Every year, when we celebrate Passover, we recall the miracles: we recall the giving of manna -- a mysterious food that enabled Israelites to survive in the desert, we recall the parting of the Red Sea. While to most people, these are stories about the ancient past, people from Russia feel much more intimate about these miracles.

If you walk into a Russian restaurant and ask for manna, they will gladly cook it to you. If you ask Russian kids what is their favorite food, many of them will undoubtedly say manna -- a white amorphous substance which is inexpensive, nourishing, and delicious. Ask Russian adults, many of them fondly remember manna that their mothers and grandmothers cooked for them, and the highest compliment would be that it tasted almost like the Biblical manna from heaven. What is it, this manna-not-from-heaven? In the US, it is known as cream of wheat (aka farina or semolina).

In contrast to manna, parting of the sea is not something many people witnessed themselves -- but it is an event that they learn in their 20 century history textbooks, an event that some of their grandparents have seen with their own eyes. It happened twice, in 1920 and in 1944. By 1920, at the end of the Russian Civil War, the Reds took over almost all the country, but the Whites were still keeping the Crimea peninsula. Crimea is separated from the mainland by a very narrow Perekop isthmus; this isthmus was heavily fortified, and both armies prepared for a long and bloody battle. But on the night before the attack, the waters suddenly receded, and the troops were able to cross to the Crimea on foot. The same thing happened in 1944, during the Second World War. The Nazis captured Crimea in 1941; in 1944, when the Soviet Army was approaching Crimea, the Germans heavily fortified Perekop making it almost impenetrable. But on the day of the battle, the sea receded, and the troops were able to cross the sea on foot.

Happy Passover to everyone!

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