

THE SPIRITUAL EFFECT OF TASTING THE MANNA

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The miracle of the manna that fell from heaven and nurtured millions of people for forty years is one of the focal points of this week's parsha. The obvious reason for the miracle's occurrence is that the Jewish people had to have daily nourishment simply to survive. However the rabbis of the Talmud injected another factor into the miracle of the falling manna.

They stated that "the Torah could only have been granted to those that ate manna daily." Thus the necessity for the manna was directly associated with the granting of the Torah to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai. No manna, no Torah. Why is this so?

Most commentators are of the opinion that only a people freed from the daily concerns of earning a living and feeding a family could devote themselves solely to Torah study and acceptance of the life values that acceptance of the Torah mandates.

The Torah is a demanding discipline. It requires time and effort, concentration and focus to appreciate and understand it. cursory glances and even inspiring sermons will not yield much to those who are unwilling to invest time and effort into its study and analysis. This was certainly true in this first generation of Jewish life, newly freed from Egyptian bondage and lacking heritage, tradition and life mores that would, in later generations, help Jews remain Jewish and appreciate the Torah.

The isolation of the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai coupled with the heavenly provision of daily manna and the miraculous well of Miriam together created a certain think-tank atmosphere. This atmosphere enabled Torah to take root in the hearts and minds of the Jewish people.

In his final oration to the Jewish people, recorded for us in the book of Dvarim, Moshe reviews the story of the manna falling from heaven. But there Moshe places a different emphasis on the matter. He states there that the manna came to teach, "... that humans do not live by bread alone but rather on the utterances of God's mouth,"

In order to appreciate Torah, to truly fathom its depths and understand its values system, one has to accept its Divine origin. Denying that basic premise of Judaism compromises all deeper understanding and analysis of Torah. Thus the manna, the presence of God, so to speak, in the daily life of the Jew allowed the Torah to sink into the depths of the Jewish soul and become part of the matrix of our very DNA.

The Torah could only find a permanent and respected home within those who tasted God's

presence, so to speak, every day within their very beings and bodies. The rabbis also taught us that the manna produced no waste materials within the human body.

When dealing with holiness and holy endeavors there is nothing that goes to waste. No effort is ignored and no thought and attempt is left unrecorded in the heavenly court of judgment. Even good intent is counted meritoriously. Let us feel that we too have tasted the manna.

Shabat shalom,

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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