

Light Insight

A Feast For the Eyes

“He afflicted you and let you know hunger, then he fed you the manna which you didn’t know...” (Deuteronomy 8:3)

One of the most recognizable features of a Jewish home is the lighting of candles in honor of Shabbos. The above verse is the source of this concept.

Ostensibly, it’s hard to see the link between the manna, the miraculous food that the Jewish People ate in the desert, and the lighting of Shabbos candles. What is the connection?

Man is a relative creature. Our perceptions operate in terms of contrast. We understand what day is because every evening the sky darkens and becomes black. If there were no night, not only would we have no concept of night, we would also have no concept of day.

Words delineate. Words separate one thing from another: “It’s this — not that.” If every part of the world was bathed in constant sunlight, we would have no concept of what day is — and no word for it.

When the Jewish People were in the desert, G-d fed them a miraculous food called manna. The manna could taste like any food, and yet the Jewish People grew tired of it and complained to Moses that it was tasteless. How could something that could taste like anything be tasteless?

Our appreciation of food does not derive solely from our taste-buds. The satisfaction of eating comes from seeing the food that we eat. The Talmud teaches us that a blind person is not satisfied by his food because he cannot experience it visually. The visual presentation of food is an art in itself and is an integral part of the satisfaction of eating.

In a sense, the generation of the desert were like blind people, for even though manna could taste like any food, visually it was unchanging. It always looked like manna. Gastronomically, the variety was infinite. Visually, it was monotonous.

With this idea we can understand how our sages derive from the above verse the concept of Shabbos candles. Shabbos is given to the Jewish People as a delight and a pleasure. Part of that pleasure are the three meals that we eat during Shabbos. If we were to eat the meal at night in darkness we would not experience the maximum enjoyment from our food. There would thus be a flaw in our Shabbos experience. In order for us to enjoy our food, and consequently our Shabbos, to the maximum, we must be able to see our food for if we cannot see our food it will be as unfulfilling as the manna became to the Jewish People in the desert.

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Response Line

Helping in Kosovo

*Damien Urban wrote:
I have had a thought since the Kosovo crisis. The question is, how much charity or help should we as Jews give to this crisis? Should Israel as a country send help? Thank you very much.*

Dear Damien,

Jews are obligated to help others in need, even if they are not Jews, and even if they are pagans. As Maimonides writes "Our Sages commanded us, even regarding the pagans, to visit their sick, to bury their dead as we bury the Jewish dead, and to sustain their poor amongst the Jewish poor."

Additionally, we are obligated to sanctify G-d's name in the world.

So we clearly have an obligation to help. It's hard to measure exactly how much is enough.

The State of Israel has indeed offered refuge to hundreds of Kosovans, most of them Moslems, who live on kibbutzim and are extremely well treated. The Israeli army sent over mobile hospitals, physicians and combat medics to care for refugees.

Standing Up for Downs

*Chana B. Keil wrote:
I have heard that it was the habit of a great rabbi to stand in the presence of a person with Down Syndrome. Can you please tell me who that was and why?*

Dear Chana,

I've heard that the famous

"Chazon Ish," Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, stood up for people with Down syndrome and the like. If this is true, I understand it as follows:

Each person is given faculties. These faculties allow him to reach his potential. The greater gifts and faculties a person is given, the more he is obligated to achieve. A person is created far away from a goal but given the tools to get there.

A person born with very limited faculties obviously has a much smaller goal to achieve. So, in essence, the person of limited capabilities is created closer to his state of personal perfection.

Such a person may even be a reincarnation of a great *tzaddik* (righteous person) who achieved near perfection the first time around, but needs to come back to this world just to "tie up some loose ends." Such a person is worthy of respect.

ETHICS of our FATHERS

"Moses received the Torah at Sinai..."

Unlike all the other tractates of the Talmud, Ethics of Our Fathers is not based on any one of the mitzvos of the Torah. It consists only of sound advice for self-improvement and character development. Wise individuals of other nations have also compiled ethical works, which they developed through their own intellect, to guide people in how to relate to one another. One might think that Ethics of Our Fathers is also a creation of man.

Therefore it begins with "Moses received the Torah at Sinai" to tell us that this tractate is not man-made but was relayed to Moses at Sinai.

"Make someone your rabbi, and acquire a friend..."

A man needs a good friend for three purposes: Firstly, to learn Torah. As one Sage said: "I have learned much from my teachers, but even more from my friends."

Secondly, to be more careful in observing the mitzvos. Even if one

friend would be tempted to transgress, he would not allow the other to fall as well. This offers hope for both of them to improve.

Thirdly, to enjoy his counsel and have someone in whom he can confide.

The term "acquire" is used here to indicate that if he can find no other route, he should even be prepared to pay to gain a good friend. It also suggests that one should be prepared to "buy" a good friend with soft spoken patience and to show him tolerance, even when he says something offensive. Otherwise the differences in human personalities will create situations that will endanger the friendship.