

Dina Demalchuta Dina South Africa's Freedom Day

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In this week's parasha, Emor, it is written: "You shall observe My commandments and perform them. I am Hashem. You shall not desecrate My holy name, rather I should be sanctified among the children of Israel. I am Hashem who sanctifies you." (Vayikra 22:31-32)

Just like last week's Parasha, Kedoshim, the main motto of this week's parasha is also the concept of holiness "Be holy. Behave in a holy way as I am holy", G-d say to us.

Already at Mount Sinai, G-d described the Jewish people as a holy nation (Ve'atem tihiyu li mamlechet Kohanim vegoi kadosh). "You shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation" (Shmot 19:6).

This concept of holiness sounds too difficult to handle. How do we achieve holiness? What does it mean to be holy?

In last week's parasha we find that in order to reach holiness we have to observe G-d's commandments. Thereafter we find a long list of those commandments.(50) Which carries on into this weeks Parasha (63!)

It is interesting to note that the first mitzvah mentioned there is fearing and respecting our parents (Vayikra 19:3). Which means that the first step towards holiness is honouring those who brought us into this world.

Sefer HaChinuch (mitzvah 33) writes that once a person integrates respect for his parents into his personality, this attitude will serve as a springboard for revering G-d. When we revere G-d we listen to Him. When we listen to Him we follow His Torah which makes us holy.

The same concept and process of self education is found in the Jewish sources with regard to Kings as well, and people of authority in general.

In the book of Samual 1 (chapter 22) we are told that the Kingdom was taken away from Saul, the first King, by G-d, because of his sin, and was transferred to David. Unfortunately, like many politicians of nowadays, King Saul did not want to leave his throne and in his frustration he started chasing after David, wanting to kill him.

As part of his escape route, David stopped in the City of Nov, a city of Cohanim- priests. There they helped David. After a while Saul came and blamed the people of Nov for rebelling against the kingdom. The Cohanim claimed that they were actually very loyal to the King and they just never knew that David was a wanted man.

The angry Saul commanded his troops to kill the residents of Nov. To his amazement his soldiers refused. They did not want to harm the Cohanim of Hashem.

There are long discussions in the Talmud (Sanhedrin Bavli 49A & Yerushalmi 10,2)

about whether it was or wasn't correct to refuse the command of a King.

This source, from the Tanach and the Talmud and others, were the hottest topics of the Yeshiva world in Israel 6, 7 years ago, at the time of the Oslo Accord, when there was talk in Israel about forcefully clearing out Jewish settlement in order to give them to the Palestinians.

Rabbis, to this very day, are struggling with the question of what is considered to be a command that soldiers don't have to obey, since it is totally unacceptable in the eyes of the Torah.

There are lots of sources expressing the importance of obeying the government's laws, irrespective of whether it is a Jewish government or a non-Jewish ruler.

In Ethics of our Fathers (chapter 3 Mishna 2) it is written: 'Rabbi Chanina... says, "Pray for the welfare of the government because if people did not fear it, a person would swallow his fellowmen alive"'.

Even before that, Jeremiah, in his prophecies (29:7) says: "Seek the peace of the city to which I have exiled you and pray for it to Hashem for through its peace will you have peace".

In other words, the nature of people is that if it wasn't for the fear of being punished by the law of a government there would be anarchy and people would simply kill each other.

In a half joking manner, I can say it in another way, once there were 2 robbers talking about their business. The one said: "You know, the police are the source of our disaster. If it wasn't for the police we would've been rich a long time ago". His friend answered him: "Don't forget, my friend, that if it wasn't for the police we would've had so much competition that I doubt our situation would be better".

I am not in any way trying to hint, with this little story, to people in high positions who steal - that's another story...

In any case, it was important for me to bring up this topic tonight as tomorrow is Freedom Day. It's been 8 years since the new government came into power in South Africa and many people have lots of complaints about the leader's performance.

I wasn't aware of how badly the reactions are until I heard what people had to say before the Mayor's visit (which in the mean time has been cancelled).

I think it is part of our nature to criticize our leaders, and in Israel you see it all the time, but here I was exposed to a different kind of criticism that is on the border of condescension.

It is therefore very important to remind ourselves again that as much as we have complaints about the high position holders and their behaviour, if it wasn't for them the situation would be much worse.

It is not for nothing that even in places where the Jews have been suffering directly from the rulers, still they carried on saying a prayer for the State they live in (or should I say it like Mr. Levy announces it every Shabbat morning with his dramatic voice: "Prayer for the Republic of South Africa").

But the most important of all is the point we started with: "Kedoshim tihiyu", be holy. How? By obeying the mitzvot - G-d's commands. The first of which is "Ish imo ve'aviv tira'u" You must revere your parents. And as part of this, respect for the local authorities must be kept.

Through honouring and respecting them we will please G-d reach "Yirat shamayim", revering G-d that will lead to observance of the whole Torah. This is the true holy way.

Shabbat Shalom

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