



The Commandments One Tramples with His Heels
Parshas Ekev

The music was playing loud, as many danced around the Bar Mitzvah boy, my grandson, during the celebration held in his honor last Saturday night at Migdal Ohr.

No one noticed the uninvited guests who gazed at the boys dancing with much passion. They looked like an Ultra-Orthodox couple with their son, and were accompanied by another Ultra-Orthodox Jew, a resident of the nearby town of Natzrat Elite.

I invited them to come and dance. I was then introduced to them. It turns out they were a couple from Germany who learned of their Judaism on their own. They lived without a supportive community for many years, clinging to the Mitzvoth despite the lack of religious services. In broken Yiddish and German I learned that they have been ordering food online for the past five years. They didn't even have a Chabad House to turn to; their dedication was rare.

They were visiting Israel for their son's Bar Mitzvah, staying in Natzrat. They were disappointed to discover that there was no synagogue in the vicinity. They walked a long distance until they located a Shul, and were invited by one of the congregants to spend the Shabbos with him. He learned of their unique story and their sacrifice to maintain the Jewish commandments. They spent the entire Shabbos discussing Judaism and their heritage.

As the Shabbos ended he invited them to visit Migdal Ha'Emek. They happened upon my grandson's celebration, were very moved by the scenes and desired to join the joyful occasion.

I gathered the boys to share with them this exceptional story. "We have merited celebrating a double Bar Mitzvah celebration." We sat the couple son's at the head of the table and asked him to say a few words. He closed his eyes and recited the Shema: "Hear, O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One." The proud parents dried their eyes and sat down to continue the celebration. The happiness apparent in their eyes was indescribable, as they experienced spiritual heights they could not have dreamt of.

We gave the new Bar Mitzvah boy a gift: a pair of Tefillin. He kissed them and vowed to don them every day. I requested from the parents that they grant me something: please send your son to learn at Migdal Ohr. They promised they would.

Our weekly parsha commence with the verse: "And it will be¹, because you will heed these ordinances and keep them and perform, that the Lord, your God, will keep for you the

covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers."² Our Sages explain: "If you will heed the minor commandments which one usually tramples with his heels; which a person treats as being of minor importance, He will keep His promise to you."

Rabbeinu Bachyei writes in his commentary on the Torah: "Our Sages warn us to respect the minor commandments which one usually tramples with his heels, for some do not heed the minor commandments." He writes the punishment for such conduct surrounds the person until the day of judgment.

What does it mean when a person 'tramples with his heels' some of the commandments? Does he fulfill them or not? If he fulfills them, why should I care about his attitude?

I think that there are times when a person chances to come upon a Mitzvah but does not notice it. If he pays attention he can accumulate more Mitzvos that he has fulfilled. It is like someone who is walking to Shul while praying. He merits much by doing so, but if he notices the charity collector and gives Tzadaka then he merits much more.

One is surrounded by Mitzvos his entire life. He is not always obligated to fulfill them all, but he merits much if he does. If we just try, look and pay attention we can earn many more mitzvos.

The classic case is expressing positive sentiments towards someone. Our Sages teach us that shining one's face for someone is much more powerful than any other Mitzvah. Smiles, an expression of understanding, of sympathy are tools that every person has, and with them he can acquire eternity.

I am just thinking; what if that man had not invited the couple warmly, who knows how things would end up? Who knows how they would continue after not receiving a warm welcome in Israel?

The following Sunday I shared this most impressive story with my community in Shul. "Where exactly do they live?" someone asked me. I told him the name of the town and he looked dismayed: "That's very close to us, right near Dresden." It turn out he was the Chabad emissary in that area, and happened to be on vacation in Israel.

"Rabbi Grossman, they will be OK, from now on they are in good hands," he promised. The circle was finally closed; the couple will receive religious support back home and their son, the pride of his parents, will learn at Migdal Ohr.

¹ In Hebrew: עָקַב. The word can also mean heel of the foot and from this understanding of the word is the Sages interpretation derived.

² Dvarim 12:7.