



THE FINAL TEACHING

FOR MUCH OF HIS LIFE, MOSES HAD BEEN A SOLITARY thinker. The many years he spent as a shepherd in the region of the Sinai mountains were a period of inner spiritual thoughts and feelings. At this time Moses was married and had a son, but in the main he lived a life of contemplation, engrossed with G-d.

Then came the Burning Bush, and G-d's command to him to go to Egypt and lead the Jewish people out of slavery. "I am not a man of words", he protested¹. He was a thinker, not a speaker.

G-d sent him his brother Aaron to act as his spokesman. Together they would deal with Pharaoh and communicate with the people. After the drama of the Exodus, in which we see Moses as a forthright leader who brings his people to freedom, came the Giving of the Torah on Sinai. For forty days and nights on the mountain, Moses absorbed the immensity of G-d's Torah.

Now he became a scholar and a teacher, which is how he is primarily thought of by later generations. He is called *Moshe Rabbenu*, "Moses Our Teacher". He dedicated himself to explaining the subtle principles of the Torah and how they are to be applied. He was also a fiery orator, as we see from his talks to the Jewish people recorded in the Fifth Book of the Torah, called in Hebrew *Devarim*, "Words".

But in our Sedra², approaching the very last days of Moses' life, we hear the final summary of everything he had to say. "Moses

finished speaking all these words to the Jewish people. He said to them: Put your hearts into all that I have taught you...”³

As explained by the Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn (d. 1950), this expresses a demand which goes beyond scholarship and oratory. Moses had said all he had to say, he had finished speaking, now something more was required. To some extent it is expressed in the English phrase “taking it to heart”.

Moses is asking each of us to open our hearts to the Torah and its message: that we should become one with the Torah and the Torah should be one with us. This means that to a certain extent, each of us should also become a thinker, like Moses in his earlier life.

This possibility of experiencing the Torah on an inward and personal level expresses our link with Moses the man of inner thought and feeling. There is a need for knowledge, and for the verbal skills which communicate that knowledge. But we also need to feel the inner warmth of the Torah, to live inwardly with its ideals, to open the door to the heart. This was Moses’ final teaching to the Jewish people and to us, the men and women of today⁴.

SUCCOT

On Sunday evening (30 September) the festival of Succot begins. The Succah booth represents the booths in which the Jewish people dwelt during their wanderings in the Wilderness. Yet it also signifies the ‘Clouds of Glory’ which protected the Jewish people at that time and gave them a sense of spiritual closeness to G-d.

Nowadays too, entering the Succah, looking up at the leaves of the Succah roof, one feels a bond of connection with G-d. Chassidic teachings tell us that in the Succah we are in a spiritual realm. The Mitzvah of waving the Four Kinds in every direction also expresses drawing Divine life-force into our hearts and lives. Through the festival of Succot, we manifest the two aspects of the teachings of Moses: be active and joyful, but also, take it to heart. Through this we, the Jewish people and ultimately the whole world are granted true blessing for the coming year.

1. Exodus 4:10. 2. Deuteronomy ch.32. 3. Deut. 32:45-6. 4. Based freely on Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn’s *Likkutei Dibburim*, vol.4, p.1475-9. See also Rabbi Menachem Schneerson’s *Sichot Kodesh*, 5728, Ha’azinu, sec.7 (p.15).

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SEDRA HA'AZINU – SUCCOT

POETRY

'Uch! I give up!' said Toby in exasperation. 'What?' muttered Dina, who was comfortably lying on her bed, reading a book, and was in no mood for interruption. 'I'm just clueless on what I should write this poem for school', explained Toby. 'What do you mean?' exclaimed Dina in surprise, 'you *never* have a problem finding a theme for a poem!' she said sarcastically, and also enviously, as she considered herself rather hopeless as far as poetry was concerned.

'Well, this time I do have a problem', replied Toby, rather hurt by Dina's sarcasm. 'Well actually,' said Dina, 'now that you mention it, I do have an idea for you. Remember our teacher was telling us about this week's Torah Portion?'

'Yes', said Toby

'Ok', said Dina, 'well, our teacher said that almost the entire portion of Ha'azinu is a long poem, written in the Torah Scroll in two columns. He said it's like the story of our people. Why things happen to us. Hashem saves the Jews from Egypt and makes them into a rich nation. Then the Jews sin and they go into exile. But Hashem still won't forget us because he chose us as His nation and He will always protect us. And eventually the Messiah will come...'

'So I should read the Torah Portion and write a poem based on that?' interrupted Toby. 'Yes!' said Dina, happy that she had actually come up with the idea.

An hour later Dina sat on her bed reading the poem that Toby had eagerly thrust at her.

*Among the thorns and the nettles
The Jews have sat and nestled
Driven by their belief
Standing up to the test of grief*

*And although they sometimes sin
They will return to G-d and win
For G-d chose us as His nation
With a responsibility to Creation*

*When that special time comes
Then the world will all be one
The Temple will be rebuilt
In the land of honey and sun*

'Wow!' exclaimed Dina, looking up from the typed paper, 'that poem is fun. I bet you get a good mark for it!' 'Thank you', said Toby blushing, 'but it was all your idea, I have to give you credit for that'.

'Ok, fine', said Dina, then she thought of something. 'Let's go outside to the garden where Dad is making the Succah. Let's show him the poem. Maybe he'll even put it up in the Succah together with the other Succah decorations!'

'But then it will need another verse, about Succot', said Toby.

'So, write one,' said Dina. 'I already have,' said Toby:

*As if in a great Succah together
All at peace without strife
The entire Jewish people
Helping Humanity make sense of life.*

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