

# Messianic Rabbi: Sometimes Grace Looks Like Black Cherry Soda

It is funny how certain things trigger our memories. Sometimes, it may be the smell of something cooking, the sound of a car or motorcycle, a scene from a movie or a song playing on the radio.

Our memories seem to be connected together by threads similar to the way #s (hashtags), group thoughts, ideas or topics on social media do.

This week, while I was reading my Bible, I read a verse which brought my mind back to a memory of my family having dinner together. The memory was as vivid as if a movie was playing on the backside of my eyelids. My family was sitting around the table and we were eating my Nana's pot roast along with side dishes.

One of my brothers began to complain about the pot roast being too dry. (For the record, I remember clearly it was cooked to perfection the way my Nana cooked everything.) My grandfather told him that the roast was just fine, and that he should eat it and be thankful for it. (I remember the exact words used to express this statement but because this is a family blog, and because I don't use those words in English or Yiddish, I translated/interpreted his statement.)

However, my grandfather's strong encouragement didn't sway my brother from his grumbling. This two-way dialogue went on for several rounds of discussion, as my brother complained and my grandfather encouraged. Then suddenly, my grandfather arose from his seat and walked around the table to where my brother was seated. Those watching were expecting my grandfather to take away my brother's plate and that my brother was about to

be reintroduced to my grandfather's wrath, including my brother. However, instead of my grandfather using the rod, so as to not spoil the child, he picked up my brother's black cherry soda and poured it liberally upon my brother's roast beef. After my grandfather finished pouring, he quietly and calmly stated, "Now the roast is no longer too dry. Eat it, every bite!"

My brother, realizing that he had somehow avoided the harsh discipline he was expecting and knew he deserved, quietly ate every bit of roast on his plate. He didn't enjoy it and his stomach ached afterwards, but he ate it all until the plate was clean.

The biblical text that caused me to recall this memory comes from Numbers 11:1-9 (TLV):

"The people were murmuring in the ears of Adonai about hardship, and when Adonai heard, His anger burned. The fire of Adonai blazed among them, ravaging the outskirts of the camp. The people cried out to Moses, so Moses prayed to Adonai and the fire died out. The name of that place was thus called Taberah because fire from Adonai had burned among them. The grumblers among them began to have cravings, so Bnei-Yisrael began to wail repeatedly, saying, 'If we could just eat some meat! We remember the fish that we used to eat in Egypt, for free—the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic! But now we have no appetite. We never see anything but this manna.' Now the manna was similar to coriander seed and had an appearance like gum resin. The people went about, gathered it up, and ground it in a hand mill or crushed it in a mortar. They cooked it in a pot or made it into cakes. It had a taste like something made with olive oil. When the dew descended on the camp at night, the manna descended with it."

As we read about the children of Israel complaining in these verses, we have to remember that this isn't the first time they complained about food. In Exodus 16, we see a similar

event taking place where the people complained, followed by G-D providing quail and then manna. However, this time the people had been eating manna for quite a while.

Just imagine getting up each day and only having to walk outside your tent so that you could gather all the food you would need for the day. No plowing, no planting, no watering, no weeding, no picking or harvesting. Just grabbing your basket every morning and picking up what G-D had provided for you. But instead of being grateful for G-D's blessings, the Israelites, like my brother, began to complain about the food they were being "served."

And just like my grandfather, G-D responded in an unexpected way. G-D could have simply said, "Well, if you don't like My food, then from now on you can get your own." Or G-D could have had the ground open up and eat those who complained about what they had to eat.

Instead, G-D gave them what they wanted: meat, lots of meat. He told them they got what they wanted and now they were going to eat every bit of it. The result was the same as what happened to my brother. They got sick and then they remember that in life many times, we have to choose between what we want and what G-D wants to provide.

Most of the time when we are grumbling, it isn't because we don't have something; it is because we want something other than what we have. So, we complain and complain and complain to G-D.

I am so thankful that when we do get into that cycle of ungrateful complaining that G-D demonstrates His grace. Sometimes that grace looks like quail and sometimes it looks like black cherry soda, and it will often result in our stomachs being upset. But an upset stomach is so much better than G-D removing His provision from our lives. {eo}

**Eric Tokajer** is the author of *Overcoming Fearlessness, What If*

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