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### PREPARING FOR THE FESTIVALS

**T**HERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT WAYS TO PREPARE FOR the forthcoming festivals. Some are contacting distant family and old friends, buying new clothes, preparing menus for stunning festive meals.

On the more individual, personal side, a person may think through what they have achieved in spiritual terms during the past year, and what could have been better. Did they patch up the quarrel with cousin Jane? Did they get the Mezuzot checked? Did they manage to get daughter Sandra into a Jewish holiday camp? Following the pay-rise in February, did they increase their level of charitable donations? This is called the 'accounting of the soul'. It is a preparation for Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, when G-d reviews His creation and decides the future for every person and each creature.

There is also another form of preparation, linked to the Sedra<sup>1</sup> reading, which includes a frightening description of the horrors of suffering and exile (Deut. 28:15-68). The *baal koreh* (Reader) who chants the Torah recites this section swiftly, in a low tone. It is a statement of the tragic outcome if, as a people, we disobey G-d. This is always read shortly before Rosh Hashanah in the autumn.

There is a similar section in the Torah read shortly before the Shavuot festival in the early summer<sup>2</sup>.

The Talmud explains that the aim is to get rid of everything

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cru@lubavitchuk.com - www.chabadresearch.net

negative before the festival<sup>3</sup>. Hence we make sure that the apparently gloomy sections of the Torah are behind us.

Chassidic teachings add a further level of meaning to this: in each case these serious and disturbing sections cleanse us, scouring out everything negative, preparing us for the beautiful experience which is going to come through the festival.

Can one measure the intensity of this positive experience? In a sense one can. Shavuot celebrates the Giving of the Torah, when G-d was revealed to us from above, but our level of participation was relatively meagre. Indeed, this is why we were able to fall into the colossal error of making the Golden Calf so soon afterwards.

By contrast Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur express our own strong attempt to come close to G-d. Every weekday in the month of Elul the Shofar is blown, reminding us to wake up spiritually; we engage in 'spiritual accounting', we make decisions to improve our lives. It is a service from below upwards, and therefore leads to a greater level of spiritual reward.

For this reason, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the harsh section in our Sedra, as we approach Rosh Hashanah, is much longer than that before Shavuot. The Sages tell us it contains twice as many harsh statements. The cleansing and scouring process is more intense - because it is in preparation for a greater and more wonderful revelation of the Divine.

In the same way our exile, since the destruction of the Temple nineteen hundred years ago, has been longer and in many ways more intense than any previous period of exile of our people. We went through the exile in Egypt for 210 years, and the exile in Babylon for 70 years.

Our exile is longer because we are in a course of preparation for a far greater level of revelation of the Divine than ever happened before, on a global level. We endure a long list of tragic events, like that in our Sedra, but this will be followed by the coming of Moshiach, bringing lasting peace and goodness to all humanity<sup>4</sup>.

1. Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8. 2. In Sedra Bechukotai (Lev.26:14-46). 3. Megila 31b. 4. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol.2 p.392.

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### SEDRA KI TAVO

#### **RAINY BLESSINGS**

“When will we be there?” asked David, peering through the window at the pouring rain, and the rows of red brake-lights of cars stopped in the traffic jam.

“Mummy” Rachel moaned, “why are we stuck in this traffic?”

It was meant to be just a quick hop in the car to the Tesco’s, which was usually just ten short minute’s drive from the Cohen’s house.

“I’m so sorry” Mrs Cohen said sympathetically to the children, “it looks as if this isn’t going to be such a short ride after all”.

Mrs. Cohen had been taking her normal route to Tesco’s when she discovered that the road was blocked off. They soon found themselves driving along a diversion, stuck in heavy traffic, and the GPS telling them to “MAKE A U-TURN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE”.

“You know what,” said Rachel hopefully, “maybe something good will come out of this”.

“Yes my dear” Mrs Cohen said, “that is the right attitude”.

“This week’s Sedra Ki Tavo talks about the negative things that could happen if the Jewish people don’t behave properly” Rachel continued. “My teacher said that really they are all

positive things because in the end they are leading to the time of Moshiach when everything will be good, and we will see that even the bad has been transformed into good.”

“How could bad be changed to good?” asked David.

“TURN RIGHT” said the GPS. Warily, Mrs Cohen did so.

“Hey” David yelled, excitedly pointing out of the window “look, Dad is walking on the street over there!”

“Quick” said Rachel, “honk the horn to tell him we are here”.

“Oh hello,” Mr Cohen said, clambering into the car in his dripping suit, with no coat, “how did you know to come and get me?” Everyone in the car looked blank.

“It was terrible” Mr Cohen continued. He told them about the fire-alarm on the underground, so the underground station near their home was closed. He got off at the next underground station but there was no bus home, just a huge traffic jam, so he had been walking for half an hour in the pouring rain, his clothes soaked through.

“So” Mrs Cohen smiled, “maybe it wasn’t so bad after all that we got diverted and stuck in the traffic. Because of that we were able to meet you and pick you up and get you out of the rain.”

“See, David,” said Rachel. “That’s an example of something bad becoming good, like in my Sedra lesson.”

“Yes, children” said Dad, latching on to the conversation, despite his soaking clothes. “Like me being so happy to see you, it was even worth being stuck in the rain. The pain of Exile becomes the joy of Redemption.”

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