Challa, Manna and Parnasa

After leaving Egypt and entering the desert, the Israelites began to suffer from a shortage of food and water. At that moment, one of the greatest miracles in biblical history took place: God caused manna (in Hebrew, *man*) to descend – a miraculous food with unique nutritional properties. Through Moshe, God instructed the people on how to handle this "food from heaven." These instructions were not technical but educational. For centuries, we Jews have applied these divine lessons to the way we think about our work and how we relate to money and material possessions.

There are three fundamental teachings regarding the manna – all of them are still deeply relevant to modern life.

ACCEPTING DEPENDENCY

The first message of the *man* is that all food and material wealth ultimately "comes from heaven." This does not mean we are exempt from working to earn our livelihood. The manna did not fall at the entrance of the Israelites' tents – nor was it delivered by Amazon. They had to step outside and make an effort to gather it. The key lesson is to remember that, even though we work and exert ourselves, our sustenance (*parnasa*) is decided by Heaven – just like the manna. A farmer may work from sunrise to sunset planting his fields, but if God doesn't send rain, he won't harvest anything. A businessman may be intelligent and hardworking, but his income can be affected if he gets sick or has an accident.

The first lesson from the manna is this: we must believe that, in the end, it is HaShem who determines what we will have to eat and whether we will have just enough or, B" H, even more than enough. *Emuna* – faith – is essential for facing and overcoming one of the most common mental health challenges:

anxiety. When we don't actively cultivate faith, fluctuations in the economy, changes in employment, salary, or business can destabilize us. We must go out and make the necessary effort to "gather the manna," but we must also know and **accept with *emuna*** that what we receive – whether a lot or a little – is exactly what God has determined for us.

THOU SHALT NOT ACCUMULATE

In the desert, it was forbidden to hoard manna. Each person was to collect only what they needed for that day. If someone collected more than necessary, the excess would rot. As a result, no one compared their portion to that of their neighbor.

This second lesson speaks to the modern tendency to accumulate material goods compulsively. Hoarding reflects a lack of faith, a lack of appreciation, and ingratitude toward HaShem's generosity – which is not finite. *Emuna* means being happy with what one has. This mindset protects us from one of the most destructive emotional conditions: envy and jealousy.

The *segula* – the spiritual power – of the manna reminds me of a foundational truth: I don't need to look at my neighbor and believe that his abundance somehow diminishes mine. The essential goal in life is not to have everything I want but to want everything I have.

NOT ON SHABBAT

On Fridays, the people were instructed to collect a double portion of manna – for that day and for Shabbat – because the manna would not fall on Shabbat. This taught them that there was no need to work on Shabbat in order to have what to eat.

Any Jew who observes Shabbat knows that it's possible to miss

out on business deals or professional opportunities by not working on the seventh day. A Jewish merchant may lose potential sales or unique offers due to Shabbat observance. As the Romans once noted, Shabbat is not necessarily “good for business.”

But what greater demonstration of faith in HaShem could there be than refraining from work on Shabbat, with the conviction that “I will not earn more than what has already been designated from Heaven for me and my family”?

That is why each Shabbat, we remember the manna – in the two loaves (*challot*) that we prepare and in the way we cover them from above and below.

The *segula* of the manna teaches us to strengthen our faith in HaShem, to adopt moderation in our consumption habits, and to avoid the trap of material excess.

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