**The Preschool Teacher- Parshat Eikev**

The infamous and much hated Rabbi, Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, once visited his little home town where he grew up. While he was there he made a point of seeing his first, early childhood teacher who had taught him the *alef-beis,*whom he loved very much*.*

Before he returned home, he happened to run into another teacher of his. “I see that you visit your preschool teacher, but you don’t visit me? What have I done to offend you?” asked the teacher.

“You taught me things that can be refuted,” replied the Kotzker, “because according to one interpretation they can mean this, and according to another they can mean that. But my first teacher taught me things which cannot be refuted, and so they have remained with me; that is why I owe him special reverence.”

The mind tends to dwell upon that which it does not know for sure.

That’s because it is the job of the mind to figure out, to conjecture, to approximate, to guess; that’s how we are able to navigate life and make decisions. But this useful tendency often becomes a compulsive habit, usurping awareness away from *what we actually do know.*

Eventually, we can come to give no attention at all to what we do know, and instead invest our guesses, conjectures and approximations with a reality they don’t really possess; this is called “living in one’s head.” Nowadays, people often feel most strongly and defend most passionately (and attack most violently in defense of) things they *don’t really know for sure.*

 What is it that we *do* know for sure?

Turn your attention from involvement with your thoughts and “see” what is actually happening, right now. That is Presence – simply noticing and therefore knowing what is actually present in your experience.

When you do, there may be a feeling of disorientation or fear.

What if thoughts are just thoughts? What will happen if you let go of all that mind generated drama and attend to what is present, to what you actually know for sure?

The ego is uncomfortable with this, because ego is the sense of identity that’s built out of our thoughts and feelings. Let go of your thoughts and feelings, and the ego can feel threatened.

 הָלַ֣ךְ חֲשֵׁכִ֗ים וְאֵ֥ין נֹ֙גַהּ֙ ל֔וֹ יִבְטַח֙ בְּשֵׁ֣ם יְהוָ֔ה וְיִשָּׁעֵ֖ן בֵּאלֹהָֽיו
*Though one walks in darkness and has no glow, let them trust in the Name of the Divine, and rely on their Divinity…*
(Isaiah 50:10)

The *haftora*hints that there is an aspect of our consciousness that is forever in a state of not-knowing: *ayn nogah lo – has no glow.*It doesn’t say that one has no “light” but rather one doesn’t even have any “glow” at all. One absolutely *halakh hasheikhim – walks in darkness.*

But if we can be totally clear about not being clear, if we can truly understand and know on the deepest level that all of our mind’s judgments are guesses and approximations, then we can transcend the ego; we can transcend our separate self-sense that thrives on belief in our own thoughts and denial of the darkness.

Then, in that surrender to not-knowing, a new way of being emerges: *yivtakh b’shem Hashem v’yisha’ein Elohav – trust in the Name of the Divine and rely on Divinity.*That is the letting go – the letting of Mystery be Mystery.

Then, we can realize: there *is* something we can know, if we would only turn toward It: we are consciousness, and we are the consciousness that is conscious of This, Now.

To really get this, to know ourselves as consciousness, and to also acknowledge our basic state of not-knowing on the level of thought, we must discern between three things:

1. Present experience
2. Thoughts arising within present experience
3. That which is beyond present experience

Ordinarily, we confuse 2 with 3; we don’t differentiate between our thoughts and reality. We are generally unconscious that we are thinking at all; we merely think and judge, with no sense of the presence of thought. But when we become aware that 2 is actually within 1, that our thoughts are *arising within* present experience, then we can easily see the difference between our thoughts and Reality; then we can truly *know that we don’t know.*

וְהָיָ֣ה ׀ עֵ֣קֶב תִּשְׁמְע֗וּן אֵ֤ת הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים֙ הָאֵ֔לֶּה
*And it will be if you listen to these judgments…*

The *parshah* begins with the strange construction – *v’hayah eikev tishma’un – it will be if you listen...*

*Eikev* means “heel,” as in the English idiom that one thing will “follow on the heels” of another, meaning that one thing is the consequence of another. But according to a Hassidic teaching, the hint is that one should become conscious *even in one’s heel –* that is, the most insensitive part of the body should become aware. Then, when one is fully present, with awareness permeating the whole body, we can make these subtle*mishpatim,*subtle judgments concerning our own mental judgments, and we can begin to truly know *what we know* and *what we don’t know,* and trust in the Mystery.

Then, in connection with the Truth of this moment and in surrender to unknowability of everything beyond this moment, the heart is set free. Gratitude arises naturally, and you will know the vastness of who you really are – the simple, open space of awareness within which the fullness of this moment now arises…

וַאֲהֵ֣בְךָ֔ וּבֵרַכְךָ֖ וְהִרְבֶּ֑ךָ
*And (the Divine) will love you, and bless you, and increase you…*

***More on Parshat Eikev...***

[**The Toothpick – Parshat Eikev**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-toothpick-parshat-eikev)
I heard a story once of a rabbi who, when he was a little boy, would eat ice cream with a toothpick. When my son was little, I told him this story to try to get him to slow down his eating. A few months later, I saw my son eating ice cream with a toothpick too. I was amazed– "What are you doing?" I asked him. "I want to make it last longer!" he said.

Some people want to give their children everything they ask for. But we know that when children get more and more, this often doesn't lead to more satisfaction, but more desire. We call that being "spoiled." If we want to give our children more, we often need to give them less.

It's easy to see this with children, but it's the same with us: we can deliberately restrict our intake, as in the example of eating with a toothpick. It doesn't have to be a restriction of food; it can be a restriction of words. Have you ever felt the intense desire to say something, perhaps because someone else was saying something totally wrong, and you wanted to jump in and correct them?

Or, you might have the impulse to jump in and stop something. Something annoying happens, like a child is whining and interrupting, and the impulse is to rush and stop it.

But if you pause, even when the impulse is to do something totally appropriate (which it often isn't), there's a space for a deeper wisdom to emerge. You can realize: you are not trapped by the impulse. You are, in fact, a vastly deep well of consciousness, and from that consciousness emerges all impulses, all thoughts, all sensations, all experience. And although we tend to reach for satisfaction by fulfilling our impulses, when you discover this vast space, there can be a far deeper satisfaction than the satisfaction that comes from any gratification.

*"Not on bread alone does a person live,"* says this week's reading. In other words, if you want to truly live, you can't only be focussed only on the "bread" – the satisfaction that comes from gratification. Rather, true living means being aware of that vast well of consciousness that perceives the "bread." That awareness is always there, and so it's easy to miss it. You can go your whole life and never notice the one thing that is constant!

And that's why we have this practice of pausing, of restricting– so that we can slow down enough to become aware of this underlying reality, the reality of your own Beingness, the miracle of this present moment.

As it says a little later in the parsha, *"You shall eat and be satisfied and bless..."*

Don't just eat, *ve'akhalta,*eat and *be* satisfied, *v'savata*. Meaning, don't just be satisfied by the food alone, but feel the satisfaction that comes from simply from Being. Then, *uveirakhta–* bless – give thanks not just for the bread, but for the gift that is always present – the gift of Presence Itself...

**​**[**The Shirt- Parshat Eikev**](http://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-shirt-parshat-eikev3466095)

Many years ago, when I was in college, I was over at the Chabad house for *Shabbos.* The *rebbetzen* and I were talking about food and health, when suddenly she jumped up and said she needed to show me a new product she was using. She returned with a bottle of some kind of juice.

“Do you know what this is?” she asked eagerly.

I recognized the bottle from my father’s house, because my father always had the latest health products. It was a bottle of “noni juice,” which was purported to have amazing health properties. But, there was something funny about the label on the bottle.

On the noni juice labels I had seen in the past, there was a picture of a muscular, shirtless Hawaiian man blowing a conch. On this bottle that the *rebbetzen* had in her hand, the picture was *almost*exactly the same, except- the man had a colorful Hawaiian shirt on!

“Wait a minute! Why does that guy have a shirt on?” I asked.

“Oh,” she replied, “it’s because we requested that the company change the picture to a guy with a shirt so that we would be permitted to buy it. It would be forbidden for us to buy any product with a shirtless man on the label.”

“But what’s wrong with a man having no shirt?” I asked. “Isn’t the human body holy? Are you saying there’s something sinful about the human body?”

“Not at all,” she replied. “The point of spirituality is to make you more sensitive. A lot of secular culture is extremely stimulating, having a desensitizing effect. By keeping bodies covered, we enhance our sensitivity to the sacredness of the human form.”

You may or may not agree with the Chabad standards of *tzniyut*(modesty), but her underlying point is true: The more you get, the less sensitive you are to what you already have… hence the tendency to always want MORE.

This is so obvious with children. We want the best for them. We want to give them everything. And yet, the more we give, the more they want. Giving them more and more doesn’t always satisfy them more; it can create spoilage. So, it turns out, if we want to give them more, we sometimes have to give them less.

This week’s reading begins with the words-

*“V’hayah eikev tishma’un- It shall be the reward when you listen…”*

The sentence is strange, because the word *“eikev”*really means “heel,” but it’s understood here to mean “reward” or “because of” or “consequence.” This meaning is probably related to the English idiom when we say that something “follows on the heels” of another thing. The thing that “follows on the heels” is the consequence.

There’s a “heel” story of the founder of the Chabad lineage, Reb Shneur Zalman of Liadi- the "Alter Rebbe." When his grandson Menachem Mendel was a boy, he would teach the boy Torah. Once, they came to this verse-

*“****Eikev****asher Avraham b’koli- Because (eikev) Abraham listened to my voice…”*

The Alter Rebbe asked the boy to explain it.

The child said, “Abraham heard God’s Voice even with his *eikev-*his heel!”

Reb Shneur Zalman was ecstatic with his answer and said, “In fact we find this same idea in another verse- *“V’hayah eikev tishma’un- It will be the reward if you listen...’*This verse tells us we should strive to become so sensitive that even our *eikev-*our heel- should ‘listen,’ meaning that we should sense the holiness that permeates all creation even with the most insensitive part of our bodies.”

How do you do that?

Be your own parent- restrict yourself.

The most astonishing and incredible thing I think I’ve ever seen was on television, several days after a huge earthquake in Haiti. A man was searching day and night for his wife who was buried somewhere under a collapsed building. After something like five days, a voice was heard from beneath the rubble. Men dug furiously toward the voice. Soon they pulled out this man’s wife. She had been buried, no space to move, no food or water, for several days.

What did she do? She sang hymns!

As they pulled her out, she was moving and singing. She was clapping her hands, crying “Halleluyah!”

I couldn’t believe it. Incomprehensible. But there it was: She was singing in gratitude for her life, for the sunlight, for being able to move. That’s sensitivity.

This is the whole point of all of those traditional spiritual practices that restrict you in some way, such as fasting. Their message is: don’t keep going in the direction of “more.” Go in the direction of less, even if just for a small period of time. This is the potential gift of suffering.

This idea is expressed a little later in the *parshah:*

*“You were afflicted and hungered… so that you would know- ki lo al halekhem levado yikhyeh ha’adam- not by bread alone does a person live, but by everything that comes out of the Divine mouth does a person live!”*

In other words, to truly *live,*you have to *feel* your most basic needs. You have to hunger a little. Otherwise, you won’t appreciate your life and sustenance as a gift, as coming from the “Divine mouth.”

And, while fasting and other traditional restrictions can be useful aids, you can actually practice this in a small but powerful way every time you are about to eat:

Rather than just digging in, take a moment. Delay the first bite. Appreciate. Say a *brakha*(blessing)- either the traditional one or something in your own words. When you are finished, don’t just get up and go. Take a moment.

As it says only a few verses later, *“Ve’akhalta, v’savata, uveirakhta- and you shall eat, and you shall be satisfied, and you shall bless…”*

On this *Shabbat Eikev,* the Sabbath of the Heel, may we become sensitive to the many gifts of sustenance that often get taken for granted. Most of all, may we be sensitive to the one gift that holds all the others- the gift of space, of awareness, within which experience unfolds. Don’t hurry through the present moment to get to the next thing. There is only one life to enjoy- that’s the one you are living, in this moment.

Good Shabbos!
-b yosef ​​