

EKEV 1981
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Ekev we have recounted again the story of how Moshe went up to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. The people worshipped the Golden Calf when they thought he was delayed. When he returned he took the Golden Calf, ground it into fine dust, and told the people to drink it. He then prayed for the people and G-d told him to ascend the mountain and receive a second Ten Commandments. This time Moshe was told to hew out the rock himself and to make a wooden ark to put them in. The first time Moshe Rabbeinu received the Ten Commandments there was thunder and lightning. The people were all assembled and he had to do nothing. The elders and Joshua ascended the mountain partway with him, and he was given the tablets all inscribed. This time he had to hew out the tablets himself. G-d inscribed them but he had to lug them up the mountain alone. There was no thunder and lightning, no expectant crowd. Moshe alone received the second Ten Commandments. He had to work hard for them but when he came down his face was glowing. He was radiant. The first time when he descended this was not true, but because of his hard work and the effort he put in he became a person whose very personality radiated Torah. In the Haphtorah this week we have the famous line from Isaiah "thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go out from you". Literally, of course, this means that Israel will no longer have enemies in their midst but the Rabbis have interpreted this to mean that sometimes the worst destroyers of the Jewish people come from the people themselves. Sometimes because they are filled with self-hate or because they use their talents wrongly Jews have turned out to be the worst persecutors of their own people. Even the last Ambassador to Saudi Arabia who was sacked by Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, was born a Jew. Those Jews who get involved with the Mafia or get involved with illegal activities bring destruction on the Jewish people, too. How do we assure that we will raise up a child who will reflect the values of the Torah and, so to speak, will shine? Too many people have wrong values. They want to

be a millionaire rather than wanting to be a mentch. I can become a millionaire in five minutes. I can go to the Mercantile Bank, take out a gun, and demand money. This, of course, is not what we want. How do we assure that our children will have the correct values? The Rabbis say that Moshe's face shone because of either three reasons. One, because when he prayed to G-d to see G-d, G-d passed over him and he was only able to see His back. We interpret this to mean that you can only tell G-d by looking back in history. We can see G-d's footsteps in time even though we cannot see G-d. G-d influences the world. He cares and is concerned about each of us. We must teach our children that they are important and that G-d needs them and that it does not make any difference whether or not you are caught that determines whether something is right or wrong. You have to do the right thing because that is what G-d wants and that's the way you become a mentch. You cannot steal, rob, deal in heroin even if you would not get caught. Some Rabbis also say that the reason Moshe's face shone was because when he took hold of the Ten Commandments which were approximately 18" wide he held the first 6". G-d's presence held the last 6", and the middle 6" shone on Moshe. In other words, we are not just to obey the letter of the law. Some people never do anything themselves but they may buy stolen property, encourage others to do wrong, etc. We must go beyond the letter of the law. We must help others, be merciful and compassionate. Other Rabbis say that Moshe's face shone because when he was writing the Torah he put his hand over his brow to pause and some of the ink went on his face. We have to learn how to make time for our family and friends. Even Moshe paused and made time for others. If we teach our children these things then their personality will shine, too. Also in this Torah portion we learn that we are to fear and to love G-d. The word fear is not a correct translation. The word fear really means respect. We must teach our children respect and

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how do we do that? By example. If a child does not learn respect from his parents then he will not grow up to be a mentch. I am reminded of a true story once how I saw a woman get on a bus with a little girl. The little girl ran past the driver without paying on the mother's instructions. The bus driver grabbed her and said, "How old are you?" She said, "Four and a half". The bus driver asked her, "When will you be 5?" She answered, "When I get off the bus". Parents who act like this destroy the child's respect for them and for important values. We all must teach our children that they are important and that they should not do wrong because it is wrong. We must also teach them to give of their time and to continue learning. If we do that then I know that they will all shine. They will not be our destroyers. They will be our builders.

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In the Torah portion Ekev we have the second paragraph of the Shma. Last week we had the first paragraph of the Shma, "And you shall love the Lord your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." We also have enunciated how we should teach our children and speak about these words "when we are sitting in our home and when we are going on the road, when we get up and when we lay down, and how we should bind them for a sign on our hands and in front between our eyes, and how we should write them on the doorposts of our home." In both the first and second paragraphs of the Shma we are instructed to have a mezuzah on our doorpost and also to put on Tephillin. The mezuzah teaches us that what shows on the surface is not what really counts. It is what is hidden, when cannot be seen that really counts. You can have the fanciest mezuzah cover worth thousands of dollars, but if the parchment is defective it is not kosher. On the other hand, you can have a cheap cover, or no cover at all, and the mezuzah would be kosher. The most important things are the things which cannot be seen. Unfortunately, in our day many people stress those things which are flashy and can be seen by everyone. The important things they neglect. People feel that the medium is the message. They fail to realize that you must have something besides outside show in order to lead the happy and the good life. The Tephillin, too, teaches us this lesson. We put the Tephillin on our left hand opposite our heart, with one Tephillin on our head between our eyes. We must always remember that our hand and our heart and head must go together. There are too many people today who worship just skill, whatever their hand can do and they totally neglect developing their character and personality. We, in this country, worship skill. We have just finished watching the Olympics. It is wonderful to watch the skill of these athletes. However, listening to many of them when they are interviewed show that many of them have not developed their personalities or their characters. Besides the skill that they have perfected, they are almost zeros in personality and character. Of course, some are not. Some have wonderful personalities and characters, but, unfortunately, others are only animated skills. In our day and age all we seem to care about is skill. A person, though, is more than a machine.

A person has to know how to relate to others. A person has to know how to develop his total personality. We always put the Tephillin on the weaker hand. If a person is left-handed, he wears it on his right hand. If a person is right-handed he wears it on his left hand. We Jews are not supposed to have the killer instinct. We do not believe in success at any cost. Our success must always be tempered by the mind and heart. There are certain things we cannot do in order to have our hands successful. Unfortunately, in our day and age only material success is stressed, and many people are willing to sacrifice their family, friends, and even integrity in order to achieve it. This is one of the reasons why many marriages today are failing. Each partner wants to do their own thing. A marriage does not have "our" goals but "my" goals. When this happens the marriage will fall apart. It is all right for each party to have a career, but each must forego some things in order to have a good marriage. This Torah portion starts with the words "Vahaya Ekev". The rabbis say that anytime the expression "Vahaya" is used it signifies happiness. The next word "Ekev" is translated here as "because" "and it shall be because you will listen to these laws and G-d will love you and bless you." The word "Ekev" here is a very unusual word. The rabbis say that it stands for the little things that you normally would crush underfoot. It is the little things that are going to make you happy and cause you to be loved and blessed. Many times in a marriage the people are interested in the big things, like how much money they are going to make, how big a house they will have, how many cars they will have, and they forget about the little things, like kindness and consideration which really cause a person to be loved and blessed. In our terrible rush to acquire things (homes and cars, etc) we have forgotten about the little things, like being there when you are needed, little acts of kindness and consideration. It is not the showy outward things that make a marriage successful. It is the little things. That is what the mezuzah teaches and that is why it should be on everyone's door to remind us that the little things are important, and they will cause you to be loved and blessed. I am reminded of the story they tell about the woman who went up to the first tee at the

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golf course and took a swing. The man after her had to wait because she was out on the fairway searching. After ten minutes he couldn't stand it any longer. He said, "Can I help you find your ball?" The woman said, "I have my ball. It's the club I can't find." Many times we confuse the important things. We do not realize that it is the little things that make us happy. The big things are nice but not necessary. It is the little things that cause love and blessing to flower in a person's home.

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One of the hardest questions against religions is the problem of suffering. How could G-d create a world in which there is such pain and suffering? Why did G-d have to create death? There was a book published recently called Why Bad Things Happen to Good People, by Rabbi Kushner. To me, this is a very unsatisfactory book. It lets G-d completely off the hook. He could have created a world without death. After all, G-d created death and is the biggest killer of all. That's what we say in the prayers three times a day: "Maimis Mechaya - G-d Who causes death and G-d who causes life."

In this Haphtorah it speaks about the suffering of the servants of G-d. "If the Lord will help me, therefore, I have not been confounded, therefore, I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." We do not understand G-d's ways, and we do not understand why He has to cause this pain and suffering, but we have confidence that in the end of days we will understand. The prophet continues, "Who is among that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant though he walk in darkness and have no light, let him walk in trust of the Lord and stay upon his G-d." In the sentence we see that the servant of the Lord walks in darkness and has no light, yet he trusts in the Lord, his G-d. We cannot understand why G-d causes all this suffering and pain in the world. We have confidence that it serves some purpose, that G-d knows why we must all suffer the pain of losing loved ones, the pain of disease, the frustrations of life, but we do not understand now why we should.

The rabbis deal with this problem in the Mishne where it says the rabbis taught the schools of Shamai and Hillel argued for $2\frac{1}{2}$ years. The school of Shamai said it would have been better had man never been created, while the school of Hillel said it was better that man had been created. After $2\frac{1}{2}$ years they took a vote and decided that it would have been better had man not been created, but now that he has been created, let him look to his ways. Let him examine his deeds. The rabbis decided that it is true that at the end of days we will understand why we had all this pain. Maybe it would have been better if G-d had not created us in the first place to go through all this pain and suffering.

In the Torah portion we have this problem dealt with also. We read, "And He afflicted you and He suffered you to hunger and fed you the manna which you did not know and your forefathers did not know in order to make known to you that not on bread alone does a man live, but on all which goes out from the mouth of G-d does man live." In this sentence we have many contradictions. How can it say that G-d suffered us to hunger and then fed us the manna? If G-d caused us to hunger, then He did not give us the manna. If he gave us the manna then he did not suffer us to hunger. Also, why does it say, "In order to make known to you that not on bread alone does man live but on all that goes out of the mouth of G-d does man live?" How, by feeding us the manna, does G-d teach us that not on bread alone does man live, and also, why does He use the expression "by all that comes out does man live?" Why doesn't it just say by the laws of the Torah G-d causes man to live.

It seems to me that here we are dealing with the problem of suffering again. People tend to think that if they make lots of money they will not suffer. If they have a big income, two Cadillacs, a swimming pool, things are going to be perfect. In this sentence G-d tells us that this is not so, that you can have all your material wants satisfied and still suffer. There are many problems that have nothing to do with money and that are more severe, like death, pain, ravages of terrible diseases like cancer, frustrations, mental illness, tyranny, unrequited love, etc. G-d was telling the people here that in life they would suffer even if all their material wants were supplied. G-d here also is not answering the question of why we suffer, but He is giving us a prescription for how to handle our suffering, how to overcome it. He is telling us that if we will share, if we will give of ourselves to others we will be able to overcome our suffering and still lead decent and good lives.

Many people today still think that if you make a lot of money you will solve all your problems. This is especially true of poor people and those who came to this country as immigrants. They feel that all their problems will be solved when they get the house

in the suburbs. Many of their problems will be solved, but not all of them, especially those that have to do with great suffering. Marx thought that all the problems could be solved through economics and, paradoxically, many right wing Republicans think the same thing, that everything depends on economics. Many things do but not everything. Many people have problems, even those who have lots of money. Sometimes people are not willing to extend themselves to recognize that people can have problems that are financially secure, but they, too, suffer from problems over which money has no control. Nobody knows what is in the hearts and minds of other people. In fact, poor people, and even the Jews in Egypt, thought if they would have money they could solve all their problems. Rich people know this is not so. They do not even have that hope.

When people have problems the only way they can overcome them is by reaching out and helping others, helping anybody who has problems. Nobody knows the heart and the mind of their neighbor. When they need help we should all offer it. That's why the expression here used is "all that comes out of the mouth of g-d." Food is different than breathing. For 30 days you can probably go without food, maybe longer. Bread is different than breath. Bread you only ingest, you only take in. You do not have to pause to give out. Breathing, on the other hand, is completely different. In order to breathe in you first must breathe out. You cannot hoard breath. You must breathe out before you can breathe in. All of us, in order to overcome our problems, must learn how to give as well as take. It is only in this way that we will be able to overcome our suffering. It is by reaching out and helping all those that need our help that we can overcome our own suffering, and it makes no difference what economic strata they are in. If they need help we should offer it.

There is a story they tell about a man who went swimming on a beach in Tel Aviv in December. He asked the lifeguard before he plunged into the water, "How is the water?" The lifeguard replied, "Lukewarm." He plunged in. It was freezing, like waters of the North Pole. He came out and screamed at the lifeguard, "Are you a smart aleck? The water is freezing."

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The lifeguard looked at him and said, "Well, it looked warm to me." We can never tell what goes on in someone's heart and mind, and whether or not they are suffering. All we should know is if they ask for our help we should give it. This will not only aid them but allow us to overcome our own suffering, too.

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Success And The Fear of G-d

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One of the most frightening aspects of modern life is that people are willing to do almost anything for success. A survey was made recently of some young corporate executives and a little over half of them said they would be willing to do anything to further their careers, even illegal acts. Success, to them, has become a god, an idol. They do not feel that their lives are worthwhile or that they are worthwhile if they are not a success.

In the Torah portion, Ekev, we have this problem highlighted. The Jewish people were told explicitly that they were not being given the land of Israel because of their righteousness but because of the wickedness of the nations they were about to dispossess. The Jewish people were not to think that they were being given the land of Israel because they were talented or innately superior to the Canaanites. They were being given the land because the Canaanites had failed morally. The Canaanites had failed because they did not fear G-d. Fear of G-d in Judaism means that a person or a people will not do evil, will not harm others even if they can get away with it and even if it looks like cheating is the only way they can become a success.

This point is emphasized in this Torah portion when we read, "Now Israel, what does the Lord your G-d require of you? To fear the Lord your G-d and to go in all His ways and to love Him." The rabbis ask, why is it that the fear of G-d is put before the love of G-d? The answer they give is because a person cannot truly love G-d unless he first fears Him. The word "Yera" in Hebrew does not have exactly the same meaning as "fear" in English. It has the connotation of

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"respect, admire." Fear of G-d means that we will not do evil things that we can get away with because we admire G-d, we respect what He has commanded us. We know that we are accountable to Him. Even if we think we can become a big success by being immoral, we will not become immoral because we fear G-d. That's what a G-d fearing person means in Judaism. A G-d fearing person does not mean just a person who observes rituals. A G-d fearing person means a person who does not use his power immorally or take advantage of the ignorance of others to achieve success because he knows there is a G-d in the world. In order to achieve success a G-d fearing man will never violate moral norms.

The Jewish people were allowed to conquer the land of Canaan only because the people there were no longer G-d fearing. They put their own success above everything else. That's what idol worship means. In our day and age we seem to be doing the same thing. We seem to forget that it is G-d Who has given us the power and the strength to accomplish, and it is only because of His help that we can accomplish great things. We seem to be living in the same type of era described in our Torah portion. "And you will say in your heart 'My power and the might of my hand made me all this success.'" In America today we take too much upon ourselves. We feel that our success is only dependent on us. We feel that we are complete masters of our own fate, that all we have to do is want to do something and we can do it even if it is immoral. If people are not successful it is because they are lazy or stupid or have too many scruples. Let them get a job, do what I am doing, and they will be just as successful as I am.

People forget that not everybody has been blessed by G-d with the same talents they have. Not everybody is blessed with good health to achieve great things. It is true that America has had to deal with a passive attitude in the world which says, "Why try? Nothing is going to change anyway." The world is cyclical: spring, fall, summer, winter, birth, teen age, middle age, and death. Why try? Nothing is going to change. We, in Judaism, believe, as America does, that it is important that we try to change things, that we try to achieve things. In America we always talk about the world's greatest this and the world's greatest that. We laud achievement. We, though, have to realize that we also need G-d's help to achieve anything, and there are certain things we can never do in order to achieve success.

This idea is stressed in this Torah portion when Moshe reviews the history of the giving of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were given to him twice. The first set of Ten Commandments Moshe smashed into smithereens after the people worshipped the golden calf. The people had made the work of their hands an idol. They did not deserve to receive the first set of Ten Commandments. Moshe had to go up the mount again to get the second set of tablets. There was a big difference between the giving of the second set of Ten Commandments and the giving of the first set. Moshe had to hew out the rocks upon which the second set of commandments were given himself. When Moshe was told to hew out the rocks for the second set of commandments the expression "Pesol Lecha - hew out for yourself" is used. The rabbis are struck by the use of this word "Pesol." This word also means "idol." The expression "Lo Sa-aseh Lecha Pesol - You should

not make for yourself an idol" is part of the Ten Commandments.

What is the difference between Moshe hewing out the stones for the second set of Ten Commandments and making an idol? The same word is used.

The difference, the rabbis say, is in the placement of the word "Lecha." When it says "You should not make an idol" the "you" is said first. After all, what are idols but just extensions of our own fantasies and desires? They are things to manipulate, objects to use. When the "you" comes first then you end up with an idol. On the other hand, when the "you" comes afterwards, when we realize that there are just certain things we cannot do to achieve success then we do not have an idol. We have a true religious perspective. The first Ten Commandments were given with thunder and lightning. Mount Sinai was engulfed in smoke and even nature was affected. A hush fell over all nature. A great quiet descended over earth. All creatures recognized the fact that the Ten Commandments were being given. When the second Ten Commandments were given nature did not recognize it. It was not silent. There was no thunder and there was no lightning, but the second tablets made a great impression. There was no pageantry yet they had a great effect. They had a great effect because they were the product of great effort. Success, achievement is not bad. It just has to be attained morally.

When Moshe came down from Mount Sinai his face glowed. He was able to pass on this illumination to the Jewish people. Moshe's face glowed, the rabbis tell us, because he had to work for the second