

Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Reprinted for Parshat Eikev, 5780
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IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** עי"ה
ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד
Shagalov

Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766

Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** עי"ה
Ekman

Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765

Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** עי"ה
Marenburg

Passed away on the second day
of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766

Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** עי"ה

Ekman (Santiago, Chile)

Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769

ת. נ. צ. ג. ה.

AND IN HONOR OF

Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתחיל
Shagalov

DEDICATED BY

Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחי
Shagalov

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by
Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann

Ekev

THE LOWEST ELICITS THE HIGHEST

There is an association between the Torah reading of Ekev and the month of Elul. Elul is a month of self-examination, prior to Rosh Hashanah. The name of the month is an acronym for the phrase, "I am for my Beloved and my Beloved is for me." This indicates that the relationship between the Jewish people and G-d has two parts: an arousal from below – "I am for my Beloved" – elicits an arousal from Above – my Beloved is for me." The name of the Torah portion has a double meaning; Ekev means both "heel," indicating the lightest or lowest level of mitzvos, and "for the sake of," indicating the end result of Divine service. This, too, parallels the two methods of Divine service. The term "Ekev" also has a double meaning in regard to Redemption.

The Torah reading of *Ekev* is always read the second Shabbos after Tisha B'Av. Sometimes, it is also the Shabbos before Rosh *Chodesh* Elul – the beginning of the month of Elul, the last month before Rosh Hashanah and the start of the New Year. (It is customary to say a special blessing for the new month on the Shabbos before it occurs. That Shabbos is therefore known as Shabbos Mevarchim – the Shabbos of blessing.)

The month of Elul, being the last month before Rosh Hashanah, is generally considered a time for 'soul-searching' and making a 'spiritual accounting' of one's accomplishments and failures during the year. This is done as a preparation for Rosh Hashanah – the Day of Judgment. Since nothing occurs by coincidence, but everything happens by Divine Providence, there must be a reason for the proximity of the month of Elul to the Torah reading of *Ekev*. To understand the significance of the connection of Elul and *Ekev*, we first have to understand the special nature of the month of Elul.

Elul, as the last month of the calendar year, is an appropriate time to take stock of one's spiritual state before entering Rosh Hashanah and the Days of Awe. Since Elul is the summation of the whole year, it must incorporate an individual's entire Divine service, as well. This concept of Divine service is expressed in the well-known declaration of our Sages that a person should approach each mitzvah – indeed, every aspect of life – with the attitude that “I was created solely to serve my Maker.” Every time we make a blessing, we acknowledge the nature of our relationship with G-d with the words, “Blessed are You, **King** of the universe.” Similarly, all our actions should be simply “for the sake of Heaven.”

The relationship with G-d can be expressed in one of two ways. When a Jew learns Torah and observes the mitzvot, this is an “arousal from below” that elicits a response from above. When a subject gladly and enthusiastically offers the king the “work of his hands” in fulfillment of the king's command, the king naturally responds with encouragement and all manner of support for future endeavors. The response of the King – of G-d – is called an “arousal from Above.”

It's important to note the order of the service. First is the “arousal from below” – the effort of the servant, the human being; second, is the “arousal from Above” – the response of the King, of G-d.

This relationship is alluded to in the name of the month of Elul. In Hebrew, Elul is an acronym for a phrase from Song of Songs. Each of the four Hebrew letters of the word “Elul” stands for one of the four words in the following phrase: “*Ani L'dodi, V'Dodi Li.*” This means, “I am for my Beloved, and my Beloved is for me.” (It is well known that the Sages considered the Song of Songs a metaphor for the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people.)

In the month of Elul, a month of *teshuvah* and reflection, the approach must first be “*Ani L'dodi*” – “I am for my Beloved.” Our

thought, speech and action must express our commitment to our King; we must fulfill G-d's commandments – the mitzvos – with renewed vigor and renewed strength. This naturally elicits the response of “*V'Dodi Li*” – “my Beloved is for me.” G-d will then automatically, as it were, grant each individual the assistance, material and spiritual, needed to carry out his or her task.

Now that we have touched on the unique nature of the month of Elul, we need to turn our attention to the weekly Torah reading that often introduces the month of Elul, namely, the portion of *Ekev*.

The name of the Torah portion – *Ekev* – which is also the first word, is used here in a somewhat unusual manner. As a noun, “*ekev*” means “heel.” Jacob – Yaakov in Hebrew – was so named because he seized the heel – the *ekev* – of his brother. Rashi, the foremost Biblical commentator, explains the use of the word as follows: “If you will listen to the commandments of minor importance, which one tramples with his heel.” This means, if one is careful with the mitzvos that tend to be treated lightly, then G-d will keep His promise to the Jewish people, as the rest of the verse indicates.

However, as a conjunction, *Ekev* means “for the sake of” or “as a result of.” Other major commentators thus explain the beginning of the Torah reading as follows: “*Ekev* – For the sake of, as a result of – your listening to these laws, safeguarding and keeping them, the L-rd your G-d will keep in mind the covenant and kindness with which He made an oath to your fathers.” In this sense, *Ekev* indicates the end or result – the concluding reward.

Since both meanings of the word – “heel” and “for the sake of” – appear in the same verse, obviously there must be a connection between them. At first glance, however, these two meanings are contradictory: According to Rashi's interpretation, “*Ekev*” indicates where one starts, at the lowest level of Divine Service, referring to the “lightest” mitzvos – the simple ones likely to be trampled upon.

On the other hand, according to the other interpretation "*Ekev*" indicates the conclusion – the result of the completion of the Divine Service.

This apparent difficulty can be resolved by referring back to the explanation of the dual nature of the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people. The revelation of G-dliness, the reward for the completion and perfection of our Divine Service, is a response from above – "*V'Dodi Li*" – "my Beloved is for me." What elicits this response, arouses the King, so to speak? Precisely the Divine service involved with the lowest level, the mitzvos it's easy to ignore and "trample with the heel." It is through the "*Ani L'Dodi*" – "I am for my Beloved" – the intense, enthusiastic involvement in even the most seemingly minor mitzvah – that one evokes the response "*V'Dodi Li*."

The conjunction of *Ekev* and Elul, the Torah reading and the month of preparation, reveals an inner significance of both. Similarly, the conjunction of *Ekev* and Elul reveals an important aspect of our contemporary situation – the time of the true and final Redemption. For, according to all signs and indications, now is the time when the declaration, "Behold, here Moshiach comes," will be a reality.

Accordingly, *Ekev* can have a double meaning in regard to Redemption, for the phrase describing the time of Moshiach's arrival is "*Ik'vesa d'Mishicha*" – the *Ekev* of Moshiach.

Here, *Ekev* can mean the heel, the lowest, most unworthy generation, the one enmeshed in a doubled and re-doubled darkness – a generation of chutzpah and arrogance. *Ekev* can also mean the end and completion, that is, the end of exile and the completion of all the Divinely ordained tasks necessary to prepare for the coming of Moshiach.

There is a practical lesson and implication to the above: In

Elul, we must first perform our Divine Service in such a way to create an “arousal from below” – *Ani L’Dodi*. That will elicit an “arousal from Above” – *V’Dodi Li*. In the same manner, since the Divine Service currently required of us is to prepare the world for Moshiach, we must approach our task, that is, perform mitzvos, with the enthusiasm and intensity of an “arousal from below.” A loyal servant who has fulfilled the desire of the King and is only waiting to see his King and receive his reward becomes impatient if there are obstacles and delays. He demands, how long must I wait? We are like that servant, for we are in a position to demand – and therefore are obligated to demand – from G-d, how long? Until when will the Redemption be delayed?

And we are assured that G-d will respond, that there will be an “arousal from Above,” and immediately He will send our righteous Moshiach. *(Based on Sefer HaSichos 5751 Vol. II, pp. 750-763)*

IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR DEAR GRANDFATHER

Reb Aryeh ben Reb Tzvi HaLevi ע"ה Lang

Passed away on 24 Menachem-Av, 5736

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