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שבת..... *for Friday night* קדש

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 Sedra Emor

SELF AND SOCIETY

ONE OF THE CENTRAL CHALLENGES IN LIFE IS THE ATTEMPT TO BALANCE one's personal development with that of the society in which one lives. Ideally these work smoothly in harmony. However, sometimes there seems to be conflict. The Sedra¹ provides us with an insight into this perennial challenge.

The Sedra tells us that on the second day of Pesach a special offering of a measure of barley is brought to the Temple, and from that day onwards “you should count for yourselves”², day by day, seven full weeks, which of course make forty nine days. Then the fiftieth day is the Shavuot festival.

The measure of barley is called an Omer, and so this counting is termed the “counting of the Omer”. It takes place every evening after nightfall, and a blessing is made. The spiritual significance of this is that, having escaped from Egypt, where we had sunk to almost the lowest level of crass immorality, we attempt to improve ourselves, step by step. This functions as a personal preparation for receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, an event which took place on the sixth of Sivan.

The Talmud points out that the key words are: “you should count *for yourselves*”³. It is not enough to rely on the central Beth Din, the

High Court, to do the counting for us. Each individual person should count for themselves. Unlike all other festivals, which are fixed by the Jewish Calendar, Shavuot is defined as falling on the fiftieth day of the counting of the Omer by *each individual*.

This means, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, that each one of us is responsible for counting our own set of forty nine days, with Shavuot falling on the fiftieth day. Each individual works on himself or herself, individually, going through a period of spiritual preparation. Ideally, the climax coincides with the moment of the Giving of the Torah on the Sixth of Sivan.

So far, so good: the individual and the wider Jewish community are in perfect step together. But what happens if a person crosses the International Date Line during the period of Counting the Omer? They lose or gain a day, and in their own personal counting of the Omer they are now out of step with the local community. The individual reaches Shavuot on a different day from those around him.

In practice, this means that many observant Jews do their best to avoid crossing the Date Line during the Omer period. However, what does it mean spiritually? The possibility of a person being out of step with society means that his or her personal Shavuot is not on the Sixth of Sivan, the day of the Giving of the Torah. It is on the fifth or the seventh. Even so, despite being out of step with the community, through working on one's own spiritual fulfilment, one achieves one's own fiftieth day, the Divine response to one's 49 days of effort.

However, there is also a further dimension of Torah which is beyond a person's individual endeavour. This is expressed on the Sixth of Sivan, when the community as a whole relives the Giving of the Torah at Sinai. Ideally, one tries to be in step, so as to experience fully this higher dimension of Torah together with everyone else. But it does not always happen that way.

Hence we see that indeed, we do have to develop ourselves as individuals. However, while doing so, we also have to do our best to relate to the wider community around us⁴. Who said it is hard to be a Jew? Not at all! Just a bit, well, *complicated*.

I. Leviticus chs.21-24. 2. Lev.23:15. 3. Menahot 65b. 4. Freely based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.3, pp.998-1001.

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SEDRA EMOR

KIDDUSH HASHEM – SANCTIFYING G-D’S NAME

Ruth and David were on the bus on the way from an exhausting morning shopping with their mother in the sales. It was a hot day, and the bus seemed to be fuller than ever.

They had been lucky to find a seat, and they sank down gratefully, mopping their hot brows. More and more people were coming on the bus, and there were now no seats left. David saw an elderly lady hobble on, looking exhausted.

Should he offer her a seat - he was so tired! But so was the old lady... He got up, and pointed to the empty seat. The grateful smile he received compensated a little for his aching legs, but not much.

When they got off the bus his mother said to him: “David, I was very proud to see that. It was a big Kiddush Hashem”. David looked puzzled.

“I know what Kiddush Hashem is!” exclaimed Ruth proudly. “It means Sanctifying G-d’s Name. It’s when you do something good and people know you are Jewish. My teacher told me that Kiddush Hashem is the Mitzvah to show people that G-d is holy.”

How do we do that by giving someone a seat on the bus?” asked David, still puzzled.

“Well,” said Ruth, “since we are G-d’s special people, people look at us and see how we are behaving. They think that surely we must be doing what G-d wants. If we do something good, it reflects on the whole Jewish people and on our holy Torah. So that is called Sanctifying G-d’s Name, Kiddush Hashem.”

“What about if we do something *not* good?” asked David, remembering an incident a week earlier, when he and two school friends had a rather loud argument on the bus.

“Oh,” said Ruth, “that’s the opposite. If we are doing something not nice - like shouting in the streets, or being rude to people, that makes people think that that is how Jewish people behave and that is what our Torah teaches us. That is called Chillul Hashem, Profaning G-d’s Name.”

“You are quite right,” said their mother. She actually had heard about the way David was involved in an argument on the bus, because one of her neighbours had seen it and was very shocked. Now she just said encouragingly “Yes, you are right, but if we are behaving nicely - like when David stood up on the bus, then that makes people see that G-d’s Name is holy.”

David felt pleased. “Hey!” he said. “I remember I also heard something about Kiddush Hashem. If someone gives up their life for Judaism, like in the olden days or the Holocaust, or a soldier defending Israel, this is also called Kiddush Hashem”.

“You are quite right”, said his mother. “One can die for Kiddush Hashem, and one can also *live* for Kiddush Hashem.”

“Yes, if one can,” said Ruth. “To live, and to help other people. I think that’s what G-d wants....”

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