

CENTER FOR MODERN TORAH LEADERSHIP

Center for Modern Torah Leadership



חרות ואחריות

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"Taking Responsibility for Torah"

ON THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SANDWICHES

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יְעִיֵןךָ וְיִרְעִיֵךְ
וְיִאֲכַלְךָ אֶת-הַמֶּן

אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַעְתָּ וְלֹא יָדְעוּן אֲבוֹתֶיךָ
לְמַעַן הוֹדִיעֶיךָ,

כִּי לֹא עַל-הַלֶּחֶם לִבְדוֹ יִחְיֶה הָאָדָם
כִּי עַל-כָּל-מוֹצָא פִי-יְהוָה, יִחְיֶה הָאָדָם

*He afflicted you, and He made you hungry
and He fed you the manna*

*which you had not known, and which your ancestors had not known
for the sake of informing you*

ki lo al halechem levado yichyeh ha'adam

ki on all that emerges from the mouth of Hashem yichyeh ha'adam

"Man doth not live by bread alone" is the King James Version's brilliantly memorable translation of *lo al halechem levado yichyeh ha'adam* in Devarim 8:3. Western tradition generally assigns this phrase one of two meanings:

- 1) Physical life is less important than spiritual life. This is the intent of Jesus when he quotes this verse to the Devil in Matthew 4:4.
- 2) Human beings cannot survive unless there is some experience beyond survival at stake. Thus freedictionary.com has: In order to survive, people need more than physical things like food and shelter. People need mental or spiritual things like satisfaction and love.

Neither of these makes much sense in context. The Torah says that this lesson should emerge from the experience of eating *manna* for forty years – how would that teach either of these messages?

Targum Yonatan (and possibly Targum Onkelos as well) offers a contextually superior translation. "*Man need not live only by bread – rather, man can live on anything that is created by G-d's command*". All the law of nature are just illusions that G-d can sweep away at will.

But if that was the message, why send *manna*, rather than letting them live without food at all (as Mosheh Rabbeinu did while atop Sinai)? And why did this message require forty years of reinforcement?

All three of the above reading have the starting assumption that "bread" stands for "basic physical needs". But what if "bread" is pure metaphor, and stands for something metaphysical as well?

The midrash (Sifri Eikev 48) suggests the following:

"כי לא על הלחם לבדו יחיה האדם" - זה מדרש;
"כי על כל מוצא פי ה'" - אלו הלכות והגדות

"Bread" - this refers to midrash

"That which emerges from the mouth of Hashem" - this refers to halakhot and aggadot

But in what sense is midrash like bread, and manna like "halakhot and aggadot"?

Rabbi Chaim Yirmiyahu Flensburg (1841-1913), who deserves to be much better known in Modern Orthodox circles, offers an original explanation in the introduction to a collection of his drashot. His starting assumption is that the study of the nonhalakhic components of the Talmud has suffered from a lack of critical rigor, and that this lack of rigor was then projected onto midrash aggada and aggada themselves. If aggada were studied with the same rigor as law, we would discover that it is as intellectually rigorous as legal reasoning. (Rabbi Flensburg makes a strong case in his Nezer haNitzachon that Chazal were familiar with and competent at Athenian philosophic reasoning, and that aggadic narratives often encode formal philosophic arguments.)

Here is Rabbi Flensburg's commentary on our verse:

ע"כ מפרש הספרי את הפסוק שהוא מדבר בשתי כתות בני אדם,
הכת האחת הם האנשים המצוינים ברוחב לבבם בתורה,
אשר להם הכח לעמוד בהיכל הפלפול לחדש דברים בהלכות עמוקות,
והם חפצים להתגדר בלמודם רק במקצוע זה, ולהניח שאר המקצועות
שבתורה,

ונגדם אמר: למען הודיעך כי לא על הלחם לבדו יחיה האדם –

זה מדרש, דהיינו פלפול הגמרא
ונגד הכת השנית, והם הלומדים הבינונים הבוחרים ג"כ רק במקצוע אחד
דהיינו ללמוד הלכות, ולהניח את האגדות,
אמר: כי על כל מוצא פי ה' יחיה האדם - אלו הלכות ואגדות,
ומלות "למען הודיעך" שבראש הפסוק סובב גם על סוף הפסוק,
כאלו אמר

למען הודיעך
כי לא על הלחם לבדו יחיה האדם
ולמען הודיעך
כי על כל מוצא פי ה' יחיה האדם,
כי יש בפסוק זה שתי הודעות, לשתי כתות הלומדים - להגבוהים ולהבינונים,
שעל כולם החובה ללמוד גם אגדות,
באשר גם הן מוצא פי ה' ועליהן יחיה האדם

Sifri therefore explains that the verse is speaking of two groups of human beings.

The first group are the people who have exceptionally broad Torah hearts,

who have the power to stand in the sanctuary of pilpul, to be creative in the deepest areas of law.

They wish to advance in their learning only in this department, leaving aside all other departments of Torah. To forestall them the Torah says: "for the sake of informing you that man does not live by bread alone" – this refers to midrash, meaning Talmudic dialectic.

To forestall the second group, which is composed of the middling learners who also choose only one department, namely the study of laws, and leave aside aggadot,

*it says: "man lives by **all** that emerges from the mouth of Hashem" – these are halakhot **and** aggadot.*

The words "in order to inform you" at the head of the verse apply also to the end of the verse, as if it said

He afflicted you, and He made you hungry

and He fed you the manna

which you had not known, and which your ancestors had not known

for the sake of informing you

that man does not live by bread alone

and for the sake of informing you

*that man lives by **all** that emerges from the mouth of Hashem*

This verse includes two proclamations, to the two groups of learners, the advanced and the middling,

that the obligation to learn aggadot rests on all of them,

since they too emerge from the mouth of Hashem and the human being must live by them.

For Rabbi Flensburg, "man does not live by bread alone" teaches that intellectuals must also study dry law;

"rather by all that emerges from the house of Hashem" teaches that rule-loving people must also study aggada. What is not elaborated on, though, is an explanation of how the manna taught these lessons. This would be fine if we assumed that his introduction was "mere drush"; but his whole point is that midrash aggada should be studied with intellectual rigor! I therefore feel justified in filling this gap.

The first mention of bread in Chumash is in the curse of Adam: "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread". In other words, bread is a symbol of sustenance achieved through human effort, and k'b'yakhol in the face of Divinely ordained obstacles. Manna, by contrast, is the symbol of passive dependence. Nothing human beings do can affect how much manna will rain down, and it cannot even be stored against a non-rainy day.

The manna lasted throughout the lifetime of Mosheh Rabbeinu. Talmudic dialectic appears only after Mosheh's death, as per Temurah 16a:

A beraita taught:

During the mourning for Mosheh 1700 kal vachomers, gezzerot shavot, and close readings were forgotten.

Said Rabbi Abahu:

Nonetheless, Otniel ben Kenaz restored them via his dialectic"

Rabbi Flensburg's challenging psychological insight is that even in Torah study there is a natural - and laudable - human desire for autonomy and for the sense of accomplishment that comes about by *overcoming*, especially by overcoming obstacles that G-d Himself put in place. Torah scholars properly want to learn the hardest sugyot rather than read simple codes. The Vilna Gaon turned down an angel's offer to teach him the entire Torah effortlessly.

We do not really wish to be returned to Eden intellectually. Moreover, we should be highly suspicious of Torah that appears to be produced without great human effort; beware of snakes offering organic fruit.

But the study of Torah can't be **all** about making G-d laugh when his children defeat Him.

The mission of the Center for Modern Torah Leadership is to foster a vision of fully committed halakhic Judaism that embraces the intellectual and moral challenges of modernity as spiritual opportunities to create authentic leaders. The Center carries out its mission through the Summer Beit Midrash program, the Rabbis and Educators Professional Development Institute, the Campus and Community Education Institutes, weekly Divrei Torah and our website, www.torahleadership.org, which houses hundreds of articles and audio lectures.