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שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 20 March 2009 - 24 Adar 5769
Sedra Vayakhel - Pekudei

GATHERING TOGETHER

DO YOU LIKE CROWDS? PERHAPS IT DEPENDS ON WHAT KIND OF CROWD, AND WHY IT IS GATHERED TOGETHER. The double Torah reading¹ this week begins with an immense gathering of the entire Jewish people. The opening words tell us that Moses assembled everyone together. It must have been a remarkable sight: the huge crowd, Moses himself addressing them, and Mount Sinai in the background.

When did it take place? Let us consider the order of events, beginning with another large gathering: the Jewish people at Sinai, hearing the Ten Commandments. After this, Moses ascended the mountain and was gone for forty days. While he was gone, unfortunately the people made the Golden Calf. When Moses returned, he broke the Tablets of the Law. Then followed a long period during which Moses, alone on Mount Sinai, pleaded with G-d on behalf of the nation. Finally, he received the second set of Tablets as a sign that the people had been forgiven by G-d.

On the tenth of the Hebrew month of Tishrei, the day which was later designated to be Yom Kippur, Moses descended the mountain carrying these second Tablets of the Law. His face shone brightly with a spiritual radiance which was so intense that he had to wear a veil. It was a day of sublime Divine forgiveness, as it would continue to be through the millennia till our own time.

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On the very next day² came the vast gathering with Moses. He spoke to the people about keeping Shabbat and about building the Sanctuary for G-d. The further details of how the people responded by actually building the Sanctuary are given in the double Sedra.

The Rabbis point out that this gathering in which the people heard about Shabbat hints at the fact that later on in history Shabbat would be a day to gather together, in particular, gathering in the Synagogue or the Study House, to hear Torah teachings from the Rabbi³. It is interesting that we also gather as families at the Shabbat table. This family 'assembly' has in some ways a function similar to that of the remarkable gathering described in the Sedra. After all the ups and downs of the week, we come together to refocus, to remember who we are and where we are going.

HAKHEL YEAR - YEAR OF ASSEMBLY

The concept of an assembly or gathering of Jews has special significance this year. The Torah tells us that once every seven years there should be a special gathering in the Temple. The whole nation should be there: men, women and children. The King should speak to them in the Temple courtyard, reading to them from the Torah⁴. Called Hakhel, it was a tremendously inspiring occasion, remembered by the participants throughout their lives.

This event would take place in the first year of the seven year *Shemithah* cycle. Today, our present Jewish year 5769 (corresponding to 2008-9), is likewise the first year of the cycle. Hence this year is imbued with the atmosphere of the special Hakhel Assembly. During a Hakhel Year there is a special significance in our meeting together with other Jews, whether on Shabbat, festivals or an ordinary day. Whenever we do so, we are harnessing a spiritual power deep within us, which has the potential to transform the world.

1. Exodus chs.35-40. 2. See Rashi to 35:1 and the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 6, p.215. 3. See the *Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Orach Chaim*, sec.290, and *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 17, p.495. 4. Deuteronomy 31:10-12.

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SEDRA VAYAKHEL-PEKUDEI

DOUBLE TROUBLE?

Mr Berg walked into the Year Eight classroom. 25 pairs of eyes looked at him, as he strode to the front.

“Good morning boys. I am substituting for your usual teacher, so even if we do things a bit differently from usual, I will need your co-operation.”

After scanning the room, and making sure that he still had full control, Mr Berg continued. “This week there is a double Sedra. Please open up your Chumash with translation to the sections of Vayakhel and Pekudei, and look through the sections quietly yourselves. Just try to see what are the main topics they describe. Make a list on a fresh page in your folder.”

The boys complied, and after 10 minutes, Mr Berg put up his hand. “Good work boys - who can tell me what the Torah portions are all about?”

Sam raised his hand. “Uh.. Mr Berg, is it possible you made a mistake? I mean, everything that I have read we already learned. Our regular teacher, Mr Davis taught us all this in the past two Torah portions, Terumah and Tetzavah.”

“Hmmm....” said Mr Berg. “Who can tell me how the Torah portion this week is repeating the previous two portions?”

Gavin volunteered. “Well, it’s all about the Sanctuary called the Mishkan which the Jews had to build in the desert.”

“Yes,” said Dave, “It talks about the altar and the Menorah and so on, and also about the clothes for the Kohanim.”

“What else?” Mr Berg asked. He was really pleased that the boys were behaving so nicely. He looked towards the back of the room. “Do any of you boys in the back row have a comment?” Isaac cleared his throat. “I think Mr Davis told us that the two earlier portions are when G-d commanded Moses about how to build everything, and these two portions are about how the Jews actually carried it out.”

Mr Berg seemed pleased. “That just about sums everything up. So now - why did the Torah have to repeat everything twice in such great detail?”

“Maybe there were two Sanctuaries!” Sam chuckled at his own joke.

“Bingo!” Mr Berg exclaimed. “There were two! The Sages tell us that the previous portions describe the Sanctuary or Temple in Heaven. Did you know that boys? There actually is a spiritual Temple in Heaven. The Torah portions of this week, however, describe the Sanctuary built on earth.”

“But why does the Torah describe them both in such detail if they are the same?”

Mr Berg smiled approvingly at the question. “G-d is teaching us a lesson. We may think that our actions down below are insignificant compared to what occurs on High. Wrong! Our actions are so precious and meaningful to G-d that this week's Torah portion takes the pains to recount every single detail, even if it all was recounted once.”

Sam had an impish look on his face. “And I thought double meant trouble!”

Everyone laughed, and for a moment Mr Berg was alarmed. Any moment there would be chaos! Then, thankfully, the bell rang, setting everyone free.

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