



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 19 | Eikev | Sichah 1

Heads and Heels

Translated by Rabbi Mendel Rapoport
Edited by Rabbi Eliezer Robbins and Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger

A note on the translation: Rounded parentheses and square brackets reflect their use in the original *sichah*; squiggly parentheses are interpolations of the translator or editor. The footnotes in squiggly parentheses are those of the translators or editors, and do not correspond to the footnotes in the original. Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation, while at the same time maintaining readability. The translation, however, carries no official authority. As in all translations, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists. **Your feedback is needed — please send all comments to: info@projectlikkuteisichos.org**

1.

TRAMPLING MITZVOS

On the verse,¹ “It shall come to pass, if {עקב} you heed...,”² Rashi explains: “If ‘you heed’ the minor *mitzvos* that a person tramples with his heels {בעקביו}.” The source of this explanation is *Midrash Tanchuma*,³ albeit with different wording: “Minor *mitzvos* that people don’t notice; rather, they cast them under their heels.”

We must clarify: According to Rashi’s explanation “that a person **tramples** with his heels” — a person “tramples” over the *mitzvos* (he belittles them) — we understand how this is implied by the word “heel,” for “trampling” is done with the “heel.” The explanation of the *Midrash Tanchuma*, “they cast them under their heels,” does not fit (according to the simple understanding): What is the connection between **casting off** the *mitzvos* — meaning, not fulfilling them — and “under their heels?” When a person does not fulfill “minor *mitzvos*,” he throws away the *mitzvos* entirely (and not just “under their heels”)!

2.

KING DAVID’S CONCERN

The *Midrash* says later that this {attitude about “minor *mitzvos*”} is epitomized by King David’s statement,⁴ “Why am I afraid in times of trouble? {Because} the sins I trod upon {עקביו} surround me.” David says that he did not fear “the major *mitzvos* in the Torah,” but rather, “the minor *mitzvos* — perhaps I transgressed one of them; did I fulfill it? Or perhaps I

¹ *Devarim* 7:12.

² {“*Eikev* — עקב” denotes a *heel*; in our verse, it means “if” or “as a result of,” as in the English idiom, “on the heels of.” Normally, “if” is translated as “*im* — אם” in Hebrew. Rashi’s remarks here are based on the unusual usage in our verse.}

³ *Tanchuma*, “*Eikev*,” beg.

⁴ *Tehillim* 49:6.

neglected a *mitzvah* because it was ‘minor’; {although} You said, ‘Be as careful with a minor *mitzvah* as with a major *mitzvah*.’”⁵

This *Midrash* is not straight-forward: Surely, King David fulfilled all of the *mitzvos*, including the “minor *mitzvos*.” As the *Midrash* says **subsequently** and as a {thematic} **continuation** of this teaching, when King David says,⁶ “Also, when Your servant was careful with them, for **in observing them there is great reward**,” he refers to the “minor *mitzvos*.” (As the *Midrash* continues, “**great reward**” alludes to the verse,⁷ “How abundant is Your goodness that You have stored away...,” which refers to “the reward for observing the ‘minor *mitzvos*.”) Since King David **knows** that “Your servant {David} is careful with them {minor *mitzvos*},” why does he say that he fears {the consequences of not properly observing} the minor *mitzvos*?

3.

FOLLOWING AN ORDER

The explanation:

The *Midrash* is not discussing a person who thinks that it is unnecessary to be careful with the observance of “minor *mitzvos*,” G-d forbid (and certainly not a person who belittles *mitzvos* — who “tramples” them). Here, the *Midrash* addresses a person who acknowledges that he must fulfill the “minor *mitzvos*,” and makes an effort to do so. He only “casts them under his heel” — he procrastinates — effectively relegating their importance beneath “his heel” {as will be explained}.

He argues that he should first ensure that “the head” {*mitzvos*} — the most major *mitzvos* — are fulfilled appropriately. Then he will address matters that are “close” to “the head” — *mitzvos* that are close to “the head”

⁵{*Tanchuma*, “*Eikev*,” sec. 1.}

⁶ *Tehillim* 19:12.

⁷ *Tehillim* 31:20.

in seriousness. Lastly, he will think about the “heel” *mitzvos* and less pressing issues: beautifying *mitzvos*, going beyond the letter of the law, and the like.

He contends: A person cannot begin with the “heel”; he must advance **systematically**. According to the priorities, a person must begin with the necessities. As long as he has not finished fulfilling these completely, he will not think about assuming other commitments, particularly those that involve going beyond the letter of the law, such as pious conduct.

When we approach a Jew and demand that he has *ahavas yisrael*,⁸ that he should love (even) a Jew from whom he has never received a favor, or a Jew whom he has never even seen before, he might complain. Why are we demanding **such** a high level of *ahavas yisrael* from him, seeing that he does not behave appropriately in much more basic areas? To drive home his point, he might say that occasionally he has faltered in fulfilling the commandment, “You shall love... **as yourself**,” even for a Jew who he knows and from whom he has received favors. Naturally, he should not be suspected, however, of repaying good with evil, G-d forbid!

Similarly, why do we demand that a person be careful about *Chitas*⁹ — learning every day the portion of *Chumash* with Rashi’s commentary, reciting the daily portion of *Tehillim*, divided according to the days of the month, and the daily portion of *Tanya* — while on occasion, he still skips out earlier parts of prayer?

His argument is that true, a person must fulfill all of the above; **he**, however, has not reached this level yet — *he* must progress systematically. He should first spend a period of time (thirty days¹⁰ — to accustom himself) in observing the primary obligations stated in *Shulchan Aruch*, such as reciting {the prayers} (that the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah*¹¹ instituted). And **afterward** — for a similar time period — he can take on additional

⁸ {The *mitzvah* to love every Jew as oneself.}

⁹ {Daily study instituted by the Rebbe, consisting of a daily portion of *Chumash*, *Tehillim* and *Tanya*.}

¹⁰ See *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 114, par. 8; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, sec. 114, par. 10.

¹¹ {The Men of the Great Assembly.}

commitments as codified in the *Rema*¹² and other *Achronim*.¹³ Afterward, he will start to go beyond the letter of the law, which is a component of pious conduct.

He is not exempting himself from anything, Heaven forbid; however, {he claims that} everything must be done in an orderly fashion.

Once, we spoke with a person regarding *ahavas yisrael*, to practice this precept in a manner that is “beyond the letter of the law,” etc. But he claims such conduct is not systematic. To support his argument, he has prepared a parable:¹⁴ A person ventures out into the street without shoes, without a shirt, etc., but around his neck, he is sporting a necktie....

4.

FAITH AND *KABBALAS OL*

Although logically — even using “holy” logic — such an argument carries weight, in truth, a most significant principle of *avodah* is that it is based on faith and *kabbalas ol*¹⁵ rather than on logical calculation. From a perspective of faith and *kabbalas ol*, a person must (not just fulfil, but also) be **careful** in fulfilling a “minor” *mitzvah* as a “major” one, and when doing so, also he should also exercise the **care** with the same degree of enthusiasm.

The point of all *mitzvos* — the word *mitzvah* connotes “connection and bond” — is that by performing *mitzvos*, a person connects with Hashem — the essence and being of the *Ein Sof*; {the potential for} this connection applies to all *mitzvos* equally. There is no difference between the “minor” or “major” *mitzvos*, the “head” or the “heel.” In this regard, the ranking of *mitzvos* is immaterial — whether a particular *mitzvah* was instituted by the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* or by a seasoned scholar from

¹² {Rabbi Moshe Isserles 1530-1572. He wrote glosses on the *Shulchan Aruch*.}

¹³ {Leading Rabbis from the 1600s until the present day.}

¹⁴ Cf. *Sotah* 8b.

¹⁵ {Accepting the yoke of Heaven.}

among the later *Achronim* — because he knows that this *mitzvah* connects him to Hashem — the essence and being of the *Ein Sof*.

However, a person’s evil inclination is a “professional craftsman”¹⁶ — as the Previous Rebbe referred to it: the wily one — he devises logically constructed arguments about {the need for progression in} “order”; he offers befitting analogies, etc., to lure a person to accept his arguments.

A person must recognize that this counsel comes from his evil inclination. Acceptance of Torah and Judaism is conditional upon placing the declaration “we will do” **before** the declaration “we will understand” — “you accorded precedence to your mouths over your ears,”¹⁷ contrary to convention. Moreover, the prophet declares: “Who is as blind as My servant...?”¹⁸ They say that “**My servant**” is blind. When a person maintains that Hashem must be served in the **way** of a **servant** who serves his master, not with his mind but rather with faith and *kabbalas ol*, some people allege that he is behaving like a blind person. For logically, they assert, in serving Hashem, the order must begin with intellect, and then afterward... have a look: If the “mind” first probes and analyzes a matter intellectually, and it logically concludes that “intellect” is not enough, then resort to faith. But — to **begin** with faith?!

5.

CONFUSING CHILDREN

The Previous Rebbe related that when his children were young, a teacher was hired for them. This teacher {it turned out} was of the opinion that children do not need to be taught astonishing parts of Judaism — about miracles, which are suprarational; or wondrous events, which defy human understanding. He argued that these anecdotes were meant for adults who adequately understand logical parts {of Torah}; so to them, we

¹⁶ See *Shabbos* 105b.

¹⁷ *Shabbos* 88a. {When accepting the Torah at Sinai, the Jewish people declared, “We will do and we will understand,” committing *verbally* to fulfill the Torah before comprehending it *rationally*.}

¹⁸ *Yeshayahu* 42:19.

can {afterward} relate miraculous anecdotes. However, these anecdotes confuse children; we must only teach them the rational aspects of Judaism. When the Rebbe (Rashab)¹⁹ became aware of this teacher's views, the Rebbe dismissed him immediately .

We must **begin** specifically with faith and *kabbalas ol* and not with intellect; even matters that can be rationalized must be accepted with *kabbalas ol*. The same applies to education: We must relate to children miraculous anecdotes that are unfathomable, for doing so implants children with faith. The objections that this conduct is not sensible, or that “why must we begin with anecdotes that confuse them?” and so forth, are prompted by the evil inclination, the *old and foolish king*.²⁰

6.

A LESSON FROM KING DAVID

In light of the above, we also understand King David's statement, “Why am I afraid in times of trouble? {Because} the sins I trod upon surround me” — he was afraid of “the sins I trod upon”:

King David was worried (not that he was, Heaven forbid, lax in the “minor” *mitzvos* — he knew that “Your servant is careful with them” (as discussed above in section two). Rather, he was worried) that he did not have the **same degree** of zeal and care for the “minor” *mitzvos* as he had for the “major” ones. He fulfilled all of the *mitzvos*, doing so scrupulously, but he was concerned that perhaps his evaluation and knowledge {of the different classes of *mitzvos*,} that **this** is a “head” *mitzvah* and that is a “heel” *mitzvah* affected his conscientiousness and beautification of *mitzvos*; that he would not **race** to perform a “minor” *mitzvah* as **scrupulously** as a “major” one. Therefore he declared, “perhaps I neglected it” (because he did not fulfill the *mitzvah* appropriately). That is why he declared, “Why am I afraid in times of trouble? {Because} the sins I trod upon surround me.”

¹⁹ {Rabbi Sholom Dovber of Lubavitch. The fifth Rebbe of Chabad, father of the Previous Rebbe.}

²⁰ *Koheles* 4:13; *Koheles Rabbah*, ad loc.

“Times of trouble” refers to a period when things run according to nature, when the Jewish people are likened to one sheep among seventy wolves.²¹ Also issues of livelihood (as the Rebbeim expressed it) are as manna,²² something supernatural. Because of the current economic hardships,²³ and particularly in times of exile, (complete) livelihood comes from {unpredictable and unexpected sources, from} beyond nature.

When a Jew makes calculations regarding the Torah, which is divine, making distinctions between “head” and “heel” *mitzvos*, and he conducts himself according to this calculation and conception, in a measured and constrained way, then Hashem conducts Himself in a similar fashion. He relates with this individual also in a measured and constrained manner. This leads, Heaven forbid, to “times of trouble.”

When a person does not deport himself according to the above calculations, and what matters only is connecting with Hashem — the essence and being of the *Ein Sof* — automatically the person exhibits the same passion associated with the self-sacrifice and the subservience of a servant and child of Hashem, whether the person performs a “head” *mitzvah* or a “heel” *mitzvah*. Of vital importance is that the *mitzvah* connects him with Hashem. Then, Hashem also relates with the person in the same way {beyond nature} from Above.

Then, too, the person has no need to harbor any fear whatsoever, since he is bound with Hashem, Who controls and rules over everything, including, of course, the conduct of nature. So “great is the Shepherd” who watches over the {one} sheep {among the seventy wolves}.²⁴ Hashem shepherds him, “In green pastures, He makes me lie down ; He leads me to water in places of repose,”²⁵ with abundant children, life and livelihood to each individual.

²¹ *Tanchuma*, “*Toldos*,” ch. 5; *Esther Rabbah*, ch. 10, par. 11; *Pesikta Rabbasai*, ch. 9.

²² {The miraculous, “heavenly” food that the Jews ate in the desert.}

²³ {This talk was delivered in 1951.}

²⁴ *Tanchumah* and *Esther Rabbah*, loc. cit.

²⁵ *Tehillim* 23:2.

Then the condition in our *parshah*, “It shall come to pass, if you heed” is fulfilled: “It shall come to pass” — an expression of joy; “if {עקב} — you heed,” i.e., heed the “heel” {עקב} *mitzvos* just like the “head” *mitzvos*, then, “Hashem your L-rd will safeguard the covenant...,”²⁶ and all of the goodness will be drawn down. As the verse describes — “He will love you, He will bless you, and He will multiply you... you will be the most blessed of all the peoples....”²⁷

And very soon {may this transpire}, “on the land that He swore to your forefathers to give to you.”²⁸

— From a talk delivered on *parshas Eikev*, 5711 (1951)

²⁶ *Devarim* 7:12.

²⁷ *Devarim* 7:13, 14.

²⁸ *Devarim* 7:13.