



COMMUNICATING SPIRITUALITY

THE SEDRA¹ TELLS US ABOUT THE UNFAIR IMPRISONMENT OF JOSEPH. WE KNOW that in next week's Sedra, his situation will be completely transformed and he will rise to greatness. Some aspects of history repeat themselves. About two centuries ago an eminent Rabbi was set free from imprisonment in Tsarist Russia². The event had a far reaching effect in the unfolding history of the Jewish people, including our own time. The person set free was Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad. The reason for his imprisonment: teaching the spiritual dimension of Judaism.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman is famed as the author of a major rewriting of the Code of Jewish Law. This alone would have set him apart as a great master, a luminary in the Jewish world. But the reason why he was imprisoned was because of his insistence that there must be more than the teaching of the law in Jewish life. There must also be the communication of spirituality. He therefore wrote the Tanya, a book providing guidance on the inner dimensions of Judaism.

In the Tanya the author discusses the underlying spiritual nature of each person, and his or her private quest to feel deep love and awe of G-d, expressed in prayer, Torah study and action of the Mitzvot. He also composed many discourses which reveal a fascinating inner

level of the Torah. Rabbi Shneur Zalman's writings seek to communicate the intense warmth and spirituality of Judaism to every Jew.

This was a controversial idea. There were some rabbis who claimed that ordinary people should not be invited to explore these more profound aspects of Jewish thought. They felt that such teachings should be reserved for a small elite of major scholars.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman believed that these teachings of the inner dimension of Judaism would help each person find their own personal path in Jewish teaching and practice. It was a time of change and of crisis. Europe was beset by forces of secularization, which would have a damaging effect on Jewish life everywhere.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman saw that the Chassidic teachings are an antidote to that danger. They emanate from the deepest level of the Torah, and they transmit the 'elixir of life' which is the true nature of our sacred Torah³. By communicating these teachings openly and making them accessible, the Jewish people would be revived. They in turn will then be able to change the whole world for good.

Further, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760), the founder of Chassidism, had a visionary experience in which he was told that through spreading these spiritual teachings, the advent of the Messiah would be hastened. As leader of Chassidism two generations later, Rabbi Shneur Zalman was dedicated to this goal.

The opponents of Chassidism made false charges against Rabbi Shneur Zalman. They falsely told the government that the charitable funds he sent to Jews in Israel were in support of the Turks, the enemy of Russia. He was arrested and might have been condemned to death. However the Tsar realised that he was no traitor, but rather a great Jewish leader, and in 1798 released him on 19 Kislev (this year Friday, 22 November).

His release was interpreted as signifying the triumph of the ideal to reveal the inner, Chassidic dimension of Torah. This would revive the Jewish people and ultimately transform the whole world.

1. Genesis chs.37-40. 2. For a comparison of these two events see the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 25 p.193 ff. 3. See Yoma 72b, Taanit 7a.

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SEDRA VAYESHEV

JEALOUSY...

It was Sunday afternoon and Sara and Dina were strolling through the park together. As they walked past the children's playground they noticed their classmate, Gabrielle, pushing her little cousin on the swing. 'You know what I heard about her?' Sara asked, turning to Dina. 'What?' replied Dina, not very interested. Gabrielle wasn't her favourite classmate.

'I heard that she is going to win the class-competition', Sara said disdainfully.

She, as well, did not like Gabrielle very much at all. 'You're joking!' exclaimed Dina, 'that is so unfair, she doesn't deserve to win! Besides,' she added, 'there are some other girls in the class that have worked much harder than her, they should win the competition.'

'I couldn't agree with you more!' said Sara angrily. Just then Gabrielle's little cousin on the swing managed to kick her right in the stomach. Gabrielle fell on the ground writhing in pain. 'Ha, ha,' sneered Dina, 'serves her right'.

Just then Michelle, another school friend of theirs, came up from behind them. 'Why are you making fun of Gabrielle like that?' she asked Dina. She had heard her unfriendly comments as she was walking a few steps behind them.

Dina and Sara tried to explain to her what they had against Gabrielle. 'I don't agree with what you're saying', said Michelle stiffly, 'in fact I would go as far as suggesting that you're both plain jealous and that's why you don't like Gabrielle.'

'That is not true', Dina said in defence, 'I'm sure there are other people in the class who deserve the prize more'.

Michelle ignored what Dina said, and instead asked, 'Do you two realise how horrible you both are? Do you know what bad things can happen because of jealousy? Didn't you listen to what we learned in class this week about Joseph and his brothers?'

Sara and Dina both looked down at the ground. They both knew what she was talking about.

'I know', said Sara. 'Jacob had twelve sons. But almost all of them were very jealous of Joseph... This was because they felt that Jacob, their father, favoured Joseph over the rest of them. As a result they ended up trying to kill Joseph by putting him in a pit full of scorpions. They began to regret that, so instead they sold him as a slave to some travelling slave dealers. They took his coat and drenched it in goat's blood and showed it to their father saying "Joseph must have been killed by somebody" ' .

Sara fell silent. She exchanged looks with Dina. They both felt they could not quite look Michelle in the face.

Sara said, 'You know, Michelle, you're absolutely right. I think we owe someone an apology.'

'But we didn't say anything to her that we should apologize for', objected Dina. 'So what?' retorted Sara, 'we were spiteful towards her; at least let's go over and say "hi"...'

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