



**Partners In Torah  
San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura  
Take home Dvar Torah**

5785 Ekev  
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*By: Rabbi Avi Cohen*

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program**

**focusing on understanding Jewish  
relevancy to our lives by studying text  
most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour  
each week, friendships are forged between  
mentors and mentees.**

***Partners in Torah  
has proven to be effective at reclaiming the  
rich  
legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and  
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for many who have, until now, lacked  
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**Please encourage friends to join you in  
participating so that we may grow  
together as  
a community.**

## תשפ"ה Parshat Ekev

*Ekev* is the third portion in the fifth and last book of the Torah, *Devarim* (Deuteronomy), which Moshe related in its entirety to the Jewish people in the last 36 days of his life, the last three portions ( וילך, האזינו, וזאת הברכה ) being said on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Adar, the day Moshe died.

Our sages tell us that *Devarim* is different than the other four books of the Torah. Using today's concepts to explain the difference, as to the first four books Moshe was like a megaphone, broadcasting Hashem's message directly to the Jewish people, *שכינה מדברת מתוך גרונו - Hashem's voice coming out of Moshe's mouth*. When giving the book of *Devarim*, on the other hand, Moshe first absorbed the material and then told it to the Jewish people. Thus, Moshe was like a voice recorder, playing back to the Jewish people what Hashem had told him in prophesy. Once again, although Hashem's actual words, they had first become part of Moshe and only then were conveyed to the Jewish people. We see this difference in that nowhere in this entire book do we find, "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..." as if Moshe was telling his own words to the Jewish people.

Hence, this book is like Moshe's last will and testament containing Moshe's charge to the Jewish people just before his death. They would enter the land of Israel without him, but with the lessons that would guide them and guarantee their future in the Land.

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

וַיְדַעְתָּ עִם לְבָבְךָ כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר יִסֵּר אִישׁ אֶת בְּנוֹ יִדּוֹד אֱלֹקֶיךָ מִיִּסְרֶךָ:

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

This verse is predicated on another verse in Deuteronomy (14:1).

בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַיְדוּד אֱלֹקֵיכֶם לֹא תִתְגַּדְדוּ וְלֹא תִשְׂיִמוּ קֶרֶחַהּ בֵּין עֵינֵיכֶם לְמַת:

1) *You are children to Hashem, your God -- you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes, over a person who has died.*

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

Indeed, 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 of His children, whom He loves unconditionally.

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

1) *You are children to Hashem, your God -- you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes, over a person who has died.*

What is the connection between the prohibition to cut yourself or making a bald spot between your eyes over someone who has died, and our status as Hashem's children?

The answer is that in some cultures it is customary for one to tear the hair out of his head and cut himself as an expression of the grief and pain he is going through over the loss of his loved one.

Hashem tells us, “You are my children whom 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 pull your hair out of your head, and scratch yourselves over someone dying, which is acting like my judgment is too harsh and you aren’t accepting of my decree. Such behavior 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 seemingly hurtful happens, it is actually a love tap from Hashem, the medicine for what ails us. Sometimes the medicine is bitter and difficult to swallow; but not everything bitter is bad for you, and not everything sweet is good for you.

Imagine a person who went to the doctor with a cough. The doctor diagnosed him with pneumonia and prescribed a liquid medicine. As he took the first dose, he began choking on the foul-tasting medicine. After spitting it out, He called the doctor all upset. “Why did you give me such an awful tasting and bitter medicine? Why couldn’t you give me the kind that I give to my kids? It’s so good tasting, they can’t wait to get their next dose!” What do you think the doctor will tell the fellow?

Rabbi Akiva in the Talmud says it unequivocally (Tractate Berachot 60b):

וכן תנא משמיה דרבי עקיבא לעולם יהא אדם רגיל לומר כל דעביד רחמנא  
לטב עביד

*A person should accustom himself to say, “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 options available to Him and yet this is the option that He chose.

An illustration will clarify things.

Let’s say your child is doing something that is really annoying you; say, he’s nervously 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 scream at him, “STOP THAT BANGING THIS INSTANT!!!! IT’S DRIVING ME CRAZY!!!!”
3. You could walk over to him, give him a hardy slap, and say, “STOP THAT THIS INSTANT!!!!”

If you knew that option #1 is all you need to get him to stop, is there any way in the world that 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 out of anger or frustration, rather to impress upon him how annoying he is acting so that he stops that behavior.

Similarly, if Hashem knew that a small hint would suffice to get our attention and stop us from doing our annoying, or possibly even offensive or hurtful behaviors, of course, that is what He

would do! 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 (Berachot 5a):

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 suddenly difficult and trying events begin happening to a person, there is a reason, a purpose, and a message. To stop them from happening, one should inspect his deeds and try to identify the reason for the slap.

The Talmud goes on to tell the story of Rav Huna, a Talmudic sage, who had 400 barrels of wine that turned to vinegar. 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 did not deserve it?"** was the rabbis' response.

Rav Huna then said, "Okay, if anyone has heard of something that I am not doing correctly, let him tell me."

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

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

The rabbis explained to him that even though he was reclaiming money that was due him, because he had gone about it in a way that violated the law, it was inappropriate.

Rav Huna accepted their criticism and agreed to stop his custom; in the end, he suffered no loss from the spoiled wine. How so? One version says that the vinegar reverted to wine, and a second version says that vinegar went up in price and his vinegar sold for the price of 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 sole purpose and reason for punishing our child is out of concern for his 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 parents, this is our responsibility.

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

חֹשֶׁךְ שְׁבִטוֹ שׁוֹנֵא בְּנוֹ וְאַהֲבֵהוּ שְׁחָרָה מוֹסֵר

*24) One who does not hit his child - hates him, and one who loves his child, chastises him when the child is young.*

Imagine a child who hates school and cries bitterly every day that he doesn't want to go to school. The parents give in and let him stay home and watch TV and play video games all day, the result being that he never learned to read, write, do math, or learn any other skill that he will need for life. The kid tells his friends that he has the best parents in the world! They don't make him do anything that he doesn't want to do!

In reality, have they done good for their child? What will his future be with no life skills? And, what will he think of his parents when he is 35 years old and homeless because he has no skills and can't get a job to support himself? Did he have the best parents after all?

The prophet Isaiah tells us (55:9):

(ט) כִּי גְבוּהַ שָׁמַיִם מֵאָרֶץ כֵּן גְבוּהַ דְרָכַי מִדְרָכֵיכֶם וּמַחְשְׁבֹתַי מִמַּחְשְׁבוֹתֵיכֶם:

*As high as the heavens are 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 Hashem's ways as the heavens are from earth. The thought of the distance between heaven and earth gives us a hint into why it is impossible to even contemplate fathoming the reasons behind why Hashem does what He does.

If you have a bird's eye view of the matter, allowing you to see at once all the different components and how things fit together and how they influence each other, then you are in a position to make an informed decision. However, when you are on the ground and all you can only see what is right in front of you, you lack 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, so far, of 5785 years, and He does everything for the best. We have no idea what lies behind the scenes.

A story taken from the writings of Rabbi Chayim Vital, a well-known Kabbalist, printed in the Sefer Otzros Hatorah Volume 3 p. 78, illustrates this point.

Yosef, married a few years, and his younger brother, Dovid, made their way to their mother's home after Shul on a Friday night to wish her "Shabbat Shalom." The house had a pleasant atmosphere as the candles cast their glow on a table beautifully set for Shabbat. The only thing that disturbed the peace was the empty chair at the head of the table, the chair of their father who had passed away two years earlier. This filled their hearts with feelings of pain and longing. Their mother sat in her usual chair looking into a book as the boys entered and said, "Shabbat Shalom, mother!" "Shabbat Shalom," mother said, trying to hide the tears that had been flowing from her eyes without end. "You are crying again, mother?" said Yosef. "There has to be a limit, and besides, today is Shabbat and you are not allowed to be sad on the Shabbat!" "But you know," said mother, "that tonight is the second anniversary of your father's passing, so how can I not cry?"

Yosef said, "Okay, tonight you have an excuse, but what about yesterday and the day before? It is already two years, and you cannot find peace. Father is in  $\text{גן עדן}$  - *Gan Eden*, (paradise, where the souls of the deceased go to receive reward after one dies) and he is surely not pleased with your sorrow. Hashem also surely doesn't want you to be sad. The Code of Jewish Law provides the guidelines of when and how much one must mourn for the

deceased, and if you don't comply, it looks like you are not accepting of Hashem's judgement.

Mother stood up, wiped a few tears from her eyes, and said, "You are correct, my son. With all my strength I wish I could forget, but I cannot. I promise to try with everything I have, to be happy."

Wishing his mother a Shabbat Shalom, Yosef left the house leaving Dovid to fill the role of father in the house. He made the kiddush on the wine, and over the course of the meal the peace of Shabbat set in, and mother even smiled a few times. After a festive Shabbat meal, they all went to sleep. Mother felt an inner peace that she hadn't felt in a very long time and soon fell into a peaceful sleep.

As she slept, she had a dream in which a group of people were running through the city, and she was running with them. They exited the city and entered a dense, dark forest. They continued running in the darkness until, suddenly, a ray of light broke through and the sun could be seen in the sky; they had come to the end of the forest. She could now see before her a beautiful garden of flowers giving off a beautiful fragrance. Surrounding the garden blue waters could be seen.

Suddenly, she saw an old Jewish man with a long white beard dressed in a long white garment, standing before her. The man asked her if she would like to see her husband, and she immediately followed him, her heart beating rapidly. The old man stopped next to a large tree full of large, beautiful fruits and from the distance she could see a meadow surrounded by a golden fence. In the center she could see Jews dressed in different colored clothing sitting in rows learning Torah. In the center stood a young

Jewish man giving the lecture. “Wait a little,” said the old man, “He will soon finish the class and then you will be able to see him.”

The lecture ended and the lecturer started walking towards her. She couldn’t believe her eyes! It was her husband! Her head started to spin, as she saw her husband standing next to her. “Avraham!” She yelled out. Feeling faint, she leaned against a tree. “That’s me,” he answered. When she came to herself, she asked him, “Why did you leave me at such a young age?”

He responded. “The world you live in is like a reformatory where people are sent to complete certain matters or to suffer for sins committed in a previous life. The true world is here. I lived in your world once before, even before you met me, and I was a great Sage and a holy man. I was so dedicated to learning Torah that I didn’t want to marry and have children, so as not to disturb my studies. When I left the world, they gave me a position as the head of a yeshiva in *גן עדן* - *Gan Eden*, and I began going higher and higher. However, when they realized that I did not marry and have children, I was sent back to the world to marry and have children. That is when I married you, my wife, and when our seventh child was born, they called me back to my Yeshiva in *Gan Eden*, where my students were awaiting my return. You have much merit as my wife and when your time comes, we will continue to live here together in peace and tranquility.

His wife said. “I never knew you were such a great Sage! During our marriage, you never had time to study Torah.” Her husband responded. “I also didn’t know. Since I went back to the that world only to correct what was missing – to marry and have children- Torah learning was not necessary. When I returned to this world, all my Torah from my previous life came back to me.”

His wife continued to ask. “Why is our son Yosef having such a hard time making a living?” He answered. “Do you remember the court case Yosef had with another Jewish person? Well, even though he won the case, in the process, he caused much pain and suffering to the other person. For that, they wanted to give him a severe punishment. I was able to prevail upon them to give him four years of difficult livelihood instead. In one more year, that will end, and he will start to succeed in his business once again.”

“And what about our son Dovid? He is already 24 years old, and they aren’t even suggesting matches for him! Besides, I don’t have the funds to pay for a wedding, anyway!”

Her husband smiled and said, “The reason for this is that Dovid’s *bashert* was late coming to the world. She is only 13 years old now, and she lives in another country. In another five years, she will move to your city, marry Dovid, and his family will also pay for all the wedding expenses.”

Her body began to tremble as a painful memory came to mind. “Why did that terrible tragedy happen to our three-year old son? Why was he murdered by a drunk gentile!”

Her husband smiled and said, “Follow me!”

She came to a meadow full of light, and planted in it were small trees budding from all around that looked like they were studying her. From above came light rays of all different colors, and beautiful birds flitted from tree to tree singing songs she could hear. They were all singing songs of praise for someone, as were large flies of different colors singing praises into her ears. Small deer frolicked in the grass singing his praises, and even the grass itself was singing his praises.

Suddenly, she saw swirling discs of fire in a host of colors that positioned themselves next to her. After them came small angels with wings and they also stood next to her. Surrounding her she could hear instruments playing a beautiful tune, and she felt that she was going to faint. Her husband picked a piece of grass from the garden and put it under her nose and she returned to herself. She looked again and saw a canopy of precious stones sparkling in all colors of the rainbow. Under the canopy came what looked like an angel and stood opposite her. It was her son that was killed, and he was laughing very happily. She once again felt like she was going to faint, and her husband once again gave her the grass to smell.

When she opened her eyes again and saw her son, she asked him. “Why did you leave me at such a young age?” The child responded. “Everything is according to the calculations of Hashem. I was already in the world, before being born to you as a son. That time I was born to a very prestigious family, but the gentiles in our city killed the entire Jewish population of our city, and only I, a six-month old baby, survived. A gentile woman found me and took me to her house where she raised me until a different Jewish community redeemed me. I grew to be a great Sage and lived my life out in peace. When I left the world, I was received in *Gan Eden* with great happiness, and began going higher and higher until I reached a point where I could go no higher. Since I had nursed for a full year from a gentile woman, my judgement was to return to the world, nurse three years from a Jewish woman, and then, upon return here, I would be able to reach the greatest heights. That is when I was born to you, mother, and it is a great merit for you to have been my mother. When the three years were up, I returned to my place in *Gan Eden*, since I had completed my mission in the world.

“But why did it have to happen in such a horrific way?” she continued to ask. The boy answered. “When it was my time to leave the world, there was a decree to kill all the Jews of our city, including you and father. They honored me to be the atonement for the city, and my horrific murder saved the city. That is why I have all this extra glory here in heaven. No one else is permitted to see me and my reward except for father.” The boy chuckled and began floating away.

At this point her husband addressed her and said, “You see that all the questions have answers. Hashem doesn’t ever do anything bad. I have to return to my lecture now.” He escorted her to where they met, next to the tree, and said to her. “Here it is very good for me, however, it is very hard for me to see your suffering and tears. Please do me a big favor and start living in happiness.”

Her husband disappeared and the old Jew appeared once again and escorted her to the dense forest.

She awoke the next morning feeling like a new person.

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

When we punished our children, for example, by grounding them, and didn’t let them go out with their friends, they were miserable. Sometimes they were crying in their rooms, cursing us, and telling us how mean and un-understanding we were. When they did that, how did we feel? Were we gloating and feeling good about our power and the control we have 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, doing what we felt was necessary 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. The Tanach expresses this.

Isaiah (63:9) says,

בְּכָל צָרָתָם לֹא {לוֹ} צָרָה

*In all of their pain, He also has pain*

King David says in Psalms (91,15):

עִמּוֹ אֲנֹכִי בְצָרָה

*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 feels our pain and goes 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 punishments that we did.

Our Sages tell us a remarkable thing: When we leave this world and enter the World to Come, we will see the complete picture from Hashem's perspective. We will then understand why Hashem what He did and how it was truly the very best thing for us. We will also see how, every time He had chosen the very best course of action, and we will thank Him for it.

There is second side to this coin. If we are Hashem's children, then He is our father and we can act towards Him the same way that a son acts towards his father. Just as a son feels comfortable asking his father for 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 would 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. Has your infant ever said, “Oh, it’s 3:00 a.m., 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?”

We can do the same with Hashem. Indeed, 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, these are just a few to consider.

If we would only appreciate how much Hashem loves us, it would surely change our entire relationship with Him. We would be grateful for every interaction with Him and feel comfortable approaching Him for all of our needs.

In the end, the greatest truth is that love often asks for our trust before it reveals its full purpose. The silence between the questions and the answers is where faith is born—where we learn to lean not on what we understand, but on the infinite compassion that shapes even the hardest moments. To be a child of Hashem is to embrace this paradox: that true strength comes from surrender, that growth often requires discomfort, and that the deepest love is

both gentle and firm. May we find the courage to stand in that sacred space, open-hearted and willing, knowing that beyond what we see, a divine wisdom we cannot fathom is always at work—crafting not just our fate, but our very souls.