

Sweat the Little Stuff

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

The Torah continues, this week, with Moshe's long oration to the Children of Israel before he dies. In it he highlights the issues that he thinks are going to lead to a loss of faith and the danger that they might abandon their faith. Without someone as strong as he was to keep them together and to impose discipline, he feared they would fall apart.

Some of the words he uses are unusual. For example, the *Sedra* is called *Ekev* after its second word. Literally it means a heel, like Jacob holding on to the heel of his brother Esau. Here it means 'consequence,' like one step following another. There are consequences to our actions.

Rashi quotes the Midrash and says it means to suggest that if you can keep the small commandments, the ones we tend to disregard, those we metaphorically crush underfoot, then you will find dealing with the heavier, more demanding commandments much easier.

You might think this counter intuitive. Surely, we take the big ones more seriously. How often do I hear people say that they can accept the big issues, the existence of God, not to murder, but to be kind to people. But they have no time for all the petty small rules of Judaism, restrictions on what to eat, keeping Shabbat. The sad fact is that like any discipline, keeping fit, dieting, treating people with consideration, the small details are important. Getting into a routine that involves little steps, does make the harder stuff easier to cope with. Regularly having to control your ego in small ways helps get you in the routine so that you can control your ego on the big issues!

Moshe was a great psychiatrist as well as being a great leader.