


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 7 January 2011 - 2 Shevat 5771
 Sedra Bo


THE CHALLENGE OF COMMUNICATION

IMAGINE GOING THROUGH THE MOST INCREDIBLY EXCITING and inspiring series of events, and then, twenty years later, trying to transmit to your children *something* about what happened and what it means... This challenge is mentioned in the Torah reading¹ this week. How we face this challenge, at any point in our history, is crucial for our wellbeing as a people.

The Sedra describes the last steps leading up to the Exodus. Nine plagues have come and gone. Guided by Moses, the Jewish people get ready for the climax. Gathered in special groups, the original precedent of our Seder, they eat the Paschal lamb together. Then, around midnight, following the news of the devastating final plague, Pharaoh himself comes to them begging that they leave. At last, in a truly wondrous way, their slavery has come to an end!

At the end of the Sedra there is a speech by Moses to the Jewish people shortly after their escape from Egyptian control. He told them about the Pesach festival which they would keep every year in celebration of their freedom, and about how they should endeavour to explain the meaning of this to their children.

The idea of telling one's children about the Exodus is mentioned twice in this passage and twice more elsewhere in the Torah: this is the



לזכרון נצח מרת טוי-ה בת פרחיה ע"ה
 In Loving Memory of Mrs Victoria Menashy ע"ה
 1 Tammuz 5770

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source of the idea of the 'Four Sons' in the Pesach Haggadah².

The four sons (or daughters) are of different aptitudes and attitudes. The Wise Son affirms Jewish values, while his brother rejects them. The Simple Son does not think about them at any depth and the fourth son does not know how to ask at all. In each case, the parents have to find a way to communicate to their child on his or her individual level.

A comment by Rashi helps us appreciate the challenge implicit in this task. The Torah states "When tomorrow your son will ask you 'what is this?' you should tell him: 'With a strong hand G-d took us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage'"³. Rashi explains that the word 'tomorrow' has two meanings: it can mean now, literally the next day; and it can mean a long time ahead. This can be understood as stating that 'tomorrow' can mean in the future. However, the Lubavitcher Rebbe points out that between the lines, Rashi is telling us about two kinds of child to whom we have to tell the Pesach story.

As far as his parents are concerned, one child is living 'now', he is together with them. He or she appreciates their ideals, and shares them. But another kind of child is living a long time ahead of his parents: a gulf separates him from them, a generation gap. The challenge of living Judaism is to find a way to bridge that gap, to reach that young man or woman who seems to be living in the future. At the very beginning of our existence as a people, this point was made to us: we have to find a way to communicate.

How can we do so? One aspect of this, says the Rebbe, is humility on the part of the person who is trying to teach. However knowledgeable and observant you are, that man or woman who feels so far away from your values, and who might even be on the point of assimilation, is your responsibility. The child of 'tomorrow, a long time ahead' is the focus of the challenge. His or her positive transformation is the way for all of us to discover the Judaism which is not of the past but of the glorious future⁴.

1. Exodus 10:1-13:16. 2. See Ex. 12:26, 13:8,14; Deut. 6:20. 3. Exodus 13:14.

4. Based on a talk of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, 10 Shevat 1970.

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SEDRA BO

MIND AND HEART

Benjy was riding his bike. It was a beautiful clear day and he was going to visit his friend David. He was hurrying because he had promised to be there at five and it was almost that now. As he passed the supermarket he saw his two sisters coming out, staggering under heavy bags of shopping. Their faces brightened when they saw him, and Rachel called out: "Benjy, could you take some of these bags? They're so heavy, and you've got a bike."

Benjy slowed down a little and thought to himself: It would be really nice to take them, the bags look so heavy - but if I stop I'll be late. So he called out to his sisters, no, he couldn't do it, he was in too much of a hurry. And he rode off, but he did not feel very good inside.

Two hours later, as he was riding home again, he still felt guilty. And then he remembered something he had learnt that day in the Sedra lesson. Mr Cohen had been teaching them about Tefillin, which are mentioned in the Sedra.

Tefillin are little black boxes with scrolls inscribed with the Shema inside, he had explained. Boys over Bar Mitzva - which Benjy would be in another year - put them on every day except Shabbat and Festivals. The boxes were bound to the forehead and the arm with leather straps.

"I don't understand why we put on Tefillin," one boy had said. "Why does G-d want us to do that?"

Mr Cohen had explained that one idea we learn from Tefillin is that we should join our mind and heart together: One part of the Tefillin is on our head, near our brain, and the other is on our left arm - right near our heart. Sometimes we want to do things very much with our heart, even though our mind knows that it is wrong. Or, our mind knows that something is the right thing to do, but our heart doesn't really feel like doing it. Through the Tefillin, we are reminded to try to unite the two, so that we will actually want to do the right thing with our heart as well as with our mind."

Benjy remembered all this now, and decided there and then that he would try and join his heart and mind together- as hard as that might be. He felt, that would make up for not helping his sisters earlier that evening.

Some days later, he was about to go into his classroom after break when another boy came up to him, his face alight with glee. "Hey Benjy, do you want to do something funny to Mr Richards? I have an alarm clock here which I'm going to set for the middle of the lesson, and I'll hide it somewhere really good where he won't find it. Do you want to help me?"

Benjy would have said yes, because he loved practical jokes, but he remembered his resolution.

"No, sorry, it sounds like a stupid idea. I really can't be bothered," he said. And he felt good inside. For once, he felt, his mind and heart were working together.

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