

# **Wake Up and See the Mountain: Thoughts for Parashat Ekev, August 16, 2014**

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By

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My wife and I recently traveled to Seattle where I had the honor of speaking at Congregation Ezra Bessaroth—the congregation in which I was born and raised. It was a special experience for us to re-connect with so many family and friends in that very warm community.

One of the highlights of the flight to Seattle is viewing the majestic Mount Rainier as the plane approaches the city. The snow covered mountain is one of the awe-inspiring phenomena of nature. From the plane, we could not only see Mount Rainier but also could look southward to view Mount Saint Helens and Mount Hood. What a tremendous experience! Oh Lord, how glorious are Your works!

As we were in rapture over the amazing scenery, the young lady sitting next to my wife was busy on her laptop computer. She didn't for one moment look out the window at Mount Rainier or the Cascade mountain range. I thought that she must have been doing some exceedingly important work that simply had to be completed before she landed in Seattle. But my wife noticed that our fellow passenger was doing online shopping for pants and shoes!

This passenger passed up one of the most significant and beautiful experiences in order to browse websites that she could have visited at any other time. I'm not sure if she found the pants or shoes that she was looking for; but I do know that she missed one of the greatest natural scenes in the world. And even sadder, she obviously did not even realize what she had missed!

In our computer age, people sometimes (often!) get so lost in technology that they lose contact with the real world. They are so engrossed in their computers, smart phones, ipods etc., that they tend to live in a cyber world instead of the real world. They ignore the people right in front of them because they are texting someone far away. They tune out real people and direct experiences, losing themselves in a technological cloud. They shop online instead of experiencing the grandeur of Mount Rainier.

This week's Torah portion begins: Vehaya ekev tishme-un et hamishpatim ha-eileh. These words are usually translated: And it shall come to pass that because you hearken to these ordinances...then the Almighty will grant you great blessings.

A Hassidic interpretation translates the words differently, taking the word "ekav" in its literal sense of "footstep:" If you take heed of your footsteps when you fulfill these ordinances....then you will receive Divine blessing. The lesson is: you gain blessing if you pay close attention to where you are going, if you focus on every footstep, if you observe the commandments with clarity and comprehension rather than by dull rote.

The broader lesson for life is: blessing is attained when we live alertly, when each step and each experience is fully appreciated. Instead of living an artificial and humdrum life, we should be awake to the freshness of each moment. We should turn off our technological devices long enough to let us actually think on our own, imagine, dream, explore the wonders of our world, interact directly with our fellow human beings. We should not let our lives slip past us as we fall into cyberspace.

Albert Einstein once remarked: "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."

Those who live as though nothing is a miracle are condemned to miss the most important, exciting and beautiful aspects of life. Those who see the miraculous in everything are the ones who live with intellectual and emotional excitement. They sense God's presence in the world. They wake up and see the mountain!

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This week's Haftarah is drawn from the words of the prophet Isaiah. This is the second of the seven Haftarot of consolation following Tisha B'Av. The Haftarah closes with God's promise to comfort the people of Israel: "For the Lord has comforted Zion; He has comforted all her waste places, and has made her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; Joy and gladness shall be found therein, Thanksgiving, and the voice of melody" (Isaiah 51: 3)

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