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In this week's Torah portion, Eikev, Moses looks back upon the Jewish people's 40 years in the desert, and mentions twice the manna they ate for sustenance. Both times, Moses seems to imply that eating the manna was somehow distressing: "And He afflicted you and suffered you to hunger, and fed you with manna"; "[He] fed you in the wilderness with manna...that He might afflict you."

In fact, the Children of Israel complained bitterly over having to eat it. "But now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes." "Our soul loathes this light bread."

At first glance their complaint is surprising, as the Torah describes the manna as being delicious - "and its taste was like wafers made with honey." Our Sages comment further that the G-dly manna was unique in that the person eating it experienced whatever flavor he wished. Furthermore, the manna was completely digested, having no waste. How then could such a wonderful food be perceived as "torment"?

However, the Talmud explains that it was precisely these qualities that left the Jews with a sense of hunger. It was hard to get used to this "bread from the heavens" that had no waste and could taste like anything in the world. The Jews wanted regular bread, "bread from the earth." They longed for food that looked like what it was.

But the truth is that the Jews' resentment was motivated by the Evil Inclination. At first, the Evil Inclination draws a person into small sins, slowly working its way to more serious ones. So it was with the Children of Israel: They started by complaining about the manna, then progressed to "crying among their families," implying transgressions in the area of family life.

The dynamics of the Evil Inclination never change, and even today, the Evil Inclination still chafes against "bread from the heavens." Symbolically, "bread from the heavens" stands for Torah and G-dly wisdom, while "bread from the earth" is secular, worldly knowledge. The Evil Inclination tries to make the Jew dissatisfied with his "bread from the heavens," and attempts to convince him that a steady diet of Torah will leave him hungry. "The Torah is endless," it whispers in his ear. "You can never learn it all; the more you'll learn, the more you'll see how infinite it is. Why not turn your mind to worldly matters? At least you'll get a feeling of fullness and satisfaction."

On an even finer level, the Evil Inclination tries to dissuade a Jew from studying Chasidut, the innermost part of Torah, which is also likened to "bread from the heavens." "Bread from the earth," the revealed part of Torah, is enough, it claims. But the truth is the opposite. Because the Jew's essence is spiritual, he can never be satiated by worldly matters. Only Torah, and the innermost part of it, can make the soul feel full, for it is through Torah that the Jew connects to the Infinite. (Adapted from Likutei Sichot, Vol. 4, L'Chaim 5759 #579)

Because you hearken to these laws (Deuteronomy 7:12) The commentaries dwell on the Hebrew word eikev in this verse -- an uncommon synonym for "because". Many see a connection with the word akeiv (same spelling, different pronunciation), which means "heel". Rashi interprets this as an allusion to "those mitzvot which a person tramples with his heels" -- the Torah is telling us to be equally diligent with all G-d's commandment, no less with those that seem less significant to our finite minds.

Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides interprets it in the sense of "in the end" (i.e., "in the heels of" or in the sense that the heel is at the extremity of the body) -- the reward being something that follows the action. A similar interpretation is given by Ohr HaChaim, who explains that true satisfaction and fulfillment comes at the "end" -- the complete fulfillment of all the mitzvot, and by Rabbeinu Bechaye, who sees it as an allusion that the reward we do receive in this world is but a lowly and marginal (the "heel") aspect of the true worth of the mitzvot.

Baal HaTurim gives a gematriatic explanation: the word eikev is used because it has a numerical value of 172 -- the number of words in the Ten Commandments.

Tzemach Tzedek (the 3rd chabad Rebbe) sees it as a reference to ikvata d'meshichah, the generation of "the heels of Moshiach" (the last generation of the Exile is called "the heels of Moshiach" by our sages because: a) they are the spiritually lowest generation, due to the "descent of the generations"; b) it is the generation in which the footsteps of Moshiach can already be heard). This is the generation that will "hearken to these laws", as Maimonides writes: "The Torah has already promised that the people of Israel will return to G-d at the end of their exile, and will be immediately redeemed."

The Lubavitcher Rebbe says: Our commitment to Torah should be such that it permeates us entirely, so that also our "heel" -- the lowest and the least sensitive part of the person -- "hearkens to these laws, observes them and does them." In other words, our relationship with G-d should not be confined to the holy days of the year, or to certain "holy" hours we devote to prayer and study, but should also embrace our everyday activities. Indeed, this "lowly" and "spiritually insensitive" part of our life is the foundation of our relationship with G-d, in the same way that the heel is the base upon which the entire body stands and moves. - chabadonline.com

"A person does not live for bread alone" (Deut.8:3) It doesn't say: 'through bread,' but 'for bread.' A person should not live just for bread; that is not the purpose of his life. A person has to eat in order to live, and not live in order to eat. (from Yesod Haikarim, translated from Sichat HaShavuah, 140, www.ascent.org.il)

For the land into which you go... drinks water of the rain of heaven (11:10-11) Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov would say: There are two types of fields: an irrigated field, and a field watered by rain. The scholar's soul is an irrigated field, devotedly developed and nurtured by her farmer. The soul of the simple Jew is a rain-nourished field, surrendering herself to the whims of the heavens, humbly awaiting blessing and stimulation from above.

The irrigated field yields a harvest that is superior, in quantity and quality, to that of her passive sister. But the rain-watered field is a truer, purer reflection on her Heavenly Maker. - chabadonline.com

For G-d your G-d... is a consuming fire (9:3) G-dliness is a blazing flame; Torah study and prayer require a flaming heart. Between coldness and heresy stands an extremely thin wall. (Rabbi Shalom DovBer of Lubavitch)

The chassid Rabbi Nechemia of Dubrovna told:

I once saw a Russian soldier being whipped. His crime? While standing watch on a winter night, his feet had frozen in their boots. "Had you remembered the oath you took to serve the czar," his commander berated him, "the memory would have kept you warm."

"For 25 years," concluded Rabbi Nechemia, "this incident inspired my service of the Almighty." - chabadonline.com

MY FATHER SAID: "ONE SHOULD NOT RECITE THE MORNING B'RACHOT BEFORE RINSING THE MOUTH IN THE MORNING, EXCEPT ON FAST DAYS." (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM, AV 22)

It is extremely important to understand children for what they are, not for what we see them as. Whereas an adult is shaped by man and society, the child is shaped by G-d. Because of their innocence, their curiosity, and their purity, children stand closer to G-d than an adult. And so the great secret to childhood is not that our children have much to learn from us, but that we have much to learn from them.

- The Rebbe