

CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

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שבת..... *for Friday night*..... קדש

Friday 29 August 2014 - 3 Elul 5774
Sedra Shofetim

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

LEADERSHIP IS A THEME RUNNING THROUGH THE SEDRA¹. AT THE BEGINNING we learn about the duty to appoint judges and officers of the law in every city, and about the Supreme Court, which will be “in the place which G-d will choose”² - meaning the Temple. Indeed the Great Sanhedrin sat in a special chamber in the Temple precincts.

Then the Sedra tells us about appointing a King, and emphasises his spirituality³. He is warned not to over-indulge in material possessions, and he is also commanded to write a Torah Scroll. Maimonides comments⁴ that even if he has inherited a Scroll from his father, he must write his own. One Scroll should be kept in the palace, the other should be with the King at all times: when he sits in judgement, when he eats, and also when he is in the battlefield. The Sedra tells us that his study of Torah induces in him a sense of humility.

Another aspect of Jewish leadership mentioned in the Sedra is the Prophet, the man of G-d with supernatural insight. The nation is enjoined to follow genuine Prophetic leadership, but is also warned not to be taken in by charlatans⁵.



In Loving Memory of Mrs Jeanne Gewolb-Sostrin
(Yenta bas Devora) ע"ה - 15 Tevet 5772
Dedicated by her Son Dr Roger Gewolb שי'

JUDAISM FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD
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How are we to understand these concepts of leadership? The theme of Judges, Kings, Prophets, Sages and the righteous leader (the *Tzaddik*) pervades not only this week's Sedra but all our sacred literature, including the many books of the Bible, the Talmud and much of later Jewish writing.

An insight into the concept is given by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (c.1800) in his book *Tanya*. He explains that the entire Jewish people, from earliest times to the remote future, is really one spiritual entity. If we consider not the bodies but the souls, all are connected together in a unity which embraces every Jew in the world today and all Jews who ever have lived, or ever will live⁶.

The true leaders of our people are those who fulfil a special role in this structure. The leaders are like the 'head' or 'brain', imparting a sense of unity and guidance to the other limbs. One can think of this 'head' as the leadership in the ancient past, like the Patriarchs and Moses, giving a sense of direction to the entire people for all time. Further, any particular generation has a similar structure, in which the leading Sages of that time function as the 'head', with responsibility and concern for everyone else, just as the head is responsible for and guides the limbs of the body.

This image helps us understand an important idea in Jewish teachings about leadership: on a profound level, the identity of any individual is closely connected with the exalted spiritual leaders of his or her own time and of the past. We are all connected with Moses and with Abraham, and also with those great Sages who accept this level of responsibility in our own generation.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman comments that this relationship is there even if consciously we *reject* it. A Jew is a Jew, whether or not he wants to be. And this also means that he or she connects with Abraham, Moses and the spiritual leadership of the Jewish people in all generations, helping give meaning to our lives.

1. Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9. 2. Deut.17:10. 3. Deut.17:14 ff. 4. Laws of Kings 3:1. 5. Deut. 18:18 ff. 6. See *Tanya* Part I, ch.2 and ch.32.

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SEDRA SHOFETIM

PEOPLE AND TREES

“What kind of comparison is there between human beings and trees?” It was Danny sitting at the back of the class room who asked the question.

It was the first day of term and the first day of teaching for the new Hebrew studies teacher for year 8, Mr Benson. It is said that a good teacher often has a rocky beginning. In that case, thought Mr Benson gloomily, he must be the best teacher in the whole country.

At the moment he seemed to be having difficulty explaining the verse from this week’s Sedra which compares people to trees. He suggested to one corner of the class that you could read the verse as a question: “is a man like a tree of the field?” His voice rose with a slight squeak in order to show it was a question. They were supposed to discuss that together.

Meanwhile the opposite corner of the class were flicking pellets at each other. Then he told *that* corner that you could also read the same verse as a statement: “for man *is* a tree of the field”. They were supposed to discuss that idea. They did not seem very interested.

At that point Danny, at the back of the first corner, asked his question. “I mean trees don’t have a mind to think and don’t have mouths to speak, so how can the Torah compare humans to trees?” Other similar questions were coming from all four corners of the class room. “Good question” Mr Benson said, to everyone.

When doing his teaching diploma he had been shown several

techniques for gaining the attention of a class. One was to open a picture on the interactive whiteboard. Mr Benson had prepared this before the lesson. Now he skilfully opened the picture, a lovely big tree, in bright colours. Everyone watched, silently and expectantly. Then he turned to face the class.

“You are asking how we can compare people to trees. Let us look at one point in the tree’s existence and see what we as humans can learn from it.”

“My mother will love this teacher” Benny thought. “She knows all about the different kinds of tree and has always been saying that they have something to teach us.”

“Both animals and trees get their sustenance from the ground. The difference between them is that animals are not connected to the ground, they can walk around freely. Trees, however, *are* connected to the ground.” Mr Benson pointed to the roots of the tree in the picture, firmly embedded in the black earth.

“Even if you move a tree or a plant you must still take some earth with it to keep it alive. This is the lesson we learn from the tree, the Jewish person has the Torah to which we must always be connected. Wherever we go, we always take Torah with us, so we don’t dry up. So the trees are telling us: be connected with the ground, with the source, with the Torah!”

Mr Benson looked round the class, with a warm smile. It seemed that the lesson wasn’t so bad after all. Benny smiled back, thinking: “I’ll tell that to my mother.”

Danny and the other boys of Year 8 gazed at the interactive whiteboard, at the picture of the tree, always connected to the ground. Like the Jewish people, always connected to the Torah.

“Do you understand that..?” asked Mr Benson. “Show green, amber or red..”

Almost everyone showed green. And then the bell rang....

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