



Partners Detroit Tuesday Night

Study Guide

&

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פרשת עקב

Partshat Eikev

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Parshat Ekev

Ekev is the third portion in the book of Devarim (Deuteronomy), the fifth book of the Torah. This entire book was told to the Jewish people in the last thirty six days of Moshe's life, with last three portions (וילך, האזינו, וזאת הברכה) being said the 7th day of Adar, the day Moshe left this world.

Our sages tell us that this book is different than the other four. Using today's concepts to explain the difference, as far as the first four books are concerned, Moshe was acting like a megaphone, broadcasting the message of Hashem to the Jewish people. (שכינה מדברת מתוך גרונו) In the book of Devarim, however, Moshe was like a tape recorder, playing back to the Jewish people what Hashem had told him in prophesy. Once again, these were the actual words of Hashem, but they had first become part of Moshe, and then they were conveyed to the Jewish people. This difference is seen, in the fact that nowhere in this entire book does it say, "and Hashem told Moshe, tell the Jewish people ..." or "And Hashem spoke to Moshe." Rather it says, "These are the words that Moshe spoke to the Jewish people..." These were received as Moshe's own words to the Jewish people.

The significance of this is, that this book is like Moshe's last will and testament. It contains Moshe's charge to the Jewish people just before he was about to pass away, and just as they were about to enter the land of Israel without him. These would be

the lessons that would guide them and guarantee their future, even though Moshe would no longer be with them.

Here is one of the important lessons in this week's portion, (8,5),

ספר דברים פרק ח
וַיִּדְעַתָּה עִם לְבָבְךָ כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר יַיַסֵּר אִישׁ אֶת בְּנוֹ יִדְוֹד אֱלֹקֶיךָ מִיִּסְרֶךָ :

You should know in your heart that just as a father will chastise his son, so Hashem, your God, chastises you:

This verse dovetails with another verse in Devarim, (14,1).

ספר דברים פרק יד
בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה אֱלֹקֵיכֶם לֹא תִתְגַּדְדוּ וְלֹא תִשְׂיִמוּ קֶרֶחַ בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם לָמֶת :

You are children to Hashem, your God -- you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person:

When we put both verses together, Hashem is telling us that *we are his children (14,1)*, and therefore, *just as a parent punishes a child, so too Hashem punishes us (8,5)*.

In fact, our sages tell us, that Hashem actually loves us more than we love our own children. It is hard to imagine love greater than that of a parent to a child, yet Hashem whose whole essence is love, has infinite love for each and every one of His children and He loves them unconditionally.

Let's take a moment to look more closely at the second verse; it doesn't seem to make sense.

You are children to Hashem, your God -- you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person:

What is does the prohibition of cutting yourself or making a bald spot between your eyes over someone who has passed away, have to do with the fact that we are children to Hashem?

The answer is, that in some cultures it is customary for one to tear the hair out of their heads and cut themselves as an expression of their grief and how hurtful the passing of their loved one is to them.

Hashem tells us, “You are my children who I love so much. Therefore, everything I do is for your best. Accept it as you would a reprimand from your father. Even if you don’t understand why I did it, realize that I have done it out of love for you, and for your benefit. Don’t be acting like my judgment is too harsh and you aren’t accepting of my decree. It is inappropriate since this is the very best thing for you.”

This concept lays the foundation for the Torah perspective on suffering and difficulty in this world. When something happens, it is a love tap from Hashem, the medicine for what ails us. Sometimes the medicine is bitter, but not everything sweet is good for you, and not everything bitter is bad for you.

Imagine a person who goes to the doctor with a cough. The doctor diagnoses him with pneumonia and prescribes a liquid medicine. He takes the first dose, and it’s foul tasting. He calls

the doctor all upset. “Why did you give me such a bitter medicine? Why couldn’t you give me one of the ones like they give my kids? They can’t wait to get the next dose!” What do you think the doctor will tell the fellow?

Rabbi Akiva in the Talmud says it unequivocally.

(3) תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ס/ב
וכן תנא משמיה דרבי עקיבא לעולם יהא אדם רגיל לומר כל דעביד
רחמנא לטב עביד

A person should get himself used to saying “Everything that The Merciful One does is for the best!”

Notice how Rabbi Akiva refers to Hashem as “The Merciful One” and how it says “for the best” not “for the good.” The implication is that this is the very best option, and that Hashem could find no other way of administering the dose of medicine that we need. Keep in mind, that Hashem has all the options available to Him, and yet, this is the option He chose.

An illustration will help bring out this point. Your kid is doing something that is really annoying you, say he’s constantly banging his foot against the table, and it’s driving you nuts.

You have three options.

1. You can ask him very sweetly, “honey, would you please stop that banging? It’s annoying me.”
2. You could go over to him and scream at him. “STOP THAT BANGING THIS INSTANT!!!! IT IS DRIVING ME CRAZY!!!!
3. You could send him to his room for a two hour time-out.

If you knew, that option #1 is all you need to get him to stop, is there any way in the world, you would resort to option #2 or #3?

But if you had asked him politely four or five times, and he has ignored you and continued banging the table, you might find yourself resorting to option #2 or even #3 if he was insolent enough. Not necessarily out of anger or frustration, rather to impress upon him how annoying he is being to you, so that he may stop the offensive behavior.

Similarly, if Hashem knew that a small hint would be sufficient to get our attention, and stop us from doing our annoying, or possibly even offensive or hurtful behaviors, of course He would do that! But, unfortunately, He has sent us many hints that we have either inadvertently or purposely ignored, and thus, we have left Him no choice but to either yell at us, or even give us a slap to wake us up.

This concept is expressed in the following teaching from the Talmud.

(1) תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ה/א
אמר רבא ואיתימא רב חסדא אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין עליו יפשפש
במעשיו

Rava, and some say it was Rav Chisda, said; *If a person sees that he is the subject of suffering, he should inspect his deeds.*

When all of a sudden, things start to happen to a person, there is a reason, a message and a purpose.

The Talmud (Brachot 5b) tells the story of Rav Huna, one of the sages of the Talmud, who had four hundred barrels of wine go bad on him. When his colleagues heard about it, a delegation of Rabbis paid him a visit and told him, “Inspect your deeds!” If your wine has gone bad, something is not right. This is not supposed to happen.

Rav Huna responded, “Do you suspect me of doing something wrong?”

“Should we then suspect Hashem for bringing a loss upon a person who was did not deserve it?” was the rabbi’s response.

Rav Huna then said, “OK, if anyone has heard of something that I am not doing correctly, let them tell me. “

The rabbis responded, “we heard that you are not giving your sharecropper his share of the stems and branches of the vineyard.”

Rav Huna did not deny the accusation, but explained that he was just trying to offset some of the losses he incurred from the theft of his sharecropper.

The Rabbis explained to him that even though he was reclaiming money that was owed to him, since he had to go about it in a way that violated a law, it was not appropriate.

Rav Huna accepted their criticism and agreed to stop his custom, and in the end, did not suffer a loss from the spoiled wine.

There is another important lesson in the idea that Hashem is like a father who sometimes punishes his child.

As parents, we know that our only purpose and reason for punishing our child is out of concern for their welfare. Even though we understand that our child is going to be very upset at us for what we are doing to him, we are prepared to endure yelling, accusations, and upset, because we understand that as a parent this is our responsibility.

King Solomon said it best when he said in Proverbs: (13,24)

(1) ספר משלי פרק יג
חֹשֶׁד׃ שְׁבִטוּ שׁוֹנֵא בְּנוֹ וְאַהֲבוּ שְׁחָרוּ מוֹסֵר

One who does not hit his child, really hates him, and one who loves his child, chastises him when he is young.

Imagine a child who hates school, and cries bitter tears every day that he doesn't want to go to school. The parents give in, and do not insist that their child go to school. The child stays home all day, watches TV and plays video games. He does not learn to read, write, do math or learn any other skill he will need for life. Are they doing their child a favor? Is this good for him? But the kid thinks he has the greatest parents in the world! Think about this. What is he going to think of his parents when he is 35 years old and homeless because he can't get a job? Were they good parents after all?

The prophet Isaiah tells us: (55,9)

(2) ספר ישעיה פרק נה

(ט) כִּי גָבְהוּ שָׁמַיִם מֵאָרֶץ כֵּן גָבְהוּ דַרְכֵי מִדְרָגְתֵיכֶם וּמַחְשְׁבֹתַי מִמַּחְשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם :
As high as the heavens over the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, my thoughts than your thoughts.

Hashem tells us through the prophet, that we are as far away from understanding His ways as the heavens are from the earth. The thought of the difference between heaven and earth give us a hint into why it is impossible to even contemplate fathoming the reason Hashem does what He does.

When you have a bird's eye view of matters, allowing you to see at once all the different components and how things fit together, and how they influence each other, you are in a position to make an informed decision. On the other hand, when you are on the ground and all you can see is the area right in front of you, and nothing beyond, you don't have all the information necessary to decide what is best for all parties involved. Let's add one more dimension. Hashem is basing His calculations on events beginning with Adam and reaching until Mashiach, a period of 5777 years so far. And everything is for the best.

There is another important lesson based on this concept that we are Hashem's children and he loves us more than we love our own children.

When we punished our children by grounding them, for example, and didn't let them go out with their friends, they

were miserable. Sometimes they were crying in their room, cursing us, and telling us how mean and un-understanding we were. How did we feel? Were we gloating and feeling good about our power and control over our children? We felt just as bad as they did, because we could not let them have their way! We wished we could give in! But we nevertheless, held the line, and did what we felt we had to do to help our children learn the lesson they needed to learn.

The very same is true of Hashem. He is experiencing our pain just as we are. There are verses in the Tanach that express this.

In Isaiah (63,9) it says,

(1) ספר ישעיה פרק סג
בְּכָל צָרָתָם לֹא { לוֹ } צָר

In all of their pain, He also has pain

King David says in Psalms: (91,15)

ספר תהילים פרק צא
עִמּוֹ אֲנֹכִי בְּצָרָה

Hashem says, I am with him in his pain.

We should never think, that Hashem doesn't know or care about what we are going through. On the contrary, Hashem is feeling our pain and going through the ordeal with us. It pains Him greatly to have to put us through it, just as it pained us to put our children through the difficult situations that we did.

Our Sages tell us a remarkable thing. They say that when we leave this world and enter the world to come, and we are able

to see the picture from Hashem's perspective, we will all understand how what Hashem did to us, was truly the very very best thing for us, and how He had chosen the very best course of action each and every time.

There is another side to this coin. If we are Hashem's children, then He is our father and we can act towards Him the way a son acts towards his father. Just as a son feels comfortable asking his father anything, we should feel the same way about Hashem. Not only that, if our son went to someone else before asking us for what we really want to give him, we may feel insulted. "Why did you go to a stranger, when I, your father, want to give you whatever you need!" Similarly, Hashem wants to be our "go-to" address. And we can ask Him for anything. Nothing is too small or too big.

Additionally, children do not hesitate to ask, pester, or even verbally batter their parents for what they feel they need right this minute! Whatever it takes to get the parent to acquiesce to the request, the child will employ to accomplish his goal. Has your infant ever said, "Oh, it's three in the morning, I won't bother my mother for my bottle tonight"? Or has your child ever said, "I have bothered my father so much about this, I am not going to ask him again"?

In the very same way, we can do the same with Hashem. As a matter of fact, He wants us to come to Him with all our needs. And, yes, even pester Him. But, Hashem will never get annoyed at us, as we sometimes do with our children.

As you can well imagine, this concept has many more applications, I have just tried to start the thought process.

If we could only appreciate how much Hashem loves us, I am sure it would change our entire relationship with Him. We would be grateful for every interaction with Him.