Assembly Notes
PARSHAS YISRO 5785
Assembly Theme: Actions speak louder than words

בסד

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He was 41 years old, in the hospital and terminal. He had just found out that his mother was Jewish; in other words, he himself was Jewish. I was asked to visit him to put on Tefillin. He told me that he is an intellectual and he wants to ask some questions first. After fifteen solid questions he agreed to put on the Tefillin.

One of his first questions was: What is unique about the Jewish religion? I replied that I'm not an expert in comparative religion; I am involved with Judaism from the inside, with practise; not as an analyst outside looking in. So I'll answer him from my limited experience and observation.

Every religious belief system that I know of contains faith and action. The acts serve to enhance the spiritual experience, which is the real goal. Judaism by contrast does contain a rich and powerful intellectual and spiritual component; but these are only secondary to action. The spiritual experience is important, but only because it enhances the doing of the Mitzvah.

Why is this so? I believe that it is ultimately connected with the reason why HaShem created the world. It was because He wanted a dwelling place in the physical world. When we do a Mitzvah the physical object becomes imbued with holiness and the spiritual and the physical become aligned and unified.

The above explains a question about this week's Sedra, Yisro, which tells us about Mattan (the Giving of the) Torah. What was so special about the Revelation at Sinai? There were always some spiritual giants who studied Torah. For example Adam, Noach, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. Throughout the time that the Israelites were in Egypt there was study of Torah, at least by some. And they fulfilled Mitzvos. But the spiritual and the physical were two separate realms. HaShem created both, distinct from each other.

After the Torah was given, the physical object became Holy. Think of a Sefer Torah, a Mezuzah, a pair of Tefillin. Using our material assets to do a Mitzvah expresses the Essence of G-d, which transcends the material and the spiritual worlds, and can therefore combine them.

The Torah refers to all Mitzvos as Tzedaka. The Chassidic works explain: the most praiseworthy way to give Tzedaka is to do it with empathy, with a smile and an encouraging word. But even more important is to give them the food or other assistance that they need. Doing a Mitzvah with your possessions fulfils their purpose. It brings redemption to them and to the world.

גוט שבת!

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Story of the Rebbe

This week will be Chof Bais (22) Shevat, the Yahrzeit of the Rebbetzin. The Rebbetzin was very low profile in Chabad Lubavitch activities, but she was very deeply involved. She was very learned and Holy. The Rebbe told people who asked for Brochos that the Rebbetzin also had the power to bless. There are many stories with people whom we know who had Yeshuos (salvation, in health, in Shidduchim and many other areas) after receiving a Brocho from the Rebbetzin.

Perhaps the greatest thing that the Rebbetzin did for the whole world, was helping the Rebbe to be available for those who needed him. For example, the Rebbe would meet with people in a Yechidus (private audience) which would begin about 8 o'clock in the evening and go well past midnight. Sometimes they would last a whole night. I personally went in around 4 am at least once, and much later (when it was already daylight) a different time. When the Rebbe came home, whether it was 1 am or 4 am or 7 am, the Rebbetzin was awake, so that the Rebbe "should not come home to a dark house ".

At one time , the Chassidim were worried about the Rebbe's health. They were also concerned about the Rebbetzin being alone until such late hours. Rabbi Zalman Gurary suggested that the Rebbetzin should ask the Rebbe to try to be home the latest by midnight or 1 am. She was at home alone, they had no biological children, she could request this from the Rebbe. The Rebbetzin responded "People need him; I will not stand in the way". In other words, the Rebbe was able to do as much as he did because the Rebbetzin was there supporting him. Perhaps we can call it a partnership.

It is almost impossible to reach such a deep level of sacrifice but, maybe we can be inspired in smaller things to go out of our own comfort zone once in a while, to think of how we can help to make a positive difference in someone's life.

גוט שבת!