

CHABAD  
**DED**  
RESEARCH UNIT

57

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

2 April 2004 - 11 Nisan 5764  
Sedra Tzav—The Great Shabbat

### TRANSFORMATIONS

**THE APPROACHING FESTIVAL OF PESACH MAKES US CONFRONT ISSUES** concerning good battling against evil, escape from enslavement by enemies, the triumph of light over darkness. There are such battles on a national level, and also within a person there is the struggle of the Good Desire against the Evil Desire, and escape from enslavement to inner negativity.

Very often we are engaged in such conflicts in order that we should survive. The battle may be not only on our own behalf, but for civilization as a whole, for the universal ideal of belief in G-d and the ethical behaviour which should result from that belief. When the Bible condemns the idolatry of the ancient Canaanites it condemns their depravity: “for also their sons and daughters they burn in fire”<sup>1</sup>.

But is this simple victory of good over evil the final goal of Jewish teaching? Chassidic thought presents a higher ideal: transformation of evil into good, of darkness into light. On the national level, the enemy becomes a friend; on the inner personal level, the Evil Desire is transformed to good, and now works energetically in service of G-d. This is the ultimate of Repentance, when the error of the past is transformed into a state of goodness and holiness.

An example of such transformation is seen in our Sedra<sup>2</sup>. In terms of world history, the key initial error was Adam and Eve eating

**Dedicated to the Memory of the  
Lubavitcher Rebbe <sup>g'l</sup>tz and the inspiration of his teachings.  
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from the Tree of Knowledge. The Divine Presence had dwelt with them in the Garden of Eden, but this tragic mistake caused it to depart. Our Sedra describes the seven days of dedication of the Sanctuary<sup>3</sup>, through which this error is finally redeemed. The purpose of the Sanctuary is that the Divine Presence should again dwell in the world. Further, the Sages tell us that the seven days in the Sedra represent a return to the purity of the seven days of Creation, before Adam and Eve sinned<sup>4</sup>.

This Shabbat before Pesach, called the Great Shabbat (*Shabbat HaGadol*) also expresses the idea of transformation of bad to good.

The ancient Egyptians had enslaved and tortured the Jews. When Moses came with the Divine mission to bring the Jews to freedom, Pharaoh continued to resist. Yet on the Shabbat before the Exodus, commemorated by this Shabbat today, the Egyptian firstborn began to side with Moses, actively attacking their own government.

The attack was a response to the idea that the final plague, which had been forecast by Moses, would mean death for the firstborn. We might see it as no more than a reaction to personal fear. However, the Lubavitcher Rebbe points out that it was more than that. It was a transformation of the inner spiritual nature of existence. Ancient Egypt represented the depths of evil, implacably opposed to holiness, as indeed we see in the figure of Pharaoh himself. Yet on that Shabbat, a great miracle took place. Within Egypt itself, in fact the firstborn of Egypt – meaning the future leaders – began a movement on behalf of the Jewish people.

True, Pharaoh and the Egyptian authorities were not transformed at that point, and the tenth plague and then the Splitting of the Sea, destroying the Egyptian forces, had to follow. But the rebellion of the firstborn was a taste of the transformations of the future, when all darkness will be changed to light, and all violent evil to good. Thus we say at the end of the Pesach Seder: Next Year in Jerusalem, meaning the time of the Messiah, when all humanity will be united in recognition of goodness together, transformed<sup>5</sup>.

1. Deuteronomy 12:31. 2. Leviticus chs.6-8. 3. Leviticus ch. 8. 4. See Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Likkutei Torah* Tzav, 10d-11a. 5. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.12 pp.33-38.

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53

### SEDRA TZAV – THE GREAT SHABBAT

#### **REALITY RACE**

Vroooooom!! Eli clutched the controls of the speeding race-car as he flew through a chicane, narrowly missing the far corner.

For three nights running they had been competing against each other in Street Car Racer II championship. Competition was tight and Eli was thinking that he had a good chance to win.

And now was the *finale*.

The second to last lap in the championship, they were both on a draw; they were at the crucial moment in the competition and this *next* corner was the harshest of all. 'You know whose winning!' shouted Meir from his armchair, still retaining his calm grip and first place position. Eli sharpened his focus. He was right behind Meir, to the left, and Meir had been slicing the road, left to right, preventing Eli a clear take-over. *Here's my opportunity*, Eli said to himself as gently applied, preparing for a smooth inside corner, *I'm gonna get him at this corner..*

For a moment he thought of Daniel, what he might be up to this minute. 'Daniel is right about the sacrifices', he laughed to Meir, 'but this is more serious for me than it is to Daniel. This win is going to be one big sacrifice'.

'Ha, ha!' said Meir, 'just you wait and see'.

*Three Days Later:*

'And that's why it says 'and G-d smote the Egyptians *with*

their firstborn', Eli's father explained to the family and guests sitting at the Shabbat table, 'G-d told the Jews to get the Pesach offering a few days early. The Egyptians saw the lambs and asked the Jews what they were for. The Jews answered smiling, 'G-d is going to kill all Egyptian firstborn. The blood of the Pesach lamb will be a sign that G-d will protect us'. The terrified Egyptian first-born, hearing their terrible fate, ran to Pharaoh, demanding that the Jews be set free.

'In this way', said Eli's father, 'G-d made the Egyptians be challenged by their very own people, their *first-born*. Then later they were completely beaten!'

Eli's mind was far away, preoccupied with a general disinterest. He was still upset that he'd lost the X-Box competition with Meir, which he was so sure he would win.

Since that night, life did not taste too good to Eli. He felt blown. He had hardly noticed Pesach round the corner, but his father's next words made his ears perk up and his back tingle.

'To turn the captors into the freedom fighters, the enemy into the ally', his father continued, 'that is why G-d smote the Egyptian first-born – so that they would rebel for the good'.

Suddenly, somehow, Eli understood why he had lost the game. It was as though his 'first-born', the Competition that was so important to him, had been lost in order that he should be *upset*... so that now he should want to look for a better choice. The freedom choice; to focus again on his responsibilities and to be successful in the important things in life. Eli reminded himself what Daniel had said to him about sacrifices... You have to give up things you want to do, in order to do the things you *should* do...

Eli smiled. It was time for him to rebel.

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