


**CHABAD**  
  
**RESEARCH UNIT**

קדש..... *for Friday nights* ..... שבת

**Friday 14 May 2010 - 1 Sivan 5770**  
**Sedra Bemidbar - Shavuot Festival**

**BREAKING THROUGH BARRIERS**

**T**HE SEDRA<sup>1</sup> IS SET IN THE DESERT OF SINAI, THE PLACE WHERE THE TORAH WAS given to the Jewish people. This event will be celebrated by the Shavuot festival on the coming Tuesday night, Wednesday and Thursday. The fact that the Torah was given in a desert is itself significant. It expresses the way the Torah is available to any and every Jew. It is not locked away behind walls and gates, rather it is accessible to anyone who wants to explore its teachings<sup>2</sup>.

This concept of being accessible and available is in fact a key theme in the very nature of the Torah, especially from the Chassidic perspective. The Giving of the Torah broke through the barriers which separate the spiritual from the physical and which divide the holiness of the Divine from earthly human life and activity.

Chassidic teachings explain that the purpose of Creation is that G-dliness should be expressed in our physical world. Yet, one may ask, how is this possible? G-d is infinite, beyond space and time. By contrast, our world is tangibly physical and finite. How can the Infinite possibly relate to the finite and be expressed in it? Surely, holiness and worldliness are two opposite realms.

At first sight, this seems absolutely true. Our Sages<sup>3</sup> tell us that before the Giving of the Torah the spiritual and the physical were



**Commemorating the 250th Yahrzeit of Rabbi Yisrael**  
**Baal Shem Tov, Founder of Chassidism - 6 Sivan**

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completely separate. A person who sought spirituality would have to retreat from the physical. There was the realm of holiness and spirituality and, totally separate, there was the realm of physical life. In between there was a kind of impassable barrier.

Then came the Giving of the Torah. G-d broke through the barrier and made the spiritual connect with the physical. The laws of the Torah concern our physical lives as earthly human beings. There are Jewish teachings for every aspect of a person's life. Nothing is too mundane, everything is included. The Torah reveals the possibility and even demand that our most ordinary daily activities should express G-dliness and holiness.

One might suggest that this theme is particularly expressed in the teachings of Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chassidism, whose 250<sup>th</sup> Yahrzeit is remembered on the first day of Shavuot this year.

The Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760) was leader of a group of kabbalistic scholars, some of whom were resident with him in Medziboz in the Ukraine, while others lived in various villages and cities, often as hidden mystics.. Most kabbalists thought that the path to spirituality was one of self-denial. Many were ascetics, often fasting. By contrast, the Baal Shem Tov taught a path of joyfulness in service of the Divine. He instituted Chassidic gatherings, where the participants would eat and drink, sing spiritual melodies, and hear inspiring teachings from the inner dimension of Torah.

In his time the learned Torah scholars held themselves aloof from the common people. It was as if there was a barrier between the scholars and the Jewish masses. The Baal Shem Tov broke through that barrier, teaching the scholars to appreciate the infinite significance of each individual.

There was also a barrier shielding the inner spirituality of Torah. Only members of a small elite were encouraged to explore this. The Baal Shem Tov broke through this barrier too, seeking to spread the wellsprings of the inwardness of Torah to every Jew, knowing that through this the ultimate barrier would be dissolved, leading to the advent of the Messiah.

1. Numbers 1:1-4:20. 2. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.2 p.308. 3. See Midrash Tanchuma Va'era, 15 and *Likkutei Sichot* vol.8 p.23..

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

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*SEDRA BEMIDBAR - SHAVUOT***ACCEPTANCE**

"Girls, I have a special announcement to make today" said Mrs. Friedman to the class, "tomorrow we are going on a trip, as a pre-Shavuot outing!". "Hurray!" everybody shouted. "What kind of trip?" the girls chorused together. "The London Zoo" she answered softly. "Hurray" shouted the girls.

The next day Leah came to school excitedly, everybody was there, even Shira who had been sick for the past few days. It was just one noisy and excited classroom, all discussing the forthcoming outing, and whether or not it would rain.

"Okay girls, the buses are here" announced Mrs. Friedman, everybody went quickly to the buses, and the trip was on its way with much excitement. "I heard they have a new bear with a cub" called out Shira from the back of the bus.

They disembarked from the bus and Mrs. Friedman called out "Girls, I need everybody over here" pointing to some benches. "I need to speak to all of you before we go inside the Zoo". The sky was very overcast, and some drops of rain could be felt. Everybody quickly made their way forward. "Right, girls" Mrs. Friedman called out in her loudest voice, "everybody has to go in groups of four, this way you will all will be accounted for".

"Oh no" whispered Leah into Shira's ear "I wanted to just go with you". "I know, maybe we could convince her that we could go by ourselves" Shira said, a little more loudly.

When Mrs. Friedman had finished speaking the two girls

approached her. "Could we go just the two of us?" asked Shira.

"I thought you were going to ask that," said Mrs. Friedman. "I will give you a little thought, and then you will understand".

"Oh no" whispered Leah into Shira's ear "a Speech".

"In Sedra Bemidbar, G-d instructed Moses to count the Jewish people" Mrs. Friedman started saying. "Do you know why G-d wanted Moses himself to count them, Moses who was the most important person?"

"Yes" said Shira "you actually spoke about it last week in Assembly." "Nice to see you listened" said Mrs. Friedman.

"Because" Shira continued "each and every person is vitally important. The whole Jewish people depends on each individual. So counting the Jewish people is also vital, and that's why we get the most important person to do it".

"Well said" said Mrs. Friedman "and that's also what happened at the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. G-d made us into a nation, in which each individual is vitally important. That's why the Ten Commandments are phrased in the singular, as if G-d were just speaking to one individual, each one of us. Because each one of us is important."

"Okay, Mrs. Friedman" said Leah, "we understand you don't want us to get lost, but if we are two together we also won't get lost".

"True" said Mrs. Friedman "but it's safer if there is a slightly larger group together, in a bigger group you are more noticeable and less likely to get forgotten..."

Shira remembered that before receiving the Torah the Jewish people said "we will do whatever we are told, and then later we will understand". She gave in. She squeezed Leah's elbow to get her support and said "Yes, Mrs. Friedman, you're right. And it's actually more fun with more people together".

Mrs. Friedman smiled, and the sun began shining.

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