


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 25 March 2011 - 19 Adar II 5771
 Sedra Shemini

KEEPING THE BALANCE

ONE OF THE MOST INTRIGUING INCIDENTS IN THE BIBLE is in this week's Sedra¹. After months of artistry and labour, the Sanctuary had been completed. A seven day ceremony followed, to inaugurate it as the spiritual centre of the Jewish people. But on the eighth day something tragic took place.

Two of Aaron's four sons came forward with an offering of incense. Their offering is described by the text as "alien fire which had not been commanded"². Immediately they were struck down by a thin stream of fire which came from the Holy of Holies. They were dead, but their bodies and clothes were unharmed. Despite his immense grief, "Aaron kept silent" (10:3). From then on his two remaining sons acted as Cohanim.

Why did this happen? What does it teach us?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the problem with the two sons of Aaron was their yearning for the sacred. This was so intense that they did not live normal lives. They had refused to get married, wishing totally to devote themselves to matters of the spirit rather than to have to deal with the practicalities of life.

When the Sanctuary was completed their ecstasy got the better of them. They brought an offering which had not been commanded,



Dedicated by Mrs Tzipora Sufrin ז"ל, to the memory and merit of her father k"zila etk rycus hfsm w w v j "vrv

without consulting Moses. The result was that the fragile balance of soul and body was upset. Their souls left them in an ecstasy of love. But they had not fulfilled their true task in life.

We need the spiritual dimension, and we also need the practical. The combination of the two is true Jewish harmony. Our most fulfilled relationship with holiness is when we discover G-dliness both in spiritual terms, such as through inspired prayer and Torah study, or the special Shabbat atmosphere, and also by living in the world, working for a living, marriage, and all the activities of daily life, discovering the Divine in every detail of existence³.

KASHRUT WITH A SMILE

The Sedra also contains the basic principle of Kashrut: some animals, birds and fish may be eaten and others are forbidden⁴. Elsewhere in the Torah we find rules about special slaughter, not to eat blood and not to mix milk and meat.

One of the effects of the Kashrut laws has been to help maintain the distinctive identity of the Jew. Here too there is the concept of a balance. On the one hand we have the responsibility to be “a light to the nations” and communicate ethical and spiritual values. On the other: this must not be, and cannot be, at the expense of our identity as Jews. If we lose that special identity we also lose our power to contribute at the highest level to humanity as a whole. As Jews and as part of humanity, the laws of Kashrut help us maintain this delicate balance.

In practical terms, in the business and professional world, this sometimes presents a challenge. What happens at that very important luncheon? Jewish belief is: there is a positive way for the Jew to observe every detail of Jewish law and also to play his or her full part in society. It might demand some extra effort, including good humour. However, we can be confident that in our time society is sufficiently diverse, and understanding, to allow a Jew to express his or her Jewishness freely, and with a smile.

1. Leviticus chs.9-11. 2. Lev.10:1. 3. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 3, 987-993.

4. Lev.ch.11.

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SEDRA SHEMINI

GOOD FOR THE BODY AND THE SOUL

“Chocolate chips.... here we go”. Leah pulled a pack of dark chocolate chips into the basket. “Now we can make the biscuits!” Shira also had a packet of chocolate chips in her hand, from a different company. “Let’s take these instead,” she said. “These have a Kosher symbol. I recognise it.”

“But Shira, we’re just making biscuits! What difference does it make if there *is* a little Kosher sign on the packet?” Leah asked, slightly irritated. The crumpled recipe in her pocket beckoned invitingly.

“Look, the others might be on the Beth Din list of kosher products. But we would have to look it up. When there’s a reliable Kosher symbol on the pack you know it’s okay.” Shopping baskets in hand, the girls headed to the checkout.

Some time later, the aroma of freshly baked biscuits filled the kitchen, and the two friends were staring at the radio clock intently. There was a small beep as the digits changed. The girls jumped.

“Six o’clock! They baked for exactly 12 minutes... they’re ready!” Leah shouted as they exchanged high fives. Shira grabbed the well worn oven mitts, and with an ear-splitting grin, opened the oven. Her grin faded as she saw the contents of the cookie tray. Instead of rows of flat neat chocolate chip circles, the dough had risen and now overflowed from the pan like a potato kugel.

"That's... not really what my Aunt Sharon's biscuits look like...." Shira finally said worriedly.

"Yeah, it does look rather odd... I'm sure it tastes fine though!" Leah said brightly. Too brightly. She knew something was wrong. It didn't taste fine though, and the small pieces they tasted were quickly spat out.

It was two dejected friends that mournfully buried their chocolate chip biscuit attempt in the bin. Sitting slumped in their stools, they mulled over what went wrong. A stained, crumpled recipe was on the table between them.

"Two cups flour, one cup sugar.... Hey, isn't that the sugar we bought? Why is the packet still closed?" Leah asked.

"Oh, there was some in the cupboard. Here" She pulled a plastic container down from the shelf.

"That's the sugar? Oh!" Shira laughed. "Leah, that's not sugar! That's baking soda! It's really bitter and makes things rise!"

"Whoops!" frowning at her clumsy mistake, Leah hoped Shira wouldn't be too mad. But Shira just smiled thoughtfully.

"It's funny how the sugar and baking powder look so similar," she said, "but have such a different effect! I guess if the recipe says to put in sugar, you've got to put in sugar!"

"Yeah," said Leah. Then she began thinking about the chocolate chip incident. "You know, I guess keeping Kosher is the same kind of thing. It might look the same, but if it's not Kosher it has the wrong effect."

"Yes", said Shira. "As far as the soul is concerned, it would be like using baking soda instead of sugar. Or worse!"

"You're right. So let's start again, and make sure it's good both for the soul, and for the body. Real tasty Kosher chocolate chip cookies!"

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