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I'M LOOKING FOR *ME*

ARE WE ALL THE SAME? OBVIOUSLY NOT. EACH PERSON IS A UNIQUE individual. *We feel unique, although we often wonder exactly how our uniqueness should be expressed. Is it in the way we drive? The way we cook? The way we do business? Is it expressed in our Jewishness?*

'In our Jewishness?' one might ask. What on earth does that mean? Surely we're all Jewish the same way. You know, we all have the same rules to keep, the same Friday Night, the same Sedra of the week. What can be different? How could a person possibly find their own unique individuality through the fact of their being Jewish?

Well, let's see what we can learn from the Sedra¹. The Jewish people are poised to enter the Land of Israel. The Sedra describes the way the territory should be divided up among the different Tribes.

Each Tribe had a specific territory, and within that, each family were given their own patch of land.

Now, the description in the Bible of entering the Land of Israel and dividing it up has several levels of meaning. One of these concerns a person having a specific task in life. For each one of us, there is the challenge of entering the Land of Canaan and transforming it into the Holy Land of Israel.

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In Hebrew the term 'Canaan' implies something secular and materialistic². Our task as Jews is to enter this secular domain - which is the world of our ordinary daily life - and make it holy. However, each one of us has our own specific patch, different to that of everyone else.

One person has a rough mountainous region, another has fertile fields, another has a deep valley. The person who has the rocky mountain terrain has a quite different challenge to his neighbour who has a broad expanse of green fields.

Now, how is it decided which patch is yours? How do you discover your unique task? The Sedra tells us that the Land of Israel was divided up among the Tribes partly on rational grounds, and partly in a way which was quite beyond reason. One verse states that a family with more members should get a larger area of territory. That is obvious and reasonable. However, another verse says 'But you must divide the land by drawing lots'³.

Drawing lots implies something random, or putting it in another way, something which is decided by G-d. Each one of us has a special patch of the Land of Canaan, which we have to work on and transform. This is our life's task. This is defined by the combination of all our skills, good points and weaknesses.

We have to use our skills to best effect, and overcome our weaknesses. In this task each one of us is quite different to everyone else. There are aspects of our spiritual strengths and weaknesses which are easy to understand, and others which seem random, like drawing lots.

However, that is *me*, and this is the challenge G-d has given each of us - as a unique individual. Through each person facing this challenge on his or her individual patch, we help the Jewish people as a whole fulfil its total task: to reveal holiness in every aspect of life, so that the world becomes a true dwelling for the Divine⁴.

1. Numbers 25:10-30:1. 2. See Hosea 12:8 where the term 'Canaanite' means a deceitful merchant. 3. Numbers 26:54-5. 4. Based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.2, pp.346-8. See also *Torah Or*, beginning of Vayeshev.

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SEDRA PINCHAS

THE CRITIC AND THE ACTIVIST

It was the end of the ballet class and Esther had just finished her exercises at the bar. She glanced in the mirror and saw Leah running across the dance floor towards the teacher. Esther rolled her eyes. "There she goes again," she thought, "being all nice and helpful."

"Can I help you pack up, Miss Binder?" Leah started rolling up the exercise mats and putting them in the storage closets.

"Why are you looking so grumpy, Esther?" Esther's friend, Dena, asked as she knelt down to take off her ballet shoes.

"Well, it's just that there's a girl here who is always trying to be helpful to Miss Binder."

"But what's wrong with that, Esther?! That's a good thing, not something to be upset about!"

"But, Dena, she's only doing it so that she'll get the main role in the performance! She doesn't really care about helping. She just cares about herself!"

"How do you know why she's helping, Esther? Maybe she really loves to do good deeds. Maybe she really likes the teacher and wants to help her."

“It could be,” Esther said, “but I heard her saying that she wants to be the main dancer.”

“But, many of the girls here want the main role. Maybe she just has a good heart, Esther.”

“I guess so.” Esther didn’t sound convinced.

“Listen ,” Dena stood up beside her friend, “at least she’s doing a good deed, right? You don’t know why she’s doing it. You probably will never know the *real* reason. But at the end of the day, she’s doing something good.”

“But what’s so great about doing a good deed if you’re doing it for the wrong reasons?”

“Well, look at the Sedra. Pinchas did something for which he was criticized. When he killed Zimri and Kozbi, there were some people who thought that he did not do it for pure reasons. But we know that they were wrong. We know that he did it for G-d.”

“Yes, he was even rewarded for doing that, wasn’t he?”

“Yes. His motives were good even though it wasn’t clear to the rest of the people. But even if someone’s motives are not pure, at least they’ve done a good deed. After all, Miss Binder got helped while we just sat here talking!”

The two girls looked at each other, and at the same moment they jumped up and ran to help the teacher. They saw that that there were still some exercise mats left for them to roll up and put away.

Again they looked at each other, then at Leah who was still busy helping, and then at Miss Binder. All four, three girls and a young woman ballet teacher, exchanged a smile.

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