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THE GENERATION OF REDEMPTION

THE SAGES TELL US THAT THE SOUL MAY COME SEVERAL TIMES into the physical world. This is true not only for individual souls, but entire generations together. According to the Kabbalists, the generation which will see the coming of the Messiah and the positive transformation of all aspects of life has in fact been previously in this world.

When did they live? The Kabbalists tell us, in the time described in the Sedra¹. These are the souls who were in the generation which experienced the slavery in Egypt, who saw Moses appear, promising freedom, and who actually went free on the night of the first Passover.

Many Sages of our own time have emphasised that we are the generation who will see the Messiah and the rebuilding of the Temple. History is reaching the conclusion of one cycle and the beginning of another. This means it is the souls of our own generation which were together with Moses and saw the events depicted in the Sedra.

Let us see how those events may relate to us as individuals and in our ordinary daily lives. A comment by Rashi is helpful². Rashi tells us that, on the one hand, it was time for the Jews in Egypt to be redeemed. From G-d's point of view the time had come. The problem was that the Jewish people were lacking in spiritual merit. After more than two centuries in Egypt, despite the fact that they had indeed preserved important elements of their Jewish identity, in most other respects they had become very similar to the Egyptians.

The task for Moses was to help the Jews gain the spiritual merit they needed in order to be redeemed. Special laws are described in the Sedra

117 GEORGE STREET, LONDON W1H 7HF
cru@lubavitchuk.com - www.chabadresearch.org

and clarified by the Sages. One was to take a lamb, the idol of the Egyptians, and slaughter it as an offering to G-d. Then it was to be roasted and eaten. This was the Pesach lamb described in the Sedra³.

Further, before eating it, the Jewish males had to undergo circumcision. This special expression of the deep bond of the Jewish people with G-d had been forgotten by most families over the generations. Yet now it was remembered. The fact that the Jewish people carried out these Commands, Mitzvot, helped them gain the merit which would enable them to be redeemed. So far Rashi's comment⁴. Now, how does this apply to us?

In our post-Holocaust era many may have imagined that the Mitzvot of traditional Judaism would simply be forgotten. The long quest to accommodate to our neighbours in Western Europe and the USA led many of us simply to forget Jewish life. Tefilin, Mikveh, real Shabbat observance and other central Mitzvot were largely ignored. Those small groups of Jews who had remained orthodox, knowledgeable and fully observant felt at first that the best thing is to keep away from those who have half-assimilated and forgotten.

In 1950 the Lubavitcher Rebbe became leader of the -Chabad-Lubavitch movement, on 10 Shevat. This coming Monday, 10 Shevat, celebrates sixty years since the Rebbe began his programme of inspiration and outreach, with the quest to change the tide of Jewish consciousness. His goal, like that of other leaders before him and particularly Moses in the Sedra, was to give each man, woman and child a little more spiritual merit, a little more connection with G-d: through practical Mitzvot, through love of one's fellow, through the joy of living Judaism, through beautiful teachings on the Torah⁵.

While we watch with horror as in many ways evil becomes more global – and painfully, ever more accepted and taken for granted by ‘rational’ people – this shows too how, ultimately, good can also become global, and be accepted by all. As in the time of Moses, our steps forward in knowledge and observance of Torah will help us make the step into the next stage of history, the time of Redemption.

1 . Exodus 10:1-13:16. See the Letters of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, vol. 13, letter 4506. 2. See Rashi's comment on Exodus 12:6. 3. See Exodus 12:3-13. 4. The idea that the Jewish men were circumcised before eating the Paschal lamb is based on Exodus 12:48. 5. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol.16 pp.114-121.

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SEDRA BO

BLACKOUT

The wind was howling, the snow was falling, the windows were rattling. It was a heavy snow storm, with strong winds. Leah and Michael were both hoping there would be no school the next day, due to the snow.

Then suddenly, the lights in the house started to flicker. Then they went completely off! It was a blackout! "Oh, Mummy! MUMMY!!" screamed Leah. She could be heard all the way from her room. "Come downstairs!" called out her mother. "I'm not sure if I could! Ouch! I just bumped into something!" Leah answered.

"Wait, I've got a torch!" called her brother Michael. He had found a small electric torch in his room, and he helped Leah see her way down the stairs. By now their parents had found some candles. They put them in the Shabbat candlesticks and lit them.

They all sat at the kitchen table: Leah, Michael and their parents. The candle flames were flickering because the wind seemed even to get into the house.

"I am scared!" whispered Leah "will the lights ever go back on?" The wind was howling outside, and the windows were rattling.

"Well," said Leah's father, "soon the city workmen will find the fault and put it right. It shouldn't take too long." He phoned one of his friends on his mobile phone, Chaim who lived in another district of the city. There wasn't a blackout there, Chaim said everything was working normally.

"What are we going to do? We can't even go on the computer" muttered Michael.

“Well, I could tell you about another blackout which happened, but this one was not only at night, it was also during the day.” said their mother.

“Well, if there’s a blackout during the day, at least they have the sun to give light, even if they can’t use their computers” said Michael. “Actually, it was before electricity was invented” said their mother.

“So what does that mean, to have a blackout? Did they blow out all the candles?” asked Leah. “Well, that’s a good question,” said her mother, “I will give you a hint: it lasted three days.”

“Oh! I know! I know!” said Michael. “In Egypt...” “Oh, of course” said Leah. “That was a real blackout! Rashi says, not only couldn’t they see, they couldn’t even move! At least we can move!”

“Yes, thank G-d. We can move, and we can see as well,” said their father. “We’ve got candles, and when dawn comes we will have the daylight, even if it is a bit hidden in a snow storm. For the Egyptians there was complete darkness.”

“But for the Jewish people there was light,” said Leah. “That was strange, that in the same place, some people had light and others didn’t.”

“Well, it’s a bit like that today,” said their father. “Where Chaim lives, there is light, and here it’s dark...”

“Or you can put it another way,” said their mother. “Some people live a meaningful life and do good things, and for them it’s light. While others...”

“So what we have to do,” said Leah, “is to make light everywhere. To try to help people have light wherever they are.”

At that moment, flickering at first, and then steady and clear, the lights came on.

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