


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 15 January 2016 - 5 Shevat 5776
 Sedra Bo

MOSES VERSUS PHARAOH

WE CAN SEE THE STORY OF THE BATTLE BETWEEN MOSES AND PHARAOH described in the Sedra¹ as a religious contest concerning recognition of the power of G-d, the Creator of the Universe. Moses came in the name of G-d, and Pharaoh denied any knowledge of G-d. We can also see their battle as an ideological conflict concerning the nature of society and the significance of the individual. Who is important in society? Who counts, who is the person who really matters?

According to Pharaoh, icon of the ancient Egyptian social hierarchy, the adult men are the only people who matter. Moses claimed that every single individual is important, old and young, man and woman.

The initial request that Moses made to Pharaoh was that the Jewish people be given permission to leave Egypt in order to go out into the desert to celebrate a festival to G-d.

“Exactly who is going?” asked Pharaoh, in our Sedra. Moses answered: the entire Jewish people. Pharaoh could not understand this at all. “Let just the men go” he said. Surely that would be enough. Yet Moses claimed that *everyone* has to go, “our youths and our old



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

people, our sons and our daughters.. for it we have a festival for G-d".² Only when everyone is present can it truly be considered a festival for our Jewish G-d, who created everyone and is concerned about every single individual.

Pharaoh's inability to understand this attitude meant that the conflict continued. One plague came after another, until finally Pharaoh himself begged Moses to leave, taking everyone with him³.

This conflict between Moses and Pharaoh has continued through the ages, taking a variety of forms. Sometimes the focus is on men to the exclusion of women, or on adults to the exclusion of children, or on young adults to the exclusion of the elderly, or on the powerful to the exclusion of the weak.

The teaching of Moses is that every single individual matters. Each person has their own special and even unique relationship with G-d. Consequently, each person has their own personal gateway giving them access to Jewish teaching and Jewish life. The goal of Moses, including the Moses in every generation⁴, is to point out that gateway, and to unlock the gate and to help the man and the woman, the young person or the senior citizen, discover their own personal pathway into the palace of Judaism.

A modern example of this endeavour is Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994). Wednesday (20 January, 10 Shevat) will be the anniversary of his becoming the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe in 1950, when his predecessor passed away. The Rebbe's message is one that each of us can continue to apply: the need of our time is to help every single Jew gain full access to Judaism, wherever he or she may be.

This recognition of the significance of each person before G-d is also the path to the ultimate Redemption from Exile, with the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem and the coming of the Messiah, when every individual in all humanity will truly be redeemed.

1. Exodus 10:1-13:16. 2. Ex. 10:8-11. 3. Ex. 12:31. 4. See Tanya I ch.42, 59a. 5. Based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.26 p.400.

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SEDRA BO

LIGHTING UP THE WORLD

It was in the middle of a game of Monopoly at which Benjy, Dina and Rachel were playing happily one evening - quietly, because their mother lay upstairs with a migraine headache - that without warning, the lights went out. Rachel jumped up and pressed the switch, but the room remained in darkness. The lights in the rest of the house also appeared to be off.

Benjy felt his way to the window and looked outside. "Wow!" he exclaimed. "The street lamps are off - and so are all the lights in the other houses. It must be a power cut!"

"A power cut?" echoed Dina. "What do you mean?"

"It means the electricity in the city, or part of the city, stops working - but don't worry, it'll probably come on again soon."

"But how can we see, meanwhile?" wondered Benjy, who had already bumped himself several times. "Let's light some candles," suggested Dina.

But alas! None were to be found in the usual place. "Oh! I remember mummy saying we needed some more for next Friday evening," said Rachel.

"What should we do? We can't wake poor mummy, and

daddy won't be back for an hour at least. We'll just have to sit quietly and talk. Oh well, it's quite fun really. It reminds me a bit of the Plague of Darkness the Egyptians had," Benjy said.

"Oh no, the Egyptians had it much worse," Rachel disagreed. "We learnt that the darkness was so dark, that you could feel it, and the Egyptians were unable to move at all!"

"Oh no, the poor Egyptians - that means they couldn't move for a few days. That's much worse than this!" said Dina, who hated the dark.

"Isn't that amazing - that darkness can be so thick you can actually feel it?" Rachel wondered. "I always thought that darkness was something that happens when there is no light - but I suppose it's something that really exists, if the Egyptians could feel it".

"Even it is something, it's quite easy to get rid of it," Benjy said. "As long as there's no power cut, all you have to do is turn on the light - and all the darkness is gone."

"You know, my teacher told us once that Mitzvot are like that - when we do good things it is like turning on the light - we help get rid of all the darkness, of the badness in the world."

"And maybe darkness actually isn't anything after all," said Rachel. "Only light and goodness are real. But when there is no light, the darkness seems very real, and that's why the Egyptians couldn't move. Really, all along, everything can turn to light."

Suddenly, as she was talking, the lights went on again. "Hooray," said Dina happily. "We got rid of the darkness just by talking about the light!"

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