



Parashat Ekev 5770

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On the Parashah... “Souls of Ikvata”

[Tal Chermon - translated by Bracha Slae]

[This Dvar Torah is based on the meanings of the unusual word "Eikev" with which our Parashah begins, and with related words: "Akev = heel", "Eikev = as a result" and "Ikvata De-Meshicha = "The 'heels' of the Messiah".]

There are souls which can be likened to the head of a body and there are those which can be likened to a heel. All these souls together form a distinct entity - the collective body of the Nation of Israel. The head and the heel each has its own unique qualities, and neither can do without the other. The heel has “its feet on the ground.” It can tread even on the thorniest soil, while “falsehood has nothing to stand on.”

Our forefather Yaakov had this "Akev" quality: “And his hand was holding on to Eisav’s heel” (Bereshit 25:26). He overcame all obstacles through his connection to the Divine: “For you wrestled with G-d and men, and you overcame them” (ibid. 32:29). This was accomplished by grabbing reality “by the heel” (similar perhaps to the metaphorical “Achilles heel”). Ya’akov’s nature is one of a Torah Scholar - “a simple man, a tent-dweller” (ibid. 25:27 with Rashi), but he has a firm grasp on reality, and can deal with corruption by attacking its “Achilles heel.” Danger lurks in the heel, not the head, as we learn from the metaphor of the snake through whom Adam was cursed, “And he shall bite your heel” (ibid. 3:15).

Rabbi Akiva was also endowed with "Akev qualities." His life story is an example of one who learned how to free himself from the snake’s curse. A descendant of gentiles who converted to Judaism, he hated Torah scholars in his youth. Through intellectual discipline and effort in the learning of Torah, he rose to such a level that he had 24,000 disciples. Just before Moshe Rabbenu’s death, the Holy One showed him a vision of Rabbi Akiva teaching Torah and then being martyred “Al Kiddush HaShem.” Ben Azai, one of Rabbi Akiva’s most outstanding disciples, respected him more than any of the other rabbis of his time, as he alone was able to deal with the worst corruption and the hardest problems, those of the "Akev". This ability is most needed in Ikvata De-Meshicha, the period preceding the coming of Messiah, when the most spiritual concepts such as the Kingship of G-d must be brought down

to earth through the Nation of Israel. Now the time has come to translate the prayer “They shall crown You in Heavens and on the earth” (recited in the Kedushah of Shemoneh Esrei), into down-to-earth action through establishment of a sovereign Israel. Simultaneously, the “souls of Ikvata” appear, those souls ensnared in the problems of "Akev". One of the signs the Talmud cites of Ikvata De-Meshicha is the prevalence of chutzpah. This chutzpah is an integral part of the process of redemption, a part of the “Achilles heel” of the process. It is as if a snake is curled around the heels of the Messiah, nevertheless we will not give up.

Maran Ha-Rav Kook explained: Even if a snake, the symbol of the evil inclination, death, and the Satan is curled around a Jew’s heel, he still remains tied to the Soul of the People of Israel.

In this period, special Torah leaders possessing leadership qualities appropriate to this special generation are required. On his deathbed, Yaakov attempted to reveal the secrets of the Redemption to his sons, but was not permitted to do so (see *ibid.* 49:1 with Rashi). However, in the Talmud, Rabbi Abba states: “There is no clearer sign that the time of Redemption has arrived than that the Land of Israel produces fruit in abundance.” Under the guidance of our great teacher, Ha-Rav Kook, we are involved in uplifting the "Akev". We do so, not by breaking with our past, but “as a result of (Eikev) following these laws” (Devarim 7:12), and understanding the quintessential divinity encompassing even “those [seemingly] unimportant mitzvot which one treads on with his heel (Akev)” (Rashi *ibid.*). This stems from an understanding of the special position of Am Israel, of “the covenant and the compassion which He swore to your forefathers,” of our continuity from Avraham Avinu. When the Redemption arrives, heaven and earth will be united, and the Divine essence of the heel too will be apparent.

We will continue to help this process along, as King David said: “Your servant was careful in them [the mitzvot], in keeping them is 'Eikev Rav' (great reward)” (Tehillim 19:12).

Rav Aviner on... Near-Death Experiences

Statement: Many people who were diagnosed as having clinically died but who then returned to life, report a remarkable experience that proves that the soul remains alive after death. The person feels himself being detached from his body, he hovers over it, gazes at it from above, and sees everything that happens to him. He enters a gigantic tunnel whose end is awash in brilliant, powerful, sweet light. He encounters an entity full of boundless love that affords him a feeling of marvelous contentment. He meets various figures, some known to him and some not, angels and saints. He watches a reenactment of his entire life, in a sort of movie. In the end he returns to his body due to a decision from Above or due to his own entreaties. All of this jibes with our sources about the World to Come being full of the light of the Divine Presence, and about encounters with previous generations. The remarkable thing is the enormous uniformity of all the descriptions. The experience is almost identical, which proves that it is true.

Reply: Indeed, everyone has an almost identical experience, but not entirely. Sometimes the experience is marvelous, and sometimes it is awful, with frightening nightmares about being tortured by demons, etc. (about 15% of the cases), unless one says that that is proof of Hell... Yet only 20% of those who have clinically “died” report near-death experiences (of whom only 15% have partial memories). Thus, most do not experience anything, which would make that proof that there is nothing...

Indeed, Dr. Raymond Moody, who in 1975 carried out all this research on clinical death before resuscitation regarding NDE, “Near Death Experience”, did do quality work, but only regarding those subjects that supported his opinion, and he ignored those that contradict it.

Research projects are not always reliable. Even the great researcher Dr. Kubler-Ross, who very much supported this theory, was, in her great enthusiasm, herself misled by a scoundrel who, so to speak, spuriously made contact with the dead, to confirm her theory. Moreover, Christians meet Jesus and the heads of the Church, Muslims meet Muhammad and all sorts of Imams and we, the disciples of Moshe, meet Avraham and all the other lofty saints. All this demonstrates that each person sees there what he believed in before, and all the other wonders he sees there are dictated by his own beliefs and opinions. That is why children, who do not yet have a rich perception of the world, report much less about near death experiences.

Psychiatrists do not believe that these phenomena constitute any proof of life after death. Rather, they consider them simply an illusion deriving from a fogging of the senses that leads to various experiences that a person undergoes being interpreted as life after death.

Hence, many people report similar although not identical experiences following other occurrences besides clinical death: 1) Taking Ketamine, a hallucinatory drug that serves as a quick-acting anesthesia. The drug causes a feeling of being cut off and distanced from the body – which facilitates operating. 2) Various drugs such as Hashish, LSD or DMT. 3) Psychosis. 4) An Epileptic fit. 5) Administering electric shock to the temple lobe during an operation for epilepsy. 6) Oxygen deprivation or diminished blood flow, for example in the trauma following the loss of much blood, or even in pilot training for fast acceleration. 7) High carbon dioxide levels. 8) Childbirth. 9) Meditation. 10) A very strong migraine. 11) Being in a critical situation, such as hearing the doctor say that you’re dead, or moments before your car is about to crash. 12) When one is in on the verge of sleep.

It goes without saying that people with well developed emotions or imaginations report more about that experience of near death.

As far as the feeling of being detached from the body and floating above it, called OBE – an Out of Body Experience – that is a well-known experience owing to a break-down in the temple lobe and the vestibular and proprioceptional system. These allow a person to keep track of his body and to know his body’s movements even with his eyes closed. When they are damaged, one’s senses operate in a distorted manner.

As far as people’s awareness of conversations going on around them when they were declared dead, it turns out that they weren’t entirely dead, despite the reports from the equipment. Or, a person may have unconsciously pieced together everything he was later told and retroactively processed it in his memory.

It is true that it is impossible to explain everything totally, but such is the lot of all the sciences, and we don’t reject them as a result. We certainly should not expand the delicate crack of misunderstanding and load tons of miracles into it.

Yet let us make no mistake. Certainly there is a World to Come. Certainly the soul lives on after death, even without scientific proof, and we don’t need such proof either. Quite the contrary, science needs faith to enlighten its path, and faith does not need science to prove it.

Moreover, let us not forget that we do not live in Heaven but on earth, and the Torah is a living Torah, which the Living G-d, who desires life, gave us. See Mesilat Yesharim, Chapter 1, which deals with Torah and mitzvot in this world. G-d doesn’t like it when we are preoccupied with death. The dead render us impure. A grave renders us impure. If someone touches the dead, he is impure for seven days. All of these mental excursions to the grave and back are not healthy. Choose life!

Maran Ha-Rav Kook wrote: “Regarding conjecture on metaphysical matters that remain outside the bounds of practical and moral life, even if we cannot deny them, we still should not let them dictate our way of life. Our holy Torah distances us from preoccupation with unclear visions, forbidding all sorts of witchcraft and séances. It forbids Cohanim from becoming impure through contact with the dead, and it links all the mitzvot to life.” (Igrot HaRe’iyah, Letter #79).

Stories about Leaving the Land of Israel - #8

When the son of Ha-Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach became engaged, his prospective father-in-law called his father. He said to Ha-Rav Auerbach: "Since traditionally the wedding is held where the bride lives, Be-Ezrat Hashem, the wedding will take place in London." Ha-Rav Auerbach was not opposed to the idea, but added: "Good, we'll see which of the children and who from the family will come to the wedding. I will not attend since I do not leave Eretz Yisrael, and even for my son's wedding I don't leave Eretz Yisrael." When the prospective father-in-law heard these surprising words, he changed his mind, and the wedding was held in our Holy Land (Chicho Mamtakim vol. 1 p. 54).

Kitzur Tefilat Amecha - #3

[adapted for middle-schoolers by Rabbi Shmuel Jablon from Rav Aviner's three-volume commentary on the siddur "Tefilat Amecha"]

The Birkat Ha-Torah, along with Birkat Ha-Mazon, are mitzvot from the Torah. In Halachah this means that they are the only blessings which if we are not sure we said we go back and say them just to be sure. In the first part of this blessing we bless Hashem who has commanded us to "busy ourselves with the words of Torah." This means that our primary job is being involved with Torah and we need mind, body and soul to do it. It's what we do to live. So here we have a very important lesson. No matter what we do during the day, our primary job as a Jew is to learn Torah.

Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for

the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

You are Fat

Question: My husband claims that I am fat and pressures me to go on a diet. I also want to be thin but I cannot stay on any diet. As difficult as I am on myself, my husband is even harder on me.

Answer: The fact that you want to be thin is good but your husband demanding it is improper. He needs to love you whether you are heavy or thin. Heavy or thin has no importance, it is vanity. The essence of a person is his soul, his good deeds and his proper character traits. Perhaps your husband forgot about this, and so you need to remind him. Sometimes people forget the most basic things, and we must therefore repeat them over and over again.

After all, it is not that you are the most beautiful woman in the world and he therefore loves you, but on the contrary, he loves you and you are therefore the most beautiful woman in the world.

If you want to be thin, perhaps turn to O.A. – Overeaters Anonymous, which will give you support and the best way to achieve your goal.

Text Message Responsa

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah" and "Olam Ha-Katan." Here's a sample:

Teacher

Q: Is it permissible to tell the administration about a teacher who seems unfit when it might cause him to lose his job?

A: It is permissible; the teacher is there for the students and not the students for the teacher – but you must provide the full picture.

Cutting

Q: Is it permissible to cut a line if everyone is doing it?

A: It is forbidden. The transgression of many does not make it permissible.

Bad Things for Good People

Q: Why does Hashem allow a woman to be killed in a car accident leaving orphans?

A: The Prophets asked why bad things happen to righteous people, but not in a text message. It is difficult to understand how a person wants to clarify such deep questions in a text message.

Hypnotism

Q: Is it permissible to use hypnotism for medical treatments or is it nonsense?

A: It has value as an addition to treatment, but only by a person who has legal permission to do so.

Holocaust

Q: Why did Hashem abandon us during the Holocaust?

A: It is spitting in the face of six million Jews to discuss this in a text message. You can call me or look in my book "Orot Mei-Ofel."

Koran

Q: If Mohammed was a monotheist, it is therefore permissible for me to read the Koran.

A: Monotheism is truly a great achievement, but it is not enough. Mohammed organized a giant slaughter of Jews, and then forced the widows and orphans to convert to Islam. The Koran is full of insults to the Nation of Israel, and denies the eternity of the Torah. It therefore should not be read.

An Oath not to Smoke

Q: If a person takes an oath not to smoke, can it be annulled?

A: No, since it is forbidden to smoke according to the Torah (See Shut Aseh Lecha Rav 2:1).

Lying to Help Someone Repent

Q: Is it permissible to lie to a secular Jew with the goal of helping him repent?

A: No, this is not the way. The Torah is the Torah of truth. It is similar to a salesman selling a damaged item and deceiving the buyer. The Torah is the most supreme good (see Eder Ha-Yakar of Maran Ha-Rav Kook).

Returning an Item

Q: There is a new law which allows one to receive his money back when returning an item. Is it permissible to buy something with the intention to return it?

A: G-d forbid. It is deception and theft.

Gog and Magog

Q: Someone told me from a trustworthy source that the war of Gog and Magog is coming soon.

A: Statements such as these mean nothing. It is forbidden to calculate the End of Days. Rambam, Melachim 12:2.

The Soul of a Non-Jew

Q: Does a non-Jew possess a Divine soul?

A: Certainly, beloved is man who was created in the Divine Image. Pirkei Avot 3:14. Tosafot Yom Tov and Tiferet Yisrael ibid.

Army

Q: How is it possible that there are Rabbis who say that one should not be drafted into Tzahal? Isn't it part of the Torah?

A: It is indeed not understandable (Me-Chayil El Chayil vol. 1 p. 168).

Abandoned Fruit

Q: If I am walking through an orchard, it is permissible to pick fruit?

A: It is certainly forbidden. And it is permissible to take what is lying on the ground only if you are positive that the owner will not gather it.

Stealing from a non-Jew

Q: It is permissible to steal from a non-Jew by downloading a song or game from the Internet?

A: Stealing from a non-Jew is forbidden (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 348:2).

Q: But the majority of people do it?

A: It still remains theft and one who is caught will be punished.

Kashrut Mistake

Q: I fried a milchig food in a flesichig pan which had not been used the previous 24 hours. What is the status of the food and the pan?

A: The food is Kosher and the pan must be koshered. It can be immersed in boiling hot water.

Cheese and Fish

Q: Is it permissible to eat cheese with fish?

A: It is permissible, but some people are strict. Shut Yechaveh Da'at 6:48.

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