



Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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Light Insight

Head's Up

"You are standing today, all of you, before your G-d" (Deuteronomy 29:9)

“S”tanding” in this context means “with your head held high.” A person can hold his head high for two reasons. He can think a lot of himself and stand tall with self-important smugness. Or he can hold his head high for a different reason.

Man exists, in a sense, between the animals and the angels. If he fills his life with vanity and the

empty frenetic rush to fulfill his own desires, then he falls to the level of an animal. Really however, he is worse than an animal, because an animal is supposed to behave like an animal. A man isn't.

On the other hand, if he overcomes his negative instincts, sanctifies and purifies his thoughts, his words and his actions, Man raises himself to the level of an angel. In reality, however, he has raised himself higher than an angel, for angels have no negative drives to overcome. This makes Man's ascent so much the greater.

That's the other meaning of standing with your head held high: All year a person is constricted by the pressures of the material world — his head and his thoughts bent downwards like an animal, dealing with all the petty day-to-day business of life that is part of survival. On Rosh Hashana, however, (it's no coincidence that 'rosh' in Hebrew means 'head') his head — the head of the angel — is held high over his body — the body of the animal. And if he is an angel, then he must be even higher than an angel, for “Today (on Rosh Hashana) you are all standing” — with your heads held high.

LOVE of the LAND

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

Land Of Milk And Honey

When he once visited Bnei Brak, the Talmudic Sage Romi bar Yechezkel saw goats eating beneath a fig tree. Honey oozed from the ripe figs, milk dripped from the goats and the two com-

land flowing with milk and honey.”

The Maharsha points out that the simplest understanding of this tribute to the Land of Israel is a graphic description of the extraordinary bounty overflowing with wholesome and tasty natural resources. However the Torah should have written “flowing with milk and flowing with honey.” By using the term “flow-

ing” only once it signals that these two elements physically combine into a single stream.

This is the meaning, he exclaimed, of “a

land flowing with milk and honey.”

Perhaps the significance of his discovery is not only that the Land of Israel is blessed with wholesome and tasty natural resources, but that these two seemingly disparate dimensions of food are naturally and perfectly blended for the health and enjoyment of the inhabitants of the land “flowing with milk and honey.”

ETHICS of our FATHERS

“Do not look at yourself as a wicked sinner.”

Never consider yourself an incorrigible sinner beyond repentance. Such an attitude can make you despair of ever mending your ways and may lead you to be careless towards the little things and small opportunities for improvement — they can appear so trifling in comparison with the big things you need to work on.

Just as you should avoid considering yourself a sinner, you should avoid considering yourself a saint. Our Sages tell us that when a child is about to enter the world his soul takes an oath to be a saint and not a sinner, but to consider himself like a sinner even if the entire world says he is a saint.

Ideally, one should consider oneself evenly balanced between sinner and saint, able to tip the scales of judgment either for or against oneself with a single act.

“Do not say ‘When I have free time I will learn,’ for you may never have that free time.”

This is a warning to busy leaders and to anyone preoccupied with many activities. When you find a little free time don't say; “What can I learn in such a short time? When I have a big break, a significant portion of time, then I will sit down to learn the Torah.”

That big break may never come. In the meantime, those fifteen minutes, a small fraction of your life which is only a long chain of such moments, has been lost to you forever.

Response Line

Blessed Art

Brenda Kaldenbach wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am a Jewish graphic designer and illustrator, and I specialize in making ketubot [marriage contract documents]. I help thus to make ritual objects beautiful. I know that one is supposed to make ritual objects beautiful, but I want to understand why. It is part of Jewish tradition, to set a nice table for Shabbat, for example, but when I pass this on to my children I want to explain to them why it is done.

Dear Brenda,

Someone who fulfills a commandment has done what G-d demands of

him. However, because of our great desire to go beyond that which is demanded of us the possibility exists to enhance each mitzvah by beautifying it beyond the letter of the law. Therefore, the Torah tells us that we should perform the commandments in a beautiful manner.

Here's an analogy. Let's say a wife tells her husband she wants a gold necklace for her birthday. The husband is faced with many possibilities: Did she mean a nine karat gold necklace that costs \$18? Or a twenty-two karat, diamond-encrusted necklace for \$18,000? Or something in between!

The answer is: If the husband just wants to “do his duty” he only needs to buy the \$18 necklace. If, however, he wants to show his wife how

dear she is to him, and how much he loves her, he will buy the most beautiful necklace he can afford.

Chair Persons

Rachel Stillerman wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Is there any ‘real’ reason that we lift the bride and groom up on chairs at their wedding or is it just something we do for fun? A friend asked me and I thought it was for fun, but wanted to make sure. Thanks!

Dear Rachel,

You're right, it is fun! However, I think — as in most lighthearted things that we do — there's an element of seriousness to it. A bride and groom are like a king and queen. Just as a king and queen are transported everywhere, likewise we lift up the bride and groom and rejoice with them.