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RELIGION AND ACTION

WHAT IS OUR IMAGE OF A SPIRITUAL PERSON, A MAN (OR WOMAN) of G-d? Torah teachings present us with a number of different possibilities. In our Sedra¹ we learn about a highly interesting figure: Joseph.

Joseph and all his brothers are regarded by the Sages as having been highly spiritual men. The Torah records some of the conflicts and paradoxes in their lives. Nonetheless, each of them had sufficient spiritual power to found an entire tribe, a whole section of the Jewish people. In fact, Joseph founded two tribes: Ephraim and Manasseh.

There is an interesting distinction between Joseph and his brothers. Joseph was the creator and administrator of a vast system which centralised the food production of Egypt. By contrast, his brothers were shepherds, leading quite solitary lives pasturing their flock on the slopes of the ancient Canaanite countryside.

Chassidic teachings tell us this contrast indicates a difference in spiritual stature. For some people, an intimate relationship with G-d can only be maintained in a quiet atmosphere, remote from the hurly-burly of daily life. The brothers, contemplative mystics, are in this category. But Joseph was on a higher level. He could maintain his bond with the Divine at the same time as playing a highly active role in a complex civilisation².

For us in the 21st century, both examples are relevant. The contemplative style of the brothers relates to certain peaceful moments

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in the day, such as times of prayer, and the day of rest, Shabbat. We need occasions when we can get away from it all, when there is a different, more peaceful rhythm.

By contrast the vigorously active style of Joseph provides the example of how we should be during the week, with every moment fully significant and effective. We use our total energy to achieve all that is possible, and more, and our creative powers discover ever new frontiers.

Following Joseph's lead, while all this is happening we continuously maintain our bond with G-d. The most frenetic series of appointments, phone calls, e-mails and jet-setting plane trips does not cause us to forget who we are, the people of G-d, and where we are really going: to construct a better world.

THE FLASK OF PURE OIL

This Shabbat is the final day of Chanuka, a festival which expresses the power of Judaism to survive the forces of assimilation. The story of Chanuka describes the way the Syrian Greeks defiled the Temple, including almost all the special oil for the lighting of the Menorah. The victorious Macabbees found just one flask of pure oil, sealed with the seal of the High Priest, enough for only one day. This miraculously lasted for eight days.

According to Chassidic teaching, within each Jew is a spark of the Divine which cannot be extinguished. It is compared to the 'flask of pure oil'. The spirituality of Judaism is always present as a potentially powerful force in the life of any Jew, however remote he or she may seem to have become from Jewish life. When this is ignited, it can burn with a miraculous power, illuminating the individual and ultimately the world.

1. Gen. 41:1-44:17. 2. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.3, 831-2.

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SEDRA MIKETZ

DREAMS...

Michael was tired from a long day, and when he finished eating, he went straight up to bed, and fell into a deep sleep.

Michael started to dream: he was in the science room in school, and there was a large box there that he had never noticed before. He approached the box and was about to look inside, when the teacher Mr Samuels told him "Michael, that box could take you to different places, so I don't think it is clever to go in there".

Michael was both curious and adventurous. Perhaps he should not have done this, but when Mr Samuels left the room he quickly opened the box and climbed inside. There were buttons and other controls. Michael thought "it's only a dream. I might as well try to get it going". He pressed some buttons and suddenly blue and red lights were flashing and there was a hum. Michael was getting a little scared, but he didn't know how to stop it. Finally the box stopped flashing, and Michael climbed out.

Sure enough, he had been transported to a different place. He was in a beautiful palace hallway. Guards stood by the walls, looking like people from the Egyptian Room in the British Museum. Michael walked forward and came to a long line of people. He joined the line.

Far ahead, at the end of the line, there was a King sitting on a golden throne, with golden steps, looking like a picture of Pharaoh. Just in front of Michael was a man in ancient

Egyptian clothing. It had slightly faded colours, like pictures in the museum.

“Hello” said the man, looking at him curiously. “What kind of dream interpreter are you? I’ve never met anyone wearing such strange clothes!”

He must have meant Michael’s school uniform. “I’m not a dream interpreter,” said Michael.

“Then what are you doing here? Everyone on this line is a dream interpreter. We have all come to explain Pharaoh’s dreams about seven fat cows which were eaten by seven thin cows, and seven healthy ears of corn which were somehow eaten by seven parched ears of corn. Of course *my* interpretation is the best one, but I am not going to tell it to you. But if you are not a dream interpreter, what are you doing here?”

“Well actually,” said Michael, “I’m in a dream.”

“Do you mean I am dreaming of you? Or do you mean you are dreaming of me?”

“..er... I’m not sure..” said Michael. He began thinking he should try to get back home. Maybe he should get back inside the box. He looked behind him. Where is the box? Had the guards taken it away? Oh no! He would be stuck here in the Sedra for the rest of his life.

Mind you, he thought. Perhaps that wouldn’t be so bad. He would get to see Joseph, who would eventually give the right interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream, and maybe also Jacob. Wow! That would be good.

But at that moment he woke up.

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