

Torah Study at Temple Beth Sholom, Saturday, August 24, 2019 [Revised]

Eikev, Deut: 7:12-11:25 (Mike Rubin) [Jewish Study Bible, p. 383, Women's Commentary, p. 1089; Old Plaut, p. 1379; New Plaut, p. ___]

Background on Eikev: End of Second discourse of Moses (2d discourse goes from Deut. 4:44-11:25). Includes the 2d portion of the SHEMA prayer (Deut 11:18-21.) Explains that the 40 years in the wilderness was to “test you” and the gift of manna to eat after forcing hunger upon you to teach you that “man does not live on bread alone”, but man may live on anything that the Lord decrees.” (Deut 8:2-6.) Explains that you will possess the land not because of your merit but because of the wickedness of the current inhabitants and because of the virtue of your ancestors (Deut 9:4-5.) Recites that it was only through Moses intervention that they were saved from God's wrath after the Golden Calf fiasco (Deut 9:8-29.) Poses and answers the following question which shall be the focus of our discussion:

QUESTION: What does God demand (require) of us? [Deut. 10:12-13.]

- 1) Words penned by Rabbi Heschel in 1958. “The Bible is an answer to the question, What does God require of Man? But to modern man, this question is surpassed by another one, namely, What does man demand of God... Absorbed in the struggle for emancipation of the individual we have concentrated our attention upon the idea of human rights and overlooked the importance of human obligations.”
- 2) Deut. 8:1: “You shall faithfully observe all the Instruction that I enjoin upon you today, that you may thrive and increase and be able to possess the land that the LORD promised on oath to your fathers.”
- 3) Deut. 11:8: “Keep, therefore, all the Instruction that I enjoin upon you today ... that you may long endure ...”
- 4) Deut. 11:18-21: “Therefore impress these My words upon your very heart: bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead, and teach them to your children –reciting them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up, and inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates –to the end that you and your children may endure...”
- 5) Deut. 10:12-13: “**And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God demand of you?** Only this: to revere the Lord your God, to walk only in His paths, to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, keeping the Lord's commandments and laws, which I enjoin upon you today, for your good.” Deut: 10:19: “You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”
- 6) Micah 6:7-9:
 - a) Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with myriads of streams of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
The fruit of my body for my sins?
⁸ It hath been told thee, O Man, what is good.
And what the LORD doth require of thee:
Only to do justly, and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with thy God,
then will your name achieve wisdom.

7) Isaiah 1:11-18:

The multitude of your sacrifices—

what are they to me?” says the LORD.

“I have more than enough of burnt offerings,

of rams and the fat of fattened animals;

I have no pleasure

in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

¹² When you come to appear before me,

who has asked this of you,

this trampling of my courts?

Stop bringing meaningless offerings!

Your incense is detestable to me.

New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—

I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.

¹⁴ Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals

I hate with all my being.

They have become a burden to me;

I am weary of bearing them.

¹⁵ When you spread out your hands in prayer,

I hide my eyes from you;

even when you offer many prayers,

I am not listening.

Your hands are full of blood!

¹⁶ Wash and make yourselves clean.

Take your evil deeds out of my sight;

stop doing wrong.

¹⁷ **Learn to do right; seek justice.**

Defend the oppressed.^[a]

Take up the cause of the fatherless;

plead the case of the widow.

8) Deuteronomy 4:1-2: “And now, O israel, give heed to the laws and rules that I am instructing you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the LORD,

the God of your fathers, is giving you. You shall not add anything to what I command you or take anything away from it, but keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I enjoin upon you.”

- 9) Deuteronomy 34:10-12: “Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses – whom the LORD singled out, face to face, for the various signs and portents that the LORD sent him to display in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his courtiers and his whole country, and for all the great might and awesome power that Moses displayed before all Israel.
- 10) **Oven of Akhnai** – Story found in Bava Metzia 59a-b (Talmud) which is set around the early 2nd century CE. [Excerpted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Oven_of_Akhnai] This Talmudic portion is profoundly in line with the end of prophecy. In the story, a new type of oven is brought before the Sanhedrin and the rabbis debate whether or not this oven is susceptible to ritual impurity. Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurcanus argues that the oven is ritually pure while the other rabbis, including the nasi Rabban Gamaliel, argue that the oven is impure. When none of Rabbi Eliezer's arguments convince his colleagues, he cries out, "If the halakha is in accordance with my opinion, this carob tree will prove it." At this point, the carob tree leaps from the ground and moves far away. The other rabbis explain that a carob tree offers no proof in a debate over law. Rabbi Eliezer cries out, "If the halakha is in accordance with my opinion, the stream will prove it." The stream begins to flow backwards, but again the other rabbis point out that one does not cite a stream as proof in matters of law. Rabbi Eliezer cries out, "If the halakha is in accordance with my opinion, the walls of the study hall will prove it." The walls of the study hall begin to fall, but are then scolded by Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah who reprimands the walls for interfering in a debate among scholars. Out of respect for Rabbi Joshua, they do not continue to fall, but out of respect for Rabbi Eliezer, they do not return to their original places.

In frustration, Rabbi Eliezer finally cries out, "If the halakha is in accordance with my opinion, Heaven will prove it." From Heaven a voice is heard, saying, "Why are you differing with Rabbi Eliezer, as the halakha is in accordance with his opinion in every place that he expresses an opinion?" Rabbi Joshua responds, "It [the Torah] is not in heaven" (Deuteronomy 30:12). He responds in this way because the Torah, which was given by God to mankind at Sinai, specifically instructs those who follow it that they are to look to the received Torah as their source and guide. The Torah says, "It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe" (Deuteronomy 30:12-14).

Rabbi Joshua's response then expresses the view that the work of law is a work of human activity, and that the Torah itself supports this legal theory. The Torah is not a document of mystery which must have its innate meaning revealed by a minority, but it is instead a document from which law must be created through the human activity of debate and consensus. Rabbinic literature was capable of recognizing differing opinions as having a degree of legitimacy (Yer. Ber. 3b), yet the community remains united and the ruling which is ultimately followed comes through proper jurisprudence. As such, Rabbi Eliezer's

miraculous appeals represent a differing legal theory and were outside of proper jurisprudence which meant that they would not be followed. Instead the Jewish community followed the ruling of the majority in this issue and in others. The Talmud asks how God responded to this incident. We are told that upon hearing Rabbi Joshua's response, **God smiled and stated, "My children have triumphed over Me; My children have triumphed over Me."**

- 10) Some Traditional Rabbinic Views on what the Lord demands of us:
 - a) The BAAL SHEM TOV: "Humility is what the Lord requires."
 - b) Talmud (Ber. 33b): "God asks only for reverence, from which we learn that everything is in the power of heaven except man's reverence for God" (i.e., the "only" must be supplied by man.
 - c) Hillel: Describing the essence of Judaism while standing on one leg: "Do not unto others as you would not have them do unto you."
- 11) Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, from "To Heal a Fractured World":

"Judaism contains mysteries, but its ultimate purpose is not mysterious at all. It is to honour the image of God in other people, and thus turn the world into a home for the divine presence." So, does God demand that we honour the image of God in other people and act to turn the world into a home fit for the divine presence?

- 12) Elie Wiesel: "God made Man because He loves stories.", Prologue from "The Gates of the Forest." So does God demand that we tell stories or at least that we be players in the stories God witnesses? [Are we here to entertain God?]
- 13) New Testament
'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments' " (Matthew 22:35-40).
- 14) Do prayer and Mitzvot "affect" God?
 - a) Kabbalah: We live in a microcosm within God's macrocosm and everything we do within the microcosm impacts the Divine macrocosm. The performance of Mitzvot by Jews have a profound positive impact upon the Divine world and is essential to restore harmony and to repair the flaws in the Divine World.
 - b) Heschel: God in Search of Man. God needs man.
- 15) Relationship (Connection). Without creation, God is solitary, without relationship. Man serves God's need for relationship. God requires man to engage with (and even wrestle with) the Divine. Nietzsche asserts that man kills God by denying God (Science and progress accompanying the Age of Enlightenment displaced God).
 - a) "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?" — *Nietzsche, The Gay Science, Section 125,*

16) The fundamental premise of God's name is that God is evolving ("I will be, what I will be). The Hebrew Bible begins with God's act of creation, particularly the creation of life. God needs humans (including Jews) to assist in God's evolution. God's fundamental requirement on us is that we live, be creative, and evolve, all of which is in imitation of God and all of which promotes God's living (relationship maybe required for active living), God's creativity, and God's evolution. The test of whether scripture reflects Divine mandate is whether that scripture helps us live, be creative and evolve as a people (not just as individuals – hence we must embrace the stranger as well as love ourselves). That is the meaning of being in harmony with God. God demands that we act so that the group will live (and thrive), will be creative and will evolve. We must solve the riddle of how this is best accomplished. God has offered us some guidance in the Torah (embrace the stranger, honor the sabbath, take care of the widows, orphans. and others who cannot properly care for themselves).