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BRINGING LIGHT TO THE WORLD

JEWISH TEACHING OFTEN SPEAKS OF “LIGHT”. THE FIRST ACT OF CREATION IS expressed by the words “Let there be light”. However, as related in Genesis, the light of the beginning of Creation preceded the forming of the sun, the source of ordinary daylight. It was a higher order of light, beyond the normal physicality of the world. The Sages tell us this light served for the seven days of Creation, and then was hidden. Where was it hidden? In the Torah¹.

We live in an epoch when the idea that something is hidden somewhere provokes the strong desire to find its hiding place, to reveal it. Man has explored the depths of the sea, and, to some extent, the immensity of space. If there is a special radiance hidden in the Torah, how can we make access to it?

Through the *inner* dimension of the Torah. The presence of this inner dimension, revealing spiritual radiance and inspiration, is celebrated this Sunday. Sunday 9 May is "Lag B'Omer", the 33rd day of the counting of the Omer. This special day has several levels of meaning. One is the fact that it is the Yahrzeit of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the author of the sacred Zohar.

The word Zohar means ‘light’, and the Zohar is indeed a book of radiance, revealing the inspiration hidden in the Torah and in life. It tells us that our main task is “to transform darkness to light”. We face darkness in many different forms, including the darkness of our own negative qualities. The Torah gives us guidance as to how to deal with this

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darkness.

On one level of Torah, we learn how to avoid that which is negative in spiritual terms. This is through the basic laws of Judaism, which map out our spiritual pathway through the world. The laws tell us the actions to avoid, such as eating non-kosher food, and which we should strive to fulfil, such as lighting candles for Shabbat and the festivals, or putting on Tefilin on weekdays.

Then comes the Zohar, and the stream of books and teachings which explain and communicate its ideas, such as Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Tanya*, written two centuries ago. This aspect of Torah reveals the spiritual significance of the Commandments, and the fact that through them we draw holiness into the world. The world as we encounter it is often dark, in many ways: morally and spiritually. Yet our observance of traditional Jewish teaching draws light into the world and ultimately transforms all darkness into light.

The Zohar tells us "for us, it all depends on love". Indeed: love of G-d, and love of one's fellow. The two are connected, for the essence of another person is the Divine dimension within. The Sages tell us that the more one is aware of G-d, the closer the bond one is able to feel with other people. Conversely, genuine concern and love for others, bring a person closer to feel love of the Divine.

This is the inner secret of the Torah, which is revealed time and again: it all depends on love. The laws of the Torah, whether of kashrut or business ethics, have the inner purpose to reveal this love, in both its forms: love of one's fellow, and love of the Divine.

Lag B'Omer is celebrated with parades, outings for children and bonfires. All these events suggest *revelation*, bringing out of concealment². The radiance hidden in the Torah is openly disclosed, and when we consider the many Lag B'Omer parades and outings being celebrated round the globe, totalling hundreds of thousands or even millions of children, we feel that this radiance has reached the street and the countryside, and is transforming us and ultimately the whole world with its simple message of Redemption: it all depends on love.

1. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.10, p.7 ff, and *Torah Studies*,

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SEDRA EMOR

KIDDUSH HASHEM (Sanctification of 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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