

NATURE IS MIRACULOUS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

One of the major miracles that the Jewish people have experienced over our long and miracle-laden history is the manna that fell from the skies during our sojourn in the desert of Sinai after leaving Egyptian bondage. That miracle is described for us in detail in this week's parsha. What makes this miracle so extraordinary is that it is not a one-shot miracle such as the splitting of the Red Sea or Elijah's confrontation with the false prophets of Baal. This miracle of the manna is a forty year long continuing and ongoing miracle. Because of the nature of this miracle and its repeated frequency - six times a week for forty years - the miracle became a natural event to the Jews, something expected and it lost its aspect of being exceptional, which after all is what makes a miracle a miracle.

When the Jewish people entered the Land of Israel the miracle of the manna ceased. But the salient message and moral teaching of the manna has remained for all time. It is implicit in Moshe's statement to the Jewish people in his valedictory address "For it is not by bread alone that humans live, but rather do they live by the utterances of God's mouth, so to speak." Thus bread baked by humans from flour threshed and processed by humans from grain grown by humans is no less miraculous than is the manna that fell directly from the skies for forty years on behalf of the Jews in the desert of Sinai. In short, Judaism views nature itself as being inherently miraculous, a product of the Divine Will. Manna is therefore not really any more special than is rye bread.

The manna had another number of lessons of life for us. It could not be stored for the next day. Humans are dependent daily on God's grace. Though we all crave security and a sense of an assured tomorrow there really is no sure way to achieve that. When I was a rabbi in Miami Beach, we once had a freezer full of meat that was destined to see us through much of the winter. A hurricane struck, the electric power failed, the freezer defrosted and the meat turned rancid. The only thing certain in life is uncertainty.

The manna did not fall on Shabat. Preparations for Shabat must be made before Shabat. The Talmud taught us that "the one who labored before Shabat will have sustenance on Shabat." This world is before Shabat. The World-to-Come - of the soul and the spirit, the eternal world, is Shabat. This world and our lives are for work and accomplishment. God's sustenance of us is omnipresent but it will not achieve its purpose without human effort and diligence.

And finally the manna taught us that God's grace does not fall evenly on all humans. The Talmud again teaches us that the manna fell at the doorstep of the righteous while others had to travel into

the desert to find and gather it. Some have it easier than others in life. We are not privy to God's Will in these matters and the question of reward and punishment in this world remains forever a vexing problem. But just as the manna was from the hand of God, so to speak, so too are all of the experiences, good or better, in life. Thus the manna lives on in its moral teachings even if we are no longer witness to its actual physical presence in our lives.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com

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