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### CONFIDENCE AND HUMILITY

**J**EWISH TEACHING OFTEN PRESENTS US WITH **OPPOSITE QUALITIES WHICH WE**, as human beings, have to try to combine. For example, we have a body and a soul, which give us two different points of focus in life. You might say, putting it simply, that food and physicality concern the body; while ideals and inner identity concern the soul. The special task of life is to bring together these contrasting dimensions. We do not sacrifice one for the other, but try to achieve a balance of both together.

The teachings of the Torah, the cycle of the Festivals and even the specific pattern of the Jewish calendar all give us input and encouragement in this task to combine opposites. The Sedra<sup>1</sup> this week is called Naso, and it serves as an introduction to the Festival of Shavuot which begins on Tuesday night 3 June.

The Sedra starts with the theme of counting the Jewish people, continued from last week's Sedra. The word Naso means 'lift up', and the opening words are an instruction from G-d to Moses to 'lift up the heads' of the Levites, which means to count them.

Everything in the Torah has many levels of meaning. The Lubavitcher Rebbe suggests that we should try taking these words literally, and as applied to us ourselves: we should lift up our heads. *Be confident!* We have tremendous energy and power: be confident that we have this resource and that we can use it the right way.

This confidence and sense of potential is a very suitable

introduction to the Giving of the Torah which is celebrated on Shavuot. On Wednesday morning men, women and children will gather in synagogues and hear the reading of the Ten Commandments reminding us of and re-enacting the events at Mount Sinai.

Our Sages tell us that the Giving of the Torah was a moment when the two opposites, the spiritual and the physical, were joined in a unique and wonderful way. For a short time the infinite intensity of G-d was revealed to physical human beings. The veils which usually conceal the radiance of holiness were drawn aside. Standing at Sinai, in every direction we looked we could hear, see and feel, all together, that G-d is speaking to us and saying "I am the L-rd your G-d"<sup>2</sup>.

While this experience was brief, it is continued in the lives of the Jewish people through the generations, by the fact of our keeping the laws of the Torah. Food is physical, yes; but the laws of the Torah which instruct us about kashrut make the act of eating into a way of expressing our inner Jewish spiritual identity. So too with all aspects of physical life. They can express Jewish law and teaching, and through that they can be joined with G-dliness and holiness.

Now another combination of opposites: On the one hand, the Giving of the Torah demands total humility. G-d is giving us Divine commands. as we listen to the Ten Commandments we are humble. But as a preparation for this event, we are also *confident*.

Facing infinite G-d, the Creator of the Universe, why are we so confident? Surely we are just puny little people? Yes, physically. But within each of us is a radiant soul with a spark of G-dliness within. This is our inner power.

The function of the soul is to illuminate the body with holiness. Our task as human beings and as Jews, combining body and soul together, is to illuminate the world, to join the physical and the spiritual. However dark things may sometimes seem, *be confident!* We can do it! This is our introduction and preparation to the Giving of the Torah...<sup>3</sup>

1. Numbers 4:21-7:89. 2. See Tanya part I, ch.36, 46a. 3. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Sichot Kodesh*, Naso, 5741, 21-29.

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*SEDRA NASO – FESTIVAL OF SHAVUOT*

**SEEING AND BELIEVING**

“Daddy, where is G-d?” Rafi asked his father one Shabbat afternoon, shortly before Shavuot, as they sat enjoying Mummy’s strawberry sorbet.

“Hmm, you do ask difficult questions usually, Rafi, but this is quite simple - I’m surprised you don’t know it yourself. G-d is everywhere.”

“But my teacher told us that it says at the end of the Sedra that G-d spoke to Moses from the top of the Holy Ark in the Sanctuary. And soon it will be Shavuot, when the Jews received the Torah at Mount Sinai, and everybody heard G-d’s voice from the Mountain. So I was just wondering if G-d is more in the Sanctuary or at Mount Sinai than He is anywhere else.”

“Well, we know that the Shechina, the Divine Presence, rested above the Holy Ark in the Sanctuary; and that if we do Mitzvot and learn Torah anywhere in the world we can make the Shechina rest there, but G-d is still everywhere.”

Rafi thought this over, as he ate some more sorbet, and then he said: “There’s still something I don’t understand. There are so many people in the world who don’t believe in G-d. At Mount Sinai everyone knew that G-d was there, because they heard His voice. But my teacher told

us that afterwards, His voice could only be heard in the Sanctuary by Moses, no one outside could hear it. So I don't understand why G-d doesn't make it that everyone can hear Him and be aware of Him the whole time, so everyone would believe in G-d and no one would do anything bad."

"That would be wonderful Rafi, but look at it this way. Do you think you should be rewarded for breathing?"

"No, why should I? I can't help breathing."

"So in the same way, people would have no free will if they could see G-d as clearly as you would like. Doing G-d's will would have no merit - it would be something people could not help doing, like breathing. But, this way, we all have an important task. We have to make the effort to obey and love G-d even though we cannot see Him. So we get a much greater reward for it. And through us making this effort, we are improving the world."

"I know how we can see G-d!" Rafi said excitedly, "if you look at all of G-d's wonderful creations, like the trees and birds and worms and everything else, then that's a way of seeing Him. Like you can see the artist in his painting. And I suppose the way to get close to Him is by doing G-d's commandments, and studying His Torah."

"That's right, Rafi. And now, how about if we go and try to glimpse G-d by taking a walk in the beautiful woods behind the house with Mummy and Yoni?"

"Yes, of course! And that will be a preparation for experiencing G-d on Wednesday, the first day of Shavuot, when the Ten Commandments will be read in Shul, and we learnt that will be just like at Mount Sinai!"

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