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INCREASING PROFITS

THE BAAL SHEM TOV, FOUNDER OF THE CHASSIDIC MOVEMENT, whose 250th Yartzeit was this year, used to say that everything that occurs in this world, however small and apparently insignificant, is guided by Divine Providence. This particularly applies to something intrinsically holy: the Sedra of the Week. So the fact that Sedra Re'eh¹ always falls near the beginning of the month of Elul must be telling us something. Indeed, this Shabbat a special benediction is made in the Synagogue for the month of Elul. What can we learn from this fact?

In Elul, the month before Rosh Hashanah, we take stock of our spiritual standing of the past year, much in the same way as a businessman produces a balance sheet showing profit and loss. Our spiritual profits are our move-ment forward in study of Torah and observance of the Mitzvot (Commandments) in our actions, speech and even in our thoughts. Some Mitzvot also involve feeling, such as the command to love G-d. Losses are when, instead of making progress, we seem to be falling back...



Celebrating the birth of Daniel Yitzchak Krieger ז"ל
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The Sedra includes a number of topics which are highly relevant to this process of self-assessment. It begins with Moses telling the Jewish people that he places before them a beautiful blessing, which will result from listening to and obeying the Divine Mitzvot, in general. Later in the Sedra the specific laws of Kashrut are presented in detail: which animals, birds and fish we may and may not eat², the law against eating blood³ which results in our koshering procedures for meat and fowl (nowadays carried out by the kosher butcher), and the idea that there is a special method of Jewish ritual slaughter⁴. Observance of Kashrut in daily life can be very straightforward, especially when kosher food supplies are easily available, and can also present enormous challenges.

The last section of the Sedra gives a list of the Festivals: Pesach, Shavuot and Succot. Together with Shabbat, which is a kind of festival happening every week, we can think back about how we observed these special times, and how we will be celebrating the approaching High Holidays and Succot. Will we have a Succah? Is there a way to get one organised?

Perhaps most important, in terms of the special Elul atmosphere, leading to the High Holidays, is the Mitzvah of giving charity. The Sedra warns us not to close our hearts and our hands when considering those in need. We should give generously, and G-d will bless us in all aspects of our lives⁵.

The Sages particularly stress the importance of the Mitzvah of Tzedakah, charity, during the month of Elul and the lead up to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur⁶. Why is this so? Why stress Tzedakah more than any other Mitzvah?

During the month of Elul and the High Holy Days we are asking G-d to bless us with a sweet, happy and peaceful New Year. Are we demanding this as 'payment' for our good deeds? Or do we supplicate G-d to bless us even if we are undeserving? Surely, the latter. This means we are asking G-d to be charitable towards us, to give us blessings we have not earned. Hence, particularly at this time of year, evaluating our spiritual balance sheet, we too give special emphasis to the Mitzvah of charity.....⁷

1. Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17 2. Deut.14:1-21. 3. 12:23-25. 4. Deut.12:21. 5. Deut.15:7-11. 6. Rambam, Laws of Teshuvah, 3:4. 7. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.34, p.89 ff.

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*SEDRA RE'EH***CHARITY**

It was a hot night, there was a heat wave. Michael and his sister Leah were both sitting on the couch reading, wiping their foreheads and enjoying it when the fan faced towards them before it moved round and pointed at the other side of the room.

“Ding dong” somebody rang on the door of the house. “Go to the door” said Leah to Michael. “No, you go, in this heat, I can’t be bothered to get up,” he said back. “Ding dong” Again the door bell rang. After some more argument between the brother and sister, finally Michael lost the argument and indignantly got up and went out into the hall to open the door.

A minute later he came back to the living room. “Mom, there is this person who said that he is collecting charity” he said. He was still feeling indignant about having to go to the door, and this showed in the next thing he said. “But I don’t think we should give him any money, I think he should get a job”.

His mother looked up from her book and peered through the top of her glasses and gave her son a look which meant ‘keep your bad mood to yourself’. Then she took some money from her purse, gave it to Michael and said quietly “please go and give this to the man”.

Michael came back mumbling “I sweated in this heat to go to the door for this man who doesn’t have a job, and gave him Mom’s money which she could have used to buy something... ” He didn’t say what. Did he mean, something for him, for Michael?

“Michael, you are being pathetic” said Leah. “Oh, be quiet, it’s hot” he shot back at her. “Michael” said his Mother, “thank you for going to the door and for giving money to that poor man.” “You’re welcome, anytime” he answered sarcastically.

“Was it so annoying for you to go the door?” she continued. “You should know, “it’s not that often that we have somebody that comes to our door collecting for charity, and in this week’s Sedra it actually speaks about the fact that we should give charity, and what an important Mitzvah it is”.

“It speaks about giving charity in the Torah!?” said Michael. “It should speak about getting a job!” “Relax,” his mother said. “In fact, the best kind of charity is actually to help someone get a job. That’s what the Rambam says. But if you cannot organize that, at least you should give them some money to help them.”

“Well, maybe this guy should try to get a job by himself, without you helping.” said Michael. “Maybe he tried to,” said Leah. “Maybe he tried hundreds of jobs. How do you know anything about it?” She was fed up with her mean brother, and she had tears in her eyes.

“Okay, fine” Michael said, not wanting to upset her, “ I agree, let’s say he tried, but didn’t manage. Let me ask another question. Why did G-d make it like that, that some people have enough money and others are very poor. Why didn’t G-d give everyone enough money?”

“Well,” said his mother, “that’s because if we didn’t need each other then we might all be really greedy and selfish, so G-d created the world in a way that we need each other. Each person tries to help other people. Sometimes with money, sometimes in other ways.”

Michael looked at his mother, and at his sister, who still had little tears on her cheeks. “Okay, I understand, sorry, look, at least we gave him something. And at least, I was the one who went to the door!”

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