

# פרשת עקב

This week's adaptation is dedicated in honor of:

our friend Estee Gross's Birthday

Happy Birthday!!!

"והיה עקב תשמעון את המשפטים" (ז, יב)

**"And it will be, because you will heed the ordinances"**

The Jewish people asked Hashem, "Master of the World! When will you grant us reward for the *mitzvos* that we do?" Hashem responded, "My children, the fruits of the *mitzvos* that you do are enjoyed now – but their true rewards I will only give you in the end (בעקב) – in the next world. This is learned from this *pasuk* – at the end you will receive reward.<sup>1</sup>

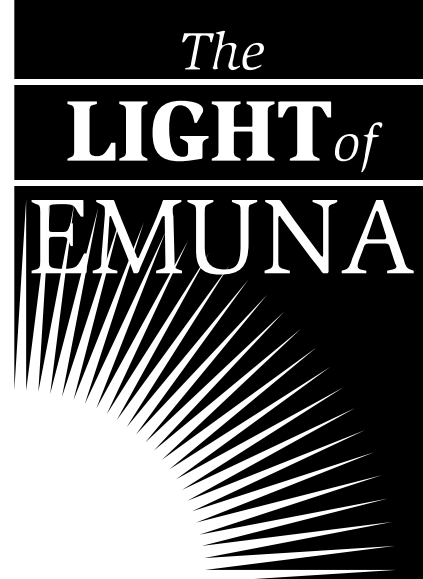
"לאהבה את ד' אלקיכם ולעבדו בכל לבבכם ובכל

נפשכם" (יא, יג)

**"To love Hashem, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul"**

Serving Hashem brings an abundance of joy, elevates the soul and fills it with hope. There is nothing that can gladden a Jew more than proximity to Hashem. "But as for me, G-d's nearness is my good."<sup>2</sup> Our souls are in a constant state of passionate longing for something greater, for a higher reality – for it to lift us up, and, if we reach it – everything will be different. What is a Jew? A Jew is a small person with a huge heart whose forefathers' feet blazed a path to the base of Har Sinai and he continuously seeks the route towards becoming closer to his Father. That is our joy, that is our serenity and that is the flavor of our lives. If we have You - we have everything. At every moment we can reconnect to You anew – when I

<sup>1</sup> דברים רבה כת"  
<sup>2</sup> ואני קירבת ד' לי טוב (תהילים עג, כח)



Based on Harav Menachem Azolai's "Ohr Ha'Emuna"

am walking down the street, when I'm driving my car, when I eat, even the moment before I fall asleep. Always with You. Always connected. When people try to harm me, I run to You. "Father, I want to tell you a little of what I'm thinking ..." After Hashem calms me and encourages me - He shows me how to truly view things.

Our objective in life is to draw near to Hashem. The main goal is just that – to have a goal, to have direction. We progress according to our strengths and abilities – we *daven*, we entreat, we judge ourselves and our mission illuminates the way like a traffic light, showing us the path like a street sign – we point ourselves towards our objective. We do not live in whatever way pleases us – we persistently desire to ascend – always eager for proximity to Hashem, to cling to Him. That is the greatest joy that a Jew can experience. When things go well - we lift our heads heavenward and thank Hashem. When things are difficult – we lift our heads heavenward and appeal for salvation. We cannot accomplish anything alone. Our greatest joy is the knowledge that no one can take You away from us.

A Jew must enable himself to be with Hashem. We must grant ourselves quality time with the Creator – whether by arriving in *shul* a bit before *davening* or tarrying a bit after *davening* without rushing out, or by visiting holy sites to pray.

There is no substitute for this sweetness. If a Jew does not feel love for Hashem or does not experience Hashem's pleasantness – he is missing the key ingredient. A Jew must seek true flavor in his service of Hashem. This cannot be compromised.

This week's *parsha* is called Eikev – which can mean “the heel.” The heel is the lowest part of the human body, the least sensitive, with tough skin – almost without sensation – just like today's generation. We are named for the heel (עקבתא דמשיחא). It is difficult for us to feel, it is difficult for us to be happy - our hearts are closed and blocked. Therefore, we must invest twice the determination not to give up on ourselves, to fortify ourselves to serve Hashem with happiness.

A Jew must find joy in the very fact that he is a Jew. If he does not, it is an indication that he has not yet fully absorbed the implication of the blessing “for not making me a non-Jew”<sup>3</sup> that we say each morning.

The Yesod Ha'avodah was once discussing matters of joy at his table when one of the attendees asked, “Why should we be happy?” The *tzaddik* raised his head and grabbed hold of one of his *peyos* in one hand and one of his *tzitzis* in the other hand and, with a look of elation on his face, declared, “there is no king in the world who has *peyos*, not even one hair of *peyos*, not even one string of *tzitzis* – who is comparable to us, who resembles us.”

Everything that we do, even those acts that have become habitual, like making blessings and putting on *tefillin*, must be done with renewed enjoyment each time - as if they were only just commanded to us.

The root of *tefilla* is the joy in our hearts towards Hashem. “Glorify His Holy Name; may the heart of those who seek Hashem rejoice.”<sup>4</sup> Dovid Hamelech played all of his *tefillas* and songs on

his harp to fill his heart with love of Hashem. “Rav Ayvo said, ‘at the time that you stand to *daven*, your heart should be happy, because you are serving the exalted G-d.”<sup>5</sup> The same goes for learning Torah, and for the performance of other *mitzvos*. “The fundamental part of the *mitzvah* of learning Torah is to be joyous and cheerful and take pleasure in one's learning - then the words of Torah will be absorbed in one's blood.”<sup>6</sup>

When a person undertakes to perform a *mitzvah* – he must recognize that he is setting out to do a great and precious thing. Every *mitzvah* and every effort to do Hashem's will illuminates the heavens with an exquisite light. The Arizal revealed that everything that he accomplished in wisdom and *ruach hakodesh* was only obtained because he performed *mitzvos* with unbridled joy. When a person is delighted with Hashem and His service – he merits a unique reception when his time comes. “If you implemented My words with gladness, My retinue will greet you and I Myself will come out to receive you and we will say, ‘come in peace.’”<sup>7</sup>

A Jew's joy is very noteworthy in Heaven. Eliyahu Hanavi travelled with Rav Beroka and pointed out two individuals as having earned a place in the world to come. Rav Beroka asked them what they had done and they explained that they were comedians/jesters who brought cheer to others.<sup>8</sup>

A Jew once visited the Baal Shem Tov and complained that he had no income and needed a salvation. The *tzaddik* advised him to be happy. The man was taken aback – how could he be happy without a livelihood. The Baal Shem Tov responded, “What do we not do to make a living.” He meant to say that this was the only way, there is no alternative [despite one's lack of feelings of joy, blessing can only be delivered to one who is happy – so, to earn a living the supplicant had to find happiness first]. If the only solution is to be

<sup>3</sup> שלא עשני גוי  
<sup>4</sup> התהללו בשם קודשו, ישמח לב מבקשי ד' (תהילים קה, ג)

<sup>5</sup> מדרש שו"ט תהילים ק'  
<sup>6</sup> אגלי טל  
<sup>7</sup> ד"א זוטא ה-ט  
<sup>8</sup> תענית כב,

happy – we must do so at any cost. A similar story is told of the Lev Simcha. Someone once asked him for a livelihood and the Rebbe responded, “What can I do, in Heaven they love Jews who are steeped in happiness.”

If I, G-d forbid, commit a sin – I do not allow the evil inclination to subject me to depression – not under any circumstances. I do *teshuva*, I beg Hashem for forgiveness, I ask Hashem to help me not stumble again – and I proceed with joy.

Uplifting words bring joy. The Rebbe Reb Bunim of Peshischa used to tell people to repeat the word “happiness” over and over again – because merely repeating the word brings one to a state of joy.

A person must incessantly act with jovial mannerisms – as if his heart is content – even if he does not feel that way at the moment. If a person acts happy – he will become happy.

Sing in a loud voice, wholeheartedly, unreservedly. Walk with a silent melody in your mind – one that inspires you. Tunes have great power to draw one’s heart towards Hashem.

Wherever you go, enter with a smile. Just as we often need someone to smile at us, light up upon seeing us – others need our smiles as well. When we cheer others up, we become cheerful. Consequently, our smiles directed towards other people are really for ourselves.

A certain Rebbe used to advise his followers to “purchase” joy. He recommended that they endeavor to participate in celebrations such as *bar mitzvahs* and weddings as often as possible because doing so causes joy to penetrate one’s soul. By fulfilling the *mitzvah* of “loving your friend as yourself” by attending a friend’s celebration – one receives a natural infusion from the wellsprings of joy.

“Eikev” hints at humility. The heel is the lowest part of the body, the meekest – yet the entire stature of the person is supported by it. Such is the role of humility – it is the source and root of

all holiness, everything is buttressed and sustained by it. It is the root of all positive attributes.

We must ceaselessly minimize our ego – for it occupies all space and does not allow the light of Hashem to penetrate into us. We relentlessly use terms such as: “My feelings are .... Why did you do that to me ... This is my opinion, why don’t you accept and follow it ...” Minimizing our egos means attempting to do everything for Hashem’s honor, not forgetting who we truly are. Particularly when we are honored a little bit – we become confused and entirely forget. We must remember that we are not owed anything – we must be so excited and impressed by everything that is given to us and done for us. If I view myself as undeserving – what others say or think about me will not bother me and I will not be distressed by the success of others. This is the loftiest and most wondrous level – to remember Hashem at every moment – because, when I get caught up in my own ego, I forget Hashem. “And your heart grows haughty and you forget Hashem, your G-d ... and you will say to yourself ‘my strength and the might of my hand have accumulated this wealth for me.’”<sup>9</sup> We must constantly proceed with the concept, “it is not me, it is not me - it is all Hashem.”

Yaakov Avinu wished to wed Rachel and agreed with her that they would marry. When they realized that Lavan wanted to trick them, they established signs. When the great day arrived, Rachel relinquished in favor of Leah – an enormous sacrifice – a colossal forfeiture – she gave Leah the signs. She did not come to the wedding canopy in her veil – the bride was concealed and no one knew whether it was Rachel or Leah. Yaakov was certain that he married Rachel – “and morning arrived and behold she was Leah.”<sup>10</sup> There is a significant aspect here that we can all relate to. Every person’s life, from the moment he is born until

<sup>9</sup> ורם ללבך ושכחת את ד' אלוקיך ... ואמרת בלבבך כוחי ועצמי ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה" (דברים ח, יד-יז)

<sup>10</sup> ויהי בבוקר והנה היא לאה (בראשית כט, כה)

this last day, is full of plans. This is our reasoning, this is our style, this is what we want. In reality – when Hashem gives us a beautiful present, He covers it, He wraps it in a veil. In other words, this veil conceals the reality that is not initially appealing to people and it appears as if one's dreams have been actualized. But it only appears so at night. In the morning, he awakens and sees that it is Leah, it is something entirely different. It is not what he wanted. The veil is the symbol of all of life. We walk around our entire lives with veils – contriving plans. When the plans do not materialize we don't know who do be angry at. We forget that that there really is One Who guides the entire world, He knows all of the secrets and He directs all of creation. Initially, He allows us to advance with the veil. Afterwards, when morning arrives, when daytime arrives, we realize that it was not what

we had wanted. But who says that it is not what we need? Who says that what we want is what we need? What we want and what we need are two entirely different things. (באור פני מלך חיים)

Our *parsha* opens with, “And it will be, because you will heed the ordinances.” The term “and it will be” is a term of joy (והיה). In order for the joy to reach our heels, our feet, we need the ordinances, the judgment – we must judge ourselves and speak to Hashem - often. Specifically in this generation, the generation of the heel, this lowly generation – there must be a proliferation of *tefilla* and *hisbodedus*. There must be an abundance of happiness and laughter.

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## תפילה

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**Master of the World!** Help me stop for a minute before - a minute before regret, a minute before forgiveness, a minute before pain. I acknowledge that I generally feel sorry after I get angry. I acknowledge that there is nothing that justifies anger. So, why am I incapable of stopping a minute before getting out of the car and yelling at the driver who is unloading his merchandise directly in front of the entrance to my narrow street and proclaims, with the epitome of apathy, that it will only take ten minutes. Help me, Father to remember how embarrassed I am afterwards, when I calm down, how I wish that no one who knows me would have seen me in such a disgraceful state. May I never cease begging Your forgiveness and pleading that You help me so that the next time I do stop the moment before I lose my temper. I know with certainty how miserable the outcome of such behavior is. I acknowledge that when I get angry, I am cut off from You. So is it with anger and so is it with other negative behavior.

Help me, Father, to stop my car a moment prior to passing another Jew who is looking for a ride. I know how the story concludes. I know how much pain I will feel for having ignored one of Your children. Even if I feel guilty and circle back to get him, most of the time he will no longer be there – someone else will have gained the opportunity.

Help me, Father, to stop a moment before indicating that I have nothing on me to that Jew who passes through the *shul* collecting *tzedaka*. I know how the story ends. I know the pain I will experience for having returned his gaze empty handed and for having incurred the lost opportunity of *tzedaka* that ultimately benefits me. Help me not to indicate that I don't have, when, indeed, I do have. If I follow him out to find him and make amends, usually, he is nowhere to be found.

Help me, Father, to stop a moment before. Not to allow the evil inclination to reassure me that this time it is permissible, that this time there are special circumstances, that this time I am justified.

Help me, Father, to learn from the past and stop a moment before.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

Dov

Notice: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the Parsha Sheet, *Ohr Ha'Emuna*, disseminated by Harav Menachem Azolai Shlita and is not a complete or exact adaptation of *Ohr Ha'Emuna* and is not necessarily even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented therein. *Ohr Ha'Emuna* is published in Hebrew; in translation, accuracy is always compromised. Rav Azolai has not reviewed this material and is not even aware of its existence. Any inaccuracies, omissions or confusion should be attributed exclusively to me. I still hope you enjoy and it provides some *chizuk*.

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