

# *Parshas Eikev*

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## *1. What is the Inherent Value of Mitzvos?*

When the Torah enumerates Statutes (Chukim) and Ordinances (Mishpatim) it always mentions the Statutes before the Ordinances. One would think that when the Torah presents our obligations it should first present the laws that can be understood on a rational basis and then the Statutes, which are dictates that are incomprehensible to the human mind. We explained earlier that the Torah first presents the Statutes and then the Ordinances to teach us that in fact there is no difference between them in terms of their basis. Meaning, the reason why we are bound to the Ordinances such as not stealing and killing is not because of their rational value but rather because it is the Will of G-d. We follow the Statutes for the same reason.

Moshe said the Jewish people, ***“V’haya eikev tishmeun ais ha’mishpatim... (This shall be the reward when you hearken to these ordinances), and you observe and perform them; Hashem, your G-d, will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers...And you will merit all the bounty and reward.”*** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the reason why the Torah uses the word “eikev” (which also means “heel”) is because it alludes to the mitzvos which are viewed as not important and therefore, trampled upon. The Torah tells us that if one keeps even *these* mitzvos he will merit the greatest degree of material reward. The question is why is keeping the seemingly less important mitzvos the cause of one’s exceptional reward?

Also, whenever the Mishpatim are mentioned it is always in conjunction with Chukim. In this instance the Torah only states, “If you will keep the Mishpatim” and there is no reference to the Chukim. The question is why?

We had asked – if one keeps the seemingly less important mitzvos that were trampled upon by one’s heel is he deserving of an exceptional level of reward. If one observes the mitzvah because it is the Will of Hashem then why does one differentiate between the more stringent mitzvah and the seemingly less important one? In either case one must adhere with the same level of commitment because they are BOTH the Will of Hashem. Evidently if one does make a distinction between the two, this is an indication that the motive for the performance of the mitzvah is self-interest rather than doing the Will of Hashem. One acts out of self-interest when he is willing to sacrifice for the “more stringent” mitzvah because the perceived liability is greater or the accomplishment has more value; yet he tends to be less concerned with the seemingly unimportant mitzvah where the liability is of a lesser consequence. Therefore if one adheres even to the mitzvos which are normally “trampled upon” by one’s heel, he is deserving of the greatest level of reward because he is performing the mitzvah purely for the sake of Hashem.

With this understanding we are able to appreciate why Moshe used the expression “Mishpatim” (Ordinances) and not “Chukim” (Statutes). He is speaking about the mitzvos that have been ignored or transgressed because of their perceived lack of value. If this is the case then the cause of one’s failing is only because one’s approach to mitzvos was based on his evaluation rather than doing the Will of Hashem. If in fact the approach to mitzvos would have been “Chukim” then one could not have rationalized their transgression because of a perceived lack of value.

Therefore Moshe is pointing out that if one regards Hashem’s Commandments as “Mishpatim” then he is susceptible to failure because his own sense of value is the determining factor in their

importance. However if one performs the mitzvos because they are purely for the sake of doing the Will of Hashem, then he will merit the greatest level of reward.

## ***2. Regardless of One's Level, One Must Realize His Vulnerability***

Moshe Rabbeinu tells the Jewish people, **“He (Hashem) afflicted you and let you hunger, then He fed you the manna that you did not know, nor did your forefathers know, in order to make you know that not by bread alone does man live, rather by everything that emanates from the Mouth of G-d does man live.”** What is the meaning of “Hashem afflicted you and let you hunger”? One could think that the Torah is referring to the forty-year period in which the Jews wandered in the desert. However, the Torah tells us that every Jew was given a sufficient amount of manna to satisfy his daily need. Regardless of how much or how little he gathered in, miraculously every Jew had a sufficient amount. If this is the case then what is meant when Moshe Rabbeinu tells the Jewish people, “Hashem afflicted you and let you hunger”?

One could think that since the Jewish people only received a daily stipend from day to day, they were continuously in an uncertain state of existence, not knowing if the stipend would repeat itself the following day. If one would want to store the manna for the following day it did not keep and became putrid. If this was the reality of the Jews in the desert, we can understand the meaning that they were in a continuously “afflicted” and “hungry” state. However, this understanding is flawed because after an extended period of receiving the manna day in and day out, one would think that their fears of not receiving were put to rest. If so, what is the understanding that they were “afflicted” and went “hungry” as a result of the manna?

The Gemara in *Tractate Yomah* tells us that the manna took on the taste, texture, and nutritional value of any food that one had in mind; nevertheless, the Jews were in a continuously afflicted and hungry state. The Gemara explains that the visual effect of food is a necessary element to satisfying one's hunger. Therefore the Gemara tells us that a blind man will never be sated, regardless of how much he eats, because he does not have the visual effect of the food. The Jews did not have the visual effect from their food.

However, if a person is living in a spiritual context and is surrounded with continuous miracles, seemingly he eats only as a means to sustain his existence in order to perform the Will of Hashem. If this is so, then how do we understand that although the Jews did not have an enhanced visual effect from what they were eating, why did they feel deprived? When the Vilna Gaon zt'l had food prepared for him it was made in such a way that he should not derive any degree of physical pleasure from it. This was because his only interest in food was as a means of sustenance and survival. If this is the case then how can we say that the most special and spiritually “enlightened” generation of Jews that ever lived were “afflicted and hungry” because they did not have visual effect from what they were eating?

The Gemara tells us, “The greater the person the greater is his inclination (evil inclination).” This principle is true because if one's inclination is not in sync with his spirituality then he loses the power of choice. Therefore as he advances himself spiritually, so too does his inclination intensify. The generation of the desert experienced revealed miracles on a continuous basis, i.e. the manna, the wellspring of Miriam, and the Clouds of Glory. Hashem had to keep their evil inclination in pace with their spiritual growth. Therefore within this context, although it should not have been considered a test, they were tested because of the manna's lack of visual appeal. Similarly, the Gemara tells us in *Tractate Avoda Zarah* that after the Sinai experience, the Jews should not have sinned with the Golden Calf; nevertheless, Hashem intensified their evil inclination to give them the choice to reject idolatry or to succumb to its temptation.

Since Hashem wanted to teach the Jews the lesson that one does not live by bread alone, but rather by the Word of Hashem, He caused the Jews to feel afflicted and denied.

## ***3. How Does One Guarantee His Spirituality Despite His Material Success***

The Torah states, **“You will eat and You will be satisfied, and bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good Land that He gave you.”** This verse is the basis for the Birchas HaMazon (Grace after Meals), one’s obligation to acknowledge Hashem after we have eaten to a sated level. The Torah continues, **“Take care lest you forget Hashem, your G-d, by not observing His commandments, His Ordinances, and His Decrees, which I commanded you today...”** The Torah is warning that one may come to forget Hashem as a result of prosperity. After one has achieved prosperity he may say, **“My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!”** How does one forget Hashem? Certainly the Torah does not mean that suddenly one day a person awakens and does not remember Hashem. Rather, forgetting Hashem is a gradual process which begins with neglecting His commandments, His Ordinances and His Decrees. Torah Judaism is not a conceptual religion, but rather its essence is the observance and the study of the Torah.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us, based on the verse quoted earlier, that there is an obligation to recite a blessing after one is satisfied from a meal. The Gemara asks, “How do we know that one also has an obligation to recite a blessing **before** one eats?” The Gemara answers based on the principle of Kal V’Chomer (one of the methodologies of interpreting the Torah) that if one is obligated to bless Hashem when one is sated, is it not logical to say that one must acknowledge Him before he eats when he is hungry? Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk zt”l comments that the grace after meals is a Torah obligation while the blessing recited before eating is only rabbinical. If the obligation of reciting a blessing after eating is derived through the principle of Kal V’Chomer (which is a Torah principle), shouldn’t the pre-blessing be considered a Torah obligation also?

Reb Meir Simcha answers that there is a fallacy in the cogency of the Kal V’Chomer and therefore it is not valid. The reason why the Torah obligates one to acknowledge Hashem after one is satisfied is because it is the tendency of a human being to forget Hashem when he is in a state of complacency. When a person is not needy but feels content and secure, his tendency is to reject Hashem and attribute all that he has to his own accomplishment. Because of this human vulnerability, the Torah obligates one to immediately acknowledge the source of his satiation in order to counter one’s natural tendency. However when one is hungry and insecure he naturally understands that he needs Hashem. Therefore, the Torah does not obligate him at that time to identify his source of sustenance; thus, the blessing that precedes eating is only rabbinical.

The Rambam tells us that the obligation of tefilla (prayer) is Biblical. This Torah obligation is to pray to Hashem once a day using the format of: introductory blessings (praise and glorification), middle segment of requests, and concluding segment to give thanks to Hashem for all that He has provided us. However, rabbinically we are obligated to pray (Amidah) three times a day; morning (Shachris), afternoon (Mincha), and evening (Arvis). The question is – why did the Rabbis of Blessed Memory feel it necessary to enact two additional prayer services within one twenty-four hour period.

The Rambam rules that if one omits the middle section of “requests” from the Amidah he has not fulfilled his Torah obligation of tefilla. The question is – if tefilla is acknowledgement of who G-d is and recognition that all that we receive is from Him, then why is it that if one omits the middle section of requests does he not fulfill his obligation of tefilla? The answer is – if one omits the section of requests from his tefilla, it is the equivalent of behaving as if He is not needed. If in fact G-d is the provider, then how do we not beseech Him for our needs? At the beginning of prayer one may have acknowledged G-d’s greatness, however, if “requests” are omitted regarding his own existence, whether it is for health or livelihood, it is like saying that G-d does not play a role. Therefore it is not sufficient only to acknowledge who G-d is but rather one must request G-d to address all of his needs. If one does not do this it is the equivalent of saying, **“My strength and the might of my hand has made me all this wealth!”**

Understanding human nature, the Rabbis felt it necessary to obligate one to pray three times a day. Regardless of one’s success or failure at any particular period of the day, one must acknowledge that the determining factor is whether G-d wishes to provide or not. If one does not have the anchor of tefilla on an ongoing basis throughout the day, then one could be easily swept

away by the successes of daily life and cause him to forget about Hashem.

If we are continuously cognizant and understand that everything emanates from Him then we will never forget Hashem or our need of His Kindness.

#### ***4. When will the Jewish People be Esteemed by the Nations of the World? (from Va'eschanan)***

Moshe said to the Jewish people, **“See, I have taught you Chukim (statutes) and Mishpatim (Ordinances)... You shall safeguard (*Shmartem*) and perform them, for it is your wisdom and discernment in the eyes of the peoples, who shall hear these statutes and who shall say ‘Surely a wise and discerning people is this great nation!’”** Chukim (Statutes) are laws that are not based on rational human thinking but are derived from Divine decrees. For example, dietary laws, Shatnez (not wearing a garment made of wool and linen), the law of the Red Heifer etc. are statutes. Mishpatim (Ordinances) are rational laws the value of which one is able to comprehend. Even if these laws were not dictated by G-d, very possibly they would have been promulgated by man anyway.

Moshe Rabbeinu told the Jewish people that if they want to be esteemed by the world and be viewed as wise and discerning, they must be proficient in the laws of the Torah as well as abide by them. If the Jew is consistent with the Torah in his personal life then the world will esteem him. However, if the Jew lives his life just like society as a whole, even though it may be ethical and moral, he will not be esteemed by the world. In fact, ultimately the world will despise him because he is not living his life as a Jew is meant to – according to the dictates of the Torah.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk z'tl predicted in his commentary on the Portion of Bechukosai (the Portion that describes the curses that will befall the Jewish people if they deviate from the pathways of the Torah), that the holocaust will originate in Berlin because the Jews of Germany referred to Berlin as “Jerusalem”. The reason he gave for his understanding was that the Jews were behaving no differently than German society. The gentile does not want to see the Jew outpacing him in his own ways.

When the Jew lives a life that is consistent with Torah values and laws, Hashem says that the nations of the world will esteem him; however, if he does not live according to the dictates of the Torah, then ultimately holocaust will come.

The verse states that when the nations of the world will hear of the Statutes that the Jewish people abide by, they will respond by saying, **“Surely a wise and discerning people is this great nation!”** The question is why will the nations of the world be impressed when they see the Jew living within the context of laws that seem to be humanly irrational and without any relevance to human comprehension?

On the surface, Mishpatim (Ordinances), such as the prohibitions against stealing and killing etc. seem to be rooted in humanitarianism, because they are logical and necessary to maintain order in society. On the other hand, Chukim (Statutes) which are laws that cannot be understood by the human mind are kept only because they were commanded by G-d. Yet, this is not the case. The basis for Mishpatim is no different than the basis for Chukim. The reason why the Jew does not kill or steal is not because it is immoral or unethical - but because G-d said “You Shall not Kill and You Shall not Steal.” This is what makes these acts unethical and immoral. In essence there is no difference between Chukim and Mishpatim - The basis for both is the Will of Hashem. We refrain from killing not because it is “inhuman” to kill, but rather because G-d commanded us not to kill. If humanism was the reason for the prohibition against killing, then one could justify euthanasia as a correct and proper way to end one’s life. However, since “Thou Shall not Kill” is rooted in the Word of G-d, regardless of one’s justification, it is considered murder.

If we observe the Mishpatim for the same reason that we observe Chukim, solely because G-d

commanded us to do so and not because of our own subjective reasons, then there is no basis or circumstance that will allow one to justify compromise. If the Jew adheres to the Torah and lives his life in this manner, then the nations of the world will esteem him. If the Jew however is corrupted because of his conflict of interest and compromises the truth of the Torah, then the world will despise him because falsehood is not something to be esteemed.

We, the Jewish people are not esteemed by the world by mimicking and imitating its values and lifestyles. This will only occur when we are proficient in Torah and observe its Statutes and Ordinances, because G-d commanded us to do so.

### ***5. The Forecasting of Our Destruction is in Essence of Our Survival (from Va'eschanan)***

In the Torah Portion which is read on Tisha B'Av it states, **“You will be for a long time in the land and you will become corrupted (idolaters). When you will do evil in the Eyes of Hashem, your G-d, He will become Angered and Heaven and Earth will be witnesses that (G-d) will destroy you.”** Rashi cites the Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin that “You will be for a long time in the land” alludes to the fact that the Jewish people would go into exile after 852 years. However, he continues that the Jews actually went into exile two years earlier than this. He says that had they remained in the land for 852 years, Hashem would have destroyed them. As the verse states, “You will be destroyed quickly from the land.” Rashi quotes the verse from Daniel “Hashem was diligent to bring about the evil (the exile) that he brought upon us because Hashem our G-d, is a Tzaddik.” Meaning, it was because of the righteousness of Hashem that we went into exile two years earlier. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin asks - how could Hashem be considered a tzaddik for exiling the people from the Land of Israel sooner rather than later?

The Gemara tells us that at the time of the First Bais HaMikdash (First Temple) there were a number of exiles which led up to the final one when the Jews were driven out of the Land of Israel. When the exile of Tzidkiyahu, the King of Yehudah, took place, the previous exile of Yechanyah was still in effect. Meaning, that the people of the first banishment were still alive in Babylon when the people of the second one arrived. The verse in Kings tells us there was a group of sages exiled with Yechanyah who were of a great Torah dimension. When they would speak, people would listen and accept their words as if they were “deaf mutes”. When these same Torah sages would give a halachic ruling it would be the final word and no one would debate the issue any longer.

If the second exile had been delayed for another two years, these special Torah sages would have already passed away. Consequently, the Jews who followed would not have been exposed to people of this dimension - resulting in the spiritual destruction of the Jewish people. Therefore when Hashem brought about the destruction of the Temple two years earlier, which resulted in the exile, it was a blessing.

When the Torah tells us that if the Jews would have been in the Land for the numerical value of 852 years, and they would have “been destroyed quickly from the Land” does not mean physical destruction, but rather spiritual destruction. Ultimately this would have cast the Jewish people into oblivion. The essence of the Jewish people is the Torah. If they are not connected to G-d through His Torah, then it is only a matter of time before they wither and die. Thus, Hashem is referred to as a “tzaddik”.

We see from this that punishment is not restricted only to the physical. To be put into a state of spiritual dislocation is also punishment. If the Jew is spiritually cut off then it is the equivalent of his annihilation. Chazal tell us, “An evil person during his lifetime is considered as dead.” This is why the Prophet states, “Hashem is a Tzaddik for hastening the destruction.”

The Jews who immigrated to America and sacrificed for the sake of Torah by not working on the Shabbos are the forbearers of the Torah community of today. On the other hand, those who did not sacrifice for their Judaism have been left with descendants that may not even be Jewish.

If a person understands the value and importance of the mitzvos and the study of Torah, then whatever “sacrifices” that may be needed will not be perceived as hardships. As the Mishna tells us, “The reward of a mitzvah cannot be given in this existence” because the value of a mitzvah is eternal.

Despite the exiles and the tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people, Hashem promised us that the Torah will never be forgotten from the Jewish people. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that even if Hashem has to install a king whose decrees are as harsh as those of Haman, He will do so to compel the Jew to do teshuvah (repentance). There are circumstances in which it may appear that the Jews are experiencing great tragedies or hardships; however, as Chazal have taught us based on the verse in Prophets, what is perceived as tragedy is in fact the greatest gift. As it is stated, “Hashem is a tzaddik for expediting the exile.” Similarly, there are many situations which we perceive as tragedy or hardship, but in time to come it will be revealed to us that they were the source of our greatest blessing.