



Parshas Eikev

For the week ending 23 Av 5758
14 & 15 August 1998

Overview

If *Bnei Yisrael* are careful to observe even those “minor” *mitzvos* that are usually “trampled” underfoot, Moshe promises them that they will be the most blessed of the nations of earth. Moshe tells *Bnei Yisrael* that they will conquer Eretz Canaan little by little, so that the land will not be overrun by wild animals in the hiatus before *Bnei Yisrael* are able to organize and settle the whole land. After again warning *Bnei Yisrael* to burn all carved idols of Canaanite gods, Moshe stresses that the Torah is indivisible and not open to partial observance. Moshe describes the Land of Israel as a land of wheat, barley, grapes, figs, and pomegranates, a land of oil-yielding olives and date-honey. Moshe cautions *Bnei Yisrael* not to become haughty and think that what they will have in *Eretz Yisrael* is a result of their own powers or vigor; rather they must always remember that it was Hashem who gave them wealth and success. Nor did Hashem drive out the Canaanites because of *Bnei Yisrael's* righteousness but rather because of the sins of the Canaanites; for the road from Sinai had been a catalogue of large and small sins and rebellions against Hashem and Moshe. Moshe details the events after Hashem spoke the Ten Commandments at Sinai, culminating in his bringing down the second set of Tablets on Yom Kippur. Aharon's passing is recorded together with the elevation of the Levites to ministers to Hashem. Moshe points out that the 70 souls who went down into Egypt have now become like the stars of the heaven in abundance. After specifying the great virtues of the Land of Israel, Moshe speaks the second paragraph of the Shema, which conceptualizes reward for keeping the *mitzvos* and penalty for not keeping them.

Insights

A FEAST FOR THE EYES

“He afflicted you and let you know hunger, then he fed you the manna which you didn’t know...” (8:3)

One of the most recognizable features of a Jewish home is the lighting of candles in honor of Shabbos. The above verse is the source of this concept.

Ostensibly, it's hard to see the link between the manna, the miraculous food that the Jewish People ate manna in the desert, and the lighting of Shabbos candles. What is the connection?

Man is a relative animal. Our perceptions operate in terms of contrast. We understand what day is because every evening the sky darkens and becomes black. If there were no night, not only would we have no concept of night, *we would also have no concept of day.*

Words delineate. Words separate one thing from another: “It's *this* — not *that*.” If every part of the world was bathed in constant sunlight, we would have no concept of what day is — and no word for it.

When the Children of Israel were in the desert, G-d fed them a miraculous food called *man*. The *man* could taste like any food, and yet *Bnei Yisrael* grew tired of it and complained to Moshe that it was tasteless. How could something that could taste like anything be tasteless?

Our appreciation of food does not derive solely from our taste-buds. The satisfaction of eating comes from seeing the food that we eat. The Talmud teaches us that a blind person is not satisfied by his food because he cannot experience it visually. The visual presentation of food is an art in itself and is an integral part of the satisfaction of eating.

In a sense, the generation of the desert were like blind people, for even though manna could taste like any food, visually it was unchanging. It always looked like

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manna. Gastronomically, the variety was infinite. Visually, it was monotonous.

With this idea we can understand how our sages derive from the above verse the concept of Shabbos candles. Shabbos is given to the Jewish People as a delight and a pleasure. Part of that pleasure are the three meals that we eat during Shabbos. If we were to eat the meal at night in darkness we would not experience the maximum enjoyment from our food. There would thus be a flaw in our Shabbos experience. In order for us to enjoy our food, and consequently our Shabbos, to the maximum, we must be able to see our food for if we cannot see our food it will be as unfulfilling as the manna became to the Children of Israel in the desert.

IMMORTAL FEAR

“You shall not be broken before them, for Hashem, your G-d is among you, a great and awesome G-d.” (7:21)

If a person loves his fellow man and gives him respect, in no way does this detract from his love and respect for Hashem. However, if a person fears mere flesh and blood, this is a sure sign that his feelings of awe for Hashem are less than perfect. If a person is genuinely “God-fearing,” then he fears no man.

SOUL FOOD

“For man does not live on bread alone, rather on all that comes from the mouth of Hashem man lives.” (8:3)

How is it possible for the soul whose very essence is spiritual to be sustained by something as physical as food? The answer is that, in reality, the whole of Creation exists only as a result of the power of Hashem’s original utterance at the time of Creation (as the verse states: “By the word of Hashem, the heavens were created”). It is this same power of Hashem’s word wrapped inside the food which nourishes the soul. When a Jew takes an apple and says a blessing over it, he awakens the latent spiritual power implanted in the fruit at the time of the Creation. That’s real “soul-food”!

STEALING THE WORLD

“And you will eat and be satisfied and you will bless Hashem your God” (8:10)

Rabbi Levi pointed out a seeming contradiction between two verses in *Tehillim* (Psalms): One verse states “The earth and it’s fullness are Hashem’s,” and another verse states “The earth He has given to Mankind.”

Really, replies the Talmud, there is no contradiction: The first verse refers to the situation before a person says a *bracha* (blessing) thanking G-d for the food, while the second verse refers to after the *bracha*. Said Rabbi Chanina “Anyone who takes pleasure from the physical world without first saying a *bracha* is as if he stole from Hashem.”

Haftorah: Isaiah 49:14-51:3

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

No matter how far the Jewish people fall from favor, they can never lose their status as the Chosen People of Hashem. That is the underlying theme of the Parsha and its Haftorah. This is the second of the seven *Parshios* of consolation after Tisha B’Av. This Haftorah is the source of the famous phrase “light unto the nations.” Isaiah tells the Jewish People that despite the terrible tragedies and hardships of exile, he does not despair — he knows that the end of the exile is coming. And so he pleads with his contemporaries and all of their offspring throughout all the generations to remember that they are the children of Avraham and Sarah, and that Hashem will surely comfort them.

Sources:

A Feast For The Eyes - The Chidah in Mayana Shel Torah
Immortal Fear - HaKsav V’HaKabbalah in the name of Maharil Margolios z”l
Soul Food - the Arizal
Stealing The World - Talmud, Tractate Berachos 35a