

Sparks

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The Nourishing Power of Love Is Your Food Missing Vitamin L?

When the Israelites were wandering in the desert, G-d fed them with a hitherto unknown substance called “manna.” The people would go out of their tents every morning, and find this strange stuff lying there on the ground. G-d tells the Israelites: “I fed you manna -- something that neither you nor your fathers knew what it was -- so that you should know that not by bread alone does a person live, but by all that comes from the mouth of G-d.”

Why did it have to be something unfamiliar? What would have happened if the Israelites would have woken up in the morning and found bagels all over the place? Imagine being in the middle of the Sinai desert, and every morning appear these bagels, sliced in the middle, with two centimeters of cream cheese and lox. Now that would be a Jewish experience! Why did it have to be something that didn't look like food?

Because if the manna did look like food the Israelites would think, “Well, okay, the bagels did come from G- d, the Bagel King, but the nourishment comes from the bagels.” However, since the manna obviously could not be nourishing in and of itself, the Israelites would necessarily learn an essential life lesson -- all things come from G-d , not just food, but the nourishment in the food. If G-d had wanted pens to be nourishing they would have been.

It's not on bread alone that man lives but by that which comes from the mouth of G-d. G-d determines what is a vehicle for life force and blessing. The Israelites realized that this odd, gray stuff was not going to nourish them. G-d was going to nourish them. The manna was just a vehicle for the nourishing love of G-d. And then they realized that back in Egypt, when they had bread to eat, it was not the bread that nourished them. It was also G-d. It's hard to recognize G-d as the source of the sustaining energy in bread, because we think of bread, or any food we are used to, as inherently sustaining. I know the bread nourishes me; I know the apple nourishes me. But what's this white, powdery, amorphous stuff called manna? Is that really going to sustain me? Obviously not. It must be G-d who is going to sustain me through this stuff. This lesson is true forever.

To the extent that I realize that this bread is only a channel for the nourishing energy of G-d to enter the world, to that extent the bread becomes a channel for the nourishing energy of G-d to enter the world.

This is why Judaism teaches that we must recite a blessing before we eat. When we say a blessing over a food, I begin with, “Blessed are You, G-d...” Many people mistakenly think that these words mean that we are blessing G-d, the Infinite One. But we are in fact acknowledging G-d as the Source of this food. When we eat an apple, we can just eat an apple, or we can, by saying the blessings consciously, make the apple into a conductor-wire for channeling G-d's presence, love, vitality, goodness, and blessing. An apple can be a nutritious snack, or it can plug me into the Source of all life force and nutrition.

The Kabbalah teaches that if we eat without reciting a blessing, then the food feeds just our body. It does nothing for our soul. But when we make a blessing on the food, we transform that food. It's not the same bread. It's not the same apple. It's not the same pretzel. This pretzel is now a vehicle for the life giving force of G-d to enter the world.

What's the difference between a home-cooked meal and a frozen dinner? It's the love and care that you can actually taste in the food. Even if it says on the package "Mom's Home-made Frozen Dinner," you can taste in the food that "Mom" is just a company that wants to make money. But the real mom makes you dinner for free because she loves you and cares. And you can taste the difference.

In order to taste the divine love and care in all food, we need to arouse the taste buds of our soul and acknowledge G-d as the loving source of all by making a blessing before we eat.

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