

ON THE HEEL OF SUCCESS

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Rashi begins his commentary of this week's Parsha by referencing the Medresh Tanchuma on the word "Eikev - as a result of." The word Eikev is an unusual word for the Torah to use. The word "Im - When" would have been more common and expected.

The Tanchuma associates the word Eikev with the Hebrew word for "heel - Eikev." (Eg. The name Yakov - "and his hand grasped the heel of his brother Eisav." Ber.25:26) The Tanchuma explains, "The Torah is referring to those easy Mitzvos that we tend to trample beneath our heel; meaning, those Mitzvos that we take for granted or consider less important.

The Ohr Hachayim begins his commentary on this week's Parsha with two questions.

1. Why does the Torah use the futuristic construct "V'Haya - "And it will be as a result of your adhering to these statutes?" The Torah could have just as well left out the word V'Haya" and started with the second word, "Eikev - As a result of..." The verse would have then read, " As a result of your adhering to these statutes"
2. Why does the Torah use the word "Eikev?" The Torah could have left out the word Eikev and simply said, "Im Tishmiun - When you will adhere..."

The Ohr Hachayim references the Medresh that explains the word "V'Haya" to denote Simcha - joy and contentment.

While attending a wedding this past week, a friend mentioned the above Ohr Hachayim, as well as the obvious association between the word "V'Haya" and the four-lettered name of G-d. Both words utilize the same letters of the Hebrew Aleph - Bait. My friend wanted to know how I understood the association of the word V'Haya with G-d's name; the Ohr Hachayim's association of the word V'Haya with Simcha - joy; and Rashi's classic interpretation of the word Eikev as referring to "the easy Mitzvos."

The Ohr Hachayim goes on to answer his two questions and to offer other insights beside the classic explanation of the Tanchuma. The main thrust of his explanation is that the word Eikev means "at the end," and that joy and contentment can only be realized when a person is committed to doing all the Mitzvos. "The outcome of a life devoted to Torah and Mitzvos will be Simcha - joy and contentment." That is why the Torah used the futuristic construct of "V'Haya - And it will be," and the word "Eikev - as a result of."

Considering my friends request I suggested the following possibility for understanding the various associations.

The word "V'Haya - And it will be" uses the same letters as the name of G-d. That specific name identifies G-d as the "G-d of Mercy," or the "Personal G-d. " (In contrast to the G-d of Justice or the G-d of Nature.) The G-d of Mercy deals with human failings. Such a G-d must utilize the element of time in His deliberations and judgments. Such a G-d must give His free-willed humans the time to make mistakes (sin) and time to learn from their mistakes (Teshuva).

The G-d of Mercy, the G-d Who is intimately involved in every aspect of our lives, lovingly gave us a comprehensive life style that addresses every aspect of the human condition. It is not for us to decide which of those commandments are more or less important. G-d gave them all to us to enrich our lives and further our awareness of Him.

Imagine a seriously ill patient deciding how much medication to take. "Even though the doctor said I should take both pills I feel like taking only one of them." Imagine that same patient deciding that he would take the medication but stop drinking fluids. Imagine the heart patient deciding that his medications are more important than the prescribed exercises or stopping to smoke. Which is more important, medicine or water, medicine or exercise, exercise or stopping to smoke?

As foolish a deliberation as that is for an individual who wishes to be healthy and remain healthy, it is equally foolish for the person who wishes to be spiritually healthy. The individual who desires to be healthy follows the entire regiment of prescribed therapies. Certain elements of the prescription address the illness and others build strength and boost immunities. Some are preventive and others therapeutic. Both are essential for health and healing. The same is true with the Mitzvos.

Every weekday we recite Psalm 100. "Serve G-d with Simcha - contentment and joy" Service presumes an attitude of subjugation and humility. We serve G-d. We do as we are told and accept all the commandments as equally important to each other. We do not presume to evaluate the importance of one Mitzvah over another Mitzvah. We do not presume to choose seemingly easy commandments over seemingly difficult commandments.

Simcha - joy and contentment is not a passing attitude or a circumstantially motivated feeling. Simcha is the natural outcome of a way of life and is sustained and nurtured by that way of life. Simcha assumes a sense of importance and accomplishment. Simcha assumes a perspective that frames all of life's offerings, good and bad, joyous and sorrowful, in service and purpose. Simcha results when we are fully committed to "serving G-d."

Most of us have been trained to be goal oriented. This is both good and bad. On the one hand, it motivates us to finish the assignments and projects that we undertake. On the other hand, our sense of accomplishment is first realized at the end of the assignment or project, not during the ongoing process that leads to completion.

Upon successful completion there is a deserved sense of elation and self worth. Upon completion we permit ourselves to accept recompense in one form or another. However, not every job ends in success. More so, every success raises the level of expectation for the next success. Few of us, if any, can rest on our laurels. "What should I do next? What will be my next assignment? Will I be successful or not?" If we merit contiguous successes we are "B'Simcha - joyous and content." If not, we loose confidence in ourselves, become embittered, angry, depressed, despondent and desperate.

The beauty of living a life of "service to G-d" is that it offers a prescription for contiguous success, sense of accomplishment, self-confidence, and Simcha. There is never a moment when one must wonder what to do next, or what I am worth. There is always another Mitzvah to do. There is always some form of Chesed to effect. There is always more Torah to learn or teach. The opportunities do not have to be "big." Small opportunities for serving G-d are as much a service to G-d as the big opportunities.

The Ohr Hachayim quoted the Medresh that associated the word V'Haya with Simcha. The word V'Haya is the same letters as the name of the G-d of Mercy who gifted us with a lifetime of Mitzvos. Rashi explains the word Eikev as referring to the Mitzvos that we tend to ignore or take for granted.

The overall message is clear. The G-d of Mercy, the Personal G-d, mandates us to serve Him with an attitude of Simcha. Simcha is the byproduct of embracing all aspects of that service, both the seemingly important and the seemingly unimportant. Such devotion to service guarantees clarity of purpose and a contiguous sense of self worth and accomplishment. Such a service guarantees a life of Simcha.

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