

# Man Does Not Live By Bread Alone

## A D'var Torah on *Parashat Eikev*<sup>1</sup> (Deut. 7:12 – 11:25)

By Sarah B. Schweitz

*“V'hayah eikev tish'm'un eit hamishpatim ha'eileh ush'martem va'asitem otam....”*  
*“As a reward, if you hearken to these laws and follow them carefully....”*

In the few short weeks before the Israelites cross the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land, Moses delivers several orations to the people as they are encamped in the plains of Moab. Moses knows that he will not enter the Promised Land. As a loving father, he puts his thoughts in writing. There is an urgency, and anxiety in his speeches. What will happen to his beloved people, he wonders, once they enter the Promised Land that is “flowing with milk and honey?” He worries about how the people will respond to the “good life,” as they accumulate their wealth of gold and silver. What if they forget Adonai? After all, Moses remembers how quickly the Israelites forgot God’s teachings at Mount Horeb/Sinai when he left them for a mere forty days to accept the Ten Commandments. Now he must leave them in someone else’s care “forever.”

Moses presents the people with four guidelines:

**Guideline One:** Remember the hardships of your past and how you were tested for forty years in the desert to teach you that human beings do not live on bread alone but on what God commands.<sup>2</sup>

**Guideline Two:** God is bringing you into a good land where you will lack nothing. When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to Adonai your God for the good land that has been given you. (Therefore the creation of the Birkat Hamazon, or the grace after meals.)<sup>3</sup>

**Guideline Three:** When you are satisfied, have built fine houses, and have increased your herds, gold, and silver, beware of your heart growing haughty, of forgetting God’s commandments, of saying: “My power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me!”<sup>4</sup>

**Guideline Four:** After you have defeated your enemies and you occupy the land, do not say to yourselves: “God has enabled me to occupy this land because of my virtues.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> עֵקֶב (eikev) means both “heel” and “reward.” Rashi comments that the expression refers to the sort of laws that people may regard as unimportant, so they tend to step on them with their heels. But if the people are careful to observe even these neglected laws, God will reward them. Thus Rashi renders עֵקֶב as “As a reward, if”.

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 8:2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 8:7-10.

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 8:12-18.

<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 9:1-5.

When I was a young child of four, my parents and I were in hiding in the Greek countryside, trying to save ourselves from the Nazis. The Nazis had already captured fifty members of our family, but —by the grace of God and with the help and generosity of a righteous gentile — we escaped. We spent about a year in the Greek mountains, hiding from village to village. The Greek countryside was at its best around spring and summer. Food was scarce and we were hungry most of the time. My father used to recite this passage from *Parashat Eikev*, “Man does not live by bread alone but with whatever God can provide.” I was encouraged to eat whatever was available — some vegetables, some fruit. We had an abundance of chamomile flowers, so we consumed chamomile tea in enormous amounts.

Fresh water was available, but not bread. The aromas that emanated from the good earth and the beauty of the surroundings are still with me. Wild flowers of every color, fruit trees gave their fruits, the aroma of chamomile flowers, sage, and oregano compensated for the lack of bread. The beauty of the surrounding countryside and the abundance of colors in the mountains under a canopy of blue sky are with me to this day. Every day my parents and I recited the *Birkat Hamazon* after our exotic consumption of food. I still remember their devotion to tradition that kept our faith during those difficult times. My parents were reassuring me that God would send us some bread.

One day as I was sitting on a hill waiting for this miracle to happen, I noticed something moving in the horizon. This black dot was getting bigger and finally I could see a mule with some supplies and a Greek man dressed in black approaching our cabin. A miracle did happen. I was jumping with joy, my parents were crying and prayers of thanksgiving were recited. When the bread was baked it was the most delicious piece of bread I have ever tasted. We recited the *Shehecheyanu*, *Hamotsi*, and *Birkat Hamazon*. Truly, God had provided for us. It left a lasting, grateful memory.

My parents were concerned that, in our isolation in hiding, deprived of human contact, food, and education I would be underdeveloped both physically and mentally. They started to teach me, without books, stories of Torah, and the Greek classics. I heard for the first time the Shakespearian plays, Balzac, and Tolstoy.

Rabbi Morris Adler states, “human beings do not live on bread alone. Human beings are not only body but also mind. Intellectual development is the most significant aspect of human life. Human beings are also seekers of good, faith, and justice. Education brings us the acknowledgement that there is mystery in this world which our limited human understanding cannot comprehend.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> As quoted in *A Torah Commentary for Our Times*, by Rabbi Harvey J. Fields; URJ Pres; 1997.

Rabbi Harvey Fields states “Most commentators see in Moses’ guidelines important lessons. They all agree that arrogance and pride lead to corruption and denial of God. The antidotes to arrogance are gratitude and recollection. An appreciation of history puts all human accomplishments into perspective. History roots us in gratitude for the gifts of God.”<sup>7</sup>

I can still hear my Father’s voice “Sarah, remember where you came from and how we survived during the Holocaust.”

Yes, Papa, I remember, by the Grace of God.

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<sup>7</sup> Fields, *op cit.*