

# EIKEV 5781: OUR CONDITIONAL COVENANT

RABBI JULIANA S. KAROL

JULY 31, 2021 | 22 AV 5781

*Eikev* (because) has the same meaning as *eikev* (reward). It means the reward which will be given at the end. The meaning of *who keeps covenant* in v. 9 (“Know, therefore, that only Adonai your God is God, the steadfast God who keeps [God’s] covenant faithfully to the thousandth generation of those who love [God] and keep [God’s] commandments,” is that God kept the covenant with Abraham. If you will be among those that love God, then God will continue to keep the covenant. In other words, the meaning of “Adonai your God shall keep with you the covenant” in our verse is, God will continue to keep the covenant if you love God. If you will be among those who love God, then God will love you, and bless you, and multiply you (v. 13). This is the meaning of the covenant made on oath (v. 12). **Abraham Ibn Ezra, 12th c. Spain**

VERSE 12 PRESENTS GOD’S FAITHFULNESS TO THE COVENANT AS A CONDITIONAL RESPONSE TO THE PEOPLE’S OBEDIENCE. GOD’S KINDNESS MANIFESTS ITSELF IN THE BLESSINGS ELABORATED ON IN THIS SECTION, WHICH CONCERN THE FERTILITY OF PEOPLE, AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS, AND ANIMALS, AS WELL AS POLITICAL DOMINANCE OVER THE OTHER PEOPLES. *FAITHFULLY - CHESED*.

IN THIS VERSE, *CHESED* AND *BRIT* FORM A HENDIADYS (A COMPOUND EXPRESSION FOR ONE IDEA), THUS

DEMONSTRATING THAT GOD SHOWS GOD’S KINDNESS THROUGH GOD’S FAITHFULNESS TO THE COVENANT WITH THE ANCESTORS AND TO THE SINAI COVENANT. THE WORD *CHESED*, WHEN USED FOR HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS, CONNOTES AN EXCEPTIONAL GOOD DEED DONE BY ONE TOWARD ANOTHER, USUALLY WITH THE EXPLICIT EXPECTATION OF AN EQUIVALENT ACT IN RETURN. GOD’S DEEDS OF *CHESED* INCLUDED ACTS OF STRENGTH, VICTORY, SALVATION, JUSTICE, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND MERCY. IN ALL THESE WAYS, IN FULFILLMENT OF THE COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP, GOD INTERVENES ON BEHALF OF INDIVIDUALS AND OF THE PEOPLE ISRAEL, SHOWING GOD’S LOYALTY AND LOVING-KINDNESS.

**DALIT ROM-SHILONI, 21ST C. ISRAEL**

וְהָיָה עֵקֶב תִּשְׁמָעוּן אֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים הָאֵלֶּה וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם וְעָשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְשָׁמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ לְךָ אֶת-הַבְּרִית וְאֶת-הַחֹדֶד אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם:

IF YOU DO OBEY THESE RULES AND OBSERVE THEM CAREFULLY, ADONAI YOUR GOD WILL MAINTAIN FAITHFULLY FOR YOU THE COVENANT THAT [GOD] MADE ON OATH WITH YOUR ANCESTORS.

**DEUTERONOMY 7:12**

*Eikev* means, “as a consequence of,” or, simply, “if.” It’s as though God is setting up a bargain: if you do what I say, then ...” We might be able to think of the commandments as optional with this “if.” Rashi explains, “even the lesser commandments which a person treads on with his heels [*akeiv*] you will heed, then God will keep God’s promise to you.” He suggests that we use the word *eikev* with the similar-sounding word *akeiv* in mind. If we see only the big picture, if we don’t value even the trivial, bothersome things we find nipping at our heels, we are in danger of misunderstanding God’s will. If we only focus on the big things, on the mitzvot, we are not fulfilling God’s will... and in return, God will not fulfill God’s promises to us. **Igael**

**Gurin-Malous, 21st c. USA**

**Covenant Sharon Kessler, 21st c. USA**

In the desert where old legends conspire, we are making fresh tracks in the sand, carrying our burden to some resting place.

Above the black crest of rock, an arc of slow fire rises. Morning again. We march forward, a tribe of mute warriors, daughters of a race so lost no legend tells of us.

We too heard voices in the wilderness but we built no tabernacle to contain them.

The sign of the covenant is not incised upon our flesh,

but deep in the one heart of our body the everlasting bush burns and is not consumed.

PARASHAT EIKEV, FOR ME, IS BRUTAL. THE CRUSH OF THE DEUTERONOMIC GOD, THE IF-THEN GOD OF WRATH AND PUNISHMENT, IS OVERBEARING. THE CHOICE THAT GOD OFFERS IN DEUT 7:12 IS NOT A CHOICE. ON THE OTHER HAND: “IF YOU DO FORGET ADONAI YOUR GOD AND FOLLOW OTHER GODS TO SERVE THEM OR BOW DOWN TO THEM, I WARN YOU THIS DAY THAT YOU SHALL CERTAINLY PERISH . . .” (DEUT. 8:19). THE GOD OF EIKEV INFANTILIZES, EXPECTING THAT WE WILL RESPOND TO AN IF-THEN CHOICE, WHICH IS NOT A CHOICE AT ALL BUT RATHER A DISPLAY OF RAW POWER. THE THING IS: HUMAN BEINGS ARE NOT AUTOMATONS. THE IF-THEN, REWARD-OR-PUNISHMENT MODEL IGNORES THE REALITY THAT LIFE IS A PROCESS OF GROWING (GROWING UP, GROWING OLDER, GROWING WISER), AND THAT PERSONAL GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION HINGE, AT TIMES, ON STRAYING FROM GOD’S WORD AND JOURNEY TO UNKNOWN AND FORBIDDEN PLACES. FORTUNATELY, WE ARE GRANTED GLIMPSSES OF OTHER FACES OF GOD IN OTHER PARSHIYOT. THINK OF THE GOD WHOM ABRAHAM ADDRESSES IN THE SODOM AND GOMORRAH EPISODE; OR THE ANGEL OF GOD WITH WHOM JACOB WRESTLES, WHO CHANGES JACOB’S NAME TO ISRAEL; OR MOSES, WHO BEGS GOD NOT TO DESTROY THE PEOPLE FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT OF THE GOLDEN CALF. IN FACT, IT IS MOSES THE NARRATOR SPEAKING TO US IN PARASHAT EIKEV, THE VERY MOSES WHO HAS ARGUED WITH GOD, CHALLENGED GOD, TRIED TO ESCAPE GOD’S SERVICE, WHO ULTIMATELY SPENT HIS LIFE SERVING GOD BUT WAS STILL NOT REWARDED WITH THE PROMISED LAND; IT IS THIS MOSES WHO CLOSES OUT HIS THEOLOGICAL TREATISE WITH THE REWARDING-AND-PUNISHING GOD, A FACT THAT IS PERHAPS BEST UNDERSTOOD IN LIGHT OF WHERE HE IS IN HIS OWN RELIGIOUS JOURNEY, NAVIGATING HIS OWN LIFE’S DISAPPOINTMENTS. THAT HE HAD A RELIGIOUS JOURNEY, THOUGH, THAT HE EXPERIENCED GOD IN DIFFERENT WAYS THROUGHOUT HIS LIFETIME, I THINK IS CRUCIALLY IMPORTANT FOR US AS WE READ THIS PARSHAH AND TRY TO MAKE SENSE OF IT IN OUR OWN LIVES. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN WE NEED A COMMANDING GOD, WHEN WE NEED THE STRUCTURE OF A GOD-WHO-ENFORCES-RULES TO GET US THROUGH A PARTICULARLY WILD STRETCH OF LIFE. THERE ARE OTHER TIMES WHEN WE FEEL REBELLIOUS, WHEN WE KNOW WHAT GOD WOULD EXPECT OF US BUT ALSO HAVE A NEED TO NOT DO THAT, TO STRETCH THE LIMITS OF SELF AND OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE GOD WE BELIEVE IN. **ABIGAIL TREU, 21ST C. USA**