"Not By Bread Alone"
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz - Temple Sholom, Vancouver BC
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In this week's Torah Portion Ekev, Moses continues his farewell address to the Jewish people imparting to them all of the laws and commandments, the insights and observations that he has gleaned from their 40 years of wandering in the desert. These are the most important things that Moses wants to convey to the Israelities before they enter the promised land, and before he himself will die. Among them is the memory of the divine gift of manna the food that God provided for the Israelites while they marched through the desert these past 40 years.

If you recall it was a hunger that led the Israelites from the biblical land of Israel to eventual slavery in Egypt nearly 500 years before. Their was a drought in Israel and with no food to be eaten in the land, Jacob and his son's led the people to Egypt where the Pharoah provided food for them, but at an incredible price, their very freedom.

Fast forward 435 years later and the Israelites are in such a hurry to leave Egypt and bondage that they must leave even before the bread they are baking rises. The matzah that they take with them only lasts them so long, perhaps 7 weeks, from Pesach to Shavuot, the period of time it takes them to walk from Egypt to Mt Sinai, there at Mt Sinai they receive the Torah. And a different kind of hunger, this a spiritual one is fed and satisfied. But then again they are out of food and a hunger ravages the camp. Many argue to return to Egypt for at least there they had food to eat, even if their labor was most severe. In their hunger, the Israelites cry out to God, God hears their cries and provides for them manna from heaven. A divine food, some think an oatmeal like grain that was carried in by the desert winds, and followed the Israelites on their marches for 40 years.

Miraculously, though they will feel hunger on a daily basis, there will always be enough food to satiate their needs, and on Friday before shabbat there will be a double portion, so that they don't have to collect it on the Sabbath, this is one of the reasons for the double challah that we have on the Shabbat table to remind us of the double portion of manna that God provided for us in the desert.

Moses in our parsha recounts all of these events and then for the first time explains to them why God gave them manna from heaven when they were hungry. He explains:

כִּי לֹא עַל-הַלֶּחֶם לְבַדּוֹ יִחְיֶה הָאָדָם

Because a human being does not live on bread alone; (Deuteronomy 8:3)

The simple answer is that they were hungry because they had no food, and the simple solution it would seem is that God gave them manna from heaven to satisfy their hunger. But Torah like hunger has many layers and if we keep reading we see that the manna was not enough to satisfy them.

In the second half of the verse Moses continues:

כִּי עַל-כָּל-מוֹצָא פִי-יְהוָה, יִחְיֶה הָאָדָם.

A human being lives on everything that comes from the mouth of God. (Deuteronomy 8:3)

The manna filled their bellies, but the fact that God provided it for them, that filled the hunger of their souls, their hunger for God.

The Talmud tells the story of R. Hananiah and R. Jonathan who were also perplexed by the meaning of the gift of manna. They wondered how it could be that God gave the Israelites food and it satisfied them but they were still hungry. So where does a rabbi go when he or she has a question, in this case they went to Menahem the Baker. Menahem listened to their question and then took two cucumbers out from beneath his counter. One he left whole and the other he chopped up in to very small pieces. He asked them how much the first whole one was worth, they said 2 silver coins, and the second he ask, the one that was finely chopped, so much that it didn't look like a cucumber any more, they said 1 silver coin. Then Menachem asked them, "But is not the crushed cucumber just as large as the whole? He then answered his own question, "Even as man derives enjoyment from the taste of food, so too he derives enjoyment from the appearance of food." YES! God provided for their physical hunger through he manna, but the miraculous appearance of the manna, that nourished their souls, Without both they would not have been truly fed or truly satisfied.

Hunger is not a bad thing as my dietician and the Torah tell us, hunger is what motivates us in life to find that which will satisfy and sustain us. Hunger tells us that we are still alive that we have needs that must be met or we will cease to live. What do you hunger for, what nourishment do you seek? Listen to your body, your heart, your mind and your soul, where is there an emptiness, a yearning? While there may be many things that will satisfy our hungers in life, more money, more possessions, more food, we know that they are just empty spiritual calories, the fast food for a hungry soul. Rather remember the words of our parsha this week:

כִּי עַל-כָּל-מוֹצָא פִי-יְהוָה, יִחְיֶה הָאָדָם.

A human being lives on everything that comes from the mouth of God. (Deuteronomy 8:3)

The true source of our hunger is not only physical, but spiritual as well. There is an emptiness in our spiritual stomachs, and we can only satisfy that deep craving with the original soul food, with words of Torah, with heartfelt prayer and deeds of loving kindness.

A few lines later in this weeks Parsha Moses explains, "when you have eaten and are satisfied give thank to God." (Deuteronomy 8:10)

וְאָכַלְתָּ, וְשָׂבָעְתָּ--וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ,

My prayer for each of us as we go forward from this place, as we prepare our minds, hearts and souls for the new year which will soon be upon us, is that we recognized and identify the hunger, the yearning - the emptiness in our lives. I pray that we learn to satisfy that hunger in ways that do honor and service to our creator, in ways that are deserving of blessing, so that we can all say not only at the end of the meal, but at the end of every day:

וְאָכַלְתָּ, וְשָׂבָעְתָּ--וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ,

I have eaten and am satisfied and for this I thank God.