


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 20 January 2012 - 25 Tevet 5772
 Sedra Va'era

TRANSFORMING INDIFFERENCE

HOW DOES A PERSON RELATE TO THE DIVINE? THERE ARE PROBABLY AS MANY ways as there are people. Each individual has his or her own unique relationship, their own special path through the teachings of the Torah. Despite this subtlety and complexity, one can suggest a simple scale which might define in general terms a person's overt, external relationship at any given moment.

If we consider just the most obvious aspects, we could say that the person has either a positive relationship, in which they affirm and are positively concerned about fulfilling G-d's Will; or they have unfortunately a *negative* attitude, in which they fiercely deny the spiritual, the holy and all its stands for; or they are indifferent.

Indifference is in some ways the most difficult challenge. The person who feels hostile and opposed has some kind of connection. His angry rejection conceals a strong bond which may lie just below the surface, waiting to be revealed at an opportune moment to the surprise of everyone, including himself. By contrast a state of indifference suggests that the person simply does not feel any kind of



Celebrating the birth of
 Chava תחילת Loewenthal - 12 Tevet 5772
 dedicated by her Grandparents ז"ל

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

connection at all. In their conscious thoughts and everyday attitude to life, the spiritual is irrelevant.

Pharaoh king of Egypt in our Sedra¹ can be seen as representing the stage of indifference. In the Haftorah² he is described as saying “My river belongs to me, and I created myself”. His self-centred narcissism means that he is simply not concerned about G-d, the Divine Creator and Guide of the universe.

There are other Biblical figures who are depicted as struggling defiantly against G-d and denying His existence. But in the Sedra last week, when Moses said that the G-d of Israel wanted the Jewish people to leave Egypt, Pharaoh’s response was simply: “who is G-d, that I should obey Him... I do not know G-d...”³. He did not argue against G-d or deny Him - he was simply indifferent to Him.

So too in our Sedra this week. Here we see Moses working miracles, revealing striking displays of Divine power. In the case of the first few Plagues, the Egyptian magicians are able to do the same. Moses turned the river Nile to blood; so did the magicians. As a result “Pharaoh turned round and went home; he paid no attention to what had happened”⁴. Again, indifference.

What did the Plagues mean? The first Plague, turning the river to blood, has been explained as a symbolic statement that the coldness of the water of the Nile has to be transformed into the warmth and enthusiasm of living blood⁵.

The second Plague was frogs. The frog is not a creature which is obviously useful for humanity; nor is it clearly dangerous like a scorpion or viper. As regards everyday human life, the frog neither affirms nor denies. It is indifferent, like Pharaoh. Yet in the second Plague the frogs, swarming all over Egypt, became a means to express the power of G-d.

This is the eternal message of the Plagues: change coldness and indifference into warm response to and recognition of the Divine. In the end, Pharaoh himself gets up in the middle of the night and begs Moses and the Israelites to leave Egypt in order to serve G-d⁶. Indifference has been transformed. This is the beginning of freedom⁷.

1. Exodus . 6:2-9:35. 2. Ezekiel 29:3. 3. Ex. 5:2. 4. Ex. 7:23. 5. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 1, p.119. 6. Ex. 12:30. 7. See *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 21 pp. 38-44.

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*SEDRA VA'ERA***TEAMWORK**

It was nearly the end of the lesson. Eli listened intently as Rabbi Bloom told the class about the project they were going to make. Its theme was the Jews leaving Egypt.

'So,' Rabbi Bloom was saying, 'we are going to make a project. You draw or paint pictures describing the plagues and other scenes. You will also write captions and explanations.' Everyone was quiet as he continued. 'I will divide the class into five teams, each with its own captain. The best display you produce will go on exhibition in the school hall.'

The boys watched as Rabbi Bloom took out a paper from the top drawer of his desk. It seemed to have on it the list of the five captains. Perhaps he had discussed who he should choose with Mr Dreyfus, the art teacher. No one said a word.

Rabbi Bloom came to Eli's place. 'Eli, I would like you to be the captain of one of the teams.' Eli was surprised. Why was Rabbi Bloom asking him? he wondered. I cannot draw or paint, if I am the captain we are bound to do badly. Then the other members of the team will be annoyed with me...

'Um... I don't think I want to do it', he said, feeling a little embarrassed. The others in the class were looking at him, including a few whom he knew were very good at art and would probably like to be team-captains themselves. 'Ok', said Rabbi Bloom, 'you don't have to. Don't worry, I'll choose someone else.'

Rabbi Bloom chose three other boys to be captains of teams, and in each case read out the list of their team members. However before he could pick the last two captains the bell went and it was the end of class.

Everyone had gone out to play but Eli was standing by the window in the corridor. He somehow didn't feel like going into the playground. 'Eli...' He heard his name being called, and spun around in surprise. It was Rabbi Bloom.

'Why didn't you want to be captain?' he asked, kindly. 'Well,' said Eli, 'I can't draw or paint, so I thought I would only make my team lose'.

Rabbi Bloom smiled understandingly. 'You don't have to be good at art yourself', he said, 'you just have to organise the others.'

'I still don't think I could do it', said Eli sadly. 'Look', said his teacher, 'do you remember what we learned about Moses, how he didn't want to accept the job of taking the Jews out of Egypt?' 'Yes' said Eli, 'he didn't want to do it because he wasn't able to speak properly'.

'That's right!' said Rabbi Bloom, 'but G-d said he should go to Pharaoh anyway, and Aaron his brother would speak for him. In the Sedra this week they do that, working together...'. Eli didn't say anything.

'I think the project that you are in charge of would come out very well, you are a very good organiser! You will get the others to draw and paint, and you will write the captions. It's a team, remember?' Eli nodded. 'Alright', he finally said. 'Fine, we'll choose the members of your team tomorrow', said Rabbi Bloom.

Eli walked home happily. 'That is true', he thought to himself, 'even if you can't do something all on your own it doesn't mean that you can't do it together with others. When you're part of a team you can get things done... *And* we'll get our project put on display... !'

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