

KILLER TORAH

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

This week's portion is called *Ekev*. Simply translated, *Ekev* means, "if". The Torah promises its bounty of blessing upon the Jewish nation. Hashem will watch you, love you, bless your children and your flocks -- in addition to five other verses all filled with various blessings. There is one caveat, however. These blessing are only bestowed with one condition -- "*Ekev tishmaoon*," **if** you shall **listen** to the word of Hashem and fulfill his commandments. *Rashi*, who usually concentrates on the simple explanations and clarifies nuances in Hebrew terminology, deviates from his norm. In his only commentary to the opening line of the portion, he translates the word *Ekev* in an entirely different light. He explains that the word *ekev* translates as heel. Thus, he explains the verse homiletically. "If you will observe Mitzvos that are ordinarily trampled on by the heel of your foot," then the blessings of Hashem shall follow.

Many commentaries pose the following question: *Rashi's* usual *modus operandi* is to first explain a verse in its *pashut p'shat*, simple explanation. That achieved, he then proceeds to expound the verse in a Midrashic light. In this case, *Rashi* uses **only** a Midrashic explanation. Why?

Rav Eliyahu Lopian raised funds for his Yeshiva in England. He once visited one of England's wealthiest Jews. The man was known to contribute to any Yeshiva or Rabbi who asked. The man himself, however, was not the least bit observant. Other than his adoration of Rabbis and support of Yeshivos, the philanthropist had hardly a connection with anything Jewish.

Rabbi Lopian went to visit the man out of respect, but decided not ask him for a contribution.

Upon arriving at the opulent mansion, Rav Lopian was greeted warmly, offered hot tea, and was shown to a place in the man's living room. Rabbi Lopian got to the point quickly. "I see that you are not an observant Jew. However, your magnanimity to Yeshivos and Rabbis is remarkable. Tell me, please, why?"

The man settled back and began his tale. "My parents were very wealthy and equally religious. I was very rebellious. They wanted me to go to the Chofetz Chaim's Yeshiva in Radin. I was not in the least bit interested, but I agreed to take an examination. I failed with flying colors and was ever the more happy for that. But I had one request. It was getting late and I had to sleep over. I asked if I could sleep in the dormitory for the evening. The Rabbi who had interviewed me did not know how to respond. I think he was afraid to have me in the Yeshiva even for a night and I could not blame him! He consulted with the Chofetz Chaim.

"The Chofetz Chaim explained to us both, 'a boy that cannot be in the dorm for a year cannot be there for a night. But that does not mean he cannot stay in my home.'

"The Chofetz Chaim took me to his home. He fed me as if I was the most important visitor in the world. He made a bed for me and made sure I went to sleep. A few hours later, in the middle of the night, I heard the door of the tiny room open. The old man was muttering. 'Oy, it's too cold in here. What will I do?' With that he took off his jacket and put it on top of me and tucked it in. It may not have been the most spiritual act he ever did, but I will tell you one thing. That jacket still gives me warmth whenever I see old Rabbis!

Perhaps Rashi is not expostulating. He is telling us the secret of spiritual survival. He is relating the formula that may be the secret to the Jew's existence and continuity. It's the small things that merit the blessings. It's the Mitzvos we tend to forget. Those we trample with our heel.

There are certain Mitzvos that anyone who prides himself as a Jew would not forgo. Yom Kippur and Passover are high on the list. Mezuzah and Kosher rank quite high, too. But there are too many others that get trampled. Rashi explains the verse by stating that if the little Mitzvos are ignored, it will not take long before the major Mitzvos join the little ones on their trek to oblivion. The Torah promises us the bounty of its blessing if we observe the mitzvos. But Rashi gives us a lesson in assuring continuity. Rashi is telling us the *Poshut P'shat* (the simple meaning)! Don't tread on the little Mitzvos. Watch the Mitzvos that everyone tends to forget. If those *heel commandments* will be considered important, then **all** the Mitzvos will ultimately be observed. That's not allegorical discourse. That's the fact!

The above story, related by Rabbi Y. Rottenberg, was printed in Shaarei Armon - on the Yomin Noraim (c) 1993 Tvuna Pub. Israel

***Dedicated by B. David & Shani Schreiber
Good Shabbos!***

Copyright © 1996 by [Rabbi M. Kamenetzky](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

If you enjoy the weekly Drasha, now you can receive the best of Drasha in book form!
Purchase **[Parsha Parables](#)** - from the Project Genesis bookstore - **[Genesis Judaica](#)** - at a very special price!

The author is the Dean of the [Yeshiva of South Shore](#).

Drasha is the e-mail edition of FaxHomily, a weekly torah facsimile on the weekly portion which is sponsored by ***The Henry and Myrtle Hirsch Foundation***

Books by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky:

