

Shabbat Eikev

As we look towards the approaching month of Elul and learn Parashat Eikev, a beautiful and deeply relevant theme emerges: the illusion of ‘my power’.

In Eikev, Moshe Rabbeinu issues a crucial and timeless warning to the people as they prepare to enter the Land:

‘You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hand have produced this wealth for me.” But remember Hashem your G-d, for it is He Who gives you the strength to produce wealth...’

Moshe Rabbeinu anticipates that once the people become prosperous, comfortable and established, they may suffer from spiritual amnesia. They may begin to believe that their material success, status and influence are reflections of their own greatness. They may mistake institutional permanence and wealth for Divine favour — confusing external infrastructure with internal holiness.

True success in Jewish life is never measured by the size of a treasury, the prestige of a surname or the number of seats inside an expansive building. When an institution begins to believe its own myth of self-importance — ‘the strength of my hand’ — it forgets the fundamental principles of Torah, humility and justice.

Notably, the word eikev means ‘as a consequence of’ and shares a root with akev, meaning ‘heel’. Rashi understands this as an allusion to the small, everyday mitzvot that a person might casually trample underfoot because they appear unimportant or lack glamour — the ‘heel’ mitzvot.

The Torah reminds us that lasting spiritual life is built through quiet and easily overlooked steps: a sincere minyan, authentic hospitality and a commitment to truth over performance.

Where, then, do we find the golden thread that ties together this week's learning? In Parashat Eikev, that thread is the danger of overlooking the small things.

How does trampling upon seemingly small things lead to arrogant pride? It happens through spiritual blindness.

The Torah links our ultimate spiritual survival to easily overlooked, everyday acts of integrity. When we neglect the humble foundations of our faith, a dangerous shift occurs within us. We slowly stop measuring our lives according to the standards of Torah and begin measuring them according to the standards of the world.

Today, we see the eternal wisdom of this warning. An institution may possess history, capital and grand halls, but if it has trampled upon the 'lowly' mitzvot — authentic hospitality, humility, devotion to genuine learning and simple transparency — its foundations become hollow.

True spiritual continuity is never sustained by pride in what 'our hands have built'. It is sustained at the level of the heel: through the quiet and sincere choices of ordinary people who come together in truth to honour the Torah, cherish Shabbat and value one another. When we neglect the quiet and honest basics, even the grandest institutions may eventually crumble from within.

As we move from Av towards Elul, Parashat Eikev provides precisely the intellectual and emotional preparation we need to begin the intense process of teshuvah.

Eikev is read during the closing weeks of Av. As we absorb Moshe Rabbeinu's warnings, the month of Elul is already on the horizon. Soon, the sound of the shofar each morning will call us to awaken from spiritual slumber.

During Elul, our primary task is to look honestly at our lives, strip away our social titles and stand transparently before Hashem. Eikev prepares us for this by systematically

dismantling human arrogance. Moshe Rabbeinu warns us against the delusion of ‘my power and the strength of my hand’.

This verse becomes a diagnostic tool.

Elul asks us: Where in our lives have we allowed pride to take credit for things that belong to Heaven? Where have we constructed a false sense of security around our social status, wealth or past achievements while allowing our actual relationship with Torah to decay?

We sometimes think of teshuvah as the work of correcting massive or catastrophic sins. Elul teaches us that spiritual decline usually begins much more quietly. It begins with the everyday mitzvot that we casually trample underfoot because they do not attract attention or feed the ego.

Elul is the month in which we stop overlooking the ‘small things’. We look down at our feet. We consider how we treat the stranger, how much sincerity we bring to our daily prayers and whether our private behaviour reflects our public reputation.

In Eikev, Moshe Rabbeinu recounts the shattering of the first tablets following the sin of the Golden Calf. He describes how he returned to the mountain to seek forgiveness and receive the second set of tablets.

According to Jewish tradition, the final forty days that Moshe Rabbeinu spent on Har Sinai began at the start of Elul and ended on Yom Kippur.

Eikev therefore reminds us that even when an individual or an institution has fallen into serious failure or corruption, renewal remains possible. The shattering of what can no longer stand need not be the end of the story.

Elul is the open door that allows us to ascend the mountain once again and build a sanctuary founded upon truth, clean hands and an authentic covenant with Hashem.

This movement from failure towards renewal continues in this week's haftarah, which emphasises Hashem's absolute loyalty to His people through the imagery of a covenant that can never be permanently dissolved.

The people cry out:

'Hashem has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.'

Hashem rejects this claim by asking whether a mother could ever forget her nursing child. Even if such a thing were possible, He declares:

'I will not forget you.'

He then emphasises His enduring loyalty to His people:

'See, I have engraved you upon the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me.'

The image signifies an indelible and unerasable connection. Hashem reinforces this message through a further rhetorical question:

'Where is your mother's bill of divorce, by which I sent her away?'

There is no such document. Exile is a consequence of transgression, but it is not evidence of permanent abandonment or the dissolution of the covenant.

Yeshayahu then calls upon the people to remember the source from which they came:

'Look to the rock from which you were hewn... Look to Avraham, your father, and to Sarah, who bore you.'

Hashem will comfort Zion and all her ruins, transforming her wilderness into Eden and her desert into the Garden of Hashem. Joy, gladness, thanksgiving and melody will once again be heard within her.

The Sheva D'Nechemta — the seven haftarot of consolation — were instituted by the Sages precisely to counter the fear of permanent rejection. After the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish people feared that they had been cast off forever. Yeshayahu's role was to

reassure them that while exile may be a painful consequence of failure, disownment is an impossibility.

Yeshayahu's prophecy is not framed as a checklist of conditions or a series of human ultimatums. It is a timeless promise and a reminder of absolute Divine loyalty.

Hashem's covenant with the Jewish people is eternal. Human failure may bring consequence, loss and exile, but never permanent abandonment.