JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Parsha Eikev

The great swan song of Moshe (Moses) continues in this week's Torah Portion. As a part of his charge to the people, Moshe reviews events that have taken place since the Exodus from Egypt and provides the reader with insight and context to several episodes that took place in the wilderness. In addition to rounding out particular narratives, Moshe explains the nature of the miracles that accompanied the Children of Israel.

"He afflicted you and let you grow hungry, then He fed you the manna that you did not know, nor did your fathers know, in order to make you know that not by bread alone does man live, rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of G-d does man live." (Deuteronomy 8:3) The manna is described earlier in the Torah as something white and thin that tasted like cakes fried in honey. The Sages tell us that it was versatile and could be prepared in different ways. It also came with very specific rules and regulations. Each person could only gather a specific amount - one Omer - per member of that household. They could not leave any over until morning and they would receive double on Friday. It could be consumed for that day, as well as for the Shabbat which would be the following day. In fact, through the introduction of the Manna, they are first introduced to the concept of Shabbat.

The rules seem part of an education that is necessary to prepare the Israelites for their duty to follow the many rules and regulations that G-d demands in His Torah. It seems clear that when a group of people are released from slavery and granted freedom, they need to learn that freedom does not imply that they are not bound by rules. Living in a democracy is inherently an expression of freedom. It still does not mean that one can choose to ignore the laws that govern the country. The manna was given with laws so that the people could adjust to the rules and grown into proper servants of G-d.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the 19th Century German Rabbinic leader, suggests that there is another message that Moshe is communicating in his pronouncement. The expression that man does not live by bread alone is essential for the formation of a just and moral society. Bread has been the staple of most diets for millennia. The output of bread is a consequence of taking raw materials and actively transforming them into a new product. When we eat bread, we make a blessing acknowledging G-d as the One who brings bread forth from the ground. There is, however, a clear understanding that a human being (or a device created by humans) takes what came from the ground and skillfully makes bread. If an individual does not feel connected to G-d, it is easy to look at oneself as the creator of the bread.

Bread is actually the justification for many of the world's atrocities. Wars are waged and rationalized because of the urgent need to supply one's self, one's family or one's country with bread. Without a connection to the ultimate Creator, people imagine that they must achieve their bread by any means. What Moshe is emphasizing in these verses is that sustenance is something that is provided by G-d. It can be in the form of bread, or it can be in the form of manna. The reliance on G-d removes the urgency to provide ourselves with bread. We certainly do not absolve ourselves as partners in the creation of bread. We know that we need to plant, harvest, grind, etc. until we achieve a finished product. What dependence on G-d does achieve, is a recalibration of our priorities. It ultimately leads to a society that does not shun competition, but does emphasize that we are not completely reliant on only the work of our own hands. Just as G-d promises to provide for us, he instructs us to make sure that we provide for those that are less fortunate than ourselves. Bread is given to be enjoyed and shared all at once. May we merit seeing such a society. One in which it is clear that G-d is an active agent in providing all of us for what we need to live.

Shabbat Shalom!