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NATION OF THE DREAM...

ONE OF THE AMAZING FEATURES OF THE RECENT HISTORY of the Jewish people is the success of the movement to strengthen our bonds with our spiritual heritage. Today there is a striking increase of interest in Jewish matters. In locations literally all over the world, there are study groups exploring Jewish tradition. To an increasing extent, men and women are rediscovering aspects of Jewish life which, sixty years ago, many people assumed were a thing of the past, with no relevance in the modern world.

This is a step by step process. Certain Jewish teachings fit our modern style of living and thinking quite easily. Others seem at first a little more difficult. Nonetheless, when you look around the Jewish world, you see that even more challenging Mitzvot are gradually increasing. More Jewish people are putting on Tefilin in Thailand, or going to the Mikveh in Sweden.

Some Jewish teachings concern practical actions. Others concern ideas. One of the key concepts of Judaism which is expressed in the Sedra¹ is belief in and expectation of the Messiah.

Balaam the heathen prophet was hired by King Balak to curse the Jews. Time and again, G-d forced him to give a blessing. The most famous of these is *Mah Tov*, "How good are your tents"², found also at the beginning of the Prayerbook. Balaam's final statement was a

prophecy about the future. “I see it but not now, I can perceive it but it is not near: a star will shoot forth from Jacob...”³.

The Sages understand the ‘star’ as referring to the Messiah. The Hebrew word for star is *kochav*. Around 132 CE, sixty years after the destruction of the 2nd Temple, a Jewish leader named Bar Koziva led a rebellion against the Romans. At first it seemed that this would be successful, and that soon the Temple would be rebuilt. Rabbi Akiva declared that this leader was the Messiah. In reference to the word *kochav* in Balaam's prophecy, he took the name Bar Kochba.

Unfortunately his rebellion was crushed. But eighty years later there was another great Jewish leader who was considered by his disciples to be the potential Messiah. This was Rabbi Judah HaNasi (the Prince). A great Sage, descended from King David, he wrote the Mishnah which became the basic text of Jewish tradition, after the Bible. Much of the text of the Mishnah concerns laws which apply only when the Temple stands. Although this had been destroyed 140 years earlier, for Rabbi Judah HaNasi and his disciples, the advent of the Messiah was a living reality. They believed very soon the Temple would be rebuilt.

This expectation is central to the Talmud and to living, healthy Judaism. When is the Messiah coming? “Today, if you obey G-d's teaching” say the Sages⁴. “The Jewish people will repent... and will at once be redeemed”, says the Rambam⁵, who also made belief in the Messiah one of his famous Thirteen Principles of Faith.

With the coming of the Messiah, the Jewish claim to the sacred Land of Israel will be affirmed by humanity at large. There will be world peace. The Temple will be rebuilt, and the Messiah himself will be the Jewish Sage-King for the Jewish people and the world. The Jews will willingly learn and keep all Jewish law. The nations will keep the Seven Noachide Laws. Disease will be conquered. The world will be like a global Garden of Eden. Sounds like a dream? Yes, this is our Jewish dream, but some dreams really come true....

1. Numbers 22:2-25:9. 2. Num.24:5. 3. Num.24:17. 4. Talmud Sanhedrin 98a. 5. Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 7:5. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.1 p.70.

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SEDRA BALAK

RESPECT FOR PRIVACY

Adina tapped her foot impatiently waiting for the lesson to end so she could go home. It had been a long day. She yawned quietly as she tried concentrating on the voice of her teacher, Mrs Solomon. They were learning about the Sedra of the week, Sedra Balak.

It was an interesting story, about a wicked man named Balaam who wanted to curse the Jewish people, but G-d prevented him from speaking badly and only blessings came out of his mouth. Adina liked this kind of story, where unusual miracles happened. She focused on the teacher and listened closely.

"One of Balaam's praises of the Jewish people was a verse which we recite in the morning prayers, 'Your tents are so good, O Jacob! Your dwellings, O Israel!'" Mrs Solomon exclaimed enthusiastically, "can anyone guess what Balaam meant by 'your tents are so good'? Any reasons why the Jewish tents were 'good'?"

Several hands were raised. "Yes, Dalia?"

"Maybe they were really pretty, and nicely furnished with Jewish objects?"

"Good guess, but not quite. I'm sure they were beautiful Jewish homes, though. Anyone else? Yes, Millie?"

"I think I've learnt this before... was it because their tents were set up in a way that each person had their own privacy? I mean, the doors weren't facing each other so that no one

could see into anyone else's home. They cared about modesty and privacy."

"Excellent!" said Mrs Solomon. "I couldn't have said it any better! And, girls, this teaches us a very important lesson of privacy. We see how careful the Jews were to respect other people's personal lives, their modesty and their belongings. Each person felt that they had their own private space."

In the evening, Adina's mother called downstairs. "Adina, sweetie, do you mind running to the green-grocer round the corner to pick up a couple of things for me?"

"Sure Mom, that's fine," Adina replied. She went to the coat closet and rummaged for her mother's handbag to find her wallet and give it to her mother, so her mother could give her the money she needed. She found her mother's black leather handbag and reached her hand in to feel around for the wallet. Suddenly, her hand froze. Something was wrong. She shouldn't be doing this...

What suddenly reminded her that this was wrong? Her teacher's voice echoed in her head... "...this teaches us the very important lesson of privacy... the Jews were careful to respect other people's personal lives, their modesty and their belongings..." Adina slowly pulled her arm out. She realized she shouldn't be going through her mother's handbag. She would give her mother the handbag and wait for her mother to give her the money from the wallet.

She brought the handbag upstairs to her mother, who gave her the money and a list of things to buy.

On the way, Adina thought to herself how important it was to respect people's privacy. I wouldn't want anyone to go through my things, she thought. What's in someone's handbag, even my own mother's handbag, is private. I'm glad I remembered in time.....

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