


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

קדש..... *for Friday nights* שבת

Friday 14 September 2018 - 5 Tishrei 5779
Sedra Vayelech - Shabbat Shuvah

FROM THE HOLY OF HOLIES TO THE WORLD

THE SEDRA¹ TELLS US ABOUT THE COMPLETION OF THE FIRST full Scroll of the Torah. G-d transmitted to Moses the concluding passage of the Torah Scroll and he wrote it down. As always, it was a kind of Divine dictation. According to our Sages, Moses did not write things which he had thought up in his own head. However great and wise Moses was, the Torah is not his creation. His true greatness is that he was able to *receive* the Torah from G-d, and faithfully transmit it to the Jewish people.

The Sedra tells us that, having completed the Torah Scroll, Moses gave it to the Levites. They would look after it. The Scroll was placed in the Holy of Holies, together with the Golden Ark containing the Tablets of the Ten Commandments.

Now, there is a great difference between the Torah Scroll and the Tablets with the Ten Commandments. The Sages tell us that the Tablets were made of sapphire stone. The letters of the Ten Commandments were engraved on them in a wondrous way: the engraved letters went all the way through the stone². While this itself was mysterious, there was something even more remarkable about the Tablets and the Golden Ark in which they were kept.

The Sages tell us that “the space of the Ark was beyond



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

measure”³. The Ark was a kind of chest made of wood completely overlaid with gold. The Torah describes precisely how it should be made and what its measurements should be⁴. It was housed in the Holy of Holies. Yet somehow, it did not take up any room. If you took a measuring tape into the Holy of Holies and started measuring from the walls to the sides of the Ark, you would find that the Ark seemed to take up no space at all.

The Golden Ark and the Tablets of the Ten Commandments inside it were in a sense beyond this world. They were something miraculous, beyond reason and ordinary understanding.

By contrast, the Torah Scroll was a real, normal object, albeit a very sacred object. The Scroll written by Moses was just like the Torah Scroll in the synagogue today. This is certainly very holy, but it is also part of our everyday world.

The juxtaposition of the Tablets and the Torah Scroll in the Holy of Holies is telling us something about the nature of holiness. The goal is that the holy should illuminate and inspire the ordinary, daily world. In the Holy of Holies itself, the first step towards the ordinary world was the parchment Torah Scroll⁵.

Indeed, it is the Torah Scroll which has succeeded in carrying the holiness of Jewish teaching to us throughout the centuries, all over the globe.

This also relates to the time when we read this Sedra: the Shabbat before Yom Kippur (commencing Wednesday evening). Yom Kippur is like the Holy of Holies in our lives. Temporarily like angels, we do not eat. We read in the Yom Kippur Machzor (prayer-book) about the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies. In a sense, each one of us is like the High Priest going into the Holy of Holies in our own heart.

Yet, as in the case of the Holy of Holies in the Temple, the goal is that the sense of holiness of that special day should permeate and inspire us throughout the year.

1. Deuteronomy chapter 31. 2. The Sages point out that this was beyond nature, because some letters are circular such as Samech or final Mem. See Talmud Shabbat 104a. 3. Talmud Yoma 21a. 4. Exodus 25:10-16. 5. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.2, pp.407-8.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

SPONSORED BY DR REUVEN JOEL



SEDRA VAYELECH - YOM KIPPUR

IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

Louis sat by his bedroom desk, his head in his hands, staring at the textbook before him, his eyebrows drawn together and lips folded together in exaggerated concentration. He glanced over at his bed, where a book was lying face down on the page he was up to. Louis sighed and dragged his eyes back to the textbook. After a minute or two, he muttered, "I'll do this later," and flung himself onto his bed and began to read an exciting novel.

There was a tap at the door. "Louis?" his father called.

Louis, engrossed in his novel, didn't respond.

Louis's father entered the room and sat at the foot of Louis's bed. "Hey, Earth to Louis!" he called out, sounding like a radio.

Louis looked round and smiled grimly. He shut his eyes tightly for a moment and put the book down. He rolled over and sat up. "Hi, dad," he said, unenthusiastically.

"I thought you were supposed to be doing your homework, young man," Louis's father said sternly.

Louis nodded. "Yeah, I know. I just wanted to finish the chapter."

Louis's father raised his eyebrows. "I believe you said that the last time I came in here."

“I know,” Louis said again. “It’s just that this book’s really good.”

“I bet. But this isn’t the first time this has happened, and procrastination won’t get you anywhere. You know, Louis, Yom Kippur can really apply to this situation.”

“What, my homework? I guess so... in both situations we’re suffering, although there it’s from starvation, not from homework.”

Louis’s father laughed. “That’s not exactly what I meant. I was talking about procrastination. What do we do on Yom Kippur other than, as you say, starve?”

“We try to regret our sins? To repent?”

“Exactly. Now the Rabbis say that repentance isn’t something that can be pushed off, that you’ll do something wrong now and repent later, because then you’ll never repent. I think that’s because once you push something off once, you’ll continue pushing it off and procrastinating until it’s too late and you’re stuck in this loop that you can never leave.”

“That’s scary. I once read a story a bit like that....”

“Well, listen, G-d accepts everyone’s prayers. Even if they come from being stuck in a loop. But my point is that it’s the same with your homework. You shouldn’t make this a habit.”

“You mean, pushing it off and pushing it off...”

His father nodded. Was the message actually getting through?

“You’re right, dad.” Louis closed his book and put it on the shelf. Then he smiled. “I don’t want that. And like you always say, if not now, when?”

***Torah teachings are holy –
please treat this page with care***