

# The Land of Israel in the Parsha & Our Lives

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

## Parashat Beshalach What Can We Learn from the Manna About Bringing About Redemption?

### What is Our Main Mission that is Amplified During the Month of Shevat?

The main mission of the Jewish people is to rectify the downfall of the first couple, Adam and Chava. The final redemption can only occur when we have completed this calling and become worthy of returning to the spiritual existence in the Garden of Eden, before the fall. The first step is to rectify our problematic relationship with food which has plagued us ever since eating from the Tree of Knowledge. As we enter the month of Shevat, our work on rectifying eating from the Tree of Knowledge intensifies, with its corresponding challenges. In my experience as soon as we arrive at the month of Shevat, it becomes much more difficult to eat mindfully. I believe that this is because when the rectification is vital for holiness and redemption the *sitra atra* (opposing forces) muster all their strength to do everything in their power to prevent this rectification. Therefore, holy people from Avraham to King David faced numerous obstacles and enemies. This also explains why throughout the ages "...not only one arose and tried to destroy us, rather in every generation they try to destroy us" (*The Pesach Hagaddah*). The midrash explains why Avraham is called "the Ivri" (From the other side) because "The entire world is on one side, but he is on the other side" (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 42:8). This sadly pertains no less to the Jewish people today, for we are also called "Ivrim." "Returning to our topic about rectified eating, the lust to quickly mumble the blessings and stuff our faces is the "enemy" of holy eating that I often encounter during the month of Shevat. This is because the tikun (rectification) of the Shevat is precisely לְעִיטָה/Le'itah - 'Eating' or literally 'pouring into me,' for this is the word used by Esav when he expressed the epitome of unholy eating in his desire for "the red, red lentil soup," exclaiming הַלְעִיטָנִי/haliteini... (*Bereishit* 25:30). Rashi explains, "I will open my mouth, and [you] pour very much into it." So, during Shevat, more than ever we need to mobilize our self-discipline and strength against the 'enemies' of holy eating to focus on the words of the blessings before and after eating, recognizing deeply that Hashem is the source of the food and pleasure we ingest while chewing mindfully and curbing our appetites to eat only the food that is healthy and beneficial for us, as well as only the needed amounts.

### Transforming Earthly Food into Manna from Heaven

During the month of Shevat, we read the Torah portion of *Parashat Beshalach*, most often during the week of Tu b'Shevat. This Torah portion is connected with the tikun and energy of Shevat through its description of the manna - the spiritual food from heaven. Manna, like the fruits of Paradise, was supernal light in physical form that contained no waste and was, therefore, absorbed completely into the body. It included no mixture of Evil, since only Goodness descends from Heaven (Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin *Ruach Chayim on Pirkei Avot*, Chapter 3). When we express our recognition that the entire whole world belongs to G-d through our blessings before and after eating, we can transform Earth into Heaven; resembling the World to Come where neither food nor drink exist, and only righteous people enjoy the Divine splendor. In this world, spiritual food is covered in a physical garment, yet the blessing reveals its inner essence. By accessing the spiritual life force of food, it will taste whatever flavor we desire, as it states about the spiritual manna that they tasted the flavor of all types of food in the manna (*Babylonian Talmud, Yoma* 75a). This is in contrast to the personification of physical desire - the snake, who is nourished by physicality and "everything he eats will taste like the dust of the ground" (*Bereishit* 3:14). By blessing Hashem for our food, we free ourselves from the curse of the snake and enjoy the Divine life force within the food. This helps us understand why "The Torah was only given to the generation who ate manna"

(*Yalkut Shimoni*, Chapter 15, allusion 258). In every generation, the Torah is given to those who purify the food from the snake bite and transform it into manna. Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, one of the richest men who ever lived, never took any pleasure from this world. Although he had a table of kings, his awareness of G-d as the source of all his abundance turned his worldly pleasure into Divine pleasure, transforming earthly food into manna from Heaven. Because Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi elevated his food into manna, he was given the ability to compile the Mishna (The main body of the Oral Torah).

### How do we Extract Divine Sparks from Human-Produced Food?

The 15th of Shevat bespeaks the praise of the Land of Israel, for on this day the strength of the soil of the Land is renewed. The land of Israel is praised for its fruits and therefore on Tu b'Shevat, we praise Hashem for the delicious fruits He makes grow in our Land of Israel. By blessing the fruits during the Tu b'Shevat Seder we can raise up our relationship with food and transform our eating into the words of Torah. According to Pri Tzaddik, each fruit includes a part of both the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life - its antidote. It is the way we partake in the fruits that determines whether we are going to continue the sin of Adam and Chava by eating the Fruit of Knowledge or whether we will be able to relate to the fruits the way of a Tzaddik and then take each bite from the Tree of Life. Although the manna was heavenly food connected to the Tree of Life, and we may long for the time when we were fed directly by the hand of Hashem, it was not ideal. Looking back at our days in the desert reminds us of the true Source of our sustenance, yet the goal is to come to the Land of Israel and work its soil. Our mission is to transform the Earth into Heaven by extracting divine sparks from human-produced food. This way we demonstrate how to serve G-d and reveal Him from within the material - from the very soil of the Land of Israel. Although growing our own food wherever we live is important, nothing compares to what grows in the Holy Land, upon which Hashem's light shines directly. This is why the Torah emphasizes that Hashem fed us Manna until we could eat from the crop of the Land of Israel, to ensure that the transition from the holy food of heaven to the holy food of the land.

### Why did the Israelites Eat Manna Only Until They Entered the Land of Israel?

ספר שמות פרק טז פסוק לה

וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָכְלוּ אֶת הַמָּן אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה עַד בְּאֵם אֶל אֶרֶץ נוֹשֶׁבֶת אֶת הַמָּן אָכְלוּ עַד בְּאֵם אֶל קְצֵה אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן;  
 “The children of Israel ate the manna for forty years until they came to an inhabited land. They ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan” (*Shemot* 16:35).

The manna stopped falling on the 7th of Adar, when Moshe passed over, (when they came to the settled land) but the manna lasted in their vessels for 40 days until the 16th of Nissan, when they came to the land of Canaan. Rav Kook explains that the food in the Land of Israel is holy in its inner essence and only physical in its exterior. However, we need to be careful with the food from outside Israel. Only through the yearning for the land of Israel can the food outside of Israel be raised up as well. When we recite *Shir Ha'ma'alot* (on Shabbat) and *Al Naharot Bavel* (on weekdays) before Grace after Meals. We express our yearning for redemption through these particular Tehillim in conjunction with blessing Hashem for our sustenance. Expressing our yearning for the land of Israel when concluding our meal comes to refine the food that is not from Israel and make it close to the level of food from the Land of Israel. This is important even for those of us who have the merit to live in the Land of Israel, due to the decrease of holiness caused by the destruction of the Temple, which caused even the food in the Land of Israel to become less heavenly (Rav Kook, *Orot Hakodesh* part 3, *The Holy Way*, page. 295). Since I learned this, I have always been careful to recite Shir Hama'alot before Grace after Meals, with the intention to elevate my physical food to resemble the spiritual manna.

**Turning Eating from the Tree of Knowledge into Eating from the Tree of Life**

Eating from the Tree is rooted in all generations, and it will only be completely corrected when Mashiach the son of David arrives. Therefore, the manna only descended until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. For it is known the land of Israel is Malchut, which is the attribute of King David and King Shlomo. The king is the source of the abundance of all kinds of delicacies connected to this world. Similarly, Eretz Yisrael was praised with all kinds of delicacies, yet these delicacies embody the spiritual aspect of Eretz Yisrael – the Holy Land. Her fruits are all in holiness, and when we partake in them, they imbue us with the recognition that they derive from the Creator. During all the 42 stations of our forty years of wilderness wandering, the words of Torah were absorbed by the Israelites each station brought us to a higher divine awareness. When we arrived at the forty-second station, even the physical desire for food – the utmost craving – entered into the highest holiness. This alludes to the future rectification when the Creator will reveal the hidden light to us (Rav Tzaddok of Lublin, *Sefer Dover Tzeddek, Parashat Acharei Mot Letter 4*). Just as the Israelites ate manna as a preparation for entering the land of Israel, in the future during the time of Mashiach we will once again eat the manna of the Face-to-Face unification with Hashem. Then the manna will truly rain down from the Tree of Life! (*Heichal Habracha, Parashat Beshalach*). May we merit mindful eating in holiness to turn our eating from the Tree of Knowledge into eating from the Tree of Life, so we can speed up the final redemption with the coming of Mashiach!