**Parshat Ekev**

In this week’s parsha Moshe Rabbenu explains a distinction between Egypt and Eretz Yisrael’s water supply:

*“For the Land to which you are coming to possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you came…which you watered on foot like a vegetable garden. But the Land to which you pass to possess… it drinks water from the rain of Heaven. A Land that Hashem your G-d looks after, the eyes of Hashem your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year.”* (See Devarim 11:10-12)

Whereas Egypt receives water from the constant supply from the Nile overflow, Israel is dependent on rainfall. This encourages Israeli farmers to turn and rely on Hashem, looking to Heaven to provide their agricultural needs.

In his parsha sheet this week, Rabbi Ledder cites the Kotzker Rebbe as teaching that though it seems to be a blessing that the Egyptians had a constant water supply, it is actually a curse. Like the snake in Gan Eden that was cursed with having dust as its diet, the Egyptians are not forced by circumstance to turn to Hashem for blessing. They are seemingly self-reliant, and suffer from a false sense of self-sufficiency.

Moshe points out that one risk of having everything and having all our needs taken care of is that we mistakenly assume that we are in charge and we make our own wealth (see Devarim 8:17). Arguably another similar but slightly different risk is that we are less likely to turn to Hashem and thus strengthen the bond with Him.

This is the world of *asiya*, or tangible action. So our *ruchniyus*/soul often has a hard time competing with our guf, our bodies. Perhaps the lesson from the rain can indirectly teach us that our deficiencies or lacking that helps encourage us to turn to Hashem and draw out our ruchniyus (soul). The deficiencies in our gufs/gashmius enable our ruchniyus to obtain the ‘upper hand’ so to speak. So instead of viewing them as a problem, we can shift our perspective and realize that Hashem deliberately creates us with deficiencies out of His kindness so that we can turn to Him with heartfelt pleas and ask for His assistance. We recognize this when we recite the words of *Borei Nefashot* (the *beracha achrona*, after bracha) thanking Hashem for creating our deficiencies “with which to sustain the life of every being.”

It is our deficiencies (in ourselves and in our lives) - but more specifically our using our deficiencies to turn to Him for aid - that sustain us! They end up prodding us to connect to Hashem and forge a stronger relationship with Him. And as Rav Ithamar Schwartz teaches, it is our relationship with Hashem that gives us the greatest pleasure.

But what about when Hashem does not grant our request, when the void is not filled? The trick is to realize that He is always listening and always answering us, even if the answer is ‘not now’ or ‘no.’ We can learn this from Moshe in last week’s parsha, when he begged Hashem 515 times to be allowed to enter into Eretz Yisrael. His prayers were not granted. Does this mean Hashem ignored him? Certainly not. Does this mean his prayers were futile and wasted? Definitely not. Then what was the use of his davening? One purpose is that each prayer connected Moshe more strongly to Hashem. Each prayer ‘watered’ his emuna and his connection with Hashem.

The key to forging such a relationship lies in the repetition. Relationships are not static but ongoing. A story is told of a groom who tells his bride once at the beginning of their marriage “I love you. I will let you know if it changes otherwise” and presumes he is ‘off the hook’. Where would the relationship be after a few weeks?

After asking 515 times, Moshe’s relationship with Hashem was much stronger than it would have been if he had asked only once. He understood that “no” did not mean that Hashem was not listening or answering him. Rather, he realized that the best reward lay not in the answer but in the interaction - a stronger relationship with Hashem.

How can we relate this message to our parenting practice this week?

First, even if we read and follow every parenting manual in the book, it is obvious to most of us that child-rearing require much *siyatta dishmaya* (Divine Providence). It incites us to turn to Hashem for guidance and help. Imagine one child who lacks *derech eretz c”v*. We may be more likely to turn to Hashem, beg Him for assistance in this regard. First, we may start calmly and then continue beseeching Him more and more desperately as the situation continues. Then, if our prayers are answered, we will turn to Him, the One whom with we have a relationship, with deep gratitude. And if we do not receive what we prayed for, we have still maintained contact and a relationship with Him regardless. Conversely, we are generally less likely to forge such a passionate relationship with our Creator though beseeching his aid for the sake of a child who is less needy. Unfortunately, it is human nature to take existing blessings for granted.

Imagine a baby who is born completely self-sufficient. It does not need to rely on us, its parents, for anything, not for milk, not for comfort, not for dressing itself. At first we may think this is a dream baby, so easy, so independent. But on second thoughts, would we really want such a child? Where would our relationship be? Would we love it as much? And would it love us? Certainly the fact that a young child turns to us for its every need is the mortar that binds two separate people together. As Rav Dessler teaches, the root of the Hebrew word love, *ahava*, is *hav* meaning “to give”.

But would giving a large amount just once suffice to make this mortar stick? Imagine that we just gave our child everything we anticipated it needed on the day of its birth.1 to 2 years’ worth of milk supply (long life UHT versions of course), 18 years of food supply, 20 years supply of clothing in various sizes, 20 years of accessories, free shelter for 20 years, and feel good notes and tape-recorded messages of love to last a lifetime. Can you imagine the efficacy of such love? Hashem also gave water to the Egyptians – the difference is that He gave them once river rather than inconsistent but numerous rainfalls. But as Rambam teaches, it’s better to give small amounts more frequently than one large amount because it multiplies the spirit of generosity (see commentary to Mishna Avot, 315). In this way, Hashem is teaching us the optimum way to give – in regular sprinklings and showers rather than an isolated monsoon!

The opposite of love is not hate but rather indifference. Psychologists teach that many marriages fall apart due to neglect and a falling away of the shared bond rather than through animosity. Good relationships are based on repeated, frequent interactions. The more we interact, including asking people (and Hashem) in our lives for things, the more love we will feel for them. And vice versa. The more we need things in our lives, the more we will be propelled to turn to the Source of everything to obtain it. Knowing this may make it a little easier to embrace the lack.

Wishing you a Shabbat epitomized by a strong, loving connection with the One above.

With bracha

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