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גה

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 6 February 2009 - 12 Shevat 5769
Sedra Beshalach

A GLIMPSE BEYOND THE VEIL

LIFE CAN SEEM VERY CONFUSING. THE STRUGGLE TO GET FROM ONE STAGE TO ANOTHER, even from one day to the next, can seem meaningless. The Torah perspective is that there is indeed deep and beautiful meaning at every step of our lives: but that sense of meaning is often *hidden*. It is veiled, covered, like a new and exciting invention which is concealed by a large flowing cloth at the beginning of its first public appearance. The crowds are standing there, feeling expectant. The journalists are ready with their poised cameras. Then the veil is drawn aside, and one hears an involuntary gasp from the crowd...

The Splitting of the Sea, the central topic in the Sedra¹, was something like this, and more. On the one hand it was an astonishing expression of G-d's power. More than any of the ten Plagues, this showed that G-d is master of nature, and that He can eradicate evil completely. After the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Sea, the threat of Egypt disappeared completely. For several centuries the Jews did not have to worry about Egypt as a political force.

Another aspect of the Splitting of the Sea is that it revealed the Infinity of the Divine to every individual. The Sages tell us that the simplest person who was present at the Splitting of the Sea experienced visions more profound than did the greatest Prophets of old².

The Sea represents the realm of that which is Hidden, since the waters conceal all that is below the waves. Splitting the Sea, and

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revealing the dry land on which the Jews could walk, expresses the idea that the hidden realms become in some way revealed and accessible. Experiencing this event had a tremendous effect on each person, and prepared them for the greatest experience of all time: the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, which took place six weeks later, and is described in next week's Sedra. The Torah comes from the inward Hiddenness of G-d. At Sinai the Hiddenness of G-d was made accessible to every man and woman, bonding them as Jews together and to G-d, throughout the generations. The Splitting of the Sea in our Sedra was a preparation for this³.

Once that kind of experience has taken place, the person *knows* that there is meaning, beauty and holiness. The fact that this meaning and beauty is hidden at the moment, by a veil, a cloth, or a heap of rubble, does not matter. One knows what one's task is: to go forward, step by step.

The struggle which might be involved in this endeavour itself has meaning. This was explained by the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn⁴, in a remarkable tract called *Bati LeGani*, 'I have Come into My Garden'. The purpose of existence is to achieve a dwelling for the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, in our physical realm. This began to be achieved at the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but due to their sin, the Shechinah receded from the world. The task of the Jewish people is to bring the Shechinah back, through our daily lives in fulfilment of the teachings of the Torah.

Sometimes this can seem very difficult. But one of the deep qualities within our personalities is *Netzach*, the determined resolve to achieve to victory. Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak tells us that when we struggle for something good, with all our effort, we break through to an exalted sense of revelation of the Divine⁵. This is the Divine aid which is granted to us, so that we can move forward to the Redemption, when, as at the Giving of the Torah and the Splitting of the Sea, the veil will finally be drawn aside, and for all humanity, infinite beauty, goodness and holiness will be revealed.

1. Exodus 13:17-17:16. 2. Rashi to Ex.15:2. 3. See Rabbi Dov Ber, the Mittlerer Rebbe's *Sha'ar HaEmunah* ch.55. 4. His Yahrzeit was on Wednesday, 10 Shevat. 5. See *Bati LeGani* ch.19.

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SEDRA BESHALACH

THE CHILDREN SAVED THE DAY!

Mrs. Gold was speaking with great animation. She was teaching her fifth grade class of girls all about the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt. She could tell the girls were greatly enjoying the lesson, and she delved further into the many details.

"Imagine girls, the Jews had been enslaved for 210 years. Finally, G-d is going to redeem them, and they are suspicious. Only the children recognized G-d. They pointed with their fingers and called out - "This is our G-d!"

Marnina felt her mind wandering back in time.

She imagined herself, a young girl, who only knew how to mix the mortar. Her hands were calloused and rough, yet as she mixed, she always dreamed. She dreamt of the time G-d would come and take His people out, as He had promised. She knew that some people - especially the adults - had long given up of ever leaving. But she could just see it. G-d would come, and unlock the heavy gates of Egypt, which were carefully guarded and encircling the Jewish people. They would be set free! What would she do in her free time? She could only just imagine....

Mrs. Gold jolted Marnina back into the year 2009. "Girls, the Sea of Reeds split open and the Jews were able to walk through! Does anyone know the formation of the water, when they were walking through it?"

Adina spoke up. "I think there were twelve pathways. for the twelve tribes to walk through."

Vivi added. "There was also trees with delicious, fresh fruit that sprouted from the bottom of the sea, miraculously."

Mrs. Gold was smiling. "Correct. Did you also know that the birds picked the fruits off the trees and gave it to the children? That is why this Shabbat, when we read in the Torah about the crossing of the Sea, we try to be kind to the birds, and make special effort before Shabbat to put food out for them."

Anna raised her hand. "Wasn't the water solid, like a wall?"

Mrs. Gold nodded. "Yes. The walls of water were solid on either side, to protect the Jewish people from any harm."

Marnina felt herself slipping back into the role of the young Jewess leaving Egypt. The frightening waves - the thundering sea - how would they cross it? The Jewish nation was cornered. They were stuck in front of the sea, and behind them came the frantic yells of the Egyptians as they spurred their horses to go faster, and the squeal of the chariots as they raced across dry sand. It was only a matter of minutes before the Egyptians would come.

But she knew, and all of her friends standing beside her, knew, that G-d would save them. They pointed with their fingers, as the sea split, saying, "This is G-d!" And indeed, they were saved.

"Girls," Mrs. Gold was wrapping up the lesson. "Know your power! With your belief in G-d and His Torah, many miracles can happen. When the children recognize and truly believe in G-d, then in truth, no harm can befall us, and the entire Jewish people are protected."

Marnina smiled.

Thousands of years ago, her belief together with all her friends' belief had saved her people!

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