

# Parashat Ekev





# The Good Land

- What is “the good of the Land” twice described in our parasha?
- What is the condition for inheriting the Land?
- What are the difficulties of travelling in the desert (chapter 8)?
- Why is the description of the good of the Land sandwiched between descriptions of the difficulties in the desert?

## 1. THE STRUCTURE OF CHAPTER 8 AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

In our parasha, Moshe twice describes the good of the Land to Bnei Yisrael, both times emphasizing that the inheritance of the Land is contingent on observance of the mitzvot:

Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors...

Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and

כָּל הַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי  
מֵצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם תִּשְׁמְרוּן  
לַעֲשׂוֹת לְמַעַן תִּחְיִין  
וְרַבִּיתֶם וּבִאתֶם וַיְרַשְׁתֶּם  
אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה'  
לְאַבְתֵּיכֶם...

וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת מִצְוֹת ה'  
אֶ-לֹהֶיךָ לְלַמַּת בְּדַרְכָּיו  
וּלְיִרְאַה אֶת-יְהוָה אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ  
מִבְּיַאֲדְךָ אֶל אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֶרֶץ  
נַחְלֵי מַיִם עֵינַת וַתְּהוֹמֹת  
יִצְאִים בְּבִקְעָה וּבְקָר:

deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. (Devarim 8: 1-11)

Observe therefore all the commands I am giving you today, so that you may have the strength to go in and take over the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, and so that you may live long in the land the Lord swore to your ancestors to give to them and their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey. The land you are entering to take over is

אֶרֶץ חָטָה וְשִׁעֲרָה וְגִפְנוֹ  
וּתְאֵנָה וְרִמּוֹן אֶרֶץ זֵית  
שָׁמֶן וְדִבְשׁ: אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא  
בְּמִסְכָּנֹת תֵּאכַל בָּהּ לֶחֶם  
לֹא תִחְסַר כֹּל בָּהּ אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר  
אֲבִינֶה בְּרוֹזל וּמִהַרְרֵיהֶּ תִּחְצַב  
נְחֹשֶׁת: וְאִכְלָתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ  
וּבְרַכְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ עַל  
הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְךָ:  
הַשְׁמֵר לְךָ פֶּן תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת ה'  
אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ לְבַלְתִּי שְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתַי  
וּמִשְׁפָּטַי וְחֻקֹּתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי  
מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם.

וְשִׁמְרֹתֶם אֶת כָּל הַמִּצְוֹת  
אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם לְמַעַן  
תְּחַזְּקוּ וּבִאתֶם וּירְשֶׁתֶם אֶת  
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲתֶם עֹבְרִים  
שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: וּלְמַעַן  
תִּתְּרִיבוּ יָמִים עַל הָאָדָמָה  
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה' לְאַבְרָהָם  
לְתַתּ לָהֶם וּלְיִצְחָק אֶרֶץ זָבַת  
חֶלֶב וְדִבְשׁ: כִּי הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר  
אַתָּה בָּא שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ לֹא  
כְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הוּא אֲשֶׁר  
יְצַאתֶם מִשָּׁם אֲשֶׁר תִּזְרַע

not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end. So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul— 14 then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and olive oil. ...If you carefully observe all these commands I am giving you to follow—to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him and to hold fast to him—then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and stronger than you.

(Devarim 11:8-23)

את זרעך והשקית בגלגלך  
 כגו הנרק: והארץ אשר אתם  
 עברים שמה לרשתה ארץ  
 הרים ובקעות למטר השמים  
 תשתה מים: ארץ אשר ה'  
 א-להיך דרש אתה תמיד  
 עיני ה' א-להיך בה מרשית  
 השנה ועד אחרית שנה: והיה  
 אם שמעו תשמעו אל מצותי  
 אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום  
 לאהבה את ה' א-להיכם  
 ולעבדו בכל לבבכם ובכל  
 נפשכם: ונתתי מטר ארצכם  
 בעתו יורה ומלקוש ואספת  
 הגנה ותירשך ויצהרך...  
 כי אם שמור תשמרון את  
 כל המצוה הזאת אשר  
 אנכי מצוה אתכם לעשתה  
 לאהבה את ה' א-להיכם  
 ללקת בכל דרכיו ולדבקה  
 בו: והוריש ה' את כל הגוים  
 האלה מלפניכם וירשתם  
 גוים גדלים ועצמים מכם.

In this lesson, we will focus on chapter 8.

The description of the good of the Land appears in the middle of chapter 8 (*pesukim* 7-10), and is preceded and followed by a description of the many difficulties of the years spent in the desert. The verses that describe the difficulties of the desert thus serve as a framework (introduction and conclusion) for the description of the good of the Land.

These introductory and concluding passages are in turn framed by introductory and concluding verses, which are mainly concerned with warning Bnei Yisrael not to forget God and to observe His mitzvot. Similarly, the central passage in this chapter – the description of the good of the Land – is marked and emphasized by the Torah by the use of delineating frame-words at its beginning and end – “the good of the Land.”

A Diagram of the Structure of Chapter 8. Chapter 8 in its entirety, marked according to this structure, is brought in an Appendix to this Shiur.

Warning to Observe the Mitzvot	The Difficulties in the Desert	The Structure of Chapter 8
Description of the Difficulties in the Desert		
Warning to Observe the Mitzvot		
“the good Land”	Description of the Land	
Description of the good of the Land		
“the good Land”		
Warning to Observe the Mitzvot	The Difficulties in the Desert	
Description of the Difficulties in the Desert		
Warning to Observe the Mitzvot		

When a parasha from the Torah is “arranged” in such a concentric literary structure (or features frame-words) which centralize a particular passage, the center conveys the main message of that chapter, while the framing passages serve to emphasize and accentuate that message.<sup>1</sup> This is true of our parasha.

1 This definition of a “concentric passage” is taken from: S. Bar-Efrat, “Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical

The center of the chapter is a description of the good of the Land, and this is the main message that Moshe wishes to impart to Bnei Yisrael: that the land they are about to inherit is a good, bountiful land. The good of the Land is emphasized by the framing context of the chapter – the description of the difficulties that Yisrael endured in the desert; and of course – the condition for inheriting the land is the observance of the Mitzvot.

## 2. CONTRADICTION IN THE DESCRIPTION OF THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE DESERT

Let's take a closer look at the two passages that describe the time in the desert: How does Moshe describe this period, and what purpose does this description solve?

Passage 1 (8:2-8):

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes

וְזָכַרְתָּ אֵת כָּל הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר  
הִלַּכְתָּ ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ זֶה  
אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּמִדְבָּר  
לְמַעַן עֲנֹתְךָ לְנִסְתָּךְ לְדַעַת  
אֵת אֲשֶׁר בְּלִבְךָ הֲתִשְׁמֹר  
מִצְוֹתָיו אִם לֹא: וַיַּעֲנֶךָ  
וַיִּרְעַבְךָ וַיֹּאכִלְךָ אֵת הַמָּן  
אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַעְתָּ וְלֹא יָדְעוּ  
אַבְתֵּיךָ, לְמַעַן הוֹדִיעְךָ כִּי  
לֹא עַל הַלֶּחֶם לִבְדוּ יִחְיֶה  
הָאָדָם כִּי עַל כָּל מוֹצֵא כִּי  
ה' יִחְיֶה הָאָדָם: שִׁמְלֵתְךָ  
לֹא בְּלֶחֶם מִעֲלֶיךָ וּרְגִלְךָ



from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

לא בצקה זה ארבעים שנה: וידעת עם לבבך כי באשר יסר איש את בנו ה' אלהיך מנסתך.

Passage 2 (15-16):

He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.

המוליכך במדבר הגדל והנורא נחש שרף ועקרב וצמאון אשר אין מים המוציא לך מים מצור החלמיש: המאכלך מן המדבר אשר לא ידעו אבותיך למען ענתך ולמען נסתך להיטבך באחרייתך.

Both passages describe the great difficulties of the journey through the desert. The expression “למען ענתך לנסותך,” “to torment you in order to test you” features in both passages, and the *man*, the manna bread, is mentioned in both as well.

However, besides these two repeated features, each passage describes different aspects of the desert period:

**The first passage** mentions the duration of the journey (40 years); the miracle that “your clothes did not become worn and your feet did not swell”; and the fact that the journey in the desert was suffering

brought upon Israel by God: “to torment you...and you were tormented and starved...from your suffering.”

**The second passage** describes the desert as a terrible place: “the great and terrible desert, of venomous snake and scorpion and thirst,” and God’s kindness in drawing water out of rocks is also mentioned.

The difference becomes yet more apparent through the expression common to both passages:

**In the first passage:** “that the Lord your God led you for these forty years in the desert **to torment you in order to test you...**”

**In the second passage:** “**Who fed you manna in the desert that your forefathers knew not to torment you in order to test you...**”

According to the first passage, the trial and torment that Israel endured is the lengthy journey through the desert, while according to the second passage, the trial and torment endured is the eating of manna.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, a careful reading reveals that the role manna plays an opposite role in each of the two passages: in the first passage, the manna is presented as a **solution** to the torment and hunger in the desert: “and He tormented and starved you, and fed you the manna”; and the purpose of granting manna to Bnei

---

2 As the Seforno interpreted in verse 16, although Rabeinu Bahya explains that the words “in order to torment you” refer to the previous verse, which reads “who led you through the great and terrible desert”: according to his exegesis, the phrase in both passages refers to the same torment.

Yisrael is “to inform you that man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the Lord’s mouth does he live.”<sup>3</sup> In contrast, in the second passage, the manna is described as part of the trial and torment itself; and the purpose of the giving of the manna, of this difficult trial, is “for your eventual good.”

How can we explain the contradictions between these two passages?

### 3. THE FIRST DESCRIPTION OF LIFE IN THE DESERT

As mentioned, there are two descriptions of the difficulties of the journey through the desert. However, the two descriptions are very different from one another:

According to the first description, the journey in the desert was paved with trials and tribulations that God brought upon Israel. The purpose of these trials was “to know what is in your hearts, whether or not you will observe His commandments”; that is – God places Israel in difficult situations in order to test whether they are also willing to serve Him

3 The Ramban explains thus: It can be said that He tormented you during your journey through the desert for forty years, and He starved you, at first, as they said (Shemot 16:3) to kill this congregation with hunger, then afterward He fed you the manna, to inform you that by every word that proceeds out of the Lord’s mouth does he live ...

This passage is one of the options that Ramban brings, and he comments that “this [possibility] arises from the plain meaning of the text” (the *peshat*). Ramban’s commentary on these verses is lengthy, and we will take a further look later on.

when times are hard, when they are tormented with suffering, when life is not running smoothly.

In this situation, when Israel's condition is most difficult, the manna appears like the gift from heaven that it is, allowing them to continue existing. God situates Israel in the desert, placing them in the face of starvation – “and He tormented and starved you.” However, at the same time, God presents a divine solution to the problem of hunger: “and He fed you the manna.” This solution is most definitely unnatural, an obvious Godsend, “that your forefathers knew not,” and, one might add, that the generations after will not know either. Israel, hovering on the brink of starvation, receive the heavenly bread and become powerfully aware that life is completely governed by God.<sup>4</sup>

The same is also true of the other torments involved in journeying through the desert – “your clothes did not become worn and your feet did not swell.” Israel leaves the desert with a strong feeling that “you shall know in your heart that as a father disciplines his son, so the Lord your God is disciplining you” – Israel's suffering is from God and for their own good, and salvation, likewise, also comes from God.

As we saw above, each description of the period of the desert is framed with opening and concluding

---

4 As Rashbam interpreted in his commentary on Shemot 16:4, “**that I may test them**: Because each and every day they are dependent for their food, perhaps thus they will believe in Me and follow My Torah. As it is explained in Parashat Ekev: “and He tormented you and he starved you.”

verses that warn Israel to observe the mitzvot. In addition to this, a brief reminder can also be found within the description itself: “to torment you in order to test you, to know that **you will observe His commandments.**” Through the great difficulties of the years spent in the desert, Israel learns the important message that life is governed by God alone, and therefore His mitzvot must be observed. Keeping the mitzvot sustains the special connection between God and Israel, and the continuation of a life governed directly by God.

#### Bountiful Abundance in the Land and the Danger of Forgetting God

After the period spent in the desert, which indoctrinates Israel into a life governed by the will of God, Israel are to arrive at a “good Land” (as described at length in verses 7-10). Life in the desert is not an ideal way of life, but merely a “series of lessons” that Israel must learn in preparation for entering the Land.

Life in the Land is completely different, as the Land is overflowing with bountiful abundance:

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. (8:7-9)

... אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֶרֶץ  
 נְחָלֵי מַיִם עֵינֹת וְתַהֲמוֹת  
 יִצְאִים בְּבִקְעָה וּבְהָרִים:  
 אֶרֶץ חֲטָה וּשְׁעָרָה וְגִבּוֹן  
 וְתַאֲנָה וְרִמּוֹן אֶרֶץ זֵית  
 וְשֶׁמֶן וְדֹבֶשׁ: אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר  
 לֹא בְמִסְקִנָּה תֹאכַל בָּהּ  
 לֶחֶם לֹא תִחְסַר כֹּל בָּהּ  
 אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲבִנֶיהָ בְּרֹזָל  
 וּמִהַרְרֵיהָ תִּחְצֹב נְחֹשֶׁת.

The contrast between “and He tormented you and starved you” in the desert and the abundance of the Land of Israel is salient: the Land is flowing with water and rich with fruit, and Israel will no longer eat in order to survive, but in satiety. In contrast to the sparse desert, in the Land of Israel, nothing is lacking.

This seems to be an appropriate ending for the chapter: Israel has learnt the important lesson of living a life fully governed by God, and they have only earned the right to inherit the Land after the desert’s “series of lessons” and the internalization that all blessing comes directly from God.

However, it appears that even so, despite the lengthy education they received in the desert, Am Yisrael is still not immune to forgetting God, and Moshe Rabbeinu sees fit to warn them accordingly:

Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (11-14)

הַשְׁמַר לְךָ פֶּן תִשְׁכַּח  
אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְבַלְתִּי  
שָׁמֹר מִצְוֹתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו  
וְחֻקֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֶנֶכִי מֵצִוְךָ  
הַיּוֹם: פֶּן תֹאכַל וְשָׂבַעְתָּ  
וּבָתִים טֹבִים תִּבְנֶה  
וַיִּשְׁבַּתָּ: וּבָקָרְךָ וְצֹאֲנֶךָ  
יִרְבּוּ וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב יִרְבּוּ  
לְךָ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לְךָ יִרְבֶּה:  
וְרָם לְבָבְךָ וְשָׁכַחְתָּ אֶת  
ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ...

It appears that being educated to place all trust in God during times of hardship and crisis is no guarantee to placing all trust in God during the opposite situation: in times of plenty. When a person becomes accustomed to receiving his or her bounty in a natural, material way, rather than directly from God, there is a danger that he will become arrogant and forget that it is in fact God who bestows all this goodness upon him.

How can we deal with this potential danger?

#### 4. THE SECOND DESCRIPTION OF LIFE IN THE DESERT

Once again, Moshe describes the desert period, this time from a slightly different angle. He describes the great and terrible desert, wrought with dangers:

snakes, scorpions, the lack of water; and nonetheless, in verses 14-15 **God is described as Israel's benefactor**, who makes their journey through the desert possible,<sup>5</sup> brings out water from rocks and gives them manna (this description is salient based on the comparison to verses 2-5, which describe God as tormenting Israel in the desert).

According to this description, in the desert, Israel experienced **God's kindness**, and this experience will supposedly imprint the Source of all good in their memory and their recognition that everything good comes from God: "and you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you strength to produce wealth."

That is, in the second passage, Moshe Rabbeinu describes the years spent journeying through the desert as a time when all of their needs were provided by God. The purpose of this period was to imprint Israel with the quality of gratitude, and to prepare them for the abundance waiting for them in

---

5 The desert is described as a terrible place which can only be travelled with God's help, as the Midrash describes: This cloud was one of the seven Clouds of Glory that enveloped them, as it says "He surrounded them" (Devarim 32:10): one above them so heat and sun would not harm them, as it says "Heat and sun will not smite them, for He who has compassion on them will guide them" (Isaiah 49:10). And one beneath, as it says, "He will lift him on his wing" (Devarim 32:11), and one before them, lifting up every low place and lowering every high place, as it says "every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill will be made low (Isaiah 40:4), and it would smite snakes and scorpions... before them, as it says, "in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way..." (*Sechel Tov* [Buber] Shemot 13).



the Land of Israel through the miraculous way that water flowed from a rock, and the Clouds of Glory surrounding them, protecting them from snakes and scorpions, and smoothing the way before them.<sup>6</sup>

However, when everything comes directly from God, without any effort on a person's part, a person is liable to take everything for granted rather than recognize such abundance as a gift from Heaven; how can a person thank God for being saved from snakes and scorpions when he is wrapped in the protective Clouds of Glory and has never even seen a snake?

For this reason, God gave them the manna. The purpose of the manna was to teach Bnei Yisrael an important lesson: "Who fed you manna in the desert that your forefathers knew not, to torment you in order to test you... for your eventual good." While the manna is one of the good things that God bestowed upon Israel, it has a certain aspect of torment and trial, thereby preparing Israel for the good they will receive in the future.

How is the manna a trial and torment for Israel?

In order to understand this, let us return to Parashat Beshalach, which describes the manna given to Israel:

---

<sup>6</sup> See comment 5, above.

And the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael complained to Moshe and Aharon in the desert: and Bnei Yisrael said to them, If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt, where we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death. Then the Lord said to Moshe, "I will make bread rain down from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day... (Shemot 16:2-4)

Here, the manna is presented as a solution for Israel's hunger, as described in our chapter in verses 2-4.

However, in parashat Behalotcha, in reaction to their rejection of the manna and their craving for meat, the Torah describes the unique goodness of the manna:

And the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance was like the appearance of crystal: the people would wander about and glean it and grind it with a mill or crush it with a mortar and cook it in a pot and make it into loaves, and its taste was like the taste of a delicacy in oil. And when the dew fell upon the camp, the manna would fall upon it. (Bamidbar 11:7-9)

והמָן כְּזֶרַע גַּד הוּא וְעֵינָיו  
כְּעֵין הַבְּדֵלֶת: שָׁטוּ הָעַם  
וְלָקְטוּ וּמָחְנוּ בְּרַחֲמִים  
אוֹ דָבוּ בַמִּדְבָּרָה וּבָשְׁלוּ  
בַפְּרוֹר וְעָשׂוּ אֹתוֹ עֲגוֹת  
וְהָיָה טַעְמוֹ כְּטַעַם לֶשֶׁד  
הַשָּׂמֶן: וּבְרִדַת הַטַּל עַל  
הַפְּתִיחָה לָיְלָה יֵרֵד הַמָּן  
עָלָיו.

Ibn Ezra interprets this passage thus:

The text comes to explain the misjudgment of the cravers, for the manna was like coriander seed, easy to collect, and white in appearance. Moreover, they could eat it as it was, or to grind it in mills and make loaves, or to crush it and cook it in pots, and it had a delicate taste like a delicacy in oil. And what is more, it would fall upon clean ground, after the dew had washed the place [where it then fell].

סֵפֶר הַכְּתוּב חֲסֵרוֹן דַּעַת  
הַמִּתְאֵוִים, כִּי הַמָּן הָיָה  
כוֹרֵעַ גַּד, וְהוּא קָל לְלִקּוֹט,  
וְהָיָה נָרָאָה, כִּי הוּא לָבָן.  
וְעוֹד כִּי יוֹכְלוּ לֵאכֹלוֹ  
כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיָה, גַּם לְמַחְנוּ  
בְּרַחֲמִים וְלַעֲשׂוֹת עֲוֹנוֹת,  
אוֹ לְדַכּוֹתוֹ וּלְבַשְׁלוֹ  
בַפְּרוֹר, וַיֵּשׁ לוֹ טַעַם נֹכְבֵּד  
כְּמוֹ לֶשֶׁד הַשָּׂמֶן. וְעוֹד  
הָיָה יוֹרֵד עַל מְקוֹם נָקִי  
אַחַר שִׁירְחֹץ הַטַּל אֶת  
הַמְּקוֹם.

If so, the manna is described as a wonderful God-given gift; so why is it described in our parasha like a trial and a torment?<sup>7</sup>

7 The Abrabanel asks similarly in his commentary on Shemot 16:22, question 8. And see his answer in chapter 16:4.

The next verses in Beshalach will contribute to our understanding:

I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions...

It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent. The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed. Then Moshe said to them, No one is to keep any of it until morning. However, some of them paid no attention to Moshe; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell

יאמר ה' אל מֹשֶׁה הֲנִי מְמַטֵּיר לָכֶם לֶחֶם מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֵּצֵא הָעָם וַלְקָטוּ דָבָר יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ לְמַעַן אֲנִסְנֶנּוּ הַיֵּלֶךְ בְּתוֹרָתִי אִם לֹא...  
זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' לְקַטֹּוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אִישׁ לְפִי אֶכְלוּ עֹמֶר לְגִלְגֵּלֶת מִסֹּפֶר נִפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם אִישׁ לְאִשְׁרֵי בְּאֵהָלוֹ תִקַּחוּ: וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּלְקָטוּ הַמִּרְבָּה וְהַמְּמַעֲיִט: וַיִּמְדוּ בְּעֹמֶר וְלֹא הָעֵדִיף הַמִּרְבָּה וְהַמְּמַעֲיִט לֹא הִקְסִיר אִישׁ לְפִי אֶכְלוּ לְקָטוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם אִישׁ אֶל יוֹתֵר מִמֶּנּוּ עַד בִּקְרָה: וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיּוֹתֵרוּ אַנְשִׁים מִמֶּנּוּ עַד בִּקְרָה וַיִּרְם תּוֹלְעִים וַיִּבְאֵשׁ וַיִּקְצַף עֲלֵהֶם מֹשֶׁה: וַיִּלְקָטוּ אוֹתוֹ בַּבֶּקֶר בַּבֶּקֶר אִישׁ כְּפִי אֶכְלוּ וְחָם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַנִּמְס: וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁנַיִם לְקָטוּ לָחֶם מִשְׁנֵה שְׁנֵי הָעֹמֶר לְאָחָד ... וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם הוּא אֲשֶׁר דָּבָר ה' שֶׁבַתוֹן שַׁבַּת קִדְשׁ לֵה' מָחָר אֶת

. So Moshe was angry with them. Each morning everyone gathered as much as they needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much—two omers for each person... [Moshe] said to them, This is what the Lord commanded: Tomorrow is to be a day of Shabbat rest, a holy Shabbat to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning. So they saved it until morning, as Moshe commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. (Shemot 16:4-24)

אֲשֶׁר תֹאכְלוּ אִפּוֹ וְאֵת  
אֲשֶׁר תִּבְשְׁלוּ בִשְׁלוּ וְאֵת  
כָּל הָעֵדָף הַנִּיחִו לָכֶם  
לְמוֹשֶׁה עַד הַבֶּקֶר:  
וַיִּנְיְחוּ אֹתוֹ עַד הַבֶּקֶר  
כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מֹשֶׁה וְלֹא  
הִבְאִישׁ וְרִמָּה לֹא הָיְתָה  
בּוֹ.

The manna was given to Bnei Yisrael in order to solve the problem of hunger in the desert, and in this sense, it is similar to the water that flowed from the rock, which solved the problem of thirst. However, as opposed to the water, which was produced in an unnatural way, but in itself was ordinary water in every sense – the manna was a new creation whose very existence was miraculous.

The wondrous quality of the manna was a constant reminder of its Divine source, a miracle which must not be taken for granted; because of its unique qualities:

1. The manna was created for Israel's needs in the

desert<sup>8</sup> and was unknown in the world before this time, as Moshe specifies in our parasha: “that you did not know and that your forefathers knew not.”

2. The procedure of collecting the manna was indebted to very strict rules, unlike usual eating: a specific amount had to be gathered, none could be left for the next day, and twice as much had to be gathered on Fridays.
3. The manna followed Divine rules: it would rot overnight, but not on Fridays (additionally, according to the Midrash,<sup>9</sup> no matter how much each person gathered, they would always end up with the same amount).
4. The people were aware of their dependence upon the manna, which fell anew each day, and only enough for that day (except on Fridays).

The manna’s unique quality, in a sense, completed the Divine profusion of the Clouds of Glory. In contrast with the Clouds of Glory, whose entire purpose was to fulfill the people’s needs so completely, to the extent that the people were not even aware of the dangers they faced, and to take this protection for granted; the manna was a Divine gift that served as a constant reminder of unceasing Divine abundance.

---

8 Over the generations, some tried to identify the manna with a natural food that was familiar to them, and Ibn Ezra and Rav Saadya Gaon counter this approach:

9 See Rashi ad loc., verses 17-18, as well as Ibn Ezra.

Thus the manna functioned as a test for Israel: first of all, in the plainest sense – if they would follow God’s instructions of how to gather the manna<sup>10</sup> (not to gather more than required for that day, not to leave over for the next day, and not to go out gathering on Shabbat).

Furthermore, the manna was a difficult test for Bnei Yisrael because of the psychological difficulty it presented them with: they must be completely, utterly dependent on God, having faith that He will bring down manna from the heavens every single day, without having any food stored for times of need. The manna forced Bnei Yisrael into a perpetual state of utter dependence on God.<sup>11</sup>

---

10 Thus Rashi explained the Torah’s definition of the manna as test (Shemot 16:4): “to test whether you will follow my commandments or not” – “if you will follow the instructions related to it, not to leave over from it, and not to go out to gather on Shabbat.”

11 As Rav Shimson Raphael Hirsch explains in our parasha: “Bread” – לחם – is a food that a person fights for – נלחם - fights against nature, and against fellow creatures. Bread is the product of nature and of the human intellect that governs the world. Bread represents the human intellect that rules over nature and acts in society in accordance with other factors, and thus humankind creates the means for its existence. And this raises the thought that a person’s ability to create is the only condition for his earthly existence, and we are thus liable to forget God’s government of the world, which is the source of human nourishment; that is, even though that each and every slice of bread that sustains us is testimony to God’s providence and His wide and generous hand... thus, the “concern for bread” will become the ceaseless, purposeless persecution of bread, and once again our hearts will not be available for thoughts of pure spiritual significance... a person’s existence is not dependent solely on nature’s help

Indeed, in parashat Behalotcha, the Torah describes Bnei Yisrael's failure to pass this test:

The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again Bnei Yisrael started wailing and said, If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna! (Bamidbar 11:4-6).

וְהָאִסְפָּקָה אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבּוֹ  
הִתְאַווּ תַּאֲוָה וַיֵּשְׁבוּ וַיִּבְכּוּ  
גַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִי  
יֵאָכְלֵנוּ בָּשָׂר: זָכַרְנוּ אֶת  
הַדָּגָה אֲשֶׁר נֹאכַל בְּמִצְרַיִם  
חִנָּם אֶת הַקִּישׁוּיִים וְאֶת  
הָאֲבִטְחִיִּים וְאֶת הַחֲצִיר וְאֶת  
הַבָּצְלִים וְאֶת הַשּׁוּמִיִּם:  
וְעַתָּה נַפְשֵׁנוּ יִבְשֶׁה אֵין כָּל  
בְּלִתֵּי אֵל הַמָּן עֵינֵינוּ.

While their complaint opens with the monotony of the manna and their cravings for a rich, diversified menu, it also reveals that they find it difficult to wait for food each and every day, as the Ramban explains their complaint:

They said “we never see anything but this manna” – even the food we live on is not in our hands, so that we feel full and satisfied, but we must constantly lift up our eyes to see if it is coming, and it does not last at all. They said the well-known parable (*Yoma* 74b)<sup>12</sup>, one who does

ואמרו “בלתי אל המן  
עינינו” – שאפילו המזון  
אשר אנו חיים בו איננו  
בידינו שתהיה נפשנו  
דשנה ושבעה בו, אבל  
נתאוה לו ונשא עינינו אליו  
בכל עת כי באולי יבא לנו,  
והנה אין כל בלתי תוחלת

---

and a person is not only represented through his “bread,” but every command of God can sustain a person’s spirit, and the bread that a person finds in an unnatural way is also the result of God’s command.



המון. אמרו המשל not have a loaf in his basket is not  
הידוע (יומא עד ע"ב<sup>13</sup>), the same as one who does not have  
אינו דומה מי שיש לו a loaf in his basket... (Ramban,  
Bamidbar 11:6) פת בסלו למי שאין לו  
פת בסלו...

If so, the manna is, on the one hand, a **gift from above**, bestowed upon Israel in God's kindness, which enables their existence in the desert; while on the other hand, the manna is a perpetual **test**, a difficult trial for Bnei Yisrael.<sup>14</sup>

12 The Talmud (*Yoma* 74b) brings two possibilities regarding what is the "torment" of the manna:

"Who fed you manna in the desert to torment you," Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi: one said: One who has a loaf in his basket is not the same as one who does not have a loaf in his basket, while the other said: One who sees what he is eating is not the same as one who does not see what he is eating.

13 הגמרא (יומא עד ע"ב) מביאה את שתי האפשרויות של העינוי: "המאכלך מן במדבר למען ענתך", רבי אמי ורבי אסי; חד אמר: אינו דומה מי שיש לו פת בסלו למי שאין לו פת בסלו, וחד אמר: אינו דומה מי שרואה ואוכל למי שאינו רואה ואוכל.

14 In his commentary on Devarim 8:2-3, the Ramban describes both sides well:

"And you shall remember all the way" etc – know that in fulfilling mitzvot there is complete good, and no righteous person will be abandoned and begging for bread, for God sustains you in the desert through a miraculous act in order for you to fulfill His mitzvot.

And it has already been commented on the story of the manna (*Shemot* 16:4) that the reason is "to torment you in order to test you to know if it is in your heart to observe His commandments or not" – for this was a great trial for them... for they entered the great desert, which is not a place of bread, and they had nothing besides the manna which rained down every day and then melted in the heat of the sun, and they hungered greatly for it. And all this was done in order to observe God's mitzvot and to fulfill what He commanded. While God could have led them through the cities around them, He had them perform these tests because He knew that through this, they would observe His mitzvot forever.

## Conclusion

On the threshold of Israel, the land flowing with milk and honey, Moshe twice mentions the period of the desert, in order that Bnei Yisrael will not forget the important lesson they learned in the desert:

The time of the desert taught Bnei Yisrael to trust in God and know that all is governed by Him: both the good and the bad is governed by God, who controls and rules all.

Moshe chooses to describe the years spent in the desert in two different passages, thus teaching Israel that there are two realities which may lead a person to stop observing the mitzvot: either out of crisis and difficulty, when a person feels that God is

---

And the reason “that you did not know, and your forefathers knew it not” – for they did not know that the manna could not sustain them for a long time, for they were not familiar with it from their forefathers’ experience with it.

Or, it could be said that it was a great kindness that their forefathers had not received it, for even though they had done all that had been commanded of them “Go out from your land, your birthplace, and from your father’s household” (Bereshit 12:1), they were not deserving of being sustained through heavenly food, as has been done for you. And so it says in the Midrash *Bamidbar Sinai Raba* (1:2), that in Moshe’s merit you lived, eating manna that your holy forefathers had never seen, as it says “and your forefathers knew it not.” And it is explained that this was done to inform them that He is the sustainer of humanity in all that He decrees, therefore observe His mitzvot and live.

That is: on the one hand, the manna is a great kindness that Israel were granted, a miracle food. On the other hand – the manna is a great trial, for people could not store it, but had to trust that it would be bestowed every day anew, and furthermore, it was an unfamiliar food – it was unclear if one could live on it alone, indefinitely.

not helping him, or even tormenting him; or out of sheer abundance, when a person's life is so filled with earthly goodness that he or she may forget the true Source of all goodness,

The manna is an answer to both of these situations. On the one hand, through it, a person can learn that even in times of difficulty and **torment**, God bestows goodness on humanity; and then a person comes to realize how his or her life is governed by God, understanding that God is teaching him a lesson through hardship, just as parents educate their children: "for by every word that proceeds out of the Lord's mouth does he live...(3); and you shall know in your heart that as a father disciplines his son, so the Lord your God is disciplining you" (5). Bnei Yisrael must remember the lessons learned in the collective "childhood" of their nation in the desert when they "grow up" and arrive at the Land of Israel in all its abundance.

On the other hand, the manna represents the constant **abundance** that never ceases – and that must not be taken for granted. The manna taught Israel that they are entirely dependent on God – and this also applies in times of abundance, when they reach the Land of Israel. Even when Israel become people of wealth, they must remember that this wealth is all from God: "and you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you strength to produce wealth" (8).

## Appendix:

### The Structure of Chapter 8

1. Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors.
2. Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.
3. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.
4. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years.
5. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.
6. Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him.
7. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land: a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills;
8. a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey;
9. a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

10. When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.
11. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day.
12. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down,
13. and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied,
14. then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.
15. He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock.
16. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.
17. You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me."
18. But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.
19. If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them,

I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. 20 Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God.

### ו. נספח: מבנה פרק ח'

- (א) כָּל הַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם תִּשְׁמְרוּן לַעֲשׂוֹת לְמַעַן תִּחְיִין וּרְבִיתֶם וּבִאתֶם וּירְשֶׁתֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה' לְאַבְתִּיכֶם:
- (ב) וְזָכַרְתָּ אֶת כָּל הַדְּרָכַי אֲשֶׁר הִלִּיכְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ זֶה אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּמִדְבָּר לְמַעַן עֲנִתְךָ לְנִסְתֶּךָ לְדַעַת אֶת אֲשֶׁר בְּלִבְּךָ הִתְשַׁמֵּר מִצְוֹתַי אִם לֹא:
- (ג) וַיַּעֲזֹב וַיִּרְעַבְךָ וַיֹּאכְלֶךָ אֶת הַמָּן אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַעְתָּ וְלֹא יָדְעוּן אַבְתִּיךָ לְמַעַן הוֹדַעְךָ כִּי לֹא עָל הַלֶּחֶם לִבְדּוֹ יִחְיֶה הָאָדָם כִּי עַל כָּל מוֹצֵא פִי ה' יִחְיֶה הָאָדָם:
- (ד) שְׁמֹלְתְךָ לֹא בִלְתָהּ מַעְלִיךְ וְכִגְלֶךָ לֹא בְצַקָּה זֶה אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה:
- (ה) וַיְדַעְתָּ עִם לִבְּךָ כִּי בְּאֲשֶׁר יִיָּסֵר אִישׁ אֶת בְּנוֹ ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ מִיִּסְרֶךָ:

קשיי המדבר -  
תיאור א'

- (ו) וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת מִצְוֹת ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ לְלִקְחַת בְּדַרְכֶיךָ וּלְיִרְאָה אֹתוֹ:
- (ז) כִּי ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ מוֹבִיאֲךָ אֶל אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֶרֶץ נַחְלֵי מַיִם עֵינַת וַתְּהַמּוֹת יִצְאִים בְּבִקְעָה וּבְהָרָה:
- (ח) אֶרֶץ חֹטֵה וְשֹׁעֲרָה וְגִפְזָה וַתֵּאֱנָה וְרַמּוֹן אֶרֶץ זֵית שָׁמֶן וּדְבָשׁ:
- (ט) אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא בְּמִסְפַּגַּת תֹּאכַל בָּהּ לֶחֶם לֹא תִחַסֵּר כָּל בָּהּ אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲבִיךָ בָרָץ וּמְהֵרָרֶיךָ תִּחְצַב נְחֹשֶׁת:
- (י) וְאָכַלְתָּ וּשְׂבַעְתָּ וּבִרְכַתְתָּ אֹת ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ עַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְךָ:

תיאור טוב-הארץ

- (יא) הִשְׁמֹר לְךָ פֶן תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְבִלְתִּי שָׁמֹר מִצְוֹתַי וּמִשְׁפָּטַי וְחֻקֹּתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם:
- (יב) פֶן תֹּאכַל וּשְׂבַעְתָּ וּבִתִּים טֹבִים תִּבְנֶה וַיִּשְׁכַּחְתָּ:
- (יג) וּבְקִרְבְּךָ וּצְאֻנְךָ יִרְבְּזוּ וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב יִרְבֶּה לְךָ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְךָ יִרְבֶּה:
- (יד) וְרַם לִבְּךָ וּשְׂכַחְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ הַמוֹצִיאֲךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּיַת עֲבָדִים:
- (טו) הַמוֹלִיכְךָ בְּמִדְבָּר הַגָּדֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא נְחֹשׁ שָׂרָף וְעַקְרָב וּצְמֵאוֹן אֲשֶׁר אִין מַיִם הַמוֹצִיא לְךָ מַיִם מִצּוֹר הַחֲלָמִישׁ:
- (טז) הַמֵּאֲכִלְךָ מִן בְּמִדְבָּר אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדְעוּן אַבְתִּיךָ לְמַעַן עֲנִתְךָ וּלְמַעַן נִסְתֶּךָ לְהִיטִבְךָ בְּאַחֲרִיתְךָ:

קשיי המדבר -  
תיאור ב'

(ז) וְאִמְרָתָּ בְּלִבְּךָ בְּחַי וְעֵצָם יְדֵי עֲשֹׂהָ לִי אֵת הַחֵיל הַזֶּה:  
(יח) וְזָכַרְתָּ אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי הוּא הִנִּיתָ לְךָ פֶּחַם לַעֲשׂוֹת חֵיל לְמַעַן הַקִּים אֵת בְּרִיתוֹ  
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְתָּיִךְ בְּיוֹם הַזֶּה:  
(יט) וְהִיָּה אִם שָׁכַחְתָּ תִּשְׁכַּח אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְעַבַדְתָּם  
וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ לָהֶם הַעֲדַתִּי בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֲבַד תֵּאבְדוּן:  
(כ) בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר ה' מֵאֲבִיד מִפְּנֵיכֶם בְּן תֵּאבְדוּן עַקֵּב לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּן בְּקוֹל ה'  
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: