



The Collective Conversation

*Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community*



Sefer Devarim

Parshat Eikev

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Parshat Eikev, or "Thanks, Dad..."

By Joe Bednarsh

Our *Parsaha* begins with *Moshe* pointing out the benefits and blessings that *Hashem* will bestow upon the Jewish people for their obedience to the word of God. *Moshe* goes on to detail the way *Hashem* will deliver the inhabitants of the land of Israel into the hands of the Jewish people — making sure to note that it will be due to God's involvement and that it will happen slowly. *Moshe* adds that Kings will be delivered into the hands of the Jews and warns against keeping spoils of war that have been used for idol worship.

At first glance, this struck me as three disparate ideas thrown together haphazardly so I read a bit forward in the *Parsha* and couldn't find a satisfactory ribbon with which to tie them together. It was only when I read backward (no, not right to left) that their commonalities crystallized for me. Immediately before that passage, several *psukim* remind the Jewish people of their time in Egypt and God's vanguard role as their savior.

I want to suggest that at the beginning of *Parshat Eikev*, *Moshe* and *Hashem* are attempting to give *Bnei Yisrael* some freedom of action, responsibility to care for themselves, and obligation to learn from their mistakes all under the watchful eye of God. It's extraordinarily parent-like.

I imagine *Hashem* saying, "Yes, I'll be there the whole time with you as you fight the battles for your homeland. Yes, it will be slow, but you now must do the hard work yourselves". I contrast that with the exodus from Egypt in which God took a public and almost complete role in the *makot*.

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I see God going on to say, "Hey, remember when I drowned *Pharaoh* and his soldiers in the sea? Well, this time, you'll have the kings of the conquered nations in your custody". In other words, there would be no speedy and complete end of the opposing leader's story. The Jewish people would have to judge the correct course of action against a nation's ruler. Seeing someone kill your enemy is a lot different from having to decide their fate yourself.

In this imaginative saga, *Hashem* goes on to say, "Remember that commandment about the Idols? Remember that golden calf? Let's see if you've learned your lesson about idolatry ... can

you destroy everything associated with it even if it means you may not recoup the cost of battle?"

So, what's the common thread? I want to think that *Hashem* is setting up a classic teaching moment, one very familiar to most of us. *Hashem* is saying, "You saw what I did to rescue you from another nation for you to fulfill your national destiny. You saw that I am with you. Now, do it yourselves. It won't be easy, and you'll see along the way that there are some very challenging and terrible decisions you'll have to make. And don't forget, not only are you teaching the people about how to be victorious, but by discarding any idolatry-related spoils of war, you are showing that even at humanity's most brutal you need to keep perspective. You do this for God and not for your pleasure or enrichment."

A *Parsha* that goes into detail about how the land of Israel should be conquered — essentially going to war with multiple nations — can quickly devolve into a negative lesson about violence. In *Eikev*, however, great care is taken to

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make it about a nation growing up and taking its rightful place all under and in the service of God. A lesson in the importance of perspective that we can all take to heart.

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Joe and Lee Bednarsh moved to New Rochelle 2 years ago from Yonkers. They have three children who all attend The Leffell School, Len who is 13; Charlotte, who is 9; and Ryan, 7. Joe is the former Director of Athletics and current Associate Dean of Students at Yeshiva University, and Lee is a Histotechnologist working with MOHS surgeons. Most Shabbat afternoons, you can find them on their driveway on Harlan Drive entertaining guests while the children play in the backyard – Please stop by to say, "Hi," or even just for a drink.

Want to write or dedicate a Parsha essay?

Please contact Steve Smith at stevenjsmith@yahoo.com

The Collective Conversation is a project of the Young Israel of Scarsdale and the YIS Living Torah Fund

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