

מִתְחַבְּרֵי מַעֲשֵׂי דָהָר כְּלָם בְּחִבְמָה עֲשִׂיתֶם לְאֵתָהּ מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ.

THE ECO-TORAH

AN ENVIRONMENTAL COMMENTARY
ON THE CHUMASH



JEWISHECOSEMINARS

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The Eco-Torah

Commentary by Rabbi Yonatan Neril and others

Edited by Rabbi Leo Dee

Jewish Wisdom Meets Ecology: The Eco-Torah reveals how the 3,500-year-old Jewish tradition offers profound teachings on ecological sustainability. It explores how the Torah and rabbinic commentaries relate to a range of contemporary ecological challenges, such as preserving biodiversity and ensuring clean air, land and water. With commentaries on hundreds of verses, this Torah publication explores a wide range of Jewish ecological topics, including food, energy, consumerism, Shabbat and compassion to animals. This book draws on the wisdom of many generations of Jewish sages, contemporary rabbis, and scientific sources.

The Eco-Torah commentary is the first of its kind and brings the abundant environmental and sustainability insights of our tradition to the English-speaking world, for whom such a commentary does not yet exist. This book will deepen Jewish learning, inspire positive changes in ecological awareness and demonstrate the timeless wisdom of our ancient tradition. At this critical, turning point in human history, when the fate of humanity and all species hangs in the balance, the time has come for such a commentary to emerge in print.

The Eco-Torah will incorporate a number of Jewish ecological infographics, which will make a significant addition to the book by conveying, visually, some key Jewish ecological concepts.

Two publishers have expressed interest in publishing such a book, however the costs of typesetting in two languages will be borne by JES. Based on a range of distribution channels, we envision the book selling 2,500 copies in the first two years, and 500 copies in each subsequent year. Additional funding would enable us to place copies in synagogues and with rabbis around the world.

To manifest this book, we seek to raise \$75,000. Single line dedications are \$1,800; exclusive dedication pages are \$10,000. Naming rights for the whole publication (The “Donor’s” Ecological Torah Commentary) are available for \$50,000. Donations are tax-deductible in the U.S. and Israel, and other countries.

כב וַיֹּסֶע מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּם־סוּף וַיֵּצְאוּ אֶל־מִדְבַּר־שׁוּר וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁלֹשַׁת־יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר
 וְלֹא־מָצְאוּ מַיִם: כג וַיָּבֹאוּ מַרְתָּה וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְשִׁתּוֹת מַיִם מִמַּרְתָּה כִּי מָרִים הֵם עַל־כֵּן
 קָרְאִישְׁמָהּ מַרְתָּה: כד וַיִּלְנוּ הָעָם עַל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר מַה־נַּשְׁתָּה: כה וַיֵּצֵעַק אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּרְהוּ
 י־הוּהוּ לְעַץ וַיִּשְׁלַךְ אֶל־הַמַּיִם וַיִּמְתְּקוּ הַמַּיִם שֵׁם לוֹ חֶק וַיִּמְשַׁפֵּט וַשֵּׁם נִסָּהוּ:

22 Then Moses caused Israel to set out from the Sea of Reeds. They went on into the wilderness of Shur; they traveled three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23 They came to Marah, but they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; that is why it was named Marah. 24 And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" 25 So he cried out to God, and God showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. There He made for them a fixed rule, and there He put them to the test.

Exod. 15: 22-24 - "They traveled three days in the wilderness and found no water"

Water in the Desert ¹

Even before the Israelites entered the land of Israel, water was central to their collective experience. In the desert, uncertainty about water resources inspired numerous complaints and lessons for the wandering Jews. The Talmud teaches that in the merit of Miriam's song, a well appeared in the desert which accompanied the Jews wherever they went. God gave us this essential resource, without which we could not live for more than a few days, in the water-scarce desert. But the long-term security of the resource was never certain. The Biblical experiences with water in the desert can be understood as a spiritual training to cultivate appreciation for God's goodness. Through the process of taking water for granted, losing it and then receiving it directly from God, the desert wanderers certainly appreciated water and the One Who provided it. Thus, at the end of the Jews' desert experience, they sang an exultant song about their

appreciation of water to God.

Upon entering Israel, the experience of water scarcity continued for our ancestors, living in an agrarian society whose bounty or famine was regulated by rain. The Talmud teaches that God directly waters the land of Israel and the rest of the world is watered by a messenger.² Yet Israel is a semi-arid country with no major rivers. It receives modest rainfall, averaging less than 100 millimeters per year in the extreme south to 1,128 millimeters in the north.³ (By comparison, New York City averages between 710 and 1140 millimeters of precipitation per year.⁴) Why is it that the one land in the world that God waters directly is a land that receives far less water than many other lands? Since water is a sign of blessing, would not the Pacific Northwest or the rainforests of Brazil or Indonesia be more appropriate candidates for the Promised Land?

2 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Ta'anit 10a, citing Job 5:10. Thus when rain is withheld in Israel, it is because of Divine intervention in response to Israel's actions, as the second paragraph of Shema makes clear.

3 "Climate: Israel". U.S. Library of Congress, online at <http://country-studies.us/israel/36.htm>

4 Normals & Extremes, Central Park, New York, 1869 to Present, National Weather Service Forecast Office, 01 April 2006.

1 Selected essays from Uplifting People and Planet: 18 Essential Jewish Environmental Teachings, ed. Rabbi Yonatan Neril and Evonne Marzouk, Canfei Nesharim: Washington, D.C., 2011

This water insecurity is by Divine design,⁵ to help us realize that God is the ultimate Provider of water and all our needs. The Land of Israel contrasts with the land on both sides of the Nile, Euphrates, and Tigris rivers. In those river valleys, farmers are able to irrigate their crops year-round from a reliable water source. Yet until the 20th century, most agriculture in Israel was rain-fed and not irrigated. The seven species that the Torah associates with the Land of Israel (grapes, olives, dates, pomegranates, figs, wheat, and barley) are all species that do not require irrigation in order to survive.⁶ The farmers who planted, tended, and harvested these particular crops depended on the winter rains in order to eat and live. In their acute need for rain each year, they depended on God who provided it, a spiritual reality that was not present in the more water abundant river valleys of nearby civilizations.

Today, Israel is working hard to address a water crisis spurred by a long-term, climate change induced drought. Over 85% of Israeli water is recycled, compared to 3% in the US. Drip irrigation saves over 50% of water in agriculture. (Desalination of Mediterranean seawater is becoming an increasing source of freshwater, yet requires a significant amount of energy to produce the water, which is currently supplied by burning fossil fuels.)

The world increasingly faces a water crisis, experienced most by those in Africa, South Asia, and China. A lack of sufficient drinking water is recognized to be a leading cause of death in the world. Some 884 million people in the world do not have access

to safe drinking-water sources.⁷ The United Nations Environment Program notes that two-thirds of the world's population is likely to face water stress by 2025, a result of "climate change, uncontrolled urbanization, unplanned water withdrawal and inappropriate water policies."⁸

It increasingly appears that Israel offers technological solutions to many of the world's water challenges - and all because God told the Jewish people to come to a country with an unpredictable water supply some 3,500 years ago.

Exod. 15:25 - he threw it into the water and the water became sweet.

When the Wood Meets The Water⁹

The Midrash (Jewish oral tradition) offers several opinions as to the nature of the wood utilized by Moses to sweeten the water. R' Yehoshua (a charcoal maker by trade) posited that it was willow. R' Natan said it was a type of bitter ivy. R' Elazar Hamoda'i surmised that it was an olive tree. R' Yehoshua ben Korcha hypothesized that it was a thistle bush. To all opinions, the consensus seems to be that the wood was bitter.¹⁰

As the worldwide demand for raw materials increases at breakneck speeds, aggressive logging and development at an unprecedented rate have taken their toll on our forests, wreaking havoc both on wildlife habitat and threatening the vast watershed and subterranean aquifers which depend on

5 For example, Rabbi Alex Israel teaches regarding rain in the Land of Israel: "The dependency of the mountain-land makes it a difficult place to live. Throughout the book of Genesis we read of periodic famine in Canaan. Israel is destined to live a life of dependency on God. This is Israel's legacy, its historic challenge. The land of Israel is naturally insecure and that is precisely the reason that it was destined for Israel." Commentary to Parshat Eikev, 5766, originally posted on website of Midreshet Lindenbaum, Jerusalem.

6 Jewish National Fund, written site information at Ein Sataf, Israel. The wheat and barley were planted during the winter rains. Fig and date trees survive near water sources, while olives trees, grapevines, and pomegranate trees are able to subsist on the water they receive in the world during the six months from April to October when it usually does not rain in Israel.

7 The 2010 Report of the World Health Organization/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation, available online at http://www.wssinfo.org/download.php?id_document=1289

8 "Note of the Executive Director," 2003, available online at www.unep.org/GC/GC22/Document/K0263442.doc

9 By Rabbi Shmuel Simenowitz, from Selected essays from Eitz Chaim Hee: Weekly Environmental Commentaries on the Torah Portion, ed. Rabbi Yonatan Neril, Canfei Nesharim: Washington, D.C., 2008. <http://canfeinesharim.org/parshat-beshalach-water-conservation-when-the-wood-meets-the-water/>

10 Tanchuma Shemot 24. Also see Rashi, Ramban and Ibn Ezra on Exodus 15:25

כו וַיֹּאמֶר אֱ-סִשְׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמַע לְקוֹל | י-הוָה אֶ-לֹהֶיךָ וְהִישָׁר בְּעֵינֶיךָ תַעֲשֶׂה וְהִצַּלְתָּ לְמִצְוֹתָי
 וְשִׁמְרָתָ כָּל-חֻקָּיו כָּל-הַמְחֻלָּה אֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַתִּי בְּמִצְרַיִם לֹא-אֶשְׂיֵם עָלֶיךָ כִּי אֲנִי י-הוָה רַפְּאֵךְ:
 כז וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵילָמָה וְשֵׁם שְׁתַּיִם עִנְתָה מִים וְשִׁבְעִים תְּמָרִים וַיַּחֲנוּ-שָׁם עַל-הַמַּיִם:

26 He said, “If you will heed Hashem your God diligently, doing what is upright in His sight, giving ear to His commandments and keeping all His laws, then I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians, for I God am your healer.”

27 And they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; and they encamped there beside the water.

the dense forest cover. Numerous species of herbs and plant life are disappearing at an alarming rate from pristine rainforests, which are being clear-cut both for the valuable old growth timber and to make room for increased cattle grazing.

“Ma’asei avot siman labanim” – the actions of our ancestors come to instruct us. So what lessons can we take away from this story to illuminate our own paths?

“The Holy One’s way is to sweeten the bitter with bitter.”¹¹ Even though the modern environmental situation has reached a point where the waters seem too bitter to drink, B’shalach reminds us of the dictum of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov: “If you believe that you can destroy, then believe that you can build.”¹²

The power that major industries and corporations have used to cause environmental destruction can be harnessed to promote a cleaner, healthier future. For example, the Clorox corporation saw their acquisition of the well-known eco-minded Burt’s Bees line of beauty products as a catalyst to begin an overall “greening” of the household chemical giant.¹³ The energy and tools needed for change are within our reach. We just need the will to utilize them, and deep understanding of that which Hashem has taught us - “God showed him a piece

of wood.”

A distraught father whose son was beginning to stray from the path of his forefathers once brought his son to the Alter Rebbe, Shneur Zalman of Liadi. R’ Shneur Zalman asked the boy what he enjoyed doing. The boy responded that he liked riding horses.

“And what qualities do you look for in a horse?” R’ Shneur Zalman asked him.

“Speed,” the boy replied.

“And what if you are on a fast horse which takes a wrong turn in the road?” the sage continued.

“You can get very lost in a hurry,” was the boy’s response.

“And what if you turn the horse around?” the elderly sage pressed on.

“You can get back just as fast.”

A slight smile crept across R’ Shneur Zalman’s face as the boy nodded his head, indicating that he understood the Alter Rebbe’s message¹⁴.

If we take the lesson of the bitter waters of Marah to heart we can turn around our horses currently galloping out of control towards oblivion. With the will to “return” on a path of responsible and sustainable stewardship, using the Etz Chayim, the Torah, as our template, perhaps we too can come back just as fast, and be carried by the sweet waters of our ancestors to a cleaner future.

11 Ramban on Exod. 15:25

12 Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, Lekutei Mahoran 112

13 Story, Louise. “Can Burt’s Bees Turn Clorox Green?” The New York Times, January 6, 2008

14 See Tzvi Freeman. Horse Kid Returns. Accessed 5.8.19. https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1959506/jewish/The-Horse-Kid-Returns.htm

טז ׀ וַיִּסְעוּ מֵאֵילִם וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל־עַדְתַּת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־מִדְבַּר־סִין אֲשֶׁר בֵּין־אֵילִם וּבֵין סִינַי
 בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי לְצֵאתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ב וַיִּלְוֶנוּ [וַיִּלְוֶנוּ] כָּל־עַדְתַּת בְּנֵי־
 יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן בַּמִּדְבָּר: ג וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי־יִתֵּן מוֹתָנֹנוּ בְיַד־יְ-
 הוָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּשִׁבְתָּנוּ עַל־סִיר הַבֶּשֶׂר בְּאֲכָלְנוּ לֶחֶם לְשֹׁבַע כִּי־הוֹצֵאתָם אֶתְנוּ אֶל־
 הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לְהַמִּית אֶת־כָּל־הַקְּהָל הַזֶּה בָּרָעַב: ד וַיֹּאמֶר יְ-הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הֲנִי מִמְטִיר
 לָכֶם לֶחֶם מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֵּצֵא הָעָם וּלְקִטּוֹ דְּבַר־יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ לְמַעַן אֲנִסְנוּ הֵילֶךְ בְּתוֹרָתִי אִם־
 לֹא: ה וְהָיָה בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי וְהִכִּינוּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר־יִבְיֹאוּ וְהָיָה מִשְׁנֵהוּ עַל אֲשֶׁר־יִלְקְטוּ יוֹם | יוֹם:

Chapter 16

1 Setting out from Elim, the whole Israelite community came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. 2 In the wilderness, the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 3 The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of God in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to death.”

4 And God said to Moses, “I will rain down bread for you from the sky, and the people shall go out and gather each day that day’s portion—that I may thus test them, to see whether they will follow My instructions or not. 5 But on the sixth day, when they apportion what they have brought in, it shall prove to be double the amount they gather each day.”

Exod. 15:27

Seventy palm trees... - The Hebrew word for date palm, “tamar”, has the same gematria, or kabbalistic numbering, as shemesh, sun-- 640¹⁵. The tops of some date trees actually look like a green sun. The date has one of the highest glycemic indexes of any fruit, which means it is highly effective at converting abundant desert sunlight to energy, and producing sugary fruits. Modern solar panels mimic photosynthesis, by creating energy from sunlight. A recent research paper on the solar power explains how photosynthesis may contain the secret of future generations of sustainable power, “Solar

energy has great potential as a clean, cheap, renewable and sustainable energy source, but it must be captured and transformed into useful forms of energy similar to plants. An especially attractive approach is to store solar energy in the form of chemical bonds as performed in natural photosynthesis. Therefore, there has been a challenge in the last few decades to construct ... artificial photosynthetic systems, which are able to efficiently capture and convert solar energy and store it in the form of chemical bonds”¹⁶

15 Rabbi Arjeh Trugman (contemporary, Israel) on his commentary to Beshalach

16 Mohamed E.El-Khouly et al. Solar energy conversion: From natural to artificial photosynthesis. Journal of Photochemistry and Photobiology C: Photochemistry Reviews. Volume 31, June 2017, Pages 36-83

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל-כָּל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲרַב וַיְדַעְתֶּם כִּי י-הוָה הוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ
 מִצְרַיִם: ז וּבִקֹּר וּרְאִיתֶם אֶת-כְּבוֹד י-הוָה בְּשִׁמְעוֹ אֶת-תְּלַנְתֵּיכֶם עַל-י-הוָה וּנְחַנוּ מָה כִּי
 תִּלְוּנוּ [תְּלִינוּ] עָלֵינוּ: ח וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בְּתַת י-הוָה לָכֶם בְּעָרֵב בָּשָׂר לֶאֱכֹל וְלֶחֶם בַּבֹּקֶר
 לְשִׁבְעַת בְּשִׁמְעֵ י-הוָה אֶת-תְּלַנְתֵּיכֶם אֲשֶׁר-אַתֶּם מְלִינִים עָלָיו וּנְחַנוּ מָה לֹא-עָלֵינוּ תְּלַנְתֵּיכֶם
 כִּי עַל-י-הוָה: ט וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אַהֲרֹן אָמַר אֶל-כָּל-עֵדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל קִרְבוּ לִפְנֵי י-הוָה
 כִּי שָׁמַע אֶת תְּלַנְתֵּיכֶם: י וַיְהִי כַּדְּבַר אֶהֱרֹן אֶל-כָּל-עֵדַת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּפְּנוּ אֶל-הַמִּדְבָּר
 וְהִנֵּה כְבוֹד י-הוָה נִרְאָה בְּעַנָּן: יא וַיְדַבֵּר י-הוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: יב שְׁמַעְתִּי אֶת-תְּלַנְתְּ
 בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל דִּבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר בֵּין הָעֲרָבִים תֹּאכְלוּ בָּשָׂר וּבַבֹּקֶר תִּשְׁבְּעוּ-לֶחֶם וַיְדַעְתֶּם
 כִּי אֲנִי י-הוָה אֱ-לֹהֵיכֶם:

6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “By evening you shall know it was God who brought you out from the land of Egypt; 7 and in the morning you shall behold the Presence of God, because He has heard your grumblings against God. For who are we that you should grumble against us? 8 Since it is God,” Moses continued, “who will give you flesh to eat in the evening and bread in the morning to the full, because God has heard the grumblings you utter against Him, what is our part? Your grumbling is not against us, but against God!” 9 Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole Israelite community: Advance toward God, for He has heard your grumbling.” 10 And as Aaron spoke to the whole Israelite community, they turned toward the wilderness, and there, in a cloud, appeared the Presence of God. 11 God spoke to Moses: 12 “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Speak to them and say: By evening you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; and you shall know that I Hashem am your God.”

Exod. 16:11-12

you shall eat flesh... - In our times, the ability to act on one's desire for meat has grown exponentially due to factory farming. The act of shechita, kosher animal slaughter, is a commandment and therefore has a blessing that precedes it. Yet the vast majority of Jews will never say this blessing or fulfill this commandment themselves. Instead, throughout their lives they rely on others who do so on their behalf. Each ritual slaughterer slaughters on behalf of thousands of people, which makes fulfilling the commandment of shechita with proper intent all the more difficult. Were the commandments intended to be heaped on the shoulders of one person

because of consumer desires and mass production? Many rabbis in our times and through the ages have questioned and critiqued meat eating. They include Rabbi Yosef Albo, Rabbi Yitzhak Arima (the Akeidat Yitzhak) and Rav Kook. Rav Shlomo Efraim Lunschitz (the Kli Yakar), wrote “It is far more appropriate for people not to eat meat.¹⁷” In our times, hundreds of rabbis have taken on a vegan or vegetarian lifestyle.¹⁸ The laws permit causing pain to animals for human needs, like striking an ox to

17 Kli Yakar, quoted in The Commandments and Their Rationale, Abraham Chill, p. 400

18 <https://www.jewishveg.org/veg-rabbis>

יג וַיְהִי בָעֶרֶב וַתֵּעַל הַשֶּׁלֶו וַתִּכַּס אֶת־הַמַּחֲנֶה וּבִבְקֹר הִיְתָה שְׁכַבַּת הַטֹּל סָבִיב לַמַּחֲנֶה:
 יד וַתֵּעַל שְׁכַבַּת הַטֹּל וְהָיָה עַל־פְּנֵי הַמִּדְבָּר דָּק מְחֻסָּפָס דָּק כַּכֹּפֶר עַל־הָאָרֶץ: טו וַיֵּרְאוּ
 בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו מִן הוּא כִּי לֹא יָדְעוּ מֵה־הוּא וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם הוּא
 הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְ-הוָה לָכֶם לֶאֱכֹלָה: טז זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְ-הוָה לְקַטּוֹ מִמֶּנּוּ אִישׁ לְפִי
 אֲכָלוּ עֹמֶר לְגַלְגָּלֹת מִסֵּפֶר נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם אִישׁ לְאִשׁוֹ בְּאֶהְלוֹ תִקְחוּ: יז וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 וַיִּלְקְטוּ הַמֶּרְבֵּה וְהַמְּעֵיט: יח וַיִּמְדוּ בָעֹמֶר וְלֹא הָעֵדִיף הַמֶּרְבֵּה וְהַמְּעֵיט לֹא הִחְסִיר
 אִישׁ לְפִי־אֲכָלוֹ לְקַטּוֹ:

13 In the evening quail appeared and covered the camp; in the morning there was a fall of dew about the camp. 14 When the fall of dew lifted, there, over the surface of the wilderness, lay a fine and flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?"—for they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "That is the bread which God has given you to eat. 16 This is what God has commanded: Gather as much of it as each of you requires to eat, an omer to a person for as many of you as there are; each of you shall fetch for those in his tent." 17 The Israelites did so, some gathering much, some little. 18 But when they measured it by the omer, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no deficiency: they had gathered as much as they needed to eat.

plow a field or a horse to move a wagon. But the suffering of factory-farmed animals is radically different to the context in which these laws were made. In fact a number of Rabbis have suggested that even "kosher milk" could be technically unkosher, if 2% or more of the dairy cows in a herd have suffered life threatening wounds, from their cramped conditions, that would render them "treif"¹⁹.

Exod. 16:18

as much as they needed... - the Emek HaDevar explains that each person received exactly what

they needed of the manna, with the measure of an "omer" being the average portion size²⁰ and any excess "became infested with maggots and stank". Wasting God-given food is wrong. We can learn from this the importance of serving suitable portion sizes at mealtimes. The average American wastes a pound of food per person per day. The volume of discarded food is equivalent to the yearly use of 30 million acres of land, 780 million pounds of pesticides and 4.2 trillion gallons of irrigated water²¹.

19 See Contemporary halakhic problems; by J. David Bleich, 1977-2005. Chapter VI. And Kovez Bet Aharon ve-Yisrael. No. 107, vol. 18, no. 5 (Sivan-Tammuz 5763). And Ha-Be'er. No. 23, vol. 5, no. 1 (Tishri 5764).

20 HaEmek Devar Exodus 16:14

21 "Americans waste 150,000 tons of food each day - equal to a pound per person". The Guardian. 18.4.18.

יט וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם אִישׁ אֶל-יֹתֵר מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר: כ וְלֹא-שָׁמְעוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּתְרוּ
 אֲנָשִׁים מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר וַיֵּרָם תּוֹלְעִים וַיִּבְאֹשׁ וַיִּקְצֹף עֲלֵהֶם מֹשֶׁה: כא וַיִּלְקְטוּ אֹתוֹ בַּבֹּקֶר
 בַּבֹּקֶר אִישׁ כִּפֵּי אֶבְלֹ וְחֵם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַנִּמַּס: כב וַיְהִי | בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי לִקְטוּ לָחֵם מִשָּׁנָה שְׁנַי
 הָעֶמֶר לָאָחַד וַיִּבְאוּ כָּל-נְשֵׂי־אֵי הָעֵדָה וַיִּגִּידוּ לְמֹשֶׁה: כג וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר
 י-הוָה שְׁבַתוֹן שְׁבַת-קֹדֶשׁ לִי-הוּא מַחֵר אֵת אֲשֶׁר-תֹּאפֹּו אִפֹּו וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר-תִּבְשְׁלוּ בִשְׁלוּ
 וְאֵת כָּל-הָעֵדָף הַנִּיחוּ לָכֶם לְמִשְׁמַרְתַּ עַד-הַבֹּקֶר: כד וַיִּנְיחוּ אֹתוֹ עַד-הַבֹּקֶר כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה
 מֹשֶׁה וְלֹא הִבְאִישׁ וְרָמָה לֹא-הָיְתָה בּוֹ:

19 And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over until morning.” 20 But they paid no attention to Moses; some of them left of it until morning, and it became infested with maggots and stank. And Moses was angry with them.

21 So they gathered it every morning, each as much as he needed to eat; for when the sun grew hot, it would melt. 22 On the sixth day they gathered double the amount of food, two omers for each; and when all the chieftains of the community came and told Moses, 23 he said to them, “This is what God meant: Tomorrow is a day of rest, a holy sabbath of God. Bake what you would bake and boil what you would boil; and all that is left put aside to be kept until morning.” 24 So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered; and it did not turn foul, and there were no maggots in it.

Exod. 16:19

Let no one leave any of it over... - The Rabbis have a deep teaching about manna and dependence on God. The students of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai asked him, “Why did the manna not descend to the Israelites once in a year?”. He said to them, “I will tell you a parable. What is this like? It is like a king who has one son. When he gave him his allowance once a year, his son would only come home once a year. So he gave him his allowance daily and his son had to greet him every day. So it is with Israel: a person with four or five children would worry and say, “perhaps the manna will not descend tomorrow, and everyone will die of hunger”. And so everyone would direct their hearts to their Father in Heaven²². The midrash is describing the phenomenon of food insecurity that has plagued mankind from creation.

However, whilst food insecurity can be a means to create a greater dependence on God, today food insecurity in the West, is also understood to be a major cause of overeating. The lack of certainty of food availability leads people (especially youth) to eat more than they need, when it is available, leading to obesity and poor health²³.

In discussing Manna, the Torah stresses the importance of each family only gathering as much as they needed, which would have both protected them from the risks of overeating, whilst also ensuring a daily moment of gratitude to God.

23 Rachel Widome, PhD, MHS. Eating When There is Not Enough to Eat: Eating Behaviors and Perceptions of Food Among Food-Insecure Youths. Am J Public Health. 2009 May; 99(5): 822-828.

22 Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 76a

כה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲכַלְתֶּם הַיּוֹם כִּי־שַׁבַּת הַיּוֹם לִי־הוּא הַיּוֹם לֹא תִמְצָאֶהוּ בַשָּׂדֶה: כו שְׁשֶׁת יָמִים תִּלְקְטֶהוּ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת לֹא יִהְיֶה־בּוֹ: כז וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִצְאוּ מִן־הָעֵם לִלְקֹט וְלֹא מִצָּאוּ: כח וַיֹּאמֶר יְ-הוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עַד־אָנָּה מֵאַנְתֶּם לְשָׁמֹר מִצְוֹתַי וְתוֹרֹתַי: כט רְאוּ כִי־יִהְיֶה־נָתַן לָכֶם הַשַּׁבַּת עַל־כֵּן הוּא נָתַן לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי לֶחֶם יוֹמִים שְׁבוּ | אִישׁ תַּחְתּוֹתָיו אֶל־יֵצֵא אִישׁ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי: ל וַיִּשְׁבְּתוּ הָעָם בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי: לא וַיִּקְרָאוּ בֵּית־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־שְׁמוֹ מִן וְהוּא כְּזֶרַע גֹּד לֶבֶן וְטַעְמוֹ כְּצַפְיֹת בְּדָבָשׁ:

25 Then Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a sabbath of God; you will not find it today on the plain. 26 Six days you shall gather it; on the seventh day, the sabbath, there will be none.”

27 Yet some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found nothing. 28 And God said to Moses, “How long will you men refuse to obey My commandments and My teachings? 29 Mark that God has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you two days’ food on the sixth day. Let everyone remain where he is: let no one leave his place on the seventh day.” 30 So the people remained inactive on the seventh day. 31 The house of Israel named it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and it tasted like wafers in honey.

Exod. 16:21

when the sun grew hot, it would melt - One of the greatest causes of food waste is a failure in logistics, transporting the food from where it has been grown to where it is needed. At least 5% of food in India, for example, spoils on its way to the customer, and far more if there is a significant delay (traffic or a train stoppage)²⁴ not to mention the 10 million tons of grain that is spoiled in storage in India each year (enough to feed 140 million people for one month)²⁵. Interestingly, food variety is one of the main causes of spoiling in the supply chain - as less variety leads to simpler stock management. Perhaps this is also an environmental learning from Manna - people who are satisfied with a single foodstuff do not need so much food transported from elsewhere. In contemporary society, demand for imported foods of great variety drives the transport of such foods over thousands of miles in energy intensive refrig-

erated containers. These foods have a high carbon footprint and higher rates of spoilage.

Exod. 16:31

the house of Israel named it manna - The meaning of “manna” is “preparation” since the people originally believed it needed to be baked, although that turned out not to be the case²⁶. Raw fruits and vegetables contain enzymes that reduce heart disease and provide multiple health benefits. How much do we consider the impact of processing on our food’s nutritional content? Manna, the quintessential God-given food, was raw, fresh and vital and came in moderate portions. This should teach us to seek out similar types of foods. Meanwhile, over 30 years, US dessert sizes increased by 70%, their calorie content by 79%²⁷ and adult obesity rates by 200%²⁸.

26 Rashi on Exod. 16:15

24 Paul Artiuch et al. Feb 2012. Sustainable Approaches to Reducing Food Waste in India. MIT. http://web.mit.edu/colab/pdf/papers/Reducing_Food_Waste_India.pdf

25 Ibid

27 McCrory et al. Fast-Food Offerings in the United States 1986-2016. Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Dec 2018

28 US Obesity Levels. August 2018. https://obesity.procon.org/view_resource.php?resourceID=006026



הוי עז כנמר, וקל כנשר, ורץ כצבי,
וגבור כארי לעשות רצון אביך שבשמים

Be brazen like the leopard, light like the eagle, swift like the
deer, and mighty like the lion to do the Will of your Father
Who is in Heaven.

Pirke Avot 5:20



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