

# THE SMALL THINGS

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

Ekev - the word itself and the parsha generally - stresses the cause and effect equation that governs all human and Jewish history. Blessings and sadder events are conditioned on previous human behavior, attitudes and actions. Life eventually teaches us that there is no free lunch. The rabbis stated it succinctly in Avot: "According to the effort and sacrifice, so too will be the reward."

There are really no shortcuts in life. All attempts to accommodate eternal Jewish practices and values to fit current fads and societal norms, have ended in abysmal failure. The road of Jewish history is littered with the remains of people and movements who looked to reform and improve Judaism and instead only succeeded in making it irrelevant to their followers.

The Torah emphasizes that Moshe brought the people closer to Heaven but he did not degrade heaven by dragging it down to the level of the people. The tragedy of much of American Jewry and of many secular Jews generally is not that Judaism was too hard and difficult - rather, it was rendered too easy and convenient and thus had no meaning in their lives and everyday existence.

Moshe in this week's parsha (as he does generally in the book of Dvarim) emphasizes the difficult times that the people endured in their forty years sojourn and travels in the desert of Sinai. And Moshe does not deign to promise them a rose garden in the Middle East upon their entry into and conquest of the Land of Israel. He warns them of the consequences of abandoning God and Torah. The God of Jewish and general world history is exacting and does not tolerate the easy path that leads to spiritual weakness and eventual physical destruction.

Rashi in this week's parsha comments that this message is particularly true regarding the "small" things in life that one easily crushes with one's akeiv - heel. It is the small thing that truly characterizes our personality and our relationships with others and with our Creator as well.

I have noticed that there is a trend in our current society that when eulogies are delivered they concentrate on the small things in life - on stories, anecdotes, memories and personal relationships - rather than on the public or commercial achievements of the deceased, no matter how impressive those achievements might have been.

It is the small things in life that engender within us likes and dislikes, feelings of affection and love and emotions of annoyance and frustration. So our Torah is one of myriad details and many small things. The God of the vast universe reveals Himself, so to speak, to us in the atom and the tiny mite. For upon reflection and analysis there are really no small things in life.

Everything that we do and say bears consequences for our personal and national future. It is this sense of almost cosmic influence exercised by every individual in one's everyday life that lies at the heart of Torah and Judaism. We build the world in our own lives' seemingly mundane behavior.

Shabat shalom

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