

## Parshas Eikev

### WORTH THE EFFORT

One of the sections of Moshe's farewell speech opens with a reiteration on how important it is that people put in real effort:

וְהָיָה עִקְבֹת תִּשְׁמְעוּן, אֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים הָאֵלֶּה, וּשְׁמֹרְתֶם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם, אֲתֶם-וְנִשְׁמַר ה' אֱלֹהֵיךָ לְךָ, אֶת-הַבְּרִית וְאֶת-הַחֶסֶד, אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע, לְאַבְרָהָם – When you will listen to the laws, observe and perform them; Hashem will safeguard you, and uphold the covenant sworn to your fathers. (7: 12)

The Alshich points out the peculiarity of the word עִקְבֹת – it is very infrequently found. In addition to which, it doesn't even seem to change the basic message in the context – were it not to say עִקְבֹת, the meaning would remain the same – it hasn't even been translated above, for this reason.

It seems to be a conditional term, but this raises an issue – in Judaism, we do not perform our duties like workers with the expectation of reward at the end. We are meant to dedicate ourselves regardless. So what is the implication of the conditional incentive clearly stated?

R' Shlomo Ganzfried explains that the reward is not actually for the net result of the action performed.

The Gemara in Berachos tells how R' Zeira took a short break from his learning, left the study hall, and decided to sit on the steps outside; so that if a rabbi walked by, he could stand up out of respect and deference, gaining merit while nonetheless being idle from learning.

This evidently indicates that positive attitude and care are independently valuable characteristics to display and exercise, outside of the set mitzvos and laws.

Similarly, the Torah requires anyone who witnesses an event to not withhold testimony. This also means that a witness can not be paid to testify – they are already obligated. However, if someone is hired to investigate something, and they find evidence or the like, they can be still be paid, not violating the above requirement.

This is because they are not being paid for the testimony or presentation of evidence. The payment is for the work and effort put in.

The same is true of the Torah's affirmation of the reward, exemplified by the story of R Zeira. There may be no reward for the actual mitzva in this world – but showing respect for the accoutrements of Torah is very different.

This is why it is specifically here that the word עֲקֹב – literally “heel” – appears here. It is not conditional on performance at all; indeed, the Torah must be observed under any and all circumstances.

But the legwork, the walking, the effort, are what matters. That makes all the difference. This is the imagery of עֲקֹב.

## INTERCONNECTED

In Moshe's final address to the people, he tells them how each one of them is important:

וְהָיָה עֲקֹב תְּשׁוּמֵעוֹן אֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים הָאֵלֶּה וְשִׁמְרָתֶם וְעָשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְשָׁמַר ה' אֱלֹהֵיךָ לְךָ אֶת הַבְּרִית וְאֶת הַחֻסָּד אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם – It will be because you listen to these ordinances, keep and perform them, that the Lord your God will keep for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers. (7: 12)

When addressing the audience, Moshe alternates between תְּשׁוּמֵעוֹן, the plural, to לְךָ, the singular. Why?

The Gemara in Shabbos records how a non-Jew approached Shamai and offered to convert if Shamai would teach him the entire Torah, standing on one leg. Interpreting the gentile's words as mockery, Shamai threw a piece of building rubble at him. The gentile approached Hillel and proposed the same. Hillel said, “Love your neighbor as yourself. The rest is commentary, now go and study.”

What was the premise of the man's request? Clearly, the request to learn Torah on one leg is absurd, let alone to ask it of the greatest rabbis of the era. Hillel's response is curious too. How does his answer incorporate mitzvos such as Shabbos, tefilin, tzitzis etc.?

Moreover, it is simply impossible to accomplish all 613 mitzvos, ever; many are mutually exclusive. Some are specific to gender, age, caste eg Kohanim and Levi'im, kings, during the time of the Temple and so on. One cannot possibly hope to do so.

Shamai spurned him with construction material. The imagery alludes to a building that has many sections, rooms and floors. Without multiple components, it's not a building. In the same vein, the Torah has many levels, and many mitzvos. Without them all, the Jew is incomplete – there is no “Jew” without “the Jews”. Shamai's response indicates that the Torah cannot be actualised by an individual; it is paradoxically impossible to fulfill each and every mitzva, one must simply recognise their place in the nation.

Hillel proposed that individuals can associate with all mitzvos – a cog in the machine is inseparable from the machine itself. His directive of וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ means that with unity, the rest of the Torah is innately there. The benchmark of unity is אחד בלב אחד – one man with one heart. A hat belongs to you, not your head. Similarly, if a Jew performs a mitzva, the entire nation tap into it. With a few simple words, Hillel explained to the gentile how to contextualise Torah directives.

Back to Moshe's speech, he says וְשִׁמְרָתֶם וְעָשִׂיתֶם – keep and perform them in the plural form, which is said to the entire nation. But nonetheless, in spite of the inability of being able to actually do them all, אֱלֹהֵיךָ, Hashem will protect you – the individual. That is, each person should keep what they are truly able, and will be rewarded as such.

This explains why it was necessary to be united at Sinai; without unity, there would be no point in receiving a Torah that could not be fulfilled.

R Yitzchak Lande points out that the Torah switches from plural to singular many times, because although there is a communal responsibility, this doesn't assuage the individual's duty to pitch in – even if the job is done!

Everyone has to pull their weight – leave apportionment of credit to God.

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