

Manna: The Heavenly Food

Ram Swarup

Published by
Ram Swarup
C-58, Maharani Bagh
New Delhi-14

Printed at
Naya Hindustan Press,
Chandni Chowk,
Delhi-6

MANNA:
THE HEAVENLY FOOD

RAM SWARUP

VOICE OF INDIA
New Delhi

Published by
Ram Swarup
C-58, Maharani Bagh
New Delhi – 14.

1st Edn.: 1960
Pdf 2015.

MANNA: THE HEAVENLY FOOD

AT Varna in Bulgaria, on May 7, 1962, the Soviet Prime Minister Mr. N. Khrushchev said, “Manna from heaven is only a fairy tale and no one has eaten it.” In the context in which he spoke, the statement carries a great truth. He took to task those communists who believe that communism means eating more and working less. He compared them to “babies who start crying for food as soon as they are born without knowing what life is about”. Communist parties demand food for the people when they are out of power; they demand work from the same people when they are a State. With allowance made for the strategic aspect of the question, Mr. Khrushchev’s statement, however, does give a well-deserved rebuke to that outlook of life which demands something for nothing.

But this is not all that Mr. Khrushchev means when he denies “manna” altogether. On the contrary, he is expressing a definite philosophy of life. He is denying the reality of everything that goes beyond man’s senses and sense-bound consciousness. This is a philosophy which he shares with many of his opponents in the West, whether in socialist Europe or in capitalist America. Materialism is the name by which this philosophy is designated. It has several variants, but through all the variations runs one common outlook: Reality is identified with the visible, the sensuous and at the most with the logical; mind is co-equal with sensations, passions, desires, pains, pleasures and in certain cases even with prudent actions. Beyond these is Zero. This outlook dominates most

of the capitals and most of the seats of learning in the West. This may not be the whole of their outlook, but this is a major note in it.

However, there is also another experience and another philosophy affirmed by all religious systems in general and by Hinduism in particular. According to this philosophy, there is a Reality beyond the senses and the intellect and, we keep strictly to Mr. Khrushchev's wording, "manna" is a fact, an overwhelming fact of spiritual experience, and not merely a theory or a fairy tale, not even a figure of speech. It is a very, very solid food, very delicious and very filling. In fact, when one is privileged to partake of it, his heart's hunger and thirst are assuaged for all time, and he becomes strengthened beyond decay. In the language of the Upanishads, one becomes hungerless and thirstless (*Vijigbatso-pipasab*),¹ undecaying, undying, immortal (*ajaro, amaromrto*).²

Manna is soul's food and soul's drink. Man does not live by bread alone. There is another meat, and another wine, which man needs and partakes of as a member of a higher reality. Man is not merely a creature of the earth, a sarcophagous animal, eating and feeding on dead and decaying and foul plants and animals. He also belongs to a different and higher order of reality, and in that station he is sustained by a different kind of food.

According to the Upanishads, there are at least three kinds of food. Man in the raw, the physical man in his ordinary unawakened status is *stbul-bbuk*,³ an eater of gross food. Here he feeds on desires, ambitions, cravings, cunning, violence, on killing of animals and exploitation of fellow-men, on the wages of shame and the bread of

1. Chhandogya Upanishad, 8.7.3.
2. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 4.4.25.
3. Mandukya Upanishad, 3.

untruth. But as he grows in being, he becomes *praviviktabbuk*,¹ an eater of subtle food. He is now sustained by beauty, order, dreams and imagination, by some sense of propriety and fair play and by participation in some creative work. At a still further remove, when he is fully awakened to his soul-life, even this kind of sustenance falls away from him. At this stage, he becomes *anand-bbuk*,² an eater of bliss. Here he feeds on faith and austerity, truth and service, on worship, love, adoration and self-giving. Here, in this station, man is called a “drinker of Soma”. In the *Kathopanishad*, the two, God and Soul—they are aspects of the same reality—have been called “drinkers of truth, and law, in the kingdom of the most high, in the world of virtuous deeds—(*rtam pibantau sukrtasya loke parame parardhe*). According to Plato, there is an order of truth, a station of consciousness, a heaven which he calls soul’s “pasturage”. The soul merely gazes at it and, as he says, “is replenished and made glad.”

While manna is self-existent, has a transcendent reality of its own, it also exists immanently in the ordinary food we daily take. In fact, without the element of manna, the tastiest food that the culinary art can devise and science can provide would turn into a veritable poison. With manna missing, the food will turn into a mere feed, something which keeps man’s metabolism going but which does not help him to grow in being and consciousness. Eating becomes purely a physical act, and not a spiritual sacrament.

Food that is earned with honest labour, food that is shared with the needy and with fellow-men, food that is taken in moderation—that food has manna in it. The

1. *Ibid.*, 4.

2. *Ibid.*, 5.

Gita calls it the food left after the sacrifice (*yajnasista*) and declares that “those who eat of this food are released from sin.” In the Mahabharata, such people have been praised as *vighhasin*.

On the other hand, the food that is taken in gluttony, that is taken for one’s own self only, that is based on the labour of others—from that food manna is missing. Those who eat this food are eating sin and death. The Gita says that “evil are those who cook for themselves and they eat evil”. The Rigveda says that “he who neither feeds a friend nor a comrade, his prosperity is in vain (*mogham-annam*); and it is as good as his death (*vadha itsa tasya*)”. It further declares that the lonely eater (*kevaladi*) is only perpetuating a sin (*kevalagah*). At another place in the same scripture, there is a prayer: “Let a man strive to win his wealth by the path of law and worship.”¹

What is this path of law and worship? It is the path of work and service and self-giving. In the language of the Gita, it is the path of sacrifice (*yajna*), of offering up the fruits of our labour to the Gods. And though, arithmetically speaking, it may not be tenable, yet in point of fact this offering does not impoverish the giver. He receives in proportion to what he gives. He is richer by what he bestows.

The Gita’s Yajna is an interchange between the Gods and humanity. “Fostered by sacrifice the Gods shall give desired objects.” But those who enjoy unilaterally, “those who enjoy these enjoyments bestowed on them without returning them are thieves.” In the Rigveda God declares in clear terms: “If you give me, I shall give you. If you want to receive from me, then bestow on me too.”

So “By the sweat of thy brow, shalt thou eat bread” is not altogether a curse. In fact, in a certain sense, it

1. Rigveda, 10.31.2.

is the very door that leads to the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the law of self-discovery through love and labour, participating and sharing. Labour in its true sense is self-giving, and self-giving is self-finding. Labour is the true meaning of life and sweat is the most ennobling part of labour. A purely economic view of life is evil. But a still greater evil is the sheer consumption-theory of economics which prevails in the world today. This theory arises out of an outlook on life, which wants to have everything and give nothing, which lusts for everything and loves nothing.

Let us work and serve and labour in love; let us nourish our soil and our cows; let us honour our workers and “give the labourer his wages before his perspiration is dry”—to put it in the words of Prophet Mohammad; let us knock at the doors of Nature and patiently and perseveringly cultivate science—in short, let us labour and serve and wait and offer our hearts’ worship, and our labours will be rewarded and will become fruitful, and our lives will be blessed, and we shall be eating of manna.

But if our work is egoistic, if it is only for ourselves, if it is based on the exploitation of our fellowmen and our Mother Earth and God’s other creatures, if our work and its fruits are not offered up to God, and the rewards are not shared with the needy, then, though our tables may be plentiful we shall be eating that which is only refuge and garbage. What we eat will only add useless fat and enervating corpulence to our beings.

It is in this sense that the Biblical statement, “By the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread”, is a curse. When people live for themselves, they get a bread which gives very little of life, and eventually they undertake a labour which gives very little of bread and a good deal of sweat. They eat and eat till they become tombs of

themselves, till they become hollow men, stuffed men, living sepulchres of themselves.

So manna is not everybody's meat and it is not given to all to taste it. Only those who are pure of sin (*puta-papa*),¹ and those who worship by sacrifice (*yajnairstva*)² are partakers of the soma-wine of immortality (*somapa*)³ and "enjoy in heaven the feasts of the Gods (*divyandivi devabbogan*).⁴ Only the pure go to this golden hall of the Lord (*prabbuvimitam hiranmayam*)⁵ or to the heavenly lake affording Refreshment of Ecstasy (*airammadiyam sarab*)⁶.

Those who labour without service and serve without worship, they do it in vain. Their labour and service are not accepted. Similarly, those who worship without service, their worship too is incomplete. Those who labour without love, their labour is mere physical or mental exertion. Similarly, those who love without service, their love is a mere warm-hearted emotion. Love fulfils itself in service. If we work and serve and worship God in Humanity as well as the God who is above Humanity and into whom Humanity has to grow, that is true labour and true service no less than true worship and aspiration.

1. Gita, 9.20.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. Chha. Up. 8.5.3.
6. *Ibid.*