


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

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 Sedra Bo


BRINGING LIGHT TO DARKNESS

COMPARED WITH SOME OF THE TYPHOONS, HURRICANES AND TSUNAMIS OF THE LAST FEW YEARS the ten plagues which smote the Egyptians were relatively gentle and symbolic in nature. With the exception of the last plague, death of the firstborn, the plagues in Egypt were dramatic, and caused discomfort, but hardly anyone was killed. They were beckoning people to understand why they had been sent, which was quite clear, if you were an ancient Egyptian and chose to listen to the message from Moses the Jewish leader.

The Plagues also have a message for us today. Let us take the Ninth Plague, Darkness, which is in our Sedra¹. There were three days of thick darkness. According to the Midrash, the Egyptians could not see, nor even move. However, for the Jewish people it was different: they had light wherever they lived (Ex.10:23).

The Sages discuss this idea. Does it mean that the darkness did not affect the specific area where the Jewish people dwelt, the Land of Goshen? Or does it mean, more mysteriously, that for a Jew, even in the Egyptian areas, there was light in the darkness?

As explained by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, these two opinions relate

	In Loving Memory of Mrs Jeanne Gewolb-Sostrin (Yenta bas Devora) ע"ה - 15 Tevet 5772 Dedicated by her Son Dr Roger Gewolb שי'
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to our view of the world. One view is that there is a deep separation between the holy (the Jewish area) and the unholy (the idols of Egypt). In the holy realm it was light; in the unholy realm it was dark.

The second view is that the Jew in Egypt had the power to bring light to the realm of the unholy. Even in the Egyptian areas, where there was frighteningly thick darkness, the Jew could see. The ultimate goal is that the Jewish light within the darkness will be visible to all.

This relates to the general role of the Jew in the world. There are two aspects to this.

One is, to strengthen the illumination in the obviously sacred realms of our lives. Thus, following the first view above, that the dwellings of the Jewish people were not afflicted by the darkness, one has the responsibility to make the brightness of Judaism shine. This might be accomplished by typically Jewish activities: Torah study, prayer, the special atmosphere of the Jewish home.

The second aspect is when one enters a realm of apparent spiritual 'darkness', through daily work or other kinds of circumstance. Practical Mitzvot, such as those relating to giving Charity and persuading others to give it, might often lead one into very 'worldly' and materialistic pathways. Even more so, the Jewish man or woman in the workplace – or the university – sometimes faces remarkable challenges.

Nonetheless, the promise of the Torah is that, like the Jews in ancient Egypt, one has the power to bring light into that darkness, to illuminate the streets of 'Egypt', of the apparently secular and materialistic world. This freedom is not only for ourselves, as Jews. Our ability to bring light to realms of 'darkness' has the goal that eventually, sooner rather than later, we will bring light to the whole world - the light of Redemption².

1. Exodus 10:1-13:16. See 10:21. 2. Based on points from the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 31 pp.46-52.

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SEDRA BO

JOINING FORCES

The heavy glass doors swung shut behind Sarah and she stood for a moment looking at the greying scenery ahead of her. A fine drizzle of rain was coming down. *Oh great, my hair's going to get frizzy too.* She had been working late in the library gathering information for a Fifteenth of Shvat event, the New Year for Trees, that she had been elected to organize for her class. The event was taking place in about two weeks, but at the moment she was feeling more than slightly overwhelmed.

Seven types of fruit and grain from the Land of Israel; chocolate fondue with dried fruit... yummy; a party with fifteen different types of fruit; birthday of trees; a tree is like a person, the roots, the trunk, the branches.

A million thoughts seemed to be crashing around Sarah's head as she walked in through the front door. "Hi Sarah," called her older sister Rina, who was coming down the stairs. "Do you still need help with that geography project that you were asking me about last night?" Rina, despite being quite a bossy older sister, could also be very helpful.

"Gosh, I completely forgot about that. It's supposed to be in tomorrow." Sarah dropped her bag on the floor. "I just don't have enough time to do it though. I must have the Tu BiShvat program ready for tomorrow morning to show my teacher. I just have too much to do!" She started to tell her sister about the exciting program she was planning.

"Who is supposed to be helping you with this Tu BiShvat project?" Rina asked. Sarah looked vague.

“I mean, Sarah, it’s all very well organizing an amazing event for your class, but you can’t let your other schoolwork suffer. It just seems that it is too much for one person.”

Saran nodded her head. “I suppose you’re right; maybe I can ask Michal to help. She is very good at that sort of thing and possibly Judy will organize the fruit and chocolate fondue; she is really creative. In fact, my teacher said that I could ask anyone I wish to help with it all. I just haven’t got round to asking them...”

“Look,” said Rina philosophically. “There is something that we could learn from the Torah portion regarding this issue. Just before the Jews were about to leave their slavery from Pharaoh in Egypt, G-d commanded them all to take a lamb, the Pesach Lamb. So each Jewish family took a lamb, kept it ready for four days, slaughtered it, sprinkled the blood on their doorpost and eventually ate it as a Pesach sacrifice in a family group. It was something like our Seder Night.

“The problem, however, was with families who were not large enough to eat an entire lamb. Part of the Mitzvah was that they shouldn’t leave any leftovers. So what happened if there were not enough people to eat the whole lamb?”

“They joined up with other families?” said Sarah. “You’re right!” said Rina. “Several small households would be able to share a lamb, thus enabling them all to fulfil the Mitzvah. So what this suggests to me, is that sometimes we can’t manage everything on our own, and it’s a positive thing to get together with others to get a better result.”

“Cool”, said Sarah. “I think you’re right. Let me go and telephone Michal and Judy now. I may even get a good mark on my geography project if they’ll help me with this!”

“I’ll be upstairs if you need me,” said Rina, triumphantly playing bossy big sister who knows it all.

“It’s all right,” said Sarah. “*That* I will manage by myself!

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