


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 15 June 2012 - 25 Sivan 5772
 Sedra Shelach


CREATING BORDERS

SHOULD THERE BE BORDERS, BARRIERS, DISTINCTIONS? OUR IMMEDIATE response may be “no, everything should be one, unified together”. Of course, the ideal of unity is a central goal in a spiritual perspective on humanity. Unity for the Jewish people is a justly repeated theme; this is also the personal quest of each individual in the varied aspects of his or her life. The ideal of unity is explored repeatedly Jewish teachings, particularly in Chassidic thought.

And yet... What is the route to this unity? Is it simply a matter of removing all the barriers?

One of the laws in the Sedra¹ suggests that we should actually *create* a border, a distinction. Now, Jewish teaching is many faceted and multi-dimensional. The instruction to create a border in one area of life is explained by our Sages as suggesting that borders are relevant also in other areas of life. Let us try to investigate!

The law in question concerns the baking of bread². Imagine the dough in the kneading bowl. Do you prefer white flour, or wholemeal? Wonderful, living dough. It is all one splendid unit, and it is going to be kneaded into one or more beautiful loaves of bread, each as delicious and inviting as the other.



Celebrating the Wedding of Yossi and Chaya Cadaner 'ש'
 25 Sivan 5772

At this point the person who is baking is instructed to create a separation and distinction in the dough. He or she removes a portion of the dough and declares it to be *sacred*. In former times this would be given to a Cohen (Priest) to eat in a state of ritual purity; nowadays it is burned, because no-one can eat it. The sacred portion of dough is called *challah*, which literally means ‘choice part’. It gives its name to the Shabbat loaves, because especially when these are baked, *challah* should be separated. In fact it is separated from all kosher bread and cake, when made in sufficient quantity³.

Why create this distinction? Why declare that a part of the dough is holy, and can be eaten only by a Cohen, while the rest of the dough remains ordinary, and can be eaten by anyone? The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains: because this comes to teach us that distinctions and borders are indeed a significant aspect of Judaism. We want unity, but the path to it is by maintaining correct borders⁴.

There are borders between the Cohen, the Levi and the Israelite, expressed by the order of calling them up to the Torah. There are borders between men and women, signified by the *mechitza*, the screen between them during prayer in the synagogue, the laws of modesty, and so on. There are borders between the Jew and the non-Jew, such as the prohibition on intermarriage. There are borders between the sacred Sabbath and the other days of the week.

The first trespass over borders was when Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, and gave some to Adam. For this reason, the taking of *challah*, establishing a healthy border in something so innocent as dough, is particularly the role of the woman, the latter day Eve.

Through these borders, genuine and lasting unity is achieved: the sacred elevates the ordinary, Shabbat pours blessing into the weekdays, wives and husbands are truly joined, and the unified Jewish people bring blessing to all humanity.

1. Numbers chs.13-15. 2. Numbers 15:20-21. 3. If the flour in the dough weighs as much as 1230 gm (2 lbs 11oz) one separates *challah* (a piece of dough weighing one ounce) but without a blessing. If it weighs 1666.6 gm (3 lbs 10 ³/₄ oz) or more, one makes a blessing before separating it, as found in the Siddur. 4. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 2, pp. 584-8.

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SEDRA SHELACH

BEING GRATEFUL

“What’s for supper?” demanded Benjy, throwing his school bag on the hall floor and coming into the kitchen. He lifted the lid off the pot on the stove and sniffed.

“Yuk! I hate broccoli - you know that, Mum. Why did you make it? Oh no, and quiche! My second worst food, after broccoli. What am I supposed to eat?”

“There’s bread and butter,” his mother said calmly.

“Brown bread!” Benjy said in tones of great disgust.

“Mummy, why don’t you ever make burgers and chips, like Daniel’s mother just made? I should have stayed there to eat - she asked me to. His mother always makes much nicer food than you do.”

His mother said “You know, Benjy, I’m sorry that you don’t like what I’ve cooked. But that’s not really the right way to talk to me. You sound very ungrateful.”

Ungrateful? Him? Benjy thought about that. Was he ungrateful?

He remembered that they had been learning in the Sedra lesson about the spies who were sent to spy out the land of

Israel, and how they had come back with a bad report. They said it would be too hard to conquer the people there. At once all the Jewish people had started complaining.

Moses had been very upset, because here they were, having just seen all these amazing miracles performed on their behalf – such as the ten Plagues in Egypt, the splitting of the Red Sea, the Manna, and the giving of the Torah - and now they were ungratefully complaining that the land which G-d had promised them wasn't good enough.

As a punishment, the Jewish people had to wander in the desert for the next forty years. The people who had complained never did enter the Promised Land, only their children did.

In school there had been a discussion about the bad effects of being ungrateful. Benjy had put up his hand and had spoken about the importance of gratitude. The teacher had been very impressed.

But now his own mother was accusing him of being ungrateful. Could this be true? Benjy suddenly felt very guilty. His mother worked hard to make food that was healthy and that everyone liked, and here he was complaining.

Benjy pulled his chair up to the table and said sheepishly to his mother:

"You know, that broccoli doesn't look so bad after all - and thank you for putting mushrooms in the quiche - you know how much I like them!"

"Thank you, Benjy," said his mother, who wasn't fooled, and could see the face he made as he put the broccoli in his mouth. "Still," she announced, "I think tomorrow we'll be having burgers and chips!"

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