


CHABAD  
  
 RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday night*..... קדש

Friday 4 September 2009 - 15 Elul 5769  
 Sedra Ki Tavo




### THE CHALLENGE

**T**HE SEDRA<sup>1</sup> INCLUDES A LONG SECTION WHICH BEGINS WITH the blessings which will come to the Jewish people if they obey G-d's teachings: "You will be blessed in the city, and you will be blessed in the field. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the fruit of your land... You will be blessed when you come in, and you will be blessed when you go out". They will be living in the sacred land of Israel, at peace.

After these warm words, comes a lengthy warning and prophecy about what will happen if the Jewish people do not obey G-d. Grievous suffering will overtake them, which is described in dramatic terms. "The sky above your head will be copper, and the earth beneath you will be iron"<sup>2</sup>. This depiction of drought and famine is followed by a list of tragedies culminating in the exile from Israel, the Holy Land, and dispersion among the nations of the world.

The tragedies described did in fact take place, during our long history of exile, wandering and persecution. There are commentators who link the details of the text with specific events in Jewish history<sup>3</sup>. How should we look at this? What is the nature of exile? The Talmud makes the intriguing comment that G-d "regrets the fact that He created exile... and the evil desire"<sup>4</sup>.



Dedicated by Mrs Tzipora Sufrin װ , to the memory and merit of her father k"z ihætk rgcus hfsrn װ װ v j"vrv

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This emphasises the idea that exile, suffering and tragedy are not natural and inevitable. They are an unnatural affliction. The goal of existence is not to accept negativity as the status quo, but to strive to reach a higher state of being, in which we are permanently freed, both from evil desire and from exile, as individuals and as a people.

As individuals this means a totally positive approach to life, with a sense of the ultimate good beyond the challenges of the moment. As a people this means the vision of living in the land of Israel together, with the Temple rebuilt in Jerusalem, at peace among ourselves, and with all humanity, in an era of universal peace and unity.

The present state of affairs for many individuals and on the international scene seems very far from that. A person might well think that these fine ideas about peace and harmony are just an elusive dream... Yet our Sages tell us, on the contrary, it is Exile which is the dream<sup>5</sup>.

There is a Chabad Chassidic explanation of the harsh warnings in the Sedra, claiming that in fact, despite all appearances, they are all blessings<sup>6</sup>. This means that the challenge is to see with our mind's eye, to be aware, that there is a luminous reality beyond the often unhappy events of the present and the past. The tragedies and the difficulties are indeed there, but, ultimately, we are not subject to them. There is a deeper reality which is the true key to our lives.

This conviction has enabled Jews throughout the generations to hear the warning prophecies in the Sedra as a positive challenge: the challenge to turn darkness to light, and, in every epoch, to make history take the next step forward.

1. Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8. See 28:1 ff. 2. Deut. 28:23. 3. Abarbanel to Deut.28:15 ff. and *Akeidat Yitzhak* Shaar 98, cited in *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 24, p.167, n.1. 4. Succah 52b, discussed in *Likkutei Sichot* 24, pp. 167, 175. 5. *Torah Or Vayesehev* 28c, citing Psalms 126:1. 6. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol.19, p.235 ff, citing Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi's *Likkutei Torah* Bechukotai, 48a.

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*SEDRA KI TAVO*

**FULLY THERE**

The hide-and-seek game spread out all over the field. Boys disappeared behind trees, bushes and the buildings on the outer edge of the grass. In the middle of the field were four tall posts. This was "Time-Out." If one of the boys who was hiding was found, but not actually caught, he could run to the middle of the field and be safe in middle of the square between the posts.

Joseph was IT. Within five minutes he found three of his friends hiding behind one of the buildings and he caught them. Five minutes later, he found another group hiding behind a clump of trees. One of the boys got to the Time-Out square way ahead of Joseph, but he caught the other two. The next three boys were harder to find. They were hiding well behind some bushes at the far end of the field. Joseph caught one of them, and the other two managed to get to the Time-Out square before Joseph could catch them.

Joseph knew that he had one more friend hiding somewhere nearby.... It was his good friend, David. Joseph was determined to catch him. Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, Joseph saw something moving in the branches of a tree. Could it be.... yes, it was, David! Joseph leaped towards the tree, but not before his friend had jumped down and started running toward the safety in the center of the

field. "I'm going to catch you, David!!" Joseph cried out breathlessly as he sped across the field as fast as his feet could carry him.

Joseph was a fast runner and he was gaining on his friend. They were nearing the Time-Out square and Joseph threw his last ounce of energy into his sprint. "I got you!" he cried as he grabbed his friend's shirt, just as David was crossing into the Time-Out square. Both boys collapsed into a heap in the grass.

"I don't think you caught me, Joseph" David said. "I was already half way into the square. It doesn't count."

The other boys in the Time-Out square agreed that David had been half-way into safety when he was caught. "The thing is," one of them piped up, "if he was only part way in, was he really in?"

A full-fledged argument ensued. Until David piped up. "I just remembered what we learned about the Sedra. It says that the Jewish people haven't entered the land of Israel until they have fully conquered and settled it. They weren't really *in* until they were *fully* in. So I guess that I wasn't really inside the Time-Out square because not all of me was inside."

"I remember learning that too," Joseph added, as he put his arm around his good friend, David. He was impressed that David had found an argument against himself. It showed that for David, playing fair was more important than winning. He also liked the idea of linking their game to the Torah.

"We also learn a lesson in how to keep Torah and do the commandments," said Joseph. "We need to be fully inside the commandments! We need to put all of ourselves into the Torah and Mitzvot, just like David." The other boys applauded in fun.

David patted his good friend, Joseph, on the back and winked. "I guess now it's my turn to be IT."

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