



GETTING THE SLAVERY OUT OF US...

THE UNDERSTANDABLE REACTION AFTER PESACH IS TO RELAX. THERE WAS a beautiful festival, now we can take it easy for a while. However, Jewish teaching tends to have a rather more dynamic perspective on life. Pesach was a step to freedom. Now we have to discover new levels of freedom. Pesach provided the key. Now we have to use that key in order to open one door after another...

This period of discovery is called the time of 'Counting the Omer'. What does this mean? The 'Omer' is a measure of produce rather like an English 'bushel'. The Torah tells us that on the second day of Pesach an Omer measure of barley should be brought to the Temple as an offering. It was to be the first offering from the new crop. This ceremony signifies the start of a period of 49 days culminating on the 50th day, the festival of Shavuot¹.

Shavuot may be thought of nowadays primarily in terms of flowers and cheesecake. In fact it celebrates the time when the Jewish people came face to face with G-d at Mount Sinai. This came 50 days after leaving Egypt. The 49 days in between were marked by a series of spiritual leaps, transformations, changes of consciousness: doors being opened to higher dimensions of freedom.

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Just imagine! A slave has no legal sense of his own identity. His tragic life is totally controlled by others, Yet in order for a person to meet with G-d at Sinai and hear “I am the L-rd your G-d” (actually ‘thy G-d’ in the singular) he or she first had to discover their own self, answering the question ‘Who am I?’

This took time. It was a process of movement and discovery day by day, with new insights, new levels of awareness of what it means to be a member of the Jewish people. During those seven weeks we ‘counted the days’ because each day meant something special.

In a certain sense this process was incomplete, and had to be continued through the generations. For when the Jewish people received the Torah at Sinai they were still raw: they had got out of the slavery of Egypt, but had they got the slavery of Egypt out of them? For this reason there was soon to be the terrible tragedy of the making of the Golden Calf.

So today in 2010 we continue the process of discovery, which now includes our entire history as a people. The festivals are also part of this history. We experienced Pesach, which apart from the special cooking and the renewed links with family and friends meant freedom to our souls. Now the spiritual perceptions of the soul, the *Neshama*, have to be drawn into our minds, into our everyday selves, into the way we look at the world.

In expression of this process, we too ‘count the Omer’², counting the days in order to experience the revelation at Sinai which will be re-enacted at Shavuot. But we are also aware that this is part of a wider process:

The different stages of our lives, as individuals, as families and as a people as a whole, are steps towards a new kind of revelation and change of consciousness: the time of Moshiach, when the doors of perception will be opened, and we and all humanity will perceive the Glory of G-d.

1. See Leviticus 23:9-16. 2. Every day after nightfall we count the weeks and days which have passed since we ‘left Egypt’ on the first night of Pesach. Friday 9 April is the 10th day of the Omer: one week and three days. After nightfall on Friday night it will be the 11th day: one week and four days of the Omer.

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SEDRA SHEMINI

RESPECT

Leah wanted her way and Michael wanted his way, it was a fight, an argument.

This is what the argument was about: it was a Sunday so they had no school, and their mother had told them that they would go somewhere together.

“Well” said Michael “I think we should to go to the Imperial War Museum”. “Why?” said Leah “You just like action, guns, fighting, and all that stuff. It’s boring”.

“So where do you think we should we go?” asked Michael.

“Let’s go to the Science museum” she answered.

“Oh no, how booooring” said Michael “so we could see how the cosmics go around bosmics.”

“Excuse me!” said Leah “it is very interesting, much more interesting than some stupid guns!”

“Okay! Okay!” said Mummy. “Let’s not fight all day about this, let’s show some respect to each other even though we don’t agree with one another”.

“Well, Mummy, all Michael wants is tanks, nothing educational” said Leah. “Tanks are also educational, dear” said their mother. “But I just want to tell you what happened to some people when they disagreed with one another, and did not respect each other.”

"I know the story" said Michael "I don't need to hear it again."

"Okay Michael, you tell it to us" replied his mother.

"Well, basically, in short, without taking too much time, Rabbi Akiva had thousands of students, and they were all really, really clever."

"Cleverer than ten Einsteins?" asked Leah jokingly.

"Yep! Way, way cleverer than ten Einsteins" Michael answered. "But anyway, they disagreed with each other, about Jewish Law. One said this and the other said that. And they took this very seriously, so, because they disagreed, they did not respect each other. As a result almost all of them died in the time between Pesach and Lag B'Omer, the 33rd day of the counting of the Omer. From here we learn to always respect each other even if we disagree with each other!" Michael finished off with a flourish of his arm.

"Was that a good speech?" he asked.

"Great" said his mother "and now let's see you practice it".

"Yes, that's the hard part" said Leah.

"Okay" said Michael "I guess the Science Museum could be fun. You know, guns were made with science".

"Good" said Mummy. "We have some progress, I think we should go while the day is young, and next week we will go to the War Museum".

Leah wrinkled her nose. "Respect!" she said, sticking out her tongue at her brother.

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