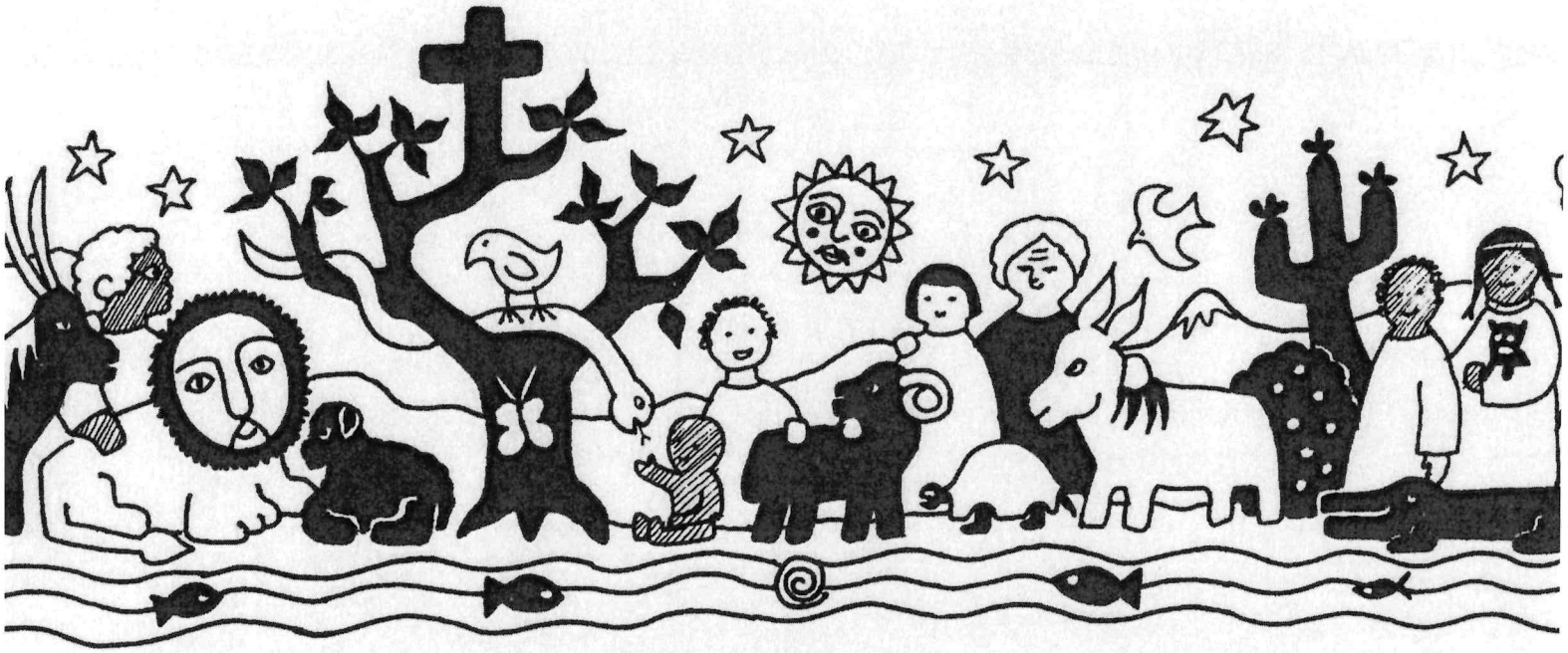
MANNA AND MERCY

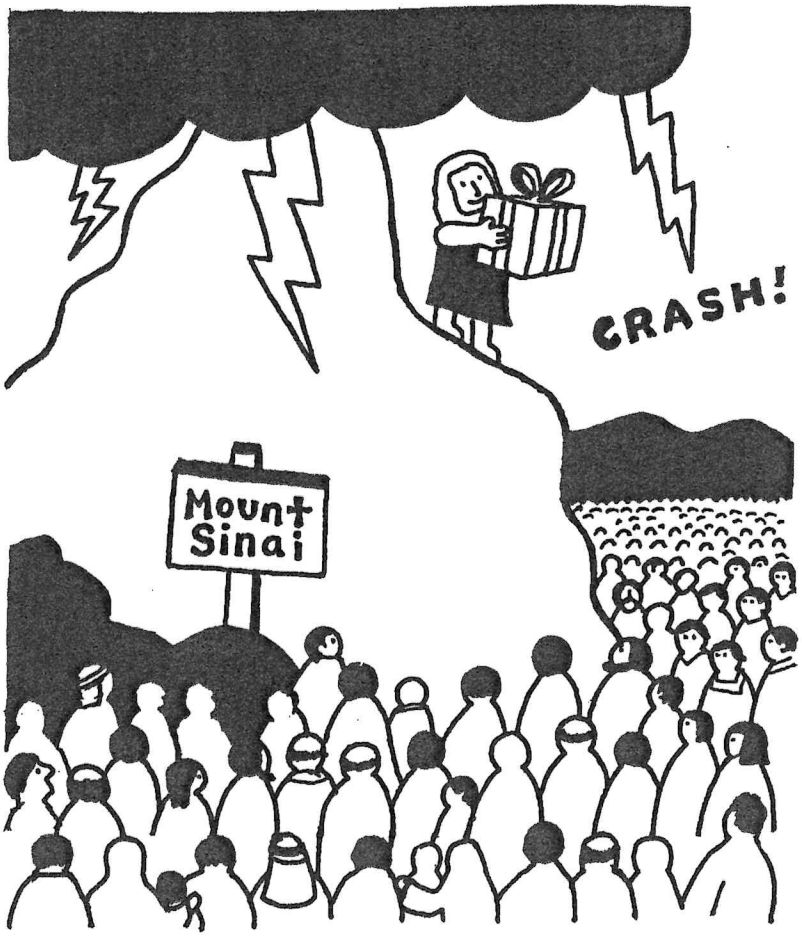


A BRIEF HISTORY OF GOD'S UNFOLDING PROMISE TO MEND THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE

Daniel Erlander

God promised to bring the wilderness people to another form of manna called LAND. This land would be home. Here they would plow and plant and harvest. Here they would raise their children, keep the Sabbath, and celebrate the great festivals. Yahweh was glad but also worried about the day when this promise would come true. Would a landed people become like Pharaoh's Egypt with big deals and little deals, rich and poor, oppressors and oppressed? Yahweh brooded and brooded and then came up with a plan. "I will bind myself to this people in covenant partnership. We will be attached to each other. We will be lovers, partners, friends forever!"

What a day it was when the covenant-making ceremony took place at a mountain called Sinai! It was like a grand wedding. In the midst of lightning, thunder, smoke, and trumpet sounds God made the covenant promise. Yahweh would be this people's God and would adopt them as a holy nation. In deep gratitude the people would love God alone with heart and soul and strength [EX 19:1-8, DEUT 6:4-5].



On that special day God gave the partner people a beautiful gift - the covenant word. The gift described the blessed way the people would live because God loved them, liberated them, and promised to be their God. The gift showed them how to live as joyful manna people <u>on the land</u>.

The leaders of Israel went up the mountain and gazed upon Yahweh without dying. They ate and drank to celebrate their household's moving to a new home [EX 24:11].

The people sensed that this was one of the greatest days since the world was created.

Just when creation and angels began to sing, the people did a stupid thing. They worshiped a golden calf made out of their earrings (EX 32:1-29). God, of course, was wroth and Moses shattered the covenant gift. Later Moses pleaded with God to forgive the people. Yahweh responded by repeating the covenant promises and giving the covenant gift a second time (EX 32:30-34:35). Gradually the former slaves would embrace the gift which they called TORAH. The center of the gift was "the ten words" or the DECALOGUE:



When the great covenant-making ceremony was over, the people went back to their classes in the wilderness school. There Moses taught them the details of the Torah, including many ways to practice MANNA LIVING. Here are several examples:

When the partner people become landed and harvest their crops, they will give the first and the best tenth of their crops to God. Thus they will remember that ALL BELONGS TO GOD. For two years out of three God will give the tenth back for a great feast. During this feast a family will know that God gives and gives. They will know that Yahweh wants humans to enjoy the bounty of the earth (DEUT 14:22-26).

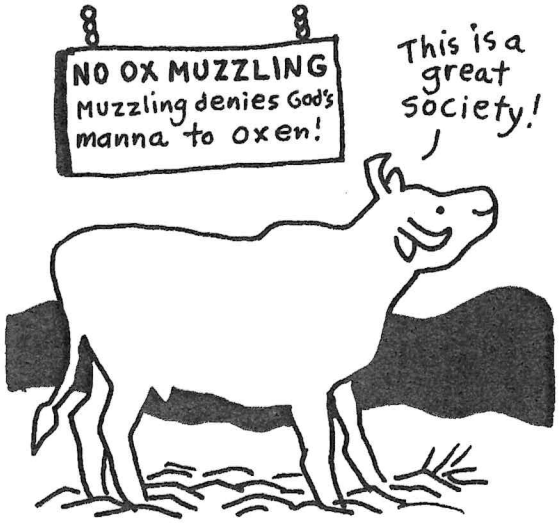


A FAMILY FEASTS ON ITS TITHE!

God loves feasting but does not want some to feast while others go hungry. This would disrupt the joyful manna balance - no one with too much; no one with too little. Therefore, every third year the people with NAHALA, land inheritance, will give the tithe to those who have no land, those who are most vulnerable - the poor, the widows, the orphans, sojourners, and priests. In this way the people share in God's hospitality, in the Creator's work of "satisfying the desire of every living thing" [DEUT 14:27-29, 26:12-18, PSALM 145:15-16]. Moses also taught the people that the day of releasing the tithe will be a day to remember the exodus from Egypt. Manna living will be a grateful response of a liberated people! [DEUT 15:1-15]



The covenant gift provided other ways to maintain manna balance. The partner people will not cut their crops all the way up to the walls. Neither will they cut a second time or pick up what falls. What is not cut or not picked up will feed the poor and the sojourners. Thus the people will remember that God owns all, and God's manna is for all. The partner people will take <u>only what they need</u> as they did in the wilderness [LEV 19:9-10, 23:22; DEUT 24:19-22; RUTH 2:1-2].



Moses [and other leaders like Miriam] taught the people how to live in friendship with animals. For example, the partner people will not put a muzzle on the ox which treads on the grain [DEUT 25:4]. Moses and the people celebrated the wonder of the covenant gift. First they were liberated from Egypt. Now they were liberated from the slavery of exploiting others - including animals! This was shalom society!

Moses and the people gave thanks.

The grandest part of the covenant word, the Torah, was the teaching about Sabbath, God's gift of time – time for resting, playing, singing, frolicking, feasting, praying, storytelling, and time for savoring friendships with God and others and nature (Remember friendship is what life is all about, not piling up stuff). According to the Torah, the gift of Sabbath will be honored in three forms:

1. the Sabbath day, the seventh day of the week.

2. the Sabbath year, the seventh year.

3. the jubilee year, the fiftieth year, the grand Sabbath year.



On Sabbath days the partner people will rest. What a gift of grace! God lets the people know the world will not fall apart if they do not work all the time [EX 20:8-11, 23:12]. It doesn't even fall apart when God takes a day off [GEN 2:1-3].

On Sabbath years many joyful things will happen. The people and the land will rest [EX 23:11]. Work animals will enjoy rest and refreshment [EX 23:12]. There will be abundant food for all [EX 23:1, LEV. 25:6-7]. All debts will be canceled - one way to keep Pharaoh's Egypt from happening. [DEUT 15:1-11]. All slaves will go free with help to start again [DEUT 15:12-15].



On jubilee years all land lost because of debt or misfortune will go back to the original inheritor - God's way of assuring that this society will never become like Pharoah's Egypt with rich and poor, land hoarders and landless slave workers. By keeping the jubilee, this people will live as God's...

CONTRAST SOCIETY.
[LEV 25:8-55]

would the partner people remain faithful to the covenant life? Would they continue to live the manna way? If they were to remain faithful, Yahweh knew that they would have to hold two qualities in balance:

RIGHTEOUSNESS
following the words of the covenant gift, the Holy Torah, which describes the manna life, the just way to live together.

MERCY
practicing compassion towards the most vulnerable in society - the widows, orphans and sojourners.

Yahweh understood that righteousness without mercy leads to grumpy legalism. On the other hand, mercy without righteousness leads to wishy-washy sentimentalism. The lover God wondered, "How can the people be helped to hold the two in balance? How can they be deepened, enriched, and renewed in the life of righteousness <u>and</u> mercy?" After thinking and thinking, Yahweh decided to give the beloved people one more gift...

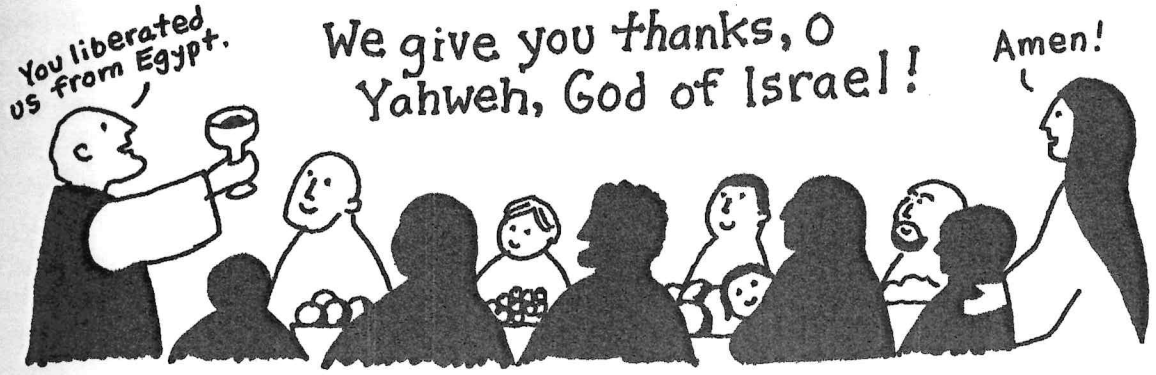
THE GIFT OF WORSHIP,

the joyful activity when the partner people will confess God's holy name and will ascribe absolute worth to God and to God alone:



[DEUT 6:4-9]

Worship will also be a special time to remember, retell, and give thanks for Yahweh's saving acts in history, the times when the lover God practiced righteousness and mercy in awesome ways, especially in the great liberation from Pharaoh's Egypt [DEUT 26:1-11].



By worshiping, the people will incorporate themselves into the life of God. By confessing the "HEAR, O ISRAEL," by telling the stories of God, by sharing the meal to remember the great EXODUS [EX 13:3-10, DEUT 16:1-8], and by offering thanksgiving, the people will immerse themselves more deeply into the life of God, into partnership with God. This relationship will empower the community to act as Yahweh acts - in RIGHTEOUSNESS and MERCY.

The worship of the partner people also included the offering of sacrifices - the best animals in the herd or flock and the first fruits. The sacrifices took place at a tent [the tabernacle] during the wilderness days, at holy places [Gilgal, Shiloh, Shechem] during the early days as a nation, and later at the temple in Jerusalem. Sacrifice was not only a powerful reminder that all things belong to God. It also served as a way of restoring the divine-human relationship.

Through the years worship came to include many other forms - national thanksgiving, national lament, sorrow for sin, coronation of kings, harvest festivals, and celebrations of creation and the Creator.

