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SIGHT AND SOUND

JACOB FELT THAT HIS END WAS DRAWING NEAR. HE CALLED HIS TWELVE SONS TOGETHER AND ANNOUNCED that he wanted to bless them all¹. Calling each one by name he blessed them. The names of Jacob's sons were obviously significant, like every word of the Torah. Chassidic teachings emphasise not only the historical reasons for the names, but also the psychological and spiritual reasons. The twelve sons of Jacob are the historical ancestors of the Jewish people, and they also represent different spiritual aspects within each one of us.

The name Reuben, the first son of Jacob, relates to the verb *ra'ah* "to see". The name Shimon (Simeon), the second son, relates to the verb *shama*, "to hear".

"Seeing" and "hearing" are two different levels at which it is possible to relate to G-d. One is a highly tuned level of awareness of G-d that can be compared to sight. When we see something the experience is unambiguous and definite. No amount of argument will convince a person that he did not see something when he did. Further, when we look at a scene we are able to absorb many details all at once. The name Reuben expresses certainty and immediacy in our awareness of G-d.

On the other hand there is also Shimon, the path expressed by the second son. This is the path of "hearing". The perception of G-d is at a lower level of awareness. It is less distinct, less clear. You can also

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only hear one thing at a time. Too many sounds together, unless they form a definite harmony, are simply confusing. A scene which you hear described is not as vivid nor as detailed as one actually observed by oneself. The level of “hearing” is one on which a person has some awareness of G-dliness but in a way which is less distinct, clear and powerful than that of “seeing”.

As explained in Chassidic teachings, the effect of seeing is “love”. Intense love of G-d, a tremendous yearning to come close to the Divine and to dedicate one’s life to spiritual goals. This is an exalted level. Ultimately, it is the attainment of a profoundly righteous person, a Tzaddik. We speak of leaders as having “vision”. They see clearly before them their goal, whatever it might be. A great Jewish leader has a clear perception of the path of Torah, the guidance which G-d gives to the Jewish people and humanity.

Others, whose experience of G-d is rather on the level of “hearing”, are conscious of the Divine and seek to relate to G-dliness. Chassidic teachings explain that their awareness generally takes the form of awe. They recognise the infinity of G-d, and wish to obey Him. They are strongly aware of the tendencies within a person to lead him or her away from the path of connection with G-d. They struggle within themselves, trying to follow the teaching they have “heard”, which means trying to remember that this is the true path, and not the confusing “noise” from the world around them...

The two aspects of “seeing” and “hearing” are potentially within each of us as levels of relationship with G-d which we can develop through Torah study, thoughtful prayer and observance of the commandments. Through each of these modes we can deepen our relationship with G-d, and make our relationship with other people and with life more meaningful. We will come to express not only the meanings of the names Reuben and Shimon, but also those of other sons of Jacob, such as Levi who represents bonding² with the Divine, and Judah who expresses thankfulness³ and utter dedication. Through seeking to reveal these qualities within us, we live up to being a true son or daughter of Jacob⁴.

1. Genesis 49:1-28. 2. See Gen. 29:34. 3. See Gen. 29:35. 4. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s “Yehudah Atah” 5738, *Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat* vol. 1 p.299 ff.

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SEDRA VAYECHI

LOST AND FOUND

Mrs. Becker, the principal, was standing in front of the crowd of school children, at the first school assembly of the term.

As she was about to conclude her speech, she noticed her secretary motioning to a box of clothes at the side of the stage. Of course! She was meant to announce that the lost and found box was filled to capacity, and that the clothes would be put on display, for their owners to come and collect them!

"Girls, before I begin to tell you about the details of how to collect any lost articles of yours, from the lost and found, who can tell me where we learn about lost and found from this week's Torah Portion, Vayechi?"

Mrs. Becker knew she had her students stumped when she was met with silence. "Girls, I am not pulling your leg - who can tell me where the Torah talks about lost and found?"

Anne, in the back, was waving her hand. Mrs. Becker nodded to her so she should speak.

"Well, when the Joseph and his brothers went to bury Jacob in the Land of Israel, the brothers had the same

positions that the twelve Tribes would have later when they were travelling in the desert. And there was one tribe that was always at the back - so I can imagine that they were in charge of the lost and found!"

Mrs. Becker was smiling. "Great thinking! Who can tell me what the name of the tribe was?"

This time Danielle answered. "My namesake - the tribe of Dan."

"Bingo! The tribe of Dan were the collectors of lost articles. Do you know, that they also helped Jews who were struggling in their belief? Anyone with any questions about G-d or religion would always know that they would find answers and comfort with the tribe of Dan."

Charlotte's hand shot up. "Can I guess why?"

Mrs. Becker nodded.

"Being at the back was probably not so much fun for Dan. They were always last, and yet they accepted their fate without complaints. Probably the fact that they listened to G-d, without any complaints or without asking why, helped them help other people."

Mrs. Becker was quite enthused over Charlotte's idea. "Exactly! A person is able to help others when one has the character of humility and simplicity. And sometimes if a person goes through something difficult in their own life, they can better help other people in theirs."

Mrs Becker looked at the hundred girls of the school, who were all listening intently. Then she caught sight of the school secretary signalling to her.

"Oh yes, Hmm...it is getting quite late. I better get back to the original topic - LOST AND FOUND!"

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