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This week's sedra contains a description of all the festivals, and in fact forms the Torah reading in the Synagogue on Passover and Succot. Each festival is explained in turn: Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Succot. Even the Counting of the Omer, in which we are currently involved, is included in the same section.

It is remarkable, however, that right in the middle of a chapter dealing purely with festivals is a single sentence that has seemingly nothing to do with festivals, and it reads as follows: "And when you will cut the harvest of your land do not cut the corners of the field, nor the gleanings of the harvest shall you cut; leave them for the poor and the Levite; I am the L-rd your G-d."

The Rabbis comment on this unusual interruption in the flow of the passage by declaring: "Anyone who leaves these gifts for the poor is considered as if the Temple is standing in his time, and as if he had brought festive offerings to the Temple." There is a clear message here. It is good and proper to celebrate all the Festivals in the appropriate manner with good food and drink, new clothes for the family, and so on. But at the same time practical help should be given to the needy to ensure that they too have something with which to celebrate.

Maimonides put it pointedly this way: "One who locks the doors of his home and eats and drinks with only his wife and family and he does not feed and give drink to the poor and bitter of spirit - this is not the joy of a Mitzvah - but the joy of his stomach!" (1) Hospitality has always been the hallmark of the Jewish people. Through inviting the needy and the lonely to our festival table we help to make themeal a truly spiritual event.

During the summer months on Shabbat afternoon there is a longstanding custom to study Ethics of the Fathers. This is part of the Mishnah, compiled some two thousand years ago by the famous Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi (the Prince). It is found in every Prayerbook. This week we study Chapter Four. In the first Mishnah (paragraph) Ben Zoma redefines some common terms: Who is wise? Who is strong? Who is rich? Who is honoured?

On "Who is rich?" he declares in answer, "one who is satisfied with what he has." In this era of relentlessly intensive materialism these words are a timely reminder that we may be following the wrong track. A little more true wealth, satisfaction with what we have, could go a long way in creating a more genuine form of happiness and enrichment. This regards material acquisitions. On the other hand the Sages recommend that in spiritual matters we should never be satisfied with what we have, and should always be seeking to achieve more and climb higher! [By Dr. Tali Loewenthal, Director of Chabad Research Unit, London - ChabadOnline.com]

"Speak to the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and say to them..." (21:1) "Speak" and "say"--enjoin the elders regarding the youngsters. (Talmud; Rashi)

The above dictum, which constitutes a primary biblical source for the concept of education, also offers insight into the nature of education. The word used by the Talmud and Rashi--lehazhir, "to enjoin"--also means "to shine." Hence the phrase "to enjoin the elders regarding the youngsters" also translates "to illuminate the elders regarding the youngsters." Education is not only an elder teaching a youngster--it is also an illumination for the educator. (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

"These are the appointed times of G-d, callings of holiness, which you shall call in their appointed time (23:2)" The festivals are "callings of holiness" (mikra'ei kodesh) in the sense that each is a landmark in time at which we are empowered to call forth the particular holiness, or spiritual quality, imbedded within it....The special mitzvot of each festival are the tools with which we "call forth" the "holiness" of the day: eating matzah on Passover unearths the gift of freedom, sounding the shofar on Rosh Hashanah calls forth its quality of awe, and so on with all "the appointed times of G-d." (The Chassidic Masters)

A king was traveling through the desert, and his son, the crown prince, thirsted for water. But instead of dispatching a horseman to fetch water from the nearest town, the king ordered a well to be dug at that very spot, and to mark it with a signpost.

"At the present time," explained the king to his son, "we have the means to obtain water far more quickly and easily. But perhaps one day, many years in the future, you will again be traveling this way. Perhaps you will be alone, without the power and privilege you now enjoy. Then, the well we dug today will be here to quench your thirst. Even if the sands of time have filled it, you will be able to reopen it, if you remember the spot and follow the signpost we have set."

This is what G-d did for us by establishing the festivals at those points in time when He initially granted us the gift of freedom on Passover, joy of Succot, and so on. (Mar'eh Yechezkel) - chabadonline.com

"...and he may not leave the Sanctuary" (21:12) The thoughts of a Jew should always be connected to the "Sanctuary", to holiness; he should never separate himself from holiness even for a moment. Even when he is busy with mundane matters, it should be as a person who leaves his house, knowing, while outside, that it is a temporary situation and soon he will find himself back home. (From The Baal Shem Tov, Sichat HaShavuah #22) www.ascent.org.il

"Be of humble spirit before every person" (Pirkei Avos 4, Mishna 10)

Every person is unique in one way or another. In that unique quality, he is superior to everyone else, and therefore everyone else needs him. A person's feet, for example, are the lowest part of his body, but nevertheless have something unique which is not possessed by the head. A person's legs enable him to move from one place to another, and they give stature to his body. In this sense they complete the wholeness of the person.

"Be of humble spirit before every person" - even one who regards himself as being on the level of 'head' in comparison with his friend should be aware that without his friend he will not achieve wholeness. Hence he must seek out the quality that he is lacking, which is found with his friend. Through self-effacement and humbleness of spirit, and recognition that all of us form a single entity - through this we become united, so that G-d's Unity can rest upon us. (However, a person who considers himself to be superior to his friend, so that the head and the foot are separated, will fall into a state of fragmentation and solitude. Likkutei Torah, Netzavim p.44a (Taken from: Pirkei Avos in the Light of Chassidus by Yekutiel Green, www.ascent.org.il)

CHASSIDUS IS DIVINE INTELLIGENCE, AN UNDERSTANDING WHICH SHOWS MAN HOW SMALL HE IS, AND HOW GREAT HE CAN BECOME. (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM IYAR 19)

You ask, "How can I be happy if I am not?" True, you can't control the way you feel, but you do have control over your conscious thought, speech and actions. Do something simple: Think good thoughts, speak good things, behave the way a joyful person behaves -- even if you don't fully feel it inside. Eventually, the inner joy of the soul will break through. From: "Bringing Heaven Down to Earth"