**Brooklyn torah gazette**

**For parshas eikev 5783**

Volume 7, Issue 46 (Whole Number 353) 18 Menachem Av 5783/ August 5, 2023

**Printed L’illuy nishmas Nechama bas R’ Noach, a”h**

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**Rabbi Yossel of Slutzk**

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**Photo of a Jewish synagogue in Slutzk in the early 20th Century**

Rabbi Yossef Peimer, better known as Rabbi Yossel of Slutzk, was born to Rabbi Meir in Skudy, Lithuania in 5556 (1796).

At a young age, Rabbi Yossel went to study at the famous Volozhin yeshiva. The Rosh Yeshiva, the Gaon Rabbi Chaim (the disciple of the Gra), became attached to the boy and showed great affection for him. Rabbi Yossel finished by becoming his main student, affirming that “everything I say, I have heard from my teacher Rabbi Chaim.” Not long afterwards, his fame spread throughout the country and he was known in his own right as a Gaon and Tzaddik, humble and pious.

When the rabbinical position in the city of Slutzk opened up, its inhabitants sought out a brilliant Rav. They heard of a certain avrech from the Volozhin yeshiva named Rabbi Yossel, a man who had all the characteristics of a Talmid Chacham. They went to see him with an offer to come and be the Rav of their city.

Rabbi Yossel was 32 years old when he became the Rav of Slutzk. It was a pious community whose Rabbis had been Torah giants for many generations.

People say that after the community leaders of Slutzk invited him to come and settle down there, he traveled to Slutzk by way of a small town located near Kapulie. At the request of the inhabitants of that town, he spent Shabbat there. The Talmidei Chachamim of Kapulie took advantage of his stay to come and speak words of Torah with him, and all marveled at his great knowledge in all areas of Torah.

**A Humbling Incident in the Tiny Town of Kapulie**

During one conversation, someone made an astute comment in the name of Rabbi Lipman, the Rav of Kapulie and author of Kedushat Yom Tov. Hearing this, Rabbi Yossef exclaimed in astonishment, “If in the tiny town of Kapulie there lives a Gaon like him, it is he who merits taking the rabbinical position of Slutzk, not I!” When he was told that Rabbi Lipman had already passed away, he accepted to become the Rav of Slutzk.

Rabbi Yossel’s arrival in Slutzk was very impressive. He was large of stature and had the head of a lion. His forehead was high and large, and his eyes looked like glowing coals, charming and alluring. He was well-built and exuded charm, drawing looks from people passing in the streets. His good looks became so famous that the government sent an artist to draw his portrait, and today we know what he looked like because of that.

**A Challenging Question on a Particular Tosaphot**

During his first Shabbat in Slutzk, Rabbi Yossel went to pray at its great Beit Midrash. There an old teacher, eminent in Torah, approached the new Rav and said to him, “Rabbi, here you are appointed as our Rav. I would like to ask you a question concerning Tosaphot on Tractate Eruvin.”

The old man then posed his question, and the young Rav briefly consulted some books and presented his response. The old man was surprised and said, “Now I know that you are a great sage of Israel and worthy of being the Rav of a great city like Slutzk. May you succeed in your task!”

Rabbi Yossef always evoked people’s surprise by recounting how he had been given Heavenly assistance to answer that particular question, for afterwards he worked hard to recall his reply, but could never remember it.

He was received as the Rav of Slutzk during the winter of 5589 (1829), and he immediately began to draw his focus on education. He had all the teachers in town come to the Beit Midrash, and there he explained to them how to instill a love for Torah in children. He warned them against corporal punishment, believing that it was better to verbally reprimand students and show them signs of affection.

When a teacher asked him what to do in the event that words proved useless, he replied, “I order you to do the following: When you find yourself obliged to strike a student, do not do so with your hand. Rather, use a towel or strap, or something similar.”

**Why He Didn’t Want Teachers to**

**Strike Students with their Hands**

When he was asked the reason for this decree, he quite simply replied: “A teacher’s hands are always at his disposition, and when he becomes angry he may use them to strike a student. Now, however, I have ordered teachers not to use their hands. Rather, they are to use something else, which they will not always have with them. Thus, during the time that they will look for these things, their anger will subside.”

Rabbi Yossef despised ill-gotten gain. He earned little and lived in tremendous poverty, and he detested gifts and never complained. After some years in Slutzk, the community leaders of Minsk asked him to be their Rav, and after incessant supplications, he sent them a letter expressing his acceptance.

When the inhabitants of Slutzk learned of that, they came to him and begged him not to abandon them. The Rav accepted to stay, but only on condition that they intercept the letter that he had sent to Minsk, and that they not increase his salary. This he requested so that nobody could say that he had remained in Slutzk because of a salary increase. They did what the Rav asked, except that they repaired the roof of his house, for whenever it rained water leaked inside and ruined his books.

**Concerned About Forgetting His Learning**

Rabbi Yossef’s greatness in Torah and the beauty of his character spread wide and far, and many young people gathered to learn Torah from him. He also issued many Halachic responses to those from around the world who asked him questions. He was extremely modest and always worried about forgetting his learning.

One story has it that Rabbi Yossef once fell ill and was forced stay in bed for several weeks. After recuperating, he was sitting by his window one day getting a breath of fresh air, when then came Benjamin, the town fool, who in his youth had been well-versed in Torah.

He passed by the Rav’s window and exclaimed the words of the Sages in a loud voice: “Rav Yossef fell ill and forgot all his learning” (Nedarim 41a). Rabbi Yossef was taken aback by the fool’s words, and he feared that he had actually forgotten his learning. He could not find peace before convening the Dayanim of the city and repeating all four parts of the Shulchan Aruch to them by heart.

Rabbi Yossef passed away on Friday, the first day of Iyar 5724 (1864). Rabbi Avraham Esofski, an elderly man who was the Gabbai of the Slutzk Beit Midrash in New York (whose Rav is Rabbi Moshe Shurin), recounted the following about Rabbi Yossef’s funeral:

“I was a young boy when I attended the funeral of that Gaon and Tzaddik. Thousands of people followed his casket, and on that same day a great amount of snow fell, covering the streets of the city and forcing the funeral procession to move very slowly. The people of Slutzk had never seen so much snow in winter, and they viewed it as a sign that even nature was mourning the loss of the Gaon. In accordance with the wishes of the departed, the epitaph on his tombstone read, ‘Here lies Rabbi Yossef the son of Rabbi Meir.’ He had ordered that no tributes be engraved on it.”

Rabbi Yossef left behind many manuscripts on the four parts of the Shulchan Aruch. His Torah commentaries have been published of late, and his words rejoice both heart and soul. (hevratpinto.org)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Eikev 5783 email of R’ Yedidye Hirtenfeld’s whY I Matter parsha sheet for the Young Israel of Midwood in Brooklyn.*

**Thoughts that Count**

**for Our Parsha**

And it will come to pass because (eikev) you will hearken to these ordinances (Deut. 7:12) Hebrew word “eikev” means literally “heel,” and refers to the End of Days – the period right before the coming of Moshiach and the Final Redemption. Our Sages counseled us to “Anticipate the footsteps of Moshiach”; at present, we can hear their faint echo and begin to appreciate Moshiach’s light. (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

And now, Israel, what does the L-rd your G-d require of you but to fear the L-rd your G-d, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the L-rd your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul (Deut. 10:12) From the way this verse is worded, one would think that this command is easy. Yet the Talmud asks, “Is fearing G-d really such an easy thing to do?” For Moses, the answer goes, it was easy. But how does this help the average Jew? Every Jewish soul, without exception, contains an aspect of Moses; with the help of this element, fear of G-d is attainable by all Jews. (Tanya)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Eikev 5783 edition of L’Chaim Weekly.*

**What Does G-d Want**

**From Each and Every Jew?**

**From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



In this week’s Torah portion Eikev, the word eikev is used atypically to mean “because.” Foremost Torah commentator Rashi explains that the choice of this word is to emphasize the seemingly less important mitzvot (commandments) that would get trampled under the eikev – heel.

Thus, “because” we will listen and do those mitzvot that might be considered unimportant, we will experience multifold blessings, including miraculous victories over those whom we fear.

**The Ploy of the Yetzer Hara**

Regarding mitzvot, we typically focus our energy on the ones we deem important. Our yetzer hara (inclination to do evil), convinces us that it makes sense to focus on the “important” ones, while pushing off the others, thereby trampling them under our “heel.”

Eikev encourages us to take a different approach to mitzvot. To defy our yetzer hara and simply do the mitzva because it is G-d’s will. Then all mitzvot are seen as equal. We do the mitzvot in a manner that is beyond our mind’s understanding.

When we take this approach toward G-d and His commandments, going beyond our understanding and doing His will, He in turn goes beyond the natural order and shows us miracles.

**The Reason for G-d’s Hiddenness**

Our portion also contains the verse, “And now Israel, what is G-d your G-d asking of you? Only to revere Him, to walk in His ways, to love Him...” What is G-d asking of us? How does one revere and love Him? When G-d created this world, He hid His presence. Had His presence not been hidden, it would have been so imposing, that we would only be able to do His will; we would not have a choice.

So, G-d’s “hiddenness” enables freedom of choice. Being that G-d can’t be seen, it is possible to forget for moments, that He is here. But G-d wants us to make Him a real part of our lives. He wants us to develop such a close relationship with Him that His presence feels as if we could see Him.

**A Strong Commitment to Know G-d**

Like in any close, meaningful relationship, it requires a strong commitment to get to know G-d. We do that through the study of His Torah and prayer. When we freely refer to G-d in our casual conversation: “thank G-d” “with G-d’s help” “G-d willing,” we develop our relationship with Him.

If, when making an important decision, we ask, “What does G-d want?” we strengthen that relationship. When we feel G-d in our homes and in our lives, we can’t help but follow in His ways. Make G-d’s presence important in our homes is true reverence. The more we develop our relationship with G-d, the more our lives becomes an expression of our love for Him.

Adapted by Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz from the teachings of the Rebbe, yitzihurwitz.blogspot.com. Rabbi Hurwitz, who is battling ALS, and his wife Dina, are emissaries of the Rebbe in Temecula, Ca.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Eikev 5783/2023 edition of L’Chaim. (Adapted from Likutei Sichot, volume 4.)*

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And you turn aside, and serve other gods (Deut. 11:16) The Baal Shem Tov taught: As soon as a Jew “turns aside,” i.e., moves away from his attachment to G-d, he is automatically considered to be “serving other gods,” engaged in idol worship. For the Jew, there is no middle ground. Either he is connected to G-d, or connected to the pleasures of this world. (Tzeva’at HaRibash)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Eikev 5783/2023 edition of L’Chaim.*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on Taking Children to Concerts with Shomrei Torah**

**Singers Singing Kosher Songs?**

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I will tell you my private opinion. I don’t think that children should become accustomed to unnecessary and superfluous things. Don’t train your children to become accustomed to going places that cost money. They don’t need it and you’re ruining them in the process. You can train them to take walks. They can take walks and get fresh air. They could play a little in the street with a ball and get some exercise, but don’t take them to concerts and things like that. I don’t believe in that at all.

I don’t believe in taking children to travel at all. Don’t get them accustomed to luxuries. A child should be taught how to live a frugal life and to desire only what is necessary. Today, people are feeding children all kinds of ideas – all kinds of wrong ideas. And people think it’s normal. Even to send your daughter to Seminary in, let’s say, Gateshead, I don’t believe in it anymore. It’s a very good place, Gateshead, but send your daughter to Boro Park or to Yeshiva of Brooklyn. There are very good places here.

And don’t let your daughter travel to Eretz Yisroel either. A man approached me the other day. His daughter wants to go to Eretz Yisroel. She’s a frum girl. He wants to know what I think about it. What does she have to go to Eretz Yisroel for?! It costs a lot of money to go to Eretz Yisroel. What does she have to go to Eretz Yisroel for?! An unmarried girl should waste money on going to Eretz Yisroel?! No, I don’t believe in these things.

Teach your children to save their money. They’ll need it someday. A bank account is better than traveling – a savings account in a bank. Teach them to save money for themselves. And you want to train them to spend money on unnecessary things?! No, I disapprove of that.

TAPE # E-217 (December 1999)

*Reprinted from the Parshas Va’eschanan 5783 email of Toras Avigdor based on Rabbi Avigdor Miller’s Tape #E-217 (December 1999) from his classic Thursday night lectures.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Eikev 5783**



The parsha this week ties together the observance of the Torah commandments, especially the warnings against paganism and idolatry, with the earthly blessings of longevity and prosperity. Over the ages this has caused great philosophic debate and discussion, for this cause-and-effect relationship is not always apparent in the national or personal lives of the Jewish people.

Many commentators hasten to add that these promises refer to biblical times when the Divine Spirit was palpably present amongst the Jewish community and the spirit of prophecy was also prevalent in the Land of Israel. This means that it was applicable to First Temple times only, for in Second Temple times the spirit of prophecy was absent in the Jewish commonwealth.

Perhaps this is an insight as to why the rabbis attributed the destruction of the First Temple primarily to idolatry – a fulfillment of the cause-and-effect system of justice as outlined in this week’s parsha – while the demise of the Second Temple was attributed to social dispute and baseless hatred, an issue never specifically mentioned in this week’s Torah presentation.

It appears that different equations, moral gauges and causes affected the Jewish commonwealth’s spiritual status during Second Temple times than were present in First Temple times when prophecy and Divine Spirit were current and abundantly visible. In any event, it is apparent that the direct cause and effect relationship between observance of G-d’s commandments and blessings and prosperity and disobedience causing punishment and disaster has not always been evident in the annals of Jewish history, especially in our long years of exile and persecution.

The very fact that the Torah this week makes this cause-and-effect relationship so patently clear, and repeats itself many times, raises the age-old problem of why the righteous suffer and the wicked are rewarded, in this world at least. This basic faith dilemma has its biblical origins in the book of Iyov where the problem is raised but basically left unanswered.

Over the long Jewish exile with its attendant difficulties and pogroms this gnawing problem of faith has always accompanied us in every generation and circumstance. The events of the Holocaust, almost unimaginable in its numbers and horror, has certainly been a test of faith for many Jews, even for those who themselves were spared that actual experience. Yet the faith of Israel is that somehow in the unfathomable system of G-d’s justice, all will be set right.

This is the main message of this week. It informs us that our actions have consequences and that there is a guiding hand to Jewish and world history and events that will eventually reveal itself. So, our task remains, as it always was – to fulfill G-d’s commandments and to behave morally and justly. The whole system of G-d’s justice, opaque as it may seem to us to be, is simply to remind us of our potential and greatness, of the importance of our behavior in the grand scheme of things, and to reinforce our sense of destiny as individuals and as a people.

Shabat shalom

*Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com*

**A Waste?**

**By Rabbi Ari Bensoussan**

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**Rabbi Ari Bensoussan**

The Chazon Ish had a Kollel in Israel in the mid-1900s. But with its financial stability uncertain, one of the students was designated to take trip by boat to America from Israel. As matters turned out, after six months of doing what he could to raise funds, he hadn’t collected anything. Literally. Finally, after months of working at it, he had raised just enough for himself to purchase a return ticket to Israel.

Though he had returned to Israel, he felt so ashamed that he had not collected anything. As a result, he didn’t make any return visit to the Chazon Ish. In no way did he want to approach the Chazon Ish and inform him that he had absolutely nothing to offer the *yeshiva*in return for his months spent in American trying to raise money. He would join another yeshiva or find some other place to study. He just couldn’t bring himself to face the Chazon Ish so ashamed.

**Informed that the Chazon Ish Wants to See Him**

Days later, a few students approached the man and informed him that the Chazon Ish wanted to see him. With a heavy heart, he appeared before the Chazon Ish. Humbly and with great remorse, he explained that he had done with utmost. He had davened and attempted to meet with whomever he could, but he just had not seen any fortune. He was so broken and so sorry.

“You collected $50,000,” said the Chazon Ish. The man was perturbed. “What do you mean? I didn’t collect anything.” “About two months after you left, a very wealthy man from Australia was looking for a minyan. He ended up praying with us, and after he inquired into our yeshiva, he was impressed and told us that he would help support the yeshiva for the next couple of years. He then donated $50,000.”

The student couldn’t believe it. “I got on a boat to go to America and missed my wife and kids and embarrassed myself… and all I had to do was stick around here and that man would have showed up from Australia?” If the man had been beside himself before, he was now even more. But the Chazon Ish replied to the man in a way that for generations has shaped how we best can approach the balance of our efforts in life.

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**The Chazon Ish**

“You needed to put in effort for that man from Australia to come here. Had you not gone to America, he would never have come here. Your *hishtadlus*(effort) was necessary for Hashem to bring about what we needed. But it is not your specific effort that yields the outcome. Your efforts don’t amount to the result. It is the *bitachon*in Hashem that brings it about. You just needed to put in effort. And when that was done, it opened the channel for Hashem to then respond to what we needed.”

Our own efforts are not what bring us our success. It is our trust in Hashem. What we do is necessary for the results to occur, for Hashem operates within the natural ways of the world as He set them up. Once we put in our effort, it activates that Hashem can grant us our needs. But it is not “this-and-that specific” effort that does the job. Our efforts do not equal our results. It is our *bitachon*in Hashem that does it; and with that, everything flows as a result.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Chukat Balak 5783 edition of the Torahanytime.com Newsletter.*

**My Meeting with**

**Princess Diana**

**By Rabbi Yisroel Roll**



When I served as the Rabbi of the New West End Synagogue, I lived in London’s West End, across the street from Kensington Palace. My children would play in the playground just outside the palace and often the red Royal Air-Force helicopter bearing Princess Diana would land outside the palace. The princess would get out of the helicopter, wave to us, and then enter the palace.

We often heard Diana’s helicopter hovering perilously over our house, late at night, as she returned to the Palace following an engagement. I’d turn to my wife and say, “Diana is keeping very late hours. As her LOR—Local Orthodox Rabbi, I will have to have a word with her.”

Indeed, I got my chance. On November 29, 1996, I went into my local barbershop to get a haircut. There was a blond teenager getting his hair cut by my barber, Lucas, and there was a young woman sitting next to him who looked very much like Diana, the Princess of Wales. I turned to a middle-aged man sitting by the window and whispered,

“Is that the Princess?”

With a shrug of the shoulders, he replied, “I don’t know.” (It turns out that he was her security guard.)

A young woman ran into the shop and said breathlessly to the Princess, “May I have a photograph with you?”

Diana replied, “I would rather not, thank you.”

Then I knew for sure that it was the Princess, and that the teenager in the barber chair next to her was Prince William, the future King of England.

I nodded to the Princess as I sat down on the sofa opposite her and she nodded back.

I mustered up the courage and said, “I am the rabbi of the local synagogue around the corner, in St. Petersburgh Place—”

**Rabbis Can Take a Half an Hour Off for a Haircut?**

She cut me off in mid-sentence and said: “You mean rabbis can take a half an hour off for a haircut?”

I rose to the occasion and replied, “It seems that even princesses can take half an hour off for a haircut!”

Diana had just revealed to the British people her impending problems with her marriage and I said, “Princess, in Hebrew we have a saying, ‘*chazak v’ematz*—be strong and of good courage.’ I wish the Princess well.”

That night was Friday night and at the Shabbat table I said my wife and kids, “You’ll never guess who I met today!”

After a few guesses, I told them, “I met the Princess of Wales! In fact, I sat in the very same chair as Prince William, the future King of England!”

After the excitement died down, I said to my young children, “You know something? He is a king… and I am also a king! Diana is a queen….and Mommy is also a queen. Look at our Shabbat table – fit for a king and a queen. And you children are the loyal citizens of the realm.

**Our Finest Shabbat Clothes, China and Crystal**

We are all dressed in our finest Shabbat clothes. Our finest china and crystal are sparkling on the table in honor of the Shabbat Queen. And me and Mommy are king and queen of our house, not because we are in charge of the house. The essence of kingship is that a king and queen care for their subjects and provide for their welfare. And Mommy and I look after you and care for you, we encourage you and we love you. We perform the same role that kings and queens perform for their subjects.”

Each of us has the capacity to be a king or queen. But we often sell ourselves short telling ourselves that we are deep down worthless.

We need to relearn our basic worth and value and act like royalty. By showing care and concern for a spouse, child, neighbor or stranger, we can overcome our personal isolation and loneliness. We can activate feelings of a positive self-image by developing our giving qualities and by being there for others. Discovering our royal self means discovering our giving self.

If you are feeling down, you have the power to take yourself out of your negative mindset by reminding yourself of your essential royal nature. There is a regal core lying dormant within you and to activate it perform an act of giving or kindness—for that is the essence of royalty.



**Rabbi Yisroel Roll**

The essence of royalty or kingship is that the monarch “provides” for and gives to his or her subjects. G-d, as King, provides us with everything—eyesight, food, oxygen and brainpower, with which we can journey through life. That is why God is called the “King of Kings”. He is the Ultimate Provider – of life itself. In return, we are invited to feel and express gratitude to God.

Strengthening your regal essence empowers you to take control of your life. When you tap into the energy and take responsibility for your actions, there is no need to blame others.

When you’re feeling down, performing an act of kindness is one of the most concrete ways to feel a sense of empowerment. Get out of the house and visit someone who is less fortunate than you, deliver a meal to an elderly person or volunteer at the local hospital. Make a phone call to a relative who is shut in or ill. By actualizing your regal giving nature you can strengthen your self-respect and feel positive about yourself.

*Reprinted from the current website of aish.com*