

CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday night*..... קדש

Friday 8 August 2014 - 12 Menachem Av 5774
Sedra VaEtchanan

BEING ALIVE TO THE FULL

JUST BEFORE THE FIRST PERSON IS CALLED UP TO THE TORAH A BEAUTIFUL verse is sung in the Synagogue: “And you who cleave to G-d, are all alive today.” (Deut.4:4). This verse is in our Sedra¹. It focuses on an important Jewish concept: cleaving to G-d. Through this, says the verse, we “live” to the full.

G-d, the Creator of the Universe, is infinite. He is the Source of all being, and is beyond all being. How can we “cleave” to G-d? To “cleave” means to join together, to be one together. How can this apply to the relationship of a tiny human, and infinite, eternal G-d?

The Baal Shem Tov and other Chassidic leaders taught people about this concept. Although we are tiny, physically, we have within us a spark of the Divine. This inner flame yearns to join with G-d. How can it do so? Through Torah, Prayer, and Mitzvot.

G-d puts Himself in the Torah: when we study Torah we are joining with Him. From this stems the special love that the Jewish people have for the teachings of the Torah, expressed in the sacred Torah Scroll and in the thousands of books which explain its meaning.

Prayer is another way of connecting with G-d. The simple



In Loving Memory of Mrs Jeanne Gewolb-Sostrin
 (Yenta bas Devora) ע"ה - 15 Tevet 5772
 Dedicated by her Son Dr Roger Gewolb שי'

meaning of prayer is that we are speaking to G-d, intimately from the depths of our heart, in any language. Further, the Baa1 Shem Tov taught that Divine radiance is present in the Hebrew words of the prayers. When we pray with love and devotion, giving ourselves over to G-d, our souls join with that radiance². This makes prayer potentially a deeply inspiring experience: very private and intimate, a coming close with G-d.

The third level of connection, which in some ways is the most powerful, is that of the Mitzvot, the Laws of Judaism. The word Mitzvah is usually translated as “Command”; but it also means “Connection.”³ Carrying out a Mitzvah means that we are connected to and bonded with G-d.

Why is this? Because the Mitzvah is the Will of G-d. When we do the Mitzvah, at that moment we became an expression of G-d’s Will. We can compare this to the way the will of a person is expressed though his or her own hand which writes, plays the piano or bakes a cake. Through the Mitzvah we are joined to G-d, so to speak, as a hand is joined to the inner will and desire of a person.

The Mitzvah might be a practical action: lighting candles for Shabbat, fixing a Mezuzah on a doorpost, putting on Tefilin, giving charity, making sure one’s kitchen is kosher. Or it might be a law involving feeling, such as love of one’s fellow. Yet this too is generally expressed in practical terms, such as doing something to help the person.

At that moment, through the action of the Mitzvah, the person and G-d are joined together⁴.

So we come back to the verse in the Sedra. Through cleaving to G-d by means of Torah, Prayer and Mitzvot, every aspect of our being is transformed: we really live!

1. Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11. 2. See *Keter Shem Tov* sec.1. 3. Relating to an Aramaic word *tzavta*, meaning “connection”. 4. This essay freely adapts and greatly simplifies some points from the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot* vol.14 p.53ff, which discusses at length the idea of ‘cleaving to G-d’ as it appears in our Sedra, Deut. 4:4, and also in each of the following two Sidrot, Ekev and Re’eh: Deut. 11:22, 13:5.

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SEDRA VA-ETCHANAN

HONOUR YOUR MOTHER

It was a very hot day, (the hottest day of the year so far, Debbi and Leah's father had announced at breakfast), and the twins were lying on their beds, the windows wide open, reading two books from the school library. They were actually both reading the same book, trying to discover who was the fastest reader. (So far Leah was three pages ahead).

There was a soft knock on the door and their mother came in. "Debbi and Leah," she said, "I'm not feeling very well and I must go and lie down. But I have some very important letters that must be taken to the Post Office on the High Street. Do you think one of you could take them?"

It was a very hot day, and the Post Office was a good fifteen minute walk. Neither of the two looked enthusiastic.

"What's wrong with the letterbox on the corner?" Debbi asked.

"There's already been a collection there today. It must go to the Post Office if I want it to get off today," her mother explained. "Oh, my poor head!"

The girls looked at each other. Finally Leah said grudgingly "Okay then, I'll go. But I don't understand why it's always me who has to do things." She stomped out of the room, not in a happy mood.

The next day the two were sitting in school, hearing about the Sedra, which contains the Ten Commandments. Their teacher explained how the first five Commandments dealt with issues between a person and G-d, and the second five concerned a person's relations with other people.

The fifth Commandment was the law to honour your father and mother. This might seem to relate only to other people, but in fact, said their teacher, it concerns G-d as well. For this reason it is in the first five Commandments.

Their teacher got the pupils to tell stories about people who showed great honour to their parents. Gitty Levy described how the mother of one famous Rabbi found it difficult to climb into her bed because it was quite high from the ground. So her son would bend down so that she could step on him like a human footstool, to make it easier for her to climb up. Everyone listened quietly. It was amazing to think of some of the things people would do to help their mother and father.

Debbi and Leah listened to these stories with an uncomfortable feeling. Later, in break, Leah said to Debbi with a sigh: "I feel guilty about how I acted yesterday. I made Mum feel so bad about posting those letters - it wasn't even such a big deal really."

"What about me?" Debbi said sadly. "At least you went. I didn't even go. I feel even worse than you. Maybe we could do something to make up for it, though I don't know what. Mum must be really disappointed in us."

"I know!" Leah had an idea. "You know how Mum is always complaining about that garage - about how it's always such a mess, and how one of these days she wants to clean it out, but she never has time. Maybe we could do it - it would be a fantastic surprise for her. I bet it will make her feel really happy..."

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