

PARSHAS EIKEV: ONLY FEAR

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

After listing all the occasions that Klal Yisroel sinned before Hashem, Moshe issued them a challenge - to devote themselves to Hashem and His mitzvos. He reminded them that despite all their failings, they still maintained their status as Hashem's Chosen Nation. The wording of Moshe's challenge to Klal Yisroel, however, is quite puzzling - and is the subject of much discussion in the gemorah and among our meforshim (commentaries).

Moshe began his charge to the Jews by stating, (Devarim 10:12) "V'atah Yisroel, muh Hashem Elokecha shoeil ma'imach ki im liyirah - and now, what does Hashem your G-d ask of you - only to fear Him? Moshe was telling his people that after all that transpired, Hashem's love for them remains unchanged (see Rashi), and all they need to do is to have to proper level of Yiras Shamayim (fear of G-d).

NO SMALL REQUEST

The gemorah (Brachos 33b) wonders why Moshe conveyed Hashem's request for the Bnei Yisroel to have yiras shamayim as a minor matter. Isn't living one's life with the fear of G-d a lifelong and difficult goal to attain?

The Gemorah answers this question by stating that as far as Moshe was concerned, fearing Hashem was second nature. He therefore presented this matter to the Jews from his perspective - which was that he was only asking a simple request of the B'nei Yisroel.

This answer, however, seems quite difficult to understand. Surely Moshe Rabbeinu realized that he was addressing the Jews who were not on such an elevated level. In fact, Moshe was in the best position to understand the spiritual level - having dealt with the many complaints of the Jews in the desert.

AN ADDITIONAL QUESTION

Perhaps more puzzling is the fact that in that very phrase, Moshe made several additional requests of the Bnei Yisroel after posing the initial call for the Jews to fear Hashem. In fact, Moshe's statement runs two full pesukim (Devorim 10:12-13) and includes the charge for the Jews to:

* Love Hashem * Emulate His ways * Serve Him with all our hearts, and ... * To keep all the mitzvos.

So, not only did Moshe present Yiras Shamayim as a small and simple request, but he added on the most fundamental components of our faith - and told the Jews to keep each and every one of the

mitzvos!

This two-pasuk segment is all the more surprising, coming on the heels of such a protracted rebuke of Klal Yisroel, and close to the death of Moshe. Why were these critical matters - to fear Hashem, and follow His commandments - presented as such a seemingly simple request?

TWO ANALOGIES, IF I MAY

Think of the amount of time that you spent preparing for your Bar or Bas Mitzvah speech, or for reading the Parsha on the week of your Bar Mitzvah. It would surely total many dozens of hours. During that time, you went over every part of the speech or parsha. You were trained in how to stand, how to deliver the speech, where to pause, when to smile - until you got it just right. Then, you practiced - again and again.

When the moment came, and you were ready to begin, I am certain that your teacher or parent gave you one last, final tip or two;

"Just relax and look around the room"

"You will be great, enjoy the moment"

"Read the words slowly."

If you enjoy playing sports, perhaps another analogy may work better.

You have been working on your baseball swing all summer long in sleep-away camp. You practice again and again and work on the fundamentals. Finally, you get a turn at bat in a big spot in a Color War baseball game. Your coach or counselor pats you on the back and says,

"Keep your eye on the ball"

"Just make contact, don't swing for the fences"

So, in both scenarios; after all the time you spend preparing for that moment, it all comes down to a simple instruction or two.

FINAL INSTRUCTIONS

Moshe realized that he was about to depart from this world. He reminded the Bnei Yisroel of their failures over the forty years in the midbar. He protected their dignity by couching his criticism in coded form. But he did not spare them as he informed them of the many details of their transgressions.

As it came time for Moshe to sum up all that his children need to do - and pass on to future generations - Moshe gave them the most basic instruction.

Fear Hashem

Once you will have internalized the proper level of Yiras Shamayim, Moshe was saying, all the other mitzvos will follow. Surely Moshe understood that this was not as simple for the Jews to follow these instructions as it was for him. However, Moshe wanted to teach his children the secret to living a spiritual Torah life was to begin with a rock-solid fear of Hashem.

May we fortunate to follow these simple - and profound - instructions and lead meaningful Torah lives.

Best wishes for a Gutten Shabbos

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