



THE SLEEP OF EXILE

ON THE SHABBAT BEFORE THE NINTH OF AV WE HAVE TIME TO remember that however wholesome and happy our lives may be, we are still in exile. The fast from Monday evening to Tuesday night (5 August) emphasises that fact. But we may well ask ourselves: “What is exile? What difference does it make?”

Exile is compared to sleep. When a person sleeps his or her mind no longer controls the body in a clear and obvious way. Although the brain still gives life, and therefore one’s heart and lungs continue to function, the person lies inert, or moves restlessly, but without meaning. In sleep there is a certain chaotic quality to one’s being. Indeed, people are sometimes known to cause injury to themselves, such as by falling out of bed!

Let us think of the universe as one vast system which should be expressing G-d, the Infinite Essence (or “mind”) of all existence. If this system were “awake”, every event would be meaningful and would clearly link together with everything else. Daily life would be a constant expression of the true inner “self” of the universe, G-d. As in a wakeful person, there would be co-ordination and harmony. Everything would make sense.

As we know, most of us do not see life like this. If you look around the area where you live, not to mention the world as a whole, there is usually an atmosphere of the chaos of sleep. Disease,

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unhappiness, crime, war - the restless and painful sleep of Exile.

The Sages tell us that the Temple in Jerusalem functions as the “brain” of existence. Within it is the *Shechina*, the Divine Presence. When the Temple was destroyed, the consciousness of the brain was lost: hence the Divine Presence does not express itself through the “body”, through existence as a whole.

But the Divine Presence is still there, and the Temple site is holy even though the buildings are destroyed. In fact all life still depends on it, just as the pulse and breathing of the sleeper are dependent on his or her brain. Hence today too we turn towards the Temple to pray.

The fast on the Ninth of Av expresses our grief at this situation of sleep and chaos. A constant hope and expectancy at the heart of Judaism is that the sleep of exile will soon come to an end: there will be a happy awakening, with unity between the warring nations of mankind and the end of all harm and sorrow. The Temple will be rebuilt, and full “consciousness” will return to existence as a whole¹.

This positive perspective links to the Sedra² which is read this Shabbat, beginning the Book of Devarim (Deuteronomy). This fifth Book differs from the earlier four Books, in that it is largely written in the first person, as the words of Moses himself, addressed to the Jewish people camped on the east bank of the Jordan, opposite the city of Jericho on the west bank. The Sages explain that this change is because the Book of Devarim is preparing the Jewish people for their entry into daily life in the Land of Israel, rather than wandering in the un-natural atmosphere of the desert. Moses is explaining how the teachings in the previous Books will apply in practical terms.

The Sages comment that this also applies to us, who have been wandering through the paradoxical generations of Exile. We too are poised to begin a life with more meaning and reality, awaking from the dreams of a sleeping and chaotic world. Hence the Sedra beginning the Book of Devarim is always read just before the Ninth of Av³. For this moment in the Jewish year reminds us of the need for a transformation, an awakening, when all violence and harm will cease, for the world will be filled with knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea⁴.

1. See Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn's *Sefer HaMaamarim 5700* pp.5-8. 2. Deut.1:1-3:22. 3. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 4, 1087-91. 4. Isaiah 11:9.

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SEDRA DEVARIM – 9TH OF AV

FROM SADNESS TO JOY

It was an odd day for an August afternoon. It was slightly humid but the sky was grey and it had been drizzling all morning. Dave and Jude were sitting on the front porch savouring the last of their super pack of kosher salt and vinegar crisps.

‘Hey, let’s go inside and listen to some music’, said Dave, ‘I’m getting bored out here and the wind is beginning to blow drizzle onto the porch’. Jude grunted and made a move to get up from his comfortable deck chair. ‘Wait a minute!’ he said suddenly, ‘we could go inside but we can’t really listen to music’.

‘Why not?!’ exclaimed Dave, ‘Oh yeh’, he said, ‘it’s the Nine Days, coming up to the 9th of Av on Tuesday when the Temple was destroyed and we’re not allowed to be happy.’ He sighed, ‘Why do we have to be sad for something that happened thousands of years ago? I mean, it’s not like in today’s world it really makes much difference’.

‘You’re right’, said Jude, settling back in his deckchair, ‘for some people it really doesn’t make much difference nowadays’.

‘Exactly!’ exclaimed Dave, glad that Jude seemed to agree with him, ‘so why don’t we listen to music and why aren’t people allowed to have a haircut?’

‘They can’t get married either,’ said Jude. ‘It’s simple. The

reason why for some people all of this doesn't make any difference and it all seems like a waste of time, is because they don't know enough about our history to care'.

'It all comes down to history, huh?' Dave said cynically.

'It does', said Jude. 'Once upon a time the Jews lived in the land of Israel, given to them by G-d. They were ruled by great kings and they built the Temple in Jerusalem where the presence of G-d was witnessed every day by everyday people, like me and you. The day that all of this was destroyed, twice in history, was on the 9th of Av.'

'Now, the Jews are all over the world, many are lost amongst the nations and we have been persecuted for the last two thousand years, simply because we are different'.

'Yes', said Dave, 'but none of that happens in nowadays...'

'Not so true', replied Jude, 'there is still hatred towards the Jews in the modern world, there are terrorists and such. But actually, that's not the point of the 9th of Av, we are also remembering what we did wrong which led to all this.'

'G-d created the world so that we could all live peacefully, all the nations together. When the Temple was there in Jerusalem and the Jews were spreading G-d's message of knowledge, peace and love, G-d was happy with us. But then the Jews began behaving very nastily towards each other. That made G-d angry. Because we were so nasty to each other, the Temple was destroyed and we went into Exile. That's the cause of the whole problem..'

'So peace between us and love will rebuild the Temple?' asked Dave. 'Yes,' replied Jude smiling, 'and then we'll have faced up to the challenge of Exile. Then life will be transformed, for every human being, everywhere! After that, instead of the 9th of Av being a fast day and a sad day, it will be a day of great celebration and happiness!'

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