

Sure, We Don't Live By Bread Alone... But All Things Being Equal, A Great Bagel is Heavenly

Svelte friends have extolled the virtues of their amazing diets. As I'm always struggling to shed a few pounds, my first reaction is to give them my rapt attention. However, if they continue with a low-carb rant, well, my patience wears thinner than the crust of a chewy, salt speckled pretzel. What kind of cockamamie diet is it that eliminates breads, crackers and pretzels?

As we are nearing the High Holy Day times of confession, I must admit (but with thinnest of chagrin) that our family's travel destinations are highlighted by the great bread we eat. In New York, Zaro's raisin pumpernickel and Zabar's onion bread and bagels. In San Francisco, well, sourdough, naturally. In Israel, the pita is divine, especially the *laffa* pita right out of the oven (and don't even get us started about the baked goods from Marzipan!). In just about every city, you'll find a great Jewish rye bread from the deli. And, absolutely no one makes challah as fabulous as my Susan.

So what's this line in this week's Torah portion about living without bread? You know the line; it's quite famous:

“...one does not live by bread alone” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

The typical sermon emphasizes a message that we do not and cannot exist only by our material needs and consumption. Rather, a good life requires a heightened spirit, the sense of purpose and meaning that comes from an engaged relationship with God and Jewish faith and culture. That's a great message, but it does not quite fit the context of the actual verse. Let's take a look at it:

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 one does not live by bread alone, but one may live on anything that comes from God.

The message is two-fold. First, know that God will provide. Even in the wilderness, even when all seems lost and hopeless, God will provide. In life there are always solutions, ways to survive, recover, rebuild and renew. Don't give up. Do not despair. Though there may be times of deprivation, if

you keep believing and trying, you will not only survive, you will also come through the ordeal stronger than ever.

Second is the message that our striving, our working, our efforts should never just be about our material welfare. As the Chatam Sofer taught, one is bidden not to stake his/her life merely on gaining a livelihood: eating in order to work, working in order to eat. Rather, one's true purpose should be learning in order to teach, and observing, doing and upholding the Torah. That is, our character is measured by the values and noble principles we champion, exhibit and nurture.

So, as we begin the month of August and enjoy a few days of summer vacation before the school and workloads pile up again, give yourself permission to enjoy some great bread---even if it is gluten free. True, we don't live by bread alone. True, heavy carbs are off-limits to many diets. But they are soooo good! I won't tell if you won't!

Regardless of what we eat, let us remember the strength and support we gain from our faith and Jewish traditions. We hope to see you at the Erev Shabbat service this Friday at 6pm. Susan has a wonderful sermon that you won't want to miss. On Shabbat morning the early service is at 9am and Jake Bridge becomes a Bar Mitzvah at 10:30am.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Rick Rheins