

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Eikev

Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25;

Torah Reading for Week of August 10-16, 2003

Like the other Parshiot in the Book of Deuteronomy, the Parshah of *Eikev* ("Because") consists entirely of Moses' final address to the people of Israel, begun on the 1st of Shevat in the year 2488 from creation (1273 BCE), and concluding 37 days later on the 7th of Adar, the day of Moses' passing.

In this segment of his "repetition of the Torah" Moses extols the blessings of the land that the people are

about to enter (without him), but warns that these blessings are dependent upon the people remaining faithful to the covenant they entered into with G-d at Mount Sinai to keep His Torah and fulfill its commandments (mitzvot):

And it shall come to pass, because you hearken to these laws, and keep, and do them; that G-d your G-d shall keep unto you the covenant and the kindness which He swore to your fathers.

And He will love you, and bless you, and multiply you; and He will bless the fruit of your womb, and the fruit of your land, your corn, and your wine, and your oil, the increase of your cattle, and the flocks of your sheep, in the land which He swore to your fathers to give you.

You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall not be a sterile man or barren woman

Commentary

BECAUSE YOU HEARKEN TO THESE LAWS (DEUTERONOMY 7:12)

The commentaries dwell on the Hebrew word *eikev* in this verse — an uncommon synonym for "because". Many see a connection with the word *akeiv* (same spelling, different pronunciation), which means "heel".

Rashi interprets this as an allusion to those mitzvot which a person tramples with his heels — the Torah is telling us to be equally diligent with all of G-d's commandments, no less with those that seem less significant to our finite minds.

Ibn Ezra and **Nachmanides** interpret it in the sense of "in the end" (i.e., "in the heels of" or in the sense that the heel is at the extremity of the body) — the reward being something that follows the action. A similar interpretation is given by **Ohr HaChaim**, who explains that true satisfaction and fulfillment comes at the "end" — the complete fulfillment of all the mitzvot, and by **Rabbeinu Bechayei**, who sees it as an allusion that the reward we do receive in this world is but a lowly and marginal (the "heel") aspect of the true worth of the mitzvot.

Baal HaTurim gives a gematriatic explanation: the word *eikev* is used because it has a numerical value of 172 — the number of words in the Ten Commandments.

Tzemach Tzedek (the 3rd Chabad Rebbe) sees it as a reference to *ikvata d'meshichah*, the generation of "the heels of Moshiach" (the last generation of the Exile is called "the heels of Moshiach" by our sages because: a) they are the spiritually lowest generation, due to the

"descent of the generations"; b) it is the generation in which the footsteps of Moshiach can already be heard). This is the generation that will "hearken to these laws", as Maimonides writes: "The Torah has already promised that the people of Israel will return to G-d at the end of their exile, and will be immediately redeemed."

The **Lubavitcher Rebbe** says: Our commitment to Torah should be such that it permeates us entirely, so that also our heel — the lowest and the least sensitive part of the person — "hearkens to these laws, observes them and does them." In other words, our relationship with G-d should not be confined to the holy days of the year, or to certain "holy" hours we devote to prayer and study, but should also embrace our everyday activities. Indeed, this "lowly" and "spiritually insensitive" part of our life is the foundation of our relationship with G-d, in the same way that the heel is the base upon which the entire body stands and moves.

IF YOU SHOULD SAY IN YOUR HEART: THESE NATIONS ARE MORE NUMEROUS THAN I; HOW CAN I DISPOSSESS THEM? YOU SHALL NOT BE AFRAID OF THEM (7:17-18)

When you understand that the nations are more numerous than you, and that you, with your own power, cannot defeat them but are totally dependent on G-d's help, then you need not fear them. But if you begin to believe that you can defeat them on your own, then you indeed have great cause for fear.

(Maasei Hashem)

ALL THE MITZVAH... SHALL YOU OBSERVE TO DO (8:1)

Do not be terrified by them; for G-d your G-d is among you, a great and awesome G-d.

The only danger they pose is the spiritual one:

The carvings of their gods shall you burn with fire; you shall not desire the silver or gold that is on them, or take it to you, lest you be snared with it, for it is an abomination to G-d your G-d. Neither shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you become accursed like it; you shall utterly detest it, and you shall utterly abhor it, for it is taboo.

A 40-Year Lesson

All the mitzvah which I command you this day shall you observe to do, that you may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which G-d swore to your fathers.

And you shall remember all the way which G-d your G-d led you these forty years in the wilderness... He afflicted you, and suffered you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you

king of flesh and blood who had an only son, whom he provided with maintenance once a year, so that he would visit his father once a year only. Thereupon he provided for his maintenance every day, so that he called on him every day. The same with Israel. One who had four or five children would worry, saying: Perhaps no manna will come down tomorrow, and all will die of hunger? Thus they were found to turn their attention to their Father in Heaven.

(Talmud, Yoma 76a)

For forty years, the Children of Israel were sustained by “bread from heaven,” instilling in them the recognition that sustenance comes entirely from G-d; that no matter how much a person toils to earn his livelihood, he receives no more, and no less, than what has been allotted him from Above.

The challenge is to retain this recognition also after entering the land and making the transition to “bread from the earth.” Even when we are nourished by bread which we earn by “the sweat of our brow,” we must remember that, in truth, our sustenance comes from G-d, and that we never receive an iota more or an iota less than what is allotted us from Above.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

MAN DOES NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE, BUT BY THE WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF G-D DOES MAN LIVE (8:3)

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Eikev

*Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25;
Torah Reading for Week of August 10-16, 2003*

among you, or among your cattle. And G-d will take away from you all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which you know, upon you; but will lay them upon all those who hate you.

Confidence

If the people remain true to G-d, they have nothing to fear from their powerful enemies:

If you should say in your heart: These nations are more numerous than I; how can I dispossess them...?

Commentary

The simple meaning of the phrase “all the mitzvah” is the entire body of divine commandment — all the mitzvot. The Midrashic interpretation is: do the whole mitzvah. If you begin a good deed, finish it, for a mitzvah is credited to the one who concludes the task. Thus it is written: “And Joseph’s bones, which the children of Israel took out of Egypt, they buried in Shechem.” Yet it was Moses himself who took Joseph’s bones out of Egypt! (see Exodus 13:19). But since he did not conclude the task, and the children of Israel concluded it, it is called by their name.

(Rashi)

All the generations of history labored to bring Moshiach, and certainly their contribution is greater than ours. Nevertheless, we are the “Generation of Redemption”, since “a mitzvah is credited to the one who concludes the task.”

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AND HE AFFLICTED YOU, AND SUFFERED YOU TO HUNGER, AND FED YOU WITH MANNA... IN ORDER TO MAKE YOU KNOW THAT MAN DOES NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE (8:3)

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was asked by his disciples: Why didn’t the manna come down for Israel once a year?

He replied: I shall give a parable. This thing may be compared to a

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Eikev

Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25;

Torah Reading for Week of August 10-16, 2003

know not and which your fathers did not know; in order to make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but by the word that proceeds out of the mouth of G-d does man live.

Your garment grew not worn upon you, nor did your foot swell, these forty years.

You shall consider in your heart, that, as a man chastens his son, so G-d your G-d chastens you.

The Blessed Land

G-d is bringing you into a good land, a land of water courses, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills.

A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil, and [date] honey.

A land in which you shall eat bread without scarceness, you shall not lack any thing in it; a land the stones of which are iron, and out of whose hills you may dig brass.

You shall eaten and be replete, and bless G-d

Commentary

At the core of every existence is a divine utterance that created it ("Let there be light", "Let the earth sprout forth vegetation", etc.), which remains nestled within it to continuously supply it with being and life. The soul of man descends into the trappings and trials of physical life in order to unite with and elevate the "sparks of holiness" buried in the food it eats, the clothes it wears, and all the other objects and forces of the physical existence it interacts with. For when a person utilizes something, directly or indirectly, to serve the Creator, he penetrates its shell of mundanity, revealing and realizing its Divine essence and purpose.

Therein lies a deeper meaning to the verse (Psalms 107:5): "The hungry and the thirsty, in them does their soul wrap itself." A person may desire food and sense only his body's hunger; but in truth, his physical craving is but the expression and external "packaging" of a deeper yen — his soul's craving for the sparks of holiness that are the object of its mission in physical life.

(Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezeritch)

This explains a most puzzling fact of life: how is it that man, the highest form of life, derives vitality and sustenance from the lower tiers of creation — the animal, vegetable and mineral? But the true source of nourishment is the "Divine utterance" in every creation, and, as the Kabbalists teach, the "lowlier" the creation, the loftier the divine energy it contains. In this, the universe resembles a collapsed wall, in which the highest stones fall the farthest.

(Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

YOU SHALL CONSIDER IN YOUR HEART, THAT, AS A MAN CHASTENS

HIS SON, SO G-D YOUR G-D CHASTENS YOU (8:5)

When a father punishes his child, the suffering he inflicts on himself is greater than anything experienced by the child. So it is with G-d: His pain is greater than our pain.

(Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev)

LEST YOUR HEART GROW HAUGHTY (8:14)

Asked Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov: The Torah repeatedly warns against pride and extols humility. Nevertheless, this precept is not counted as one of the 613 commandments. Why isn't it a mitzvah to be humble?

Answered the Baal Shem Tov: If humility were a mitzvah, the ego of man would count it among its achievements.

WHO LED YOU THROUGH THAT GREAT AND TERRIBLE DESERT... [A PLACE OF] THIRST WHERE THERE IS NO WATER (8:15)

The "Holy Ari" (master Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria, 1534-1572) writes that the last generation of the *Galut* (exile) is the reincarnation of Moses' generation — the "generation of the desert".

Indeed, ours is a generation of "thirst without water." It is a generation that thirsts for the truth, thirsts for meaning and purpose in life. But the water to quench this thirst, the knowledge to address the why and how of existence, is elusive to them, sealed behind barriers of ignorance and alienation.

But the thirst is there, awaiting satisfaction. Ours is a generation prepared to drink, if only they would be provided with the water they know

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Eikev

Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25;
Torah Reading for Week of August 10-16, 2003

your G-d for the good land which He has given you.

With abundance and plenty, however, come the danger that "your heart grow haughty" and,

You will say in your heart: My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth...

No less dangerous is to begin to believe in one's own righteousness:

Speak not you in your heart: Because of my righteousness G-d has brought me in to possess this land...

Not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart do you go to possess their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations G-d your G-d does drive them out from before you, and that He may perform the word which G-d swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Later in the Parshah, we hear more on the specialty of the Land:

The land into which you go to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence you came

Commentary

not where to seek.

(from an address by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, summer of 1957)

FOR G-D YOUR G-D... IS A CONSUMING FIRE (9:3)

G-dliness is a blazing flame; Torah study and prayer require a flaming heart. Between coldness and heresy stands an extremely thin wall.

(Rabbi Shalom DovBer of Lubavitch)

The chassid Rabbi Nechemia of Dubrovna told:

I once saw a Russian soldier being whipped. His crime? While standing watch on a winter night, his feet had frozen in their boots. "Had you remembered the oath you took to serve the czar," his commander berated him, "the memory would have kept you warm."

"For 25 years," concluded Rabbi Nechemia, "this incident inspired my service of the Almighty."

SPEAK NOT IN YOUR HEART... "BECAUSE OF MY RIGHTEOUSNESS" (9:4)

Better a sinful person who knows that he has sinned, than a righteous person who knows that he is righteous.

(The "Seer of Lublin", Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz)

AND I GRABBED HOLD OF THE TWO TABLETS (9:17)

The Tablets were each six handbreadths long and three handbreadths

wide. Moses held two handbreadths [of the Tablets' length], G-d held two handbreadths, and in between were two handbreadths of space. Moses' hands prevailed, and he grabbed hold of the Tablets and broke them.

(Midrash Tanchuma)

THUS I FELL DOWN BEFORE G-D FORTY DAYS AND FORTY NIGHTS... BECAUSE G-D HAD SAID HE WOULD DESTROY YOU (9:25)

There was not a corner of the heavens with which Moses did not grapple to attain G-d's forgiveness of Israel...

When Israel committed that act, Moses arose to appease G-d and said: "Master of the Universe! They have given You an assistant, and You are annoyed with them? Why, this Calf which they have made will be Your assistant: You will cause the sun to rise while it will cause the moon to rise; You will look after the stars and it will see to the constellations; You will cause the dew to descend and it will cause the winds to blow; You will make the rains come down, while it will be responsible for the growth of plants."

Said G-d to him: "Moses! You err as they do! For there is nothing real in it."

Said Moses: "If this be the case, 'Why should Your wrath burn against Your people?'"

(Midrash Rabbah)

I PRAYED TO G-D, AND SAID: "O G-D, DESTROY NOT YOUR PEOPLE... WHICH YOU HAVE BROUGHT OUT OF EGYPT (9:26)

What was his idea in mentioning here the going out of Egypt? Because

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Eikev

Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25;
Torah Reading for Week of August 10-16, 2003

out, where you did sow your seed, and did water it by foot, like a vegetable garden. [Rather,] the land into which you go to possess it is a land of hills and valleys, and drinks water of the rain of heaven.

A land which G-d your G-d cares for: the eyes of G-d your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

Commentary

it was thus that Moses pleaded: “Master of the Universe, see from which place You have brought them forth—from Egypt where everyone worships lambs.”

Said Rabbi Huna in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: It can be compared to a wise man who opened a perfumery shop for his son in a street frequented by harlots. The street did its work, the business also did its share, and the son’s youth likewise contributed its part, with the result that the son fell into evil ways. When the father came and caught him among the harlots, he began to shout: “I will kill you!” But his friend was there, and he said: “You were the cause of this youth’s corruption, and you shout at him? You set aside all other professions and have taught him only to be a perfumer; you skipped over all other districts and opened a shop for him just in the street where harlots dwell...”

This is what Moses said: “Master of the Universe! You passed over the entire world to have Your children to be enslaved only in Egypt, where all worshipped lambs... Bear in mind whence You have brought them forth!”

Another interpretation:

This is what Moses said: “Master of the Universe! When I asked You what their merit was that You should redeem them, since they are idolaters, You said: ‘You see them only now as idolaters, but I can foresee them departing from Egypt, and My dividing the Red Sea for them, and bringing them into the wilderness, and giving them the Torah and revealing Myself unto them face to face, and they accepting My kingship—yet denying Me at the end of forty days by making the Calf!’ (This is the meaning of what G-d said to Moses at the burning bush, “I have heard their cries”—I hear already their cries around

The Sin of the Golden Calf

Moses reminds the people how “Also in Horeb you provoked G-d to anger, so that G-d was angry with you to have destroyed you.”

Because you hearken to these laws (Deuteronomy 7:12)

The commentaries dwell on the Hebrew word *eikev* in this verse — an uncommon synonym for “because”. Many see a connection with the word *akeiv* (same spelling, different pronunciation), which means “heel”.

Rashi interprets this as an allusion to those mitzvot which a person tramples with his heels — the Torah is telling us to be equally diligent with all of G-d’s commandments, no less with those that seem less significant to our finite minds.

Ibn Ezra and **Nachmanides** interpret it in the sense of

the Calf).

“Since You have told me of their making a Golden Calf long before You did deliver them,” argued Moses, “why do You seek to slay them now that they have made it?” It was for this reason that Moses mentioned the Exodus from Egypt in his plea for mercy.

Another interpretation:

It can be compared to a king who had an uncultivated field and who said to a tenant-laborer: “Go improve it and convert it into a vineyard.” The laborer went and tended the field and planted it as a vineyard. The vines grew and produced wine, which, however, became sour. When the king saw that the wine had become sour, he said to the laborer: “Go and cut it all down; what is the use to me of a vineyard that produces vinegar?” But the laborer pleaded: “O my lord and king! Consider what sums you invested before the vineyard was planted, and now You want to cut it all down! Do not give me the reply, ‘But its wine becomes sour,’ for this is due to the newness of the vineyard, and a freshly-planted vineyard cannot produce good wine.”

Similarly, when Israel made the Golden Calf, G-d intended to destroy them, but Moses pleaded: “Master of the Universe! Did You not bring them forth from Egypt, a place of idol-worshippers? They are yet young, as it for it says (Hosea 11:1), ‘When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.’ Be patient with them yet awhile and go with them, and they will yet perform good deeds before You.”

(Midrash Rabbah)

REMEMBER ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND ISRAEL (9:27)

Moses pleaded: “Master of the Universe! Why are You angry with Israel?” “Because they have broken the Ten Commandments,” said G-d.

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Eikev

Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25;
Torah Reading for Week of August 10-16, 2003

"in the end" (i.e., "in the heels of" or in the sense that the heel is at the extremity of the body) — the reward being something that follows the action. A similar interpretation is given by **Ohr HaChaim**, who explains that true satisfaction and fulfillment comes at the "end" — the complete fulfillment of all the mitzvot, and by **Rabbeinu Bechayei**, who sees it as an allusion that the reward we do receive in this world is but a lowly and marginal (the "heel") aspect of the true worth of the mitzvot.

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172 — the number of words in the Ten Commandments.

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The **Lubavitcher Rebbe** says: Our commitment to Torah should be such that it permeates us entirely, so that also our heel — the lowest and the least sensitive part of the person — "hearkens to these laws, observes them and does them." In other words, our relationship with G-d should not be confined to the holy days of the

Commentary

"Well," said Moses, "they possess a source from which they can make repayment... Remember that You tested Abraham with ten trials? Let those ten serve as compensation for these ten." This is why Moses said, "Remember Abraham..."

Another interpretation:

Moses spoke thus: "Master of the Universe! Do the dead live [in the World to Come]?"

Said G-d: "Moses, have you become a heretic?"

But Moses answered: "If the dead are not brought to life in the World to Come, then You are free to do all that You intend. But if they be alive, what will You say to the Patriarchs when they will arise and seek from You fulfillment of the promise which You have made them? What answer will You give them? For did You not promise them that You would increase their children as the stars of heaven?"

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND I MADE AN ARK OF SHITTIM WOOD (10:3)

According to the Talmud, the *shittah* was a type of cedar; in Rabbi Saadiah Gaon's (Arabic) translation of Torah it is rendered *shant*, or "acacia."

Chassidic teaching sees the word *shittim* as related to the word *shetut*, "folly"—an allusion to the fact that the function of the Mishkan was

to transform the folly of materialism into "folly of holiness"—commitment to G-d that transcends the rationale and normalcy of "the way things are."

AND I STAYED IN THE MOUNTAIN, LIKE THE FIRST [FORTY] DAYS , FORTY DAYS AND FORTY NIGHTS (10:10)

Just like the first 40 days, to receive the First Tablets, were with good will, so were these the 3rd 40 days, to receive the Second Tablets) with good will; but the middle 40 days, in which that I stood [on the mountain] to pray for you, were in anger.

(Rashi)

G-D HEARKENED TO ME AT THAT TIME ALSO, AND G-D WOULD NOT DESTROY YOU (10:10)

Moses absolved his Creator of His vow. When Israel made the Calf, Moses began to persuade G-d to forgive them; but G-d said: "Moses, I have already taken an oath that 'He that sacrifices unto the gods... shall be destroyed' (Exodus 22:19), and I cannot retract an oath which has proceeded from My mouth."

Said Moses: "Master of the Universe! Did You not grant me the power of annulment of oaths? (see Numbers 30:3)? If a jurist desires that others should respect his laws, he must be the first to observe them. Since You have commanded me concerning the annulment of vows, it is only right and proper that You should follow this procedure Yourself."

Whereupon Moses wrapped himself in his *tallit* and seated himself in the posture of a rabbinical judge, and G-d stood before him as one asking for the annulment of his vow; for so it says, "Then I sat in the mount"

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Eikev

Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25;

Torah Reading for Week of August 10-16, 2003

year, or to certain "holy" hours we devote to prayer and study, but should also embrace our everyday activities. Indeed, this "lowly" and "spiritually insensi-

tive" part of our life is the foundation of our relationship with G-d, in the same way that the heel is the base upon which the entire body stands and moves.

Commentary

(Deuteronomy 9:9)...

What did Moses say to Him? A most difficult thing. Rabbi Yochanan said: The difficult thing he said was: "Do You now regret Your vow?" G-d replied: "I regret now the evil which I said I would do unto My people." When Moses heard this, he proclaimed: "Be it absolved for You, be it absolved for You. There is neither vow nor oath any longer..."

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND NOW, ISRAEL: WHAT DOES THE L-RD YOUR G-D ASK OF YOU? ONLY TO FEAR G-D (10:12)

Is fear of G-d a minor thing? Yes, for Moses it is a minor thing.

(Talmud, Berachot 33b)

At first glance, the [Talmud's] answer is incomprehensible, since the verse says "What does G-d ask of you" [not of Moses!]

But the explanation is as follows:

Each and every soul of the house of Israel contains within it something of the quality of our teacher Moses, for he is one of the "seven shepherds" who feed vitality and G-dliness to the community of the souls of Israel.... Moses is the sum of them all, called the "shepherd of faith" (*raaya meheimna*) in the sense that he nourishes the community of Israel with the knowledge and recognition of G-d...

So although who is the man who dares presume in his heart to approach and attain even a thousandth part of the level of the faithful shepherd, nevertheless, an infinitesimal fringe and minute particle of his great goodness and light illuminates every Jew in each and every generation.

(Tanya)

G-D... TAKES NO BRIBE (10:17)

What kind of bribe might G-d take? Even if a completely pious person commits a transgression, G-d does not deduct from his merits to

compensate for his sin, but will punish him for the sin and give him full reward for his good deeds.

(Nachmanides)

FOR THE LAND INTO WHICH YOU GO... DRINKS WATER OF THE RAIN OF HEAVEN (11:10-11)

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov would say:

There are two types of fields: an irrigated field, and a field watered by rain.

The scholar's soul is an irrigated field, devotedly developed and nurtured by her farmer. The soul of the simple Jew is a rain-nourished field, surrendering herself to the whims of the heavens, humbly awaiting blessing and stimulation from above.

The irrigated field yields a harvest that is superior, in quantity and quality, to that of her passive sister. But the rain-watered field is a truer, purer reflection on her Heavenly Maker.

FOR THE LAND... IS NOT AS THE LAND OF EGYPT.. WHERE YOU DID SOW YOUR SEED, AND DID WATER IT BY FOOT, LIKE A VEGETABLE GARDEN... [RATHER] IT DRINKS WATER OF THE RAIN OF HEAVEN (11:10-11)

"Rain" represents the reciprocal relationship between heaven and earth. "A vapor rises from the earth" to the heavens, and the heavens return it as rain which "quenches the face of the land" (Genesis 2:6). This represents the spiritual truth that "an arousal from below evokes an arousal from above" — that G-d responds to the efforts of man, reciprocating our prayers, yearnings and deeds with nurture from Above.

This is the doctrine of the rain-watered land. Egypt, however, was nourished not by descending rain but by the overflow of the Nile, which would periodically flood the land. The spiritual "Egyptian" is one who does not recognize the Heavenly source of the blessings of life. He believes that all is generated from below — that everything he has and has achieved is of his own making.

The people of Israel had been subjected to the Egyptian mentality for four generations. Thus they had to spend 40 years in the desert during

*(Talmud, Berachot 40a)***PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY****Eikev***Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25;
Torah Reading for Week of August 10-16, 2003***Commentary**

which they were subjected to a diametrically opposite set of circumstance, in which one's daily bread descends from heaven and one's own efforts have no effect on the result. Only after this lesson in the true source of life could they enter the Land that "drinks water of the rain of heaven" — where man's efforts are crucial and significant, yet are permeated with a recognition of, and dependence upon, the true Source of All.

*(The Chassidic Masters)***TO LOVE G-D YOUR G-D AND TO SERVE HIM WITH ALL YOUR HEART (11:13)**

What is the service of the heart? This is prayer.

(Talmud, Taanit 2a)

One should begin praying only in a contemplative state of mind. The early Chassidim would meditate for an hour before praying.

(Talmud, Berachot 30b)

When Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi neared his twentieth year, he decided — with the consent of his wife, Rebbetzin Sterna — to travel to a center of Torah learning and service of G-d.

At that time (circa 1764) Vilna and Mezeritch were the great Jewish capitals of Eastern Europe. Vilna was the seat of Rabbi Eliyahu, the famed Gaon of Vilna, and Mezeritch was the hometown of Rabbi DovBer (the "Maggid"), leader of the Chassidic movement.

Related Rabbi Schneur Zalman: "I debated as to where I should go. I knew that in Vilna one was taught how to study, and that in Mezeritch one could learn how to pray. To study I was somewhat able, but of prayer I knew very little. So I went to Mezeritch.

"The Almighty blessed me with making the right choice. I became a devoted chassid of our Rebbe's and, upon my return to Vitebsk, I guided my disciples in the teachings of Chassidism, which were well received by them."

*(Likkutei Dibburim)***I WILL SEND GRASS IN YOUR FIELDS FOR YOUR CATTLE, THAT YOU MAY EAT AND BE FULL (11:15)**

Said Rabbi Judah in the name of Rav: A person is forbidden to eat before he feeds his animals, for it is written "[I will send grass in your fields] for your cattle" and only after that, " that you may eat and be full."

AND YOU WILL PERISH QUICKLY FROM OFF THE GOOD LAND WHICH G-D GIVES YOU. AND YOU SHALL PLACE THESE WORDS OF MINE (11:17-18)

Also after you are exiled, you must distinguish yourselves with the mitzvot: put on tefillin, make mezuzot, so that these not be new to you when you return. Thus [the prophet] says (Jeremiah 31:20): "Establish for yourself signs."

(Sifri; Rashi)

AND YOU SHALL PLACE THESE WORDS OF MINE IN YOUR HEART AND IN YOUR SOUL; AND BIND THEM FOR A SIGN UPON YOUR HAND, AND THEY WILL BE AS TEFILLIN BETWEEN YOUR EYES. AND YOU SHALL TEACH THEM YOUR CHILDREN... (11:18-19)

Just as it is incumbent upon every Jew to put on *tefillin* every day, so is there an unequivocal duty which rests upon every individual, from the great scholar to the most simple of folk, to set aside a half-hour each day in which to think about the education of his children.

(Rabbi Shalom DovBer of Lubavitch)

IN THE LAND WHICH G-D SWORE TO YOUR FOREFATHERS TO GIVE TO THEM, AS THE DAYS OF HEAVEN UPON THE EARTH (11:21)

The verse does not say, "to give to you" but "to give to them": from here we derive a reference to the resurrection of the dead from the Torah

*(Sifri; Rashi)***TO WALK IN ALL HIS WAYS (11:22)**

He is merciful; you, too, should be merciful. He does acts of kindness; you, too, should do acts of kindness.

(Rashi)

G-d clothes the naked, as it is written: "And G-d made for Adam and for his wife coats of skin, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21); so should you, too, clothe the naked. G-d visits the sick, as it is written: "And G-d appeared to him by the Oaks of Mamre"; so should you, too, visit the sick. G-d comforts mourners, as it is written: "And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that G-d blessed Isaac his son" (Genesis 25:11); so should you, too, comfort mourners. G-d buries the dead, as it is written: "And He buried him in the valley" (Deuteronomy 34:6); so should you, too, bury the dead.

*(Talmud, Sotah 14a)***CLEAVE TO HIM (11:22)**

Is it possible to say such a thing? G-d is a "consuming fire"! But the meaning of this commandment is this: cleave to the students and sages of Torah, and it shall be considered as if you did cleave to Him.

(Rashi; Sifri)

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

THE SECOND CHAPTER OF THE SHEMA

A basic component of the Torah reading of Eikev are the nine verses (Deuteronomy 11:13-21) which constitute the second *parshah* (“section” or “chapter”) of the Sh’ma.

Last week’s reading of Va’etchanan included the six verses that make up the Sh’ma’s first section (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). A third section (Numbers 15:37-41) completes the 20 verses which the Jew is obligated recite each morning and each evening of his life. Together, the Shma’s three chapters enumerate the fundamental beliefs and practices of the Jewish faith: the oneness of G-d, our love of Him, Torah study, education, the mitzvot of *tefillin*, *mezuzah* and *tzitzit*, the concept of reward and punishment and the remembrance of the Exodus.

But while the third section contains precepts (the mitzvah of *tzitzit* and the remembrance of the Exodus) not contained in the first two, a large part of the second section seems but a repetition of what has already been stated in the first. The first section reads:

Hear O Israel, G-d is our G-d, G-d is one. You shall love G-d your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words, which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart; you shall teach them thoroughly to your children, and you shall speak of them when sitting in your home and walking on the road, when you lie down and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as *tefillin* between your eyes. You shall write them upon the doorposts of your home and gates.

The second section of the Sh’ma reads (the “repetitions” passages are in **bold**):

And it shall come to pass if you diligently hearken to My commandments which I command you today, **to love G-d your G-d** and to serve Him **with all your hearts and with all your souls**; I will give the rain of your land in its due season, the early rain and the late rain, and you shall gather your grain, your wine and your oil. And I will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you shall eat and be sated. Take heed for yourselves, lest your heart be led astray, and you turn away and worship alien gods and bow down to them. G-d’s anger will then be inflamed against you, and He will withhold the heavens that there be no rain, and that the earth not yield its produce; and you will swiftly perish

from the good land that G-d is giving you. **You shall place these words of Mine upon your hearts and upon your souls; you shall bind them as a sign upon your hands, and they shall be tefillin between your eyes. And you shall teach them to your children to speak of them when sitting in your home and walking on the road, when you lie down and when you rise. You shall write them upon the doorposts of your home and gates.** In order that your days be multiplied, and the days of your children, upon the land that G-d vowed to your fathers to give to them for as long as the heavens are above the earth.

The most obvious difference between the two sections is that first simply instructs the Jew to pursue his relationship with G-d, without promising reward or threatening punishment. The second section, while enjoining us to do the very same things as the first, informs us of the benefits of doing so (“I will give the rain of your land in its due season... and you shall eat and be sated”; “In order that your days be multiplied... upon the land”) and warns us of the consequences of transgression (“He will withhold the heavens”; “you will soon be perish from the good land”). Other than that, however, the second section seems a repetition of the first, with only minor differences in wording and syntax.

Rashi, in his commentary on these verses, cites several further examples of how the second section introduces a concept or injunction not included in the first. These include:

2) In the second section the commandment to love G-d comes in the plural (“with all your hearts and with all your souls”) as opposed to the singular (“with all your heart, with all your soul”) employed by the first section. The first section, explains Rashi, is “an injunction to the individual,” while the second is “an injunction to the community.” (This difference is repeated throughout the two sections. The Hebrew language distinguishes between second person singular and second person plural (as Old English does with “thee” and “you”); the entire first section speaks in second person singular, the second section, in second person plural.)

3) In the second section, the commandments to don *tefillin*, study and teach Torah and affix *mezuzot* immediately follow the warning “you will swiftly perish from the good land that G-d is giving you.” This, says Rashi (citing the Sifri), is to teach us that “also after you are exiled, you must distinguish yourselves with the mitzvot: put on *tefillin*, make *mezuzot*, so that these not be new to you when you return.”

(There are many instances in which the Torah speaks of the mitzvot as laws to be observed in the Holy Land

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

— most notably in Deuteronomy 6:1-3, the verses preceding the first section of the Sh'ma. Hence the need for the Torah to reiterate them here, after alluding to a time when the people of Israel will be exiled from their land.))

An examination of the two sections reveals more differences between them:

4) The first section enjoins to love G-d “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” The second speaks only of “hearts” and “souls,” omitting “might”

5) In the first section, the commandment to study and teach Torah precedes the commandment to don *tefillin*. In the second section the order is reversed.

Gift of Sight, Creation of Sound

These five differences — explains the Lubavitcher Rebbe — all stem from a deeper, more basic difference between the first and second sections of the Sh'ma. This difference is also reflected in the two Torah-sections — -- *Va'etchanan* and *Eikev* — in which they appear.

There are two basic ways in which a person may acquire something: it may be granted to him as a gift, or he may earn it by his own toil and achievement. Each mode of acquisition has its advantages and disadvantages. An attainment — whether material or spiritual — that is based on a person's unaided efforts, will always be limited by the extent of his talents and resources; only a grant from someone wealthier, wiser or greater than himself can bestow upon him something that transcends his own inherent limitations.

On the other hand, nothing is a person's own as something he has pieced together by the sweat of his brow, mind or heart. “A person would rather one bushel of his own grain,” says the Talmud, “than nine of his fellow.” The home he himself built, the idea he himself conceived, the feeling he himself developed, are far more precious to him than an inherited mansion or the knowledge and inspiration imparted by his superiors.

And more enduring. His own “one bushel” may be less, both in quantity and quality, than the gifted nine, but it is unequivocally his. What is given may be taken, what is revealed may be concealed, and feelings roused by a charismatic master or an overwhelming “experience” may fade when the inspiring mentor or event recedes; but what a person has himself created is his forever, real to him under all and any circumstances.

The difference between the granted and the earned is also the difference between two of our major senses —

sight and hearing. Sight “gives” the mind the information all at once, conveying a scene, with its thousands if not millions of details, as a single imprint upon the retina. The eye sees it all simultaneously; the mind then proceeds to process all this information, drawing from the all-embracing image imparted by the eye.

Our faculty of hearing functions in the very opposite manner: we hear but one sound at a time. We cannot grasp the entire idea at once: we can only hear it, sentence by sentence, word by word, syllable by syllable. We cannot “see” the entire concerto as a whole: we can only hear it, bar by bar, note by note. Each of these particulars is virtually meaningless on its own; we must recreate the idea or the score in our minds, piecing it together bit by bit.

Two Parshiot and their Names

The difference between sight and hearing, between what is received as a gift and what is pieced together by the person himself, is the difference between the two Torah-section *Va'etchanan* and *Eikev*.

The Torah is divided into 54 “portions”, known as *parshiot* or *sidrot*. Each portion is assigned to another week of the year — a week in which the Jew “lives” with this particular section of Torah, studying it and applying it to his daily life; on Shabbat, the entire Parshah is read from the Torah scroll in the synagogue.

This is not an arbitrary division of Torah into weekly readings: each Parshah is a self-contained unit, its many sub-sections expressing various aspects of the Parshah's basic theme. At times, this theme is obvious; but often the surface of the Parshah shows seemingly unconnected laws and events, and one must delve into their deeper significance to uncover their underlying unity.

The key to unlocking a Parshah's theme is its name. The name of a Parshah is taken from its opening words; yet, upon closer examination, the name always expresses the essence of a Parshah's many particulars.

The same is true of the two Torah-portions that contain the first and second sections of Sh'ma.

Va'etchanan means “and I beseeched.” This is the opening word of the Parshah. Moses is telling the Jewish people of how he implored the Almighty to be allowed to enter the Holy Land: “*And I beseeched G-d at that time, saying: ‘...Please, let me cross over and see the good land...’*”

To “beseech” is to ask to be granted something that is beyond one's own power and deservedness. As Rashi points out, Moses specifically uses the word *va'etchanan* (instead of other, more common words for “request” or “prayer”) to imply that he saw his prayer as a request for an undeserved gift. Indeed, *va'etchanan* is related to Hebrew word for “undeserved” (*chinam*). As

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

Rashi states in his commentary on this verse: “The verb *chinun* (the root of *va’etchanan*) always implies an undeserved gift.”

The gift that Moses is asking for is the gift of sight: “Let me cross over and *see* the good land.” What Moses wanted was not merely the fulfillment of a personal desire to enter the Holy Land; he wanted that the land be given to the people of Israel as an instantaneous, unrestricted bestowal from above.

Our sages tell us that had Moses’ request been granted and he would have led the people of Israel into the land, there would have been no need for the many battles fought under Joshua; instead of conquering the land city by city, province by province (as with the piecemeal assembly of hearing), the Canaanites would have “melted away” before their advance. The Land of Israel would have been granted them as a supernatural gift, instead of their having to earn it by their earthly efforts. (Indeed, Moses was, in a certain sense, granted his wish: G-d told him to ascend Mount Nebo “and see with your eyes” the entire land; and it was Moses’ sighting of the land that empowered the people of Israel to conquer it.)

Following *Va’etchanan* comes the Torah-portion of *Eikev*. The name derives from the Parshah’s opening verse: “And it shall come to pass, because (*eikev*) you hearken to these laws, observe them and do them...” Many of the commentaries puzzle over the use of the unusual word *eikev* instead of other, far more common Hebrew idioms for “because”; so they refer to another meaning of the word to uncover a deeper layer of meaning to the verse. *Eikev* can also be pronounced *akeiv*, which means “heel.” Rashi interprets this as an allusion to “those mitzvot that a person tramples with his heels”: the Torah is telling us to be equally diligent with all G-d’s commandment, no less with those that seem less significant to our finite minds.

Chassidic teaching offers another interpretation. The heel is both the lowest and the most lifeless part of the body. But a Jew’s commitment to Torah must be such that it permeates him entirely: that also his “heel” “hearken to these laws, observe them and do them.” That his relationship with G-d not be confined to the holy days of the year or to the daily hours he devotes to prayer and study, but embrace also his most material endeavors. Indeed, this lowly and spiritually lifeless part of his life is the foundation of his relationship with the Almighty, in the same way that the lowly and lifeless heel is the base upon which the entire body stands and moves.

Thus the heel is told to *hearken* G-d’s command-

ments. If *Va’etchanan* is the Parshah of sight, of revelatory gifts from Above, *Eikev* is the Parshah of hearing. *Eikev* is the methodical building of a relationship from the bottom up, of a person’s humanly finite efforts to connect to the Divine. It may be a relationship less glorious, less brilliant, less absolute than one that is bestowed from on high, but it is the person’s own, more real to him than the most unbounded gift.

The Needs of the Developing Soul

Now we can understand the difference between the first two sections of the Sh’ma in the context of their respective Parshiot.

Both sections describe the Jew’s relationship with the Almighty on the emotional (loving G-d), intellectual (Torah study) and actual (*tefillin*, *mezuzah*) levels. But the first section, appearing in *Va’etchanan*, deals with this relationship from the standpoint of one who is privileged to “see” G-d, who has been granted the gift of relating to G-d on G-d’s terms. The second section, part of the Torah-portion *Eikev*, relates man’s struggle to create with the finite ingredients of self.

Thus, there is no mention of reward or punishment in the first section of the Sh’ma. Indeed, what do “rains in their due season,” “grass for your cattle” or even the “multiplication of your days and the days of your children” have to do with one’s love and service of the Almighty? When a person “sees” the divine truth, there is no need to point out the benefits of a virtuous life or the tragic results of a nation’s abandonment of G-d; he then “does the truth because it is true” (as Maimonides puts it) regardless of personal gain. But when man approaches G-d on his own finite and subjective terms, reward and punishment play an important role in his development. In building his moral and spiritual self “from the heel up” he must base his relationship with G-d on what he is, including that aspect of himself that has yet to outgrow the immaturity of ego and self-interest.

This also explains the difference between the two sections in the order of the verses that speak of Torah study and *tefillin*.

Our connection with G-d is realized by two general venues: our study of Torah and our observance of the mitzvot. Torah is our *experience* of G-d. Torah is what G-d revealed of Himself to us, allowing us a glimpse of His wisdom and a glimmer of insight into the essence of His creation and His relationship with us. The mitzvot are the actualization of our relationship with Him in our physical lives, in “blind” obedience to His unfathomable will.

In building our relationship from the bottom up, deed precedes experience: first most come a firm grounding of commitment, upon which can be based the more “intellectual” aspects of the relationship. Hence, in the second section, *tefillin*, representing deed (“*Tefillin* is equivalent to

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

all mitzvot" — Talmud, Kiddushin 35a), precedes Torah. In the first section, where the relationship is granted to us "from the top down," the order is reversed: we begin with the revelation of His truth in Torah, to which we respond by applying this truth to our daily lives.

Man and More

This difference is also reflected by the omission of the words "*u'bechol me'odecha*" in the second section.

U'bechol me'odecha is usually translated "and with all your might." But "might" is only an approximate rendition of the Hebrew word *me'od*. This translation is also inconsistent with the logic of the verse: if we are being told to sacrifice all our desires ("with all your heart") and even our very lives ("with all your soul") for the sake of G-d, what is added by the words "and with all your might"? Indeed, what more *can* be said?

The precise meaning of the word *me'od* is "very" or "more so." *U'bechol me'odecha* could therefore be understood as "with all your veryness" or "with all your beyondness" — that is, above and beyond your currently defined self. The Torah is saying: after you have attained your personal ultimate ("with all your heart and with all your soul") in your love of G-d, reach higher yet. Relate to Him on *His* terms, surmounting the finiteness of your own being.

U'bechol me'odecha, then, applies only to the *Va'etchanan* element of the Sh'ma, to that aspect of our relationship with G-d that is granted us from Above. In the second section of the Sh'ma, where the Torah discusses the human dimension to the relationship, we are told to love G-d "with all your hearts and with all your souls." Here the objective is a love that is built wholly on what we are, not one that is overwhelmed by a revelation of the infinite beyond.

Our Many Selves

Another difference: in the first section of the Sh'ma, the Torah addresses us in the second person singular; in the second section, in the plural. This, too, is connected with the difference between a "seeing" and "hearing" relationship with the Almighty.

What, indeed, is the difference between "an injunction to the individual" and "an injunction to the community"? If we are each individually commanded to love G-d, study His Torah and teach it to our children, don *tefillin* and affix *mezuzot*, what is added by reiterating these commandments as communal duties? Various explanations are offered by the commentaries.

Chassidic teaching, however, explains Rashi's words by applying them to the "individual" and "community" within the "miniature universe" that is man.

Man is a virtual "community" of convictions, states of mind, feelings and character traits. Yet underlying it all is his singular "I" — the subject of all these diverse faces and expressions.

The "sight" aspect of the Sh'ma is addressed to the individual in man, to his singular essence. It is this core self that bonds with the Divine essence, receiving and embracing the gift of truth from above. But to create a piecemeal, "details first" appreciation of the Divine, we employ the diverse community of our more external self. Thus, the second, "hearing" section of the Sh'ma is addressed to the plural in us, to the many senses, talents and traits with which we assemble our self-generated relationship with the Almighty.

Sounding The Darkness

As we pointed out earlier, a gift from On High may be superior in every way to a finite creation of man's; but what we receive from Above endures only as long as the Divine giver gives. As something that comes from outside the self, it is conditional upon the continuing effect upon us by the outside source. On the other hand, what we ourselves generate from within remains significant to us under all conditions and in all circumstances.

This brings us to another difference between the Sh'ma's first two sections: taken on its own, the first section implies only a connection to G-d through the Torah and its mitzvot as observed in the Holy Land. We need the second section to tell that all this is equally applicable in exile.

The first section describes a relationship whose relevancy we can assume only under conditions of closeness to G-d: when we dwell secure in the land "that G-d's eyes are constantly upon it," and when He manifests His presence amongst us in His holy home in Jerusalem. But when He hides His face from us and banishes us "as children exiled from their father's table," our ability to love Him, to comprehend His truth and to implement His will can be questioned. Indeed, we cannot even assume that these precepts weren't meant to apply to such conditions of spiritual darkness.

Not so the second section. Because the relationship is one of our making, because it stems from within, it becomes ingrained in of our very essence. Integrally us, it persists wherever and whenever we persist.

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, www.therebbe.org; adapted by Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com

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