



PARSHAS EIKEV
AUGUST 11-12/ AV 20

WEEK IN REVIEW

ON JEWISH THOUGHT AND ITS CONTEMPORARY APPLICATIONS

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Warm Feet

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PARSHA EIKEV IN A NUTSHELL

When even our heels are connected we know that we are in a good place. And when we are, the energy will flow with holy abandon. In order to know how to live, we must remember how not to live: golden calves are a waste of gold; scouts are meant to observe and report, not decide; being a rebel is only good if it brings people closer. But even when everything breaks, we can make things whole and holy again. For forty years heavenly manna and the blessing of the Creator sustained us. The flowing land we are about to enter is blessed with seven inimitable kinds of flora, and the Holy One's eyes are upon it perpetually. Remove any impurity from its borders. The second section of the Shema chronicled.

PROTECT OUR CHILDREN

When you read these Haftarah readings one outstanding emphasis that jumps out at you is the abandonment and pain of our children.

Take this week's reading: It is essentially the story of children abandoned by their parents. But in their absence the children grow in most surprising and expansive ways.

The prophet begins with the sad words: But Zion said: "G-d has forsaken me; my G-d has forgotten me" (Isaiah 49:14).

The cry of every abused child, of every broken heart – how can you leave me here alone, vulnerable to the monsters attacking me?!

At first the hurt child hopes and expects that his parent will come to his rescue. But after a while, the child sadly gives up, and blames herself. After years of waiting for salvation, the child tragically believes that she has been utterly abandoned, with no indication of hope and salvation. After sustained abuse, protracted feelings of loneliness the child feels that he has been forsaken, abandoned and utterly rejected: *G-d has forsaken me; my G-d has forgotten me.*

To this, G-d responds and informs the child that he is gravely mistaken: Can a woman ever forget her nursing child; cease to have compassion on the son of her womb?! Yes, they may forget; yet I will not forget you!

Perhaps the most troubling mystery of life: How is it possible that a mother or father can forget their own child? How can they possibly become so consumed with their own needs (or perceived needs) to the extent that they can neglect the fruit of their womb? Yet, we see it all the time. No animal in the universe is capable of such utter narcissism. How can humans stoop to such cruelty?!...

Yet they do. And when they do, lives are left shattered in their wake. Forever changed. And we children are left to pick up the broken pieces.

But G-d says: Yes, they may forget; yet I will not forget you. Even when forgotten by those that should be protecting us, G-d does not forget.

Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me.

G-d tells His children that, in reality, you remain My constant focus every single moment. Moreover, your boundaries (walls) remain continually intact – even when they may have been breached by one form of abuse or another.

Your children hurry; your destroyers and those who laid you waste will depart from you.'

This has a two-edged meaning: Abuse causes children to run for cover, to escape and hide. People who have been deeply hurt find it difficult to be at peace, to trust and commit. Your

children hurry. In their insecurity they are always on the move; always leave a back door open; always ready to flee from danger.

Your destroyers and those who laid you waste will emerge from you. One of the most damning declarations of all: The greatest devastation is perpetrated by the people closest to us – from within our midst.

On the other, healing, side of the coin this verse also means that wounded children learn to hurry and never be complacent. Their suffering has taught them, in the hardest possible way, that we should never take our gifts for granted. Your children hurry – their lives have a sense of urgency.

Your destroyers and those who laid you waste will depart from you. You are promised that your abusers will leave you and cannot control your destiny. But it will take your hard effort to ensure that the “destroyers” do not hold your psyche hostage.

Lift up your eyes round about, and see: They all gather together to come to you. As I live, says G-d, you will surely adorn yourself with them like an ornament, and bind yourself with them like a bride.

Then your waste and your desolate places and your devastated land will be too narrow for the inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away. The children that were born in exile will again say in your ears: 'The place is too narrow for us; make room for us to dwell in.'

Therein lays the ultimate transformative power of healing. In the bigger cosmic picture it is unacceptable to simply “get out of the line of fire” of those who have tried to destroy us; true healing is about transforming our liabilities into strengths; to become stronger in the broken places.

In the mysterious cycle of suffering and growth – without justifying any form of pain – the fact is that the profound refinement, the nobility, aplomb and unfathomable strength that can come out of sorrow and loss is of a completely higher quality – incomparable to any virtue that comes

without anguish. Whether we understand it or not, the most powerful light comes of our darkness, the mightiest energy is generated through resistance.

Your greatest enemy is, of course, yourself. Which is the ultimate meaning in the verse: Your destroyers and those who laid you waste will emerge from you. Even when we have been victimized by another, even if the crime was perpetrated when we were vulnerable and innocent, with no power to resist, we all have built-in Divine immune/healing systems to overcome any challenge. Ultimately we will have the choice whether we will remain victims and be haunted by our pasts, or we will access deeper resources and break our shackles.

At first the hurt child hopes and expects that his parent will come to his rescue. But after a while, the child sadly gives up, and blames herself. After years of waiting for salvation, the child tragically believes that she has been utterly abandoned, with no indication of hope and salvation.

The Haftorah teaches us that the secret to achieving true freedom from our pasts is by lifting our eyes to a loftier place:

Lift up your eyes round about, and see: They all gather together to come to you.

Through hard work and determination you can discover how your pain can propel you to expand your horizons. Your sorrow can access enormous reservoirs of strength and creativity, adorning you like an ornament. Your hurried sense of urgency – spawned by your waste and your desolate places – will not allow you to conform to the status quo. If you allow it, your restlessness will make you feel that this place is too narrow, allowing you to dream, aspire and give birth to unprecedented creative heights, broaden our boundaries to expand far beyond the narrow straits of conventional life, *making room for us to dwell in.*

And appreciate the healing you have achieved:

Then you will say in your heart: 'Who has given me these? I had lost my children, and was childless, exiled, and wandering to and fro. Who has brought these up? Behold, I was left alone; from where have these come?'

This is what G-d says: Behold, I will lift up My hand to the nations, and raise My standard to the peoples, and they will bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters

will be carried on their shoulders. Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down to you with their faces to the ground, and lick the dust of your feet; and you will know that I am G-d. For those who wait for Me will not be ashamed. Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of the victors be delivered?

But this is what God says: Even the captives of the mighty will be free, and the prey of the tyrant rescued; for I will save your children.

When mortals hurt mortals, the only path to salvation is to reach to the immortal.

* * *

As powerful as this message may be; with all the hope and confidence we gain from knowing that G-d protects abandoned children – the big question looms: What does this teach us about our responsibilities to our children.

Yes, it's nice to hear that G-d protects us even when our loved ones do not. But what do we learn from this?

Some may even tragically use this Haftorah as a way to minimize the effect of abuse and cop-out from our own responsibilities, by just relying on G-d to protect our children.

However, with a little thought and sensitivity, it is clear that this Haftorah provides us with many vital lessons. Above all, we are instructed to follow G-d's ways, "just as He is compassionate so too shall you be compassionate." This week's Haftorah reading teaches us the grave responsibility we, parents and adults, carry to emulate G-d's ways.

We must ensure that no child should ever cry out: G-d has forsaken me; my G-d has forgotten me.

We must live up to our mandate: Can a woman ever forget her nursing child; cease to have compassion on the son of her womb?!

Just as G-d does not forget the child, we too must never allow a situation in which G-d says: They may forget; yet I will not forget you...

David Caar – the junkie-turned-acclaimed-NY-Times-journalist – confesses his own greatest sin in his new scathing book, *The Night of the Gun*. In one of the rawest self-con-

demnations I have ever read, Caar writes about a heart-sickening trip he took to a dope house with his baby twins, who he left in a cold car as he went in to get his fix.

I certainly couldn't bring the twins in. Even in the gang I ran with, coming through the doors of the dope house swinging two occupied baby buckets was not done. Sitting there in the gloom of the front seat, the car making settling noises against the chill, I decided that my teeny twin girls would be safe, that God would look after them while I did not.

I got out, locked the door and walked away. Inside, a transformation — almost a kidnapping — got under way. The guilty father was replaced by a junkie, no different from the others sitting there. Time passed, one thing begot another and eventually I was thrown clear.

Leaving, I remember that. Out the metal door and then out the front door with its three bolts onto the porch and the hollow sound of my boots on the wood floor. A pause. How long had it been, really? Hours, not minutes. I walked toward the darkened car with drugs in my pocket and a cold dread in all corners of my being.

I cracked the front door, reached around, unlocked the back and leaned in.

I could see their breath.

God had looked after the twins, and by proxy me, but I realized at that moment that I was in the midst of a transgression He could not easily forgive. I made a decision never to be that man again.

As we read this week's Haftorah, we are reminded about our greatest responsibility in all of life:

Protect your children.

Comfort you children.

What better way to honor these seven weeks of comfort than by bringing to the fore the question that we must all ask of ourselves and each other: Are we doing our best in bringing comfort to our sons and daughters? What more can we do?

Time has come that we once and for all declare: We will do

everything in our power to not abandon our children. To protect them with our very last ounce of energy – to ensure that they can enter their adult lives unscathed by the wounds of abuse.

G-d can and surely protects innocent children. But G-d wants to work through us – His agents, created in the Divine Image, emulating His compassionate ways.

I have personally witnessed – as I am sure many of you have – the never-ending agony of wounded children turned adults. It is unbearable to watch. The thousands of hours wasted on fighting fears, insecurities – the haunting voices – and the loneliness. Oh, the loneliness. The child's utter isolation every time his or her parent neglected him.

Do we need to wait for G-d to intervene and protect our children?

Some basic suggestions:

- Each day take some extra time to spend with your child.
- Don't ignore your children or take them for granted. Every morning make sure your child recognizes that you are aware of him or her.
- Even if you don't have your own children, we can each apply the same attitude to a nephew or niece or a child of a friend.
- Find a child with special needs, an orphan or anyone that can use some extra attention, and volunteer your services.
- Don't wait for trouble. Always be sensitive and look out for any signs of a child's discomfort, and address them
- Maybe we can create a blog, Protect Our Children, which offers more suggestions and provides a forum for further discussion, addressing dilemmas and exchanging ideas.
- Turn this into a priority, excepting the most from ourselves and our friends.

For G-d has comforted Zion. He has comforted all her waste places, and has made her wilderness like Eden,

and her desert like G-d's garden. Joy and gladness will be found there, thanksgiving, and the voice of song.

The voice of song.

Our children are our most precious commodity. Our voice of song.

Parents, educators, anyone who cares – wake up! Our children are at stake. Our future is at stake. Is that not more important than our own petty comfort zones?■

WARM FEET

A common cause for the ailments of the feet is poor circulation. The foot is the part of the body furthest from the heart; thus, the feet are often the first to suffer from inadequate blood supply due to circulatory problems, especially in its smaller veins and capillaries.

This physical phenomenon also has its counterpart in the spiritual life of man, which depends on the lifeblood of the soul—the Torah and its mitzvot—for its vitality and health. The Torah section of Eikev (Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25), opens with the words, "And it shall come to pass, because you heed these laws and keep them and observe them..." The word eikev ("because"), which gives the section its name, is an uncommon term in the Hebrew language, prompting a number of homiletic interpretations by our sages. One of these makes the correlation of eikev and akeiv ("heel")—the two words have the identical Hebrew spelling—explaining that the verse is alluding to "those mitzvot which a person tramples under his heels."

Often we tend to distinguish between "important" mitzvot and "lesser" mitzvot. The same person who is outraged by an act of thievery or adultery, who wouldn't think of eating pork or violating Shabbat, might casually transgress the prohibition against lashon hara (speaking ill of another). But a mitzvah is a divine commandment, an expression of the will

of G-d; the human mind can hardly appraise a mitzvah's true impact on his own life, much less its quintessential worth. So the ultimate test of a person's commitment to G-d is to be found in those mitzvot which "people trample under their heels." Is his observance of the mitzvot contingent upon his subjective appreciation of their social and spiritual utility, in which case he will inevitably discriminate between "greater" and "lesser" mitzvot, or has he indeed subjugated himself to the divine will, in which case he fulfills every divine command with equal joy and veneration?

When a soul's heart—its commitment and bond to its Creator—is hale and fit, the distant heel also receives an adequate "blood supply," and glows with the warmth and vivacity that are the hallmarks of spiritual life.

Based on a letter by the Rebbe dated Sivan 19, 5717 (June 18, 1957) ■

Quote of the Week:

“Let joy and enthusiasm join life.”

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Many of the ideas developed in this publication are based on the words of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory.

The Chassidic stories in the Week in Review are taken from a variety of sources.

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