

## A Muse: Ekev 2008

“If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you today, loving the Lord our God and serving Him with all your heart and soul, I will grant he rain for your land in season...” (Deuteronomy 11:13)

This sedra offers us the second paragraph of the Shema; the first paragraph having appeared in Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 5. Apart from the obvious difference between the two paragraphs there appears to be a significant difference in the grammatical structure. The first paragraph is in the singular however the second paragraph is in the plural.

The first paragraph references love of God and indeed the fundamental principal in the first paragraph is “kabbalat ol malkhut shamayim” – “acceptance of the kingdom of heaven” through the love of God. What is love and how it is expressed is a very personal and private matter. Thus, the first paragraph is written in the singular. It speaks to the individual engaging him in the challenge of expressing his/her love of/for God.

Whereas the first paragraph enjoins us to “kabbalat ol malkut shamayim”, the “acceptance of the yoke of heaven”, the second paragraph refers to the “kabbalat ol mitzvoth”, accepting the commandments. The performance of mitzvoth, unlike expressing love of God, is performed within the framework of society, thus the language of the text is expressed in the plural. Whether or not a Jew can live as a Jew fulfilling mitzvoth living an isolated existence, alone, is debatable.

The mitzvoth are given to us so that we can form a more just society. The practice of the mitzvoth is not an end unto themselves but to make us better humans, more sensitive people in the service of God. Thus it is the application of the mitzvoth which become important; not just the practice. It is for this reason that our prophets were so

preoccupied and concerned that while mitzvot may have been practiced, the application of the mitzvot was ignored.