



SIEBENQUELL

Getting to know The Word of God



SOURCE: HENRI J.M. NOUWEN, THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON

Years ago I had the opportunity to listen to the grand storyteller, Reuven Gold. On that evening he told us, free and without a text, stories of the Chassidim. One of these stories was simply entitled »Mordechai«, and I tell it to you as I have kept it in my memory.

Precisely in the middle of a village in the heart of Russia, there lived a pious, Jewish couple. And more than anything else in life, they wanted a child. And because they were very pious, they prayed, and prayed, and then prayed some more. And this, together with considerable other efforts, lead to day when the woman conceived a child. On the day she conceived, she laughed louder than the day on which Sarah conceived Isaac. Nine months later a lovely little boy came into the world, and they named him Mordechai.

Mordechai was the apple of their eye, and rightly so. He was the kind of child who learned from everything in the world each time he came into contact with it. He grew in wisdom and grace. And then the day arrived on which Mordechai was to go to the synagogue to learn the Word of God.

In the night before her was to go to the synagogue, his parents sat him down. They told him how the Word of God would hold him, in good times and in bad. Mordechai nodded his head as sign that he understood. But the next day, after he left the house to go to the synagogue, he never arrived. Instead, he found himself in the forest, swam in the lake and climbed high up into the crown of the trees. When he returned in the evening, everyone in the tight-knit community knew of the family's shame.

Thus, his parents sat him down again, wiped their brow and explained to him the importance of the Word of God for his life. He had to go to the synagogue to learn the Word of God. But on the next day, he found himself outside in the forest, swam in the lake and climbed high into the crown of the trees. As he returned home that night, his parents felt how the shame had come over their house. They did not know what to do.

Therefore, they called in the behaviour modification experts. And the experts in behaviour modification came, and modified Mordechai's behaviour, so that there was no behaviour in Mordechai that was not modified. Nevertheless, the next day he found himself in the forest, swam in the lake and climbed high into the crown of the trees. That night, when he came home, his parents wiped their brow and did not know what they should do.

So they called the psychoanalysts in. And the psychoanalysts unblocked his blockages, so that there were no more blockages that could block Mordechai. Nevertheless, the next day he found himself in the forest, swam in the lake and climbed high into the crown of the trees. His parents were beside themselves. They did not know what to do.

It was at this time that the great rabbi, the Baal Shem Tov, came to their village. And the parents thought, »Ah, perhaps the rabbi can help!« Thus, they brought Mordechai to the rabbi and laid out before him their long and painful story of the delinquency of their son. The rabbi said, »Leave the boy with me. I will give him a talking to«. His parents were terrified. It was deeply painful to them that their son did not go to the synagogue to learn the Word of God. But to leave him alone with this lion of a man seemed too much to bear. But since they had gone this far, they left Mordechai with the rabbi.

Now the great rabbi stood tall in his study and looked out in the parlour, where little Mordechai stood. He called, »Come here, boy!« Trembling, Mordechai stepped forward. Then, the Baal Shem Tov lifted the up, and held him, silently against his heart.

The next morning his parents came and took Mordechai home. And, low and behold, he went to the synagogue and learned the Word of God. But, when he was finished in the synagogue, he went into the forest. And he swam in the lake. And the Word of God became one with the Word of the lake, and it became one with the Word of Mordechai. And he climbed the tree. And the Word of God became one with the Word of the tree, and it became one with the Word of Mordechai. And Mordechai grow up to become a great man. People came to him when they were lonely. With him they found communion. And people came to him when they had no exits, and with him they found a way out.

And he often said, »I first learned the Word of God when the great rabbi, the Baal Shem Tov, held me silently against his heart».

It is one thing to complain that people nowadays do know the Word of God. It is altogether something else, to offer them a heart and some silence as the places, where you can get to know the Word of God. And to get to know the Word of God in such a way, that it is one with the Word of creation and the Word of my life, strikes me not only as an extraordinarily beautiful way of making the acquaintance of the First Storyteller. Only then will we hear and heed every story God wishes to tell.

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