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הב

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 21 March 2014 - 19 Adar II 5774
Sedra Shemini

SILENCE

IN THE COURSE OF LIFE SOMETIMES STARTLING AND SHOCKING EVENTS TAKE PLACE. Some might be close at hand, affecting people we know. Yet we learn how to respond to such tragedies from our sacred Torah, which tells of events happening thousands of years ago, and of responses which are eternally relevant.

In the Sedra¹ a very unexpected and tragic event is described. At the moment of the final consecration of the Sanctuary, two of Aaron's sons were killed. Without consulting Moses, they let themselves be overcome by enthusiasm and came too close to the infinite Power of the Divine in the Holy of Holies. In effect, they died as a result of their own unbridled ecstasy.

The Sedra describes how Moses comforted Aaron, and that Aaron accepted what had happened: "And Aaron was silent"². The power to be silent at certain moments of life and of history is an important strength. It expresses the awareness that G-d is Infinite, and cannot be encapsulated in our human conceptions of what should take place.

Language, speech, signifies comprehensibility. Melody is beyond language, expressing moods which words cannot describe; and silence is yet higher.

The Talmud tells of a case when Moses himself was told by G-d to be silent. G-d showed him in a vision all future generations

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of the Jewish people, and the leaders of each generation. Moses was greatly impressed by the wisdom of Rabbi Akiva. Then he saw the way the Romans tortured him to death. “Is this the reward of his Torah knowledge?” Moses asked. G-d answered: “Be silent, thus it arose in My thought”.

Before the event, assuming there is some warning, one must do everything possible to prevent tragedy. Once it has happened, through our spiritual “silence” we reach a special closeness to the Divine. Rashi tells us that because Aaron was silent, he was rewarded by G-d speaking directly to him later in the Sedra (10:8).

However, this silence is only in terms of our intimate, personal relationship with G-d. In terms of our practical lives, even the worst and most horrific event is a call to action³. It may be a call to do all one can to alleviate the suffering which has been caused. It may be a call to rebuild homes which have been lost.

Or it may be a call to ‘rebuild’ in a more spiritual way. The Jewish people have confronted a physical Holocaust ending sixty nine years ago and also various forms of spiritual damage through intermarriage and assimilation. How do we respond to this? Not through passive silence, however mystical that might be, but with supreme effort, action and joy, through which we try to help every individual Jew turn towards their Jewish heritage and rebuild Jewish family life and Jewish knowledge, round the globe.

Today, as Jews we also face onslaught in Israel and elsewhere through political action, through media attacks and also sickening violence. Here not silence, but the right voice defending Israel’s right to exist in security and peace is required: to exist healthily, with secure borders.

So we see that in the case of any kind of tragedy, G-d forbid, there is a time for “silence” like that of Aaron. Yet there is also a call to respond, through action, love and determination, and thus to rebuild a shattered world. Through this we too, like Aaron, will merit Divine revelation. G-d will bring the Messiah, rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, and bring everlasting peace to the world.

1. Leviticus chapters 9-11. 2. Leviticus 10:3. 3. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Iggrot Kodesh*, vol. 13, letter 4506.

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SEDRA SHEMINI

A THEME FROM THE SEDRA

Rachel was walking to school together with her friend Michelle. 'I don't know what to do!' exclaimed Rachel in exasperation. 'What's wrong?' asked Michelle sympathetically. 'I have to do a Current Affairs report, and I have no idea what to write!' explained Rachel. Michelle felt sympathetic. 'What do you have to write about? Maybe I can give you an idea'.

Rachel's face lit up, 'Yes, maybe you can. I have to write something about animal diseases, Like Foot and Mouth disease and bovine tuberculosis'. 'Hmm...' Michelle thought for a minute. 'You know, I think I might have an idea for you'. Rachel looked interested. 'Ok, go on'. She usually liked Michelle's ideas.

'Well last night my mother was reading to my little sister about this week's Torah Portion, which discusses the different species of animals; the kosher ones and the non-kosher ones, and all the signs that tell them apart. If an animal has split hooves and chews the cud then it is kosher, and if not, then it is not kosher!'

'But,' said Rachel, with a puzzled look on her face, 'what does that have to do with my report?' 'Simple!' exclaimed Michelle, 'you can write a report on whether the animal being kosher makes a difference to how much they might be affected by the disease!' 'But who said that there is any connection?' said Rachel, very puzzled.

'There may not be a connection, but there might be, and that's what you're going to discuss in your report', explained Michelle.

'That seems a bit difficult,' said Rachel. 'As far as I know, there is no connection at all. Both kosher and non-kosher animals can get these diseases. In fact, by definition, Foot and Mouth disease affects cattle, and cattle are kosher...'

Michelle wrinkled her nose. She felt stumped. Rachel was right. But then, what could her friend write about?

'I know!' she said suddenly. 'Write about animal diseases in the Bible and in Jewish history. I am sure you can find some information about it! The school just got that very interesting new CD Rom Jewish Encyclopedia.'

'Oh! That's an idea!' Rachel said. 'I'm going to start working on that in break-time'.

'Guess what!' Rachel cried out happily to Michelle, looking really flushed and excited. It was a week later and they were, again, on the way to school. 'What happened?' asked Michelle in interest.

'You know that idea that you gave me last week, about animal diseases in the Bible? Well, I started off with the plague which killed the animals in Egypt, and then I went on to all kinds of interesting things in the Talmud. And I also have a whole thing about what the Rabbis said when inoculation and vaccination began for animals in the 19th century, because the health of the animal is an important part of Kashrut.'

'Well done!' said Michelle. 'And I got a very good mark for it,' said Rachel. 'It just shows that if you start with the Sedra of the Week you go in the right direction'.

'Is that the kosher way of getting a good mark?' joked Michelle. 'Yes!' said Rachel. The two girls laughed and headed off to the ice cream shop to buy some kosher ice cream...

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