

## Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Ekev  
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פרשת עקב  
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Torah Reading: *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 7:12-11:25

In this *parasha*, Moshe continues his speech to the Bnei Yisrael, reminding them to keep Hashem's commandments when they enter the land of Israel.

The first verse of the *parasha*, which includes the word for which the *parasha* is named, reads:

וְהָיָה עֵקֶב תִּשְׁמָעוּן, אֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים הָאֵלֶּה, וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם, אֹתָם--  
וְשָׁמַר ה' אֱ-לֹהֵיךָ לְךָ, אֶת-הַבְּרִית וְאֶת-הַחֶסֶד, אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע, לְאַבְרָהָם

And it shall come to pass, because you listen to these laws, and keep and do them, that Hashem your God shall keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your ancestors.

The word “עֵקֶב – *Ekev*” above is translated as “because.” This is an unusual construct; the word used for “because” in Hebrew, even in Biblical Hebrew, is generally “כִּי – *kee*.” In addition, the word עֵקֶב means “heel,” as in the heel of a foot; עֵקְבוֹת – *ekvot* are footsteps. There must be some homiletical principle – something from which we can derive a deeper moral lesson – to be learned from the use of the word *ekev*.

Rashi [11<sup>th</sup> Century Franco Germany] and Ibn Ezra [12<sup>th</sup> Century Spain] draw two very different lessons from this word.

Rashi states, “If even the simpler *mitzvot* which a person usually steps on with his heel [that is, which a person may be inclined to treat lightly], you will listen to and observe, then Hashem will keep for you the promise.” This brings to mind the statement in *Pirkei Avot*, the Ethics of the Sages (2:4): ‘הוֹי רָץ לְמִצְוָה קְלָה כְּחַמּוּרָה’: ‘Run to pursue a simple *mitzvah* as much as you do a more serious *mitzvah*.’ Rashi

is saying in effect, that there is no such thing as a less important *mitzvah*, and that in the eyes of God, all *mitzvot* are of equal importance, no matter how trivial a particular *mitzvah* may seem to us.

Ibn Ezra takes a different tack. He says, “This is parallel to the verse in Psalms (119:112), ‘נָטִיתִי לְבִי, לַעֲשׂוֹת חֻקֶיךָ לְעוֹלָם יְקָב’ – I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes, forever at every step [*ekev*].’ The reward comes after everything, in the footsteps of the deed.” He is implying that the use of the word *ekev* in our verse indicates that the positive consequence of doing the *mitzvot* is that Hashem will keep the promise made to our ancestors.

No matter which of these explanations you think better explicates the unusual word usage in the first verse of *Parashat Ekev*, it is enlightening to note the rich tapestry that the Torah transmits to us through a single word and the latitude that we humans have to read into it multiple meanings.

Shabbat shalom.

For Discussion:

- Which of the explanations above makes more sense to you? Why?
- The name of one of our forefathers, יַעֲקֹב – Yaakov, also derives from the word יְקָב. Do you think that this is at all connected with this verse? If so, how? If not, why do you then think they derive from the same Hebrew word; what might they have in common?
- What might be considered an “easy *mitzvah*” and why? What might be a “serious *mitzvah*” and why?