanding of their words, and with the appropriate level of intention, our words become spiritual "conduits" for the Divine light that brings blessing to us and the world around us! (You can even bring blessing to someone who is miles away when doing a mitzvah on his or her behalf, or when making a blessing with the intention that another should spiritually benefit as well.)

Therefore, the Ba'al HaTurim's connection between the mitzvah to fear G-d and the rabbinical one to make 100 blessings daily is quite appropriate (not that the Ba'al HaTurim needs our approval). For, the words, "yireh Shamayim" (fear of Heaven), literally mean the "seeing of Heaven," an euphemism for G-d Himself. And, the point of the 100 blessings is to make the hand of G-d far more apparent in every day life. They are one and the same idea. (Why "100" blessings? That is a more Kabbalistic matter, beyond the scope of this parshah sheet...) © 1999 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org