


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 1 February 2013 - 21 Shevat 5773
 Sedra Yitro

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

THE ABILITY TO LIVE WITH DIVERSITY IS A CENTRAL FEATURE OF MODERN LIFE. We try to “recognize” the diverse views of our neighbours and friends. We acknowledge that they have opinions differing from our own, and try to express respect for the individual, even if we do not agree with their position. We can accept and love the person even while feeling that there is something wrong with his opinion.

At the same time, together with our recognition of diversity, we know that there are absolute values of right and wrong. These are presented by the Torah, in the form of guidance along a path through life, tailored for each individual. Together with the Code of Law there is the specific guidance of the Rabbi, showing how, in practice, the subtleties of the Law should be applied in each individual case¹.

The Torah provides clear guidance and absolute values. But the Torah is not monolithic. When we look at the Talmud, the source of Torah guidance, we find that there are usually several diverse views on each topic. These are discussed at length in the pages of the Talmud. Yet an essential aspect of this study is the quest to find the “halachah”, the actual path to follow in practice, the ruling of Jewish



In Memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson ז"ל
Yahrzeit 22 Shevat – May her Memory be for a Blessing

Law. At this point, all the diverse views come together. Unlike Parliament, where those who are overruled in a vote remain an opposing minority, in Jewish teaching all the Sages join together and accept the ruling of the Sanhedrin².

Sometimes this point of guidance, the path of the Torah, might seem beyond conventional reasoned understanding. We ask: “..why is the Law like this?” Yet we also have an innate ability to accept , which emerges from the deepest, most spiritual dimension of our self.

Through this acceptance, as when we say the Shema, with closed eyes declaring the unity of G-d and our eternal bond with Him, we connect with the deepest level of Torah teaching - with the absolute truth expressed in the Torah. At this point we reach a level of spiritual unity beyond the natural diversity of life. In this week’s Sedra³ there is a hint to the way the Torah brings peace and unity in an atmosphere of diversity and conflict. When the Jewish people came to the Sinai region, where they were soon going to receive the Torah, we read that they camped by the mountain. However, instead of using the plural verb, “they camped”, the Hebrew text says “he camped” in the singular. Rashi says this is because at that point the whole people was “like one man with one heart”. He adds that the other times the people camped were with argument and conflict⁴.

Certainly, the Jewish people are diverse and have many different views. It is hardly surprising when there is conflict between them. However the power of the Torah is to bring peace. It does this through its ability to express, recognize and discuss all the different views of the Sages, and then to find the unifying halachah, the path of the Law, which, within Jewish tradition, all dissenting voices accept.

As one explores the discussions of Torah study, the different views of the Sages are all legitimate and indeed holy. Yet the fact that the Torah resolves their differences and finds the clear instruction of the halachah, the ruling of Jewish law, indicates the power of the Torah to bring peace. This is an expression of the Essence of the Divine, beyond the different opinions. Through this power, the Torah brought peace to the arguing Jewish people at Sinai, and ultimately it will bring true peace to a troubled world⁵.

1. The main guidelines of the Torah are, of course, equal for all. 2. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot* vol.21, p.112, and the sources cited in n.33. 3. Exodus chs.18-20. 4. See Ex.19:2 and Rashi. 5. Based freely on *Likkutei Sichot* vol.21 pp. 108-118.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

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SEDRA YITRO

KEEPING TO THE RULES

Sherry Levine was so excited. It was her thirteenth birthday today! She was having a class party that evening and they were going to have her favourite activity – swimming. Next door lived Mr and Mrs Katz, who had a swimming pool in their home, and that was where the girls were going to swim. Their daughter Chava Katz was a Sixth Former in Sherry's school and was trained as a Lifeguard. She would be supervising the swimming.

Soon girls were arriving at Sherry's home with presents and birthday balloons, and swimming bags. Sherry couldn't stop grinning. When all the girls had arrived they made their way next door to the Katz's home.

Chava Katz took them downstairs to the pool. It was beautiful! Blue mosaic tiles adorned the walls, and soft lights made the water glisten. The girls hurried to the dressing rooms, and soon they were splashing and swimming happily, taking turns whooshing down the slide.

"This is the best birthday party ever!" Leora told Sherry.

"Yeah, swimming is my favourite! You must have known I was coming!" Adina laughed. Sherry joined in the laughter. "Well thank you guys for coming!"

"Come on, let's go down the slide again!" Leora said. The girls scrambled out of the pool and ran towards the slide.

“Girls!” Chava Katz called out, “No running by the pool! It’s very dangerous!”

“The floor here is dry,” Adina mumbled under her breath, “What’s the big deal?” “Shhh,” Sherry said, “She’s right. It could be dangerous.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Adina said, and she made a beeline for the slide, aiming to get there before Leora. But unfortunately she didn’t notice an inflated armband on the floor near the pool. She tripped over it and went flying into the water. “Wow!” shouted Sherry. Thankfully, Adina could swim quite well, and wasn’t hurt. But Chava was upset.

“Listen girls,” she shouted. “That could have been a nasty accident. Thank G-d, Adina is okay. But you have to follow the rules. Even if you don’t understand at first, just stick to the rules and you’ll be safe. So, from now on: no running!”

The rest of the evening went just as Sherry dreamed it would. There was a delicious dinner after the swimming, and then games, and the birthday cake. It was her best birthday ever.

The next day, during Sedra class, Mrs Steiner was teaching them about the Torah being given at Mount Sinai, in Sedra Yitro.

“You know what was amazing, girls,” she was saying, “the Jewish people had no idea what the laws of the Torah were going to be. They just knew that G-d was offering them the Torah, and without hesitating they replied ‘we will do and then we will hear!’, as we learn in next week’s Sedra Mishpatim. They meant they would accept the Torah with all its laws, even if they didn’t yet understand the meaning behind them.”

Adina heard this and smiled. She scanned the classroom until her eyes met Sherry’s. She was grinning as well.

Adina felt they were both thinking the same thing. Even if you don’t understand – the best thing is to keep to the rules. That way there are less accidents – and more fun for everyone.

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