



CHANGING BAD INTO GOOD

CAN BAD BE CHANGED INTO GOOD, OR MUST IT BE TOTALLY DESTROYED? This is a question which relates to many aspects of life - personal morality, education, therapy, rehabilitation, even, sometimes, international politics. It is also a central issue in the quest by modern man and woman for spirituality in their daily lives.

The Sedra¹ gives a glimpse of the possibility of the process of changing something negative into the highest level of goodness and holiness.

The theme of the Sedra is the construction of the Sanctuary, the prototype of the Temple which was built at the foot of Mount Sinai, before the Jews began their journey to the Promised Land. G-d tells Moses the details of how it should be made. The aim is that the Presence of G-d will dwell in the Sanctuary. Later on the Torah recounts how the Sanctuary was actually completed, and how it functioned as the central spiritual focus of the lives of the Jewish people during their long journey through the wilderness.

A basic concept in Chabad chassidic thought is that the Torah is not speaking only about the remote past. It is also talking about the present.

There was a Sanctuary in the wilderness thousands of years ago, and there is a Sanctuary within each person, constructed through our

own personal service of G-d. The effect of this personal Sanctuary is to make the Presence of G-d dwell within us.

The details of this process are described in a fascinating tract² by Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn (d. 1950). One of the ideas in this tract helps us understand the relationship between the negative and the positive in our lives.

The main structure of the Sanctuary was built by fashioning planks of acacia wood, overlaid with gold. Each was ten cubits high (about 5 metres). They stood upright and were connected together, forming a low rectangular enclosure, measuring ten cubits by thirty. The roof was formed from several layers of specially woven cloth. This central part of the Sanctuary, containing the Golden Menorah and the Ark of the Covenant, was thus a kind of tent with solid walls formed from the planks of wood, overlaid in gold.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak points out that the Hebrew word for 'plank', used in the Sedra³, is *KERESH*. However, the same Hebrew letters, arranged differently, spell a quite different word: *SHEKER*, 'Falsehood'. He explains that something which in itself is negative, unholy and false, can be transformed into something sacred, into an integral part of the Sanctuary: *SHEKER* can become *KERESH*...

How does this take place? Through dedication to the Mitzvot (Commandments) of the Torah, sometimes even going beyond the norm. The sacred Mitzvot enable us to connect every aspect of our lives, including the most earthly, and even the most negative, with holiness.

That drive and passion within a person, which might have been negative and dangerous, changes its quality. Channelled by the rules and teachings of the Torah, it becomes transformed into something positive. The Torah connects earth with heaven, and changes darkness into light.

This might be a long struggle. Yet it is through this process that we bring the Presence of G-d to dwell within our personal Sanctuary, in the details of our daily lives.

1. Exodus 25:1-27:19. 2. *Bati LeGani*, available in English translation from chabad.org. 3. Ex.26:15 ff. See *Bati LeGani* chs. 6 & 10.

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SEDRA TERUMAH

CHANGING THE RULES

“Wow, that was so interesting, what Mrs Cohen was telling us in Sedra today,” Debbi said to Leah, as they waited outside school one day for their mother to pick them up.

“Oh, about the Ark in the Holy Sanctuary? I thought it didn't make any sense at all. I mean how could it not take up any space? Everything takes up space!”

They had been taught that day about the Mishkan, the Sanctuary that the Jewish people built in the desert as a special place to serve G-d.

Their teacher had told them about the golden Aron, the holy Ark, which housed the two tablets on which were inscribed the Ten Commandments.

She said that an amazing thing about the Ark was that it did not appear to take up any space in the Sanctuary. It was placed in the middle of the Holy of Holies, which was ten cubits square, 5 metres by 5 metres. The Ark itself was two and a half cubits by one and a half, and one and a half cubits high.

Then Mrs Cohen had explained: “But the Sages tell us that if you measured from any wall of the Holy of Holies to the Ark - it was five cubits, two and a half metres! From the North wall to the Ark, was 5 cubits. From the South wall to the Ark - was 5 cubits.”

She asked one of the pupils to draw a diagram of this on the whiteboard. Sandra Bloom drew it nicely, using different colours. She drew lines showing the measurement from the wall to the Ark on each side. Each line was labelled '5 cubits'.

"But the total length from the North wall to the South wall - was ten cubits," said Rachel Levy. "So it was as if the Ark itself did not take up any space!"

There was a whole discussion in class. And this is what Leah could not understand. It didn't make sense.

Debbi answered her sister. "I know it doesn't seem to make sense - but it was a miracle. Lots of miracles go against nature - like the splitting of the sea."

"Well, that also doesn't really make sense." Leah argued.

"Well, I think it does," Debbi said thoughtfully. "After all, G-d created nature - so He can change its rules when He wants.

"Like Miss Cohen - she has all these classroom rules, like no eating in the classroom, but when she wants, she can change the rules - like when we had a party, and she said then that we *could* eat in the classroom".

"Yes, that was fun," said Leah. "But then someone accidentally spilled apple juice into the avocado plant-pot and she got very upset! She thought it might die..."

"Yes, but listen," said Debbie. "G-d created all these rules of nature, for example that things take up space, but when He wants, He can change the rules - like in the Mishkan, the Ark didn't take up any space. Or He can split the sea..."

"Hmmm, that's interesting," Leah said. "I guess you're right - G-d can do anything, because He created everything."

"And maybe even make the avocado plant like apple juice..."

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