Kol Rina
In Independent Minyan
Parashat Eikev
August 24, 2024 *** Av 20, 5784

Eikev in a Nutshell
https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3041/jewish/Eikev-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Eikev," means "because," and it is found in Deuteronomy 7:12.

In the Parshah of Eikev ("Because"), Moses continues his closing address to the children of Israel, promising them that if they will fulfill the commandments (mitzvot) of the Torah, they will prosper in the Land they are about to conquer and settle in keeping with G-d's promise to their forefathers.

Moses also rebukes them for their failings in their first generation as a people, recalling their worship of the Golden Calf, the rebellion of Korach, the sin of the spies, their angering of G-d at Taveirah, Massah and Kivrot Hataavah ("The Graves of Lust"). "You have been rebellious against G-d," he says to them, "since the day I knew you." But he also speaks of G-d's forgiveness of their sins, and the Second Tablets which G-d inscribed and gave to them following their repentance.

Their forty years in the desert, says Moses to the people, during which G-d sustained them with daily manna from heaven, was to teach them "that man does not live on bread alone, but by the utterance of G-d's mouth does man live."

Moses describes the land they are about to enter as "flowing with milk and honey," blessed with the "seven kinds" (wheat, barley, grapevines, figs, pomegranates, olive oil and dates), and as the place that is the focus of G-d's providence of His world. He commands them to destroy the idols of the land's former masters, and to beware lest they become haughty and begin to believe that "my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth."

A key passage in our Parshah is the second chapter of the Shema, which repeats the fundamental mitzvot enumerated in the Shema's first chapter, and describes the rewards of fulfilling G-d's commandments and the adverse results (famine and exile) of their neglect. It is also the source of the precept of prayer, and

includes a reference to the resurrection of the dead in the messianic age.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Isaiah 49: 14-51:3

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/543183/jewish/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftorah is the second of a series of seven "haftorot of Consolation." These seven haftarot commence on the Shabbat following Tisha b'Av and continue until Rosh Hashanah.

The exiled Jewish people express their concern that G-d has abandoned them. G-d reassures them that it is not so, comparing His love and mercy for His people to that of a mother for her children, and even greater than that, too.

The prophet Isaiah then touchingly describes the ingathering of the exiles which will occur with the Messiah's arrival and returning to the initial subject matter of this haftorah, that of the Jewish people's complaint of being abandoned by G-d, he reminds them of their rebellious behavior that brought about the exile and suffering. He concludes with encouraging words, reminding us of what had happened to our ancestors, Abraham and Sarah. Just as they were blessed with a child when they had all but given up hope, so too, G-d will send us the Messiah.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Why Civilisations Fail by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l 5771

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/eikev/why-civilisations-fail/

What is the real challenge of maintaining a free society? In parshat Eikev, Moses springs his great surprise. Here are his words:

> Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God... Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery... You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." ... If you ever forget the Lord your God... I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Deut. 8:11-19

What Moses was saying to the new generation was this: You thought that the forty years of wandering in the wilderness were the real challenge, and that once you conquer and settle the land, your problems will be over. The truth is that it is

then that the real challenge will begin. It will be precisely when all your physical needs are met – when you have land and sovereignty and rich harvests and safe homes – that your spiritual trial will commence.

The real challenge is not poverty but affluence, not insecurity but security, not slavery but freedom. Moses, for the first time in history, was hinting at a law of history. Many centuries later it was articulated by the great 14th century Islamic thinker, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), by the Italian political philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), and most recently by the Harvard historian Niall Ferguson. Moses was giving an account of the decline and fall of civilisations.

Ibn Khaldun argued similarly, that when a civilisation becomes great, its elites get used to luxury and comfort, and the people as a whole lose what he called their asabiyah, their social solidarity. The people then become prey to a conquering enemy, less civilised than they are but more cohesive and driven.

Vico described a similar cycle:

"People first sense what is necessary, then consider what is useful, next attend to comfort, later delight in pleasures, soon grow dissolute in luxury, and finally go mad squandering their estates."

Bertrand Russell put it powerfully in the introduction to his History of Western Philosophy. Russell thought that the two great peaks of civilisation were reached in ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy. But he was honest enough to see that the very features that made them great contained the seeds of their own demise:

What had happened in the great age of Greece happened again in Renaissance Italy: traditional moral restraints disappeared, because they were seen to be associated with superstition; the liberation from fetters made individuals energetic and creative, producing a rare fluorescence of genius; but the anarchy and treachery which inevitably resulted from the decay of morals made Italians collectively impotent, and they fell, like the Greeks, under the domination of nations less civilised than themselves but not so destitute of social cohesion.

Niall Ferguson, in his book Civilisation: the West and the Rest (2011) argued that the West rose to dominance because of what he calls its six "killer applications": competition, science, democracy, medicine, consumerism and the

Protestant work ethic. Today however it is losing belief in itself and is in danger of being overtaken by others.

All of this was said for the first time by Moses, and it forms a central argument of the book of Devarim. If you assume – he tells the next generation – that you yourselves won the land and the freedom you enjoy, you will grow complacent and self-satisfied. That is the beginning of the end of any civilisation. In an earlier chapter Moses uses the graphic word venoshantem, "you will grow old" (Deut. 4:25), meaning that you will no longer have the moral and mental energy to make the sacrifices necessary for the defence of freedom.

Inequalities will grow. The rich will become self-indulgent. The poor will feel excluded. There will be social divisions, resentments and injustices. Society will no longer cohere. People will not feel bound to one another by a bond of collective responsibility. Individualism will prevail. Trust will decline. Social capital will wane.

This has happened, sooner or later, to all civilisations, however great. To the Israelites – a small people surrounded by large empires – it would be disastrous. As Moses makes clear towards the end of the book, in the long account of the curses that would overcome the people if they lost their spiritual bearings, Israel would find itself defeated and devastated.

Only against this background can we understand the momentous project the book of Devarim is proposing: the creation of a society capable of defeating the normal laws of the growth-and-decline of civilisations. This is an astonishing idea.

How is it to be done? By each person bearing and sharing responsibility for the society as a whole. By each knowing the history of his or her people. By each individual studying and understanding the laws that govern all. By teaching their children so that they too become literate and articulate in their identity.

Rule 1: Never forget where you came from.

Next, you sustain freedom by establishing courts, the rule of law and the implementation of justice. By caring for the poor. By ensuring that everyone has the basic requirements of dignity. By including the lonely in the people's celebrations. By remembering the covenant daily, weekly, annually in ritual, and renewing it at a national assembly every seven years. By making sure there are always Prophets to remind the people of their destiny and expose the

corruptions of power.

Rule 2: Never drift from your foundational principles and ideals.

Above all it is achieved by recognising a power greater than ourselves. This is Moses' most insistent point. Societies start growing old when they lose faith in the transcendent. They then lose faith in an objective moral order and end by losing faith in themselves.

Rule 3: A society is as strong as its faith.

Only faith in God can lead us to honour the needs of others as well as ourselves. Only faith in God can motivate us to act for the benefit of a future we will not live to see. Only faith in God can stop us from wrongdoing when we believe that no other human will ever find out. Only faith in God can give us the humility that alone has the power to defeat the arrogance of success and the self-belief that leads, as Paul Kennedy argued in The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers (1987), to military overstretch and national defeat.

Towards the end of his book Civilisation, Niall Ferguson quotes a member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, part of a team tasked with the challenge of discovering why it was that Europe, having lagged behind China until the 17th century, overtook it, rising to prominence and dominance.

At first, he said, we thought it was your guns. You had better weapons than we did. Then we delved deeper and thought it was your political system. Then we searched deeper still, and concluded that it was your economic system.

But for the past 20 years we have realised that it was in fact your religion. It was the (Judeo-Christian) foundation of social and cultural life in Europe that made possible the emergence first of capitalism, then of democratic politics.

Only faith can save a society from decline and fall. That was one of Moses' greatest insights, and it has never ceased to be true.

[Eikev: When Our Leaders Gaslight Us by Rabbi David Chapman](https://truah.org/resources/david-chapman-ekev-moraltorah_2024_/)

In the 1944 thriller "Gaslight," a scheming husband drives his unsuspecting wife to lose her grip with reality. Among his deceptions, he causes their apartment's gas lighting to mysteriously flicker, leading her to think she's hallucinating. While the term "gaslighting" did not become immediately popular, over the last few decades it has become almost ubiquitous. Today, gaslighting is used to describe

any kind of psychological manipulation in which someone presents a false narrative as the truth. Gaslighting is pernicious enough when practiced within a family unit.* But what happens when our public leaders — the people in whom we've invested the most trust — start gaslighting us?

In Parshat Ekev, Moses recounts the story of the two sets of stone tablets he received from God. In his retelling, we are reminded of why that second set was necessary — the incident of the chet' ha-eigel (the sin of the calf), Israel's paradigmatic foray into idolatry.

The story originally appears in Exodus. This week, in Deuteronomy, we can see many differences between the two accounts: the name of the mountain Moses ascended, the way Moses destroyed the idol, and how much of the law was actually revealed at that moment. Perhaps the most striking discrepancy is the role Aaron — one of the people's trusted leaders — plays in the episode.

In the first telling of this story, Moses holds Aaron at least partly accountable. He demands of his brother: "What did this people do to you that you have brought such great sin upon them?" (Exodus 32:21) This accusation accords with what we read in that chapter: It was Aaron who facilitated — albeit unwillingly — the creation of the calf. It was Aaron who proclaimed it the god of Israel. It was Aaron who built the altar before it and announced a festival in its honor.

But in his description in this week's portion, on the banks of the Jordan River, Moses shifts the blame from Aaron to the people. The calf, in this retelling, was a sin committed primarily by the community. (Deuteronomy 9:16) Moses protects his ally (and, by extension, himself). Throughout Deuteronomy, Moses retells events in a misleading way. Take for another example Deuteronomy 1:37, when Moses asserts that it was due to the people's sins that he is barred from entering the land, omitting the fact that God levied that punishment on Moses for his own sin of striking the rock. (Numbers 20:12)

On the face of it, these inconsistencies could be innocent; we never tell the same story the same way twice. It is also possible that Moses is simply "recalling past events as he wished they had happened" (Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary, 1045). Or, as the medieval commentator Ramban claims, Moses wishes to convey that everyone in a society is responsible for the sins of a few (see Ramban on Deuteronomy 1:37). To me, these are overly generous readings. Taken together, we perceive an agenda: Repeatedly, Moses retells stories to make himself look

more powerful, more compassionate, or more aligned with God than the people he leads.

I find it hard to confront these instances without thinking of the world we live in today: a world in which leaders routinely shift blame and present "alternative facts" as reality. By falsifying accounts for his own benefit, by contradicting events that people (or their families) experienced, Moses presages today's gaslighters around the globe.

Gaslighting thwarts justice and subverts the rights of those experiencing harm. Our colleague Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg illustrates this tendency by highlighting the knee-jerk truth-blurring response we see when someone is accused of having said or done something offensive. "Inner state and outer action become the same thing — if a person meant well, there could not possibly have been any harm," Ruttenberg writes (On Repentance and Repair, 8). This form of gaslighting committed by public figures is "a manipulative way of denying reality" which subverts the needs of victims and maintains an unjust status quo (Ruttenberg, 9). Jews have suffered the effects of gaslighting for generations in forms too numerous to count. Of course, we are not alone in this experience, nor are we immune from perpetrating it on others.

The world becomes more dangerous when leaders cannot be trusted and incontrovertible facts are subject to manipulation — when "truthiness" overtakes truth, as Steven Colbert put it. Our responsibility, both as leaders and as citizens who elect them, is to value accountability and call out gaslighting for what it is. Our democracy, and our very grip on reality, depends on it.(**If you or someone you love is experiencing gaslighting, contact SHALVA or another support organization.)*

(Rabbi David Shmidt Chapman (he/him) is a rabbi at Congregation Beth Shalom in Northbrook, IL. He was ordained by JTS in 2022 where he studied as a Wexner Graduate Fellow. Prior to rabbinical school, David worked for the New Israel Fund. He currently serves on the Conservative/Masorti Social Justice Commission. He and his husband Jonathan are the parents of two children.)

The Afterlife of Our Actions: Eikev by Eliezer B. Diamond

https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-afterlife-of-our-actions-2/

Will Israel receive all the rain it needs this coming year? It depends on whether we are faithful to God's word. At least that is the claim made in a biblical passage that we recite twice a day as part of the Shema:

If, then, you obey the commandments that I have enjoined upon you this day,

loving the Lord your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul, I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. . .Take care not to be lured way and serve other gods and bow to them. For the Lord's anger will flare up against you, and He will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain. . . (Deut. 11:13-14, 16-17, NJPS translation)

Many of us are uncomfortable reciting these verses. We live in a scientific age. We look to science, in this case meteorology, to explain the weather. Moreover, our experience of the world belies Deuteronomy's claim. It rains or it doesn't. People fulfill the commandments or they don't; they commit atrocities or great acts of kindness. There is no observable link between the two. And even if one were to grant the premise of Deuteronomy, the tone of these words sound like a threat—"the Lord's anger will flare up against you"—which some of us find demeaning. We are fine with being told that it is important to fulfill God's commands, but we don't want to be bullied into it.

When I recite these verses I do not experience them as a threat. I see them as a vital reminder that the effects of the good and evil we do are not limited to the moment in which we act. Our actions have consequences far beyond that moment, and most of them are beyond our control. If I spread gossip about you, I hurt you not only in the moment that I tarnish your reputation in the mind of the hearer. He will undoubtedly tell others who will in turn tell others. I cannot control the ripple effects of my act of denigration, nor of anything else I do, for better or for worse.

Of course this is true not only of sin, but of good deeds as well. Shakespeare got it wrong when he had Anthony say, in his funeral oration for Julius Caesar, "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones." (Julius Caesar, Act 3, Scene 2). Good has an afterlife just as vigorous as that of evil.

I share with you a small but moving example of this truth. In our family we tell the story of my cousin Shira who, every Shabbat after services, puts away any prayer books that have not been returned to their proper place. She does so because she observed our grandfather, a man who was dedicated to prayer and synagogue life, carefully restore order to the sanctuary after the congregants had left. One Shabbat a few years back, she noticed that a young man who had recently moved into town was engaging in the same task. She approached him

and complained, tongue-in-cheek, that he was taking away her job. He explained that many years ago he had studied for his bar mitzvah with a man by the name of Mr. Weiss. He had seen him return the prayer books to their shelves week after week and was inspired to follow his example. Mr. Weiss, of course, was Shira's and my grandfather.

I also regard the very implausibility of rainfall depending on human behavior as calling me to reflect that the results of our actions are not only often unknowable but often unforeseeable. Consider the story of David and Ahimelekh. In I Samuel, Chapters 21-22, we read how David, fleeing Saul's wrath, maneuvers the priest Ahimelekh into unwittingly aiding him in his escape by providing him with food and a sword. One of Saul's generals, Doeg the Edomite, overhears their conversation and reports it to Saul. In a paranoid rage, Saul orders the death not only of Ahimelekh, but also of 85 of his fellow priests. When Saul gives the order for the priests to be killed, none of his men steps forward. Finally, it is Doeg who does the deed. I wonder what went through Doeg's mind. Did he regret having informed on Ahimelekh now that it had resulted in his killing of innocent men? In any case, he was ensnared by the unforeseeable consequences of his words.

We need not let our theological differences with Deuteronomy blind us to the deep truth underlying its words: Until we act, we are the master of our actions. Once we do act, they master us. *(Eliezer Diamond is Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics at JTS)*

Eikev: Shivat Haminim, The Seven Fruits of Israel
by Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

https://www.growtorah.org/devarim/2023/7/28/eikev-shivat-haminim-the-seven-fruits-of-israel

The Land of Israel is described as *"A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and [date] honey."*[1][2]

The praise of Eretz Yisrael for its fruit trees is a lesson in itself, testifying to the symbolic significance of nature. The Torah paints the shade of the grape vine and fig tree as a metaphor for the idyllic world-peace we await. Our ultimate trust in Hashem is expressed through the serene environment where "Judah and Israel will sit securely, each person under his vine and fig tree…"[3] There is no greater sign of the coming redemption than when the Land of Israel produces fruits in abundance.[4]

Each individual fruit of the seven species is also symbolic, as accentuated by the great Kabbalist Arizal, [5] who attributes the spiritual energies of each fruit to one of the seven lower sefirot (spiritual emanations) that we count during each week of the Omer.[6][7] Wheat corresponds to chesed (kindness); barley reflects gevura (restraint); grapes represent tiferet (beauty); figs correspond to netzach (endurance); pomegranates correspond to hod (glory, majesty, gratitude and recognition); olives and olive oil are yesod (foundation); and dates correspond to malchut (kingdom).

The offerings of the choicest fruits—the bikkurim—brought to the Temple in Jerusalem on Shavuot were only from these seven species. Nogah Hareuveni [11] explains that the seven species flower and fruit during the period between Pesach and Shavuot, a season that depends on the delicate balance between contradictory forces of nature. It is characterized by climatic contrasts between extreme dryness and heat on the one hand and cold storms on the other. Therefore, the seven species are selected to reaffirm our pure faith in Hashem, by our expressing thanks to the One and only Hashem specifically for the fruits of the Land.

The flowering and fruiting of the seven species coincides with our own spiritual development during the season between Pesach and Shavuot, as we count the Omer during the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot, preparing for receiving the Torah. [12] Both are a part of an annual reaffirmation of faith in Hashem and appreciation for the gifts we were given.

With the effects of anthropogenic climate change, our environment and agriculture are in an even more delicate balance these days. Weather events are increasingly more extreme, and other fluctuations can affect the growing window and yield. [13] In these conditions, the significance of the seven species and the appreciation of Hashem's role in sustaining us are all the more valuable.

These seven species were the staple foods consumed by the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael during biblical times. Their holiness is crystalized in the unique blessing recited after eating them, thanking Hashem for the goodness of the land. This blessing, said after eating grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives or dates, differs from the blessing said after any other fruits in its effusive praise of the land of Israel and its fruits: "Blessed are You, Hashem our God, King of the universe, for the tree and the fruit of the tree, for the produce of the field, and

for the precious, good, and spacious land which You have graciously given as a heritage to our ancestors, to eat of its fruit and be satiated with its goodness… For You, Hashem, are good and do good to all, and we will thank You for the land and for her fruits. Blessed are You Hashem, for the land and for her fruits." [14]

These seven species are central to a Jewish spiritual path that endeavors to elevate the physical through intentional living. Through them, we can better connect to the land, promote our spiritual and physical health, and deepen our relationship with Hashem. *(Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, a native of Denmark, is the founder and Director of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin . She holds a Bachelor of Education in Bible and Jewish Philosophy from Michlala Jerusalem College for Women, and a Masters of Art in Jewish History from Touro College. Chana Bracha lives with her family in Israel, on the land of the Judean hills.)*

[1] Devarim 8:8 (All Tanach translations are the author's own adaptations from The Jerusalem Bible [Koren]). [2] The Sages understand the verse's mention of honey to be date honey. See Mishna Brura 202:44. [3] I Melachim, 5:5. [4] Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98a. [5] Rabbi Yitzchak Luria Ashkenazi , Tzfat 1534-1572. [6] Arizal, Sefer Halikutim, Parshat Eikev, chapter 8. [7] Click here for more on Omer and the sefirot.

[8] See here for a source on grains and cardiovascular health. [9] See here for a source on grape skins and diabetes. [10] See here for a source on the health benefits of figs. [11] Nogah Hareuveni is the founder and chairman of Neot Kedumim, The Biblical Landscape Reserve in Israel, and author of numerous books on Judaism and nature. [12] The Counting of the Omer is a verbal counting of each of the forty-nine days between Passover and Shavuot. This mitzvah derives from the Torah commandment to count from the day following Passover when the Omer, (a sacrifice containing an omer-measure of barley), was offered in the Temple, until Shavuot when an offering of wheat breads was brought to the Temple in Jerusalem. Moreover, counting the Omer is a spiritual preparation for the receiving of the Torah on Shavuot. According to Kabbalists, each day corresponds to one of the seven lower sefirot with its sub-sefira. [13] Read the IPCC report on food security. [14] Translation from chabad.org with

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YAHRTZEITS

Harriett Katz remembers her husband Erving Katz on Sunday August 25

Rabbi Lisa Vernon remembers her grandfather Arthur J. Vernon on Tuesday August 27