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הג

שבת..... *for Friday night* קדש

Friday 25 September 2009 - 7 Tishrei 5770
Sedra Ha'azinu - Yom Kippur

JOINING HEAVEN AND EARTH

THE SHABBAT BEFORE YOM KIPPUR HAS A SPECIAL QUALITY. There is an atmosphere of preparation for the great, serious, yet also beautiful day which lies ahead, when all transgressions are rinsed away. On Yom Kippur, beginning on Sunday evening, we will come so close to the Divine that the stains and smudges which may have accumulated on our souls will be dissolved. We will be purified, with a fresh start, ready for the coming year.

The mood of Yom Kippur repentance and forgiveness is anticipated in the Torah reading¹ this Shabbat. It is a poem concerning the relationship of the Jewish people with G-d.

The Torah describes the initial closeness and love in this relationship; and also the way the Jews, sated with luxury, turn their back on G-d. This leads to suffering and exile: G-d is hidden from His people. Finally, the conclusion of the poem proclaims reconciliation and redemption². The basic theme is that although G-d sometimes seems hidden from the Jews, He is never absent.

An interesting feature of this poem is that at the very beginning it addresses the Heavens and the Earth. There are several explanations



Dedicated by Dr Jutta Singer 'hj , in Memory of her Mother
LEAH bas FREIDEL v"g
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of this, such as the idea that Heaven and Earth are called as witnesses to the pact between G-d and the Jews³.

Another comment from the Sages is that the theme of “Heaven and Earth” reminds the Jewish people of the two basic ingredients in their pact with G-d: the Torah was given from Heaven, and it is accepted and carried out by the Jewish people on Earth.

The idea that Torah teachings reach towards us from Heaven, from the spiritual realm, and that we in our earthly and human realm accept them and try to put them into practice in our lives, is the real kernel of Judaism. It expresses the fact that we combine two opposites in our existence, a spiritual and an earthly aspect. Each one of us is on the border between them, and our task is to join heaven and earth in our personal lives.

When an individual succeeds in taking a step forward in study of Torah teachings, and in observance of the Commandments, he or she is bringing the heavenly and ethereal into the practical reality of the daily world, joining Heaven and Earth.

Indeed, this touches on another explanation by the Sages. The Heaven represents study of Torah, which comes from Heaven; Earth represents observance of the Mitzvot (Commandments), which always take place on the plane of down-to-earth practical life⁴.

Thus on the Shabbat before Yom Kippur we are able to consider where we are in relation to both Heaven, Torah study, and Earth, practical Mitzvot. Are we balancing these two dimensions of being in the best way? Could we take a step forward?

Then on Sunday evening Yom Kippur begins. Any mistakes we may have made, whether in relation to Heaven or to Earth, are smoothed over. Some errors may need a little further attention. No problem, the inspiration of Yom Kippur will carry us forward. We will rediscover our bond with G-d, and try to live up to the responsibility it gives us, as individuals and as a people together: to join Heaven and Earth.

1. Deuteronomy ch.32. 2. Deut. 32:43. See Rashi. 3. Rashi to £2:1. 4. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.4, p.1155, based on Midrash Sifrei.

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YOM KIPPUR

PAST AND FUTURE

Leah pushed the door open, came in and slammed it shut after her.

“Leah! How many times have I told you...”

Leah added “slamming the door” to her mental pile of misdeeds that day. She had many. It started with yelling at her baby brother for spilling his cereal on her school uniform this morning. Then, she said something not so nice about her teacher, who overheard her and threw her out of the classroom! Then, she knocked someone over in the playground (accidentally, of course) because she was in a rush to get to the swings first. Then, it was the missing math homework, and, and, and... Leah saw the list growing longer and longer in her head. She stomped up the stairs and into her room, threw her bag on the floor, and herself onto her bed.

“Ugh,” she said. And rolled over. Visions of the day marched through her head. She had really messed up, over and over and over again.

“Ugh,” she said again. She really wished she hadn’t yelled at her brother. She really wished she had been nice to her teacher, and the girl on the playground, and she wished she had been responsible about her work. Oh, dear. She was quite awful.

“Ugh,” she said. And rolled over again.

“That’s the third time you’ve said ‘Ugh,’” said a voice from the corner.

“Yikes!” Leah jumped up on her bed. “Oh, it’s you Shifra. You scared me! What are you doing here?”

“If you don’t want me here I’ll leave. In fact, I have plenty of other friends to play with...”

“No! Stay!” Leah thought about all the people she hurt that day. “Please stay, Shifra.”

“What are you ‘ughing’ about, Leah? You sound pretty upset.”

“Yes, I’ve had a rotten day. I’ve been rather rotten actually. I hurt a lot of people.”

“Well, why don’t you apologize?”

“I did, but I just wish I wasn’t so...”

“Listen Leah. It says that the day before Yom Kippur is for regretting the past, and Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, is for deciding to be better in the future. Right now, it sounds like you really regret what you did. Why don’t you start thinking about how you’d like things to be?”

After Shifra left that evening, Leah took a blank piece of paper and sat down on the floor in her room. On the top of the paper she wrote in big letters: How I Can Make Tomorrow Better Than Today.

And she wrote about who she would be the next day. Someone she really liked. And she wrote and wrote, and then tucked it under her pillow and smiled. Tomorrow would be a better day.

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