

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת עקב

והיה עקב תשמעון את המשפטים האלה ושמרתם ועשיתם אתם ושמר ה' אלקיך לך את הברית ואת החסד אשר נשבע לאבותיך

“And it shall be, because you listen to these ordinances and keep and do them, that Hashem, your G-d, shall keep with you the covenant and the mercy that he swore to your fathers” (7:12)

The Baal HaTurim points out that the word "eikev" contains the same letters as "keva," "permanent." The blessings will only come to us if our service of Hashem is permanent and constant. A person is supposed to set times for Torah learning that he keeps every day. If we only keep the Torah when it is convenient or every so often, we will not merit the blessings. There is no such thing as a vacation from serving Hashem. We must serve Hashem constantly, at all times and through whatever it is that we may be doing. Wherever we go, whether in the shul or beis hamedrash, whether at home or at work, the ultimate purpose of all of our actions should be to serve Hashem. This is the key to deserving the bountiful blessings described at the beginning of the parsha.

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Why does the Torah choose to use the word “eikev,” literally “heel,” in this posuk? Rashi answers that there are some mitzvos that people “step on” and are not performed as commonly as other mitzvos. The posuk is telling us that if one is careful to fulfill the mitzvos that people trample with their “heel,” he will receive a great reward.

R' Moshe Feinstein offers an alternative way of understanding this posuk. Chazal tell us that Klal Yisrael merited to receive the Torah because they said "na'aseh v'nishma." What did these words mean and what was so special about saying them? They did not just say that they would do the mitzvos, but that they would listen to talmidei chachamim and follow the Torah in the way that they were taught and not follow their own interpretation. If each person followed his own understanding of the Torah, there would not be just one Torah but many different versions. The Jews said that they would do as Hashem commanded and listen to the scholars and wise men to explain, based on tradition, what the Torah means us to do and how to understand what Hashem wants from us. This is the message of our posuk. People should direct their own "heels" to listen to how others explain the Torah. Taking steps on one's own is not the proper way to do the mitzvos. One should direct his steps to follow the advice of our sages. R' Feinstein singles out the mitzvos of tzedaka and talmud torah as examples of mitzvos that many people fulfill in their own ways without seeking guidance from a talmid chacham. Many people make their own decisions in these areas and, as a result, they may not be fulfilling the mitzvah properly.

The way to correct this problem is to develop a relationship with a talmid chacham. This mitzvah is actually derived from the commandment in this week's parsha to cling to Hashem

(10:20, Mitzvah 434 in the Sefer HaChinuch). In connection with the mitzvah to associate with talmidei chachamim, the Rambam (Hilchos Deios 6:2) writes as follows: "It is a positive commandment to associate with wise people and their students in order to learn from their actions, as it is written, '...and you shall hold fast to him' - this 'him' is not Hashem, for how can one attach himself to the Divine Presence? In explaining this commandment, the Sages said that one has to attach himself to wise people and their students. Therefore, one should endeavour to marry the daughter of a learned sage, to marry one's daughter to a learned sage, to eat and drink with learned sages, to trade with them and to join with them in all matters in which one can join, as it is written, '...and to hold fast to him.' The Sages similarly commanded that one should join with the dust of their feet, and to listen enthusiastically to their words."

**וזכרת את כל הדרך אשר הוליכך ה' אלקיך זה ארבעים שנה במדבר למען ענתך לנסתך
לדעת את אשר בלבבך התשמר מצותו אם לא**
“You shall remember the entire road on which Hashem, your G-d, led you these forty years in the wilderness so as to afflict you, to test you, to know what is in your heart, whether you would observe His commandments or not” (8:2)

Based on this posuk, the Chofetz Chaim writes that suffering, difficulties and challenges are a test from Hashem. He points out that the word "lenasoscha," "to test you," has a homonym that means "to raise you up." When a person is tested, he becomes uplifted. This is the natural result of the test. One who undergoes difficulties achieves new levels of greatness. The Midrash says that Hashem does not give greatness to a person until he has been tested. Life is full of challenges. It is upon us to make sure that we stand strong during those difficult times. The days that a person serves Hashem when he is not showered with great blessings are inscribed permanently in the heavenly records and Hashem always remembers this.

When Moshe told the people in the wilderness that the challenges that they faced over the years were tests from Hashem, he was speaking to our times as well as the days of old. Today, the Jewish people face great difficulties and challenges. We should recognize that we are being tested from above and remain steadfast in our emunah in order to pass the test as we should.

עשה משפט יתום ואלמנה ואהב גר לתת לו לחם ושמלה
“He carries out the judgment of orphan and widow and loves the proselyte to give him bread and garment” (10:18)

The previous posuk describes Hashem as "great, mighty and awesome" and then the Torah tells us that Hashem cares for orphans, widows and converts. Based on this, the Gemara in Megillah 31a says: "Wherever you find the greatness of Hashem, there you find His humility." What are we to learn from the juxtaposition of Hashem's greatness and humility? R' Nissan Alpert answers that we see how Hashem uses His greatness to help those in need. This is the mark of a great person as well. When a person is privileged to be blessed with abilities and power, he should use it to help others. Whether it is wealth or knowledge or other talents, he should concern himself with those who can benefit from him and share his special blessings with others.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

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