


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 26 December 2008 - 29 Kislev 5769
Sedra Miketz-Chanukah

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WORLD

THE SEDRA¹ DESCRIBES A SITUATION WHICH HAS OCCURRED MANY times in the history of the Jewish people. The non-Jewish ruling power appoints a wise Jew to a senior position as advisor or administrator. The Sedra tells of the appointment of Joseph as Viceroy of Egypt, in charge of storing and distributing grain.

Later in the Bible, the Book of Daniel tells of a plan by the ruler of Babylon to have a group of Jewish children brought up in the palace. His idea was that they would become a group of Jewish advisors helping him to run the country. Daniel himself was the foremost of this group.

Jews often held such positions in medieval Spain. One example among many is "Samuel the Prince", who was aide to the ruler of Granada in the 11th century. Samuel was a general of an army, and also wrote an introduction to the method of the Talmud, which is printed in the standard edition.

Naturally, one challenge for people in this kind of position is the effort to maintain their own level of Jewish observance and life.



Dedicated by Mrs Tzipora Sufrin װװ , to the memory and merit of her father k"z ihætk rgcus lfsrcn װ װ װ j"vrv

117 GEORGE STREET, LONDON W1H 7HF
cru@lubavitchuk.com - www.chabadresearch.org

Thus, in the case of Daniel we read of his insistence on having kosher food in the Babylonian palace. He refused to eat the meat or drink the wine, and asked for vegetarian food instead. The steward in charge of providing his food was unhappy about this -if Daniel and his friends did not look healthy, the steward himself would be put to death! “Try us out for ten days on a vegetarian diet” asked Daniel. This was successful - Daniel and his friends looked healthier than the other youths, and from then on received only vegetarian meals (Daniel Ch.1).

Another challenge is the need to try to elevate the moral and religious standard of the country. There have been attempts in this direction in the past: for example, the Rabbis tell us that Joseph sought to introduce belief in one G-d into polytheistic Egyptian society. However, this had only a limited effect.

It is in our own time, more than ever before, that virtually every Jew has the opportunity to make this attempt and to seek to communicate the ‘Seven Noahide Laws’, the basic universal teachings of Judaism. By accepting this responsibility for wider society we begin to fulfil what the Torah is demanding of us as individual human beings and as Jews, the Chosen People².

This links with the theme of Chanukah. The Talmud³ tells us that the Chanukah lights should be lit ‘at the entrance to one’s house, on the outside’. For various reasons this is not the general custom today outside Israel. Nonetheless, many people follow the similar custom of placing the Chanukah lamp in the window, and the large public Chanukah Menorah has become a familiar feature in most Jewish communities round the world.

The Chanukah lights are intended to light up the darkness ‘outside’. Inside the home is holy. ‘Outside’ suggests the opposite. In a spiritual way, the Chanukah lights transform the outside and illuminate it. They do this through their constant increase: one light the first night, two the second, and so on. This also expresses the power of the individual Jew to illuminate the world, through his or her own personal advance, step by step⁴. Then, ultimately, the darkness itself will shine.

1. Genesis 41:1-44:17. 2. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot* vol.26 pp.132-144. 3. Shabbat 21b. 4. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol.1, pp.91-92.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

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53

SEDRA MIKETZ - CHANUKAH

THE STRENGTH TO KEEP SHABBAT

Dear Mom and Dad,

I seem to have forgotten how much I enjoy the great outdoors! The fresh smell of pine trees, the rustling foliage, the magnificent sunsets - I could live out here forever! Mom - I am sure glad I listened to your advice and brought along a sweater - brrr - it can get really chilly at night. Thomas and I have been out in the wilderness for almost three days now. We did manage to light the Chanukah candles each night, like you said. We have stopped at a camping store alongside a resort area, and that's where I am jotting down this quick email to you.

Listen - Thomas and I are thinking of extending our trip over Saturday, and we'll come back Sunday instead of Friday. Thomas says it's no problem keeping Shabbat out here, we just won't light the fire in the morning. What do you think? I mean, it's just for one weekend....

Missing you, but having a blast,

Michael.

Dearest Michael,

Dad and I just received your email, and we hope you are still around the camping store, where you have internet access, to read this.

Michael, I am sure it is great camping out in the wilds. However, we do feel it is very important for you to have a proper Shabbat, as we do at home. Where will you be able to make Kiddush? Where will you eat a proper Shabbat meal? And it is the Shabbat of Chanukah as well, with Hallel in the Synagogue, and THREE Torah scrolls being read. Perhaps it will be best if you do not extend your trip.

You know, in the Torah portion of this week, Miketz, it talks about Joseph. The Sages tell us that there is an extra word in the Hebrew text which gives us a clue that when Joseph hosted his brothers in his home it was the eve of Shabbat. Although the Torah had not yet been given, Jacob and his family kept many parts of Jewish law, and they kept Shabbat.

Joseph was viceroy to the king and was constantly involved in the busy life of Egypt, buying and selling lots of grain. And still, despite this, he kept Shabbat. Because of his special efforts to keep Shabbat, he managed to connect to G-d in a very deep way.

Michael, come home. Let us light the six Chanukah candles together, then your sisters and I will light the Shabbat candles, and then later we will all make Kiddush together, and eat the Shabbat meals together. We will celebrate Shabbat just like Joseph did!

With Love,

Mom and Dad

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