



58

## EDUCATING ONESELF AND OTHERS

**A** CONTINUOUS LIFE PROCESS IS 'EDUCATION' BOTH OF ONESELF and of others. Each individual is growing, exploring, discovering - throughout his or her life. At the same time, each person has a responsibility to help in the task to educate others.

The themes of education and growth are expressed in the Sedra<sup>1</sup>, not only as regards its content, but also the time of year when it is read, between Pesach and Shavuot.

Let us start with the content. The Sedra begins with a series of laws concerning the Cohanim, the Priests of the Jewish people. A Cohen is specially holy, and therefore special rules apply to him. For example, in normal circumstances he is not permitted to come near the dead<sup>2</sup>.

The Hebrew text uses a double expression. G-d instructs Moses to "say to the Priests, the sons of Aaron, and you should say to them they should not become impure from the dead..." The term 'say' is repeated. Rashi explains that this repetition is in order to convey to us the responsibility of an adult towards a child: he must not let the child Cohen become impure from contact with the dead.

Citing this passage the Sages broaden the idea: in general, there is an emphasis that adults should teach children to observe the laws of the Torah<sup>3</sup>. The entire Jewish people can be considered Cohanim because it is described in the Torah as a 'Kingdom of Priests'<sup>4</sup>. All

adults are involved in the task to transmit the special responsibility entailed in being Jewish to the next generation. Further, this includes the duty to teach those who are 'children' only as regards their Jewish knowledge. In other respects they may be mature and accomplished adults!

The theme of education and development is also expressed later in the Sedra when it describes the annual cycle of the Jewish festivals. These clearly have a strong educational content in themselves, and particularly through the fact that they tell the history of the Jewish people: on Pesach we left Egypt, then fifty days later we received the Torah expressed in the festival of Shavuot. Each year we relive this experience.

This was a process of development embracing the entire Jewish people together. Our Jewish consciousness was minimal while we were in Egypt, where for two centuries we had been downtrodden slaves. Then we left, inspired by Moses. As we travelled through the wilderness towards Sinai, day by day our understanding and sense of purpose increased. To an ever increasing level we knew who we were and where we were going, literally 'counting the days' till we reached Mount Sinai and received the Torah.

The Sedra instructs us to re-enact this counting<sup>5</sup>. In fact, Sedra Emor is always read at this time of year between Pesach and Shavuot when we 'Count the Omer' day by day. This signifies not only counting successive days but also the quest to improve and advance, developing further as individuals and as a nation, the Priests of humanity.

What is our educational goal? To reach the time described by our Prophets when 'the world will be filled with knowledge of G-d, as the waters cover the sea...'<sup>6</sup>

1 . Leviticus chs.21-24. 2. Unless the deceased is a very close relative, or in a case when there is no-one else who can bury the body. 3. See Yevamot 114a and the discussion and sources in *Likkutei Sichot* vol.7 p.147ff. 4. Exodus 9:6. 5. Lev.23:15. 6. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.2, pp.679-80 and *Sefer HaSichot* 5750 pp.443-5.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

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SEDRA EMOR

**DEAR BENNY...**

My name is Samuel, my friends call me Sam. I am 12 years old and I am in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I live in Elizabeth New Jersey and I go to the Hebrew academy school. My English teacher gave me your e-mail address to-day and told me that you are interested in being my pen pal by e-mail. Do you want to be my pen pal?

I like to go fishing with my dad and I like to play soccer, do you like to play soccer or should I call it football? I hear that in England you guys play a lot of football. I am on my school's team. Does your school have a football team?

Yesterday we were having a game against the 7<sup>th</sup> graders and they were winning by 3 to 0. By half time I was really fed up. You see we have this new kid in the class and because the coach wanted him to feel "a part of it" he put him on the whole time, the problem was whenever he got the ball he would kick it really hard and it would go to the other team. The coach didn't seem to get angry and just before he sent us back on he said to David "Wow that is a really powerful shot you got there son, now when you get the ball next time just slow down a little and look for your team mate and pass it."

The truth is that I didn't think it would work, not this time. I thought "that kid doesn't even know how to kick the ball please coach just send him off" but the interesting thing was that after the compliment the coach gave him he started to play much better and we actually started scoring. I even scored one goal. In the end the 7<sup>th</sup> graders won 4 to 3. But I got a lot just by seeing how that one compliment changed the whole game.

The funny thing was that just after that in the Sedra class Mr. Moses gave his lesson on saying nice things to people. And he said that actually this is the message of this week's Sedra because the Sedra is called '*EMOR*' which in Hebrew means 'say' .

However, he said, there is another word '*DABER*' which also means 'say', just it is a harder way of speaking like a command as opposed to '*EMOR*' which is a softer way of saying it, 'a nicer way of speaking' and this, he said, looking me in the eyes, teaches us the importance of saying only nice things to other people, because every one has some good inside them and some bad, and when you say something bad in front of some one he just thinks "Oh I'm bad anyway, so I might as well not study, or I might as well not be nice to people..."

And then he said even when you are not in front of the person, when you say it to some one else or even just think it to your self, it changes the way you and other people look at him, and "how we look at something changes the way we act towards it," but on the other hand if we only think well about other people then that causes us to talk in a better way and that causes us to act better and all that brings out the best in him, changing him to actually become a better person.

After Mr. Moses said all that it really got me thinking about the things we say to people, and when I got home I even tried it out. I complimented my sister on how she is such a nice person, and a little bit after that I asked her if I could borrow her new MP3 player and guess what - she said "yes".

Try this with your friends and write back to tell me what happens. Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Hoping to hear from you soon  
Your new e-mail pen pal  
Sam

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