

This week's Torah Portion Eikev, discusses our experience of wandering in the desert. The Parsha reads "God subjected you to the hardship of hunger and then gave you manna to eat, which neither you nor your ancestors had ever known, in order to teach you that people do not live on bread alone, but that they may live on anything that the LORD decrees." I feel I have gained two insights from this passage.

The first being that in seemingly barren times, God still provides, and those provisions exist beyond the bounds of our previous expectations or imagination. It is indeed in times such as those we are in living today, that we strive to look harder to see how God provides for us, beyond bread alone. It is through awareness of all the different ways we are nourished that we are even better fortified for our journey. Although I personally feel a hunger for live theater and dinner parties, without the distraction of social engagements, I've found purpose in nourishing my soul through discovering both new and old hobbies and interests which I had previously laid aside.

We have all experienced different examples of how God has provided for us in ways we previously couldn't have imagined. While we collectively need spirituality and social connection, God has acted through our Temple leadership to provide services and experiences outside of the physical space we previously have relied on. Through these creative minds, we have been able to and will continue to have the opportunity to gather in prayer, learning, and socializing through video chat gatherings such as this. While we can't be together in person, we can find deeper connections with friends and family who live far away, because we are using technology in ways we never considered using before. Personally, I used this technology to celebrate Passover with friends and family all throughout the country. The spirit of this creativity continues, as we approach High Holidays. This year Sukkot will have new meaning for me, as the ultimate opportunity to give thanks and honor all of the socially-distant visits I have been able to have outside of my home; another way God has provided in this experience.

The second insight that I gained from the words "people do not live on bread alone", is that the various hungers we feel from our emotional, mental and spiritual needs are equally as important to our physical hunger.

Just as we have the need for a job to provide income to take care of our basic physical needs, it is also important that a job provide the necessities for emotional & mental wellbeing. Studies show that whether or not people stay at their job is impacted more by company culture and growth opportunities, than it is by pay. You often hear people who love their jobs describing their coworkers as family. Good workplaces have co-workers that we rely on not only to make sure the job gets done, but to add life and levity to the day to day drudgery that can often be present in the office. But now as we navigate this pandemic, for many of us, that day to day work drudgery is in our homes, we have had to find new ways to take care of our emotional and physical needs. For some of us, the additional time with our families has aided in this. For others, the flexibility and free time afforded to us has led us to embracing practices like meditation or yoga to bring calm to the emotional storm around us.

Just as the body needs movement to maintain health, movement is equally as important to mental and emotional wellbeing. When we move in ways we enjoy, we can access greater feelings of joy in our body which then create a positive feedback loop with our mind. We also gain greater feelings of calm and groundedness, along with perspective on our connection to our community and the environment.

When we are looking for spiritual guidance as we deal with the day to day changes our current situation has forced upon us, we can look at this week's passage as an example. We don't talk about wandering through the desert like it was a walk in the park; we were lost and survival was difficult. But there were still pieces of life to be grateful for. We had mana; we had faith; and we had each other. And while today our manna may look more like a loaf of sourdough bread, we do not live by sourdough bread alone. Keeping our faith through virtual and socially distant means is essential to making it to the land of milk and honey. Shabbat Shalom.