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שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 14 January 2011 - 9 Shevat 5771
Sedra Beshalach

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

THE KEY EVENT IN THIS WEEK'S SEDRA¹ IS THE SPLITTING OF THE SEA. Pursued by Pharaoh and his chariots, the Jewish people faced the Red Sea. G-d told Moses to lift up his staff, and to stretch his arm out over the waters. The Sea split, and the Jewish people walked on dry land. The Sages tell us that for every member of the Jewish people this was a mystical experience surpassing the visions of the Prophets².

The splitting of the Sea, revealing the dry land beneath, expresses the revelation of a spiritual dimension which is normally concealed. Chassidic teachings³ say the splitting of the Sea was a preparation for the Giving of the Torah at Sinai, some weeks later, when likewise there was an intense revelation of the Divine to every individual.

Through the generations the observance of the Mitzvot, Shabbat and the Festivals, and especially the personal sense of inspiration which can be attained by study of Torah, are all ways in which the spiritual dimension of existence might be in some sense revealed to individuals, families and communities.



In Memory of Meshulam Scharfstein V"g - 10 Shevat
Dedicated by his daughter Dr Jutta Singer ח"י ,

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The date of this Shabbat, the Tenth of Shevat, commemorates the publicisation of a famous tract of Chassidic teaching which presents a global view of existence and of our purpose in the world. It was first published for the Tenth of Shevat, 1950, by its author Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn, the Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, that date being the Yahrzeit of his grandmother Rivkah (1833-1914), who was herself a famous personality in Chabad history. However the author himself passed away on that date, and this Chassidic tract became, in effect, his last will and testament. Beginning on Tenth Shevat 1951, just sixty years ago, his son-in-law and successor Rabbi Menachem Mendel, known today as the Lubavitcher Rebbe, began expounding the teachings of this tract, and did so each year on this date.

The tract starts with a quotation from Song of Songs (5:1): “I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride”. What is the ‘garden’? It is this world, which can be and is intended to be a beautiful garden. Indeed, at the beginning of Creation it is described in the Torah as the beautiful Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve were together with the sacred Presence of the Divine. However, their error in eating from the Tree of Knowledge, and subsequent transgressions such as Cain killing Abel, in effect made the Divine Presence retreat from the world. Man and woman were still in this world, but the Divine Presence was hidden, and the world no longer seemed like a garden.

Then came seven Tzaddikim, starting with Abraham and culminating with Moses, the seventh. Each brought the Divine Presence a bit closer to the world, until Moses temporarily enabled the Divine to dwell in the Sanctuary and in the heart of each individual. This remains the task of the Jewish people. By observing the Mitzvot, especially when some personal effort is required, we reveal the Divine in our hearts and in the world. To establish such a dwelling for the Divine in this world is the ultimate goal, which will be achieved with the coming of the Messiah⁴.

1. Exodus 13:17-17:16. 2. See Rashi to Gen.15:2: “a maidservant saw at the Sea that which the Prophets did not see”. 3. See Rabbi Dov Ber, the Mittlerer Rebbe’s *Gate of Faith* ch.55. 4. See *Basi LeGani* (I have come into My Garden), Chassidic discourses by the Sixth and Seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

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SEDRA BESHALACH

DO ALL IN YOUR POWER... AND THEN...

If she tried one more time she felt she would burst. Leah sat by the table, staring at her math book, the numbers swarming around making absolutely no sense to her. She looked up and saw through the window Michael having a snow fight with his friends – they seemed to be having such a blast. ‘It’s not fair,’ she groaned, ‘everyone’s having fun and I’m stuck here studying.’ She could picture her friends enjoying themselves – they were all good at math and surely had no problem passing the exam, on the other hand she wasn’t so good and so was stuck spending her Sunday morning studying!

She tried to focus. But the boring looking decimals and fractions didn’t help. Till now she’d always been more or less ok with math but this year it had taken on a whole new level. “You know what,” she said aloud. “Chances are I’m going to fail anyway. This is way too hard – I GIVE UP!” and she slammed her book shut. Suddenly Leah noticed her mother coming towards her.

“Leah dear, are you alright?” she asked.

“Yes, whatever, I’m fine - I’m just quitting math. I’m probably never gonna know it anyway.”

“Hang on a second there. Who says you’ll never know it?”

“Well... I’ve been studying and I still don’t know it. I can learn a bit more, but what’s the point? I’m pretty much doomed to fail.”

“Well let’s try stop thinking about math for a second and I want to tell you a bit about this week’s Sedra.”

“Huh?” Leah was expecting a speech about how important it is for her life. But, well, this would do. “Ok,” she shrugged.

“So this week’s Sedra is called Beshalach. In this Sedra, the Jews have finally left Egypt but the dangers aren’t over yet. They find themselves stuck between their dreaded enemies, the Egyptians, behind them, and a raging sea in front. There’s nowhere to turn. What can they possibly do?”

“Nothing really. I mean after all they’ve been through, they’d probably just give up.”

“Well you’re right – many did. But the Midrash tells us there was one man called Nachshon the son of Aminadav who just went straight ahead – he jumped right into the sea. You know what happened to him?” “I dunno. He drowned?”

“Nope. All of a sudden, the sea split! G-d made a miracle and the Jews walked through straight into freedom. You see in order for this miracle to happen, the Jews had to do all that was within their power, and once they’d done that, G-d took care of the rest. Not everyone realized this but Nachshon did, and because of that they all got saved.”

“Wow.”

“Now, do you see what that has to do with studying for your exam?”

Leah thought for a moment. “Yes, I think so. Well obviously it’s on a much smaller scale than all the Jews being saved, but basically a person should never give up – I’ve got to do all that I can, even if it seems impossible and let G-d take care of what’s not within my reach.”

“Exactly!”

“Sooo... I’m just going to study a little bit more and we’ll see what happens.” Leah smiled and went to open her math book, humming as she did.

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