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From Hashem

Rav Yechezkel Levenstein, zt”l, the famed Mashgiach of Yeshivas Mir, was a paradigm of mussar, *avodas Hashem*, emunah and bitachon. A man of great spiritual intensity and religious fervor, “Reb Chatzkel” was also known to have a serious disposition and stern demeanor. One morning, the talmidim noticed that Reb Chatzkel seemed uncharacteristically jovial and his face shone with a big smile. One student timidly inquired, “How is the Rav feeling today?”

The Mashgiach nodded kindly in response and turned to the students. “Listen carefully,” he sighed, “let me tell you a story. Before the War, in Lithuania — and later, too, when we were refugees in Shanghai, China — we were all so poor. My small salary from the Yeshivah was often late in coming. My wife and I would daven every day for our sustenance, and we truly relied on the Ribbono Shel Olam for every piece of bread on our table.

“Since coming to Eretz Yisrael and joining the Ponovezh Yeshivah, things have changed. I have been working for Rav Kahaneman, who travels the world fundraising, and he always pays our salaries on time and in full. I confess, I didn’t realize it, but my davenning has changed a little over the years.

“Just this morning, we received word that the Yeshivah has hit some hard times and that our salaries will be delayed.” The Mashgiach then beamed and lifted his hands as if dancing for joy, “For the first time in a long while, today’s davening reflected the level of *bitachon* that I had previously felt! What *simcha* it is to rely only on Hashem and know that everything is in His Hands!”

Immediately following the awesome miracles and salvation revealed at the Yam Suf, Am Yisrael travelled to Marah and began their desert sojourn. Faced with the realities of desert life and having no means of survival, they turned to Hashem and asked desperately for water and food. However, they did not just request sustenance, for the Torah records a litany of embarrassing complaints:

“If only we had died by the hand of Hashem in the land of Egypt when we sat by pots of meat, when we ate bread to our fill! For You have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire congregation to death...” (*Shemot*, 16:3).

The intense *chutzpah* of this proclamation is jarring, and even more so considering that they had just witnessed God’s *yad chazakah*, ‘strong arm’, and miraculous salvations.

“We remember the fish we ate for free in Mitzrayim,” they *kvetched*, “and the

cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic..." (*Bamidbar*, 11:5). However good the Egyptian salad bar might have been, we all sense that their yearning to return to captivity was a bit much.

The students of the Baal Shem Tov understand this irrational, backwards pull toward the 'comforts' of exile as the flip-side of our deeper desire to be redeemed: an unrealized yearning to rely solely on Hashem.

In response to their cries, in the very next pasuk, Hashem assures Moshe: "Behold! I am going to rain down for you bread from Heaven, and the people shall go out and gather what is needed for the day, so that I can test them הֲיִלֶךְ בְּתוֹרָתִי אִם-לֹא — whether or not they will follow My teaching" (16:4).

In facing the unknown each morning there is a renewed challenge, and in this, an opportunity. We are called to check our spiritual vitals, to take our *bitachon* pulse.

The daily portion of *mahn* that fell was tailor-made for that day's needs. They were not given a pension plan or long-term investment account to save for a rainy day. Whether they gathered a lot or a little, the portion they received was actually enough. This new and unknown Divine system was a challenge for the Jews who, for generations, had known a different reality — they had worked hard and were fed. Therefore, in beholding their bread from Heaven, they asked, *Mahn hu?* "What is *this*?"

As a people, when we embarked on a new life of independence and freedom, we temporarily fell into misplaced and unhealthy nostalgia for the 'good old days' of slavery. It was as if we had forgotten not only the miracles, but also the preceding

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two hundred years of abusive slave labor and mass murder. This is how deeply human beings desire certainty, predictability and security. A slave is defined by a lack of choice, and there is an ironic sense of stability in being choicelessly controlled and corralled like lambs. In being liberated, however, this predictability is necessarily sacrificed.

Even as we enjoyed the blessings and sustenance that Hashem rained down on us, we struggled with the lack of linear causality and structure, and complained. This showed that we were not yet completely free. Real freedom blossoms in self-reliance, built upon the foundations of faith and trust in Hashem. The *mahn* falling in the desert helped us cultivate this faith and independence.

In response to a challenge by his holy talmidim as to why the *mahn* fell daily, and not once a year to take care of our needs in one shot, Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai shared a *maschal*:

וְלֹא הָיָה מִקְבִּיל פָּנָיו אֲבִיו אֶלָּא פָּעַם אַחַת בְּשָׁנָה. עָמַד וּפָסַק מְזוֹנוֹתָיו בְּכָל יוֹם, וְהָיָה מִקְבִּיל פָּנָיו אֲבִיו כָּל יוֹם.

A prince would go and *makbil pnei aviv*, greet his father, the king, only once a year. Upon realizing that his son only came

when it was time for him to receive his sustenance, the king began to distribute his allowance every day.

אָף יִשְׂרָאֵל... שָׁמָּה לֹא יָרַד מִן הַמָּחֶר, וְנִמְצְאוּ כּוֹלֵן מֵתִים בְּרָעָב, וְנִמְצְאוּ כּוֹלֵן מְכוּזָּנִים אֶת לֶבֶם לְאַבְיָהוּ שְׁבָשְׁמִים.

So too, it was with the Jewish People... They would be worried and say, 'Perhaps the *mahn* will not fall tomorrow and we will all die of starvation.' Consequently, everyone directed their hearts to their Father in Heaven every day (*Yoma*, 76a).

The Gemara concludes that the *mahn* that fell each day was sufficient only for that day, so that all would continuously daven for sustenance and remain connected and aware of Hashem.


This week many people will perform a *segulah* for parnassah by reciting the portion of *Parshas haMahn* from our sedrah. Some have the custom of adding *Parshas haMahn* after davening each morning throughout the year. Whether we do this or not, may we "follow Hashem's teaching": and be in a constant state of *makbil pnei Avinu*, seeing and being seen by the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, sustained by Divine blessing and bounty in every facet of our lives, in the great joy of *bitachon*.

...And may Hashem 'make it rain' for us every day! ■

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