


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 4 September 2015 - 20 Elul 5775
Sedra Ki Tavo


AWAKENING...

EVERY NEW STEP HAS SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE, ESPECIALLY A NEW JEWISH YEAR. A NEW YEAR SIGNIFIES a new level of life, and also a renewed level of relationship with G-d. Now we are in the Hebrew month of Elul, some ten days away from Rosh Hashana, the New Year, which starts Sunday evening, 13 September. On this Saturday night, after midnight, there will be melodious “Selichot” services in the synagogue, beginning the prayers of supplication and repentance which lead up to the festival.

A famous metaphor, a kind of spiritual story, describes the different stages in our relationship with G-d at this time of year. This is the image of ‘the king in the field’.

When a human king is in his palace he is not easily accessible. You need permission to enter, which may take months or even years to obtain. There are armed guards at the gates. If you are granted permission to enter and the guards let you through, you have to wear specially smart clothes and behave in a way which befits a person in the royal palace.

However when the king is travelling through the countryside he



In loving Memory of
 הרה"ח וו"ח עוסק בצ"צ ר' ארון דוב בן ארי' זצ"ל
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welcomes the villagers and the farmers. Wearing their ordinary clothes they come forward to see the king. He waves at them and smiles at them. Then the king proceeds on his way to his capital city and to his palace: but now the ordinary folk are able to follow him. He enters the palace and they go with him...

What does this parable mean? During the month of Elul there is a heightened atmosphere. G-d, the King of the Universe, is specially accessible. Of course, at any time you just have to think about G-d and you are at once communicating with Him. He is protecting and caring for each one of us all the time. There are also occasions when there is a special opportunity to draw near to G-d, such as Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. But then a person feels, quite rightly, that they should go to the synagogue, and keep the special laws of these sacred days. G-d is in His palace and we try to be there with Him.

However in the days of the month of Elul it is as if G-d is there encouraging you even when you are not thinking about Him. As in the story, the King is not in His palace; He has come into the countryside to be with you. He made the first move. The effect of this is to wake us up a little bit, spiritually. On each weekday morning during the month of Elul, the Shofar is blown in the synagogue. This expresses the spiritual arousal which is in the air, bringing the atmosphere of spiritual awakening...

Now we approach the final week before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Since we met the King “in the field”, we are more easily able to follow Him as He enters the palace. The awakening in the countryside changed us in some subtle way. The guards at the doors of the palace let us enter. The little step we privately made during the month of Elul becomes a kind of password which lets us into the palace on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

The Sages point out that the word Elul in Hebrew has the initial letters of the phrase “I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me”. In Elul, G-d arouses us, despite ourselves, to feel “I am to my Beloved”. Then, in His palace, we can truly come close to the Creator of the Universe, and He grants us a new year which is good and sweet in every detail of life...¹

1. Based on points from the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s discourse in *Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat*, vol.4, pp.363-8.

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SEDRA KI TAVO

DAVID THE FARMER

Mr Farbstein strode into the Year 5 classroom, his black briefcase tucked under his arm. "Hello boys!" he boomed. "Who wants to hear about farming today?"

Levi Goldberg wrinkled his nose in confusion. "Farming?" he asked. "Isn't this supposed to be Sedra class, Mr Farbstein?"

Mr Farbstein grinned and sat down in his seat. "Of course we're learning Sedra today. The Sedra is called Ki Tavo and it talks about farming. Hands up boys who have spent time on a farm!"

Several hands went up. Michael Levy described his holiday on a real farm in Wales.

Meanwhile, Mr Farbstein got the electronic board working and a Power Point picture of a farm came up on the screen.

"So there's a Jew living in Israel. His name is David. He has a farm." Mr Farbstein stood up and began pacing. "On his farm he grows wheat, barley, olives, figs, dates, pomegranates, grapes... He's a happy man, this David, and he and his wife and children live in a nice home in Israel, let's say in Tzfat."

Mr Farbstein pressed 'next' on the remote control and a sketch picture of a large basket appeared. "What is this basket for?" he asked the class. "Write suggestions on your whiteboards!" Most boys wrote something, but only a few boys hit on the secret. The basket was to carry the First Fruits to Jerusalem.

"The Law of the First Fruits is in the Sedra Ki Tavo", said Roger. "Good!" said Mr Farbstein. "What does our farmer have to do in order to keep this law?"

"He has to see which fruit gets ripe first. He ties a ribbon on the branch to remember. Then he puts the First Fruits in a basket and takes it to the Temple in Jerusalem," said Alex.

There was then a discussion of how long the journey would take from Tzfat to Jerusalem, on foot. A large map of Israel on the wall was consulted. Jack Farber worked out that since, as the crow flies, the distance is about 85 miles, walking for ten hours a day, covering three miles an hour, it would take about three days. They agreed, it might take longer if your feet got sore. Alan pointed out that to avoid breaking Shabbat, you would have to begin quite early in the week.

Now different boys approached the picture of the basket on the interactive board and began drawing the fruit which was in it. One by one, they added each of the seven kinds of produce: wheat, barley, olives, figs, dates, pomegranates, grapes.

"How do we show today that these seven kinds of produce are special?" asked Mr Farbstein. "Write the answer on your personal whiteboards!"

Two boys remembered that after eating any of those kinds of produce, a special quite long blessing is said, called 'Al HaMichya'. They looked up this blessing in their Prayerbooks.

"I want Moshiach to come, so that we can all be farmers like David, and travel to Jerusalem with our baskets of First Fruit" said Izzy.

Mr Farbstein laughed. "Amen!"

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