

# HOW SWEET IT IS!

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

Dip the apple in the honey, make a Brocho loud and clear, Shana Tov u Metuka, have a happy sweet New Year! - Song for children of all ages, based on the custom to dip an apple in honey on Rosh HaShana

The Talmud reminds us, "If we ourselves are not prophets, we are the children of prophets." That means that even many of the traditional things we Jews do, may seem inane and outdated but they may have a deep and holy source. Why do we dip an apple in honey and declare, using the name of HASHEM, that it should be a good and sweet year? The same question can be asked and amplified by our use of the name of HASHEM in a host of other similar declarations, called Simanim, or Omens. We are normally very careful not to use HASHEM's name loosely. Usually we can only employ HASHEM's name when reading a complete verse or reciting a necessary Brocho that was carefully crafted and minted by the Men of the Great Assembly. Now, on the first day of the New Year, when our fate is being decided and fear is in the Shofar filled air, we are seemingly casual.

I had a friend in Yeshiva more than 33 years ago. He was a Sefardi with dark serious eyes and long a long black beard. He used to learn Zohar all night, all week. Just looking at him inspired Yiras Shemayim. One day I observe that he is observing me as I am making my morning coffee, heaping one spoonful of sugar after another. He asked me blankly, "What are you doing?" I told him, "I'm putting sugar in my coffee." He replied with intensity and certainty, "The coffee is sweet!"

I pretended not to react but when I tasted my coffee it was already too sweet with all the sugar I had put in and so I made myself a coffee without sugar and guess what, it was sweet. I haven't had coffee with sugar now for more than 33 years because he insisted "the coffee is sweet". That phrase altered my tasting experience for all time.

When I was yet a Yeshiva student, it happened, one Shabbos morning that a problem was found with the Sefer Torah we were reading in Shul. The entire congregation migrated to another Minyan.

There we joined the reading of the Torah in progress. That Monday morning I was sleeping past my alarm when I found myself startled by a vivid dream. There was a Sefer Torah spread out before me and raised high in the air. Then suddenly it began to fall forward. As it did I sat up in horror and realized that I was late.

I dressed quickly and came to Yeshiva. I assumed my usual spot in the corner where I was absorbed in the devotions. Since it was a Monday, the Torah was taken out and read from. Cohen, Levi, and

Yisrael had already made their appearances. Suddenly the Gabai was there motioning with his wrist that he wanted me to lift the Torah. I walked with trepidation to the Bima, haunted by the dream. Since the regular Sefer Torah was still being repaired they had procured a substitute. As I approached I was cautioned, "Watch out! This Sefer Torah is very heavy!"

I was frozen with fear. Then someone else warned, "Be careful! The handle is loose!" I made a "time out" gesture and walked over to the Rosh HaYeshiva and quietly insisted, "I am not lifting this Sefer Torah!" He looked at me with incredulity and asked why not. I told him, that I just had a dream that a Sefer Torah fell. He responded, "A Sefer Torah falling? That's a good dream!" So I lifted the Torah without any problems.

Later, I asked the Rosh HaYeshiva if I could ask him a question and he told me that he has some time if I wouldn't mind tagging along while he did carpool. When we pulled up to his house it was pouring rain and the children came running into the car trying hopelessly to duck from rain and all the while he waved them in and repeated, "Rain is good!" When they left again to go out to school he repeated as they ran back out into the wet world, "Rain is good!" When the children were gone I had my chance to ask, "Is it really a good dream to see a Sefer Torah fall?" He told me the Talmud says, "Everything follows the interpretation!"

Taste and see that HASHEM is good! (Tehillim 34:9) Rain is good! Coffee is sweet! Say and see- **how sweet it is!**