

Good Shabbos, everyone.

I want to thank the sponsors of today's drasha:

- Mordechai and Miriam Gordon, in honor of Mordechai's retirement. Much hatzlacha!
- Avraham and Susan Landesman, in memory of Susan's mother, Yitta Goldstein, whose yahrtzeit is 20 Av.
- Mark and Elsa Lustman, in memory of Mark's mother, Anne Lustman, whose yahrtzeit is 21 Av, and in honor of Rabbi Marwick.
- Moshe and Esther Preiser, in memory of Esther's father, Aaron ben Yoav Tzvi.
- Hillel and Dena Soclof, in memory of Sandford Soclof, Shmaryahu ben Avraham Abba, whose yahrtzeit is 24 Av.
- Peshie & Mendy Vim, in memory of Peshie's father, Shlomo Parasol, whose yahrtzeit is 21 Av.
- Tommy and Judy Weiss, in memory of Tommy's father, Fred Weiss, whose yahrtzeit is 19 Av.

May all the neshamos have an aliya and may you all be rewarded for your generosity and dedication to the shul with much bracha and hatzlacha.

This week, the Torah world lost a great Talmid Chacham, scholar, educator, and ohev Yisrael, Rabbi Adin Steinzaltz. He devoted more than four decades to translating the Talmud. Not only was this a great contribution in its own right, but it also inspired other translations, like ArtScroll, and made the Talmud accessible to hundreds of thousands. His contributions to the world of Jewish scholarship are numerous and he will be sorely missed... יהי זכרו ברוך

In this morning's parsha, we are told:

דברים פרק ז' יב: והיה עקב תשמעון את המשפטים האלה ושמרתם ועשיתם אתם ושמר ה' אלקיך לך את הברית ואת החסד אשר נשבע לאבותיך

“If you obey these rules and observe them carefully, then Hashem your God will maintain faithfully for you the covenant that He made on oath with your fathers.” Hashem tell the Jewish people that, if they listen to Him and keep His laws, He will keep the covenant He made with their ancestors.

From **Targum Onkelos** and onward, commentators throughout the ages have discussed the puzzling word “ekev” used in this pasuk. The word literally means a heel, and the image of a heel suggests “an end.” In that vein, the simple meaning here is “as a result of” or “as a reward for.”

But why did the Torah use the word “ekev,” instead of the standard word “baavur” or “tachas”?

One possible message suggested by this unusual word is that a life of success and achievement, spiritually and materially, is about getting our heels to follow our heads. It is sometimes easy to commit in our heads to a course of action, to commit mentally to a lifestyle or to a plan. But going through with it, walking the walk after we talk the talk, is sometimes very difficult.

The great Shammai, taught in **Avos (1:15)** that one should say little and do much.

משנה מסכת אבות פרק א משנה טו
[*] שמאי אומר עשה תורתך קבע אמור מעט ועשה הרבה והוי מקבל את כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות:

As Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel also taught in Avos (1:17), the main thing is not teaching or espousing. The main thing is taking action.

משנה מסכת אבות פרק א משנה יז

[*] שמעון בנו אומר כל ימי גדלתי בין החכמים ולא מצאתי לגוף טוב אלא שתיקה ולא המדרש הוא העיקר **אלא המעשה** וכל המרבה דברים מביא חטא:

Commitments and mantras are not ultimately what bring achievement and success. is teaching the Jewish people that God wants us to follow Him not just with our minds, but also with our heels, our actions.

But I believe that the word “ekev” takes this one step further (excuse the pun).

Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev writes that there are two different methods of serving Hashem. One way he calls serving Hashem with our heads. It is thinking about each action and doing it out of intellectual conviction. At each step of the way, you have a question how to proceed and your head tells you to do the right thing. He calls this שכלית, serving through sechel. That is a high level of avodas Hashem.

But he claims that there is an even higher level of avodas Hashem. It is doing the mitzva because your entire being demands it—it is simply second nature. You have trained yourself to feel and understand that this is what must be done, what is right and true. He calls this אמונה, serving Hashem through faithfulness and consistency.

Rav Levi Yitzchak reads this in the pasuk “vehaya, ekev tishmeun”—which literally means “It will be if you listen with your heel.”

קדושת לוי דברים פרשת עקב

כי הבחינה הראשונה שעובד את הבורא ברוך הוא ומשיג אחדות הבורא על ידי שחוקר בשכלו, ומשיג שיש אלוה בעולם ואחדותו ברוך הוא, הבחינה זו נקרא 'ראש'. והבחינה השנית שעובד את הבורא ברוך הוא מחמת האמונה, שמאמין באלהותו ובאחדותו ועובד אותו, הבחינה הזאת נקרא 'עקב', כי הוא סוף המדריגה.

He says that doing a mitzva with your heel—the part of the body farthest away from the head, symbolizes that the Torah’s value system has become a natural and intrinsic part of who you are—and you are serving Hashem with every fiber of your being, the level of avoda called אמונה.

As David HaMelech exclaims in **Tehillim 35:10**:

תהלים פרק לה

(*) כל עצמותי תאמרנה ה' מי כמוך מציל עני מחזק ממנו ועני ואביון מגזלו:

“All my limbs praise Hashem...”

David Hamelech is describing avodas Hashem as second nature--it is simply part of who you are. Rav Levi Yitzchak says that, ultimately, is what God wants from us—for Torah values to become part of our very essence—to become second nature—part of our identity.

Rav Dessler, in his classic *Michtav M'Eliyahu*, writes that this idea can be inferred from the concept of personal responsibility for aveiros b'shogeg, unintentional sins. In many legal systems, intention and premeditation are necessary for finding someone guilty. However, in the Torah system, a person is liable even for mistakes and unintentional sins.

מכתב מאליהו ח"ג עמ' 138-139

התורה הקדושה תובעת מן האדם שיהיה פנימי: שכל גדרי התורה יהיו פנימיים ולא חיצוניים. דבר זה למדנו מגדר עונש השוגג. כי לכאורה תמוה, מכיון שעבר מבלי דעת, מדוע נענש? ואף על פי כן מוצאים אנו תמיד בתורה "והוא לא ידע ואשם או הודע אליו" וכו'. פירוש או ישא את ענשו על שגגתו או יתכפר בקרבן.

על חטא שחטאנו לפניך ביודעים ובלא יודעים, As we say on Yom Kippur,
We may not even be aware that we sinned—and we need forgiveness.

Why is this true?

Rav Dessler answers

אבל הענין הוא שכל אשר נמצא באדם בעצם פנימיותו לא יטעה בו ולא ישכחנו, כי הוא מציאותו. ואם שכח או טעה באיזה דבר זה לאות שגדר זה עדיין חיצוני הוא בו, ואם כן קרוב הוא לאבדון ח"ו, כמו שכתב הרמב"ן כי הרי נתבאר לעיל שהחיצוניות נוחה להתבטל על ידי פיתויי היצר. ..

If you have truly internalized the Torah's values, it becomes very difficult to make a mistake because these values are part of your essence. You are in sync with the will of Hashem.

As Rabban Gamliel, the son of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, taught in **Avos (2:4)**, we should synchronize our will with God's will.

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ב משנה ד
[*] הוא היה אומר עשה רצונו כרצונך

If we easily forget or make mistakes, in Rav Dessler's words, that is a sign that the value system of Torah and mitzvos is still external to us, to some degree; we have not internalized it to the point that it is second nature...part of our essence.

In the worldview of Rav Levi Yitzchak, it shows that Torah values have not yet reached the level of emunah, of faithfulness built on understanding. We are serving with our heads, but not with our heels.

Rav Soloveitchik offers a similar idea in *Al Hateshuva*. He writes that there are two levels of faith, and the higher level of faith is called "daas of Hashem." He describes it as a consistent belief that is impossible to separate from, even for a moment, as it is an inseparable part of one's identity.

על התשובה (הגרי"ד סלביצ'יק) מאת פנחס הכהן פלאי
ואולם במונח "לידע" הכוונה לתודעה מתמדת, להכרה תמידית שהאמונה באלקים תהיה לאדם בבחינת זיקה שאינה פוסקת. . מציאות חיה שאינה יכול להסיה דעתו ממנה אפילו למחצית הדקה. .

This sounds great, but how does one achieve this level of faith?

I believe there are two crucial steps—both learned from the phrase ekev tishmeun—

בעל הטורים דברים פרשת עקב פרק ז פסוק יב
עקב. עשה תורתך קבע (אבות פ"א מט"ו):

The **Baal HaTurim** writes that the first is hinted at in that word—ekav.

If the letters of ekev are rearranged, they spell keva—consistency.

For Torah to be internalized, to become part of our identity, it must not be an infrequent or erratic choice. Instead, it needs to be a consistent lifestyle.

Shammai, who taught us "emor me'at v'asei harbei," stressing action, also taught עשה תורתך קבע.

משנה מסכת אבות פרק א משנה טו

[*] שמאי אומר עשה תורתך קבע אמור מעט ועשה הרבה והוי מקבל את כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות:
"Make Hashem's Torah constant and consistent in your lives and a part of who you are." It is not by accident that Judaism demands daily acts like brachos and tefilla, as contrasted with infrequent, even if intense, acts of spiritual pursuit.

Without consistency, even the best intentions and beliefs, both between man and G-d, and between man and man—can be fleeting and short-lived. When they are challenged, they will not necessarily endure. Making something real, and a fundamental part of yourself, requires consistency. Consistency and attention are what ultimately allow the grander ideas to take root in our lives.

For anything that we want to do well, we need to find a way to consistently make it a part of our life. This is true of religious activities like davening, mitzvos, and chessed. It is no less true of secular activities, like running, other exercise, and eating carefully.

And as the **Sefer Hachinuch** writes, our actions inform our attitude.

ספר החינוך פרשת בא מצוה טז
כי אחרי הפעולות נמשכים הלבבות.

But consistency in avodas Hashem, the ekev described here, begins with an attitude as well--- "ekev **tishmeun**." It begins with the way we listen and respond to Hashem and His mitzvos.

שו"ת הרשב"א החדשות (מכתב יד) סימן שסח
חזר עוד וטען, ואנה מצאת אתה בכל ספריכם בין בספר תורה בין בספרי התלמוד שהוא ית' אחד על הצד שלקחתם אותו שאין בו רבוי ואחדות. אמרתי נתבאר זה באור אמתי באמרו שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד, כאן העמידנו על היחוד והזהירנו לשמוע ולהבין מצד החקירה האמתית ונקבל להאמין, כי מלת שמע כוללת שלשה ענינים אלה, **שמיעת האזן** שנאמר אזן שמעה ותאשרני, והבנת הלב שנאמר ונתת לעבדך לב שומע, וקבלת הדבר והאמנתו שנאמר אם שמוע תשמעו אל מצותי. ותכלית כל זה שתשמע ותבינהו ותחקרהו, ואחר החקירה וההבנה נאמין כי הוא ית' אחד.

Listening, says the Rashba in a teshuva explaining the words of “Shema Yisrael,” goes beyond hearing intellectually and thinking emotionally—**to fully internalizing**...kabbalas hadavar v’haamanaso—making it a part of our essence—making it second nature.

The proper attitude and approach to accepting the responsibility of Torah and mitzvos is not just to follow the mitzvos as external commandments, not just to go through the motions. Instead, we must understand them, personalize them, internalize them, accept them emotionally and intellectually—make them part of who we are—so that observance is also just a part of who we are.

We live in a world which focuses too much on how things look, as opposed to what they really are. For real accomplishments and achievements, we need to make sure that we understand our value system and that we make them an intrinsic part of who we are.

Parshas Ekev reminds us that, in Judaism, depth is more important than image. With proper attitude, commitment, and consistency, we can internalize our value system and listen to Hashem with our heels as well as our minds. This is the true kiyum of “ekev tishmeun,” and in that zechus—we are promised

ושמר ה' אלקיך לך את הברית ואת החסד אשר נשבע לאבותיך

Hashem will remember the bris avos and bring the final geula, bimhera viyamenu. May we merit to see that day soon...amen.