

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
The Portion of
Eikev

Sponsored in Loving Memory of our Son

Yehoshua Yitzchak Ben Avraham Meir z'l – Joshua Waitman z'l

(Yartzeit Av 18)

By Dr. Albert and Bat-Sheva Waitman

May His Neshama have an Aliyah

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
1. <i>Contending with Man's Ego</i>	2
2. <i>Revealing the Deficiencies in One's Service of G'd</i>	3
3. <i>Humility, the Magnifier of Truth</i>	4
4. <i>Spiritual Contentment</i>	5
5. <i>Expressing One's Love for G'd</i>	5

About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Yad Avraham Institute
New York
August 6, 2009

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Eikev

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

Dean

1. Contending with Man's Ego

The Torah states, **“You will eat and you will be sated, and bless Hashem, your G'd for the good Land that He gave you.”** This is the basis for the positive commandment that one is obligated to acknowledge G'd (through the recitation of the blessing of thanks) after having partaken of any of the grains that are mentioned in the Torah.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos asks, “The obligation for the blessing that one recites after the meal is explicit in the Torah, what is the basis for the blessing that one recites before eating?” The Gemara responds that it is based on the concept of *Kal V'Chomer* (logical deduction, which is one of the 13 methodologies that were ordained to Moshe at Sinai to interpret the Written Law). Just as the Torah obligates one to acknowledge G'd after one is sated, is it not logical to say that one must acknowledge G'd before one eats when he is in a state of hunger?” The Gemara concludes, “The reason one recites a blessing before one partakes of food is based on the principle that one who benefits from this world without a blessing is considered as if he had benefited from something that was consecrated.”

The Gemara points out that there seems to be a contradiction between two statements of King David in Psalms. King David writes, “The world in its entirety belongs to G'd” (which includes even the terrestrial level). However, in another verse, he writes, “The heaven is for G'd and the earth was given to mankind.” This indicates that the terrestrial plane is considered to be man's domain. The Gemara reconciles the two statements of King David by explaining that the statement “the world in its entirety belongs to G'd” is before the recitation of a blessing. The statement in Psalms “The land was given to mankind” is after one had recited the blessing. When one recites a blessing before one eats, one acknowledges G'd as the Creator and his Benefactor and thus causes the food item

to be released from its consecrated state into the individual's domain.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk explains that the blessing that one recites before eating is only of Rabbinic nature while the after blessing (*birchas hamazon*) is a Torah obligation. Since the Gemara suggests that the basis for the pre-blessing before one eats is based on *Kal V'Chomer* concept, seemingly the nature of this blessing should assume the force of a Torah law. Why is it only Rabbinical?

Reb Meir Simcha explains that although the Gemara did not refute the *Kal V'Chomer*, there is a fallacy in its logic. The Torah obligates one to recite a blessing after one is sated because when one is complacent and feels secure one has a tendency to forget G'd. As the verse states, **“When Yeshurun (the Jewish People) become fat (financially secure) they bolt (from G'd).”** The Torah therefore obligates one when he completes his meal to immediately acknowledge the source of that satiation and complacency. However, when one is in a state of hunger and feels in need, one tends to have greater clarity and recognizes the source of his blessing. He is fully cognizant that G'd is his benefactor. Thus, the Torah does not require one to recite the pre-blessing before eating.

There is a positive commandment on Yom Kippur, **“You must afflict yourself...”** In order to fulfill this commandment one must be in an afflicted state regarding the five areas of deprivation. All commentators agree that if one eats or drinks, he is liable for spiritual excision. However, regarding areas of deprivation one may only be in violation of a Rabbinical enactment. On Yom Kippur, the Jew must come to the level of clarity in order to be able to repent and atone for his sins. When fasting one finds himself in a denied and needy state. This feeling of deprivation enables one to have the clarity and lack of distraction to introspect and atone for his past sins. If one would be in a sated state he would have difficulty

internalizing and sensing the wrong of his transgression in order to have sufficient remorse. Therefore, the Torah obligates the Jew to be in an afflicted state in order to achieve purity on Yom Kippur. As Rambam explains the mitzvah of Yom Kippur is to repent and achieve spiritual purity.

2. *Revealing the Deficiencies in One's Service of G'd*

The Torah states, **“This shall be the reward when you hearken to these ordinances.”** The Midrash cites a verse from Psalms. King David states, “ ‘Why should I be fearful in the days of evil? The sins of my heel surround me.’ G'd has given the Jewish people the Torah which contains 613 mitzvos. Among them, there are those, which seem to be more severe and those which are less severe. Because there are mitzvos that are less severe, people tend to not observe them properly and throw them under their heels (to be trampled upon) as if they are to be taken lightly. It is from this that King David feared on the Day of Judgment. King David said to G'd, ‘Master of the Universe, I am not concerned about the more severe mitzvos (because I performed them properly); however, I am concerned about the less severe mitzvos. Perhaps I have violated one of them because I related to them as if they were of lesser importance. You G'd have said, ‘One must be as careful in the observance of the lighter mitzvah as one must be careful with a more stringent mitzvah. Therefore I am concerned that the sins that I have thrown under my heel will come to condemn me (prosecute) on the Day of Judgment.’”

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that if suffering comes upon an individual he should introspect and reflect upon his past behavior in order to understand the cause of his culpability. Tragedies and suffering only come upon an individual as a result of one's transgressing the Will of G'd. It is through experiencing pain that one is motivated to repent. If one introspects and does not come upon the cause for his travails, he should attribute his predicament to insufficient Torah study (*betul Torah*). King David was devoutly pious and continuously introspected throughout his life upon his service of G'd and consequently repented. There was no moment in his life that he did not reflect upon his actions and behavior and strive to improve them to a perfected level. If in fact this was so, why should King David be concerned on the Day of Judgment that he may have failed regarding the less severe commandments that he did not address properly? Presumably, if he had failed, he would have

repented as a result of his introspection and thus not be concerned about G'd's prosecution on the Judgment Day.

It is understood that King David performed all of the mitzvos, both severe and less severe. His concern was; did he perform the less severe mitzvos with the same degree of reverence and dedication as the more severe ones. He understood that if he did not revere the less severe mitzvah to the identical degree as the more severe one (even as much as an iota), it would be a claim against him on Judgment Day because G'd said, “One must be as careful in the observance of the lighter mitzvah as one is with the more stringent mitzvah.”

The Torah tells us that if one keeps the seemingly less important mitzvos that are trampled upon and not valued sufficiently, he deserving of unlimited bounty. Why is this so? If one observes the mitzvah only because it is the Will of G'd then one would not differentiate between the more stringent mitzvah and the seemingly less important one. This is because the basis for one's motivation to fulfill G'd's Commandment is purely the Will of G'd. More severe or less severe should be irrelevant. However, when one does make a distinction between the two, it is a definite indication that the objective and incentive for the fulfillment of the mitzvah is for self-interest rather than being bound by the Will of G'd. When one acts out of self-interest one chooses to sacrifice for the “more stringent” mitzvah because of the perceived liability or the greater perceived reward. However, regarding the less severe mitzvah, he will have lesser interest in its fulfillment because the liability and reward seem to be inconsequential. One's mindset will reveal itself through one's enthusiasm and meticulousness in the performance of mitzvos. Therefore, when one addresses even the seemingly less important mitzvos, that are minimized (trampled upon) he is deserving of unlimited reward because it is clear that he is performing the mitzvos for the sake of G'd.

King David was concerned that despite the fact that he was one of the most humble people who ever lived, he may have had a nuance of self-interest in the performance of mitzvos. If that were true, then his adherence to G'd's Will, even regarding the severe mitzvos, would be deficient and lacking because the underlying motivation for their fulfillment was ultimately himself. This would be a basis for prosecution on the Day of Judgment. The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states, “You should be as careful with the less stringent mitzvos as the more stringent because one does not know the true reward of a mitzvah.” The closing statement of the Mishna is not relevant to King David, but rather it is

intended for the mere mortal (the average person) whose motivation for the performance of mitzvos is self-interest. This individual should know that although he perceives the lesser mitzvah as something of inconsequential value it is only because he does not understand the unlimited reward for the less severe dictate.

3. *Humility, the Magnifier of Truth*

The Torah states, **“When you hearken to these ordinances...(V’haya eikev tishmeun eis ha’mishpatim)”** Chazal tell us that the word **“eikev”** is derived from the word **“aakeiv,”** which means **“heel.”** The heel of the foot symbolizes humility because it is the lowest part of the body. One is only able to actualize his spiritual potential by perfecting the characteristic of humility. Moshe, who was G’d’s spokesman and the conduit of Torah to the Jewish people, is not referred to as **“devoutly righteous”** but rather as **“My faithful servant.”** Moshe was the most spiritually advanced Jew to ever live because he had negated himself completely to G’d. There was no trace of self in his being that could obscure or interfere with his perception of truth, which was absolute. He was not conflicted and thus hindered by self-interest. As the Torah tells us, Moshe was the most humble man who ever walked the face of the earth.

The Midrash states, **“G’d desired you not because you were the most numerous of all the nations of the world. It is not because you perform more mitzvos than they do. In fact, there are times when the nations of the world glorify My Name to a greater degree than you. As it states, ‘From the East to the West, My Name is made great by the nations...’ but you, you desecrate My Name. Why then did I choose you? It is because you are few. In the merit of you minimizing and humbling yourselves before Me, I have chosen you. Because of this you are My beloved. As it states, ‘I have loved you, but Esav I despise.’ Despite the fact that the Jewish people are undeserving, G’d nevertheless desires them because they have minimized themselves.”**

The Torah states in the Portion of Haazinu, **“I have expended all of My arrows in them (Jewish People).”** The Midrash states, **“G’d said. ‘Although My arrows have been expended upon them, they have not been expended.”** Meaning, despite all of the tragedies and travails that have befallen the Jewish people, they have remained intact - unlike the nations of the world who were destroyed through Divine Retribution that had come upon them. The Midrash compares the predicament of the Jewish people to a wooden beam that remains intact, although the archer had expended all of his arrows into it,

emptying his quiver. The Jewish people remain intact despite all the difficulties they had befallen them throughout history.

The Midrash tells us that there is no nation that G’d had begun to punish that was not ultimately destroyed. The Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and the Romans, have long been destroyed and have gone into oblivion as a result of His Wrath. Why have the Jewish people survived, despite the extent of G’d’s Retribution, while other nations perished? When G’d’s wrath had come upon the nations of the world, they chose to defy and rebel against Him, feeling that they were being unjustly punished. Rather than recognizing that their punishment was due to their own spiritual failings, they intensified their defiance against G’d. They were therefore ultimately destroyed as a result of their obstinacy. This is because the nations of the world are haughty and arrogant and do not possess the innate characteristic of humility. Conversely, when the Jewish people experience tragedy and suffering, they become introspective and recognize that the cause of their punishment is due to their own failing, thus causing them to repent and return to G’d. The Jew has the capacity to do this only because he possesses the attribute of humility.

The Jewish people possess the attribute of humility because they are the spiritual heirs of the holy Patriarchs. Avraham had opposed the entire pagan world in his espousal of monotheism. As Chazal explain, he was equivalent of a person who took on the world single-handedly, despite the overwhelming opposition. If Avraham was motivated by self-interest such as being acknowledged and perceived in a positive light by the world, one could not have not what Avraham, our Patriarch had done. Because of his position of belief and dedication to G’d, Avraham was considered to be a pariah who was despised by his community and consequently became a fugitive. It was only because of his exceptional quality of humility that he had the capacity to ignore the opposition of the world for the sake of G’d. Avraham was considered to be one of the most humble people to ever live. As it states, **“Avraham said, ‘I am but ash and dust.’”** Meaning, Avraham believed that he was undeserving. The innate characteristic of humility is part of the spiritual gene pool of the Jewish people because of Avraham.

The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin states, **“I (G’d) created the evil inclination and the Torah as its antidote.”** It is because the Jew has the innate characteristic of humility that Torah is able to provide him with the clarity to perceive truth and not be ensnared by the evil inclination. However, the nations of the world, who do not

possess this special innate characteristic of humility, have no relevance to Torah because it is only a mechanism to come upon truth to the one who is unhindered by ego.

4. *Spiritual Contentment*

The Torah states, **“When you hearken to these ordinances...(V’haya eikev tishmeun eis ha’mishpatim).”** Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh points out in his commentary that the word **“V’haya”** in the verse is seemingly superfluous. The Torah could have omitted it and not changed the connotation of the verse. Why then does the Torah use this term? Chazal explain that whenever the word **“V’haya”** is mentioned it is an expression of joy. Chazal tell us that the word **“eikev”** is derived from the word **“aakeiv,”** which means **“heel.”** The heel is the lowest part of the body and thus connotes something that is the end. Therefore, in the context of this verse the expression **“V’haya eikev”** is coming to communicate, **“only in the end can you rejoice.”** One has the right to rejoice only at the end of one’s life because it is only then that he can reflect back upon his spiritual accomplishments. However, before that time, not knowing what the future will bring, there is not basis to rejoice. One may not fulfill one’s spiritual objective before he passes on.

Although a Jew must be in a continuous state joy because he has been chosen by the Creator to be given His Torah and fulfill it; nevertheless, the joy that is being addressed in the verse is one’s sense of accomplishment as a Jew. This sense of joy for one’s spiritual accomplishments is relevant only at the end of one’s life.

Chazal tell us that regarding the accumulation of the material, **“if one has only one measure of something he desires two measures of it. If he has two measures of it, he desires four ...”** There is no end to one’s pursuit of material because it continuously increases exponentially. However, regarding the spiritual, a small amount is sufficient. Why is this so?

Chavos Lavavos explains that the only reason an individual desires and pursues more material is because he focuses on what he does not have, rather than recognizing and appreciating the gifts that G’d with which he has been endowed. As we find in the Torah regarding the discussion between Yaakov and his brother Esav. Esav had said regarding the gift that Yaakov had sent him (not wanting to accept it), **“I have much”** while Yaakov response to that was, **“I have everything.”** Meaning, Yaakov was fully focused on what G’d had bestowed upon him and

therefore anything beyond that was seen as excess. Esav, on the other hand, whose essence personified hedonism and evil, had an insatiable need for the material that was endless and unattainable. Yaakov understood that the only thing of value in existence was one’s spiritual development. The material is only for the sake of facilitating a spiritual end. In contrast, Esav believed that the material was an end unto itself.

Chofetz Chaim pointed out that when a child is born, his fist is always clasped. This is an indication that man comes into existence believing that all material has relevance to him to pursue and amass. As the Torah states, **“The inclination of man is evil from the moment he is cast from his mother’s womb.”** Chazal tell us that when one passes away one has not come upon fifty percent of his aspirations/desires. When the average person dies he does so with his hands open, indicating that he never attained his pursuit of the material. In contrast, when the Chofetz Chaim passed away he did so with his hands clasped, indicating that he succeeded in the acquisition of the spiritual.

Man does not naturally crave spirituality because his essence is physical. This is the reason one naturally feels content with whatever amount of spirituality he has. However, there is a built-in mechanism within each mitzvah that allows the human being to be motivated and compelled to advance his spirituality. This is based on the principle that the performance of one mitzvah will bring about the fulfillment of another. This spiritual dynamic only comes to being when one’s fulfillment of the mitzvah is not done by rote or reflexively. We must supplicate G’d to give us the focus to appreciate the value of His service to actualize this spiritual momentum.

5. *Expressing One’s Love for G’d* (from Portion of Va’eschanan)

We find in the Portion of Va’eschanan the positive commandment of declaring one’s belief in the unity of G’d through the recitation of the Shema. In addition to accepting the yoke of heaven there is a positive commandment to love G’d. As it states,, **“You shall love Hashem, your G’d, with all your heart (levavecha), with all your soul, and with all your resources.”** Rashi cites the Gemara, **“Why does the Torah choose the word “levavecha” for “heart which has a double “beis” rather than the word “libcha” which has only one “beis” and is more grammatically correct? It is to teach us that one should love G’d with both his good and evil inclinations. Meaning, one should suppress his evil inclination despite its difficulty, because of his love for G’d. The double**

“*beis*” in the word “*levavecha*” alludes to a person who possesses the equivalent of two hearts- the positive and negative. Another interpretation is that when one performs a mitzvah, his inner feeling and intention should reflect his outward behavior. There should not be a discrepancy between his action and what is in his heart.”

One is obligated to love G'd with all of one's soul and all of one's resources. Chazal explain that one must love G'd to the degree that he is willing to give his life for His sake. As the Gemara tells us, one is obligated give his life if faced with the choice of violating the three cardinal sins or dying. If it is a time when the underpinnings of Judaism are being threatened and uprooted, one must give his life even when given the choice to violate a custom. If one is given an ultimatum to either violate a negative commandment, such as eating a *kezayis* (size of a large olive) of non-Kosher meat, or forfeit all of one's material holdings, one must choose the latter. This is the degree that one must demonstrate his love for G'd.

Chazal explain that “**with all your heart**” means that one must perform a mitzvah wholeheartedly without any self-interest. One must be fully dedicated to G'd and act only for His sake. As it states in the Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers regarding demonstrating one's dedication to G'd, “You should not be like servants who serve their Master for the sake of receiving reward, but rather be like servants who serve their Master without the intent of receiving any reward...” One's love for G'd must be unconditional and not contingent upon anything. The moment there is any prerequisite for one's love of G'd it is not considered to be selfless love. The fact that one becomes the beneficiary of eternal reward that is brought about through one's mitzvah performance it should be unrelated to one's motivation to do the mitzvah. One must be dedicated to His Will because of one's recognition of Who He Is, which is the ultimate.

Rambam in his work, The Fundamentals of Torah (Yisodei HaTorah) asks, “How is one able to come to love G'd if he does not?” Meaning, it is understandable that the Torah legislates many commandments, such as the observance of the Shabbos, dietary laws, charity, etc. because observing these mitzvos is a matter of doing. However, love is an emotion, how could the Torah command one to feel love for G'd if one does not? Rambam explains that one can come to love G'd by observing His Greatness as manifested in creation. When one gazes upon the universe and understands how unfathomable and awesome Creation is, he will become awestruck, overwhelmed, and taken aback with reverence

for G'd. This sense of G'd's majesty will cause him to be negated and thus evoke a love for G'd. He will want to be associated with Him and dedicated to His Will. This individual will love G'd unconditionally, although he has not been a beneficiary of His reward.

The heart unfortunately lusts for many things; some are in accordance with the Torah while others are inappropriate. We supplicate G'd in the blessing preceding the Shema (*Ahavah Rabah*) to “Designate our hearts exclusively to love and fear Your Name.” Chofetz Chaim explains this request with an allegory. A diamond merchant who had precious stones in his possession had asked a third party to safeguard his most special diamonds for him while he was away. The diamond merchant explained that the stones that were being given to him were extremely valuable. The perspective custodian, before assuming responsibility to care for these diamonds, asked the merchant if he could gaze upon them while he was away. The merchant agreed. The custodian, with great trepidation, opened the wooden box and unwrapped the silk cloth in which the diamonds was contained. As he was unwrapping the silk, he was taken aback because he found intermingled with the precious stones, particles of putrid and decaying food. He could not understand how a man, who has an understanding of the value of diamonds, allows something that is so precious to be contained together with something so detestable and unclean.

Chofetz Chaim concludes that the heart of a human being contains within it all of the feelings of love. The love of a Jew contains his love for G'd in addition to his belief and faith in Him. However, simultaneously in that same location, he possesses other feelings, interests, and desires that are inappropriate and are not in conformance with the Will of G'd. Within the same heart there is something that is infinitely precious that is contained in a location with something that is of a mundane nature. Therefore, we pray to G'd to “Designate our hearts” exclusively to love and fear Him and to be devoid of any impurity that is contrary to that.