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הגה

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 7 September 2012 - 20 Elul 5772
Sedra Ki Tavo

ARE YOU HAPPY?

FOR MOST PEOPLE, THE VACATION IS WELL AND TRULY OVER. The relaxed atmosphere of the Summer has been replaced by the challenge of a new season, whether in academic study, business, or simple daily life. At this point people sometimes ask themselves: am I really happy? Wouldn't I always prefer the carefree atmosphere of the vacation, travelling, doing as I please, being free...?

Indeed, there are some people for whom the Summer months themselves were tense and problematic, for whatever reason. How do they look towards the coming months of the Autumn? With joy, or with foreboding?

At this point our Sedra¹ is enlightening. It reveals that joy and gloom are not, as we might suppose, a kind of thermometer of our general situation in life: if everything is alright, the person is happy; if not, he feels miserable. Instead, the Torah suggests that joyfulness is a state of mind which we should aspire to achieve in virtually every situation, especially when things are going well, but even if unfortunately there are set-backs.

Celebrating the Batmitzvah of Mussie תחילי Loewenthal (Melbourne)
and of Chava תחילי Loewenthal (Copenhagen)
Both on 21 Elul 5772 - Dedicated by their Grandparents ש"י

JUDAISM FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD
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A long section of the Sedra describes the terrible suffering which would come to the Jewish people if they betray G-d. The Sedra speaks of destruction, famine, war, illness, exile. The sins which provoke this terrible punishment seem to be those of idolatry and general rebellion against G-d's law.

Yet then comes a surprising statement. Why have these terrible things happened? "Because you did not serve G-d with joy and a happy heart, when you had everything"².

Maimonides writes that this verse shows that one must serve G-d with joy³. The same comment is made by the great kabbalist R. Isaac Luria, and this is a central theme of the Chassidic movement. Our lives as Jews should be joyful; keeping Mitzvot (Commandments) should be joyful. Even when we have done wrong, perhaps something seriously wrong, and we regret the past and attempt to mend our ways for the future - we should at the same time be joyful that G-d grants us this possibility of change⁴.

The Chassidim ask us to be joyful also when we have serious problems! Rabbi Shneur Zalman gives advice in his Tanya how to achieve a state of joy even if, G-d forbid, a person has grave worries concerning health, children or lack of livelihood; or if one has distressing guilt feelings about the past; or if one regards oneself as a terrible person in the present.

In each case Rabbi Shneur Zalman presents a path towards a balanced and joyful state of mind, despite all odds. That joy, he says, is the key to inner mastery. It enables the person to win as a human being and as a Jew, despite the pain. Paradoxically, a person can experience grief and at the same time feel a sense of joy⁵.

So as we approach Rosh Hashannah, the New Year, now just over a week away, let us make a New Year resolution: to serve G-d with joy, and also to help others to be joyful...

1. Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8. 2. Deut. 28:47. 3. *Yad*, Laws of Lulav 8:15. 3. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 39, p.326. 4. See Tanya I, chs.26-29. 5. Tanya I ch. 34, 43b.

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SEDRA KI-TAVO

THANK YOU

'Sara, come downstairs', called Sara's mother. 'What is it, Mummy?' Sara called from her room. 'You'll see', said her mother. Sara came down the stairs, 'What's the big surprise?' she asked.

Her mother took out a package and handed it to her. Sara carefully, unwrapped it, and to her dismay she found inside a light green dress with yellow flowers on it. 'Oh Mummy, is this the dress you were talking about yesterday, that you saw in the shop window?' she asked nervously. 'Yes!' said her mother proudly; 'I bought it for you today on the way home from work'.

Sara hated the dress, it was the wrong colour, the wrong style - everything about it was wrong. 'Mummy, this dress is all wrong; how could you possibly think I would like it?' she complained.

'Oh, I'm sorry,' said her mother. 'The trouble is I won't be going near that shop again for a few weeks unless I make a special journey. I didn't think it would be so bad...'

'But Mummy, you know I hate the colour green!' Sara said getting even more upset. She left the package with her mother and ran off to her room.

The next day in class Sara sat and listened as her teacher taught them that week's Torah Portion. 'This week the Torah tells us all about how we say "thank you" to Hashem for all the food he gives us, especially in the Land of Israel. There is a special way in which a farmer would take the first fruits of his fields to the Temple in Jerusalem'.

The teacher went on to explain in detail how it was done. First they would put a layer of barley at the bottom of the basket. On top of it they laid down a layer of leaves. Then on top of that a layer of wheat, then leaves, then olives..-' The teacher went through a list of different kinds of produce.

'...Why did they go to so much trouble? Why didn't they just bring the produce to the Temple in a sack?' she asked. 'Because the Torah wants us to know that we have to say thank you in the nicest way possible!'

The teacher continued the lesson, but Sara's mind was drifting away; she was thinking about the night before. 'Oh why was I so mean to my mother? I didn't even say thank you! All I did was complain... and make her feel really bad for buying me a dress', she scolded herself sharply. Now she felt really bad. In fact, she felt terrible.

Later on that day Sara came home from school, she could smell cooking in the kitchen so she guessed her mother was there. 'Hi Mummy!' she said almost bumping into her mother who was carrying a large tray of cake from the oven. 'Hi Sara! How was your day at school?' her mother asked, smiling at her.

'I'll tell you about that later, Mummy, but I just wanted to tell you...' she found it hard to say it because she felt like crying.

'... Thank you.' she whispered. 'Thank you for the dress...'

She kissed her mother on the cheek, and for once, her mother was quite lost for words.

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