

# THE TRUE SPICE OF LIFE

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

The layer of dew ascended and behold – it was over the surface of the Wilderness, something thin, exposed- thin as frost on the earth. The Children of Israel saw and said to one another, "Is it Manna?!" for they did not know what it was. (Shemos 16:14-15)

You open your hand and satisfy every living thing with its desire. (Tehillim 145) He gives to each and every person what they quest. Each and every person tasted in the Manna what he wanted... Rabbi Abba stated that he did not even have to request it with his mouth but rather if he just thought in his heart that this is what he desires, the taste was the taste of what he wanted! (Midrash Rabba)

That heaven-sent bread known as Manna that the Jewish People ate for their duration in the desert functioned like a kind of culinary Rorschach test. It tasted just like one wanted it to. All they had to do is think of what wanted and that was the flavor. Someone once famously asked the Chofetz Chaim how the Manna tasted if someone did not think. Something to the effect that, "if a person does not think then how can a thing taste?!" was his spicy response. I often wondered what that might mean.

Years ago I went to visit a friend on a hot summer day. After climbing to his apartment on the top floor he invited me in and offered a cold drink. There he placed a cold can of apple juice. I looked curiously at the Hebrew lettering studying the brand of the drink. "Very odd" I thought as I put the word together...Somech- Feh- Reish- Yud- Nun- Gimel, "SUFFERING?" That name will entice a drinker to happily partake?! Then I turned the can around and there in English was the name "SPRING". Then I recognized my mistake and I also realized that the difference between an experience of SUFFERING and SPRING can be a single point.

I remember vividly from more than thirty five years ago when walking down the long driveway of the Yeshiva one wintery evening I looked up and the sky was filled with huge snowflakes gently gliding to earth. The Street light high above accented the depth of this awesome scene. My visceral reaction, "OY What a huge inconvenience this is gonna be!"

As I continued on my way, coming in the other direction was a young fellow from South Africa, Ben Tzion. He had never seen a single snowflake in his lifetime, till now. He was marching with glee, looking up at the same street light and shouting with radical awe, "MANNA from HEAVEN, MANNA from HEAVEN!"

As we passed each other it occurred to me how snow had lost its innocence with me over time and how darkened my attitude had become. We were both responding to the exact same phenomenon

and having completely different experiences.

The son of an old friend who is learning in a nearby Yeshiva came to our house recently on a Shabbos when plenty of snow fell. When I drove him home after Shabbos he was busy telling me how amazing it is that these fragile and individual snowflakes when added together created such a huge effect.

We spoke about how great accomplishments in learning can be achieved with small and steady steps. I told him about the Penny Harvest we are having in Yeshiva and the statement from the sages, "Each and every penny adds up to a great sum!"

There is so much to learn from snow. I was thinking this morning that King David writes, "It is He Who gives snow like fleece (a sheep's wool coat) and He scatters frost like ashes" (Tehillim 147) HASHEM will only make it so cold to the degree that the wool coat of the sheep can sustain and protect him protect him from the cold. So too HASHEM gives us challenges in life only to the extent that we can endure them and not more.

King David also writes, "Taste and See HASHEM is good!" (Tehillim 34) Maybe it means that a person could either taste or see that HASHEM is good. Maybe "taste" - Taamu can mean to reason-contemplate and if one invests thought they can then see HASHEM is good! We joke all the time in our house, "Whoever invented (for example) dates or garlic or cantaloupe or bee honey knew what they were doing!" Tasting HASHEM changes the way we experience everything in life and is it not **the true spice of life!**