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### FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

**A**S HUMAN BEINGS, WE HAVE A DEEP NEED FOR INNER SPIRITUAL FREEDOM. Every creature seeks a form of freedom, whether the freedom to eat what it desires or to move where it wants. Human beings have an additional level of need: we require moral freedom, the freedom to decide that one thing is right and another is wrong. Without this we might function as bodies and as minds, but we would be no more than a sophisticated automaton. Our power to choose, to affirm one course of action as good and our ability to reject another course of action as bad, makes us into the human being who is created in the Divine Image.

In the case of the Jew, this sense of choice extends into virtually every activity in daily life and has a kind of interactive power, affecting the totality of existence. This idea is the theme of the beginning of the Sedra<sup>1</sup>, which is called *Re'eh* - "See!". *The Torah* is telling us to see that there are two paths before us: good and bad.

The good path will lead to 'blessing', a positive connection between us and G-d. The bad path leads to the opposite.

Torah teachings, in all their subtlety, present us with an in-depth critical and evaluative view of all our possible activities, whether in the realm of thought, of speech or of action.

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Sometimes what is 'good' or 'bad' is quite obvious. However, sometimes the choice facing us needs careful thought. We may have to consult a Rabbi, whether it is a question of kashrut in the kitchen or business ethics in the office.

But why does 'bad' exist? Why did G-d have to create us with tendencies to negative behaviour? Why we should human beings ever *want to* commit crimes? Why should a Jew be tempted to ignore Torah law?

A seemingly simple answer, given by our Sages long ago, is that bad exists in order that we should choose good. The force of the temptation to do bad is only in order that our power of *choice* can be expressed.

Here we come back to the key concept that our power of choice is an essential aspect of our quality as human beings. G-d created us in order that we should have choice, and therefore He had to create false pathways and negative temptations. But they exist only for our sake. Evil does not have an independent existence of its own. In Jewish teaching there is no force which is simply acting for the bad. There is only good, and the evil which exists is in order to bring out our power to choose good.

This is what the beginning of the Sedra asks us to "See". See that ultimately there is only good, and that bad has no reality.

According to the kabbalists, the fact that we realise that 'bad' exists only to highlight good, has itself a transformative effect on everything which might be termed 'bad' all the way through the spiritual system of existence. When we 'see' that the purpose of bad is good, that actually makes bad become good. It reveals its inner purpose-to help us serve G-d<sup>2</sup>. As we go through life, often facing very difficult temptations and hopefully making the right choices, we are gradually transforming our world into a positive revelation of goodness and holiness, which ultimately, everyone will see...

1. Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17. 2. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.4 p.1339- 1342.

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*SEDRA RE' EH*

**ONLY ONE PLACE...**

Rafi and Daniel staggered under the large boards of wood they were carrying.

They put them down on the patio outside Daniel's house and went back to the front gate to get the tool box and the rest of their equipment. The two friends lived on the same street and had arranged a woodwork club for their younger neighbours. Both boys enjoyed woodworking and hoped that it would not be too difficult to show others how to build the various models that they had prepared.

"Phew" Daniel wiped his brow. "Those boards were heavier than I thought. I'm definitely glad that's done!"

The boys began to sort out the wood into piles of various shapes and sizes. They had almost completed their task when Daniel's mother appeared at the back door. She looked slightly disturbed at the sight that met her.

"Where are you planning on running your woodwork project?" she asked the boys.

"Here, Mummy" Daniel responded, waving his hand at the neat patio.

His mother shook her head.

"No. Definitely not. I can not have sawdust all over here. This is where the baby plays and it will be dangerous to have the tools lying about here. You can do it on the table outside the greenhouse. But please do not have the

children going inside the greenhouse. Daddy will be very upset if any of his plants get spoilt”.

Daniel rolled his eyes. “Mum, we have just dragged all this wood over, and it weighs about a ton. Almost. It will be very difficult to move it”.

His mother shook her head, there was going to be no winning her over. “I’ll bring you out some cake and drinks when the children come, but there is only one location where it can be held.”

Daniel turned to Rafi. “Sorry, I guess we’re not done yet”. Rafi shrugged.

“It’s fine, I guess that it is a bit like what we were learning about in the beginning of the Sedra”. Daniel looked puzzled. What had the |Sedra got to do with it?

Rafi continued “Remember, it was about the sacrifices. G-d was telling the Jews that there was only one place where they can bring all their offerings - in the Temple, which was eventually built in Jerusalem, and nowhere else. And yet the Tanach (Bible) tells us that people kept wanting to bring offering in other places, but they were wrong”.

Daniel smiled at the comparison. “Okay! I guess we can only make our woodwork club in one place - though we’ll have to *sacrifice* a bit of ourselves to get all this stuff over there.”

Laughing at the idea that their woodwork club somehow connected with the Temple and Jerusalem, the two friends picked up the planks and started down the garden path.

“Hey,” said Rafi. “Let’s call it ‘Jerusalem Woodwork Club’”. They both felt their holiday venture was going to meet with success.

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