

Date: 19 Av 5785 (August 13, 2025)

Torah Portion: Ekev

Topic: Will Keep the Covenant for You

It is written (Deut. 7:13):

“[YHWH] shall love you, bless you, and increase you. He shall bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land—your grain, your new wine, and your oil—the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock, in the land that He swore to your fathers to give you.”

The word עֵקֶב (e-kev) is generally translated as “if,” yet its literal meaning is “heel.” This invites several layers of interpretation:

1. “On the heels of your heeding...” – Observing Hashem’s commandments will be closely followed (“come at the heels of”) by the blessings enumerated in the following verses.
2. “If you heed even the ‘heel’ commandments...” – The blessings will be given specifically for fulfilling those mitzvos that people tend to neglect or “trample under their heels.”
3. “In the ‘heel’ of history...” – The blessings refer to the messianic future, the “heel” or final stage of history, when the reward will be granted.
4. “In the footsteps of the Messiah...” – In the era immediately preceding the coming of the Messiah (when the “footsteps” are heard), the people of Yisrael will return wholeheartedly to YHWH.

A *brit* (covenant) is a binding pact between two parties, uniting them as two halves of a single whole. Based on this inner bond, they agree to act toward each other with enduring love, regardless of whether future conduct merits such a treatment. If Hashem made such a covenant with our forefathers, swearing to treat their descendants with unending *chesed*, why does the Torah now present His blessings as conditional upon our observance of the commandments?

The answer is that if Hashem were to fulfill the covenant literally—granting blessings even when we are undeserving—this would not, in the truest sense, benefit us. First, we would be like small children whose immature behavior is tolerated only because maturity is not yet expected of them. More seriously, such unconditional giving would erode our sense of Divine justice, leaving us to live in spiritual confusion or even shame.

The rewards for obeying Hashem’s commandments are far greater than the human effort required to fulfill them. Nevertheless, for the reasons stated above, Hashem has made the granting of these rewards dependent upon our striving. The infinite nature of the ultimate reward is thus matched by the infinite, wholehearted quality of the effort we are called to invest.

Therefore, we must approach even the seemingly “minor” commandments with the same devotion we give to the “major” ones. This demonstrates that our motivation lies in Hashem’s will itself, not in our own evaluation of a commandment’s importance. When we serve in this spirit, Hashem responds by bestowing His goodness upon us in measure far beyond the strict limits of what we have earned.

Shalom.