


CHABAD

 RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש


Friday 4 October 2013 - 30 Tishrei 5774
 Sedra Noah

TURMOIL AND TRANQUILLITY

IN MOST PEOPLE'S LIVES THERE ARE TIMES OF TURMOIL AND TIMES OF TRANQUILLITY. During difficult, hectic and troubled moments we may forget that things can ever be any different. At such times, people often feel quite desperate - and this itself does not help in coping with the situation. One of the messages of the Sedra¹, as taught by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, is about keeping one's balance when all around is tumult and confusion.

How so? The turmoil in the Sedra is quite clear. After all, there is a devastating Flood, the result of terrible evil among humankind. As if that were not enough, near the end of the Sedra is the story of the Tower of Babel, a timeless symbol of fragmentation and confusion. But where is the tranquillity?

There is an interesting idea that the name of each Sedra is itself significant. It can be seen as summarising the Sedra's contents, expressing it all in a word or phrase. Sometimes the name of the Sedra apparently contrasts with the contents. This itself teaches us something.

	<p>In Loving Memory of Mrs Jeanne Gewolb-Sostrin (Yenta bas Devora) ע"ה - 15 Tevet 5772 Dedicated by her Son Dr Roger Gewolb שי'</p>
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Now, the name of our Sedra is Noah. This would seem quite natural: Noah is the person who built the Ark and survived the Flood. It is interesting, considering this in very simple terms, that while the Sedra is largely about the turmoil of the Flood, the name of the Sedra focuses on Noah who survives it. At the very least, we are talking about getting through the difficulties, instead of letting them overcome us.

The Rebbe presents a further dimension: the name Noah in Hebrew means “comfort” both in the sense of consolation² and of feeling comfortable. A further meaning, based on the Aramaic usage of the word, is “calm” or “tranquil”.

It is remarkable that the Sedra which is about such terrible turmoil should have a name connoting comfort and tranquillity. Further, even in the context of the events in the story, there are moments of blissful calm: such as when the Flood subsides and Noah finally comes out of the Ark. As the Sages put it: “he saw a new world”. Everything was fresh and pure, with a unique sense of global tranquillity.

The Torah is presenting us with a fundamental teaching about life. Yes, there are times of turmoil and chaos. But the inner purpose of this, is for us to reach a sense of comfort and tranquillity. We face the challenges, with G-d’s help, however daunting they may seem. And through this, perhaps at fleeting moments of respite during the struggle, and hopefully when it is all over and we have got through our own personal Flood, we experience a deep and true tranquillity. At these moments we sense the sacred inner dimension of all being, beyond the harsh exterior.

One point which helps us in this is the central theme of the Sedra: the Ark. The Baal Shem Tov pointed out that the Hebrew for Noah’s Ark also means “word”. We shelter from the Flood by entering the “word” of Jewish prayer and Torah study. Despite the raging waters, for a moment all is calm. And then we return to the struggle, with renewed confidence that this indeed is G-d’s plan, and that ultimately all is pure, good and holy³.

1. Genesis 6:9-11,32, 2. See Genesis 5:29. 3. See *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.20, pp285-7.



SEDRA NOAH

THE WATERS OF NOAH

The rain came pouring down as Debbi and Chava walked home from school one early October afternoon. They were discussing the day's events at school.

“That was quite funny, when Mrs Burton discovered that none of her white-board pens would write. Did you see how she pretended not to notice?” chuckled Debbi, splashing happily through a large puddle.

Chava looked worried. She didn't quite agree with her friend. “I don't know...” she said slowly “I don't like the way poor Mrs Burton is being so persecuted - she's quite nice, really, and some of the things Sara and the others are doing are really horrible.”

Debbi thought for a moment. She thought of the sad look on Mrs Burton's face when she opened her drawer and discovered that a jar of honey had been emptied over her books... It must be awful to be treated like that!

“Chava, you know, I think you're right. It isn't really nice the way our class are treating Mrs Burton. Why don't you tell everyone to stop it - you really persuaded me, I think you should tell everyone else.”

“I couldn't!” said Chava. “They'll all just laugh at me!”

The next day though, during the Sedra lesson, Chava remembered what Debbi had said. Their teacher was telling them about Noah. He was a good man and G-d saved him and his family from the Flood.

“But, even though Noah was saved, he is not considered to be as great as Abraham. We even see that in the Haftorah the flood is named after him – It is called ‘the waters of Noah’. Can anyone think why that is so?”

Naomi, the brain of the class, raised her hand. “I think it's because Noah just worried about himself, he didn't try to make sure everyone else was saved.”

“That's right. Noah knew that G-d was going to bring a flood because people were bad. He could have spent all his time trying to persuade people to behave differently, but he didn't. He was good himself, but he did not make others better. That is why the flood is called ‘the waters of Noah’. Noah himself is partly to blame”.

Chava thought about this. Wasn't she a bit like Noah? Maybe Debbi was right - she should let her classmates know what she thought about it, and see if she could change the way they were treating their teacher...

One evening, several days later, Mrs Burton said to her husband: “You know, I can't think what happened to my students. Most of them were being really terrible, but the last two days they have all been as good as gold. One of the worst pupils even gave me a bunch of flowers. I was going to speak to the Head about them, but now I see they are all very good...”

***Torah teachings are holy –
please treat this page with care***