



THE DRAMA OF HISTORY

AT THIS REMARKABLE POINT IN THE HISTORY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE there is confusion and perplexity. In the sacred Land of Israel, and also for Jews round the world, there are many questions. After the recent Gaza war, what will happen next? How can the situation be improved? Will only a miracle help?

The mood could be compared with that in much of our Sedra¹. The sons of Jacob are deeply perplexed. Faced by famine in the Land of Canaan they travelled to Egypt to buy food, as everyone else was doing. Yet there they were accused of being spies, of seeking to harm the country.

Unwittingly they let slip that they had another brother still at home in Canaan, the youngest of the family, Benjamin, deeply loved by his father. Now they were told they must bring him to Egypt. “We are guilty!” said the brothers to each other, remembering how they had sold Joseph many years before. “I told you so!”, said Reuben, the oldest of the brothers². He had never wanted to harm Joseph, but had not succeeded in protecting him.

Does this remind us of arguments about whether or not Israel should have disengaged from Gaza in 2005, or similar controversies before and since?

The sense of confusion and perplexity is redoubled later in the Sedra. Back in Canaan, the brothers managed to persuade their father

Jacob that the only way forward was to allow them to bring Benjamin to Egypt. They were confident this would solve everything. But in fact, things got worse. Quite inexplicably Benjamin was accused of stealing a goblet and they were told that Benjamin must remain in Egypt as a slave. It seemed like a total disaster.

The Sedra leaves us hanging at a moment of impasse. The beginning of next week's Sedra presents the denouement, in which the Egyptian Viceroy who had been making these demands is revealed as the long lost brother Joseph and the whole family is reunited with tears of joy.

This indeed will be the future of the story for the Jewish people too. Ultimately, the Messiah will come, bringing peace and unity to all nations, and the Jewish Priests and Sages will lead humanity in recognition and praise of G-d the Creator of the Universe, from the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem.

How do we get to that stage? Certainly, we should stand up for our right to live securely in the Land of our Fathers and to own all our historic sacred sites. We must also be ready to defend the lives of the Jewish people. But we also need the awareness that G-d is running the show.

This point is emphasised on this Shabbat, which is the point when Chanuka and Shabbat are joined. Chanuka expresses the Jewish attempt to turn darkness to light, globally. Shabbat expresses the idea that we should consider that 'all your work has been completed'³. During the weekdays, we did what we could. Now the rest is up to G-d. Indeed, G-d can transform everything in a moment.

The Sedra tells of Joseph's sudden rise to power from a dungeon to Viceroy, and next week's Sedra recounts how joy unexpectedly returned to Jacob and his family, when Joseph was re-joined with his family. So too, for us today, the transformation of history can take a moment⁴. We have to recognise that the Jewish dimension of our lives is paramount, both in the Land of Israel and world-wide, and that the drama of history is in the hands of G-d. This will bring us to the next Sedra, to survival and Redemption.

1. Genesis 41:1-44:17. 2. See Gen. 42:21-22. 3. See Rashi to Exodus 20:9. 4. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Sefer haSichot 5748* vol. I pp.179-182.

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SEDRA MIKETZ

NOT TO BRAG...

Ben Silverberg woke up on Wednesday morning with a feeling of excitement. His cousin Avi was here to visit his family during the winter holidays all the way from Switzerland. Today he was joining Ben in a school trip to an ice skating rink which had been reserved for the school.

They jumped out of bed and hurried to school, eager to start the trip. They joined Ben's class getting onto the bus and off they went. The journey was long, and at some times boring, but before they knew it, they had arrived.

The teachers led the pupils into the building and the boys began to gear themselves up. Avi was the first one to smoothly slide onto the ice. He eased his way in and did some spins and twirls, focusing so intently on his moves that he didn't realize that Ben and some classmates were all watching him, amazed. Whilst he was doing an even spin, he looked around for Ben but couldn't see him anywhere. Finally, when he glanced at the entrance, he spotted Ben and some other boys, staring at him in wonder. He glided swiftly towards the entrance.

Why aren't you guys coming on the ice?" he asked, puzzled.

"We were just watching you, Avi. You're brilliant at skating!" Dave exclaimed.

"Yeah, where did you learn how to do all that?" Ben marvelled, slightly jealous. He hadn't realized his cousin was so good at skating. For a second, he thought maybe his cousin was about to brag and boast about how well he could skate.

“Oh,” said Avi, slowly, “well... I’ve been skating ever since I was young. Every winter the lakes freeze over and we go skating the whole time. Most of my friends back at home know how to skate very well, too, even better than me. So I guess it’s just the way I grew up... I can show you all if you want.”

“That would be really great!” Ben replied. The rest of the boys enthusiastically agreed.

Ben was relieved. ‘I should have realized’, he thought, ‘Avi comes from Switzerland and that’s what children there are used to. I’m impressed though, because he could have bragged about it. I know I would have if it was me.’

‘Hey,’ thought Avi, ‘he’s like Joseph in this week’s Sedra! When Pharaoh was confused about the strange dreams he had at night, he called his wise men, but they couldn’t explain them. Then he called Joseph and said: “You are known as an interpreter of dreams.” But instead of taking the credit for himself, Joseph replied “The wisdom to interpret dreams is beyond me. G-d will give the answer Pharaoh needs..” That’s kind of like what Avi did. He didn’t take any credit for himself... Wow, I have a lot to learn from my cousin...’

“Hey Ben!” Avi called to his cousin. Ben looked up, startled. He hadn’t realized that he’d been so deeply engrossed in his thoughts.

“You okay?” Avi winked. “Are you planning on joining us on the rink at all today?”

Ben got up slowly, holding on to the railing to balance himself on his unstable skates.

“Yup, I’m okay,” he replied, “In fact I’m more than okay! Let’s go!” He gave Avi a heartfelt slap on the back, and with Avi’s help, he smoothly glided onto the ice rink. Maybe one day he would really be able to skate!

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