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POSSIBILITIES - BAD LEADS TO GOOD

THE IDEA THAT WHAT WE SEE AS 'BAD' LEADS IN THE END TO 'GOOD' is found repeatedly throughout Jewish teaching. The approaching Pesach festival is the foremost example of this. Through the harsh Exile in Egypt the Children of Israel were forged into a nation with first-hand awareness of G-d's rule over all existence. The evil and suffering of the slavery in Egypt was transformed into the glory of the Exodus, with a permanent sense of freedom.

The Rabbis give a similar perspective on the Sedra¹. Here we read of an affliction, often loosely termed 'leprosy', which affected people, clothes and even houses. In some cases this could lead to the house having to be demolished. Could anything be more disastrous? But the Rabbis add an intriguing point: the owner often benefited from this. Frequently, when the house was demolished the owner would find ancient treasure troves hidden in the foundations; Instead of being impoverished, the owner and his family became wealthy².

The ups and downs in the life of each individual can often be seen in these terms, and humanity as a whole is actually taking part in a similarly paradoxical process. The chaos of the present-day life of people round the globe, with war, terror, oppression, natural disasters, hunger, abuse, personal conflict and suffering in every form, is the dark and negative situation, the equivalent of the bondage in Egypt or of the 'leprosy' in the Sedra.

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Jewish teaching presents the trust and expectancy that at any moment this can all be transformed. We, and all nations of the world, will see the negative changed into the positive, the darkness into light. We will rediscover the beauty of a possibility first glimpsed in the Garden of Eden: the intimate Presence of G-d in daily life. Adam and Eve dwelled with the Presence of the Divine and, ultimately, so can we and everyone else!

In response to this there will be a deep change of heart, for everyone, and hence (among other good things) peace over the whole world. Is this possible, or is it just a dream?

The promise of Redemption is described as something like the moment of going out of Egypt: “As in the days of your going out of Egypt, I will show you wonders”³. Relating also to the theme of our Sedra, it is intriguing to find the Talmud describing the Messiah as a ‘leper’ at the gates of Rome.

A certain Rabbi Joshua the son of Levi wanted to know when the Messiah would come. He was told to go to the gates of the city of Rome, where the lepers and sick people congregate. One of them is the Messiah. Rabbi Joshua made the journey to Rome, and found the person who had been described. Rabbi Joshua asked: when are you coming? The Messiah answered: “Today!”

The day passed, and the Messiah had not come. How could this be? Did the Messiah lie? No, says the Talmud. When he said “today”, he meant the verse: “Today, if you listen to G-d’s voice!”⁵. The Talmud was completed around 1500 years ago, but this sense of instant possibility remains even more strongly with the Jewish people. At any moment the Messiah can come, if we truly listen to G-d’s teaching.

The Sages add that even if we do not listen, the Messiah will still come. But listening helps! One of the ideas which characterises our time, perhaps more than at any previous epoch in history, is that anything is possible. At any moment, a change can take place, from ultimate bad to ultimate good. A little step from us, listening to G-d, and a little step from G-d...

1. Leviticus chs.14-15.
2. See Rashi to Lev.14:34.
3. Micah 7:15.
4. Sanhedrin 98a, see also 98b.
5. Psalms 95:7.

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SEDRA METZORA

HIDDEN JEWELS

Sara awoke with a scream – “No don’t do it! Don’t destroy my bedroom walls – I just got them painted....NOOOOOO!!”

Her mother rushed to her daughter’s bedroom, but not before glancing at the clock on the wall: 4:12 am. Why on earth was her daughter screaming in the middle of the night?!

As soon as she opened the bedroom door, she realized her daughter was having a nightmare. “Shhh...Sara....it’s just a dream. Don’t worry you’re home, lying in your bed, sshh”

“Oh Mummy!” Sara sobbed. “It was so real! Just like we learned in the Sedra class today! One of the walls of the house inside was covered in spots. It was terrible. Mr Cohen from next door came and looked at it, and said the wall has to be knocked down!”

Her mother sat down next to her, on her bed, and began to stroke her hair. “Shhh darling...it’s OK...that only happened thousands of years ago, that sort of thing does not happen nowadays...”

“Mummy! You don’t understand,” Sara cried. “We learned all about this week’s Sedra Metzora in class today. There is a thing called Tzara’at, with spots and patches. It can come on someone’s skin, or on their clothes, or on the walls of their house. One reason why it came was because of speaking

badly about people, Lashon Hara. If the person didn't stop, it would get worse and worse. Even the walls of his house would become covered in spots. Then, he would have to destroy his home to get rid of them. Imagine – his very own home!”

Sara's mother looked at her daughter with a tired smile. “Sara – it seems that you have only heard half of the story. Life sometimes does that – what appears to be so strange and even scary really ends up to a person's benefit.”

Sara rubbed her eyes in confusion. “I don't get what you are trying to say...”

“Before the Jews came to settle in the Land of Israel, the Canaanites lived there. The Canaanites knew that the Jews would conquer the land, so they hid their jewels in the walls of their homes. This was actually a way that the buried treasure would be discovered.”

Despite the late hour Sara gave a huge grin. “My dream does not seem so scary anymore! I can just imagine – this poor man, feeling so bad about his sin, having to destroy his own home....Lo and behold – he finds treasures hidden inside the wall! What a great ending!”

Exhaustion was rapidly affecting Sara's mother, but not before she got her last word in. “You know Sara, the jewels hidden in the walls tell us something about people. Some people seem very negative, like a wall covered with spots. But in fact, there is always something positive and beautiful hidden inside them. The Torah is always hidden inside their soul – like the precious jewels.”

Sara laughed. She looked up at the clock: 4.30am. She had forgotten her bad dream. “I can imagine helping everyone uncovering their treasure inside – but just not at this early time in the morning!”

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