

Parshat Beshallach  
What Tests Our Religious Beliefs Most?  
Rabbi Avi Mitzner, January 27, 2024

**Exodus 16:4**

And ה' 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.	וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הִנְנִי מַמְטִיר לָכֶם לֶחֶם מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֵּצֵא הָעָם וַלְקֻטּוֹ דָּבָר יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ לַמֶּעַן אֲנִסְנֶנּוּ הֵילֵךְ בְּתוֹרָתִי אִם־לֹא :
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**Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Itzhaki, France, 1040-1105) on Exodus 16:4**

THAT I MAY TRY THEM WHETHER THEY WILL WALK IN MY LAW — whether they will observe the commands associated with it: viz., that they should not leave any overnight, and that they should not go out on the Sabbath to collect it.

**Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, Spain/Jerusalem, 1194-1270) on Exodus 16:4**

THAT I MAY TRY THEM, WHETHER THEY WILL WALK IN MY LAW OR NOT. "I.e., whether they will observe the commandments associated with it, such as [the laws] that they should not leave [a remainder] of it until the morning, and that they should not go out on the Sabbath to collect it." Thus the language of Rashi.

But this is not correct. Rather, the intent [of the trial mentioned here] is as He said, *Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not; that He might afflict thee, and that He might try thee, to do thee good at thy latter end.* (Deuteronomy 8:160. [The manna itself] was a trial to them, since they had no food in the wilderness and were without recourse to any sustenance except the manna, which they knew not from before and had never heard of from their fathers. Each day's quantity came down on its day, and they were eagerly desirous for it. Yet with all this, they hearkened to walk after God to a place of no food. And so indeed He said to them again, *And thou shalt remember all the way in which the Eternal thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, that He might afflict thee, to try thee, to know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no.* (Ibid., Verse 2). He could have led them by way of the cities that were round about them. Genesis 35:5. Instead, He led them *through the wilderness wherein were serpents, fiery serpents, and scorpions,* (Deuteronomy 8:15). and each day's quantity of food would come to them only from heaven in order to try them and to do them good at the end so that they would believe in Him forever. I have already explained the matter of "trial" in the commentary on the verse, *And God tried Abraham.* (Genesis 22:1).



**Rashbam (Shmuel ben Meir, France, 1085-1158) on Exodus 16:4**

THAT I MAY TRY THEM the trial consisted in the fact that the people had to look to God on a daily basis for their immediate food supplies. This experience would bring home to them that on the one hand they could rely on God, and on the other hand, as stated in Deuteronomy 8,3 such a lesson was only learned when, even briefly, for a day, they had been “starved” by God.

**S’forno (Ovadia ben Ya’akov Sforno, Italy, 1475-1549) on Exodus 16:4**

THAT I MAY TRY THEM, WHETHER THEY WILL WALK IN MY LAW OR NOT. If when receiving their food without effort they will take care to keep My commandments, seeing they will then not have any excuses not to. This idea has been formulated in the classic statement by our sages in the Mechilta, section ַּוּוִּי chapter 2 “the Torah, as an instrument of profound study, has been given only to the generation who ate the manna.” [no other generation had so little to distract it from devoting time to Torah study. Ed.]

**Rabbi Yaakov Medan of Yeshivat Har Etzion**

We do not know how much manna descended each day, but even if there was a great abundance, no one could know in advance what quantity would be needed to feed the millions of hungry mouths. Clearly, the manna had to suffice for everyone. People who took more than they needed would cause their neighbors to suffer a shortage. ...this was a test presented to free people who were not receiving their set rations from their masters, but rather were able to gather it themselves, and could – were it not for the commandment, and had they so wished – take more for themselves. They gathered; some more and some less. And when they measured the omer, he who had taken more had none left over, and he that had gathered less was not lacking; they gathered - each according to his eating. (16:17-18)

The newly liberated slaves ... faced their first test of mutual respect, consideration for others, and especially, discipline. All of these are fundamental elements on the road to building a properly run society and nation; they are basic to freedom. The test of freedom is not whether a person is able to do whatever he wishes, but rather whether he is able to act in accordance with his will, out of free choice, but at the same time - to remain a human being, in the moral and cultured sense of the word. Therefore, this is also the test of a free society and of a free nation.

