



**Parashat Eikev**  
**Love the Stranger**

by Igael Gurin-Malous on Friday August 07, 2009

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Deuteronomy 7:12 - 11:25

*Eikev*; love is the big thing...

*Parashat Eikev* is one of the most important *parashiyot* in the Torah; it contains a large portion of the speech that Moses delivers to the people of Israel right before he dies. Moreover, it is the portion that deals with many different aspects of the values, morals and spirituality of the Jewish People. It is an introduction to the recounting of *mitzvot* and is regarded as the preamble to the *mitzvot*. Without this explanation and articulation of what makes us who we are, *mitzvot* have little meaning.

*Parashat Eikev* gets its name from the Hebrew word *Eikev* which means, “as a consequence of,” or, simply, “if.” Many commentators have pointed out how unusual it was to use this word in the *parasha*—it’s as though God is setting up a bargain with his people: if you do what I say, then ... ” It’s almost as though we might be able to think of the commandments as optional, this “if.” Rashi, the 11th century French commentator, captures the true reason for the choice of the word *eikev*. He writes:

*Eikev*- [means] “if”. Even the lesser commandments which a person [sometimes] treads on with his heels [*akeiv*] you will heed, [then] God will preserve... God will keep his promise to you.

What Rashi is suggesting of course is that we use the word *eikev* with the similar-sounding word *akeiv* in mind. He points out that if we see only the big picture, if we don’t value even the trivial, bothersome things we find nipping at our heels, we are in danger of misunderstanding God’s will. If we only focus on the big things, on the *mitzvot*, we are not fulfilling God’s will... and in return, God will not fulfill its promises to us...

Reading the rest of the *parasha* we learn what those commandments are what makes us Jews. I want to focus on a specific mention and again a rather unusual choice of words in it.

In the 10th chapter (19th verse) its says: “Love ye therefore the stranger; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.”



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Love? You must *love* the stranger? One can imagine a command to respect the stranger, or to allow them certain rights under the law, things we can control, but how does one command *love*?

The clue to understand this commandment comes from the other times in the Torah we are commanded to love. There are 2 more...

To love God (from the *Shema*) in Deuteronomy (6:5 and 11:1)

And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might

And once in Leviticus (19:18)

Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD.

These commandments of love are astounding, they tell us how important it is to love the stranger, to love the ones who are different, the ones who stand out, the ones who are the minority, the ones who are not of equal rights; the gay, the lesbian, the bisexual, the transgender – the ‘Other’!

The Torah recognizes even from the time of the ancients, that rules change, that laws change. Torah recognizes a more important truth – that if we love those around us we will make sure that the laws and rules will change according to that love. With compassion and kindness, with equality and empathy in mind, even the smallest of strangers, the most trivial of differences, will be recognized, upheld, valued, and made equal under the law. This is the true meaning of our *parasha* and indeed Moses’ intent, to teach us the values that drive the actions.

The Torah issues this commandment to love the stranger and equates that love [with its use of the same word] with the love of and for God. Through this literary technique, the Torah demonstrates to us that loving the ones who are different is the same as loving God. The Torah teaches us that loving God is also loving the “other” amongst us. They must be connected. They must come from the same place in the self.

Finally, how can one command Love? Well, that’s easy...

Do you know the feeling you get when someone says ‘I love you’ to you? Even if you don’t love them the same way...you get a feeling of wanting to say it back.. You are filled with a sense of their love and in many cases it makes you love them back...



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Well, it's the same here. If you know that God loves you, you cant help but love God back..

And in our case, if we love the stranger to us, (even if they don't always love us back) eventually they will feel it and will be left with no choice but to love us too.



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