



Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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Light Insight

Cogito Ergo...

Rene Descartes, the French philosopher, said, “I think, therefore I am.” Maybe we could extend his idea and say that most of us believe that “We think — and therefore everything is.” That is, we perceive the world’s existence as predicated on our own existence. If I exist, the world also exists. If I don’t exist, then maybe the world will vanish with me.

The Jewish idea is: “I exist, therefore I am obligated.” This is where spirituality begins. Accepting G-d’s authority means that the perception of my existence is identical to the knowledge that I start from a point of prior obligation.

The Torah portion *Naso* is the longest in the whole of the Torah. *Naso* also contains the greatest number of Midrashim, the homiletic expositions which contain the Torah’s hidden mys-

tical depths. And, *Naso* always follows the festival of Shavuot, the giving of the Torah at Sinai. What is the connection? Why is it that after the Jewish People accepted the Torah, the Torah itself seems to “blossom” and expand?

At Sinai, the Jewish People said, “We will do and we will hear.” How can you do something that you haven’t yet heard about? The answer is that Israel’s acceptance of the Torah was not predicated on understanding it, “hearing” it. “We will do it” means “We understand that our very existence makes us obliged.” They accepted the Torah, not because they thought it was a good idea or that it would be spiritually fulfilling; rather, they understood that their very existence obligated them.

We live in a generation which is on a very low spiritual level. People are more interested in feeling spiritual than being spiritual. We want a quick spiritual fix. We have been taught that fast is good, instant is better.

Fast is what we want from our food, our cars, our computers. Instant is what we want for our gratification. Instant religion, instant feel-good spirituality. Instant Kabbala. Mail order mysticism.

What does it mean to be spiritual? It means to be in synch with reality. From the outside, Judaism may look like a life full of restrictions: You can’t do this. You can’t do that. You can’t eat this. You can’t eat that.

In spite of its outward appearance, everything in Jewish life, each and every mitzvah, connects us to spirituality. Otherwise there would be no use for that particular mitzvah. But before we can connect to spirituality through the mitzvot, we must first align our thinking, reorient ourselves. We do this twice a day by saying *Shema*, in which we accept upon ourselves the “yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven,” in order to create in ourselves the perception, not “I think, therefore I am,” but “I am, therefore I am obligated.” This is the beginning of spirituality.

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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

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Giving people the benefit of the doubt

In order to “whitewash” the questionable behavior of others, we might only need to realize that we ourselves are engaged in...

Money Laundering

I was in yeshiva in New Jersey. The coming Shabbos was an “off-Shabbos,” free for the students to make their own plans, and I planned to go home to Brooklyn. The bus I needed to take cost eight dollars at that time, and I had the money in my jacket pocket.

At yeshiva the next morning a friend of mine took the

money out of my pocket, and started playing around with it. When he finally gave it back to me there was only three dollars. I knew that I had put eight dollars there, so I demanded that he give me the other five dollars, which he did.

The next week, he kept on asking me to give him back the five dollars. He claimed that he only took three from my pocket, and that he gave me the other five as a loan as a favor since I needed it for the bus.

The next time I did laundry, I found five dollars among the clean clothes. Then I realized what had happened: I thought I had put all eight dollars in my jacket pocket, but really I had left five dollars in my shirt pocket, and it went through the wash. I apologized to my friend, and I learned my lesson to judge other people favorably.

Response Line

How Much does a Pentecost?

Name@Withheld wrote:

Does Pentecost mean Shavuot?

Sort of. Pentecost is Greek for “the fiftieth day.” It’s a non-Jewish term for our Shavuot holiday, which occurs 50 days after Passover.

We call it Shavuot, meaning “weeks.” The Torah tells us to count “seven weeks” after Passover and then to celebrate a holiday.

Whatever you call it, Shavuot is not given a specific calendar date in the Torah, but instead is designated as being a certain number of days from Passover. This emphasizes the fact that Passover and Shavuot are

not separate holidays; they are connected.

What’s the connection between Passover and Shavuot? Freedom. Passover is freedom from Egypt; Shavuot is freedom from inner evil. Shavuot celebrates the Torah and the commandments we were taught at Mount Sinai. The Torah teaches us how to conquer the enemy within; the commandments turn all our talents and actions toward doing good.

LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

The “Desirable Land”

“I gave you a desirable land” is how the Creator describes His gift of the Land of Israel to His chosen people. (Jeremiah 3:19)

The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni on Psalms 7:19) explains with a parable the manner in which this Divine gift

was made: A king once made a great feast at which his most beloved friend was a guest. When the main course was served on a communal platter, the king signaled to this friend to take one portion which he knew to be the best. Since the friend failed to understand the hint, the king himself took the portion and handed it to him.

When the Creator divided all the

lands of the world amongst the nations, each of them chose a portion at least twice the size of the Land of Israel. He signaled to the People of Israel to choose the Land of Israel. When they showed reluctance to do so because it was so small, He took the land and handed it to them.

A little land but a most “desirable” one.