

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

Something implicit in the Torah from the very beginning becomes explicit in the book of Devarim. God is the God of love. More than we love Him, He loves us. Here, for instance, is the beginning of this week's parsha: "If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep his covenant of love [et ha-brit ve-et ha-chessed] with you, as he swore to your ancestors. He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers." (Deut 7:12-13)

Again in the parsha we read: "To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the Lord set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations- as it is today." (Deut. 10:14-15)

And here is a verse from last week's: "Because he loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength." (Deut. 4:37)

The book of Deuteronomy is saturated with the language of love. The root a-h-v appears in Shemot twice, in Vayikra twice (both in Lev. 19), in Badmibar not at all, but in Sefer Devarim 23 times. Devarim is a book about societal beatitude and the transformative power of love.

Nothing could be more misleading and invidious than the Christian contrast between Christianity as a religion of love and forgiveness and Judaism as a religion of law and retribution. As I pointed out in Covenant and Conversation to Vayigash, forgiveness is born (as David Konstan notes in Before Forgiveness) in Judaism. Interpersonal forgiveness begins when Joseph forgives his brothers for selling him into slavery. Divine forgiveness starts with the institution of Yom Kippur as the supreme day of Divine pardon following the sin of the Golden Calf.

Similarly with love: when the New Testament speaks of love it does so by direct quotation from Leviticus ("You shall love your neighbour as yourself")

and Deuteronomy ("You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might"). As philosopher Simon May puts it in his splendid book, Love: A History: "The widespread belief that the Hebrew Bible is all about vengeance and 'an eye for an eye,' while the Gospels supposedly invent love as an unconditional and universal value, must therefore count as one of the most extraordinary misunderstandings in all of Western history. For the Hebrew Bible is the source not just of the two love commandments but of a larger moral vision inspired by wonder for love's power." (Simon May, Love: A History, pp. 19-20) His judgment is unequivocal: "If love in the Western world has a founding text, that text is Hebrew." (Ibid. pg. 14)

More than this: in Ethical Life: The Past and Present of Ethical Cultures, philosopher Harry Redner distinguishes four basic visions of the ethical life in the history of civilizations. (Harry Redner, Ethical Life: The Past and Present of Ethical Cultures, 2001) One he calls civic ethics, the ethics of ancient Greece and Rome. Second is the ethic of duty, which he identifies with Confucianism, Krishnaism and late Stoicism. Third is the ethic of honour, a distinctive combination of courtly and military decorum to be found among Persians, Arabs and Turks as well as in medieval Christianity (the 'chivalrous knight') and Islam.

The fourth, which he calls simply morality, he traces to Leviticus and Deuteronomy. He defines it simply as 'the ethic of love,' and represents what made the West morally unique: "The biblical 'love of one's neighbour' is a very special form of love, a unique development of the Judaic religion and unlike any to be encountered outside it. It is a supremely altruistic love, for to love one's neighbour as oneself means always to put oneself in his place and to act on his behalf as one would naturally and selfishly act on one's own." (Ibid. pg. 50) To be sure, Buddhism also makes space for the idea of love, though it is differently inflected, more impersonal and unrelated to a relationship with God.

What is radical about this idea is that, first, the Torah insists, against virtually the whole of the ancient world, that the elements that constitute reality are neither hostile nor indifferent to humankind. We are here because Someone wanted us to be, One who cares about us, watches over us and seeks our wellbeing.

Second, the love with which God created the universe is not just divine. It is to serve as the model for

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated by
Mayer Grosser
in memory of his mother
שולמית (גרסור) בת הרב יקיר הכהן ע"ה

us in our humanity. We are bidden to love the neighbour and the stranger, to engage in acts of kindness and compassion, and to build a society based on love. Here is how our parsha puts it: "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awesome God who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. So you must love the stranger, for you yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Deut. 10:18-19)

In short: God created the world in love and forgiveness and asks us to love and forgive others. I believe that to be the most profound moral idea in human history.

There is however an obvious question. Why is it that love, which plays so great a part in the book of Deuteronomy, is so much less in evidence in the earlier books of Shemot, Vayikra (with the exception of Lev. 19) and Bamidbar?

The best way of answering that question is to ask another. Why is it that forgiveness plays no part at least on the surface of the narrative-in the book of Bereishit? (I exclude, here, midrashic readings of these texts, some of which do make reference to forgiveness.) God does not forgive Adam and Eve or Cain (though he mitigates their punishment). Forgiveness does not figure in the stories of the Flood, the Tower of Babel or the destruction of Sodom and the cities of the plain (Abraham's plea is that the cities be spared if they contain fifty or ten righteous people; this is not a plea for forgiveness). Divine forgiveness makes its first appearance in the book of Exodus after Moses' successful plea in the wake of golden calf, and is then institutionalised in the form of Yom Kippur (Lev. 16), but not before. Why so?

The simple, radical, answer is: God does not forgive human beings until human beings learn to forgive one another. Genesis ends with Joseph forgiving his brothers. Only thereafter does God forgive human beings.

Turning to love: Genesis contains many references to it. Abraham loves Isaac.

Isaac loves Esau. Rebecca loves Jacob. Jacob loves Rachel. He also loves Joseph. There is interpersonal love in plentiful supply. But almost all the loves of Genesis turn out to be divisive. They lead to tension between Jacob and Esau, between Rachel and Leah, and between Joseph and his brothers. Implicit in Genesis is a profound observation missed by most moralists and theologians. Love in and of itself-real love, personal and passionate, the kind of love that suffuses much of the prophetic literature as well as Shir Ha-Shirim, the greatest love song in Tanakh, as opposed to the detached, generalised love called agape which we associate with ancient Greece-is not

sufficient as a basis for society. It can divide as well as unite.

Hence it does not figure as a major motif until we reach the integrated social-moral-political vision of Deuteronomy which combines love and justice. Tzedek, justice, turns out to be another key word of Deuteronomy, appearing 18 times. It appears only four times in Shemot, not at all in Bamidbar, and in Vayikra only in chapter 19, the only chapter that also contains the word 'love.' In other words, in Judaism love and justice go hand in hand. Again this is noted by Simon May:

"[W]hat we must note here, for it is fundamental to the history of Western love, is the remarkable and radical justice that underlies the love commandment of Leviticus. Not a cold justice in which due deserts are mechanically handed out, but the justice that brings the other, as an individual with needs and interests, into a relationship of respect. All our neighbours are to be recognised as equal to ourselves before the law of love. Justice and love therefore become inseparable." (Loc. Cit. pg.17)

Love without justice leads to rivalry, and eventually to hate. Justice without love is devoid of the humanizing forces of compassion and mercy. We need both. This unique ethical vision-the love of God for humans and of humans for God, translated into an ethic of love toward both neighbour and stranger-is the foundation of Western civilization and its abiding glory.

It is born here in the book of Deuteronomy, the book of law-as-love and love-as-law. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l* © 2025 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Remember the entire path along which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the desert, He sent hardships to test you." (Deut. 8:2) "The land which you are about to inherit is not like Egypt." (Deut. 11:10) Our Biblical portion of Ekev devotes much praise to the glories of the Land of Israel; its majestic topography, its luscious produce, and its freely-flowing milk and honey. And in order to conceptually explain the truly unique quality of our land promised us by God, the Biblical text – in chapters eight and eleven of the Book of Deuteronomy – contrasts the Land of Israel with the desert experience of manna on the one hand and the geographical and geological gifts of Egypt on the other, with Israel coming out far ahead. In this commentary – heavily inspired by Rav Elhanan Samet's "Studies of the Weekly Portions" – I shall attempt to understand what it is that makes the Land of Israel so special.

The Israelite wanderers are hardly enamored with the manna they receive in the desert. Again and

again they complain about the lack of meat and fish (Numbers 11:1-7), about the scarcity of water and fruits, crying out in despair, "Why did you bring God's congregation into this desert? So that we and our livestock should die? Why did you take us out of Egypt and bring us to this terrible place? [The desert] is an area where there are no plants, no figs, no grapes, no pomegranates, no water to drink" (11:4,5). And even in our portion of Ekev, God describes the desert years as years of "hardships to test you," of "chastisement and training" (Deut. 8:3,5). The moral message of the inexhaustible manna was merely to teach the people that the ultimate source of food is God, "so that you may observe His commandments and fear Him" (8:3,6).

Indeed, the desert's difficulties are contrasted with future life in the Land of Israel, the Torah narrative praising the Promised Land's blessings. In three packed verses (8:7-9) the land (eretz) – in contrast to the desert – is referred to seven times, a chiasmic structure reveling in the seven special species of fruit for which Israel is esteemed (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olive oil and date-honey), a "good land with flowing streams and underground springs, gushing out in valley and mountain, whose stones are iron and from whose mountains you will quarry copper."

The wondrous descriptions depict a wide range of foods and natural resources produced by the earth – from bread and olive oil to copper mines – all of which require serious human ingenuity, input and energy to create a partnership with God to properly develop the gifts inherent in the land. After all, to properly irrigate the fields, rainwater must be collected and gathered through the underground springs; the making of bread requires eleven agricultural steps; oil must be carefully extracted from the olive trees by means of olive presses; and the copper must be painstakingly quarried from the depths of the mountains. It is precisely this partnership between God and humanity that is critically necessary to develop – and ultimately perfect – the world which we have been given.

It shouldn't surprise us that Egypt, representing the very antithesis of the desert ("the gift of the Nile," in the words of Herodotus) is where agriculture had initially developed – a development which made the land of the Pharaohs the most commanding power of the ancient world. And so, chapter eleven of the Book of Deuteronomy, in our portion of Ekev, provides a dazzling parallel (verses 8-12) to the passage we discussed earlier (8:7-9), similarly emphasizing the "defining and leading" word *eretz*, land.

Interestingly enough, in our passage where "eretz" is mentioned seven times, the land of Israel is the focus of all but one, the fourth time, when it refers to Egypt. On one level the contrast is between land and desert, but the Torah's intention is to provide a contrast between Egypt and Israel, the latter introduced as the "land flowing with milk and honey" (11:9). The Biblical

text continues: "Because the land you are about to inherit is not like Egypt, the place you left, where you could plant your seed and irrigate it with your feet, just like a vegetable garden" (11:10). Since the fertility of Egyptian land and the cultivation of its crops does not depend on rainfall but is effectively irrigated by the Nile's natural overflow and from the omnipresent moisture of the great river, Egyptians did not need to turn to the heavens for rain.

However, while Egyptian land may be easily cultivated, it remains a dry, desert valley, unlike Israel, a land flowing with milk and honey: milk derived from livestock grazing on fields of natural growing grass and honey from bees that thrive in areas blessed by a natural abundance of flora. It may be difficult to live only on milk and honey – but it is possible. And more importantly: "The land you are crossing to occupy is a land of mountains and valleys, which can be irrigated only by rain. It is therefore a land constantly under the Lord your God's scrutiny; the eyes of the Lord your God are on it at all times, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year" (Deut. 11:11,12).

Ancient Egypt had very little to offer in the God-human partnership. The rich, fertile soil of the 'gift of the Nile' makes the agricultural process a relatively simple one, its dependency on rain removed. Israel, abundant in its natural supply of resources, nevertheless must rely heavily both on plentiful rainfall as well as human input for a successful agricultural crop. And since Israel must rely on God – the obvious source for rain – the Israelites must be worthy of God's grace by dint of their ethical and moral conduct, their fealty to God's laws. Hence our Biblical portion concludes with a call to sensitive fulfillment of God's laws as the key to our successful harvesting of the land's produce. Perhaps this is really why Israel is called the land 'flowing with milk and honey: only milk and honey can be garnered without destroying any form of life whatsoever – human, animal or plant. © 2021 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The The Torah reading of this week continues the long, final oration of Moshe to the Jewish people, as he prepares for his own mortal demise. It is important to note that throughout the words of Moshe here in the final book of the Chumash, there is, mixed together, the requirement of the memory of the past – the distant and immediate past – with the vision of the future, again the far future and the immediate future.

There are those amongst us who live pretty much in the memory of our long, eventful and holy past. Being suffused with nostalgia, they paint for themselves a picture that is many times more fantasy than reality. And since the reality of the past never is portrayed, any attempt to learn from that past is futile. We see so often

in the words of Moshe how frank and honest is his recollection and recitation of the events of the past. He spares no one and no event.

His love for the Jewish people, that shines forth from every verse and word of this book, in no way forces him to color the past and sanitize the events that occur. It is the honesty of his oration and presentation that gives it such power and eternity.

The person who has to climb a hill will oftentimes in the middle of the climb look back to see how much has already been accomplished. In order to continue the climb, psychologically that is an enormous aid. So too, on the eve of the entry of the Jewish people into the Land of Israel, Moshe reminds them of the past and of the climb that they already achieved and experienced – the travails of our ancestors, the slavery in Egypt, the revelation at Sinai, the disasters of the desert – in order to prepare them for the rest of the climb before them.

But he also portrays the vision of their future in the Land of Israel and in the diaspora. There again Moshe is honest and candid with his words of prophecy. He promises no rose garden, nor an easy path towards the ultimate redemption and return of the Jewish people to their homeland, to their faith and ultimately to their Creator.

Just as Jews were and are prone to fantasize about our past, so too, perhaps even to a greater extent, are we susceptible to creating a picture of an unrealistic and unsustainable future. We see in the Talmud the opinion that promises us a rather bland messianic era. Maimonides adopts this viewpoint as well. However because of the length of the exile and of the enormous tragedies that have been our lot in that exile, many Jews have upped the ante for the messianic era.

By so doing, we are disappointed with what has already been achieved and make it more difficult than ever to have a realistic view of what our policies and expectations for the future should be. For a balanced picture of the holy vision regarding the Jewish people, past and present, one need only study and remember the final words of Moshe as they appear before us in the Torah readings of these weeks. © 2016 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Grace After Meals

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The verse instructs us to “Bless the Lord your G-d for the good land” (*Devarim* 8:10). Our Sages (*Berachot* 48b) extrapolate from here that the Torah requires three blessings to be included in *Birkat HaMazon*. The first blesses G-d for providing food

(*Birkat HaZan*), the second blesses G-d for the Land of Israel (*Birkat HaAretz*), and the third blesses G-d for the rebuilding of Jerusalem (*Boneh Yerushalayim*). If they are based on the verse, how can the Talmud also tell us that Moshe instituted the first blessing, Yehoshua the second, and David and Shlomo the third? It must be that while the content was established at Sinai, the precise words that we recite were formulated by Yehoshua, David, and Shlomo.

Since *Birkat HaZan* was instituted by Moshe Rabbeinu, it is surprising that some versions of the blessing include the verse: “You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing” (*Tehillim* 145:16). After all, *Tehillim* was written by King David, who lived much later than Moshe. The likely explanation is that some of the verses of *Tehillim* were formulated at an early stage, and King David wrote them down at a later stage. This is borne out by the language used in *Birkat HaZan* to introduce the verse: “As it is **said**, ‘You open your hand,’” and not “As it is **written**, ‘You open your hand.’”

As we mentioned, the specific formulation of the blessings was originally different from what we recite today. A person could have fulfilled his obligation (for *Birkat HaZan*) by saying in Aramaic, “Blessed is the merciful One, King, the Creator of this bread.” Along the same lines, when someone sings *Tzur MiShelo* – the Shabbat song whose structure is parallel to that of *Birkat HaMazon* and incorporates the same themes – it is possible that he has fulfilled his obligation to recite *Birkat HaMazon*. Accordingly, perhaps a person should have in mind when he sings *Tzur MiShelo* that he does not intend to fulfill his obligation. This way, he ensures that his fulfillment of the mitzva takes place only when he recites the classic *Birkat HaMazon*. © 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopaedia Talmudit

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

One of the foundations of the Torah, included by the Rambam in his list of thirteen main principles, is the belief in reward and punishment. In this week's portion, we have been commanded to recite this principle morning and night, to write it on our doorposts, to bind it onto our hands, and to think about it whether we are sitting in our houses or traveling on a road. In the passage of Shema, “And it will come to pass if you listen” [*Devarim* 11:13], we are taught not only about the existence of reward and punishment but also about the essence of these matters. The punishment is the exile of Bnei Yisrael from their land, while the reward is to partake of the fruits of the land and to be satiated from its goodness.

However, when we look at our own generation it may seem to us that events do not seem to behave

according to this principle. How can we believe that sins are the cause of our being exiled from our land, when the sinners are the ones who have been privileged to rebuild the land after two thousand years of exile? To put this into sharper focus, how can we reconcile the principle of reward and punishment with the well known prediction in the Talmud that Mashiach will arrive in a generation that is totally guilty?

In his book "Daat Tevunot" the Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Lucato) writes that the Almighty guides the world on two levels: Divine guidance and guidance by justice. The principle of justice is what is explained in this week's Torah portion, and this is what caused us to be expelled from our land into the long and difficult exile. This is what we deserved as a result of our terrible deeds. The return from exile, on the other hand, involves a unique Divine guidance which reveals that all of the complex events taking place, even if caused by human sins, always remain within the bounds of Divine control as part of His plan to bring ultimate good into the world.

Divine guidance represents G-d's absolute good-the reason that He created the world and the reason that He recreates it anew day after day. Redemption is the ultimate expression of the world in which we live, and that is why Rabbi Yehoshua is able to state (as the Rambam notes in his book of halacha) that redemption does not depend on repentance at all. G-d's plan has control over all the historical processes, and this guides events in such a way that everything will unconditionally reach the proper end.

At the same time, the revelation of this ultimate good does not relieve us of the obligation to read the passage "And it will come to pass if you listen." Even though the complete repair of the world is a Divine plan which will take place whether we are worthy of it or not, we still have the power to make this happen soon or to delay it for a relatively long time. "If they have not been privileged, the redemption will come in its due time, but if they have been privileged, I will rush its time" [Sanhedrin 88a]. The words of the GRA are well known: the simple interpretation of the verse is that both types of redemption must come simultaneously-"It will come in its due time and also be rushed" [Yeshayahu 60:22]. What this means to us is that even when the time for Divine mercy has arrived, according to G-d's plan of redemption, we must do all we can to shorten the process and to decrease the days of evil. In this way we will once again be worthy of the great light that will be revealed to us from the point of view of the guidance based on justice.

"One who Takes Advantage of the Crown will Fade Away" by Rabbi Amichai Gordin, Yeshivat Har Etzion and Shaalvim High School

I reprint below a letter that I sent to my students who are serving in the IDF. I hesitated about whether to

publish it because of the issues involved. In the end I decided that in spite of its personal and intimate nature, the contents are important enough that it is worthwhile to make it public.

The letter is on the subject of shaving. I asked my students if they want to grow a beard while in the army for reasons related to religion or for their own convenience. I told them that if the beard is for personal reasons and not because of religious conviction they should remove it. They then asked if they should keep the beard even if it is indeed for religious reasons.

I want to wish you all a good week. Let G-d watch over you as he watched over our ancestors from the time of Egypt until now.

Aviad called me on Friday. Among other things, he told me about the subject of the beards and I told him my opinion. Since this is an important issue and I have an opportunity to write about it, I will summarize what I think.

Let me tell you about something that happened to me many years ago. I was in an officers' training course, and the Fast of Gedalia took place. Near the end of the fast we had a "weekly review" scheduled. I fasted on that day, and since to the best of my knowledge the IDF rules did not require soldiers who were fasting to participate in any activity, I did not appear for the review.

A few hours later my commander asked me why I had not come to the review, and I replied that I was fasting. When he asked me, "Did you feel too weak to come?" I didn't reply.

The following week was one of the worst times of my entire life. I will not go into details about what happened to me that week. It is enough to note that I was put on trial twice for disciplinary failures, and that I was confined to my base as a punishment.

We do not know how closely G-d guides our lives and how he punishes us for our actions, but I was absolutely sure at the time that my troubles were a result of the way I had taken advantage unnecessarily of the fast in order to gain a free hour. I had failed, big time.

We should be very wary before we make use of G-d's name. We must be very careful not to take any advantage of the Torah. Even if the reason that we grow a beard makes no difference at all to the army, we must never make use of G-d's name in vain.

Decide whatever you want, but please be sure of one thing-do not use G-d's name in vain. If you keep your beard for religious reasons, that is good. But if it is only an excuse do not do it. Your personal integrity is worth much more than whether you shave or not for few days. Be honest with your own selves. There is no substitute for internal personal integrity.

We are not slaves within the IDF. The obligation to obey the commands does not mean complete self-deprecation in the face of our officers'

orders. One is allowed to search for legitimate ways to get out of obeying silly orders that the army sometimes gives to its soldiers. But even if the goal is appropriate, we must never make use of the crown of Torah in a distorted way. Even with respect to rules that seem silly to us, such as whether to have a beard or not, it is forbidden to make use of Jewish customs in order to avoid obeying them.

It is important to keep our distance from fraud and deception in general. Even more so we must stay away from fraud that is based on halacha and the Torah.

The sages taught us, "He who takes advantage of the crown will fade away" [Avot 1:13]. Anybody who makes unnecessary use of the Torah will be called to account for his deeds. *(This article is dedicated with appreciation and esteem for the IDF recruits of Av 5769, including the students of the fortieth graduating class of Yeshivat Har Etzion.)*

HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

Bais Hamussar

Even one who does not have the ability to study mussar from a sefer can still reap many of the benefits of mussar by studying nature. When asked to suggest a sefer that could aid in strengthening one's emunah, Rav Wolbe (Igros U'Ksavim) answered that no sefer is needed, because simply studying nature can bring the same results.

However, the ability to gain from nature, like mussar study, hinges on hisboninus.

Although technological advancements assist us in numerous ways, Rav Wolbe would bemoan some of the spiritual repercussions of these advances. When a person observes a gorgeous sunset or beholds a breathtaking view, the first thing he does is take out his camera to snap a picture. Why doesn't he spend a minute to internalize his picturesque surroundings and eternalize it in his mind instead of in his camera? Such an activity can bring one to great levels of emunah.

The truth is that it is not just the magnificent landscapes that declare Hashem's awesomeness. Every aspect of nature has the ability to bring one to emunah if it is studied properly. Rav Wolbe (AleI Shur vol. II pg. 271) suggests being misbonein in a leaf of a tree. Notice the perfectly symmetrical veins that bring the water to each part of the leaf. Note the side facing up is a darker green than the side facing down, since it contains the chlorophyll that absorbs the sunlight and causes photosynthesis which provides the atmosphere with much needed oxygen. Who created this if not the The Creator? Fruits and animals also provide ample emunah-provoking thoughts, but only if the time is taken to be misbonein in their many marvelous features.

If you are going on vacation, take a few minutes to enjoy a sunset or beautiful view -- without a

camera! The effect such hisboninus can have on a person is worth much more than the souvenir provided by a picture! © 2017 Rabbi S. Wolbe zt"l & aishdas.org

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

Their Own Reward

A single word can spark a long discussion among the Rabbis especially if that word has different meanings. Our parasha begins with one such word, "And it will be [eikev] because of (as a consequence of) your listening to these ordinances and your observing and performing them, then Hashem your Elokim will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers." Our familiarity with the root of this word (eiyen, kuf, vet) stems from our forefather Ya'akov. Ya'akov received his name because he was holding onto the "heel" of his twin Eisav when they were born: "And after that his brother went out and his hand was holding on the [akeiv] heel of Eisav and he called his name Ya'akov."

The Jastrow Dictionary, a primary source for Biblical and Talmudic volumes, gives several definitions for the word eikev. The primary meaning of the word eikev is "to follow or come at the end". It is easy to see how the word is then related to heel. The Gemara speaks of a person walking into a room whose head enters first and his heel enters last or follows. The word can also mean "a consequence as something which follows from one's actions". It can also mean "an end or, in the future, as that is what follows from now."

Rashi understands this passage as stemming from the meaning of the word as "heel" but not the heel itself. He compares these mitzvot to, "the relatively light commandments that a person tramples with his heels (does not take seriously enough)." People often prioritize a hierarchy of mitzvot. The Gur Aryeh describes these mitzvot as if "they seem light to a person in that their fulfillment does not seem worthy of significant reward." Since Hashem did not rank the mitzvot, one must assume that all mitzvot are important and are all rewarded. (There are only a few mitzvot in the Torah where the reward for the observance of that mitzvah is written.) Rashi suggests that one should give importance even to these "minor" mitzvot since through their observance one will receive the reward of Hashem's covenant.

The Ramban focuses on another meaning for the word eikev, namely "an end or result." He begins with Rashi's premise that people think that the laws that govern us every day must be less important than the laws which pertain to Shabbat or Yom Tov. The laws of commerce are treated lightly since many of them fall under the guise of common practice and logic. The Ramban uses Onkelos to demonstrate that the term eikev is circular. Our actions bring about a reaction from Hashem, thus our following the mitzvot causes Hashem to fulfill the covenant. The Ramban also

insists that it would be impossible in a large nation for everyone to fulfill the mitzvot completely, but that is not what is required. This is a community condition and the reward is to the community not the individual. The covenant between Hashem and the people which includes the rewards from Hashem is only a national agreement that is fulfilled by individuals but judged as a nation. The reward is not for personal gain.

HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch emphasizes another meaning of the word eikev, "a natural consequence." All of the different types of mitzvot here are "classed together under the concept mishpatim, nothing but 'legal maxims' with which the most varied conditions and relationships of the spiritual and material life of the individual and state have to be carried out... for which no thanks and no reward can be claimed, are they to be carried out." Hirsch shows us that every mitzvah should be performed without expectation of reward. Performing the mitzvot is our attempt to maintain that harmony of the world by giving of that part of the harmony which is the unique responsibility of man. "That is why all mitzvot without distinction should be performed with equal conscientious faithfulness." Hirsch's emphasis then is the performance of mitzvot as doing our part in the world and not with an eye to what we might receive for that action.

HaRav Zalman Sorotskin, the Aznayim L'Torah, sees eikev as the actual part of the body, the heel. We might think that the rosh, the head, is the part of the body that rules over all other parts. Yet we say, "all of my bones will say to Hashem who is like You." Not just the head but even the heel must serve Hashem. But how can one serve Hashem with his heel? Sorotskin gives several examples: the Tanach informs us "turn from evil and do good," walking to the Beit HaMedrash, house of study, walking to visit a mourner or a person who is ill, attending a simcha or doing an act of kindness for someone, or performing a positive commandment or avoiding a negative commandment.

The Or HaChaim combines his understanding of the word eikev with another word in the sentence, v'hayah, it will be. Our Rabbis tell us that the word v'hayah is always tied to simcha, joy. This indicates that there will be simcha as a result of our observing and following the mitzvot of Hashem. The Or HaChaim explains that the Gemara also uses the term eikev in its description of the end of days and the coming of the Mashiach. The end of days will be a time of great turmoil and confusion but it will conclude with great joy at the coming of the Mashiach. This is the completeness of Man, the time of simcha, as a time when one realizes the righteousness of his own actions. The reward that he receives is the knowledge that he has done his part in the world as we learn "the reward of a commandment is the commandment itself."

Each meaning of eikev guides us. As Jews we have a responsibility in our covenant with Hashem.

The fulfillment of our part in this covenant brings us the ultimate reward of happiness and joy in the performance of our part in the world. As a consequence of our actions, Hashem also fulfills the promises of the land of Yisrael with all of its riches and spiritual rewards that are a natural part of the land. Hashem will cause our efforts to succeed and prosper and He will grant us the ultimate reward of Peace. This is not just the Peace between Yisrael and its neighbors, it is the inner Peace that we will have with ourselves in knowing that our actions on this Earth have made our lives and the lives of others worthwhile. That is the ultimate reward. © 2018 Rabbi D.S. Levin

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Our Parashah begins: "This shall be the reward Eikev tishme'un / if you listen to these ordinances, and you observe and perform them..." Rashi z"l comments on the wording: If you will listen even to the lighter Mitzvot that a person usually treads on with his Eikev / heel. [Until here from Rashi]

R' Ben Zion Rabinowitz shlita (Biala Rebbe in Yerushalayim) asks: What is meant by a "lighter" Mitzvah? Are we not taught in Pirkei Avot to treat all Mitzvot with equal seriousness, as we do not know the reward for any Mitzvah?

He explains: In the marketplace, we find that goods are not priced based on their inherent value, but rather based on supply and demand. Out of season clothing, for example, is hard to sell at full price no matter how high its quality.

Mitzvot, too, seem to have seasons. Teshuvah and prayer with extra concentration are "in season" around Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but neglected at other times. Torah study is neglected by many, especially the youth, during the summer months. This is not how it should be! We all know deep down that there are no times that are more appropriate or less appropriate for serving Hashem. Nevertheless, we treat different Mitzvot "lightly" at various times.

The Biala Rebbe adds: R' Yitzchak Luria z"l ("The Arizal"; 1534-1572) teaches that, from the time of Creation until the End of Days, no two moments are alike. Each instant was created for a unique purpose, such that Torah study, prayer, or another Mitzvah missed today can never fully be made up. There is no moment when we are not called upon to serve Hashem. (Mevasser Tov: Chiddushei Shabbat, Introduction)



"Your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem, your Elokim, Who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery... And you might say in your heart, 'My strength and the might of

my hand made me all this wealth!' Then you shall remember Hashem, your Elokim--that it was He Who gives you strength to make wealth..." (8:14, 17-18)

R' Nosson Lewin z"l (1857-1926; rabbi of Rzeszw, Poland) writes: The Torah commands us here to remember at all times that Hashem is Good and does good, and that everything that any created being has is from His "Hand." Therefore, all created beings are obligated to thank Hashem for everything He does for them.

He continues: Rambam z"l teaches in his Moreh Nevochim, "The verse (Tehilim 16:8), 'I have set Hashem before me always!' is a major principle of the Torah and an attribute of the Tzaddikim who walk before Hashem. By following this verse's teaching, a person attains Yir'ah / fear, subdues himself before Hashem, and is afraid to sin against Him. [Until here from Rambam]

It follows, continues R' Lewin, that one who forgets Hashem will lose the trait of Yir'ah and its place will be taken by haughtiness. [Ed. Note: R' Lewin appears to be reading our verse to say, "Your heart will become haughty and you will already have forgotten Hashem."] This, writes R' Lewin, is why our Sages say that one who is haughty is considered to have denied G-d. (Bet Nadiv p. 59-60)

"With seventy Nefesh / soul[s] your ancestors descended to Egypt." (10:22)

Midrash Vayikra Rabbah (4:6) observes that Yaakov's family numbered seventy people, yet they are called "Nefesh" / soul (singular). In contrast, even when speaking of a time that Esav's family numbered only six people, the Torah calls them "Nefashot" / souls (plural).

R' Yitzchak Shmelkes z"l (1828-1906; rabbi of Lvov, Galicia) explains: A Rasha / wicked person doesn't want others to be as wicked as he is, for then they might act wickedly toward him. A thief doesn't want others to steal, for then they might steal from him. Thus, the wise king [Shlomo] says (Mishlei 21:10), "The soul of the evildoer desires evil; his companion [in evil] will not find favor in his eyes." Since evildoers can never truly unite, the Torah calls them Nefashot.

In contrast, the ultimate desire of a Tzaddik is that all mankind be righteous, just as he is. This, concludes R' Shmelkes, explains the Gemara (Yevamot 61a) which says that only the Jewish People are called "Adam" -- a word that has no plural form, paralleling the unity of purpose that the righteous desire. (Bet Yitzchak)

"You (plural) shall teach them to your (plural) children to discuss them, while you (singular) sit in your home, while you (singular) walk on the way, when you

(singular) retire and when you (singular) arise." (11:19)

Why does the Torah change plural to singular in the middle of the verse? R' Yitzchak Menachem Weinberg shlita (Tolner Rebbe in Yerushalayim) explains: The Torah is teaching that successful parenting requires a person to work on himself. "You" (singular) means "You alone!" Do not rely on the merits of distinguished ancestors. Do not think that your behavior when you are alone, when no one sees you, does not matter. If a person serves Hashem even when he sits alone at home, when he walks alone on the way, when he retires to bed alone and when he arises alone, then he can teach his children. (Chamin B'Motzai Shabbat: Devarim p.82)

From the Haftarah: "Can a woman forget her nursing, withdraw from feeling compassion for the child of her womb? Even were these to forget, I will not forget you." (Yeshayah 49:15)

Midrash Yalkut Shimoni on this verse records a conversation between the Jewish People and Hashem. The Jewish People said, "Hashem, since You never forget, perhaps You will never forget the sin of the Golden Calf." Hashem replied, "I will forget that!" The Jewish People said, "If You are capable of forgetting, perhaps You will forget the events at Har Sinai." Hashem answered, "I will not forget! In reality, I never forget, but for the good of the Jewish People, I act as if I have forgotten." [Until here from the Midrash]

R' Yerachmiel Shulman z"l Hy"d (Menahel Ruchani of the Bet Yosef-Novardok Yeshiva in Pinsk, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) observes: Human nature is to forget the good others do and to remember only the bad. Even one hurt caused by another person can make someone forget a thousand kindnesses. Hashem's way, however, is the opposite: He "remembers" the good event--the Giving of the Torah--and "forgets" the bad event--the making of the Golden Calf--even though the good event occurred earlier than the bad one. R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes that the Torah calls upon us to emulate this -- for example (Devarim 23:8), "You shall not despise an Egyptian, for you were a sojourner in his land." Although the Egyptians enslaved our ancestors, they first took them in in their time of need (during the famine), and we must remember that.

(Peninei
Ha'shlaimut:
Sha'ar
Ha'savlanut
1:7) © 2022 S.
Katz and torah.org

