


**CHABAD**  
  
**RESEARCH UNIT**

שבת..... *for Friday nights* ..... קדש

**Friday 16 September 2011 - 17 Elul 5771**  
**Sedra Ki Tavo**


**DISCOVERING EVERYTHING, TODAY**

**A**ROUND THE GLOBE THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE, BOTH YOUNG and old, who are discovering Judaism for the first time. These individuals were born as Jews, but never before had the opportunity to enjoy that fact and experience the positive spiritual dimension of Jewish teaching. Suddenly, whether by meeting the right person or by getting on line to the Internet, Judaism is available<sup>1</sup>. It makes sense, is beautiful and exciting.

At the same time there are others who have been part of a friendly, close Jewish community all their lives. They take many aspects of Jewish observance for granted. It is simply the way things happen. Of course, kosher. Of course, Shabbat. Of course....

Of course? Every detail of Jewish teaching connects each person, man, woman or child, with G-d the Infinite. This is something one can never take for granted. One may or may not 'feel' the experience, but as thinking beings we know that it is taking place. This prompts us to look at our Jewishness with fresh eyes, and see it as something we have discovered today for the first time.

The Sedra<sup>2</sup> prompts us to think in this direction. Moses said to the Jewish people: "Listen! This very day you have become a people for

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|  | Celebrating the Wedding of Mushky and Yakov Jacobs 'ש<br>Crown Heights, New York 17 Elul 5771<br>Dedicated by their Grandparents 'ש |
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**117 GEORGE STREET, LONDON W1H 7HF**  
**www.chabadresearch.org - cru@LubavitchUK.com**

Hashem your G-d!". The famous commentator Rashi writes: "Every day it should seem to you that just today you entered the covenant with G-d".

Moses is asking us always to be conscious of the newness and excitement of Jewish teaching. How can we attain this? Are we supposed to become some kind of starry-eyed neophyte? Is this a realistic demand?

One way of approaching this question is by considering the nature of existence. According to the teachings of Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760) and Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812)<sup>3</sup>, the founders of the Chassidic movement and of the Chabad branch of it, respectively, Divine life-force is constantly recreating the entire universe. According to their teachings, based on earlier concepts, spiritual energy has a pulsating quality. Every moment, every hour, and certainly every day, there is a new pulse of life and, in effect, a new beginning. This applies to everything: to marriage, to every detail of life.

Each morning we can look around at the world and see it as something which has only just come into being. The world looks new, and we feel new ourselves. In this state of rejuvenation, of course our Jewish identity and our feelings towards Jewish teaching are also renewed.

It seems strikingly like Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, which celebrates and spiritually re-enacts the creation of the world. Following the teaching of the Baal Shem Tov and Rabbi Shneur Zalman, in a sense, each day has the freshness and sense of renewal of a new year and a new universe.

This means that in every aspect of our lives we are able to feel the wonderful sense of this very day entering into a unique closeness with G-d, and of being a member of G-d's special people, with the goal to bring healing and wholesomeness to the entire world.<sup>4</sup>

1. This category includes, of course, righteous Converts to Judaism. 2. Deut. 26:1-29:8. See 27:9. 3. This Shabbat, 18 Elul, celebrates both their birthdays. 4. Freely adapted from a talk by the Lubavitcher Rebbe on Shabbat Ki Tavo, 1986.

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SEDRA KI TAVO

**FIRST AND BEST**

“Mummy look! Look at these strawberries - they’re the first fruits that have grown in my garden!” Avigail exclaimed. She showed her mother some small but delicious looking strawberries. “They are called ‘everbearers’ because they grow in the autumn. Maybe we could make some jam with them - we just learnt how to make jam in school.”

“We could - but I think you’d need a few more strawberries than that to make jam,” her mother said. “You’ll have to wait till the rest of them grow. But why don’t you eat these now? They look really tempting.”

“It’s really amazing that these strawberries were ready today, of all days,” Avigail remarked, as she popped a strawberry into her mouth, having first made the blessing thanking G-d for creating ‘fruit from the ground’.

“Why, what’s special about today?” asked her mother.

“Well, we were just learning today about bringing the First Fruits to the Holy Temple. In those days, what happened was that when someone saw that the first fig appeared on his fig tree, he would tie a piece of string around to mark it, and then all the fruits which appeared first would be put into a basket, together with other fruit, and it would all be taken to Jerusalem. These fruits were called *Bikurim*.”

“So if you were living in the time of the Temple would you have to take these first strawberries to the Temple?” her mother asked, smiling.

“Well, my teacher said that it only applies to the special seven products of the Land of Israel - grapes, pomegranates, figs, dates, wheat, olives and barley - not strawberries. And anyway, these strawberries weren't grown in the Land of Israel, but here in England, so I don't think the law of First Fruit applies to them.

“But even though we can't keep this Mitzvah now, my teacher said there is a lot we can learn from it. It shows us the whole idea that the first and best things should be for holy purposes. For example, the first thing we do in the day while we still have lots of energy should be to pray and study some Torah.”

“What about getting to school on time?” asked her mother.

“Mummy, it all has to be fitted in!” said Avigail. “Anyway, a very quick thing our teacher told us is that as soon as we wake up in the morning the first thing to do is to say the prayer *Modeh Ani*, which thanks Hashem for giving us back our soul every morning when we wake up. We should say *Modeh Ani* even before we get out of bed. She showed us where it's written in the Prayerbook”.

“And so that's like offering the First Fruits to G-d in the Temple?” asked her mother, looking at the strawberries. She was wondering, how do you get from fruit to the Prayerbook?

“You know, Mummy,” said Avigail, “everything has several levels of meaning. A lot of the prayers are anyway to compensate for not being able to bring Offerings in the Temple. So you could say that *Modeh Ani* is another example.” “That makes sense”, said her mother.

“Mummy, could we have the strawberries for dessert on Friday Night?” “Yes dear, that's a very good way to use them. I'm sure that counts as another good way to use First Fruits!”

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