

SPACED OUT!

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The Torah, this week's portion tells us, is not in space. We do not have to travel to the heavens, nor cross the seas to learn it. It is close to our hearts and our lips to do and observe (Deuteronomy 30:12). Though the Torah is not in the heavens, that is not always the case with the Jews! We read this week that sometimes the Jewish people will be so dispersed that "if your exiles are scattered at the end of the skies, Hashem will gather them from there" (Deuteronomy 30:4).

Those two verses are an amazing contrast. Though the People of the Book may be as far-flung as the heavens themselves, the Book is always within our reach. Ultimately however, both the far-flung Jew and the Book he or she is meant to observe will always land together.

The meaning of the message is surely open to analysis. What does the Torah mean by telling us that Torah is not in heaven? We all know that. After all, aren't we reading those verses on Shabbos, in synagogue, here on earth?

Rashi explains that the Torah means to tell us that if the Torah was actually in heaven we would have to find a way to retrieve it, bring it back to earth, and study it! Quite a prescient prediction of space-travel! But, I imagine, if a possible cure for cancer or the quest for other scientific discoveries prompted a multi-billion dollar space program with a goal to land on the moon, Mars and our other celestial neighbors, the quest for morality would have propelled us there thousands of years prior!

Perhaps, however, we can use an old Jewish story to see how the Torah is entreating us in a different vein.

The story is told of Reb Chaikle, a poor tailor from Lodz, who had recurring dreams. Each night his father would appear to him and tell him about a secret fortune. All he had to do was travel to Vienna and visit the royal palace. Exactly 50 yards from the palace, explained his father, was an old oak tree. Under that tree, his father told him, lies a great treasure. All Reb Chaikle had to do was dig under the tree, and all his financial problems would be solved.

At first, Reb Chaikel ignored the dreams, but they kept repeating night after night, and he felt compelled to travel to Vienna and seek his fortune.

He camped out near the palace and waited for an opportune moment to begin the dig to fortune. At midnight on a moonless night he stealthily crept up to the tree and began to dig. His shovel did not get a chance to strike dirt when he felt a rough hand squeeze the back of his neck.

"Jew!" shouted the palace guard. "What on earth are you doing at twelve midnight, 50 yards from the palace gates, shoveling dirt?"

Reb Chaikel had no choice but to tell the story of the dream and the great fortune that lay beneath the oak tree that he was about to dig up. He even offered to split the booty, if only the guard would let him go.

"You idiot!" laughed the guard. "Everyone has dreams. In fact, I myself even dreamt that if I would go to the city of Lodz in Poland, and dig in the basement of some Jewish tailor named Chaikel, I, too, would find a fortune! Hah! Now get lost!"

Legend has it that Reb Chaikel returned to Lodz, and after a little digging in his own home became a very wealthy man.

Sometimes we look at the Torah's goals as way up in space! We look at the mitzvos as nearly impossible tasks that are as difficult to achieve and perform as landing on the moon. We view them as hurdles that are impossible to overcome and not feasible to attempt. We must travel to distant lands and perform incredulous feats.

The Torah assures us twice that it is within our reach. A Jewish soul may be lost in space, but Hashem will find a way to bring him home. Whether through a chance meeting with an observant Jew stuck in Thailand, or seated next to him or her on an airplane circling Dallas airport, Hashem will find him. Next, the Torah assures us that its very manual is a lot closer to practical observance than people may imagine. One may think it takes extensive efforts to become something he imagines is way beyond his reach.

This week the Torah teaches us the secret of the Jewish soul and the Book that was written to guide it. Both of them are within our reach. Neither of the two is forever spaced out.

***Dedicated by the Pinsky Family in memory of Sondra Pinsky of blessed memory --
22 Elul***

L'Iloy Nishmas Shulamis bas Reb Avraham Moshe O"H

Good Shabbos!

Parabolic Reflections:

(In this footer, I'd like to add notes and minutia from & to readers!)

Best Wishes to our subscriber US Air Force Rabbi Brett C. Oxman who is conducting High Holiday services for our troops in Bosnia. It is wonderful to know that we are on his mind as he is on our mind too! Shana Tova U'mesuka!

Mazel Tov to Avigdor Fuld upon his marriage to Yoni Kantor! and Yasher Koach to all who made the

simcha so beautiful!

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