



58

REAL PEOPLE

IS JEWISH TEACHING JUST FOR PERFECT PEOPLE? OR IS IT FOR EVERYONE? When it comes to religious activities, some people are natural affirmers. They really like doing it... Others are more resistant. They might say, “the other guy is inspired, good for him. But I am normal”. However, Jewish teaching considers every person to be in the game, with a great present and an even greater future. A clue to this idea is found in a passage in the Sedra¹, as interpreted by the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

The Sedra tells us about the Jewish people travelling through the Wilderness. What could they eat during their journey? As is well known, in a miraculous way they were fed by the Manna from Heaven. This was a wonderful food which settled round the camp overnight, like dew. Each morning the Jews would go and collect the Manna, and consume it during the day. On Fridays there would be a double portion, so that they would not have to collect it on Shabbat².

When we eat bread, we say the blessing praising G-d for producing food “from the ground”. There is an opinion that the blessing recited on the Manna was a praise to G-d for producing food “from Heaven”. Ordinary bread, our staple diet, is earthly; the Manna was from Heaven.

We might have thought that the Manna could only be consumed by special people. Among the Jews in the Wilderness were truly good, holy people, but also people who were continuously complaining - as they do in the Sedra³ - and even some very problematic individuals. Yet the Sages point out that all of them were able to eat the Manna. It was from Heaven, but it was for everyone.

This gives us an insight into a basic quality of Judaism. That which

Celebrating the Barmitzva of Yosi Lent ^ש in Dublin, with brochos that he should be a Chassid, Yerei Shamayim and a Lamdan. Dedicated by his Loewenthal Grandparents ^ש

is Heavenly is for everyone, including those who seem far from perfect.

Further, that which is Heavenly is intended to blend with that which is earthly. The Manna was food, sustaining physical bodies. Eventually, it also had an effect on people's minds. The Sages tell us the Manna helped the Jews of that time relate to the Torah teachings they heard from Moses⁴.

We do not have the Manna today. But we have something rather similar: Shabbat. Shabbat is sacred, representing the atmosphere of Heaven. It is described as "having the quality of the World to Come"⁵. It brings that Heavenly atmosphere into a real home, where there is a human family, together enjoying delicious food and drink at the Shabbat table.

But Shabbat is not only for the righteous. According to the Sages, even someone who might be considered "wicked" responds in some way to the Shabbat atmosphere⁶. Shabbat is relevant, wherever one is on the Jewish scale. A person can make a step to observe some aspect of Shabbat, even if the full picture of Jewish life still seems out of reach.

As with the Manna, through Shabbat Heaven reaches Earth. This indeed is the purpose of all Torah teaching. The Torah which comes from the exalted heights of Sinai, emphasising its fundamentally spiritual nature, becomes part of the daily life of real human beings in this world. At least in the initial stages of this, the people are *as they are*. Not perfect, but real.

Ultimately the perceptions and sensitivities of people will be transformed and purified. Yet they will still be 'real'.

This expresses the ultimate purpose of Creation: a physical world, inhabited by real men and women, in which they dwell together with the Presence of the Divine⁷.

1. Numbers chs.8-12. 2. For this reason we have two loaves at the Shabbat meal. 3. See Numbers 11:1-6. 4. "The Torah was given to be expounded only to those who ate Manna" (Mechilta and Yalkut Shimoni to Exodus 16:4). 5. Talmud Berachot 57b. 6. "Even a completely wicked person will not tell a lie on Shabbat" (Jerusalem Talmud, Demai 4:1). 7. Based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.4 p.1035 ff.

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SEDRA BEHA'ALOTECHA

BECOMING INDEPENDENT

"Mummy, she's asking me again," Miriam said, dropping down on the couch beside her mother.

Her mother looked up from the book she was reading. "Who?"

"Rita. She's asking if she could copy my homework again. I feel bad giving it to her, as it doesn't actually help her learn. It doesn't make her want to do it herself, as she knows that I will always have the homework for her to copy from."

"That's a very uncomfortable situation," Miriam's mother said, putting the book down and closing it. "Have you tried talking to her about this?"

Miriam shook her head. "No. Every time I try bring it up she starts talking about another subject, and by the time she's finished what she's saying, I feel bad to press it on her."

"I see."

"And I can't say no. She's my friend."

"I think if you *were* her friend you would want to stop her copying from you."

"I know, but I just can't." she sighed miserably.

“Let’s talk about the Sedra,” her mother said.

“What?”

“In the beginning of Sedra Beha’alotecha, Aaron is commanded to light the lights of the Menorah. But instead of using a word like ‘kindle’, G-d says ‘you should raise up’ the lights.”

“What does this have to do with Rita?”

“I’m getting to that. Rashi explains that Aaron should ‘kindle the lamp until the flame rises up by itself’. This is telling us in general about the relationship of a teacher with a pupil.

“The teacher has to try to teach people in such a way that they understand and keep the Torah and love G-d without relying on the teacher. The teacher has to try to make the person develop their own qualities.”

“Are you saying I should help Rita do the homework, rather than letting her copy mine? That could take hours... Well, at least twenty minutes...”

“That might be a good idea. She is your friend after all.” Her mother raised her eyebrow.

“Alright. I suppose I could do that. Maybe only ten minutes. And then she might learn how to do the homework on her own.”

Her mother smiled and picked her book up again. “I’m glad you got that figured out,” she said, opening the book and resuming her reading.

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