


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT
 שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש
 Friday 2 September 2011 - 3 Elul 5771
 Sedra Shofetim

THE CHAIN OF TRADITION

AN ASPECT OF JUDAISM WHICH IS OFTEN THE SUBJECT OF DISCUSSION is the chain of religious authority. One hears people say “I accept the Bible as Divine, but why should I accept the teachings of the Rabbis who lived thousands of years later?” The Sedra¹ provides an answer to this question. It begins with the command to set up a system of authority, and then instructs everyone to obey the leaders in one’s own time in any case of doubt or dispute. The Torah tells us: “You should act according to their instruction. Do not deviate from what they say, neither to the right nor to the left”².

Due to this Biblical command, when carrying out laws instituted purely by the Rabbis, such as lighting the Chanukah lamp, we say the blessing “Blessed art Thou, G-d... Who commanded us to light the Chanukah lamp”. The Talmud³ asks “And where did He command this?” Surely, the Chanukah miracle took place nearly 1,500 years after the Giving of the Torah. It answers: because of this verse in this week’s Sedra: “You should act according to their instruction. Do not deviate from what they say...” This provides Divine authority for the decisions of the Sages through the generations.



In loving Memory of
 הרה"ח וו"ח עוסק בצ"צ ר' ארון דוב בן ארי' זצ"ל
 Rabbi Aron Dov Sufirin זצ"ל - Yahrzeit 6 Elul

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The chain of rabbinic leadership extends from Sinai to the present. The first millennium of links from Moses are delineated at the beginning of Ethics of the Fathers: Moses, Joshua, the Elders, the Prophets, the Men of the Great Assembly. After them come the Sages of the Mishnah and the Talmud, which was completed round 500 CE.

After the completion of the Talmud, the leaders of Jewry in Babylon (Iraq) were known as the 'Geonim'. One of the most famous of these was Saadia Gaon in the 10th century. Before the close of the period of the Geonim in the East, the Torah academies of the West began to flourish, led by Rashi and his disciples.

At the same time major scholars turned their attention to codifying and clarifying Jewish Law. Maimonides (12th century) began this mammoth task. In the 16th century the Sefardi Rabbi Yosef Karo compiled the *Shulchan Aruch*, the 'Laid out Table', also known simply as the Code of Law. With additions by the Ashkenazi Rabbi Moshe Isserlis of Cracow, Poland, this became a joint expression of both Sefardi and Ashkenazi teachings concerning Jewish law in daily life.

A number of explanatory commentaries were written on the Code of Law, and in letters by rabbinic leaders, called Responsa, many detailed points of law were clarified. Around 1770 Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi wrote a new version of the Code of Law which incorporated many of these further points. Much more has been written during the past two centuries, including 20th century halachic works by the Chofetz Chaim and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein.

Further, the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, collected in hundreds of volumes, encourage us and also help us define how we should absorb, understand and express this great tradition, conducting our lives as Jews in a complex and often changing world. Thus the unbroken chain continues...

1. Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9. 2.. Deut. 17:11 3. See Talmud Shabbat 23a.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care
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SEDRA SHOFETIM

WAKING UP TO MEET THE KING

“Hey what’s that noise?” Isaac asked. They were in the sunlit garden of Sammy’s home. His friend Sammy put down his geography textbook and listened. A long drawn out noise was heard:

“**Tooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooh.....**”

“Oh that’s my father blowing the Shofar “ he explained. “Isn’t that what they blow in the Synagogue on Rosh Hashanah? Why is he blowing it now? Rosh Hashanah is not for a long time I thought”.

“I know. But we just began the month of Elul, that’s the month before Rosh Hashanah. My father blows the Shofar every day during the month of Elul. It’s blown in the Synagogue but he also blows it at home, for my mother and sisters, who didn’t go to the Synagogue this morning.”

Isaac frowned. “What’s it for? I mean why blow it before Rosh Hashanah?”

“It’s supposed to wake us up in order to remember to do Teshuva - to repent - before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In fact my father told me that the gates of Heaven are open now so all our prayers are straight-away accepted. And he told me a kind of parable about the King in the field”.

“The King in the field?” echoed Isaac. “What does that mean?”

“You see, usually a King is in his own palace and if a

