

Parshat Ekev 5777

continues פרשת עקב's monumental address to the בני ישראל prior to their entry to the Promised Land. They are reminded of their time in the wilderness, so inhospitable and threatening, yet through which they passed unharmed, enwrapped in the Almighty's blessings and supernatural protection. The vista of life in the land of Israel is also put before them - the blessings that await if they would observe His מצות, as well as the dangerous effects of over-familiarity with Providence, taking for granted G'd's great gifts.

According to the פרשת עקב, ספר ההנוך contains 2 negative מצות (not to benefit from ע"ז, idolatry, and not to retain anything from ע"ז) and six positives: לברך ה' אחר אכילת מזון ('grace after meals'); לאהב את הגרים (to love/support the stranger or convert); לירא מהקב"ה (to fear G'd); לעבד את ה' בתפילה בכל יום (to pray, every day); להדבק בידעי התורה (to attach oneself to those who know the Torah); להשבע בשמו יתברך באמת (to swear or make an oath in the name of G'd in truth). Clearly all of these still apply nowadays and some, such as the fear of G'd, are relevant every moment of every day.

There are several פסוקים within the פרשה that have found their way into our סידור, most notably the second paragraph of the שמע. I would like to focus on two consecutive פסוקים, which we recite on a מוצאי שבת and have fundamental significance in characterising our relationship with G'd: 'For the L'rd your G'd is G'd of gods and L'rd of lords, the great, mighty and awe-inspiring G'd, who shows no favouritism and accepts no bribe' [R' Sacks' translation]. This is immediately followed by: 'He upholds the cause of the orphan and widow and loves the stranger giving him food and clothing.'

These two פסוקים are cited in the גמרא (31a מגילה) אמר ר' יוחנן בכל מקום שאתה מוצא גבורתו של הקב"ה שם אתה מוצא ענותנותו. Rabbi Yochanan said: Wherever you find the strength [or 'greatness'] of the Holy One, blessed be He, there you will find His humility.

The מהרש"א (ad loc) notes that 'One can see in this expression how different are the ways of the Almighty from those of flesh and blood; the way of a powerful man is to distance himself from the poor and those cast down; in contrast הקב"ה draws them near and watches over them even more attentively.'

The מאירי derives from this that a man should always be gentle and not habitually [put himself] in [a position of] 'שררה' (rule or authority); he should learn this from his Maker as it is written... (he then quotes in ר' יוחנן מגילה).

The (72 דרוש) בינה לעתים comments: One observes that, for self aggrandisement, humans seek to impress great people, not lowly people. You might think that a קל והומר should be

applied to הקב"ה but it is not so. The very fact that He demonstrates His greatness to us - that is an expression as it were of His *humility*. Hence the particular language used - not every place *it is said*, but every place that *you* find Him, *then* שם אתה מוצא ענותנותו. We [even the greatest of us] are lowly, שפלים, yet He reveals Himself to us.

The תורה תמימה explains (פרשת עקב ad loc) עשה משפט יתום ואלמנה - these are indeed the poor and low in spirit and הקב"ה, as it were, joins with them in their pain to achieve justice and comforts them in their misery. תורה תמימה then refers to his comments on עקב in פסוקים. To precis, תורה תמימה notes that after the end of our פסוקים in עקב, it is mentioned that ה' 'loves the stranger to give him bread and clothing'. תורה תמימה asks what is the greatness here? Humans also give bread to the hungry - where is the special humility in this? His answer is somewhat mystical but not inaccessible. He suggests, in the name of 'בעלי אגדה והכמי האמת', that an angel is an entirely spiritual being, that cannot feel concrete items, so even if the angel felt mercy to man, it could not fulfil man's material needs such as bread and clothing, because it (המלאך) doesn't perceive any deficiencies of this type. It might be thought that ה', the ultimate in spiritual perfection and purity, should be even more removed from mortal man. How great therefore is the 'ענוה' of הקב"ה that he can, as it were, understand and feel for those suffering souls.

Modern science presents man with extraordinary projections, from the infinitely great to the infinitesimally small. Our 2 פסוקים paint a similar picture but of greater contrasts - the unimaginable, transcendent greatness of ה', beyond anything of which mortal man could conceive -in the words of the תפילה (8:27 מלכים א') שלמה המלך שלמה המלך תפילה לא - הגה השמים ושמי השמים לא יכלכלוך וכו' (heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee, let alone this house that I have built'. In contrast is His Immanence and accessibility to man, thus, as it were, ה' could 'contract' his presence to address משה from a lowly burning bush.

I believe that these two פסוקים are the key to the positive מצות listed above, because without the 'licence' granted to us through ה' 's 'humility', how would we dare to raise our voice in prayer to Him. They are the perfect encouragement, at the end of each שבת, as we face a new week, a) to emulate the Almighty and recognise that greatness lies in helping those less fortunate than ourselves and b) not to be reluctant to approach ה' because, as it were, He is close and ready to hear our call. This is also a great message of hope as we approach the הבעל"ט, ימים נוראים and the חודש אלול of ימי רצון.