



### SIGN OF FREEDOM

**E**VERY DAY THERE ARE CHOICES, SOMETIMES MAJOR AND SOMETIMES seemingly minor. Every day there are opportunities to grow, to reach beyond, to stop being trapped, to go free. The Sedra<sup>1</sup> is about the Jewish people finally leaving their slavery in Egypt. This happened thousands of years ago, yet Chassidic teachings tell us this is also our opportunity, as individuals, every single day<sup>2</sup>.

Egypt is a country on the map. But to be enslaved in a personal Egypt is a state of mind. The Hebrew word for Egypt, Mitzraim, has the same consonant letters as another Hebrew word meaning 'limitations', meitzarim. If we look carefully, we may see ourselves as trapped in our own personal limitations, our own form of Egypt: and then we have the chance to break free.

What is this personal Egypt? It might be something like selfishness. Trapped in the bonds of a seeming inability to give to others. Or laziness. Or being stuck in a rut of inertia, doing the same old thing and not responding to new opportunities. There is a time to move, to do something: but we are stuck, or so it seems. Or we are afflicted by negative social pressures of various kinds. All are varieties of slavery.

And then we break free. We get up and go, make the right phone call, take the right action, say the right words, think positive, and sometimes say 'no' rather than 'yes', as appropriate... We realise that it is in our hands, that we have the responsibility, and then we do it.

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This is the constant step towards freedom, which, in some form, we are able to achieve every day of our lives. The Sedra tells of a particular way in which this new and constant freedom is expressed. As soon as the Jewish people had safely left Egypt, Moses gathered them together and gave them a talk about remembering, through the generations, how they had been slaves and how G-d had brought them to freedom. In expression of this, he told them, Jewish men should wear Tefilin<sup>3</sup>. According to the great kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria, a woman is included in this Mitzva through her husband<sup>4</sup>.

Tefilin! A traditional Jewish action which reaches back through the millennia. A mark of adulthood, in that a Bar Mitzva boy starts to wear Tefilin; a mark of freedom, the sign of our special connection with G-d which means that He brought us out of slavery, for ever.

Every weekday there is the opportunity to put on Tefilin, and to say the morning service. Or, as a beginning, just to say the Shema. The Tefilin contain parchment scrolls on which are written two paragraphs from the end of our Sedra, speaking of going out of Egypt, and two paragraphs of the Shema. Tefilin mean we are free, spiritually, eternally; and that we recognise G-d, Who gives us this freedom, Who is One. And we pledge ourselves in love to be devoted to G-d, His Torah and His commands.

The Tefilin are worn on the head, to express the dedication of one's mind, and on the arm near the heart, to express dedication in one's feelings. Wearing Tefilin is an action in which we express our connection with G-d, and G-d responds, with blessings of life and health. The Lubavitcher Rebbe comments that when the father in a family puts on Tefilin, the flow of blessing extends to his wife and his children<sup>5</sup>. The step of acquiring a set and putting them on daily (except Shabbat and festivals), or, as a woman, encouraging one's spouse to do so, is an important daily opportunity to express our freedom. Yet again we leave the slavery of limitations, going towards the Promised Land....

1. Exodus 10:l-13:16. 2. See Tanya Part I, ch.47. 3. See Exodus 13:9, 15. 4. Quoted in the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Letters*, vol.25, p.132 (n.), citing Likkutei Torah of the Arizal, Bereishit, Ta'amei HaMitzvot and Shaar Maamarei Rashbi, Tikkunim, beginning. 5. See *Sefer HaSichot* 5749, 203-5.

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*SEDRA BO*

***THREE LONG DAYS***

Danielle and Debra, two sisters, were walking home from school together.

'I hate the winter' said Debra, complaining. 'Why is that?' asked Danielle. 'Well, first of all, in the winter, by the time we get out of school it's already dark!', explained Debra.

'Oh, don't complain so much,' said Danielle, besides, in the summer you complain about it being too hot!'

'Well,' said Debra, 'the truth is that the reason why I hate the winter is not so much because of the dark and cold, but because it is dark and cold and it doesn't even snow here!'

Danielle could not think of a good reply, so she fell silent. The two girls were just then entering their street.

'Oh my!' exclaimed Debra in surprise. 'It is awfully dark on our street. It looks as if all the street lamps are broken'.

'Hmm...this could be quite an adventure', said Danielle, 'we could be secret explorers who are about to uncover the world's greatest treasure, as we pick our way through the gloomy tunnel', she said gleefully. 'Oh, come on Danielle,' said Debra impatiently, 'you know that I hate the dark!'

'Hey Debra, it can't be as bad as it was in Egypt', said Danielle, finally sympathising with her sister. 'Over there the darkness was so thick that they could not even move their arms or legs, in fact they were frozen in whichever position they were in when the darkness hit Egypt'.

Debra was giggling now. 'What's so funny?' asked Danielle. 'I'm just imagining the Egyptians being stuck in all sorts of funny positions', giggled Debra as she pretended to be stuck with her arm stretched out in front of her and her right leg in the air. 'Oh my!' exclaimed Danielle laughing, 'you look totally ridiculous!'

'Yes,' said Debra, 'but at least I don't have to keep this position for three days straight. My teacher said that that is how long the plague of darkness lasted'.

'Really?' Danielle said in surprise, 'I didn't know that', and then she added, 'you know, Debra, in this weather you'd probably get frozen into that position...'

'Yes, but not in the hot land of Egypt. And you know, for the Jewish people there was light. If only the lamp-posts would light up again - for us Jewish people and for everyone!'

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