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הב

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 2 November 2012 - 17 Cheshvan 5773
Sedra Vayera

KEEPING ONE'S BALANCE

THE JEWISH PEOPLE HAVE THE KNACK OF KEEPING THEIR BALANCE despite being confronted by extremes. They have great ideals, but are also realists and pragmatists. They are sensitive to spirituality, with a long list of prophets and visionaries - but also know how to keep their feet on the ground. They are steeped in study of the sacred Torah, but also know how to make a living and create a warm and welcoming home environment.

This ability to balance spirituality and the practical level of life goes back to Abraham and the opening theme of the Sedra¹. Abraham has just been circumcised, and is sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. At this point, G-d revealed Himself to him.

Now, the idea of G-d being revealed to anyone is a very striking concept. Obviously this means some kind of intense state of consciousness. Abraham had experienced this previously, as we see in last week's Sedra². There it tells us that "Abram prostrated himself face down, and G-d spoke to him..." By contrast, in our Sedra when G-d revealed Himself to Abraham, he calmly sits at the entrance of his tent.



Dedicated by Mrs Tzipora Sufrin ת"י , to the memory and spirit of her father k"z ihætk rgcus hfsrn ןר װ, v j "vrv

JUDAISM FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD
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A hint at the intensity of the Divine revelation to Abraham is expressed in the idea that this was happening “in the heat of the day”. The intensity of the sun relates to the intensity of the spiritual revelation that was taking place.

Nonetheless, Abraham went on calmly sitting at the entrance. There is no indication that he was blown out of his mind. He seems to have been able to balance the exalted and intensely spiritual revelation of the Divine with being a hospitable person, sitting at the entrance of his tent and looking for guests. The Sages tell us this is because he had been circumcised (at the end of last week’s Sedra). The Covenant with G-d expressed by Brit Milah enabled Abraham to keep his balance when G-d was revealed to him³.

Why should circumcision have this effect? One explanation is because it establishes a pact between G-d and the most physical dimension of the person. This gives the person the ability to reach for the highest level of the sacred while at the same time keeping one’s feet on the ground.

According to the Sages, for a male the covenant of circumcision requires a physical operation. By contrast a Jewish female is considered to be born circumcised⁴. She is born with the ability to balance holiness with the reality of daily life.

Another aspect of the Brit, the covenant which balances holiness and daily reality, is that it has the power to affect not only one’s physical body but also the world in general. The prime example of this is the sacred Land of Israel. The Sages tell us that by merit of the Covenant of Circumcision, the Jewish people were given possession of the Holy Land⁵. They were able to transform the Land of Canaan into the sacred Land of Israel, the Land where the Divine is most intensely revealed.

This is the purpose of the Jewish people in the world: to join holiness and daily reality, including physical flesh and physical earth, with balance, tenderness and joy⁶.

1. Genesis chs.18-22. 2. Gen. 17:1-3. 3. See Midrash Yalkut Shimoni, beginning of this Sedra. 4. Talmud Avodah Zara 27a. 5. See Rashi to Gen. 17:2. 6. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Sefer HaSichot* 5752 vol. 1, p.85 ff.

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SEDRA VAYERA

VISITING THE SICK

“Over here, David! Throw it to me!”

“No, to me, to me!”

“David, throw it here!”

David felt torn about where to throw the ball. He was standing on the edge of a kind of bank in the school playground, looking down. So many boys were calling to him, he wasn't sure how to make the next move. 'I'll throw it to Yoni', he thought. Yoni was in David's class, Year 8.

He leaned forward, turned his back and with all his strength threw the ball in Yoni's direction. As he threw the ball, he lost his balance and fell off the edge of the bank, falling to the ground three feet below, badly twisting his foot on the way, hurting his arm and banging his head. He cried out in pain.

Yoni dropped the ball and ran to call the teacher on playground duty, Mr Moss. The teacher hurried over to them, examined David and said “Don't move him. He seems really hurt. We need to get him to the hospital as soon as possible. David, try to keep still.”

Mr Moss rushed off to the school building. The boys stood round David, who lay on the ground looking twisted and unhappy, moaning. Another teacher appeared with two blankets, which she used to make David feel more comfortable. Then Mr Moss came back.

Soon a siren was heard and an ambulance appeared at the school gate. The boys watched as the paramedics strapped David onto a stretcher and carried him carefully into the ambulance. Mr Moss went in with him, to the delight of Year 8, who were supposed to have him next lesson for maths, and the ambulance sped off. The bell rang and the boys returned to their classrooms quietly. Year 8 had a substitute teacher who insisted on teaching them maths, much to their disappointment. It wasn't fair.

Later that day Rabbi Cohen, the principal of the school, entered Year 8's classroom. He said David would be alright, but he had broken his leg. He would have to spend two weeks in hospital before coming back to school with his cast.

"Okay guys, let's set up a rota for visiting David," Yoni suggested. "What do you mean?" asked Michael "Isn't it too soon for visitors? He is probably in a lot of pain and won't want to see us."

"Yeah," added Daniel, "and what will we talk about? If we talk about what we've done in school, he might get upset that he missed out. You know how hard he works. If we talk about sport, he'll remember what happened and also get upset. We don't want to upset someone who is in so much pain already!"

"You're right that maybe for the first day or two he will be too weak to see us," Yoni said. "We can ask his mother when he'll be ready for visitors. But once he is up to seeing us, of course we should go! Didn't you listen to this week's Sedra lesson? Abraham was recovering from having Brit Mila, and it says 'G-d appeared to Abraham'. Rashi says that G-d Himself visited him, because it is a Mitzva to visit the sick. So we should follow that example!"

"You're right," said Michael. "Listen guys, do you think that David wants to lie in bed all day with nothing to do and no one to cheer him up? Come on, here's our chance to do a Mitzvah! I'm sure David will really be pleased. Let's phone his mother this evening and ask when we can visit!"

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