

Parshat Ekev

To love and to revere As we reach the end of *Moshe Rabbeinu's* rebuke this week, we can take an overview of the first *parashiyot* in *Sefer Devarim*, identifying themes that stand out. One clear example is loving and revering Hashem, which occurs numerous times in these *parashiyot*. The idea of people loving and revering Hashem appears throughout the Torah: for example, Avraham is described as a *y'rei elokim* ("reverer of G-d", *Bereishit* 22:12), while the phrase *l'ohavai ul'shomrei mitzvotai* ("to My lovers and those who guard/observe My commandments") appears in the *Aseret hadibrot* (*Shemot* 20:6). On the other hand, the explicit *mitzvot* of loving and revering Hashem appear in our *parashiot*,¹ and the concepts are reinforced throughout the rest of *Sefer Devarim*. (They are mentioned at least 13 times in these two *parashiyot* and another nine times through the rest of *Devarim*. They rarely appear elsewhere in the Torah.)

It can be argued that our *parasha* also makes clear that this is a central concept in Torah, or even *the* central concept. After another historical rebuke from Moshe (9:1–10:11), he informs us: "And now, Israel, what does Hashem your G-d ask of you? Only to revere Hashem your G-d, to go in all of His ways and to love Him and to serve Hashem your G-d with all your heart and all your soul, to guard/observe the mitzvot of Hashem and His statutes which I am commanding you today, for your good" (10:12–13)

The use of "only" (*ki im*) suggests that what follows should be a single, easy thing to do. It may remind us of a similar exhortation in *Micha*: "He has told you, man, what is good, and what Hashem seeks from you, only (*ki im*) to do justice and loving-kindness and to walk modestly with your G-d" (6:8). Again, this is neither a single demand nor is it in the slightest bit easy. The *gemara* (*Brachot* 33b) asks about the supposed smallness of Moshe's demand. Its answer is both simple and troubling: "For Moshe, *yir'at shamayim* (reverence of Heaven) is a small thing." But what about for us? Could Moshe really have expected *bnei yisrael* to reach his lofty heights? The Ramban reads the text slightly differently. He connects the question "What does Hashem ask of you?" to "for your good": everything that He

¹ While the phrase *v'yareita mei'elokecha*, "and you shall fear your G-d", appears twice in *Kedoshim* and three times in *Behar*, there it is a warning to the would-be sinner that Hashem is "watching" (see Rashi on *Vayikra* 19:15) rather than being a *mitzva* in itself. Notable in this context is that the *Sefer haChinuch* lists the *mitzva* of revering Hashem in our *parasha*, and not for these earlier occurrences.

asks is only for *your* benefit, not His. In other words, he connects *ki im* ("only") to "for your good", rather than reading "only" as a description of the demands themselves. This does resolve our question here: the demands are neither easy nor is there only one of them, but *ki im* does not imply that they should be. This reading also helps us to understand the quote from *Micha*: the desire is for the good of man, not for the benefit of Hashem. Nonetheless, we are still left with the difficulty that this resolution does not address the simple reading of our verses as understood by the *gemara*.

A different approach is taken by the *Netziv*. He also deals with the issue that *Moshe Rabbeinu* could have given a directive to the whole people which was impossible for them to fulfil, and that this directive has so many parts. In addition to the concern of the *gemara*, the *Netziv* also observes that love of Hashem is achieved through either learning Torah or through the Temple service, which is not achievable by the whole people. He further notes that there is an apparent inconsistency in the use of "and" in the text: there seem to be four separate sections of the instructions which are not connected by "and": "Only to revere Hashem .../ to go in all .../ to guard .../ for your good." The resolution that he proposes is that Moshe is addressing the whole people, but that each part of the exhortation is focused on a different group (where the groups are those identified at the beginning of *Nitzavim*):

- "(only to) revere Hashem ..." – this is addressed to the leaders of the people;
- "(only to) go in all His ways ..." – this is addressed to the elders (the experts in Torah);
- "(only to) guard/observe the *mitzvot* ..." – this is addressed to the multitude of the people;
- "(only to do) for your good" – this is addressed to those with fewer *mitzvot*, namely women, children and slaves, as an instruction to work for the good of the people.

This approach also resolves the challenging *gemara*, though it may seem strange, that only the leaders of the people are being exhorted to revere Hashem. However, we must remember that these verses only describe one key thing that each group is being asked. For these *mitzvot* apply to us all: "Congregate for Me the people so that I may let them hear My words, so that they will learn to revere Me all of the days they are living on the ground, and they will teach their children" (4:10).