

Dvar Torah Commentary
Parsha Eikev
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Shabbat Shalom!

The first line of Eikev is a key message of the whole parsha: “If you do obey these rules and observe them carefully, the Lord your G-d will maintain faithfully for you the covenant that G-d made on oath with your ancestors”. “G-d will favor you and bless you”...with fertility, with crops and livestock success. With health. And finally, should enemies arise that are “more numerous”, we are to “have no fear”, we are to remember what G-d did to Pharaoh and the Egyptians, i.e. G-d will lead us to defeat these enemies.

Eikev’s theme is one of the basic human beliefs: do the right thing, and good things will come to you.

And this core theme is one of the first ways that Eikev reminds me of...parenting. My wife Randy and I have six children. And we have many nieces and nephews, including my niece Joice who is here today visiting from Chicago. Eikev reminds me of parenting. In preparing for this D’var, Rabbi Lerner pointed out to me how much the parsha reminds us of parenting. In this parsha, Moses is seen in essence parenting the Jewish people. He parents them with this core message, he parents them with his patience, with losing his patience and his temper a bit, and with the repetition that parenting requires. He, like a parent, has to teach the same lessons again and again. And like a parent, he finds that stories and wisdom from long ago play out once again today. Let me tell you more about what I mean.

The core Eikev message of do-the-right-thing-and-good-things-will-come-to-you -- this is one of the core messages we preach as parents.

Study in school and you will get into a good college.

Practice hard for sports and you will win.

Do well in college and you will get a good job.

Eat well and exercise, and you will be healthy.

Give tzedakah, and the world will be a better place.

Send your children to hebrew school, and they will learn to be a thoughtful Jewish person.

Which by the way I was reminded of as I discussed my D'var with my son William -- also here today -- and he drew on his Jewish education to give me insights into preparing this D'var and wisely and correctly relating it to his Bar Mitzvah parsha Shlach Likhah -- proof enough for me that "doing the right thing" of sending him to Hebrew school resulted in a nice discussion of Torah with him.

Patience is another aspect of parenting that plays out in Eikev. Moses loses his patience I believe when he throws the tablets in anger. How many parents have "thrown" something -- if not objects then maybe words -- in anger at our children's behaviors? How many of us, like Moses in Eikev, calm down and again try to guide the children. In Moses' case bringing duplicate tablets down again -- (another lesson there: always back up important documents :-)).

Back to the core do-the-right-thing concept of Eikev: we *repeat* this concept over and over as parents. Over and over we preach this lesson, repeated many times. Which brings me to the next way that Eikev reminds me of parenting: repetition.

Hasn't the Torah already delivered the message of live by G-d's values and you will thrive?

Why in this parsha do we need to repeat the story of Moses coming down the mountain with the 10 Commandments, seeing the Israelite's with the golden calf, throwing the tablets out of impulsive anger, going back up the mountain, and emerging again with a second copy of the 10 Commandments? Lecturing the people to remind them how bad they were then, and how nice he and G-d were to them.

But Eikev is not about this story itself -- that has already been told in the Torah. Eikev is about *reminding* the Israeli people of the story of Moses and the tablets.

Reminding, repetition, re-telling. A theme of parenting and seemingly a universal principle of Torah and life. Repeat, retell.

The Torah reading system itself is repeating and retelling. Eikev is sort of a mini "recursive" Torah cycle within a Torah cycle -- a bit of a computer programming term for those who understand. Something I believe comes up over and over again in the Torah.

Today we can see that the promises of Eikev are still playing out repetitively. The promise of G-d to the people of Israel is not just something anciently historical. The Eikev promise has played out for the people of Israel in the last seventy years, and is playing out at this moment. It's as if Eikev was written recently, not thousands of years ago but seventy years ago.

As Eikev predicted, in the last seventy years Israel has indeed proven itself a good land, where modern Israelis can eat of abundant wonderful food, have fertility and agricultural productivity (ranked among the world's best), and ward off sickness (indeed Israel has, I believe, one of the

best and most efficient healthcare systems in the world, and led by research at places like The Technion is actually improving the health of the world).

Most of my family was in Israel this past February on our wonderful Temple Emunah Israel Trip. While there we were able see plenty of examples first-hand of how Israel, as G-d promised, have indeed thrived in the Land of Israel.. We met Israelis and felt their joy and success and the true miracle of modern Israel.

The other part of the Eikev message, the part about other peoples who are enemies to Israel, has unfortunately also proven true in modern times particularly today. Today we have Hamas, ISIS, Iran...but Eikev reminds us that there has always been some enemy and Eikev correctly predicts, unfortunately, that even thousands of years later there will be enemies facing Israel.

Today the meaning of “a people” as an enemy requires some interpretation, some explanation. It is my opinion, my interpretation, that today’s enemy “people” are not the average resident of Gaza. I believe that it is the extremist leadership and their troops, the evil Hamas, that is the enemy of both the Israeli people and the average Gazan. It is incredible to note that in this conflict Egypt is seeing Hamas as the same “enemy people” that Israel is. I believe that defeating Hamas and it’s cousins will be as much a blessing to the average resident of Gaza as it will be a blessing to the residents of Israel. We mourn all deaths of civilians in both Israel and Gaza -- we are taught that every life is precious.

Hamas is only one example of the enemies that threaten Israel. Indeed the events of not only today in Gaza, but the entire history of the modern State of Israel, have forced the Israelite people to believe the message of Eikev and have the faith to be confident that they can prevail against nations that are indeed dramatically more numerous than Israel.

Our Temple Emunah Israel trip took us to see the enemies of Israel first-hand on our Temple Emunah trip in February. Many of our group visited Sderot. We stood and looked out at Gaza. We saw the remains of missiles that had been launched at Sderot and collected in a huge pile to bear witness. We all had to feel, as G-d suggests in Eikev, that we must be confident in the face of our many enemies. To remember what G-d did for us in Egypt.

Our Israel trip group also stood near the Syrian border in the Golan Heights. We heard loud noises in the distance that turned out be actual shelling and gunfire of the Syrian civil war. As sadly moving as it was to hear that, it was also startling to see how familiar our tour guides were with these sounds and how non-notable it was to them. As Eikev says, Israel will have lots of enemies.

I read the paper and watch the news. I stop and think of the Iron Dome and the miracle that more Israeli lives had not been lost from the missiles and otherwise. I feel that G-d is indeed looking out for us.

One other event covered in Eikev is the 40 years of wandering. It makes me wonder: perhaps the Israeli people have been “wandering” for the last forty years with respect to what to do about the territories? About Gaza and West Bank. Perhaps a day will come soon where G-d will send a solution, via a messenger and leader like Moses, that will finally end the “wandering” with the territories, defeat Hamas and the other violent extremist leaderships, and bring peace to all the peoples of the region -- Israelis, Gazans and West Bank residents.

Do the right thing, and good things will happen.

Do not fear the enemies more numerous than us, G-d will lead us through.

Have patience, even though you may lose your temper at times.

G-d and Eikev, like good parents, repetitively teach these timeless lessons of the Torah over and over through the years. May the people of Israel continue to do the right things, and may the outcome of Israel’s current situation in Gaza lead to defeat of yet another enemy of Israel, and to peace for the people of Israel and all the peoples of Israel’s neighbors.

Shabbat Shalom!

Appendix and Out-takes

In the case of Eikev, in the parsha: do the right thing by living by G-d’s commandments, and good things will happen -- you, the people of Israel, will be given the land of Israel and it will prove a land of plenty. Plenty of food, plenty of fertility, dates, figs, olives -- you name it.

Even better, by living by G-d’s commandments the Israelites need not fear other People. Don’t worry if they are way more numerous than you, Israelites. G-d will look after you -- remember what G-d did for Israel when leaving Egypt.

One way the parsha is like parenting is teaching them the lesson that we all teach our children today. A lesson that we all believe in today: do the right things and good things will happen.

Notes from Wikipedia, etc:

Eikev = “if you follow”

6865 Hebrew Letters

1747 Hebrew Words

111 Verses
about 232 lines in a Torah Scroll

Blessings of obedience to God
Directions for taking the land
Golden Calf
Aaron's death
Levites duties
Exhortations to serve G-d

First aliyah:

Moses tells Israelites that if they obeyed G-d's rules then G-d would maintain the covenant, bless them with fertility and agricultural productivity, ward off sickness.

Moses directed the Israelites to destroy all the peoples whom G-d delivered to them, showing no pity and not worshipping their g-ds.

Moses told the Israelites not to fear nations because they were numerous -- recall what G-d did to Pharaoh/Egyptians...

G-d made Israelite's travel the long way 40 years to test them
hunger/manna...not bread, but on G-d decrees...
Clothes did not wear out, feet did not swell. Disciplined them as a man disciplines his son.

G-d was bringin

10 Commandments

Aaron