



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

## Ekev 5781

### The Mechanics of Consolation

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered August 15, 1970)

One of the great paradoxes of human nature is the meeting of opposites, the fact that two conditions which are contrary to each other in the extreme can produce the same effects. How frequently are we amused to find the Vatican and the Kremlin towing, with characteristic dogmatism, the same lines; occasionally we are astonished at the coincidence of views of the Wall Street Journal and the Daily Worker. Both extreme Right and extreme Left are alike in condemning the liberal centre, and in demanding blind obedience of their followers. Both were equally hostile, for instance, to the Marshall Plan.

In the same vein, we find that affluence and plenty often produce the same results as do adversity and poverty. It is no secret that indigence breeds immorality and corruption. In the Middle Ages, the Black Plague and the universal poverty combined to cause the greatest crime wave in the recorded history of Europe. Murder, violence and theft were the immediate results of pestilence and destitution. Starvation and privation are bound to unleash the tidal waves of immorality and degeneracy whether in Nablus of Arab Palestine or in Harlem of enlightened New York. Sociologists usually blame low standards of morality on low standards of living.

But the astounding fact is that there are people who would behave immorally and irreligiously and unethically when they earn \$200 a week, whereas they did not do so when they barely eked out a living at \$25 a week. Somehow prosperity will sometimes produce worse effects than will poverty. The recent basketball scandals have shown that boys from wealthy homes are not necessarily immune from the temptation of the fixer. Today, when America is enjoying comparatively high prosperity, the record for narcotics, sports scandals and government bribery is as black as ever. It is a well-established phenomenon that that

nouveau riche, the man who has suddenly become wealthy, leaves his House of Worship and forgets his religion. Even political immorality is practiced by the extremely wealthy. There are some millionaires who are known sympathizers of American Communism, as an "ism" which usually preys on the poor and dejected only.

This principle or paradox was already formulated in the Torah and explained by our Sages. In today's Sidra we read, השמרו ואכלת ושבעת, "And you shall eat and be satisfied," לכם פן יפתה לבבכם וסרתם ועבדתם אלהים אחרים, "take heed and beware lest your heart be deceived and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them." And the Rabbis of the Midrash infer from the sequence of the texts that there is a definite relationship between satiety, eating till you're full, and idolatry. אמר להם: הזהרו שלא תמרדו במקום, שאין אדם מורד במקום אלא מתוך שביעה. "Moses said to the Jews, 'Beware of rebelling against G-d - that is, worshipping idols - because it is only out of satisfaction and satiety that one takes to idolatry.'" Was not the Tower of Babel, the symbol of rebellion against G-d, built during a period of affluence? Did not the wickedness of Sodom flourish among a wealthy people? And had the Rabbis of the Midrash lived today, they would add: And was not Berlin, the city which admitted only wealthy "schutz-juden," the center of assimilation? And is not the Jew who moves from Rivington St. to Forest Hills the first to dispense with his Tallis and Tefillin, and ultimately with Shabbos and Kashruth and then all of Judaism? אין אדם מורד במקום אלא מתוך שביעה. Only when people are satisfied and content with themselves do they go haunting for other gods, whether the money god or the entertainment god or the god whose first commandment is "thou shalt keep up with the Joneses."

Well, we can understand that שביעה, satiety and contentment, should result in laxity of morals and religion. After a heavy gluttonous meal, one's metabolism rate

drops, his pulse and respiration go down and energy is sparse. One feels lazy, and if he forgets his המזון ברכה, if he skips a מצוה or two or commits a sin or so, it is a result of negligence and indolence rather than מרידה במקום, rebellion against G-d, idolatry. Why then do the Rabbis, why does the Torah insist that שביעה leads to עבודה זרה, that eating the satisfaction is the precursor of the worst of all sins, idolatry?

My friends, idolatry, no matter what kind, ancient or modern, is easier than true religion. And because it is easier to practice, success is more readily attainable in idolatry than in monotheism. First of all, it requires less mental exertion. True religion is more abstract, more difficult conceptually than belief in a tangible idol. The invisible is harder on the intellect than the visible. Then, idolatry is less taxing emotionally than Judaism. It is easier to offer your overt devotions to or embrace a slab of concrete or a totem pole or a Rembrandt or a moneybag or a rabbit's foot than it is to fall in love with an unknown G-d whom your senses cannot even detect. And, lastly, idolatry places less restrictions upon your behavior than does our religion. The creed of the Moloch or Baal never demanded strict Sabbath observance. The religion of the money-bag certainly places no restrictions on corrupt business practices. And the faith in the sacred cow of science requires ethical conduct of no one. All sources indicate that idolatry has frequently sanctioned murder, immorality and downright degeneracy.

Why do normal people fall prey to the curse of idolatry? Why do they succumb to this opiate of easy living? Let us read the verse preceding the one we have previously quoted: ונתתי עשב בשדך לבהמתך ואכלת ושבעת, השמרו לכם פן יפתה לבבכם *“And I will give grass in you fields for your animals and you shall eat and be satisfied,”* and then, *“beware of worshipping other gods.”* Certainly: If a man is satisfied with eating the grass reserved for his cattle, if he is satisfied to thrive on straw and hay, then certainly his goals are so low that he will be satisfied with the easily attainable idolatry. If his noblest goals are not as high as the stars in heaven, but as low as hay in the field, and if he is satisfied with this grass, then his loftiest aims and ambitions in his entire religious life will be not the dedication to One G-d in heaven but the worship of a dozen cheap clay and wooden statues. ונתתי עשב בשדך לבהמתך ואכלת ושבעת, the danger of idolatry rears its ugly head when people's aims are level with the ground, when they strive for straw and are content with their success in obtaining it.

The great American ideal is “success.” But “success” can apply as well to a well-executed murder as to the amassing of a fortune. I have two friends who intended to accelerate their reading this summer. One decided to read ten important novels published during the past year. The other friend was less ambitious and selected three best-sellers for his summer reading list. By today, I hear, the second fellow has well completed his list of three books. He is by all American standards a success. The first fellow finished only eight of the ten books he had set out to read. Again by American standards, he is a dismal failure. Yet who has accomplished more? Is success really a measure of achievement? Is it really necessary for a meaningful life? In this same vein, idolatry is easier to succeed in than Judaism. It all depends on what your original goal is. ונתתי עשב בשדך לבהמתך ואכלת ושבעת. People who are satisfied with straw are rife for idol worship.

Look about you in your places of business and in the streets, and you will meet the typical American Jew of 1951. How high are his goals? Doesn't he seem to think that an insignificant check to charity is the summum bonum of Jewish life? Isn't he satisfied with a Sunday School education for his children? His highest religious ideal is to visit the synagogue on the High Holy Days. And sometimes he is even satisfied with a temple which differs from a cathedral only in minor architectural details. His standard for Kashrus is two sets of dishes in the home and one set all over the rest of the world. In short, our typical American Jew is often satisfied with straw. A bellyful of hay is sufficient to pacify his spiritual hunger, and a thimbleful of ersatz-religion satisfies his cultural requirements. ונתתי עשב בשדך לבהמתך ואכלת ושבעת. He is unfortunately satisfied with the grass for his cattle, and that means that he is prepared to bow and kneel to the next idol. What the American Jew needs is not a face-lifting but a lifting of his level of vision. He must learn to aim higher.

One of the reasons that the Talmud gives for the destruction of the Temple is שלא עבדו לפנים משורת הדין, that the people acted only as was legally expected of them, and no more. They followed the letter of the Law, but failed to rise to the spirit of the Law. This view of the Talmud was given a modern slant in plain English when Sen. Fulbright, commenting on the sad state of American political morals, said that it was “setting a low level” for our national development if “our only goal for official conduct is that it be legal instead of illegal.” Indeed, he was expressing the popular fear that our country, the Sanctuary of Democracy,

is endangered because its sights are as high as the דין, the strict Constitutional law, and not לפנים משורת הדין, the spirit of the law, the unwritten moral code. A diet of hay & straw is bad for the spiritual health of our nation. We must raise our sights.

Peretz, the famous Yiddish and Hebrew writer, has immortalized the type of Jew whose goals were no higher than עשב בשדך לבהמתך, the animal's straw, in his story "Bontsche Shweig." When Bontsche died, he was tried by the Divine Tribunal, and the Heavenly Court decided that he merited any reward he would chose. Bontsche could not believe it. "Taki? Really?" he asked in wonder. He was reassured. When Bontsche announced his decision, the court and angels looked down, a little ashamed, and the prosecutor laughed. For Bontsche had answered, "Well, if it is so, I would like to have every day, for breakfast, a hot roll and fresh butter."

In the same way, a leader who prods his people on to higher goals and loftier ambition is a leader who loves his people. And, conversely, the leader who lulls his people into complacency and self-satisfaction is a traitor. Some of the laudatory and flattering of epithets were bestowed upon Israel by Balaam, the gentile prophet. Oh, how he praised us! Just compare what he told the Jews to the sermons that Isaiah preached at them. Balaam told them that G-d saw no sin or evil in them; Isaiah said that they were repulsive to G-d and rebellious sons. Balaam told them that glory would be theirs without a struggle; Isaiah

warned of impending doom if they would not mend their ways. But who would you say loved Israel more? Certainly, the strict and critical Isaiah! For he set higher and finer goals for his people, goals more difficult to achieve, if success was at all humanly possible. He demanded of them exertion and initiative, while Balaam told them that they could rest on their laurels, that they were successful and nothing else was worth striving for. Balaam was not a friend- he was a bitter enemy. The leader who loved his people will give them not a pat on the back, but a shot in the arm. He will teach them that if ואכלת ושבעת, if they can digest and be satisfied with עשב בשדך לבהמתך, with hay and straw, then they are bound to wind up prostrating themselves before אלהים אחרים, pagan idols.

Our good friend, ex-Ambassador James G. McDonald, warns us in his recent book that "the spiritual future of Israel is not without danger." We can keep our aims low and become a banana republic on the shores of the blue Mediterranean, or we can press forward towards the mark, the prize of our high calling. Success is assured us if we will be content with hay; but the rewards will be greater if our ideals will be loftier.

Today we welcome the month of Elul. During this month, reserved for penitence and introspection, we will reevaluate and possibly reset our present standards and ideals. We can make them as low as the grass upon the fields for the cattle, or as high as the stars in the infinite heavens above. Which shall it be?

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## In the Long Run

*Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l*

**T**he famous English economist, John Maynard Keynes, was once presenting an analysis of the national economy, when he was asked, "what will happen in the long run?" In response, he said, "in the long run, we are all dead." Perhaps it is this pessimistic view of life by such an influential economist that contributed to economics' reputation as being "the dismal science." The Jewish view of life, however, does not follow the pattern that was laid out by Mr. Keynes, as a study of the beginning of this week's parsha, in tandem with the end of last week's parsha, reveals.

Parshas Eikev begins with the statement, "And it will be 'because of' (eikev) your listening to these ordinances,

and your observing and performing them : the Lord, your God, will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers" (Devorim 7:12). The midrash, as cited by Rashi, already noted the peculiar use of the word 'eikev' - because of - rather than the more usual term, 'im' - if, which would have rendered, 'if you listen to these ordinances, etc.' The midrash explains that the word 'eikev' also means 'heel,' and the Torah, by using this word, is thereby hinting that reward will come for observing mitzvos that people deem to be light, or unimportant, and tread on with their feet. This comment of Rashi must be seen in conjunction with his comment on the last verse of parshas Vaeschanan, "You shall observe the

commandments, and the statutes and the ordinances that I command you today, to perform them. “ (Devorim 7:13). Rashi there explains that we are to do the mitzvos today, and receive our reward for them tomorrow, in the world to come. Therefore, when the Torah now tells us that we will receive reward in this world for mitzvos that we do, Rashi explains this to be referring to a specific kind of mitzvoh, as alluded to in the word ‘eikev’).

We may, however, add a certain nuance to Rashi’s understanding of the reward for seemingly minor mitzvos, based on another source. The medieval commentary, Pa’aneach Razah, by Rabbi Yitzchok ben Yehudah HaLevi, seems to understand the midrashic explanation of ‘eikev’ differently from Rashi. He writes that the first letters of the two words, ‘eikev tishme’un’ - because you will listen’ - are the same letters that are at the beginning of the words ‘eiruv tavshilin’ - which is a rabbinic enactment to prepare certain food items before a Yom Tov that runs into Shabbos, in order to permit cooking and baking on that Yom Tov for Shabbos. The rabbis tell us, continues the author of Pa’aneach Raza, that Avrohom kept all of the mitzvos, including the rabbinic mitzvoh of eiruv tavshilin. Thus, the word ‘eikev’, hints to this seemingly minor mitzvoh that Avrohom observed, along with the rest of the mitzvos. The special reward that one receives for doing such mitzvos, then comes when it is done in conjunction with all the rest of the mitzvos, as was the case with Avrohom. The image of the heel, then, according to Pa’aneach Raza, should perhaps be taken to mean that we need to keep all of the mitzvos, ‘from head to heel.’

Rashi’s grandson, Rashbam, seems to understand the term eikev, as used in our verse, differently from the way his grandfather does. According to Rashbam the word eikev refers to the end of a process. In this sense, the verse must, again, be interpreted in connection with the verse near the end of parshas Vaeschanan ; “You must know that the Lord, your God, He is the God, the faithful God, Who safeguards the covenant and the kindness for those who love him and for those who observe His commandments, for a thousand generations “ (Devorim 7:9). Rashbam explains this to mean that we should not think that God will fulfill his promise whether or not we observe his mitzvos. Therefore, God tells us, that He “safeguards the covenant and the kindness for those who observe His commandments”. If the nation does not observe the commandments, God will wait even for a thousand generations, until the people are worthy. This message, says Rashbam, concludes with the

first verse in parshas Eikev, in which God says that if the people do observe the mitzvos, then God will not wait until the thousandth generation, but fulfill his promise with the current generation.

Rabbi Aharon Dovid Goldberg, in his commentary Shiras Dovid, cites this explanation of Rashbam, and asks, how he can say that God’s fulfillment of his promise to the forefathers is dependent on the nation’s observance of the mitzvos? Didn’t God tell Avrohom explicitly that the fourth generation of the exile would return to the land? He answers that the people would have entered the land even if they had not observed the commandments, since God promised Avrohom that the fourth generation would return there. However, they would not have remained there very long if they did not observe the mitzvos, and would go into exile, and only return on a permanent basis when they did follow the Torah. I would like to suggest a different answer, based on a comment of the Ramban in parshas Bo, 12:40. The Torah tells us there that the sojourn of the children of Israel in Egypt was four hundred thirty years. Ramban asks, didn’t God tell Avrohom that the nation would be in exile for four hundred years? He answers that they had to stay an additional thirty years because of their sins. Rav Dovid Feinstein explained that the period of four hundred years was similar to a minimum sentence handed down by a judge. If the prisoner serves out his sentence properly, he will be released on schedule. Otherwise, he may have to serve a longer sentence. Thus, the nation could have served a sentence of even longer than four hundred thirty years. According to Rashbam’s explanation of the verses we are examining, the sentence could have lasted a thousand generations, if the nation did not begin observing the mitzvos. The end of the process - eikev - would come when the nation followed God’s Torah, so that they would be worthy of entering the land.

In light of Rashbam’s explanation, the use of the word ‘vehaya,’ - ‘and it will be’ - in the beginning of our parsha, in the opening phrase, ‘vehaya eikev tishmeun’ - and it will be because of your listening - takes on added significance. As Rabbi Chaim ben Attar points out in his commentary, this word is, according to the Talmud, an expression of joy. Although the simple explanation of the use of this term here is that the reward God will grant will bring joy to the people, Reb Zadok HaKohein of Lublin explains, in his commentary Peri Zaddik, that the joy referred to must be seen in conjunction with the rebuke mentioned at the end of the previous parsha. God’s rebuke is a means of

bringing the people to observe His commandments and come close to Him, and, thus, ultimately generates a state of joy. Following the Rashbam, perhaps we can explain the joy expressed here as coming from an awareness that, no matter how long the people may stay in exile, in the end, God will fulfill his covenant with the forefathers and grant

## Fair or Unfair?

*Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given in the Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on May 24, 2018, the week of Parshas Naso, 5778)*

In a cryptic passage in Gemara Berachos (daf 20b), the malachim ask Hashem a question from a pasuk at the end of this week's Parsha, and He answers them based on another pasuk from its beginning. In the parsha of Birkas Kohanim (in Parshas Naso), the pasuk says: *ve-samu es Sh'mi al b'nei Yisrael, ve-Ani avarecheim*. Hashem agrees to give us three brachos. Including the ultimate, third brocha—*Yisa Hashem panav eilecha, ve-yasem lecha shalom*. Hashem will be *nosei panim*—He will turn His face to you. The phrase, *yisa panim*, sounds a little negative to us. *Masa panim* means to show favoritism, which is an *issur de'oraisa* for judges. And the Gemara in Berachos tells us that the malachim actually questioned Hashem about it. They said: It's not fair. How can You say *Yisa Hashem panav eilecha*—that Hashem is *nosei panim* to the Jewish People? Doesn't the Torah describe you (at the end of Parshas Ekev) as *asher lo yisa panim ve-lo yikach shochad*? You do not show favor and do not take bribes. So, how can You favor the Jewish people? What happened to the value of fairness? And Hashem cryptically answers the malachim: How can I not favor the Jewish people? After all, I said in my Torah (at the beginning of Parshas Ekev): *ve-achalta ve-savata u-verachta es Hashem Elokecha*. According to the psak of most Rishonim, one is *chayav* in Birkat ha-Mazon only if they ate a relatively large meal and was satiated, quite literally fulfilling *ve-achalta ve-savata*. And yet, the Jewish People are *machmir* on themselves and say Birkat ha-Mazon *ad-kezayis, ad ke-beitza*. It's a *machlokes* between Rebi Meir and Rebi Yehuda. And *le-ma'ase*, we *pasken* that if we eat a *kezayis*, we *bentsch*. Therefore, says Hashem to the malachim: If they are so *machmir* on themselves when they *bentsch*, how can I not favor them?

It's a very peculiar exchange. What does Hashem's answer to the malachim mean? Firstly, so what?? They give Hashem some extra brachos! So it's not a gratuitous *yisa*

the entire land to them. The joy, then, comes from the knowledge that, on a national scale, we are in the middle of a process, and, in the long run, we will endure and possess all of the land that God promised our forefathers to give to us.

*panim*; it's *lekichas shochad*! It's still not fair. Secondly, what does it have to do with anything? So they made a little *chumra* in Birkas ha-Mazon. Should that change how Hashem runs the universe because they have a little *chumra* in Birkas ha-Mazon?

I think that the *pshat* is very obvious. We are not talking about a regular *chumra* in Birkas ha-Mazon here. What does it mean *heim hechmiru al atzman ad-kezayis, ad ke-beitza*, that they would *bentsch* on a *kezayis*? To us, in our modern era, it sounds like a little *chumra*. *Mi-deoraisa*, you only need to *bentsch* if you ate a big meal. But *mi-derabanan*, if you had a little snack, you also have to *bentsch*. And this is a *chumra* like we have in a thousand other *halachos*. But, No. That's not what Hashem answered the malachim. The pasuk says: *Ve-achalta ve-savata u-verachta*. *U-verachta* means that we appreciate what Hashem did for us. We say: Thank you, Hashem! We say, Hashem, You were great for us! *Mi-deoraisa*, logically, *ve-achalta ve-savata*—if we had enough to eat, then we show our appreciation. And if not. Let's say we were very poor, and at the end of the day, we went to bed hungry because we didn't have enough to eat—then Hashem didn't really come through for you. Logically, you should not bless him then. What was the *chumra* that they made? It wasn't just a regular *chumra*. In the olden days, an average person went to work to earn enough money to buy bread for his family for that day. If he was successful and made enough money that day, brought home a big basket of bread, everyone ate and was satisfied, they blessed Hashem. But let's say he had a tough day—he was on hard times. He worked hard all day, and all he made was a few pennies, and he was only able to buy one small roll and had to divide it among eight members of his family—so they each got a *kezayis*. And the kids were a little hungry. They said: *Aba do we have more food?* And he said: *No. That's all we have for*

tonight. I need to go to sleep. Maybe tomorrow will be better. Logically speaking, in such a situation, we should not thank Hashem. What do you mean? Hashem did not come through for him! He didn't give him what he needed. An essential need of a human being is to go to sleep after eating a good meal—with a full stomach. Nevertheless, we are machmir on ourselves. Even when Hashem doesn't give us what we want, even if He doesn't do what we think He should do, even if He doesn't give us what we think we deserve. We say: You know what, Hashem, whatever You gave me, I appreciate anyway. I thank You for a kezayis, just like if I had all my needs provided. Because everything that You do for me is good, and that it's for the ultimate good, and I appreciate it whether it's a lot or a little. Hashem then said to the malachim: This is very fair. I work according to the principle of mida-keneged-mida. The Jews could be saying that they will only thank Me if I give them all that they need. But, instead, they say, we will be machmir. We will love Hashem. We will thank Hashem and appreciate what we do have—even if it's only a little and it's not what we thought we deserved. Likewise, Hashem says, that's how I act with the Jewish people. They owe me. I deserve to get from them—kaveyachol—the perfect performance of all 613 mitzvos. They should keep all of them. If they do, I should give them a favorable judgment, and if not, I should not do them any favors. But let's say a Jew only does one or two mitzvos. He does an aveira here or an aveira there—he is not so frum. But he says krias Shema. He does gemilus chasadim. He does a few other mitzvos, here and

there. Logically, I should say that it's almost worthless. But just as they show their appreciation, whether I gave them a lot or a little, I will appreciate what the Jews do. Even if they only do a few mitzvos, I will be nosei panim to them. I will favor them and appreciate that little they did. I will reward them and bless them and give them all the brachos, nonetheless. Not out of favoritism, but because of mida-keneged-mida. I think that's the real depth of this cryptic agadah, and I think it applies even nowadays. It's very unusual in the modern world—in the twenty-first century—that anyone would go to bed hungry because they only had a kezayis of bread. Perhaps not everyone in our community has steak, but it's safe to bet that they have enough bread to eat at night. Nonetheless, everyone thinks that Hashem owes them this or that. Other people have X, but we didn't get X. We think that Y should have happened, and Y didn't happen. It's very easy to be disappointed with what Hashem did for you in life. And that's what Hashem tells the malachim: That's not the mida of Klal Yisroel. Our mida is: We hope that we get what we want, what we think we need, what we think we deserve. But whatever Hashem gives us, we appreciate, and even though achalta ve-lo savata, yet still u-verachta es Hashem Elokecha al ha-tov asher nosan lach. And, im yirtze Hashem, if we do that, Hashem will be nosei panim to us and overlook the debts that we didn't pay, and the responsibilities that we didn't fulfill. And, im yirtze Hashem, He will fulfill *ve-samu Shmi al Bnei Yisroel ve-ani avarecheim*, and He will give all the brachos to us and all Klal Yisroel.

## And You Shall Bless Hashem Your G-d

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's poetically stirring and masterful parsha, as transmitted to us by Moshe Rabbeinu, we have the well-known mitzvah of birkat ha'mazon, grace after meals ("bentching" after a bread meal). The Torah tells us: וְאָכַלְתָּ, וְשָׂבַעְתָּ--וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת-ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, עַל-הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לְךָ - and you will eat and be satisfied, and you shall bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good land He has given you (Devarim 8:10).

Chazal teach (Brachos 20b):

אָמְרוּ מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרָת לִפְנֵי הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, כְּתוּב בְּתוֹרָתְךָ "אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשָּׂא פָּנִים וְלֹא יִקַּח שֹׁחַד", וְהִלֵּא אֶתָּה נוֹשֵׂא פָּנִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, דְּכַתִּיב: "יִשָּׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ"? אָמַר לָהֶם: וְכִי לֹא אֲשָׂא פָּנִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, שֶׁכְּתִיב לָהֶם בְּתוֹרָה "וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ", וְהֵם מְדַקְדְּקִים [על] עֲצָמָם עַד כְּזוֹת וְעַד כְּבִיּוֹצָה

*The ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed*

*be He: Master of the Universe, in Your Torah it is written: "The great, mighty and awesome God who favors no one and takes no bribe" (Devarim 10:17, Parshas Eikev), yet You, nevertheless, show favor to Israel, as it is written: "The Lord shall show favor to you and give you peace" (Bamidbar 6:26). He replied to them: And how can I not show favor to Israel, as I wrote for them in the Torah: "And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless the L-rd your G-d" (Devarim 8:10), meaning that there is no obligation to bless the L-rd until one is satiated; yet they are exacting with themselves to recite Grace after Meals even if they have eaten as much as an olive-bulk or an egg-bulk. Since they go beyond the requirements of the law, they are worthy of favor.*

Since we bless and praise Hashem for all that we have -

from satiation from a meal the size of an olive or the size of an egg - Hashem shows us favor in return.

And yet... When we have eaten to satiation, when we are filled with the bounty of the Land, man is called upon to recognize the Source of all goodness, and to bless the One Who sustains us each and every day. However, what does it mean וּבֵרַכְתָּ, and you shall bless Hashem your G-d? Does Infinity need the blessings of finitude? Does the Ein Sof (Eternal) require blessings of mortal man? How can the mitzvah to bless G-d be understood, and what is the purpose of our blessing Hashem?

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav zt'l, powerfully teaches, "What does it mean to bless G-d? How can flesh and blood, temporal man, referred to in the liturgy as 'a fading flower,' 'a broken shard,' 'a fleeting cloud,' approach the everlasting King of Kings, the Creator of the world, and say Baruch Atah Hashem, blessed are You, Hashem?"

"The answer is that man must provide 'assistance,' as it were, to the Master of the Universe. Man must 'help' G-d to reveal His presence in the world. The Shechinah, the Divine Presence, resides with us on earth... We encounter the Shechina continually.

"Yet G-d is not clearly revealed to us; He is hidden from view; Behold I come to you in the thickness of the cloud (Shemos 19:9). He is indeed close, but He does not reveal Himself; He is hidden from the world. He dwells concealed... in the shadow (Tehillim 91:1). G-d is in close proximity to man, so close that man can almost touch Him, but not everyone can penetrate the cloud to reveal Him.

"The obscuring cloud takes on any number of guises. For the physicist, the cloud is a mathematical formula. For the biologist, it is a biochemical reaction. For the physiologist, it is an instinct; for the psychologist, a drive; for the general, the power of his army. The cloud is any manifestation of nature or man that promotes the illusion

that the world operates autonomously, concealing the reality that G-d is responsible for all that occurs on earth.

"G-d can decide to disperse the obscuring clouds, and occasionally in history He chooses to reveal himself and proclaim: 'I am the L-rd your G-d.' More often, however, G-d remains obscure, a G-d Whose abode is transcendence.

"When one recites a bracha, he is in essence saying: 'Master of the Universe, You are hidden behind a cloud; no one sees You. Yet, as I drink this glass of water, I reveal Your presence. The very fact that I can eat, that my body absorbs food, that I can digest, indeed the entire biological process behind food consumption and the creation of food itself, is testimony to Your presence. Through this recognition I am removing the obscuring cloud: I am revealing You.'

"Blessings are addressed to G-d in the second person: 'Blessed are You,' rather than 'Blessed is He,' to affirm G-d's very presence before us; as if to say, 'Where are You, G-d? You are right here with me! How do I know? Because Your presence is evident in this water I am about to drink!' The purpose of a bracha is to transform the Hidden into Presence; through use of the second person singular, we reveal the Divine Presence directly in front of us" (Chumash Masores HaRav, Devarim, p.74-75).

What a powerful and profound teaching and insight into our daily routine of brachos which we recite countless times a day! From the brachos that we recite before we eat, to those we say after the meal; from the blessings upon thunder and lightning to that said upon seeing a rainbow; from the bracha we say after using the facilities to the one we say before going to sleep at night.

"Baruch Atah Hashem, blessed are You, Hashem"... with these three words we reveal the Presence of G-d in our world and in our lives.

## The Elusive Translation of Eikev

Rabbi Mayer Schiller

וְהָיָה עֵקֶב תִּשְׁמָעוּן אֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים הָאֵלֶּה וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם וְעָשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְשָׁמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ לְךָ אֶת־הַבְּרִית וְאֶת־הַחֶסֶד אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאֲבוֹתַי  
"And it will be because of your listening to these ordi-nances, and your observing and performing them; then Hashem, your God, will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers." (Devarim 7:12)

This possuk, and particularly the word עֵקֶב ("eikev" from here on out), are subject to multiple understand-ings. Most simply, the word means "since", that since we listen to the mitzvot, Hashem guards our cove-nant with him. Rashi, however, offers a unique expla-nation of this word, explaining that the words "eikev tishmiun" mean to say that even the relatively light

commandments which a person tramples with his heels (eikev), you shall listen to.”

The source given by Rashi for this comment is the Midrash Tanchuma. We do not find, in any of the Mid-rashic texts we have, Rashi’s precise wording. (A momentary digression: there are three versions of the Tanchuma which we know have existed. One of them has been completely lost to time. It is possible that Rashi’s wording may be found there. Alternatively, Rashi is simply shortening and paraphrasing the text of the Tanchuma which we do have.) In our versions of the Midrash, it states “there are light mitzvos which people do not pay attention to, but they throw them under their heels. . .” Thus, Rashi uses the Tanchuma to understand eikev as meaning heel in the sense of these “light mitzvos.”

The commentaries on Rashi, such as the Levush Haorah, all wonder what compels Rashi to translate eikev in this manner, as opposed to the simple translation of “heel.” We know that Rashi’s approach is always to seek out a Midrash which explains an issue within the pshat (simple understanding) of the possuk. What issue did Rashi have with the pshat in this instance? The Ohr Hachaim seems to compound this kashya by referencing Rashi’s explanation as drush, removed from the simple meaning of the possuk. What pressing need did Rashi see which compelled him to cite this Midrash?

The Ramban offers four alternatives to Rashi’s Tanchuma, and proposes a serious question against it. He begins by citing the possuk (Bereishis 26:5) which says “eikev asher shama Avraham bikoli”, which translates to “because Avraham obeyed my voice.” In that context, the word eikev simply means “because.” Why couldn’t Rashi use this explanation here?

The Ramban then proceeds to quote Rashi and (according to the Tur’s reading) question him. The possuk here makes reference to mishpatim, which are monetary laws. These halachos are extremely dense and complex, and can hardly be called “light”. Thus, according to Rashi, the possuk would be contradicting itself, first making reference to these light mitzvos with the word “eikev”, and then recalling the complex dinim of Choshen Mishpat (monetary law)!

The Zichron Ozer, an anonymous, contemporary commentary on the Ramban, suggests an answer for Rashi, based on the fact that there are many miniscule details within monetary halacha which people do not consider to be so significant. Thus, the possuk uses the word

mishpatim to reinforce that we must be careful about all mitzvos, even those which appear insignificant. However, the Ramban regards this approach as far from satisfactory, and instead offers three other alternative explanations.

The first explanation, cited in the name of “meforshim” but really a reference to the Ibn Ezra, is that the word eikev means “a reward in the end.” The possuk therefore reads “and it will be, as the end result of listening to the ordinances . . . then Hashem will guard, etc.” Here again, according to the Ibn Ezra, we have a simple explanation of the possuk, which Rashi chose not to give. Once again, we are forced to ask why Rashi did not opt for a more simple explanation of the possuk. The Ramban offers four pesukim to validate the Ibn Ezra, where a bodily limb is used in reference to a chronological order or order of importance, such as “head” being the first or most important thing, and “tail” meaning the last or least important. Thus, the Ramban posits that the word eikev could feasibly be a reference to an end result, using the heel’s position at the end of the body as a metaphor. (Interestingly enough, and worthy of further discussion, the Ramban does not offer any examples of the word eikev being used this way in any other context.)

The Ramban then turns to Onkelos, who translates eikev as “chalaf” meaning “in exchange for.” The possuk thus translates to “and it will be in exchange for listening to the ordinances . . .” The Ramban attempts to prove this explanation by citing examples of eikev meaning “going around” or “crooked.” The Ramban says that this is what the Targum meant by “chalaf”, and that the possuk would then read “and it will be after going around, the result will be . . .”. Admittedly, the Ramban’s explanation of Onkelos seems to be far removed from the simple meaning of the word chalaf.

In his concluding paragraphs, the Ramban brings many more proofs to eikev being a reference to some form of “circling to a conclusion”. This appears to be an attempt to combine the explanations of Onkelos and the Ibn Ezra. The Ramban also agrees that a simple pshat in the word could simply be “since”.

And so, we are left with a glaring question on Rashi. Why did Rashi abandon these potential explanations of the word, and instead cite the Midrash? Every commentary on Rashi searches for a justification of his use of the Tanchuma. The Gur Aryeh explains that what troubled Rashi was that the possuk abandoned the standard word, “im” (if). The very fact that the possuk used a peculiar

language forced Rashi to find an alternative explanation.

The Be'er Heitiv has an alternative explanation for Rashi, namely, that the word eikev means something which is certain, not something which is conditional! The possuk in Bereishis means that Avraham surely obeyed Hashem's voice. Thus, the Ramban's first pshat of "since" or "because" cannot work here.

According to both the Be'er Heitiv and the Gur Aryeh, Rashi saw a fundamental issue with the pshat in this phrase, which led him to cite the Tanchuma to justify the use of the word eikev in this context.

## Eretz Yisrael's Riches

*Rabbi Noach Goldstein*

**P**arshat Ekev contains one of the most stirring descriptions of Eretz Yisrael in the entire Chumash: "A land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land where you may eat bread without scarceness, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper."

However, the Ramban notes that there is one natural resource conspicuously absent: precious metal. Iron and copper, the metals used for construction and labor, are abundant, but gold and silver are nowhere to be found. R. Shmuel Alter notes this in his *L'kutei Bosar L'kutei* and explains that the pasuk's point is that as long as life's necessities are provided for, one should adopt the mindset of "you will lack nothing." The scarcity of luxury goods in Israel must not detract from its inhabitants' sense of blessing and plenty; rather it should enhance it. Our mantra is Yaakov Avinu's response to Esav: "יֵשׁ לִי כֹל" – I have everything.

However, the pasuk really does seem to imply that Eretz Yisrael has all the resources necessary for Bnei Yisrael to truly grow wealthy. In fact, Moshe will explicitly warn about the potential dangers of the wealth they will soon enjoy, most famously in Parshat Ha'azinu ("וַיִּשְׁמַן יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּבְרָכֵם"), but already in our parsha when Moshe envisions the people forgetting God as they build beautiful houses, grow live flocks, and indeed amass silver and gold!

We can propose a second explanation of the Ramban's insight. Eretz Yisrael has all the resources necessary not only for a viable society but for a highly prosperous one—as long as its inhabitants put in the effort. They cannot just

As for the issue raised by the Ramban from the word "mishpatim", we can explain using the Zichron Ozer, that Rashi understood this as a reference to those aspects of monetary law which are generally neglect-ed. Alternatively, the Gur Aryeh brings sources where the term mishpatim includes all mitzvos, even those outside of Choshen Mishpat. According to this explanation, Rashi would read the possuk as warning us to adhere to the minor details of all mitzvos, not just monetary ones. Whether the category of "minor de-tails" is objective or subjective, will have to be subject to further *iyunim*.

get rich quick mining silver and gold (or, we can now add, oil). For decades, economists have explored the resource curse: places with abundant natural resources, ranging from the gold-mining Spanish empire to modern petro-states, often struggle to truly develop. Eretz Yisrael does have the resource potential to establish a thriving economy precisely because its resources demand human effort and ingenuity.

This sheds light on the classic warning the Torah issues immediately afterwards: "Beware lest your heart grow haughty and you forget the Lord your God ... and you say to yourselves, 'My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me' ("כִּהְיִי וְעַצְמִי יָדִי"). The fact that Eretz Yisrael actually does require the Israelites to harness their power and the might of their own hands is what makes this perspective such a likely trap. On the one hand, Hashem gave us a land where our work would enable us to succeed. On the other hand, we must always remember that that success is also thanks to Him.