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UNITY OF OPPOSITES

THE QUEST FOR 'UNITY' IS CENTRAL, TO HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS. But it is generally very difficult to attain. The highly diverse Jewish people, who are counted in the Sedra¹ in all their different Tribes and groups of Tribes, provides a clear example of the origin of thousands of years of diversity. Even in the Biblical narratives they were often arguing with each other. However, the Sages tell us that shortly before the Giving of the Torah, this very multifaceted and conflict-ridden people achieved unity².

In fact, this is the deep nature of Torah. Teachings by the Sages concerning the Festival of Shavuot, which begins on Tuesday night and celebrates the Giving of the Torah, give us a little more insight into the Jewish concept of unity. It is not just a matter of being "one". Jewish unity means being diverse, or even opposite. And then: one.

The Talmud³ speaks about the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai in an intriguing way, enumerating a series of "threes", as follows:

"The triple Torah was given to the triple people by the third person on the third day of the third month."

Why is the Torah described as "triple"? Because it consists of the three sections Torah, Prophets, and Writings. Similarly the Jewish people include the three groups of the Cohen, the Levi and the Israelite. Moses is called the third person because he was the

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third child, born after his siblings Miriam and Aaron. The Torah was given on the third day of preparation, in the month of Sivan which is third from Nisan.

This emphasis on "three" seem strange when we consider that Judaism stresses oneness - the oneness of G-d, of the Jewish people, of the holy Torah. One would have thought that the theme of Shavuot should rather have been based on the concept of One. Yet this emphasis on "three" helps us understand more clearly what One-ness really is.

Chassidic teachings explain that the ultimate unity is not simple oneness, but the combination of two apparent opposites into a third entity. This third entity expresses the true, underlying unity of the two opposites which brought it into being.

If G-d were only interested in "pure" oneness, He would not have created the world. There would have been only the utter Oneness of G-d, the Infinite. In fact He *did create the world, a "Second" entity, which at first glance seems to conceal the Divine.* Then comes the process reaching a truly higher level of one-ness. Because the unity which is not challenged in any way is not as deep nor as total as the unity in which opposites are brought together.

Our task is then, through a long process of purification and elevation, to unify this crass material world with G-d: and thus we achieve true Unity, the world which in every detail expresses G-d. This third stage is achieved through the individual, and the Jewish people as a whole, following the teachings of the Torah. It is for this reason that there are so many "threes" associated with the Giving of the Torah, and so much diversity or even conflict in life.

All is a setting of the stage for the Jewish people to achieve the goal of unifying the whole world with G-d, thereby revealing the profundity of G-d's one-ness and indeed, the one-ness of all existence with G-d. Hence we were given the Torah, which we celebrate on Wednesday morning in the Synagogue, with the reading of the Ten Commandments, re-enacting a preparing for a time of unity for all humanity with the coming of the Messiah.

1. Numbers 1:1-4:20. 2. Rashi to Exodus 19:2. 3. Talmud Shabbat 88a

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SEDRA BEMIDBAR - SHAVUOT

THE GUARANTORS

"I'm so excited for Shavuot," Dina sighed happily, as she swung back and forth on the swing. "I can't wait to hear the Ten Commandments read in the Synagogue on Wednesday morning. My teacher said we should make sure to go."

Her brother Benjy, who was lying in the hammock, disagreed. "What I really like is Mummy's amazing cheesecakes - and those yummy Blintzes. Anyway, we're only kids so it doesn't matter if we hear the Ten Commandments or not. The main thing is for adults to hear them."

"That's actually not true, my teacher told us that Shavuot is a special festival for children." Dina said. "Really? Why?" queried her brother.

"Well, many, many years ago, G-d was wondering if He should give the Torah to the Jewish people. Would they take proper care of it? Would they keep its commandments properly?

"So G-d asked the Jewish people: 'Who will be the guarantor that you will keep the Torah?' The Jewish people answered: 'How about our forefathers, Abraham,

Isaac and Jacob?'. But G-d could not accept them as Guarantors, so the Jewish people then suggested the prophets. 'They'll make sure we keep the Torah.'
"G-d did not accept them either.

"Finally the Jews said, 'How about the children? They can make sure that the Torah will not be abandoned. They can be our guarantor.' G-d accepted this idea, and the Jewish people received the Torah."

"Wow! So I suppose that means it's our responsibility to make sure the Torah is being kept?" Benjy said, inspired.

"Yup! And think of it - we have a greater power than Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the Prophets, because they weren't able to be the guarantors, and we are."

"So we have to make sure we know what the Torah is talking about - so I suppose that means we have to go to Synagogue, and hear the Ten Commandments. Ooh, I'd better make sure to tell my friends to be there too!"

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