

Food – Physical and Spiritual

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Parshat Behukotai

If you follow My laws . . . I will provide your rain in its season. . . . You will have your fill of food and live securely. . . . I will grant peace in the Land. . . . You will pursue your enemies and they will fall before your sword. . . . I will make you fertile and numerous. . . . I will place My Sanctuary within you and . . . will walk among you. . . . I took you out of Mitzrayim . . . and led you forth with your heads held high. (Leviticus 26:3-13)

Well, it certainly seems like a reasonable proposition. Follow some laws, keep some commandments – many of which we do anyway and many of which it makes sense to keep. In return we get plenty of income and the peace and security to enjoy it.

There's the aspect of gratitude, too. After all, G*d did take us out of slavery, remember? Not like thieves sneaking out, but with our heads held high.

But hold on a second. Is that it? Is the sum of Torah observance champagne and caviar in a villa overlooking the Mediterranean? Is the sum of Torah observance having an invincible army?

Another thing. Since when is going *komemiyut* (proudly, with our heads held high) such a good idea? The *Shulhan Arukh* teaches (*Orah Hayyim* 2:6) that pride, holding the head high, drives away G*d's Presence from the world. So how was it a good thing for G*d to take us out that way?

Rabbi Nathan of Nemirov (the chief disciple of Rebbe Nahman of Breslov) reminds us that the ultimate station that we are to reach is one that is higher than that of the angels. We will be privy to matters that angels will not be able to perceive without first asking us.

Rebbe Nahman teaches that a foretaste of this level can be experienced while eating. Eating? Yes, eating! We know that eating is built into Creation. Most of us view eating as a necessary function for maintaining life; energy is consumed, and it needs to

be replenished. When we eat, however, we are able not only to avail ourselves of the physical nourishment implanted within the food, but also to draw *da'at* (knowledge, awareness) of G*d into our souls.

The progress in *da'at* that we can make while eating is unlike the progress we can make while studying Torah. When studying a text we ought to derive well-defined ideas, concepts, and policies of how to speak and behave. The *da'at* that comes from eating is one that cannot be put into words but can only be hinted at.

Rabbi Nathan points out that woven together with the blessings of livelihood and peace is the blessing (v. 12) of **I will walk among you**. Rashi teaches us that this means G*d will accompany us in the Garden of Eden. This is the meaning behind and the purpose of the blessings for wealth and material success that we find in the Torah – to ingest *da'at* from our mundane affairs as well, such that even in this world we feel G*d's walking with us.

But having the opportunity for this growth of *da'at* is not a guarantee for achieving it. There is one thing we must have in order to be successful – the belief that we will succeed. Rebbe Nahman teaches that the greatest sin is melancholy. It is a sin to be a *shlimazi* (a sad sack)! We must “stand erect” with confidence that we will succeed eventually, even if things are currently going badly.

This, then, is the meaning of the dictum (v. 7), **You will pursue your enemies**. Heartfelt performance of the *Mitzvot* enables us to engage our “enemies,” the false ideas and ideologies of the world – almost all of them based on an “us-against-them” mentality – that allow no peace, to expose their wrongness and reveal to all who would live by them the beauty and truth of G*d's Message. Such ideas (see Rashi on Genesis 47:22 and also Rebbe Nahman's *Likkutei Moharan*) **will fall by the sword** (v. 7), the sword of our prayer.

And the heartfelt performance of *Mitzvot*, the blessing of material wealth, the confidence, and the prayer all begin with **If you follow My laws**, if we exert ourselves to receive G*d's instructions.

Shabbat Shalom.