


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 9 January 2015 - 18 Tevet 5775
 Sedra Shemot

THE POWER OF INVENTION

HUMANITY HAS THE POWER TO SELECT BEAUTIFUL PIECES OF NATURE and arrange them in a pleasing way. We also have the power to create new things which do not occur naturally; we discover fresh possibilities, and develop them into something which has never existed before.

Both these faculties are important. However, it is our power of invention and discovery which has led to the fascinating technology with which we live. It is our power of invention which has created the modern world.

How do these two faculties relate to the Torah? Is the Torah trying to push us back to the simplicity of the past, or forwards to the discoveries of the future?

A discussion of the Sedra¹ by the Lubavitcher Rebbe throws light on this question.

One of the themes in the Sedra concerns *bricks*. The Jewish slaves had to make bricks. They mixed straw and clay, formed the mixture into blocks of the right shape and heated them in a kiln². With the resulting bricks they built store cities for Pharaoh.



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

A serious moment in the Sedra is when Pharaoh tells the Jews he will no longer supply them with straw for the bricks. They will have to gather it themselves.

Now, the brick making technology described above might sound very primitive, straight out of the British Museum. True. However, the point is that it was a 'technology'. People had discovered, through human thought, creativity and inventiveness, that this was a way to obtain strong bricks. It was a completely different approach from building with natural rock cut to size.

How does this tell us anything about us? Isn't this just describing a detail of ancient history, the slavery of the Jews in Egypt?

The Chassidic way of understanding the Torah is that as well as telling us our national history, it is also describing our own personal lives. We too may find ourselves in a kind of spiritual slavery, in which we use our personal powers of creativity and invention for our 'Egyptian' taskmasters. In other words, we use these powers for purely material purposes, perhaps even, for *selfish* purposes.

Metaphorically, we use this power to build 'store-cities for Pharaoh'.

Personal redemption from Egypt means that this human power of invention is redeemed from slavery. It is devoted to unselfish goals, and even more, to spiritual goals. Our power of invention is used as a way to serve G-d. In the imagery of the Torah, when redeemed we make bricks not for Pharaoh's store cities but in order to build 'the city of G-d'.

This helps us understand the Jewish concept of Redemption. It is not only a matter of passively recognising the G-dliness which is hidden in nature. It means also utilising to the full our human powers of creativity, our ability to make something new in order to express the Glory of G-d³.

1. Exodus 1:1-6:1. 2. See Exodus 5:7 ff., and also Gen. 11:3. 3. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 6, pp.14-25.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

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SEDRA SHEMOT

THE RIGHT ROLE

Esther burst through the front door, her eyes sparkling with excitement. Without even taking off her schoolbag, she rushed into the kitchen. Her mother was chopping up vegetables for supper. "Mommy, you're never going to guess what happened!" Esther cried. "We're having Production in school and the directors told me today that I'm going to be dance head! Isn't that just amazing?"

Mrs. Weissberg hugged her warmly. "That's such wonderful news! I'm sure you'll do an incredible job!" "I hope so. It sounds like lot of hard work but the results will be worthwhile. What do you have to do?"

"Well, we're having two dances in the production so I have to make them both up and then teach each one to a different group of girls." "Sounds great. I'm sure you'll have a lot of fun," Mrs. Weissberg turned back to the vegetables.

The front door opened again and then closed with a soft thud. "I'm home," Natalie called out. Her voice was dull. "What happened Natalie?" Mrs Weissberg asked her older daughter as she walked into the kitchen. "You look so upset."

"The directors of the school Production told me today that I'm just going to helping out with the props for the stage scenes." Natalie shook her head unhappily. "I was so sure I was going to be running the choir!"

"Oy, that's such a disappointment," Mrs Weissberg said sympathetically. "But helping out with props is an important job in the production..." She tried to smile at her daughter. Natalie grimaced. "Anyone can do that job."

“You have to be especially quick moving to keep the production going on time. You know you can run fast and carry heavy things easily. You’re a good person for the job, Natalie. You’ll do a magnificent job.” “Yeah, Natalie, you’ll be really good!” Esther put in.

Natalie glared at her. “Easy for you to say. You’re the one who got to be dance head.” Esther frowned. “Don’t be a jealous cat...” she mumbled.

“OH!! I’m. Not. Jealous!” Natalie hissed through clenched teeth. “I just don’t think it’s fair. After all, she’s younger than me.” She nearly began crying.

Mrs Weissberg sighed. “Let me tell you something from this week’s Sedra, Shemot. G-d asked Moses to be the leader of the Jewish people, to take them out of Egypt. But Moses didn’t want that. He didn’t think he was worthy of the job.”

“But didn’t he say yes in the end?” Natalie asked curiously, her anger temporarily forgotten.

“Because G-d told him that he’s the right one for the job. G-d knew that Moses was the one who had the right qualities and strengths to be the one to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt. But before Moses was convinced, he said to G-d, let my brother Aaron take the job instead. After all, Moses thought, he’s older than me. But G-d said that he, Moses, was supposed to be the leader, even though he was younger. But G-d gave another job to Aaron...”

Natalie bit her lip. “Sorry Moses,” she said to Esther. “I’m not complaining about you. You definitely deserve to be dance head. You’re such a good dancer.”

“And I’m sorry I was mean to you,” Esther said contritely. “Moses was humble. I should learn from Moses, to be humble like him.” She smiled at Natalie, who smiled back.

“That’s the spirit!” Mrs Weissberg said, approvingly.

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