

Bnei Yisrael ate the manna for forty years...They ate the manna until their arrival at the border of the land of Canaan. (16:35)

In the *Mechilta*, Chazal teach that, *Lo nitnah Torah lidrosh ela l'ochlei man*, "The Torah was given to be expounded only by *mann*-eaters." This means that there were positive reasons for the Torah to have been given to *Klal Yisrael* while they were in the midst of their forty-year sojourn to the Promised Land. The wilderness was an integral part of this experience. The Torah had to be given in the desolate wilderness. It is not just because Egypt's prevailing environment was filled with spiritual bankruptcy and defilement. It was because to live in the desert is to defy the laws of nature. **Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl**, explains that a nation cannot exist in the wilderness by natural means. It needs a miracle. By giving us His Torah in the desert, Hashem taught us that devotion to the Torah is never compatible with belief in nature. Unrestricted faith in "natural causes" cannot go hand in hand with Torah, because to view the world through the prism of nature is antithetical to Torah perspective.

A person who sees the world only as the arena for natural forces will inevitably consider any attempt at living a spiritual life to be doomed to failure. The two – "nature" and "Torah" – just do not go well together. The Torah demands from us faith in a Power, Who transcends nature and Who directs nature in accordance with spiritual purposes. Rav Dessler observes that this negation of the natural point of view and adherence to the spiritual perspective may, at times, lead us to make decisions which seem bound to lead to disaster. One clear instance is that of the nascent nation following the Cloud of Glory out into the wilderness, without making any provisions for the future. This was considered by Hashem to be our nation's finest hour. *Zocharti lach chesed neurayich...lechtech Acharai ba'midbar b'erez lo zeruah*. "I recall for you the kindness of your youth...your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land" (*Yirmiyahu* 2:1). Pharaoh, as well as anyone whose perspective on life is dominated by nature, viewed this step as courting disaster. He only saw the "evil, blood and destruction," *Reu. 'ki raah neged pineichem*, "See! That evil intent is opposite your faces" (*Shemos* 10:10).

Hashem gave us the Torah on a supernatural basis. The Torah was given, to those who lived off the *manna*, to those who recognize on a daily basis that whatever they achieved was only by the grace of G-d. Indeed, Torah knowledge and retention are not based purely on acumen. One who is diligent and assiduous in his Torah study will be granted his achievement by virtue of a gift from the Almighty – its Divine Author. This concept applies to all of Jewish life, as well. There is nothing natural about serving Hashem. We serve Him with all of our *kochos*, abilities, until the very last moment, when we simply no longer have any strength left within us. We are stretched to the limit, and we still serve.

Hashem promised Avraham *Avinu* that he would father a son, upon whom the purpose of Creation would depend. Yet, the Patriarch found it difficult to accept, because he had seen "in the stars"

that his fortune was not to have a son. Hashem told him to “leave his astrology,” an idea which means: do not be moved by the power of nature which, from its very inception, is in violent confrontation with the spiritual purpose of Creation. The purpose of Creation can only be achieved by following a course which transcends nature.

Rav Dessler applies this idea to present day endeavor. On his own individual level, each one of us is confronted with challenges. For some, it is *Shabbos*. These people feel that *Shabbos* observance presents a serious test. Looking at earning a livelihood through the perspective of nature, *Shabbos* observance stands in the way of earning a living. The individual who trusts in Hashem, who understands that the Almighty provides, sees that even what seems to be “natural” is, in effect, miraculous. He trusts that “somehow” Hashem will find for him an avenue of financial salvation.

Likewise, one who seeks a lifestyle of solid financial freedom based on natural causes, with cause and effect playing a prominent role in his decision-making process, will certainly not take the “*ben Torah*” path. He will see that assuming such a course would collide with his perspective on earning a daily livelihood. Only one who takes the Torah plunge, taking his life in his hands, learning at all costs, despite the hardship and constant challenge, will find that he will be helped to learn and gain a meaningful livelihood without accepting the “vaunted” natural basis.

At a meeting of prominent *Rabbinic* leaders held in Lithuania, one of the speakers argued that, based upon the current financial situation, there was no way that the *yeshivos* could possibly have a future. There simply was no money, and, without a natural means of support, they simply could not survive. The *gadol ha’dor*, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, **Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl**, uncle of *Rav Dessler*, immediately countered, “Do not worry: The Torah exists on miracles. It will never have a natural basis.” This means that we must make every attempt to raise funds to increase a *yeshiva*’s financial structure in order to glorify Torah, to make it great in the eyes of people. Regardless of how daunting the task and how difficult the challenge, however, we may never give up hope, falter or become complacent, because the future of Torah is assured. Hashem will “take care” of the Torah.

Indeed, *Rav Dessler* writes that the saintly **Chafetz Chaim, zl**, was unhappy with the idea of investing large sums of money so that the *yeshivos* could have a strong financial foundation from which to be assured a regular income. He said, “I would rather invest the money in expanding the existing *yeshivos* and in creating new ones. How will they exist? That is Hashem’s business!”

The following story is a classic, related by **Horav Yaakov Ades, zl**, *Rosh Yeshiva* of Porat Yosef. The mere fact that this story was related by an individual of such an enviable spiritual caliber indicates how we must view these (apparently not-so-simple) stories. Two “retail” textile merchants in *Yerushalayim*, circa pre-State of Israel, had stores in close proximity of one another. A silk wholesaler approached one of them, whom we shall call Reuven, and offered him a fine lot of silk at an incredibly low price. Reuven examined the merchandise and saw that it was well-made,

light and flexible, yet strong, a perfect combination for long wearability. Now, came the haggling over the price. Back and forth they went, offer and counter offer, until they finally settled on a price. There was, however, one problem: It was a large lot which had to be purchased in its entirety. Reuven's business could not assume such a consignment. He decided to call his competitor, Shimon, with whom he had a good relationship. Perhaps he would take half of the order. This was not unusual, since this was one way that they could drive down the wholesale price. They competed, but they were not at one another's throats.

The shipment arrived, and it was split evenly between Reuven and Shimon. Now, all they had to do was sell the merchandise. Reuven and Shimon had two distinct styles of doing business. Shimon was hardworking and diligent, working in his shop from early morning until evening. Reuven also worked hard, but he had his priorities. He went to *shul* in the morning and took his time praying. Afterwards, he would recite *Tehillim* and study his daily dose of *Parsha* and *Mishnayos*. He ate breakfast and took his time *bentching*. Then he went to work. When Reuven arrived at his shop, Shimon's shop had already been open for a few hours. Reuven was of the firm opinion that Hashem would provide him with his needs. His *hishtadlus*, endeavoring, would suffice. The Almighty would do the rest.

One evening, shortly after the shipment arrived, Reuven's shop was visited by a Russian Orthodox priest who happened to be a regular customer. Reuven proudly displayed his new material. The priest was visibly impressed, and, after purchasing a bolt of material for himself, hurried back to the monastery to share his good fortune with his fellow priests. Seeing what their friend brought back with him, the other priests suddenly had an urge to update their collection of apparel. First thing in the morning, they were going to present themselves at Reuven's textile shop and purchase material for themselves.

The next day, bright and early, a group of Russian Orthodox priests were to be found standing impatiently in front of Reuven's shop. Lo and behold, Reuven was nowhere to be found. *Shul* was more important. He opened for business only after his spiritual affairs were put in order. Meanwhile, Shimon, who had already been open for business for a few hours, saw the priests, and, like a good samaritan, he approached them and offered to show them his material, which just happened to come from the same shipment as to be found in Reuven's store. Hearing this, the priests proceeded to Shimon's store to examine his material. If his claim was true, he would be the lucky vendor.

They had brought a sample of the material purchased the day before from Reuven's store by the first priest. After comparing the two, they declared that Shimon's material was inferior to that of Reuven. They were going to stick with a winner and wait for Reuven to open his shop. Shimon explained that it was impossible – both materials were the same. The priests were not to be convinced.

Reuven made the sale, which profited him handsomely. Afterwards, Shimon came over and said,

“We both had the same material, bought from the same shipment, at the same place – and, yet, they would only buy from you. You are right. You do your part –Hashem does His.”