

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Eikev

22 Menachem Av, 5781 – July 31, 2021

Compiled from the works of
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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Eikev**

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Rashi in His Own Words

דברים ז', י"ב: והיה | עקב תשמעון את המשפטים האלה ושמרתם ועשיתם אתם ושמר ה' אלקיך לך את הברית
ואת החסד אשר נשבע לאבותיך:

רש"י ד"ה והיה עקב תשמעון: אם המצות הקלות שאדם דש בעקביו תשמעון:

Devorim 7:12: And it will be because you will heed these ordinances and keep and perform them, that the Lord your G-d, will keep for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers.

Rashi Heading: And it will be because you will heed: If you will listen to the minor commandments which one usually tramples with his heels...

Synopsis

At the beginning of this week's Torah portion, Eikev, the Torah tells us the reward for fulfilling a certain type of Mitzvah. Specifically, it is discussing "minor Mitzvos," precepts which people do not take all that seriously¹. Rashi explains this by pointing out the unusual use of a word at the very beginning of the Parshah. The Hebrew word "Eikev - עקב" can mean "because;" i.e., "because you will listen to." However, the word "Eikev" can also be translated to mean a heel, namely the lowest part of the body, meaning something which appears to be insignificant. Hence, Rashi says that the reward comes as a result of listening to the "minor" commandments.

Rashi's comments are based on the Midrash Tanchumah. The Midrash says that we are discussing "'Minor Mitzvos,' meaning those Mitzvos to which people do not pay attention. As so to speak, they "throw these Mitzvos under their heels." What is the meaning of this strange expression? Rashi's explanation makes it clear that we are talking about those Mitzvos which people tend not to take seriously. These are Mitzvos which generally not considered as

1. The fact is that from one perspective all Mitzvos are equal; each Mitzvah connects us to Hashem. However, from a different perspective each Mitzvah has a different effect of me and the world. The same is true of the limbs of the body. If (G-d forbid) any limb is missing the person is not complete. However, there is a difference between each organ; between a brain, a liver and a kidney etc.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

important as other Mitzvos.

Rashi's explanation is far closer to Peshat than that given by the Midrash. According to the Midrash, we are discussing Mitzvos which are generally not performed; they are just kicked under the heels. The Midrash continues and tells us how Dovid prayed to Hashem to protect him specifically from minor sins. He knew that he would not transgress something serious. However, he was not sure about standing up to something which was considered minor. What we do know is that Dovid was equally concerned about all Mitzvos. This is made clear by the conclusion of the Midrash Tanchumah. There he prays to be saved from minor sins.

King Dovid did not distinguish between Mitzvos. In his eyes, all of the Mitzvos were the same. As mentioned on several occasions, the Hebrew word Mitzvah is related to the Aramaic word Tzavso – meaning connection. This is why through each Mitzvah we perform we attach ourselves closer to G-d.

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Parshah, Eikev, begins by saying that² “and it will be because you will heed these ordinances and keep and perform them ...” The Torah continues by telling us the rewards we will receive for following these commandments.

What specific sort of Mitzvah is the Torah discussing? Rashi comments that “If you will listen to the (so-called) minor commandments which one usually tramples with his heels...” In other words, Rashi explains that the Torah is specifically telling us the reward for fulfilling Mitzvos which people view as being “*minor*.” These are Mitzvos which are not that important in most people's eyes.

How does Rashi derive this? When the Torah writes “and it will be *because* you will heed these ordinances,” it uses an unusual word to convey the meaning of “because.” It uses the word “Eikev - עֵקֶב.” There are times in the Torah that the word Eikev does have the meaning of because. However, more often than not Eikev is translated as a heel. Based on the use of the word “Eikev,” Rashi derives that here the word has both meanings. Rashi writes that “if you

2. Our Parshah, Devorim 7:12.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

(because you) will listen to the minor commandments which one usually tramples with his heels...”

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Rashi bases his comments on the words of our Sages in the Midrash Tanchumah³. However, the Midrash uses different wording. It says in the Midrash that we are discussing “‘Minor Mitzvos’ which people do not pay attention to; rather they throw them under their heels.”

Rashi makes it very clear that we are referring to Mitzvos which one usually tramples with his heels. People do not treat these Mitzvos with the respect they deserve. This is therefore obvious according to Peshat that we are discussing “heels,” meaning the part of the body which tramples. Everything fits together.

However, the approach of the Midrash⁴ does not seem to have any connection with Peshat whatsoever. The Midrash does not say that we are discussing Mitzvos which are not given the respect due them. Rather, the Midrash seems to be talking about Mitzvos which are thrown away, they are thrown under one’s heels. There is no remnant of the Mitzvos left. It has nothing to do with heels. And this has nothing to do with Peshat.

The Midrash Tanchumah goes on to tell us what Dovid Hamelech said⁵. “Why should I fear in days of misfortune? The iniquity of my heels surrounds me.” The Midrash explains that by “the days of misfortune” King Dovid meant the more severe sins of the Torah. Of these sins, Dovid was not afraid. The only thing of which he was afraid was “the iniquity of his heels.” The heels, as we know refer to “so-called” minor sins. In other words, King Dovid was not afraid of the more “severe” sins. However, he was afraid of the minor ones. He was concerned that he may have overlooked something because it was minor. However, the Torah explains that one must be as careful with a “major Mitzvah” as with one which is “minor.”

This requires explanation. Dovid was certainly careful about all Mitzvos, without categorizing them. In fact, the Midrash which we began quoting continues by telling us the words of King Dovid. He prays that G-d should⁶ “also withhold Your servant from willful sins;

3. See the Midrash Tanchumah at the beginning of our Parshah.

4. This is Rashi’s source.

5. Tehillim 49:6.

6. Tehillim 19:12.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

let them not rule over me; then I will be perfect and I will be cleansed of much transgression.” In other words, for Dovid Hamelech there was no difference between one type of sin and another. He wanted to be, and certainly was, clean of sin in all respects.

The Explanation

The explanation is that we are not discussing one who has no desire to perform “minor Mitzvos.” We are certainly not discussing one who wishes to disparage Mitzvos of any sort. Under no circumstances does he wish to “step on” Mitzvos. However, nonetheless, his attitude is less than perfect. He wants to fulfill *all* Mitzvos. He knows that he must fulfill all Mitzvos. However, he does have priorities. Step number one is to take care of the head⁷. He will obviously try to be occupied with the feet, meaning those Mitzvos which are taken lightly by most people. However, he feels that for now he must focus on the “more important” Mitzvos, and “throw others under his heels.” He must wait to fulfill certain Mitzvos until he is ready. He must wait until he has perfected his head!

Each of us must learn a daily portion of Chumash, Tehillim, and Tanya. We must all learn Rambam every day. But is that where we should begin? Aren't there more important places to start our service of Hashem? Torah is so big!!! There is so much to get done. Shouldn't we try to accomplish a little at a time.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

This can be compared to a person who wants to bestow kindness upon his fellow Jew. If his fellow has no hat, no shoes or no shirt, what should he do? Should he first provide him with a tie? Everything must indeed be done with an order.

The Evil Inclination tells us to begin by first getting him shoes and a shirt, etc. From that point, we can go further. But the fact is that we can and we must do all *Mitzvos*! The very word Mitzvah means connection. That is the way in which I can connect myself to Hashem. However, I need to get all of it. I cannot begin by figuring out what is more or less important. I have to do everything which I can without exception. Not only that, but I cannot even pause to take a rest. Just as a living person cannot take a rest while he pauses breathing. He may say that he has more fundamental things with which to occupy himself now. The Yetzer Hora is called a craftsman in his job. He is capable of persuading anyone to go along with him. But

7. Please note, that the Holy Zohar says that the 248 positive commandments are related to a person's 248 limbs.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

using the power given to us by Hashem, we can all stand up to him. King Dovid could (and did) successfully pray for G-d to save him from temptation, the same is true of each and every one of us.

Dovid Hamelech is called Dovid King Moshiach. The time of his arrival is coming closer and closer. With the help of our learning from him and following in his footsteps, we shall certainly reach that Divine revelation now!

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Eikev 5740)

I hope that you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

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חיילי "צבאות השם" חיים ועדן עודד שיחיו מאריס

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נדפס ע"י הוריהם

הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וחי' מושקא שיחיו מאריס

לזכות

מרת אסתר שתחי' שרבני

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נדפס ע"י בנה

ר' גרשון שי' בן טוב