

# Parsha Perspectives FOR TODAY

Short Divrei Torah on Eikev for your Shabbos Table by Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

Delivered on Tuesday, 16 Av, 5784/August 20, 2024

Listen and read more Parsha Perspectives at [rabbiefremgoldberg.org/parsha](http://rabbiefremgoldberg.org/parsha)

Sponsored by Eli & Sara Malka Neger lilui nishmos Esther Tehila bas R' Gavriel Pinchas & Yitzchok Moshe ben Aaron Yaakov Yehoshua.

## DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

### No Mitzva is Too Small

In the opening *pasuk* of Parshas Eikev, Moshe tells *Benei Yisrael* that they will be rewarded *עקב תשמעו את המשפטים האלה* – as a result of their faithful observance of the Torah's laws.

Rashi makes a famous comment on the unusual word *עקב* in this *pasuk*, explaining that Moshe here alludes to *קלות המצוות* – the “light” *mitzvos* which a person is prone to “trample on” with his heel. Moshe uses the word *עקב* (“*eikev*”) as a subtle reference to the word “*akeiv*” – “heel,” as he speaks here specifically of observing the *mitzvos* which we tend to deem less important than others. We must remain unconditionally committed to all the *mitzvos*, recognizing the great significance and value of each one, without ever mistakenly thinking that some are less important and can thus be dismissed or neglected.

Rav Soloveitchik develops this point further, explaining that we may never consider any *mitzva* to be beneath us, unworthy of our time, attention and effort. The reason, Rav Soloveitchik says, is that we can never know for certain our designated role and purpose in the world. We might want to think that we have been placed here for jobs that bring honor and prestige, but the truth is that we do not know. There are people brought here to be the shul president, and there are people brought here to collect the *siddurim* and clean up after everyone goes home. Neither is necessarily more important than the other. We have no right to “trample” on any *mitzva*, to dismiss any opportunity we are given to contribute, even one which people consider undignified, because we never know if we were brought here for specifically that role.

The Rav cited in this context the story told in the Talmud Yerushalmi of Rabbi Tarfon, whose mother once came to his colleagues and begged them to pray for her son, who had fallen ill. She emphasized how righteous Rabbi Tarfon was, how careful he was to respect her and care for her, to the extent that once, her shoe broke, and he placed his hands on the ground so she could step on them, without getting her feet dirty. The rabbis responded by saying that even if Rabbi Tarfon would do this one hundred times, he still will not have achieved even half of what the *mitzva* of honoring parents demands.

Why would Rabbi Tarfon's colleagues downplay his greatness? Why did they “dismiss” his respect for his mother as but a fraction of what the *mitzva* entails?

The Rav explained that as Rabbi Tarfon was among the leading sages of his time, it seemed that his role was to disseminate Torah, that he was brought to the world to serve as a scholar and teacher. The rabbis were saying that this was not necessarily true. It was entirely possible that Rabbi Tarfon was sent to this world to care for his aging mother, that this was his primary obligation. And, if so, then he had so much more to do, as his mother still needed him. Hence, he could not leave this world, as his job was far from complete. The rabbis in a sense petitioned on Rabbi Tarfon's behalf, observing that his primary task might be to care for his mother, such that he must continue living so he could complete this job.

We never know which *mitzva* opportunity is the one through which we realize our purpose. Every small favor, every small contribution we make, every endeavor we get involved in – could be the one for which we are here. Therefore, we should never see any *mitzva* as too small, or unworthy of our attention and enthusiastic devotion.

## DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

### כל המצווה – Extending Beyond “Checklist Judaism”

Moshe Rabbeinu pronounces: *כל המצווה אשר אנוכי מצווך היום* – תשמרון לעשות – “All the commands that I am commanding you today, you shall ensure to perform them” (8:1).

The Rachmastrivka Rebbe, in *Amaros Tehoros*, offers a deeper layer of interpretation, explaining that Moshe Rabbeinu here alludes to the two ways in which people might approach the *mitzvos*. The first is what we would perhaps call “checklist Judaism,” whereby one simply “checks off” each item on his list of responsibilities. *Halacha* demands that we do certain things and refrain from certain things, and so for some, the Jewish experience is about going down this checklist, making sure that we have followed all the rules satisfactorily, checking off each item on the list.

However, the Rachmastrivka Rebbe writes, this is only the simple, basic level of *mitzva* observance. We must strive

to extend beyond this standard of “checklist Judaism,” and reach higher, to experience the פנימיות, the depth and spiritual power of the *mitzvos*, building our connection to Hashem. The Gemara in Maseches Shabbos (105a) teaches that the word אנכי, with which the *Aseres Ha’dibros* begins, is an acrostic representing the phrase אנא נפשי כתיבת – “I have written and given Myself.” Meaning, Hashem embedded Himself, His essence, within the Torah. When we learn and observe the Torah, we interact with Hashem and experience His presence. Every time we open a *sefer*, and every time we perform a *mitzva*, we are to give our full attention and fully invest our emotion so that we can maximize this experience of encountering the *Shechina*.

The Rachmastrivka Rebbe thus interprets כל המצווה אשר to mean that כל המצווה, the “complete” *mitzva* experience, is achieved when we strive for אנכי, when we seek to encounter Hashem through that *mitzva*. We should not feel content with just המצווה, performing the act and checking it off the list. We must aspire to כל המצווה, the highest level of *mitzva* observance, which is reached through אנכי, by investing ourselves fully, connecting emotionally to our Creator.

We might add that the word אנכי – which literally means “I” – also has the precise opposite connotation. I often cite the insight of the *Baal Shem Tov* regarding Moshe’s description in last week’s *parasha*, Parshas Vaeschanan (5:5), of *Ma’amad Har Sinai*: וביניכם בעת ההיא – “I was standing in between God and you at that time.” The *Baal Shem Tov* commented that what stands ביניכם – between us and God, what prevents us from building a close relationship with Him, is אנכי – our ego, our selfishness, our refusal to sacrifice our own interests for a higher purpose. We must choose one אנכי or the other; we must decide whether to prioritize our own comfort, convenience and enjoyment, or to prioritize our relationship with Hashem. We cannot have it both ways. In order to achieve כל המצווה, the full impact of the *mitzvos*, we must choose the אנכי of Hashem over our own אנכי; we must be prepared to set aside our own interests and wishes for the sake of the great privilege of building a relationship with the Almighty.

## DVAR TORAH FOR SHALOSH SEUDOS

### The Test of Appreciation

Moshe Rabbeinu tells the people that their miraculous existence during the years of travel through the wilderness was intended as a test of their loyalty to Hashem: לנסותך לדעת: את אשר בלבבך התשמור מצוותיו אם לא – “to test you, to determine what is in your heart, whether or not you will observe His commands” (8:2).

In what way was *Benei Yisrael’s* experiences in the desert a “test”? As Moshe mentions in the very next *pasuk*, Hashem provided them with food from heavens each and every day. How was this a test?

One answer is given by the Rashbam, who explains that *Benei Yisrael* went to bed every night with no food available. Only a single day’s portion descended from the sky each morning, and it could not be preserved until the next day. This meant that the people would turn in for the night

without any food in their pantry for the next morning. This is akin to a person without any money in his bank account, and with no income. Would he be able to fall asleep knowing that he has no way to provide food for his family the next day, trusting that Hashem will care for them? The Rashbam writes that this was the test of the manna – that the people needed to place their faith in God each and every night, trusting that He would provide their needs the next morning.

The Chida (Rav Chaim Yosef David Azulai) explains differently. He notes a seemingly peculiar comment in the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni*), which cites this *pasuk* and then states: מכאן שמדליקין נרות בשבת – “From here we know that we light Shabbos candles.” Somehow, this *pasuk*, in which Moshe speaks of the “test” of the manna, is linked to the *mitzvah* to light Shabbos candles just before the onset of Shabbos on Friday afternoon. The core essence of this *mitzvah*, it seems, is rooted in Moshe’s description of the manna.

The Chida explains that the “test” of the manna was the test of appreciation. As the manna fell every morning, *Benei Yisrael* might have grown accustomed to this miracle, to the point where they took it for granted and failed to appreciate this precious gift. This extraordinary blessing could easily be seen as ordinary, since it repeated itself each day for forty years. The “test” was for *Benei Yisrael* to continue appreciating this great miracle and feeling immense gratitude to Hashem for caring for them in the arid, uninhabitable desert.

The Chida writes that this is the purpose of the Shabbos candles. Our homes are to be illuminated on Shabbos so that we can look around our homes and see and recognize the countless blessings in our lives. We are to look upon and appreciate our family members, our guests, the food and utensils on our tables, the furniture – all the beautiful gifts that we have been given, but which we too often take for granted because we have grown so accustomed to them. The source of the *mitzva* of Shabbos candles is the test of the manna – the test of appreciating that which has become familiar, routine and expected.

How often do we pause to appreciate the fact that we have a family, that we have money in our bank account with which to buy food, that we have a roof over our heads and comfortable furniture? When we step into our homes on Friday night, we are supposed to look around, and take a moment to feel immense gratitude to Hashem for all He has given us.

This insight relates to another reason given for the *mitzva* of Shabbos candles – שלום בית, ensuring an atmosphere of joy and serenity in the home. There is no greater way to enhance our שלום בית than through appreciation and gratitude, recognizing all that our spouse has done for us and continues to do for us. The light of the Shabbos candles is meant to draw our attention to all our blessings, to our debt of gratitude to Hashem and also to the many people – most importantly, of course, our spouse – who help us and bring us joy. The “test” we face is to never take all this for granted, to feel grateful even for our everyday, familiar blessings, appreciating that everything we have is a precious gift.