


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 3 February 2017 - 7 Shevat 5777
Sedra Bo

LEAVING EGYPT EVERY DAY

THE IDEA OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE LEAVING EGYPT, THE CENTRAL EVENT IN OUR SEDRA¹, IS ONE OF the key concepts in Jewish thought. The Exodus is the basis of most Mitzvot of the Torah, in the sense that G-d saved us from Egyptian servitude in order to give us His Divine laws and make us His special people.

The Sages emphasised that the Exodus is our own personal experience. At the Seder table we imagine ourselves to have been in Egypt. We feel that the deliverance from Egyptian slavery directly affects us, in the sense that if our ancestors had not been redeemed, we would still be there as slaves (and the religious, cultural and political maps of the world would be rather different).

The Torah asks us to remember this event every day: “you should remember the day you left Egypt every day of your life”². Every single day we are enjoined to say the Shema, and the third paragraph of the Shema was instituted because it reminds us about the Exodus, telling us that G-d took us out of Egypt in order to be our G-d³.

Chassidic teachings reveal a further dimension. Rabbi Shneur Zalman tells us⁴ in his Tanya that in every generation, and every



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 Dedicated by her son Dr Roger Gewolb שי'

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day, each of us has the duty to see ourselves as if we had left Egypt on that very day. We not only remember the Exodus described in the Sedra as a fundamental event in the past, we see it as taking place daily in our own lives in the present.

We might well ask, in which way have we left the slavery of Egypt *today*? Everything seems quite normal. There were no taskmasters, no plagues, no dramatic events...

Or so it seems. Rabbi Shneur Zalman explains that our life in this world is itself a kind of Egypt. The Hebrew word for Egypt, Mitzrayim, can also be read as meitzarim, 'limitations'. We are in a realm of limitations which conceal the Divine, and our Animal Soul seeks to enslave us, drawing us towards materiality and egotism.

Very well, you might say. So that is a kind of daily Egypt. But how do I break free? Where is my personal Exodus?

According to Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the step of observing any Mitzvah is an immediate personal Exodus. Especially, he points out, the saying of the Shema in prayer to G-d.

The moment that we say "Shema Yisrael, Hear o Israel, G-d is our G-d, G-d is One", our inner Divine Soul breaks free in the joy of a personal Exodus. At that moment we break out of our ordinary worldly limitations and join with the Divine. Our G-d is 'ours', in the same way that G-d is the G-d of Abraham. Unlike Abraham, we did not work for the privilege: we inherit it. Yet this link is real, and the moment we turn towards the Divine we inwardly experience this bond and this freedom.

Because saying the Shema is a personal Exodus, the third paragraph of the daily Shema prayer mentions the Exodus, and concludes with the statement that G-d takes us out of Egypt in order to be our G-d. In fact this is also taking place at that very moment, simply by saying the Shema.

At this moment too, sitting at the Shabbat table, the door is open to freedom. Through the Mitzvah of Shabbat, we leave the limitations of Egypt and bond with the freedom of the Divine...

1. Exodus 10:1-13:16 2. Deut. 16:3. See Mishnah Berachot 1:5. 3. Numbers 15:41. 4. *Tanya*, Part 1, ch.47.

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SEDRA BO

SORRY

The wind blew hard sending chills through David's body making him shiver all over as he walked home from school that Wednesday.

"It's cold" David thought.

Most days David would wake up at half seven, say the "Modeh Ani" and the morning Blessings and then he would shower, eat breakfast and go to meet his best friend Samuel at the corner. They would walk to school together. Then they would stand next to each other in the school Synagogue and finish the morning prayers.

David kicked a stone down the drain as he walked on feeling lonely and upset because for the past few days he had been walking to school and back by himself.

"When did this whole thing start, anyway?" David thought, feeling frustrated.

"It doesn't matter when it started" he said to himself "the point is that it has to end".

It is always hard when best friends get in to a fight and it is especially hard when the best friends are both stubborn by nature. In this case, neither was ready to give in.

"We are like two Pharaohs" David thought, thinking

about the sad situation.

“Pharaoh was very stubborn. He would not let the Jewish people leave Egypt even after so many plagues” his teacher had said that day.

“But wasn’t it G-d who hardened his heart?” David had asked. “Wasn’t it G-d who made Pharaoh so stubborn?”

It was a good question and the teacher had been proud of David for thinking of it.

“However bad someone is” his teacher had explained “they always have a chance to do better, they can always repent”.

“So Pharaoh could actually have let the people go.” David said. “Even after G-d hardened his heart he was still able to repent if he really wanted to”.

“Yes” the teacher said “and that is why Moses kept going back to Pharaoh before each plague to warn him of the impending strike, just to give him the chance to repent”.

“So it’s always possible,” thought David. “Maybe that’s what I should do...”

“Oh” David said, startled, as he felt a tap on his shoulder. It was Samuel.

“I’m sorry Samuel” he said.

“I should be the one to say sorry” said his old and new friend Samuel. Then they walked together the rest of the way to school on the cold morning, with warm hearts, happy.

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