


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 23 November 2012 - 9 Kislev 5773
Sedra Vayetzei

TORAH STUDY AND THE WORLD

WHAT IS THE GOAL IN LIFE FOR A JEW? TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE. This means a personal spiritual connection with G-d, in all aspects of one's daily activity, and also the continual quest to immerse oneself in the beautiful teachings of the Torah.

It is sometimes quite difficult to achieve a healthy balance between, on the one hand, an active practical life, and on the other, being absorbed in the spiritual ideas of the Torah.

Some people go to one extreme, being so involved in their worldly affairs that they never have the patience to open a Torah book; others go to the other extreme, and try to avoid all practical activities, claiming Torah study as their sole task in life.

The Sedra¹ provides us with the example of our great ancestor Jacob. He particularly represents the ideal of Torah Study. The Torah describes him as "dwelling in tents", which the Sages explain as the tents of Torah study². Further, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are described as representing the "three pillars on which the World stands: Torah study, Prayer and Good Deeds"³. Abraham, manifesting kindness and hospitality, expresses Good Deeds; Isaac, who prayed in the field⁴, expresses Prayer, and Jacob expresses study of Torah.

Yet although Jacob is seen as so intimately connected with Torah study, in our Sedra we see him working day and night with the flocks,

trying to look after his growing family, who would be the foundation of the Jewish people, with a sense of spiritual purpose in his dedicated activity.

His wife Leah also provides an insight into this side of his character. When she gave birth to her sixth son she called him Zevulun, a word signifying “dwelling”. She said “now that I have given birth to six sons, my husband will dwell with me”⁵. If Zevulun represents Jacob’s dwelling, we might expect the character of this tribe to mirror that of Jacob, the scholar. However, on the contrary, the tribe of Zevulun were distinguished as businessmen who ran fleets of ships, and they provided for their brothers of the tribe of Issachar, who were noted as Torah scholars⁴. We expect consistency in the details of the Torah. Why is the person who expresses Jacob’s “dwelling” a figure noted for business activities rather than scholarship?

These points help us see a more rounded picture of Jacob. Certainly, he represents dedication to Torah. Yet he is also fully active in the world. In this Sedra we see him working day and night, which indeed is a necessary feature of Jewish life today. A person might be working at a business, making money to help his own family and also the Jewish community as a whole. Or he or she might be working dedicatedly to run a Jewish school, a synagogue, or any of the essential communal structures which require dedication, perseverance and sheer hard work, in order for them to exist.

Together with this dedicated effort, the person makes time in their week and in their day for Torah study and also for devoted prayer. When they study Torah, indeed they represent their ancestor Jacob, dwelling in the tents of Torah. Yet when they work hard in the practical world, they are also following Jacob’s example. Through combining both aspects of our great ancestor, we can live a balanced life and move the Jewish people forward to a glorious future. Then, with the coming of the Messiah, we will all be able to fulfil the essential ideal of Jacob’s life, Torah study, and the whole world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d, as the waters cover the sea⁷.

1. Genesis 28:10-32:3. 2. Gen.25:27, see Rashi. 3. Ethics 1:2; see the Tzemach Tzedek in *Or HaTorah*, Bereishit 1, p.136. 4. Gen.24:63. 5. Gen.30:20, see Rashi. 6. See Deut. 33:18, and Rashi. 7. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot* vol.30, pp. 134-40.

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53

SEDRA VAYEITZEI

SAVING FROM EMBARRASSMENT

It was a rainy Sunday afternoon when Mrs Green and her daughter Aliza were in the car heading for the shopping centre to buy some warm clothing for the cold winter weather that was soon approaching.

When they arrived, they went straight to the clothing shops. Mrs Green looked through the racks of clothing for suitable clothes, while Aliza oohed and aahed over the warm knitted sweaters of all colours and styles.

While Aliza was combing her way through piles of cardigans, she heard a girl behind her talking on the phone very animatedly. Aliza couldn't help but overhear her conversation.

"Yes, Debra, there's a notice right here on the wall saying that all purchases are 30% off. So I can buy so many things for such low prices! Isn't that great?" the girl sounded very excited.

Soon, the girl moved away from where she was standing and Aliza herself caught a glimpse of the notice. She moved closer so she could see better and in fact, the notice informed customers that all items were 30% off. But, her eye also caught the sentence that was written on the bottom in small letters – "*sale valid with coupons only". Oh no, thought Aliza, they must have given out coupons in the shop and the girl may not have realized that. She would be so embarrassed if she didn't know when she came to the cashier.

Aliza quickly ran to find the girl and finally found her standing in the queue, with a full basket of clothes, waiting to pay. Aliza

made her way over to her.

“Hi, what’s your name?” she asked with a smile.

“Sherry,” the girl replied, “what’s yours?”

“My name is Aliza,” Aliza said. “I just wanted to tell you that I couldn’t help overhearing your conversation with your friend before. You thought that all items in the shop were 30% off, but I think you might have missed the part where it said that it is only valid to coupon holders.”

Sherry’s eyes widened. “Oh, really? Wow, thanks so much for letting me know. That certainly would have been very embarrassing if I came to the cashier and I would have to put back some things because it was too expensive. Thank you again. You are a very thoughtful girl!”

Aliza smiled and was glad she could help out. She ran back to find her mother, who by that point had filled a whole basket for Aliza to try on.

“Where have you been?” Mrs Green asked her. Aliza told her what had happened.

“Wow, Aliza, I am so proud of you! You know, this actually reminds me of this week’s Sedra. We see how Laban tricked Jacob into marrying his daughter, Leah, instead of Rachel, his other daughter. Jacob knew that Laban could not be trusted, so he arranged a secret sign with Rachel.

But Rachel realised her sister Leah would really be put to shame. So she told her the secret sign. And that’s a bit like what you just did. You thought of that girl’s feelings and saved her from embarrassment.”

Aliza hadn’t thought that what she had done was important. She liked the comparison her mother made. She was pleased.

“Now, Aliza, you have a whole load of clothes to try on, so let’s get moving!”

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