


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 30 January 2015 - 10 Shevat 5775
 Sedra Beshalach

WHEN TO FIGHT

THERE ARE MANY BATTLES IN LIFE, FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL and also for the Jewish people as a whole. There are times when we have to throw ourselves into the battle with all our power, and other situations when the best strategy is to carry on with the positive things we are doing, with the confidence that the obstacles will disappear by themselves.

The Sedra¹ this week presents these two different approaches in confronting two different kinds of problem. The Jewish people have left the slavery of Egypt. Now their immediate goal is to reach Mount Sinai where the most remarkable meeting ever between G-d and humanity is to take place. A year earlier, when G-d gave Moses his task to bring the Jews to freedom, he had been told: "When you take the people out of Egypt you will serve G-d on this mountain." That mountain was Sinai². So now the Jewish people have a direction and a purpose: to reach Mount Sinai and receive the Torah.

At this point Pharaoh begins pursuing them. The Sedra describes the position: the Jews are travelling towards the Red Sea, and Pharaoh with his chariots is approaching from behind them. The people are alarmed. Moses tells them not to worry. "G-d will fight on your



In Memory of Reb Meshulam Scharfstein ע"ה
 10 Shevat - Dedicated by his daughter Dr Jutta Singer תקי'

behalf". G-d Himself says: "Tell the Jewish people to travel forward."³ Ignoring the Egyptians behind them, the Jewish people indeed travel forward. The Sea splits, ceasing to be an obstacle. When the Egyptians try to follow the Jews onto the seabed, the waters return and engulf them. For many generations ahead, Egypt will no longer be an adversary.

By moving straight ahead towards their goal, the Jewish people were successful. This is one example of a strategy in confronting problems. Go straight ahead in your main task and let the problem fix itself. Of course, some problems do not fix themselves. They get in the way and actually stop us from moving forward towards our real goal. This situation is expressed in the second example in the Sedra, the war with Amalek. After the stirring events at the Red Sea, the Jewish people are advancing towards Sinai. Now, however, they are attacked by a fierce enemy: the tribe of Amalek. This time Moses tells Joshua: "Go out and battle with Amalek"⁴.

This is a time to fight, because the enemy is in the way, preventing one from reaching one's objective. One needs faith in G-d, and one needs direction from G-d. During the battle, Moses held his arms aloft, reminding the Jewish people of G-d, and as a result they were victorious. However, they also had to take real swords and other weapons and physically attack the enemy.

Wisdom and a certain measure of inspiration are needed to help us decide which strategy to apply: go straight ahead, or stand still and fight. You might say, if the obstacle is in your way, you have to confront it directly, like the battle with Amalek. But if the problem is behind you as Pharaoh was, do not turn back to fight. Just go straight ahead and G-d will fight the battle for you⁵.

Is it always so simple? Friday 10 Shevat commemorates the passing of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, in 1950, and the beginning of the leadership of his successor, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson (1902-1994). The many volumes of the Rebbe's teachings, and many video recordings of his talks, help us understand the Torah as guidance for life in our troubled times, leading to a positive and glorious future for us and all humanity.

1. Exodus 13:17-17:16. 2. See Rashi to Exodus 3:12. 3. Exodus 14:14-15. 4. Exodus 17:9
5. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.1 pp.144-6.

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SEDRA BESHALACH

WHY?

“Daddy.” Rebecca tapped her father on the shoulder. “Can I ask you a question?”

Mr Jacobs smiled warmly down at her. “Of course darling. Come sit down here next to me.”

Father and daughter sat down on the blue couch together.

“So, ask away,” Mr Jacobs told his daughter. “What’s up?”

“Daddy...” Rebecca took a deep breath and then looked at her father squarely in the eye. “Can you please explain to me why we Jews have been attacked by other people again and again throughout history?”

“That’s a good question Rebecca. You know, one answer is jealousy. Some people think that the Jews are richer and cleverer than everyone else, even if they actually are not. A Rabbi once said that the money a Jew has, glows. Wicked people are attracted by the glow and they come and kill him and take the money away, and then it stops glowing.”

“Look, I know lots of Jews are actually quite poor. So why is it that some people are jealous?”

“Well,” said her father, “I think a deeper reason is because the Jews were chosen by G-d to be His people. G-d promised Abraham that his descendants would be G-d’s special people,

through whom would be blessed all families of the earth. G-d promised him that his descendants would have the holy Land of Israel. The Sages tell us that blessing came from the Land of Israel to the whole world...”

“So are you saying that the Jews glow and Israel glows?”

“Yes, they have a special quality which has given a lot of goodness to the world. They taught the world there is one G-d who created Heaven and Earth. Some people appreciate that goodness. Others attack it.”

“And what about Israel?”

“Israel is our Holy Land which G-d promised to us. So this makes it very precious in the eyes of lots of other people. But listen, Rebecca, in this week’s Torah portion, Beshalach, it talks about war. The Amalekites tried to fight us. They wanted to attack us just because we were Jews.”

“So what happened?” Rebecca asked. “Two things,” Mr Jacobs said. “One: the Jews prayed to G-d to help them win the war. And two: they formed an army and went to fight them. You see Rebecca, when G-d gives us an army to fight our enemies we have to do both of these things.” Rebecca nodded in understanding. “We need to have the physical and the spiritual. Without the army, we wouldn’t be able to protect ourselves from the enemy. And without G-d, we wouldn’t be able to do anything at all. But all these struggles have a higher purpose...”

“To bring Moshiach?” Rebecca asked.

“Exactly! We hope and pray that Moshiach, our redeemer, will come very soon and then we and all nations will be able to live in peace and harmony.”

“Amen!” Rebecca said. “Now!”

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