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RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 3 June 2011 - 1 Sivan 5771
 Sedra Naso - Shavuot

A SENSE OF UPLIFT


A SENSE OF UPLIFT IS A VALUABLE ASSET TO OUR LIVES. The sense of moving higher and higher, whether in a plane, a balloon or perhaps as one takes step after step climbing up a mountain. This relates both to our Sedra¹ and to the forthcoming Shavuot festival (Wednesday and Thursday).

The Sedra is called Naso which literally means 'Lift up'. G-d tells Moses to finish counting the Levites, completing the census which began in last week's Sedra. The phrase which is translated "count" literally means: "lift up the heads".

Everything in the Torah has many levels of meaning. This year our Sedra is read before the Festival of Shavuot, which celebrates receiving the Torah thousands of years ago. The Torah has fashioned us into the unique Jewish people. Its laws set the pattern for our daily lives, such as Shabbat, Festivals, kashrut, Mezuzot on the doors.

To get the greatest benefit from the Torah, however, we have to study it ourselves.

The fact that the Sedra called "Lift up the heads" comes shortly before the Festival of the Giving of the Torah is telling us that Torah



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study can give every one of us, man and woman, a beautiful sense of uplift. In this there is a double effect: on the one hand we feel uplifted beyond ordinary daily activities, on the other we feel empowered to see those daily activities in a more spiritual and meaningful way.

This is expressed also in the fact that the Sedra concerns counting the Levites. In Temple times, unlike most people, the Levites did not work the land. Their role was to be spiritual teachers and guides, and they served in the Temple. Generally, we understand that a Levite is simply someone whose father is a Levite. However the Rambam tells us that certain aspects of the concept of the Levite can apply to anyone.

He writes: “Not only the Tribe of Levi, but any individual whose spirit prompts him to separate himself and stand before G-d and to serve Him, disregarding ordinary material concerns - that person attains the highest level of holiness”².

This applies to every man or woman. When we dedicate ourselves to spiritual things, whether activity on behalf of the community, helping others, or Torah study - we go beyond the limitations and frustrations of ordinary life. We are *uplifted*.

This sense of uplift does not take us away from the world: it enables us to help the world even more than ever. With the spiritual input that we have gained, we are more able to make the world a better place.

In practical terms, the Sedra is telling us that since we are about to receive the Torah afresh on Shavuot, let us determine to find ways of studying Torah to get the spiritual uplift it provides, making us all into “Levites”.

A study session at some point during the week, our own personal timetable of Torah study, a phone-in Torah Study line³ or an Internet site with Torah teachings⁴ gives us a sense of uplift which we can then translate into positive action, lifting up the world around us as well. Enjoy!⁵

1. Numbers 4:21-7:89. 2. *Mishneh Torah*, end of “Laws of the Sabbatical Year”. 3. Try Tel-Torah, 020 8905 3770 or 0845 120 9770. 4. Visit www.chabadresearch.net or www.chabad.org. 5. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Hitva’aduyot* 5750, vol.3 p.272 ff.

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SEDRA NASO – SHAVUOT

HUMILITY AND PRIDE

“How was school today, Debbi and Leah?” their father asked the twins.

Debbi just looked despondent but Leah exclaimed “Oh, great. We got our maths tests back. I did the best in the whole class. I got 100%! Mrs. Brown says I'm the best student she's ever had. Debbi only got 75%.”

She looked at her father hopefully. He usually gave them some money whenever they got more than 90% in a test, but he didn't look pleased now.

“What's the matter, Daddy?”

“Have you been learning about Shavuot in school, Leah?”

“Of course.”

“Well, did you learn why the Torah was given on Mount Sinai, which was a rather low and insignificant mountain, and not on another one which was very high?”

Leah flushed. She realised what her father was getting at.

“Oh, because all the other mountains boasted about how beautiful or big they were, so therefore the Torah should be given on them, and only Mount Sinai said nothing, so it was chosen, in order to teach us humility.” She sighed, and fell silent.

After a minute she said, "I'm sorry. It's so hard not to boast... And does that mean I should never tell you if I get a good mark in a test?"

"Of course you should," answered her father. "I like to know how you're doing. But there's a way of telling us - and you chose a pretty boastful way."

Leah began making up in her mind non-boastful ways of saying she got 100%. It wasn't very easy!

Her father continued: "You also have to remember that although you can feel proud of yourself that you studied hard to get a good result, you should also acknowledge that you were lucky enough that Hashem gave you good brains which help you do maths well. Not all the credit goes to you!"

"And also the right questions for you came up on the test!" Debbi said. "I usually do quite well, but this time three of the questions were on topics which the class learnt while I had flu!"

"But..." said Leah, "we also learned in school that the name of the Sedra, Naso means to lift up. The teacher said we should lift up our hearts and be proud and confident that we have the Torah. Shavuot is the most wonderful time when Hashem gave us the Torah."

"Yes," replied her father, "but it doesn't mean you have to boast about getting a better grade than your sister".

"Hmmm, I suppose I'd better work on being a bit more humble," said Leah. "Now, if I manage, can you be proud that you are humble?!"

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