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### WHEN OPPOSITES JOIN

**O**UR LIVES OFTEN SEEM FRAGMENTED, PARADOXICAL, A MIXTURE OF OPPOSITES. This can be true for each of us as individuals, and also for the Jewish people as a whole. We are free, confident and generally affluent, and at the same time on the political front regarding Israel and openly expressed attitudes about the Jewish people globally we are facing challenges almost day by day. What is happening?

A simple answer is that this is Exile. We the Jewish people are in Exile, whether we live in Israel or elsewhere. What is Exile? The first Exile for the Jewish people was our Exile in Egypt. We were in Egypt instead of in our Holy Land, and we were enslaved instead of being free. From this stem all future Exiles of the Jewish people.

The Sedra<sup>1</sup> this week and also that of last week describe the series of steps which led towards that Exile: in a word - dreams. In last week's Sedra, Joseph had dreams, and the butler and the baker had dreams. In this week's Sedra, Pharaoh had dreams. These dreams led to the fact that the entire family of Jacob moved to Egypt. Within a very few generations there, they began to be enslaved by the Egyptians.

Dreams seem to be the path towards Exile, and in fact they exhibit one of the key characteristics of Exile: the joining of opposites. In our dreams we sometimes find the depiction of ordinary situations in which there is some gaping irrationality.

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This is like our life today. Everything is normal, and fine and healthy - but... We could say that in Exile we ourselves are in a dream.

However, as the Lubavitcher Rebbe suggests, the path out of Exile, towards Redemption, also has a dream-like quality. In order to leave Exile we need a deeper level of personal spirituality, more commitment to the observance of Jewish law in our daily lives, more devotion to Torah. Yet a person might well protest at this: “what, me? I am not up to that! If I began observing *that* I would just be a hypocrite! Look at all the other things I do not observe properly!”

This person’s question concerns the issue of consistency - and in a normal, ordered world he or she might be right. But in a dream, the dream of Exile, everything is possible. One is free to make a step forward, a step of observance and of spirituality, despite whatever else is going on in one’s life, just as in a dream one can fly and travel great distances in a moment.

This idea also relates to Chanukah. In the time of the First Temple our lives were ordered and largely consistent, and so the Golden Menorah was in the sacred inner hall of the Temple and it shone with a constant light. Then came destruction and Exile and the rebuilding of the Temple under the control of a Gentile power. Next came Greek domination and, even worse, the willing promotion of Greek idolatry by the Jewish Hellenists. The Chanukah Menorah, which commemorates the victory of the Macabbees against all this, expresses our ability to go beyond our limitations, to act when to do so seems impossible.

The Chanukah Menorah is not hidden in a sacred recess of the Temple, it is in our homes and in fact facing outwards into the darkness. Its light is not a stable constant, but is always increasing. The Chanukah Menorah states that we are not limited by our situation. Because there is darkness and assimilation, we can act from our innermost heart, increasing day by day, reaching out into the darkness and transforming it to light. Through exercising this freedom, in all areas of our lives, we will awake from our dream and discover the reality of Redemption<sup>2</sup>.

1. Gen. 41:1-44:17. 2. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 1 pp.85-92.

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*SEDRA MIKETZ – CHANUKAH*

**THE BATTLE GOES ON**

'Yoni, you look like Uncle Rupert when you read like that', Chava, Yoni's older sister commented with a chuckle. Her brother was lounging in an armchair with his feet up on a footrest, reading a magazine. On his rare visits to London, their American uncle, a writer, would lie comfortably in exactly the same way.

'Well, I am related to him', Yoni replied. 'Besides', he added, 'this is a very interesting article, which discusses Judaism.'

'Really?' said Chava, 'and what does it have to say on that great subject, Uncle?'

Yoni ignored her sarcastic tone. 'It says that many people say that they find Jewish ideas interesting. But the real point is not just the ideas, but keeping the actual Mitzvot, like Kashrut and putting on Tefilin.'

'That is very interesting,' said Chava. 'It reminds me of what we were learning about Chanukah'.

'What was that? Surely, Chanukah is just about winning a battle and the miracle of the oil'.

'Well, you must remember that the Greeks tried to ban the Jews from practicing Judaism.'

Our teacher explained an extra point here. She said that the Greeks didn't really have a problem with Jewish ideas. In fact they thought it was a wonderful and interesting culture. But they did not like the idea that the Jews should be doing a Mitzva simply because G-d told them to do it. That's why they banned Brit Mila and lots of other Mitzvot. They wanted to prevent us from following laws that we keep simply because G-d commanded us to keep them'.

'So do you mean they would let us keep some Mitzvot and not others?' asked Yoni.

'Yes, you're right. The Greeks were not against laws like not stealing, laws which we can understand. But they wanted to stop us keeping those Mitzvot which are called Statutes, laws which we keep simply because they give us a connection with G-d.'

'So that means, in a way,' said Yoni, now sitting up straight, 'that the battle with Greek ideas goes on today'.

'Yes, you are quite right', agreed Chava. 'We have to be dedicated to Hashem, and keep all His Mirzvot, whether or not we understand them. And also, we have to keep them all in the exact way the Torah says. Each Mitzva connects us to Hashem.'

"You know, that's just what this article says," said Yoni.

"Well, then it's a good article," said Chava. "Who wrote it?" Yoni looked back to the beginning of the article, where it had the name of the author. "Wow!" he said. "Rupert Morgan! It's written by our uncle!"

Chava jumped up and looked. It was true. The article even gave his email address.

"Come" she said. "Now Daddy is calling and it's time to light the Chanukah lights. But later we'll write to him and tell him how we read his article about being dedicated to G-d...'

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