


**CHABAD**  
  
**RESEARCH UNIT**

שבת..... *for Friday nights* ..... קדש

**Friday 1 January 2016 - 20 Tevet 5776**  
**Sedra Shemot**

**WOMEN AS SCHOLARS AND ACTIVISTS**

**T**HE SECOND BOOK OF THE TORAH BEGINS BY DESCRIBING THE ONSET OF SLAVERY IN EGYPT. At first the Jews were prosperous under the protection of Joseph who was Viceroy. Even after his passing his memory and influence remained. But the mood began to change. The Sedra<sup>1</sup> states that the Jewish population increased dramatically and their influence began to be resented by the Egyptian ruling classes.

What did Pharaoh do with his Jewish problem? “Let us deal wisely with them”<sup>2</sup>, was his response. First, a cunning plan to enslave the Jews was initiated. Even when this succeeded he was still not satisfied. The Jews increased in population even more. The more they were oppressed, it seemed, the more they multiplied. There came a time when Pharaoh lost patience.

“All the boys who are born shall be thrown in the river, but all the girls you shall make live”<sup>3</sup> was his command. At first sight this seems strange. If Pharaoh was concerned to eliminate the Jews why distinguish between boy and girl?

The Sages tell us that he had a twofold strategy. One, get rid of the boys physically. Two, transform the girls spiritually. If the girls could only be “made to live” in the Egyptian way of life, they would no longer be Jews at all.<sup>4</sup> The Jewish problem would be solved!



**ז"ל In Loving Memory of Menashy ben Yechezkel Ezra**  
**24 Tevet - Dedicated by his Family שי'**

For us today this helps us understand the importance of a thorough Jewish education for girls and women. The woman holds the key to Jewish survival, and in our complex society this means she should be fully equipped to understand the subtle ideals of Jewish teaching. She needs to study not only the practical halachah (law), but also the spiritual meaning behind it.

For this reason girls and women today are encouraged to study a broad range of Torah literature, including works such as the Tanya and Chassidic discourses which teach of the spiritual quest of each individual, whether man or woman.

Two hundred years ago Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the author of the Tanya and founder of Chabad, wrote an extensive syllabus for women's education in his book "Laws of Torah Study". The Lubavitcher Rebbe commented about this, that if a man really knew all the Torah that a woman should study, he would be considered a true scholar, a *Talmid Chacham!*

Rabbi Shneur Zalman had private study sessions with his daughter Freida. It is told that once her brother Dov Ber, who was later the second Lubavitcher Rebbe, hid behind the long curtains in order to overhear the study session. His father caught him and sent him out of the room: Freida's private study session with her father was for her alone.

The late Lubavitcher Rebbe greatly emphasised the importance of Torah study for girls and women, and also empowered them in all aspects of their lives. He said that a man tries to succeed through conquest, but a woman has a different approach. She convinces the person that this is what he or she really wants. The Rebbe said that woman's approach is superior and men should learn from women: this is the approach which is needed in spreading traditional Jewish teaching<sup>5</sup>.

The Sages tell us that through the merit of the women over three millennia ago, the Jews went free from Egypt; by the merit of the women of today there will be the Redemption<sup>6</sup>.

1. Exodus 1:1 – 6:1. 2. Exodus 1:10. 3. Exodus 1:22. 4. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.1 p.111. 5. See *A Partner in the Dynamic of Creation, Womanhood in the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe* p.7. 6. See Sotah 11b, *Likkutei Sichot* vol.20, p. 227.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

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*SEDRA SHEMOT*

***JUST LIKE MOSES***

“David, I'd like to speak to you,” Mr Cohen said. David immediately felt his heart go thump! What did Mr Cohen want him for? What had he done wrong?... But he needn't have worried, Mr Cohen looked quite cheerful - not at all angry.

“David,” he said, “Next week, several important people are visiting our school, including the mayor. The headmaster would like them to speak personally to some of the boys, to talk about our school, and he asked me for some ideas, so I suggested you. What do you say?”

David felt paralysed. HE, speak to the mayor? He couldn't! Surely Mr Cohen realised that he couldn't. Everyone knew that David had a speech problem, that he stammered. Unkind people often laughed at him when he spoke. He COULDN'T speak to the mayor ...All these thoughts tumbled around his mind. At last he said: “I d-don't think th-that I c-could do it, Mr C-Cohen.”

“Why ever not?” his teacher sounded surprised.

“I-I don't speak w-well enough. I always s-stammer.” David said sadly. He looked at Mr Cohen, who seemed to be smiling encouragingly.

“David, I'm surprised at you! Don't you remember what we just learnt in the Sedra lesson? You just said exactly the same thing that Moses said to G-d. Do you remember? G-d tells Moses that he wants him to be His messenger to tell Pharaoh to release the Jews from their slavery, but Moses protests that he can't speak properly - like you David, Moses had a speech impediment...”

During the Sedra class David had in fact noticed that Moses had a speech impediment. He had felt too shy to mention it to anyone else, but now Mr Cohen was speaking about it!

Mr Cohen continued. “G-d tells him that He, G-d, makes people speak, and will put words in his mouth. When Moses protests more, G-d lets him take Aaron, his brother with him, who will speak for him. So, Moses went to Pharaoh, accompanied by his brother, and eventually, through his efforts, the Jews were able to leave Egypt.”

“Y-yes, I r-rem-mem- b-ber”, said David.

“Now, I want you to speak to the mayor because you are a good example of the boys in this school, and you are not less good because you stammer. Moses was the greatest of men, and he also stammered!”

David thought this over. It was very flattering to be compared to Moses, and it was comforting to know that even very great people had the same problems as he had. Maybe he should agree, just as Moses had agreed to be the messenger of G-d who would lead the Jews out of Egypt.

“Ok-kay. I'll do it!” he said.

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