

Parsha Ponders

Eikev | Aug 3, 2023 | 17 Av 5783

Prized Heels¹

והיה עקב תשמעון את המשפטים האלה ושמרתם ועשיתם אתם ושמר יקוק אלקיך לך את-הברית ואת-
החסד אשר נשבע לאבתך

It will be *Eikev* you listen to these judgments and safeguard and fulfill them, Hashem your G-d will guard you, the covenant, and the lovingkindness that He swore to your forefathers²

Our verse uses an unusual expression. “It will be *Eikev* you listen” to Hashem’s commandments. *Eikev* usually is translated as heel. Targum Onkelos translates³ it in this case as “in return for your listening to these judgments”. Meaning, the verse is telling us a reward we’ll receive for our *mitzvah* observance. However, our Sages were bothered⁴ why didn’t the verse use the traditional word בעבור, meaning due to our loyalty, we’ll receive reward. Why use the same word for heel? Furthermore, the verse sounds like it’s encouraging us to serve Hashem to receive reward. The problem is, our Sages adjured⁵ us to do just the opposite⁶!

Perhaps we can resolve these issues by quoting a story about one of the Sages. We are told⁷ that when Rabbi Zeirah would feel too weak or ill to learn, he would sit next to the study hall. He shared that his rationale is that when the Sages would walk by him, he would stand up in their honor and receive reward. Again, the problem with this is it implies he was doing *mitzvos* in order to receive reward⁸.

The answer is based on a *halacha* that it is forbidden to receive payment to testify⁹. However, that’s only referring to someone who already witnessed an event. Since they are obligated to testify¹⁰, they are not allowed to receive payment to do so, as that may affect their integrity. However, it is permissible to receive payment to go witness an event, even if the intent is to later testify about it¹¹. The same is true for fulfilling *mitzvos*¹². When a person is obligated to fulfill a *mitzvah*, they shouldn’t do it in order to receive payment or reward. However, to put oneself in a position where they will become obligated in a *mitzvah*, intent for reward is totally legitimate¹³. Rabbi Zeirah was perfectly justified then to anticipate reward, as he put himself in the position where he would have to honor the Sages.

All of this is alluded in the word *Eikev*. This word has two connotations. One, the idea of walking; moving one’s heel towards a *mitzvah* opportunity. It also means “in return”, meaning by following Hashem’s judgments, we are assured to receive reward. Both of these together teach us that anticipating reward is legitimate when placing oneself in a *mitzvah* opportunity.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on Sefer Apiryon to Deuteronomy 7:12

² Deuteronomy loc. cit.

³ Targum Onkelos ad. loc.

⁴ Midrash Tanchuma Eikev § 1, brought by Rashi ad. loc.

⁵ Avos 1:2

⁶ Alshich ad. loc.

⁷ Berachos 28a

⁸ Sefer Apiryon says there are those that ask this. The Chida in fact does in his Pesach Einayim ad. loc. More recently Rav Elyashiv ad. loc. also asked this question, as well as his son-in-law Rav Zilberstein in Chashukei Chemed ad. loc.

⁹ Bechoros 4:6; Rema to Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 34:18

¹⁰ Sefer HaMitzvos Aseh § 178

¹¹ Rema loc. cit. The source for this distinction is found in Teshuvos HaRashba 3:11

¹² See <https://parshaponders.com/pinchas-5780/>

¹³ Rav Elyashiv loc. cit. suggests the same thing