

EIKEV (DEUTERONOMY 7:11-11:25)

Where Were YOU When the Lights Went Out?

2003 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Today's Hebrew lesson is about the word **עֵכָב** – *Eikev*. *Eikev* means “since,” or, “because of the fact that . . .” It is spelled with the same three letters as the word *Akeiv*, which means, “heel.” We often find that the Torah uses a particular word or phrase because of its similarity to another word. This “double entendre” is meant to teach us a double lesson.

This week's Torah Portion teaches us such a lesson:

*It will be BECAUSE OF THE FACT that you listen to these laws, and your ob**serving and performing them, G-d will safeguard for you the Covenant . . . He will love you, He will bless you, He will multiply you . . .* (Deuteronomy (7:12-13)

It has been pointed out that the Torah used the word “**Eikev** -- BECAUSE OF THE FACT that you will listen . . .” instead of the word “**אִם** -- **IM** -- IF you will listen . . .” The Talmud says that the Torah is promising us reward for observing “*Eikev/*Heel Mitzvahs.”

What is a “Heel Mitzvah?” Midrash Tanchuma observes that King David was afraid that he would be taken to task for “*the sins of my heels* . . .” (Psalms, 49:6), referring to “minor” infractions that no one pays attention to. Everyone knows that murder and idolatry are terrible sins against G-d and humanity. David was more afraid that he had violated one of the “little” sins; the sins that people “trample upon with their heels.”

People are essentially good. We do, however, tend to take liberties when it comes to minor infractions. We wouldn't dream of reaching into the cash register at the local supermarket and “sampling” its contents. Yet, many people wouldn't think twice about nibbling on a grape or two in the produce department. Most of us don't drive at 95 miles per hour in a 55 MPH zone. But how many of us stay under 56???

The Torah tells us that there is no such thing as a “minor infraction.” If we observe the Commandments that WE consider important, and ignore those that WE consider unimportant, what are we saying to G-d? We are saying, “Well, G-d, You are entitled to Your opinion as to what You consider to be important. I will decide for myself which of your Mitzvahs are worth listening to. I will decide which Mitzvahs to step on!”

The Torah's message is that G-d rewards us for following the "Heel Mitzvahs." There is no Mitzvah worthy of being trampled upon. There is no Mitzvah that is insignificant. If G-d finds a particular Mitzvah worthy of our attention, do we dare to ignore His opinion???

Isn't it amazing how we take the little things for granted?

I was sitting at my computer this afternoon (Thursday) when the office lights began to flicker. Within a few minutes, the retirement home where I serve as a chaplain lost all its power. Many residents didn't come to dinner because the elevators were out. We had no water to serve. ("Let them drink soda!")

I was very concerned while driving through busy intersections because the traffic lights were out and it was "every man for himself." I was pleasantly surprised that the local grocery store had generated power, and that it could still read my credit card! I had to buy large containers of water for my home because no electricity means that the pump could not deliver water from our well, disabling, among other things, our toilets.

The biggest frustration of all was the sporadic accessibility of cell phone service! Life is tough!!! :-)

We usually take life's daily amenities for granted. We "trample on them with our heels," without giving them a second thought. We don't stop to appreciate them . . . until we lose them.

As did 9/11, today's blackout seems to be bringing out the best in people. Complete strangers are offering each other rides and bottled water. I keep hearing that Manhattan, notorious for its aggressive drivers, is actually seeing a "kinder, gentler" city of courteous individuals, patiently waiting for the other car to proceed.

As the bumper sticker says, "I must be good; G-d doesn't make junk!" Every person is made in G-d's image. No one should be viewed as an obstruction, a faceless, nameless obstacle in our way to be stepped over and ignored on our way to do "important" things.

G-d doesn't ignore His children. Neither should we.

Have a great Shabbos.

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