

Acts of Love

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

The Talmudic sages enumerate three great miracles in the desert. First was the manna, which fed the wandering Israelites. Miriam's well provided water. And there was the covering of clouds that offered shade. One interpretation of the sukkah is that it commemorates the cloud covering in the desert.

The Steipler Gaon asks an intriguing question and gives a beautiful answer. Why of all three miracles does only the cloud covering deserve a holiday? There is no festival of the manna or the water, only Sukkot remembering the clouds.

His answer is that the manna and the water were necessary; without them Israel could not survive. But the cloud covering was an act of love. Festivals — the liberation of Pesach, the gift of Torah on Shavuot — are tokens of God's love.

A ring must be offered under the Chuppah, because a gift is not necessary, but rather a mark of love. Sustenance alone is not enough; love finds its expression in offering more than the beloved needs. Love is lavish; no parent is satisfied to give a child only what she needs. Love overflows boundaries, whether spreading a blanket on a sleeping child or covering the desert with clouds.