



### THE REAL HERE AND NOW

**Y**OU CAN LOOK AT LIFE ONE STEP AT A TIME, concentrating on what is happening at that particular moment. Or you can take a wider view, looking for a pattern. The method of the Torah is to use both approaches.

There is the focus on the present, in its own terms: this is what you have to do at this moment. Most of the Commandments are expressed in this way. They highlight the here and now. Chassidic teachings emphasise this immediate dimension of the Commandments: through a few sincere words of prayer, a single Mitzvah, such as giving charity, through study of a few lines of Torah - a person is intimately and deeply connected with G-d.

At the same time there is the wider view. The Sedra<sup>1</sup> this week presents a broad view of our history, which is continued in the first part of next week's Sedra. This week we have what is called 'the blessing and the curse'.

In a beautiful passage, the Jewish people are told of the wonderful blessings which would come to them if they kept the Torah properly. Then they are warned about the terrible disasters which would take place if they did not keep the Torah. In next week's Sedra the theme is continued: Moses tells them that in fact they will go through both stages, the blessing and, unfortunately, the curse. The curse will bring destruction, suffering, exile. But then, at last, we will be redeemed. Even if we are scattered to the ends of the heavens, G-d will gather us together and bring us back to our Land<sup>2</sup>. As

explained by the later Prophets and our Sages, G-d will then lift us and all humanity to a new level of consciousness, resulting in the end of war and of all evil.

This section of the Torah gives us a broad outline of our history, extending over thousands of years. We had the blessing, particularly in the time of King Solomon, when the Temple was built and the whole Jewish people was at peace. Then unfortunately followed conflict and different kinds of exile, culminating in the horrors of seventy years ago.

According to the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, now comes a new stage in the Torah history of the world. Almost everywhere, the Jews have achieved freedom. The most recent very significant group are the Jews in the former Soviet Union<sup>3</sup>. This is the beginning of a process which will eventually include all humanity, liberating everyone. Humanity as a whole has the technology to achieve much of this in practical terms: what we need now is the will and the sense of direction. This is the broad view of life.

We require both perspectives in order to live properly as Jews. We need the awareness of the power of the Mitzvah in the here and now, and we also need the broader, global view, which tells us that this Mitzvah is part of a general transformation of the world.

Chassidic teachings amplify the connection between the two perspectives. Tanya, by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, explains that there is a spiritual aspect of existence through which the whole universe is interconnected. When a Jew carries out one of the Commandments of the Torah there is an effect which, on an inner level, changes part of the world for the good. If the whole Jewish people would carry out the Commandments of the Torah properly, the *entire* world would be transformed in this way<sup>4</sup>.

We tend to look at life from the perspective of the 'here and now', especially when, as today, the global view of the world looks so threatening. As we approach Rosh Hashanah, let us focus on the broader Torah perspective: after the blessing and the curse in our Sedra, comes the Redemption. Then we and everyone will refocus and discover a totally positive meaning to existence. In the time of the Messiah, we will all discover the real here and now.

1. Deuteronomy 26:1 – 29:8 2. Deut.ch.30. 3. See the Rebbe's *Sefer Hasichot* 5751 vol.2, pp. 515-7. 4. See Tanya, part 1, ch.37.

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*SEDRA KI TAVO***THANKLESS**

It was dinnertime, and the Levy children were sitting down for supper, while their older sister Dina served the food. It was something simple – eggs, chips and salad.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Levy had to go to a sudden important meeting that evening. Mrs Levy hadn't even had time to prepare supper. So Dina had been placed as the one responsible for the other children, having to cook and serve supper, make sure that everybody went to sleep on time, and apart from all that, having to deal with her own homework for GCSE subjects.

The homework had been piled unmercifully on her, like a slave's workload. And she felt like a slave, having to work so much, getting very little help from the other children, even her slightly younger brother Chaim, and certainly no appreciation. Oh well, she thought, flipping an omelette onto the last plate. At least Mum and Dad will back eventually tonight. It's a madhouse here.

She sat down to eat, and tried to shut out her siblings' chatter and the baby's shrieks as she banged her plastic spoon on the highchair tray. "More!" the one-year-old commanded. Dina sighed and put some cucumber on the tray. The baby examined it suspiciously.

They had just finished supper and Dina was clearing up when there was the sound of a key being pushed into the lock, the

click of it being turned, and a few seconds later Mr. and Mrs. Levy entered. The kids jumped up and surrounded them, talking loudly. Dina smiled tiredly. "How's it going?" Mrs. Levy asked.

"Tiring," Dina admitted. She felt a whole load lifted off her chest, and she thought maybe she'd not bother with the rest of the washing up. It felt good not to have to care anymore.

"Who've we got to thank, children, for taking care of all of you?"

"Thank you, Dina!" They chorused.

"It's always important to say thank you, children" Mrs. Levy said. "When somebody works hard without getting any thanks, they feel like slaves, just ordered around without getting any form of appreciation." The children looked embarrassed. Dina looked hard at her mother, wondering if she could read her mind.

"You know," Mrs. Levy added, "This week's Sedra tells us about expressing appreciation. The commandment of Bikkurim, which tells the farmers to bring their first fruits to the Temple, is about giving thanks to G-d for what He has done for us, how much He has blessed us."

Chaim looked at Dina. He had made the most fuss about wanting his egg cooked exactly this way and not that. "Thank you Dina, I'm sorry... I'm sorry I wasn't a bit more help".

"Don't worry Chaim. But thank you for saying that, anyway."

"Well, and we certainly have to thank you Dina," said her mother. "Without your help, we would not have been able to go to the meeting. Thank you!"

Suddenly Dina felt better, and ready to face her homework. "Thank you Mummy," she said. She remembered her homework: Maths, French and Biology. Great!

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