

CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

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שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

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Shmini Atzeret, Simchat Torah, Bereishit

THE TORAH AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

WHAT IS GREATER, THE TORAH OR THE JEWISH PEOPLE? THIS IS A FITTING MOMENT to ask this question, as we finish the Torah and begin it again on the great Festival of Simchat Torah, the Rejoicing of the Law. Then the final Sedra¹ in the Torah will be read. How does the Torah end? The last few lines state that there never arose a prophet as great as Moses, who was uniquely intimate with G-d, worked miracles and carried out wonders and remarkable deeds “before the eyes of all Israel”.

The commentator Rashi adds an intriguing statement. Explaining the final phrase, Rashi says that Moses decided to break the Tablets of the Law at Sinai “before their eyes”, and that G-d agreed that this was right. Now, is this the way we would expect the Torah to end? With Moses breaking the sacred Tablets of the Law which he had brought down from Mount Sinai? Was *this* his greatest achievement?!

The answer is yes, this was indeed a great achievement. Even more so, it shows us that for G-d as well as for Moses, the Jewish people themselves are yet more important than the sacred Torah. Let us see how.

After the Jewish people heard G-d declare the Ten Commandments at Sinai, Moses had ascended the Mountain. During forty days and nights, the Tablets were engraved by G-d. These

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Tablets of the Law ratified the special pact between the Jewish people and G-d that had been established at Sinai, based on the Commandments of the Torah. The Tablets were like the Ketubah, the marriage document which formalises and concretises the relationship between a bride and a groom.

Upon descending the mountain, however, Moses saw that some of the Jewish people had made the Golden Calf and were dancing round it in a horrible orgy. This was a total betrayal of the central teaching they had heard from G-d at Sinai: "Do not serve idols". It was a betrayal of G-d Himself. Indeed, as a result of this betrayal G-d wanted to destroy the people.

At this moment Moses broke the Tablets. The effect of this action, comment the Sages, was to turn the clock back. Breaking the Tablets meant that the special relationship between G-d and the Jewish people had not yet been formalised. Breaking the Tablets was like tearing up the Ketubah, the marriage document of the bride and groom. Without the Tablets, the orgy round the Golden Calf was indeed a terrible error, it was evil: but it was not direct personal betrayal in the same way. Without the Ketubah the bride and groom are not yet formally married. At this stage any waywardness is wrong, terribly wrong - but it is not actual 'adultery'.

Moses loved the Torah, infinitely. He loved the Tablets engraved by G-d, For him to break the Tablets of the Law was the hardest thing in the world. Yet he did so - in order to protect the Jewish people. Why? Because great as the Torah is, the Jewish people are even more precious. The love of Moses for the Jew, even the wayward Jew who serves an idol, is indeed his greatest quality, and is rightly the final statement about him in the sacred Torah Scroll. G-d agreed to this².

This is the true meaning of the Rejoicing of the Law: the Torah is great and wonderful - precisely because it has the power to reveal the hidden grandeur of the Jewish people, the nation bonded from the depths of their souls with the boundless infinity of the Divine³.

1. Deuteronomy chs. 33-34. 2. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.34, p.217ff. 3. See there p.222 n.51, citing Midrash Tana d'bei Eliyahu Rabba.

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SEDRA BEREISHIT

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Mrs. Goldman swung her handbag over her shoulder and turned to look at her three children. "Zack, Daniel and Lana, when I come back from the grocery store I want to have the kitchen spotless. Zack, you clean the table. Daniel, you clear the counters and Lana, you sweep the floor. Clear?"

The three children nodded dutifully and Mrs. Goldman smiled, waved and left.

"Let's go clean up," Lana said, going into the kitchen. She grabbed the broom from the corner and began making long strokes on the floor.

Daniel glared at the counter. "Why is it such a mess today? It's your fault Lana! You baked that chocolate cake this morning and you left all the ingredients out! You made the cake – you have to clean up from it!"

"Mommy asked you to clean up from it," Lana said, sweeping busily. "I don't care. It's not fair. You should do it." Daniel folded his arms stubbornly.

Zack snorted. "And excuse me, you made a tuna sandwich this morning and left the tuna and the bread out on the table. I think you should clean the table."

"No. Mommy asked you to do it." Daniel echoed his sister's earlier words. "I'm not cleaning up from your mess," Zack

complained. "That's not fair." "And I should clean up from Lana's?" Daniel retorted.

"You guys are so impossible! Seriously! Can't you just take responsibility for once? So who cares who made the mess? Mommy made you responsible for cleaning up the counter, Daniel, and Zack, she made you responsible for cleaning the table. That means that she wants you to do it," Lana said, banging her broom for emphasis.

"It's like I learnt in school this week," she said thoughtfully. "When Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge, G-d asked Adam why he ate from it when he had been specifically instructed not to. Adam blamed it on Eve, because she had convinced him to do it. So G-d asked Eve why she convinced him to do it and you know what she said?"

"No, what?" Daniel looked intrigued.

"She said that it was the snake's fault. None of them took responsibility for their actions! They just kept blaming it on other people. You guys are doing the same thing. You can't take responsibility! You're trying to get out of your job by blaming other people for the mess. That's not right!" Lana spoke heatedly, her hands gesticulating wildly.

Zack nodded slowly. "You're right, you know?" He began stacking up the plates littered on the table. "Yeah, what you're saying is really true." Daniel began wiping the dirty counter with a dishrag.

"That's the way to do it," Lana said, smiling. "You guys are great!" She resumed sweeping.

And when Mrs. Goldman walked back into the house a half hour later, she found the kitchen sparkling. "Wow! I'm so impressed! Thanks for taking responsibility for cleaning up!" she said, looking at her children proudly.

She had no idea why they looked at each other, and all burst out laughing.

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