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גה

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 14 September 2012 - 27 Elul 5772
Sedra Nitzavim - Rosh Hashana 5773

CHOOSING LIFE!

WHAT IS THE FOCUS OF ROSH HASHANA? OUR ANXIETIES ABOUT THE FUTURE, and the hope that everything will improve? Or is it our concern for personal success, and the desire that things will go as planned, or even better than planned, in the various fields of endeavour in our lives? Or our constant need for health, happiness and security? Of course, all of these are real issues and are part of the programme of good wishes, prayers and thoughts for the Rosh Hashanah festival, concretised in customs like eating apple dipped in honey and other sweet foods at the meal, to signify a sweet year ahead.

However, another way of looking at the New Year festival is that the focus is not so much on events outside ourselves but *inside*. Each one of us is a person with unique power and potential. Rosh Hashanah is the time when this power is energised and triggered off for the coming year. This certainly affects everything around us. Hence the good wishes, the sweet apple and the honey. But something is also happening inside our own being.

We see this from a profound Jewish teaching about Rosh Hashanah, which commemorates the creation of Adam and Eve, on the



In Memory of Mrs Chawa (Evelyn) Loewenthal ע"ה - Rosh Hashanah 5752. Dedicated by her son ש"י, daughter-in-law תה"ל and grandchildren ש"י

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sixth day of Creation. There was a complete universe which had preceded them: the sun, moon and stars; the seas and the land-masses; vegetation of all kinds, plants and trees; the insects, fish, birds and animals. But Adam and Eve were different to everything else. Why? Because only they had *free will*. Every other created thing, whether mineral, vegetable or animal, behaved according to general natural laws, laws on Nature, implanted by the Creator. Man and woman alone had the freedom to *choose*.

The Midrash¹ tells us that when Adam was created, the animals recognised that he was different. At first they thought that he was G-d. Adam knew, however, that he was not G-d. He knew that his task instead was for him to recognise G-d and to help everything else in Creation recognise G-d as well. He called to Creation around him: "Come, let us bow down to G-d, Who has made us"².

This is the moment we re-enact every Rosh Hashana. The moment when we show our power to choose that we ourselves should connect with G-d, and that, in addition, we should help all existence do so as well. This expresses our power to choose good, which affects our own selves and all else that exists³.

This idea is mirrored in the Sedra⁴, which is always read before Rosh Hashannah. G-d tells us "I have put before you life and death... You should choose life, in order that you and your descendants will live! By loving G-d, and obeying His teachings."

Rosh Hashannah is the time when we choose life, When we refresh our connection with G-d, and commit ourselves to keeping His laws, and studying His Torah. We are also aware that the opposite choice is also possible. Only when both possibilities are there do we really have free will. This is the true uniqueness of a human being.

So this Rosh Hashanah, let us exercise this choice which transforms ourselves and has a corresponding effect on the entire the world. May G-d in response grant us every kind of sweetness, success and blessing for a truly Happy New Year.

1. Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer ch. 11; Zohar I 221b . 2. Psalms 95:6. 3. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.9 p.415-417. 4. Deuteronomy 29:9-30:20. See 30:19-20.

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SEDRA NITZAVIM

WAR AND PEACE

Sammy could hardly remember how it started - it was something to do with Daniel Marks and Jonathan Howard, and the fact that they had a fight about something, he wasn't sure what, but one day the nineteen members of Year Five were friends, and the next day they were split up into several groups, each group whispering together against the other groups.

Sammy decided that he didn't want to have anything to do with it, but he found it almost impossible not to get involved - everyone else was. But, he did manage to avoid taking sides, and hoped that it would all blow over; it was hard to play a decent game of football at break-time with everyone fighting. And the football match against Year Six was coming up...

The next day, their Hebrew teacher announced that he would like one boy to prepare a presentation on the Sedra every week. Did he have any volunteers for this week? Sammy immediately raised his hand, ignoring his friends' looks of surprise - he had just had an idea...

It was time for Sammy to give his presentation. He had worked long and hard on it, with some help from his mother, and he hoped it would do the trick. He marched up to the front of the class, holding a large brown paper bag. From the bag he took out a long thin stick.

“I would like a volunteer to come and break this stick for me”, he announced. Jonathan volunteered, eager to show off his strength. With little effort he snapped it in half. Everyone watched.

Sammy then took out something else - a thick bundle of similar sticks, and asked for another volunteer to break these. Daniel, hoping to exceed Jonathan’s feat, came up, but despite much effort, he could not break the bundle in half. Sammy started his speech.

“The beginning of this week’s Sedra, called Nitzavim, starts with Moses gathering all the Jews, and he said....” Sammy consulted his notes, then he went on.

“‘You are all standing together before G-d - your leaders, men, women, children, proselytes, also your woodcutters and drawers of water.’ In those days you didn’t get water from a tap, someone had to get it and sell it to you”, he explained.

“The word ‘together’ teaches us a very important lesson, that the Jews all stood united, from the highest to the lowest person, no one thought they were better than anyone else other. When people unite, they become much stronger, like a bundle of sticks - when they were together they were hard to break, but singly, it was easy for Jonathan to do. So the lesson we can learn from here, is that we should all be friends. And this is especially important before Rosh Hashanah, when we are judged before G-d.”

Sammy stopped, and looked at his classmates. Jonathan and Daniel, and a few other boys, had gone a little red, having realized what Sammy was getting at.

The following Tuesday, the whole class playing together, like a real team, managed to win the football match against Class Six.

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