

Kol Mevasser

SHABBAT EKEV

18 Av 5769

August 8, 2009

Kahal Joseph Congregation • 10505 Santa Monica Boulevard • Los Angeles, CA 90025

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It's the Little Things that Count

Rabbi Yosef Benarroch

This week's Torah portion entitled "Ekev" discusses the concept of "Reward and Punishment". Two texts stand out in this respect.

One is the second chapter of the "Shema" that is recited daily in our morning and evening prayers. In it we read the following, *"And it shall come to pass if you hearken to my commandments that I command you today, to love G-d and to serve him with all your heart, and will all your soul and with all you might, then I will bring the rains in their time, and you will gather in your corn, and your wine, and your oil" (Devarim 11:13-14)*. The "Shema" as you can see addresses the issue of "Reward and Punishment". It tells us clearly that if we follow G-d's commands, then we will be rewarded with rains in their appropriate times and with abundance of crops.

This idea also appears at the very beginning of the portion. The Parasha begins as follows, *"And it shall come to pass (ekev) if you hearken to these judgments and keep them, that the Lord your G-d will keep the covenant that he has promised to your forefathers. And G-d will love you and he will bless you" (Devarim 7:12-13)*. Here too the Torah tells us that if we follow G-d's commands, then we will be rewarded with "G-d's love".

While both of these texts discuss reward and punishment, a close reading shows that the two texts are not parallel. While the opening words of each section (encouraging us to follow G-d's ways) are almost identical, the rewards that are mentioned are very different. The "Shema" speaks of material rewards in the form of rain and abundant crops, while the opening verses of the Parasha mention a more spiritual reward of "G-d's love".

What are the "judgments" that we must keep to be deserving of such a worthy reward?

PRAYER SCHEDULE

SHABBAT EKEV

17 Av / Friday, August 7th

Shaharith6:30 am
Minhah & Arvith6:45 pm
Shabbat Candlelighting.....7:30 pm

18 Av / Saturday, August 8th

Shaharit8:30 am
Minhah & Arvith7:00 pm
Motzei Shabbat.....8:32 pm

Weekdays

19 Av / Sunday, August 9th

Shaharith7:30 am

20-23 Av/ August 10th to 13th

Shaharith6:30 am

SHABBAT RE'EH

24 Av / Friday, August 14th

Shaharith6:30 am
Minhah & Arvith6:45 pm
Shabbat Candlelighting.....7:22 pm

The opening words of the Parasha are quite ambiguous. The Torah doesn't spell out exactly what those judgments are. Are the judgments mentioned here referring to Shabbat, Kashrut, or other major laws? After all just like a punishment must fit the crime so too the rewards must fit the act.

"Rashi", in his commentary, explains that the "judgments" being referred to in the opening verse are the most minor commandments of the Torah. Using a play on words "Rashi" explains that the "judgments" refer to those commandments that a *"Person tramples with the heel (Ekev) of their foot" (Rashi Ekev 7:12)*.

Rashi's explanation requires some understanding. The reward seems to be disproportionate. How can we receive such a great reward for performing such "minor commandments"? Great acts deserve great rewards and small acts deserve small rewards.

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The answer is very significant. Life is really about the little things. Everyone wants to change the world; we all dream about doing big things and making a huge impact. Reality is that what really matters is the little things.

Take going on vacation as an example. You are faced with a decision to stay in a four star or five star hotel. You ask yourself what the difference is. The answer is the little details. At the five star hotel the bathroom has a nice robe, the soap and shampoo have brand names, the bed comes with three pillows not two, the TV is 27 inches and not 21, and it's a plasma screen to boot. In the end what distinguishes between the four star hotel and the five star one is the details.

This same idea applies to love. If marriage has taught me anything it is that love is built on the little things. You can buy your wife the most expensive car or the biggest diamond ring, but if you can't find five minutes for her or the right word when she is down then the car and the diamond are worthless. Love is about the little things like finding time, the right words, and a helping hand when the hour is late. Sometimes a bouquet of flowers is far more significant than the most expensive jewels. Yes it is the little things that count. The little things that we do are the greatest statements of our love. They show that the other person really matters to us.

When we do the little things for the people we love then what we get is love in return. That is precisely what the Torah is saying to us. What the Parasha is telling us is that G-d's love is the result of doing the little things. When G-d sees that we are willing to take care of the details and to show our constant love to him every day then he turns around and says now you are worthy of my love.

One of those details is discussed later on in the Parasha. In this week's portion we find the obligation to recite "Birkat Hamazon" the grace after meals. That obligation is derived from the verse, "*When you eat and become satiated you shall bless the Lord your G-d*" (Devarim 8:10). This is the only time the Torah obligates us to make a blessing over food.

Reciting a blessing after eating is a perfect example that doing the little things is what's important. Eating is something we constantly do. Every day we eat which means that every day we have the ability to thank G-d. That little act of finding a few minutes after every meal allows us to connect to G-d. The mundane and constant act of eating is thus transformed into a spiritual moment. When we do that and take those few moments to show our gratitude to G-d for the food he has provided us, then for that little act we are deserving of G-d's love in return. Judaism is made up of thousands of similar little acts. Each one is an opportunity to show our love to G-d, and to receive G-d's love in return.

Published courtesy of the SEC

Ge'onim: The Great Sephardic Scholars ***Abraham Ibn Ezra***

The Golden Age of Spain produced magnificent Jewish scholars. One of these was Abraham Ibn Ezra. Born in 1089, Ibn Ezra was a friend of Judah HaLevi. Tradition maintains that he married HaLevi's daughter.

Ibn Ezra was a poet, astrologist, scientist, and Hebrew grammarian. All the Hebrew grammar books to that time had been written in Arabic including Saadia Gaon's famous work. When he discovered that the Jews of Italy didn't understand Hebrew grammar, he wrote an excellent book in Hebrew which became a best-seller. It elucidated Hebrew grammar for Jews living in Christian Europe. Ibn Ezra also introduced the decimal system to Jews living in the Christian world. He used the Hebrew *alef to tet* for 1 to 9, but added a special sign to indicate zero. He then placed the tens to the left of the digits in the usual way.

Ibn Ezra's most famous work was his commentary on the Bible. Unlike Rashi, Ibn Ezra didn't want to use midrash in his explanations. He concentrated on the grammar and literal meaning of the text. Ibn Ezra found seams and grammatical problems that invited introspection and resolution. He used the phrase, "And the intelligent will understand" whenever he discussed a challenging insight.

Abraham ibn Ezra presented philosophical positions in his biblical commentaries. He was essentially neoplatonic and was influenced by Solomon ibn Gabirol's allegorical interpretation of the account of the Garden of Eden. He described God's relation to the world like Gabirol and said of God that "He is all, and all comes from Him; He is the source from which everything flows." Ibn Ezra described the process of the world's emanation from God by the image of the multiplication of numbers from the One, and or of speech issuing from the mouth of a speaker.

He suggested that the form and matter of the intelligible world emanated from God, whereas terrestrial matter was pre-existent and uncreated. The intelligible world, like God, was eternal, while the terrestrial world was created in time and through the mediation of the intelligible world. The terrestrial world was created from pre-existent terrestrial matter and the biblical account of creation relates only to the terrestrial world. Accordingly, he interpreted *Elohim* ("God") as the intelligible world or angels, and *bara* ("created") as "He limited."

Ibn Ezra divided the universe into three "worlds:" the "upper world" of intelligibles or angels; the "intermediate world" of the celestial spheres; and the lower, sublunar "world" which was created in time. His images of creation powerfully influenced later generations of kabbalists.

We offer our
deepest condolences
to the family & friends of

Hannah Isaac, z"l
mother of Ezie Isaac
& Raymond Isaac

May they be comforted together
with all the mourners of Zion

Shabbat Kiddush
is sponsored
in honor of the
Bar Mitzvah of
Kevin Pouldar

by Afsaneh & Edi Pouldar

Refuah Shlemah

Please include these individuals in your prayers
Yonatan ben Alizah ▪ Mazal Tob bat Sulha
Matana ▪ Jack Wickett ▪ Ayala bat Naomi
Yosi ben Esther ▪ Yaheskel ben Regina
Matilda Louisa ▪ Victor ben Pauline
Haim ben Mordechai ▪ Khayah Noa bat Sara
Pnina bat Esther ▪ Moshe ben Naji

Parasha & Haftara

Parashat Ekev pp. TBA
Haftarah TBA

In Memoriam

These anniversaries occur from Shabbat, the 18th of Av (August 8, 2009) to Shabbat, the 25th of Av (August 15, 2009). It is customary to light a memorial candle in the evening and donate tzedakah. Family members are encouraged to attend services.

Shabbat / 18 Av
Kadoori ben Sasson

Sunday / 19 Av
Ester bat Rivka

Tuesday / 21 Av
Khatoon bat Noosha
Farangis bat Hanonbib

Wednesday / 22 Av
Rahel bat Zivar

Thursday / 23 Av
Rachel bat Moshe*

Friday / 24 Av
Itzhak ben Abdullah Ezra

Shabbat / 25 Av
Simha bat Sulha Mitana

**Yahrzeit names with asterisks are missing contact phone numbers and addresses for family members. To update the database, please call 310.474.0559.*

SPICE READERS CLUB

Wouldn't you like to chant a haftara for a special occasion? Do you want to add spice to your reading? Then call the office to reserve your haftara at 310.474.0559!. Schedule time with Saeed & learn your haftara with authentic Baghdad ta'amim, Iraqi melodies for chanting from the Torah.

Talmud Torah Registration

for 2009-2010 is going on now!

First Day of Class is
September 6th at 9:30 am

*For information contact Molly at
310.474.0559 or molly@kahaljoseph.org*

KAHAL JOSEPH CONGREGATION

Tuesday, September 1, 2009 at 8 pm

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