


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 31 December 2010 - 24 Tevet 5771
 Sedra Va'era

THE DIVINE STAFF

WE PREFER TO AVOID CONFRONTATIONS, CERTAINLY AGGRESSIVE ONES. Yet there are some that we do have to face. One kind of confrontation is taking place primarily in our own being: a battle between the inner Divine dimension and other forces. Another kind concerns the way we look at the world: who, or what, is master of the universe? G-d, or some other power?

The Sedra¹ provides an insight on this issue, in its description of the confrontation between the leaders of the Jewish people, Moses and Aaron, on the one hand, Pharaoh and the magicians of Egypt on the other.

Moses told Aaron to throw down his staff: it turned into a snake. Pharaoh called his magicians and they did the same: they threw down their staffs, and they too all turned into snakes. Then Aaron's staff devoured theirs².

After this, step by step, come the ten plagues: blood, frogs, lice and so on. The Egyptian magicians were able to imitate the first two plagues. However at the third plague, lice, they said: "it is the finger of G-d"³. Then came further plagues, as described in this Sedra and the next, and at last the Jewish people went free.



Dedicated by Mrs Tzipora Sufrin חַיָּה, to the memory and
 merit of her father k"z ihætk rgcus hfsrn חַיָּה חַיָּה חַיָּה
 Yahrzeit 28 Tevet 5738

117 GEORGE STREET, LONDON W1H 7HF
 cru@lubavitchuk.com - www.chabadresearch.net

What was happening here? The confrontation was that of Moses and Aaron against the limited Egyptian view of nature. Is nature a force in its own right - which might be manipulated by ancient magic - or an expression of the Divine? The wonders carried out by Moses were establishing the basic concept that G-d rules all existence.

G-d created the universe in such a way that it looks as if it has independent power, giving us the power of choice. The idea that there is any force other than G-d, the Creator, is in fact the source of all evil. This affects the way we see ourselves and the world around us, and the course of action we elect to follow. The events described in the Sedra are part of a process of recognition that the only power is G-d. This has the effect of transforming evil into good. This change starts within us, in our own private battles and confrontations with negativity. Ultimately it affects the world as a whole.

The first stage of this process was when Aaron's staff devoured the staffs of the magicians. This represented the intensity of the power of the Divine in one simple but startling event. After this, the Ten Plagues were details, moving step by step towards the goal. At the third plague, the magicians realised that "it is the finger of G-d". At the tenth, Pharaoh himself agreed to let the Jewish people go, although his final defeat was only later, at the Splitting of the Sea. The gentle beginning of this battle was the moment when Aaron's staff devoured the staffs of Pharaoh's magicians.

What does this mean for us today? We too can recognise the power of the Divine, in all aspects of our lives. We have an immediate and realistic way of expressing this recognition: by making one step forward in increasing our observance of Jewish law and its ideals. We might see objections against taking such a step. But these are simply the natural expressions of the sense of a rival force, like the magicians of Egypt. In fact, our own staff of the Torah swallows all other kinds of power⁴.

After this initial victory the rest is a process, not of plagues and destruction, but of positive and healthy spiritual development. We recognise "the finger of G-d" in all aspects of life, and even become aware that we and all humanity are on the threshold of Redemption.

1. Exodus 6:2-9:35. 2. Exodus 7:12. 3. Exodus 8:15. 4. Freely based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 26, p.56.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

SPONSORED BY DR REUVEN JOEL



SEDRA VA'ERA

STEP BY STEP

Michael tried to push open the door, but it wouldn't budge. He pushed harder and suddenly the door flung open as three boxes came tumbling down. He squeezed himself into the mess. All of a sudden, he lost his balance and tripped over a water bottle, then flew into the air and landed headfirst onto his book covered bed. Ouch!

Rubbing his head, Michael looked around his bedroom. He'd come in to get his basketball, but upon looking at the mess, he gave up. I'm useless, he thought. Always gonna be a mess – I'll never be able to invite anyone to my room without being totally embarrassed.

"UGH! How I hate being like this!" He hadn't meant to say that out loud, but when his dad poked his head through the door, Michael realized he was about to receive a speech of sorts.

"Hate being like what?" Mr. Kahn asked.

"I dunno," he mumbled, "I just hate being in such a mess! None of my friends' rooms look like this. Chaim's room is actually really cool – he's got all these airplane models around and stuff! Me, I don't know what my room even looks like any more. Yesterday, I tried cleaning it up but then gave up. Today in school I got told off for not doing my homework. I had written to do it in my homework diary, except of course I couldn't find my homework diary, so that didn't help. Whatever, I'm just a lost cause!" Michael sighed as he finished his long garble. He looked down, feeling embarrassed over his outburst.

Mr. Kahn thought for a moment, and then spoke. "You know, you might be surprised to hear that you can actually get help in cleaning your room from this week's Sedra – Va'era."

"Huh?" Michael looked confused. "The Sedra? How will that help?"

"Yes – the Sedra. You see, the trick is to take it step by step. Think of your problem about being tidy and organized as the slavery in Egypt. Pharaoh was very powerful and had all the Jews as slaves to him. Further, the Jews themselves had sunk very low.

"Now, in order to loosen Pharaoh's power so that the Jews could leave, and to raise the Jewish consciousness of who they were, G-d sent ten plagues – seven of which are mentioned in this Sedra. He didn't just force Pharaoh to let the people go and then finished. He took it one step at a time – each plague in a sense loosening Pharaoh's control and strengthening everyone's awareness of G-d. Then the Jews were freed."

"So do you mean that I'm like 'the Jews' and I want to free myself of my problem – 'slavery to Pharaoh'? Instead of getting aggravated and expecting it all to change overnight, I've got to take it step by step..."

"Exactly! Don't just look at it as one big thing. Take it one stage at a time."

"So, say first I'm just going to concentrate on always having my bed tidy, and I'll try to make it properly each morning...."

At least that way next time if I fall on it, it won't hurt so badly, he thought to himself with a laugh.

"You got it!"

"Anyway thanks dad! I'm going to get started – I think it's going to be a real redemption, step by step!"

***Torah teachings are holy –
please treat this page with care***