Eikev

וְהָיָה עֲקֵב

This shall be the reward

The topmost part of the body is the head which is called ראש in Hebrew. The bottommost part of the body is called the heel, which is called עקב in Hebrew. And the translators tell us not to translate עקב as heel but to translate it as reward. But we will understand heel as meaning from top to bottom, this shall be the reward.

When you hearken to these ordinances and you observe and perform them, Hashem your God will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers.

This is the blessing that goes from the head, which is בראשית to the bottom which is עקב.

He will love you, bless you, and multiply you, and He will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your Land: your grain, your wine, and your oil.

What does blessing mean? To answer this, we must first explore what we mean when we speak of God as blessed. Rabbi Mandel teaches,

When we speak of God as blessed **TITL** we mean that God is the source of all blessings, just as when we say that God is wise or strong or good and so on, we mean that God is the source of wisdom strength, goodness. So when we bless God, we are blessing God as the ultimate primal source of all goodness¹ which He continually showers onto our world. We say a blessing before we do some action, like eating, and we say blessings after we do some action like washing hands or eating. Our sages tell us that God does not really need our blessings. The blessings are really for our own benefit.

How is it for our benefit when we bless God?

God is complete, perfect, not in need of anything. And no matter what we give to God, God is already full and does not change from what we give. So in effect if we cannot benefit the one to whom we give the blessing, the only possibility is that the blessing is really for our benefit.

How is it for us? By making the blessing, with intention, we sensitize our consciousness to be open to the constant blessings that God showers and gives to us and to our world. That is, the blessings God gives, has no existence if we are not conscious of it. If we have no consciousness of the blessing that God gives, then in effect we have not received the blessing. Even worse, by not receiving the blessing we reject it.

^{1.} Nissan Mandel, My Prayer, Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, Brooklyn, NY 1984, p20.

Just think. Suppose you attempt to give a gift to a friend and the friend rejects it. Then the gift has not been given. How do you feel? And anthropomorphically we can understand that this in effect is how God feels when the blessings he is constantly giving to us are not received. Therefore, the Halacha is that we must be acting in ways to constantly maintain God consciousness so that we consciously receive the blessings he is giving us.

Eikev contains the second paragraph of the שמע. Last week, Va'etchanan contained the first paragraph of the שמע. beginning with Listen Israel, Hashem our God, Hashem is one. Let us explore this to understand a bit deeper about God consciousness. First the outer layer.

If we count the letters of the Shema, starting from Shema and continuing through the third paragraph of the prayer, not counting the Blessed be the name of the glory of his kingdom for ever and ever, we count exactly 1000 letters. 1000 in Hebrew is אֶלָף. the letters of אֶלֶף also spell אָלֶף. יאָלף is one. One is Hashem. All this is just the outer sign. Now for one level of the inner layer.

We read in the Zohar.

When Israel engage in the mystical unification of the wat, with a perfect will, a light emerges from the secret of the supernal world and this light strikes the spark of blackness from within and splits up into seventy lights and these seventy shine on the seventy branches of the Tree of Life.²

In Hebrew, light is אור. Rabbi Hirsch explains that אור is related to עור to be awake, to become or to be receptive to external impression (hence also skin, the general organ of feeling) sometimes also to awake; אור, light is the awakening element, that awakens all forces to development.

The Zohar is telling us that when we unify with intention, a light from the supernal world strikes us, the spark of blackness. Why blackness? Because whatever is not receiving God's light in that moment is considered black. And this light, when received, splits up and shines on all aspects of the lower seven sefirot of our soul and its tree of ten sefirot that each of the lower seven contain.

What does it mean to receive? Our highest organ of receptiveness to development is our consciousness. The receiver of the light is our consciousness. This gives rise to the metaphor that light is consciousness. Since truth and knowledge are in consciousness, light can also be a metaphor for truth and knowledge. And it is from this metaphor that the meaning of enlightenment comes.

And God said: Let there be light.

The Malbim teaches,

Now it should be understood that the absolute light and sublime essence of God, is referred to in

^{2.} Zohar II 133b

In Your light, we see light.³
The Lord is my light.⁴

and so forth. The Sages of Kabbalah speak of it as *the primal light* and as the *purest light* and that which is loftiest, they call the infinite Light

About this we read in Midrash Rabbah

Rabbi Simeon ben Rabbi Jehozadak asked Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman: As I have heard that you are a master of Haggadah, tell me whence the light was created? He replied: The Holy One, blessed be He, wrapped Himself therein as in a robe and irradiated with the luster of his majesty the whole world from one end to the other. Now he had answered him in a whisper, whereupon he observed, There is a verse which states it explicitly:

Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment.⁵

yet you say it in a whisper! Just as I heard it in a whisper, so have I told it to you in a whisper.

There is a secret to this Midrash. The secret is in the whisper. Why does Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman tell it in a whisper? Because when the light comes to us, it comes in a whisper. At the moment it comes, our consciousness may be aware of other thoughts, much louder thoughts. But the light is fine, sublime, and subtle so it comes in a whisper. And we have to be prepared to see it when it comes. We have to always be prepared to be receptive to it.

With these teachings we are able to come to an interesting insight for the verses,

And God said: Let there be light. And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good.

The first part, *Let there be light* is the purest loftiest light that comes to us from the garment of God. This is God's giving. If we are attentive to it and we receive it, then the second part *And there was light* becomes actualized. This is our receiving of God's light.

Receiving the light is not a passive. For receiving the light means we must be conscious of it and be doing something Torah consistent with the light we have received. When we do, we return the light back to God. Now the third part, *And God saw the light* plays itself out. This is God's receiving of our returning light. As a result of God seeing our returning light, the fourth part, *that it was good* becomes activated. This is God's giving us the acknowledgement that he has received our returning light. In any situation where the sequence happens in its fullness, God becomes manifest as a complete giver and receiver and we have become a complete giver and

^{3.} Psalm 36:10

^{4.} Psalm 27:1

^{5.} Psalm 114,2

receiver.

This is the reason why when the sequence happens in its fullness we become aware of a sweetness, an indescribable delight, a complete peacefulness, and we make a blessing. This is the blessing after the action. For this is the manifestation of *that it was good*.

Rabbi Glazerson teaches that Lights, אורות has a gematria 613. There are 613 מצוות, actions which are Torah consistent. The root of the word is מצוה which means to join. By the mitzvah we connect to God. This is the outer layer. The inner layer is that the connection to God is activated by maintaining the consciousness to receive so that we become a complete giver and receiver.

Thus we understand one level of the unification of the **שמע**. God is One: This is the unity of being a complete giver and complete receiver. This is the unification spoken about in the prayer book, the unification of the letters ידים with ידים of the name of Hashem. This is blessing.

And now we understand

When you hearken to these ordinances and you observe and perform them, Hashem your God will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers.

For the Torah is, at the level of which we speak, an instruction book about maintaining God consciousness. The teaching of Eikev is that when we live God consciousness, we receive the blessings of Hashem.

Our discussion has been abstract and has been about man and God. But it also is applicable between man and man. Some of the light of God comes to us via our friends and our spouses. Very practically, they are also giving to us. But if we are not conscious of their giving, then we cannot receive their giving. Not to have their giving received is a rejection. If what they give is not received, they will feel bad and feel rejected or worse they may get angry. In this case a whole new stream of difficult side effects will occur.

So the message is clear. We must maintain a discipline of an open consciousness to receive: from Hashem directly or from Hashem via his messengers -- our friends and spouses. In general, we discipline ourselves by attentiveness and finding a way to interpret all what happens to us in a positive way, and as something that carries holiness. Thus, we are constantly surprised and amazed about how people in our immediate situation are acting as messengers of Hashem. Between man and God, one of the ways we maintain this discipline is by blessing God. In general, we maintain this discipline is by going beyond the appearance of what confronts us and seeing into its holy essence. And this is what the opening phrase of Eikev is about: וְהָיָה עָקַבּ
This shall be the reward means, by interchanging the first two letters and the last two letters of the first word אַקָּבָּה עַקַבּ

This is the profoundness of living in accordance with the Will of God.