



Eikev - Heeding the Heel

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“And it will be, because you will heed these ordinances and keep and perform them, that the Lord, your God, will keep for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers.” (Devarim 7:12)

At first glance, it represents a simple, straightforward theme; if we follow the word of God, He will take care of us. The Torah is replete with verses emphasizing the reciprocal nature of our relationship with God. If we are willing to commit our allegiance to the Torah and Mitzvos, God will see that our needs are met. This idea is at the core of our relationship contract with God: you will get out what you are willing to put in. Yet, the famed commentator, *Rashi* (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki 1040-1105) highlights an additional dimension of meaning:

“And it will be, because you will heed: Heb. עִקֵּב, lit. heel. *If you will heed the minor commandments which one [usually] tramples with his heels [i.e., which a person treats as being of minor importance].”*

The Torah uses the word *eikev* which contextually means “if” but can also mean “heel.” As such Rashi understands an additional nuanced message, “*If we are vigilant with the details which people normally trample upon, there will be abundant Divine blessing.*” Rashi is teaching us two profound lessons.

Lesson #1: We all trample on something. In our spiritual lives we consciously or subconsciously create a religious hierarchy. There are some obligations which we feel are important and other obligations which are not. There are details which apply to each individual and details which do not. There are *mitzvos* we each can relate to and others which seem anachronistic, or at odds with our personal life outlook or philosophy. And so, we trample. We adhere, obey and admire the aspects with which we agree and intentionally or unintentionally set aside the aspects with which we don’t. Here is the beautiful reality: God doesn’t ask us to be perfect. He doesn’t expect us to perform all of His commandments and He doesn’t expect proficiency in every area of Judaic practice. All God desires is effort. We create these “*mitzvah* rankings” as a way of justifying non-performance. But we don’t have to do that. We don’t perform all the *mitzvos* because we are limited human beings who try hard but can’t always get it right. We recognize that every law and detail in the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law) is binding and obligatory but are not always able to live up to this standard. The good news is, it’s ok. God understands. Just don’t trample and make things unimportant to justify our human finitude. In fact, if you look at the wording of the verse it says, “And it will be if you listen (*tishmaun*) ...”, just listen! Yes, the ultimate goal we aspire to is performance (*va’asiseem*) but start just by listening, acknowledging that these are the expectations.

Lesson #2: Spiritual success doesn’t require spiritual heroism. Little things make all the difference. This is true in many life relationships. In marriage, it is not the birthday or anniversary gifts which shape the fabric of the relationship, it is the phone calls during the day to say, “I love you,” or the small acts of consideration, companionship and love (though the presents certainly help). When our children bring home a project for Mother’s Day or Father’s Day our hearts are filled with joy, even though these creations are objectively junk (please don’t share with my children). Why? Because it is a genuine expression of love. The same is true in our relationship with God. The little things make all the difference. The way we talk to others, the manner in which we conduct our business dealings, our concentration during prayer, our commitment to daily Torah learning, our willingness to give charity, these are the little things which have such a dramatic impact. The Torah and our history are filled with stories of great people making enormous sacrifices for God. But day to day life is filled with the opportunities to do small things for God. These are the “*eikev*” moments. The little things that at first glance seem so insignificant that you can just step on them with your heel, yet, these are the very things which determine our spiritual identity and relationship with God. If you are grumpy in the morning and push yourself to greet people with a smile, the sea will not split before you, but you have done something amazing. If you see someone in need and manage to step out of yourself and help them, God will not call out your name from the heavens, but you have furthered your relationship with Him. If you are exhausted after a long day of work but manage to carve out some time to learn Torah, you won’t see the lightning and hear the thunder of Sinaitic revelation, but you have shown your Father how truly committed you are.

We must find the strength to stop trampling and start building with the small bricks of “*eikev*” accomplishment. God promises that He is waiting for us and ready to reciprocate our efforts. May we find the courage the first small step and feel the blessing of His love in the journey ahead.