

CHABAD
DED
RESEARCH UNIT

5774

שבת..... *for Friday night*..... קדש

Wed. Night 4 Sept. 2013 - Rosh Hashana 5774
Rosh Hashana - Sedra Ha'azinu

THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND THE WORLD

FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL PHILOSOPHERS HAVE PONDERED THE MEANING OF EXISTENCE. Why are we alive? What does it all mean? Rosh Hashanah, the anniversary of the creation of Adam and Eve, gives us an opportunity to think about this question. The Torah starts with the words “In the beginning”, which actually mean the beginning of Creation. Before that point, there was simply the infinite eternity of G-d. Nothing else. Since there was only G-d, words fail us. We can imagine infinite radiance, or infinite Oneness: Ultimate Unity, which also expresses ultimate Truth.

Then came Creation. The universe and our world came into being. A world of multiplicity, of almost unlimited variety. A realm which appears the complete opposite of the utter Oneness of G-d. As we know all too well, our world is so complex that it even includes falsehood and evil.

The purpose of Creation is that the Oneness of G-d should be recognised and expressed in the multiple realm of Creation. The two opposites should be unified, in a total and truly wonderful harmony.

How can this take place? If Oneness and Multiplicity are opposite, how can they be drawn together? The answer given by Chabad teaching is that there has to be an intermediary which has both



In Memory of Mrs Chawa (Evelyn) Loewenthal ע"ה - Rosh Hashanah 5752. Dedicated by her son שי, daughter-in-law תחיל' and grandchildren שי

qualities. Through this intermediary, the two opposites can be joined.

What or who is the intermediary? The Jewish people. We combine both a Divine and an earthly dimension. We have an earthly, multiple dimension by virtue of being mortal humans. The Divine dimension we have acquired from our great ancestors such as Abraham and Isaac, who were ready to give up everything for G-d, and from our unique experience at Mount Sinai when G-d was revealed to the entire Jewish people and indelibly bonded within their hearts.

Rosh Hashanah is the point at which we fulfil our role of recognising G-d's Kingship within a multiple world, which we do through the prayers and the blowing of the Shofar.

We the Jewish people have the special responsibility to do this, and the effect of this union deeply concerns all humanity and, indeed, existence as a whole. For as a result of this bond with G-d, recognising the Creator and Master of the universe, Divine blessings of life and of goodness are poured into the world, for a year of sweetness and light, for each individual, for the Jewish people as a whole, and for all humanity.

BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

This special role of the Jewish people in joining humanity with the Divine is expressed also in the Sedra² read on the Shabbat after Rosh Hashanah, known also as Shabbat Shuvah, "the Sabbath of Return". The Sedra is a poem, said by Moses, addressed to Heaven and Earth, asking them to witness the special role and purpose of the Jewish people. Moses says "Listen, you Heavens, and I will speak; let the Earth hear the words of my mouth". The Sages point out that the Hebrew *Ha'azinu*, which means 'listen', suggests being very close to something, while "hear" implies being further away.

The Jewish people are indeed close to Heaven, yet they are also rooted in the more distant Earth. This gives them the power to try to join the two, which they do on the High Holy days and throughout the year, in this way bringing the world a step closer to fulfilling the ultimate purpose of Creation³.

1. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Sefer Hasichot* 5750, vol. 1, pp.7-8.

2. Deuteronomy ch.32. 3. See *Sefer Hasichot* 5750, p.18 ff.

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SHABBAT SHUVA - SHABBAT OF RETURN

ASKING FORGIVENESS

Leah nudged her friend Rina. "There she is!" she whispered loudly. Both girls giggled and started to walk quickly away from the gate they had been leaning against while they chatted. Old Mrs. Sure was already hobbling down her broken front steps towards them.

"I've told you children not to lean on the fence! It has been broken before and you will break it again", she rasped angrily after them. The tabby cat rubbing against her legs hissed noisily at the girls.

"I'm so sorry", said Rina. "We were just talking and didn't mean to disturb you." The girls walked away chuckling to themselves. Mrs. Sure had lived on this street for as long as the girls could remember. Her house was at the end of a dead-end street near Rina's home and the girls enjoyed sitting on the grassy area in front of the woman's gate. It was a quiet, tucked away spot, though unfortunately the old woman did not seem to like the idea of them being there.

"She seems quite lonely", Leah said quietly as they sat down on the floor of Rina's bedroom to do their homework. Rina raised her eyebrows. "Leah she's just old and.... Listen, living alone with a bunch of cats, she can't be normal. I see her sometimes in the Synagogue as well. She never talks to anyone".

Leah shrugged "I don't know... She probably has no one else other than the cats to keep her company. Anyway I only brought it up because of what Mrs. Cohen was saying in school today." Rina looked at Leah questioningly, and Leah continued.

“You know, she was saying that these ten days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are special days of repentance, but that G-d only forgives us for things that we have done against Him, not for things that we have done against other people. For that we have to go and ask the person to forgive us.”

Rina rolled her eyes. “Come on... Are you suggesting that we go and ask Mrs Sure to forgive us for sitting in front of her garden? She, she’ll set her cats at us...” Both girls giggled, but Leah became serious again. “Well, I thought maybe we could go and chat with her one day. She might appreciate that”.

Leah’s voice sounded more confident than she felt. The thought of knocking on the old woman’s door made her feel particularly uneasy.

The next evening the two girls walked up the rickety steps in front the woman’s house. “She’ll never hear that knock” Rina whispered. But there was a sound of scratching at the door and it opened.

“What do you girls want?” The visit was not off to such a good start. The cat raised its tail and Leah started edging back.

But Rina smiled warmly. “Hello, we just came to visit you. Here, we brought you some flowers from our garden.” Mrs Sure looked baffled, and then tears filled her eyes. “Why, thank you. Thank you. What are your names?” she said, softly and pleasantly. *‘Nobody has visited me for years’* she thought to herself. *‘Since my husband died, ten years ago, I haven’t wanted to speak to anyone. But these girls seem so kind’*. The girls stood there shyly asking a few questions about the cats and then went off.

A week and three visits later Leah and Rina walked home munching the hot chocolate chip biscuits that Mrs Sure had made them. “You’re right, Leah,” Rina said, in a moment of unusual humility. “She really is such a nice lady. And I’m glad she accepted my mother’s invitation to eat with us on Succot. We must continue visiting her after the Festivals.”

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