

AUGUST 7, 2017

Parashat Eikev

Saving and Changing Lives through a Mitzvah

Because you will heed (Deuteronomy 7:12)

תשמעון עקב והיה (דברים ז:יב)

Hebron resident Sheik Muhammad Jabaar was not always a proponent of peaceful coexistence with Israel. During his youth, he identified with Hamas and with a friend, initiated a plan for a car bombing attack against an Israeli military installation in Beersheba. In a recently aired [interview on Israel's Channel Two](#), Jabaar explained that as the two scoped out the area of the army base to prepare for the attack, a soldier stopped them and asked, "What are you doing here?" "Looking for food," they answered. The soldier went into the base kitchen and returned with food for the men. "I looked at my friend," Jabaar said, "and wondered, how are we trying to kill such a good person? Not only did he not shoot us, he helped us and served us food! These soldiers are not wicked, as our leaders teach us." Jabaar explained that this simple act of kindness "turned a switch in my head" and it started him on very different path in life—a path of peace

Moses explains the impact that a simple act can have in this week's parashah. In his final address to the nation before his death, Moses reminded the people to fulfill the mitzvot, explaining "it will be, because you will heed these ordinances and keep them and perform, that the Lord, your God, will keep for you the covenant and the kindness that he swore to your forefathers." (7:12) The word "eikev" is often translated here as "because" or "if," however Rashi explains that "eikev" translates literally as "heel." He suggests Moses told the people that God will keep the covenant "if you will observe mitzvot that are ordinarily trampled on by the heel of your foot." Rashi's interpretation reminds us that we must not underestimate the impact of any mitzvah; even the simplest deeds can bring kindness in return. The anonymous soldier who brought food to two Palestinian boys did not know that he was saving the lives of other soldiers at his base or that his act of kindness would change the heart of the young Arab boy. Moses's words in this parashah teach us that any mitzvah that we fulfill, and especially those that express kindness and brotherhood to others, has the power to be returned with even greater compassion.

Today, Sheikh Jabaar preaches the teachings of Islam through peace, love and brotherhood. He openly shares his message of non-violence in Hebron, a hotbed of Hamas fundamentalism. He encourages coexistence and rails against the message of hate so prevalent throughout the Palestinian territories promoted not only by Hamas, but also by the Palestinian Authority. Speaking to Hamas supporters in the streets of Hebron he said, "You tried war with the Palestinians. You tried murder. You tried blood. Let us try love. Let us try true peace. If I uproot the hate from my heart and you uproot the hate from your heart, there would be peace without the need for negotiations." Inspired by the simple act of compassion extended to him by the soldier, Sheikh Jabaar now publicly encourages others to embrace the spirit of good will. In the conclusion of the report, Channel 2 reporter [Ohad Hemo notes](#), "The evolution that the former Hamas terrorist underwent proves that almost anything is possible." Just as Moses maintained that even the most ordinary acts would yield kindness in return, the soldier's simple act of benevolence inspired Jabaar's transformative mindset. The anonymous soldier's good will and Sheikh Jabaar's preaching of kindness gives us hope that one day Israelis and Palestinians can create a foundation of understanding and trust, making a permanent peace agreement a real possibility. ■

Intense Involvement to Defuse a Dangerous Situation

And I fell down before the Lord (Deuteronomy 9:9)

ואתנפל לפני ה' (דברים ט:ט)

Far too often in the Middle East, a single event can escalate quickly and lead to violent conflict. After Israeli-Arab terrorists smuggled weapons onto the Temple Mount and [murdered two Israeli policemen last month](#), Israel decided to install metal detectors to ensure security at the site. The Jordanian-controlled Waqf responded by [refusing to enter the shrine](#), ultimately leading to violent protests, during which [several protesters were killed](#). Tensions between Israel and Jordan further heightened when an Israeli guard at the diplomatic mission in Jordan [killed two Jordanians in apparent self-defense](#), and the Jordanians forbade the Israeli embassy staff from leaving until the security guard was handed over to Jordanian authorities. In a short period, Israel found itself in a difficult situation, which could have spiraled out of control. What prevented the violence from escalating and forced cooler heads to prevail? The parties were able to step back and calm tensions with the aid of intense American involvement.

Parashat Eikev shows how Moses similarly navigated a dangerous situation during the height of the sin of the Golden Calf. Moses explained that for, “forty days and forty nights; I did neither eat bread nor drink water,” (Deut. 9:9) as he sojourned in divine spiritual communion with God on Mount Sinai. Moses was then jolted by the news that the people at the foot of the mountain were committing the sin of idolatry. God threatened to destroy the nation, telling Moses to, “Leave Me alone that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven...” (9:14) Recognizing the people’s precarious position, Moses immediately sprang into action by breaking the tablets of stone, removing the idolatry and punishing the people who perpetrated the desecration. He then returned to Sinai where he, “fell down before the Lord as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I did neither eat bread nor drink water; because of all your sin which you sinned...”

Michal Simchon and Ruth Walfish [note](#) the correlation of language between Moses’ time on the mountain before and after the sin of the Golden Calf. In both instances, we read about the “forty days and forty nights” during which he “ate neither bread nor water.” Why does Moses use the same language to describe both experiences? Simchon and Walfish explain that, “the repetition of the identical combination of many words in such a different situation...illustrates the great difference [between the two]: the same length of time, the same spiritual quality, yet this [second] time involved desperate prayer in order to maintain the connection, and not break or destroy it.” In order to prevent catastrophe and ensure the nation’s survival, Moses employed the same effort, energy and fervor he exerted as he had in his original mission.

As conflict ratcheted up last month, intense American involvement played a similarly critical role in the Temple Mount Crisis, intermediating between the different parties and easing discord. According to the [Times of Israel](#), Jordanian King Abdullah II “thanked [President] Trump for his administration’s role in helping to defuse tensions and stressed the importance of deepening U.S.-Jordan ties ‘to avoid the recurrence of such crises.’” Israel also expressed its gratitude to the U.S. for its involvement and intervention, especially with regard to the release of its security guard in Jordan. Just as Moses recognized the need for personal involvement in order to save the Jewish people, the U.S. administration immediately and intensely involved itself in a volatile situation in order to protect Israel’s interests, reduce hostility and ultimately perhaps save many lives. As Israel works to ease tension with Jordan and its other neighbors, we must remember our work as Americans to ensure Israel’s safety is critical. While America and Israel can face some challenges alone, both nations are stronger together. As supporters of the Jewish state, we must ensure America continues to remain engaged in the region and to facilitate direct talks between Israel and any other country with which it encounters tension. ■

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