



KEEPING ONE'S FEET ON THE GROUND

IS JEWISH TEACHING A FLIGHT FROM REALITY? **SOME PEOPLE MIGHT FEEL it is. Yet others would say no, it is rather a drawing of holiness into reality, and keeping one's feet firmly on the ground. This point is expressed at the beginning of the double Sedra¹, with the mention of the death of the two sons of Aaron.**

The full description of this is found in Sedra Shemini, read in the synagogue a fortnight ago. In a startling, tragic event, two of Aaron's sons died². They were filled with a spiritual longing to come close to G-d, and therefore entered the inner part of the Sanctuary in an unauthorised way. The Sages tell us that they were not married³, which might have been an expression of their longing for holiness. Yet Judaism has always shunned the concept of a monastery. Another tradition relates that they were drunk⁴ - intoxicated with a longing for the spiritual, not being able to cope with the humdrum practicalities of life.

The message of the Sedra is that this is not the path. True, one seeks to move towards G-d, but not in order to lose oneself. The goal is rather the attempt to draw G-dliness and holiness into daily life⁵. Guided by Jewish Law there is holiness at the dining room table, holiness in every detail of married life, holiness in the way one earns money.

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The ultimate goal is that this holiness should permeate all aspects of society, affecting all nations of the world. Through this goal, which will be reached with the revelation of the Messiah, we will succeed in fulfilling our special Jewish task of reaching upwards towards the Divine and, keeping our feet firmly on the ground, drawing G-dliness into this world. Then daily life will truly express the Glory of G-d!

WHAT IS HOLINESS?

The theme of the second Sedra is holiness. It begins “you shall be holy, because I G-d am holy”, and the Hebrew name of the Sedra, “Kedoshim”, means ‘holy’. But what is holiness? Can you define it?

One definition found in Chassidic teachings⁶ is that holy means “selfless”. Normally our self dominates our horizon. Concern for our own ego is so great that it prevents any awareness of the infinite, of the spiritual and of the Divine. Further, we are so pre-occupied with our own self that we often put our own interest first, before any concern for other people.

Holiness means the opposite of this. The self no longer dominates one’s attention. We can see beyond it, and be sensitive both to the boundless oneness of G-d and also to the needs of others. For this reason, Chassidic teaching stresses that love of G-d and love of one’s neighbour go hand in hand. Both come from the ability to see further than one’s own ego.

This leads us to one of the most important statements in the Sedra, and perhaps in all Jewish teaching. “...Love your neighbour as yourself I am G-d”⁷. On this Rabbi Akiva comments: “This is a fundamental principle of the Torah”.

To sum up: holiness means selflessness, which means both love of G-d and love of your neighbour. This will be the atmosphere in the time of the Messiah. We can try to start to achieve this now!

1. Leviticus chs. 16-18, 19-20. 2. Leviticus 10:1-7. 3. Midrash Tanchuma, Acharei, 6. 4. See Rashi to Lev.10:2. 5. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.3, 987-989. 6. See R. Shneur Zalman’s *Tanya*, ch 6, 10b. 7. Lev.19:18. See Rashi’s comment.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

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SEDRA ACHAREI-KEDOSHIM

COMMON SENSE

It was a Shabbat afternoon, one of those long summer Shabbat afternoons. Leah was sitting reading in the living room.

There was a knock on the door. "Who's there?" asked Leah, going into the hall. "Sam" the person answered.

"Michael" called Leah to her younger brother, "your friend is here". She went back to her book. Michael came running down the stairs and went to the door. "How are you doing Sam? Shabbat Shalom," he said, half out of breath.

"Shabbat Shalom" said Sam "you want to come to my house? I got this new board game for my Afikomen present. It's a really good game."

"Umm, sure, I've just got to go ask my mother" said Michael enthusiastically. "Wait a sec", and Michael bounced away, leaping up the stairs. He came back down half a minute later, looking a bit crestfallen.

"My mother is resting, and my dad is out. I think he went to a class in the Synagogue," said Michael. He was upset. He stood at the front door, looking longingly at Sam and the sunlit street outside, not knowing what to do or say.

His sister Leah, sitting in the living room, with a book on her lap, could hear the frustration in his voice. "Maybe you could wake her up," she called. "Mummy has been resting for more than two hours. She usually gets up now anyway."

"Umm, you are right" said Michael. "Let me go and wake her."

Again he bolted upstairs. A minute passed. Then another. Sam stood awkwardly at the doorstep.

Michael came slowly down the stairs. "I don't think I should wake her up," he said.

"Why not, Michael?" asked Leah, coming back into the hall, her book in her hand. "She usually gets up now anyway".

"I will give you a philosophical answer" said Michael, smiling. "And since when did you become a philosopher?" teased Sam, feeling that at last something positive was happening.

"Well," said Michael, "I became a religious philosopher, watch this". Michael pulled up his sleeves and started to wave his hands like an orator:

"G-d said in this week's Sedra that you shall honour your parents, and that includes not even waking up your parents if they are asleep".

"Michael, that isn't very philosophical", said Sam. "It's just called common sense. It's common sense from the Torah".

"True" said Michael. "Anyway it means I'm stuck here for now". "Okay," said Sam, "let's play something here". He came inside and shut the door behind him.

At that moment they suddenly saw Michael's mother coming down the stairs. "Hey, are you awake?" asked Michael. "Yes, I just got up from a really good sleep" she answered.

"Well, could I go over to Sam's house?" asked Michael. "Sure," answered his mother, "just be back when Shabbat is over". With that the two boys turned and bolted out of the door...

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