

**Death March****960516**

I've always been pretty crazy about hiking and camping. (Or perhaps I was just crazy, period). And I was fascinated to read about native Americans that could run all day along the mountain paths. So as a young (mature?) adult I went along with several of my friends on a couple of hikes that would eventually earn the name "Death March". The first one involved hiking in the Great Smoky Mountains from Newfound Gap to Davenport Gap (a little over 30 miles) in one day. The next one went in the direction from Clingman's Dome to Fontana dam, about the same distance, also in one day. We carried only a fanny pack and wore good tennis shoes (not heavy boots) on our feet. Later, we moved up to "Double Death Marches", where we hiked 30 miles each day for two days, and slept in a hammock at night.

We live in such a comfort-oriented age. It is an age where we are supposed to eat, drink, take a pill, or buy something for ourselves whenever we feel a little below par. What do you do on a Death March? The selection of food to take on a trip like this required some thought, for our fanny packs did not have much room. So in our last minute shopping, we picked up our favorite junk food, thinking how good it would be on the trail and how that 'quick energy' would surely help us to walk all the way. My personal favorite is Hershey's special dark chocolate. We also got a little variety by taking along something like a little cheese and crackers.

It is interesting that after hiking several miles, the body runs out of the quick energy stores that usually keep us going. Once this happens, we are stripped down to the real core of our body's strength, the inner man. The body now has to break down more complex substances to furnish its energy, substances that have been created and stored over a period of time. This is our true strength. We hit a 'wall' similar to that which marathon runners talk about, where our body undergoes a great change in metabolism. It is now much harder to walk, but possible if we have the right reserves.

The great shock that comes when our body begins to need real nourishment usually happened about half way through the hike. After eating Hershey's special dark chocolate for 6 or 7 hours, my body began to demand something more substantial; something of real value. I dreamt of a great big juicy steak, with lots of sides! When undergoing this kind of stress, the food that seemed to be so wonderful when life was easy just could not give us what we need. It even became revolting to us, and we began to throw it out as an unnecessary burden.

The parallel to our lives is simple. When life gets tough, we must prepare ourselves by being in the proper spiritual shape and having the right kind of reserve strength. We have to have a great spiritual reservoir. We must not burden ourselves down with things that advertise a quick high or thrill. There are other "junk" things besides "junk food". These things are never enough to bring us through the long haul.

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

*2 Timothy 4:7*

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,*

*Hebrews 12:1*

*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.*

*Revelation 2:10b*