

# PARSHAS EIKEV

*by Gedalia Litke*

1. In this week's Parsha (8:1) Moshe teaches that we should do 'kol hamitzva', 'all' of the mitzva. Rashi says this means that one should finish a mitzva he has begun, as credit for the mitzva only goes to the one who completes it; 'all' of the mitzva. As proof, Rashi (quoting the Tanchuma) quotes a pasuk in Yehoshua where Bnei Yisroel are described as having brought up the bones of Yosef to Eretz Yisroel for burial; in fact Moshe brought them up, but since Moshe did not complete the task (as he was not permitted to enter Eretz Yisroel) the credit of carrying the bones is given to those who finished the job of burial - Bnei Yisroel, not Moshe. The message seems to be: "Finishing a mitzva is crucial to its undertaking." Why does the Tanchuma choose Moshe's failure to complete Yosef's burial as the example of one who starts but does not complete a mitzva; Moshe had no choice in the matter. He would gladly have completed this mitzva had he been granted permission to enter Eretz Yisroel. To the contrary, the general principle is that one who intends to do a mitzva but due to 'oness', extenuating circumstances, fails to do the mitzva, is nonetheless given credit as if he actually did the mitzva. Wouldn't it be better to use an example of some who willingly abandons a mitzva.

2. In contrast to this week's Parsha: In last week's Parsha (4:41) Moshe explains that he designated three Cities of Refuge on the Trans-Jordan. Rashi points out that Moshe undertook this mitzva even though it did not yet apply (because the 3 Trans-Jordan cities first achieve their status as Cities of Refuge only after the additional three cities in Eretz Yisroel are so designated). Moshe did this because it is best to accomplish whatever one can in the way of mitzvos. Even if the designation does not yet have effect, and Moshe himself, who was not permitted to enter Eretz Yisroel, knew he would not live to see the day when his designation of these cities would have effect, nonetheless Moshe wanted to get started on it. The message seems to be clear, and the opposite of this week's Parsha: 'Do whatever aspects of a mitzva are available to you and don't worry about finishing them'. How do we reconcile these somewhat contradictory messages about finishing mitzvos?

1. Maskil L'Dovid answers the first question. Of course one who is an 'oness' gets credit for his good intentions. However, if one brings the extenuating circumstance upon himself by his own poor choices then the situation does not qualify as 'oness'. In Moshe's case and on his level, Moshe sinned and therefore was denied entry into Eretz Yisroel. Because this was so to speak Moshe's own doing, it does not qualify as 'oness'. Accordingly, he began the mitzva of Yosef's burial but he did not complete it due to his own subsequent actions, not due to 'oness'. A true 'oness', however, does get credit for good intentions to do a mitzva which remain unrealized. The example of Moshe not completing this task is a perfect example, because the idea of 'finishing a mitzva is crucial to its

undertaking' applies precisely to this kind of self-induced failure to complete. However, if someone failed to complete, or even start, due to circumstances truly beyond his control then he would get credit for his good intentions.

2. Based on the Maskil L'Dovid the reconciliation of the seemingly contradictory messages emerges. This week's Parsha covers the case where someone could have finished the mitzva but did not do so because of circumstances over which he has control. In this context there is the admonishment to always finish mitzvos as one who abandons a mitzva gets no credit. Last week's Parsha - Moshe designating the Cities of Refuge - was undertaken after the decree against Moshe's entering the Land was already set. At the time he undertook the mitzva he knew there was no chance of completion, yet he began the mitzva anyway. This is extremely admirable and shows intense love of mitzvos. In this context of impossibility of completion one should nonetheless 'do whatever aspects of a mitzva are available to you and don't worry about finishing them'.

[Note that the context and placement of these messages about mitzvos are very interesting. See Sforno and Kli Yakar on 4:41 for an explanation of last week's context; perhaps this week's is derived from the balance of the pasuk in which Moshe is telling Bnei Yisroel about their imminent arrival in Eretz Yisroel.]

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