Manna

A Recipe for Faith

by

Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

*Whoever has enough to eat today and says, ‘What shall I eat tomorrow?’ is a person of little faith.*

-Sotah 48b

Manna.

Is it bread? If so, what kind bread? Whole wheat? Rye? Bagels? We do not know. We do not know because we are not told. All we can say with certainty is that manna is sustenance; it *sustained* us in the desert, when our hunger gnawed at us. That our hunger was both physical and spiritual suggests a great deal about the meal that God provided. For in God’s “recipe”, we can discover powerful lessons of faith.

As we sojourned through the desert, God provided manna on a daily basis. It was the physical embodiment of the truth that God provides for all our needs. Our portion sizes. The exact right amount for one day, each to his need. An adult’s portion perfectly suited for him, no more and no less. So too, a child’s portion. As God provided for one day, so too would He the next. As R’ Elazar HaModai teaches, “Whoever has enough to eat today and says, ‘What shall I eat tomorrow?’ is a person of little faith.” (Sotah 48b)

God provided manna to each man, woman and child in the perfect portion for his or her needs that day. And then, on Fridays, God provided a double portion (v’haya mishneh al asher yilketu yom yom). The double portion, Rav Hirsch explains, means that we should never think that observing Shabbat will be an impediment to our livelihoods. In other words, we should have faith in God and all our needs will be fulfilled.

The Mechilta teaches that Torah could only have been given to a people who ate manna. No manna. No Torah.  That is, no manna, no faith. Only people taught to trust in and rely upon God’s goodness and constancy could possibly accept and appreciate Torah.

But what *is* manna? R’ Akiva (Yoma 75b) holds that manna is exactly what sustains the angels.  He contends that in manna there is ziv ha’shechina, the glow of God’s presence, giving it a material veneer so humans can eat it. R’ Yishmael disagrees. He teaches that manna is not angel food but that it is so sublime that it was completed absorbed into the body, producing no body waste.

Whether food for angels or not, manna clearly is not merely calories to satisfy the demands of our stomachs. There is Godliness amongst its ingredients. And delivered fresh each day!

In our day, we take great joy in our Prime “same day delivery” but even the most efficient delivery pales when compared to the “straight from Heaven” delivery service that provided manna to each person exactly when it was needed. Wow! Great service and yet… when it came to the double portion, God did not want us to be passive recipients of this magnificent sustenance. God wanted us to be involved and engaged in preparing this sacred meal. He wanted us to be *sous chef* to this brilliant feast. Just as a mother draws her children close to assist in baking the Shabbat challot, so God knew that calling us to add our “personal touch” would make the manna taste that much sweeter.

HaShem told Moshe that the manna would fall each day so that there was no need to save any for the next day – with one exception. On the sixth day, the manna, “shall be double what they pick every day.” (Shemot 16:5) Each Friday, a double portion manna would fall; one portion for Friday, and a second one for Shabbat.  In anticipating for Shabbos, Bnei Yisrael had to *actively* collect the double portion – “…and it shall be on the sixth day – ve’hechinu – when they prepare what they bring.”  *Ve’hechinu* – they had to prepare, to actively participate in the manna process.

But why *ve’hechinu*? Why “prepare”? Wouldn’t it have been more accurate to call us to, “go collect, go and gather”? In this, *ve’hechinu* teaches us a most important Shabbos lesson, and a lesson relevant to all spiritual matters.  Rashi explains that in this “preparation”, the Torah is guiding us in something more than food preparation; it is teaching us that we must be mindful that anything to be used or consumed on Shabbos or Yom Tov must be ‘designated’ for use on this special day. It must be ‘planned’ for. That is, the food must be muchan (ready), referring to the special halachic category of hachanah with its many implications.  If the food was not planned to be eaten on Shabbos or Yom Tov then it may *not be* eaten on this special day.

Food prepared for a Shabbos meal is to be considered days earlier. Fresh ingredients must be acquired. The table settings must be placed. Attention must be paid. Family and guests must be anticipated. The honor and dignity of the day must be accounted for.

Rav Yitzchok Hutner *zt’l* elaborates on Rashi’s thinking, explaining that for an item to be *muchan* means more than excluding a “forbidden” item. Being *muchan* is more than a double negative – not doing what is forbidden. Being *muchan* is the affirmation of doing *what is appropriate*!

But how does designating food as “prepared” make it appropriate for Shabbos? How does it demonstrate the greatest glory to God?

The answer lies in the recognition that true preparation goes beyond the detailed instructions found in a gourmet recipe book; it exceeds the choice of a fine wine to accompany the meal, and goes beyond fine table clothes. Preparation rests not just in the physical but it rests equally in one’s intention. Food designated for Shabbos is not inherently tastier than the food prepared for Tuesday’s meal. But, by the act of its preparation, the act of affording it its honor, its *kavod,* the Shabbos meal is made more delicious.

For the Shabbos meal is not simply to satisfy the hunger in my belly but to satisfy the desires of my soul.

We must approach Shabbat with intention; must never engage her on “auto-pilot”. The twenty-five hours of Shabbat are hours of mindfulness and thoughtfulness. They are hours of contemplation, reflection and acknowledgment. They are hours of rest.

Rav Pinchas Scheinberg *zt’l* (quoted in Artscroll’s Limud Yomi - Series Three) suggests that when a person plans on using an object, he has imbued that object with a new sense of importance. It is no longer “just another object”, not just another piece of fish. It becomes something with implicitly assigned value and meaning.

*Ve’hechinu*. Torah is telling us that on Shabbos we don’t eat as we do on Monday or Thursday. *Shabbosdig* food is *Shabbosdig* because we intend it to be! It is *muchan*. Just as Shabbat is special. It is the only day of the week designated by a name rather than a number. It is defined by intentionality, by *Kodesh.*

*Kodesh* never “just happens”. We must be active agents in bringing it about.

Shabbos food, Shabbos tablecloths, Shabbos clothes… they are *kodesh* by their association with Shabbat and by our intentionality in engaging with them. When I wrap myself in my Shabbos tallis, I wrap myself in a garment made holy not only by its inherent purpose or by the day but by my association of it with that day. It is elevated. *I* am elevated.

Mindfulness does not come automatically. It must be constant as many intentionally and mindfully map their entire week around Shabbos. Not easy, but so wonderful and delightful!

How sad that so many Jews rush into the Shabbos as if they are on autopilot. The days of the week, and their many demands, are squeezed in until the last possible moment. How can one be mindful and intentional with that mindset?

How can we become enwrapped in the *kodesh* of Shabbat if we remain creatures of the weekday? The holiness of Shabbat does not just *happen*. We don’t receive it as passive recipients. We must actively plan for it. *Ve’hechinu*. Talmudic scholars diced vegetables, chopped firewood, set the Shabbos table, set the Shabbos candles – activities alien to their weekday routine. Why? Because before Shabbos, they sought tasks that caused their hearts and souls to shift to Shabbos mode.

Mindfulness. The Noda B’Yehudah explains that we recite a *bracha* before performing many mitzvoth because doing so focuses us on the performance of those mitzvoth, focuses our attention on the holiness of the mitzvoth and keeps them from becoming rote. Our *brachot* transforms a physical act into a holy behavior.

This intentionality has everything to do with manna.

As we sojourned in the desert, did God really want us to simply accept his gracious gift from His outstretched hand so that our faith would grow and deepen? Not at all. We received manna during the week to satisfy our hunger. But for Shabbos? “And it shall be on the sixth day ve’hechinu.” We prepared for it. On the sixth day, we cannot be simply passive. On the sixth day, we must be active, we must be intentional, we must be mindful. If we are, if our food is *muchan*, then our meal can be, as R’ Akiva envisioned, angelic or, if not angelic, as R’ Yishmael viewed it, sublime.

All that is required is that we add mindfulness and intentionality to the recipe. It is our intentionality that, like a *bracha* before a mitzvah, elevates the physical to the spiritual; which elevates our hungers beyond physical need to spiritual fulfillment.