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CREATING THE JEWISH HOME

THE THEME OF THE SEDRA¹ IS THE BUILDING OF THE SANCTUARY, THE SACRED edifice where the Divine Presence dwelled. The Sedra describes the dedicated way the Jewish people donated the precious materials which were needed: gold, silver, copper, beautiful materials of wool and linen, acacia wood, precious stones. Then, with great artistry, the Sanctuary was constructed. Everyone was involved, both men and women, with a tremendous sense of enthusiasm. The Torah gives special mention to the artistic work of the women².

The key point of everyone's activity was the taking of personal possessions and making them into something holy. Their goal was that here, in this world, the Presence of the Divine should be revealed. The Lubavitcher Rebbe comments that a parallel structure which we are able to build today is the Jewish home, where the Jewish family lives.

The Rebbe points out that when the Torah initially gave the command to create the Sanctuary where G-d dwells, it includes not only the building of a structure of wood and silver and gold, but also the heart of each person. The Torah says "They should make for Me a



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Sanctuary, and I will dwell in *them*''², and the Sages comment: G-d does not say 'I will dwell in *it*, in the Sanctuary, but I will dwell in *them*, within each individual''³.

G-d dwells within each person. But the effect of this indwelling is magnified when a man and a woman come together as husband and wife and create a family. The Zohar states that the husband, wife, sons and daughters express respectively the four letters of the Divine Name. The Divine Presence was manifest in the Holy of Holies in the Sanctuary. It is also present in the Jewish home.

The Mezuzot on the doors, the kosher kitchen, Jewish books on the bookshelf, a Charity Box, candlesticks for Shabbat: these are some of the appurtenances which help create the atmosphere of holiness. But, unlike the Sanctuary, this form of holiness is accessible, familiar, with the intimacy of the everyday.

The Rebbe points out that one could not enter the Sanctuary at any time. Some parts of the Sanctuary or Temple could only be entered by a Priest, or even only by the High Priest, once a year. The Sanctuary expresses holiness beyond daily life. By contrast the home is the point where holiness and daily life meet. The Jewish ideal "know G-d in all your ways" (Prov. 3:6) is expressed in a wholesome, inclusive way in the context of the Jewish home and family.

A key expression of this is on Friday Night, when the family is present, and perhaps also some guests. The special light of the candles, the Challah loaves and the wine, all help to manifest the spiritual in tangible form. Everyone works together to create this sacred domain, including the children. But most particularly the woman of the home, the wife and mother, has this spiritual power⁴.

The Sages call the woman 'the essence of the home', and it is there that her greatest level of beauty is revealed. The Kabbalists add that the unique spiritual quality of womanhood represents that of the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, which is manifest in the home, and particularly on the sacred Shabbat. Enjoy!

1. Exodus 35:1-38:20. 2. Exodus 35:25-6. 3. Exodus 25:8. 3. See Rabbi Yosef Yitzkah Schneersohn, *Bati LeGani*, ch.1, and the earlier sources cited there. 4. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol.31 p.237; Sihot Kodesh, Yud Shevat 5734, sec.8.

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SEDRA VAYAKHEL

SHABBAT

If there was one word to describe it, it would be chaos. The school never looked like this, except for right before the annual play. There was less than a week till the performance and still a great deal of work to do. Students rushed back and forth, measuring costumes, painting scenery, practicing their lines and so on. Everyone was doing something. Everyone was using their talents to help get this production together.

Leah, who was in charge of scenery, had a huge white canvas stretched on a frame with paints in all sorts of colours scattered around her. Together with her three helpers – Shira, Rachel, and Sharon - she had to transform the dull canvas into a luxurious palace. There was a lot of work and not much time. Then there was Abigail who was the Organizer. She and her troops marched around, putting their organized and somewhat bossy nature into use – making sure everything was going just right. Rivka, who was a super talented actress, was head of drama – helping girls to rehearse as she too practiced her own part. Then there was Talia doing the costumes, Sarah in charge of finance, Chaya dealing with the brochure and so on.

As Leah dipped the large, coarse paintbrush into the silver chunky mixture, she couldn't help being reminded of what they'd learnt in school earlier the week - about the building of the Tabernacle. All the Jews, young and old, male and female, united together, pitching in to use their talents to help put together that beautiful masterpiece. It was that same exhilarating atmosphere now – everyone uniting their talents to put together the production, which would hopefully be the best one yet.

“We’ve got so much left to do and the play is on Sunday - in just two days!” Leah yelled frantically.

“I know!” Rachel agreed, “What are we going to do? This is crazy!”

“You know what? I’ll bring home the stuff, and you all come to my place tonight and we’ll work on it then and finish tomorrow! We should be fine.”

“Leah, tonight and tomorrow’s Shabbat, we can’t work on the scenery!” replied Rachel.

“Oh my goodness, you’re right! So what are we supposed to do? Just stop everything now?! When there’s so much left to do?” Leah was beginning to get hysterical.

“Yeah, I guess so,” Rachel said, shrugging. “You know what - we were just learning about the same kind of thing in Sedra class with Mrs Korf. How before Moses told the people about building the Tabernacle, he told them about Shabbat. Because when we’re busy with something important, we can think it’s all up to us and feel too much pressure and stress. Shabbat helps us keep a balance. Even though we need to do our best, it’s not all up to us, and it’s important to take time out and think about G-d.”

Sitting on the couch snuggled up with a book, the Shabbat candles flickering in the background, Leah smiled. It was such a beautiful feeling knowing that whatever busy things were going on the week, the week that had gone and the week to come, there was always Shabbat – a time to take a step back and remember that not everything is in your hands. There’s also G-d, running the world. At that moment Leah was sure, come what may, everything would be good.

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