


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 11 January 2013 - Eve New Moon Shevat 5773
 Sedra Vaera

BREAKING FREE

AFTER 210 YEARS THE JEWISH PEOPLE ARE STILL ENSLAVED in Egypt. But a glimmer of light has appeared on the horizon. Redemption has begun to seem n distinct possibility. After a long absence Moses has appeared. Moses, the man who many years before killed an Egyptian who was beating a Jew. Now, years later, Moses had obtained an audience with Pharaoh and requested, or rather, demanded in the name of G-d, that he let his people go.

Pharaoh refused to recognise G-d. His immediate response was to make things worse for the Jewish people. As a result, one by one came the ten plagues, of which seven are in this Sedra¹ and three next week.

As the plagues continued, gradually the entire Egyptian people realised that G-d is truly the Master of the universe. Although the Egyptians themselves had a technology which still amazes scientists, and were skilled at magic arts of all kinds, they eventually came to accept that G-d was more powerful than they.

This process is also expressed in the nature of the plagues. After all, G-d could have worked any wonder! The first of the plagues was that the Nile was miraculously turned to blood.

The Sages point out that there was a specific purpose in this. The River Nile represented two things to the Egyptians: firstly, it was the source of their livelihood, since its water made their crops grow, there

being very little or no rain in Egypt. Secondly, and as a result of this fact, the Nile was regarded as a deity and was worshipped. It was this sense of total and secure dependence on any force other than G-d which was attacked by the plagues². The Haftorah, from the Book of Ezekiel³ speaks of Pharaoh the king of Egypt who says “my river is mine and I created myself”⁴ .

In the first plague, G-d smote the river. Eventually the Egyptians recognised G-d, and the Jews were redeemed. This has relevance for us too.

We ourselves ascribe enormous power to the material structure of our lives, such as the current source of our livelihood. Of course we *are* dependent on material affairs, and on having a job. The question is to what extent we see the Divine in the picture. For the ancient Egyptians, it was an incontrovertible fact that the Nile provided their sustenance⁵. The problem was they did not see the Nile as controlled by G-d. In our case too, a person’s life can be dominated by a quest for material security and achievement without recognising the role of the Divine and the wider framework of Torah values. He or she is figuratively “thrown into the Nile” like the Jewish boys in the time of Pharaoh⁶. Spiritual wellbeing is sacrificed for material concerns.

The changing of the river water to undrinkable blood was a message from G-d to the Jewish people in every generation. A person should not put his or her sole trust in the material dimension of life, as the be all and end all of everything. Both our struggles and our success are not just a product of our own efforts, but by the grace of G-d. This means that in our attempts to succeed, Torah values, such as Shabbat and Kashrut, should always come first. Further, we should recognise that whatever we achieve has a spiritual purpose. Every penny we earn is intended to help us link more directly with G-d in every aspect of our lives.

In our constant attempt to realise this, we break the dependence on our personal river Nile. At that moment we become afresh true and dedicated servants of G-d. This is our freedom.

1. Exodus 6:2-9.35. 2. See Rashi to Ex. 7: 17. 3. Ezek.28:25-29:21. 4. Ezek.29:3. 5. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 5, p.295. 6. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol.1, pp.111-112.

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SEDRA VAERA

THE NATURE OF NATURE

"Shabbat Shalom! Good Shabbat!"

It was Friday night, and the Kirsh family, Rachel, Benjy, Dina, baby Miriam and their parents were about to start their meal. It was extra special tonight, because Uncle Moshe was here. The children loved Uncle Moshe - he always had a joke and a sweet for them, and he always had good answers to their questions.

After all the special songs were sung, Kiddush was made over a goblet of wine, and then everyone washed their hands for bread. The children waited expectantly as the golden, delicious smelling, and still warm Challa, was cut, and slices passed around.

"Yummmmmmmmmmmmm!" Benjy said. "Mummy, your Challa is so yummy. Could I have some more please?"

"Did you make this yourself?" Uncle Moshe asked "It's really good - much better than the bakery's."

Mrs Kirsh said: "Oh yes, I just started baking my own Challa a few months ago - I found a recipe in my Kosher Cookbook and I thought I'd try it, and it was so good I haven't bought since."

"Now, who has something to tell me about the Sedra?" Mr Kirsh said. He always liked to hear what they had learnt in school.

Little Dina said: "My teacher told us all about the mean king of Egypt, the Parrot" - everyone smiled and Rachel muttered "Pharaoh," - "who made all the Jewish people work very, very hard, and then G-d made lots of plagues, like the river turning into blood, and everyone got lice, but the Parrot - Pharaoh still didn't let them go."

"I don't understand," Rachel said "How could all those things, like the river turning into blood and millions of frogs, really happen? It doesn't make sense. How can water turn into blood? It goes against Nature!"

"That's a good question, which a lot of people have," her uncle said. "But let me ask you a question. Who created the world?"

"G-d, of course," Rachel and Benjy said together.

"As well as creating the world, G-d created all the laws of Nature. So, G-d created water. Who knows what water is?"

"I know," said Benjy "H₂O. Two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom".

"That's right," his uncle said. "So, since G-d created water as H₂O, as part of Nature, He could also change it. So He did: He changed it to blood, which is much more complicated. But G-d can do that because He created everything, and keeps everything in existence all the time. G-d creates Nature to run in a certain way, but G-d Himself is above Nature and can change it at any time."

"Wow!" said Benjy. "Imagine being able to do that!"

"Well, when the Egyptians, who didn't believe in G-d, but instead worshipped various idols - including the River Nile itself - saw all these amazing things happening, which were beyond Nature, they realised that G-d is the true master of the world. Then at last Pharaoh let the Jews leave Egypt."

Benjy said admiringly: "Wow, you know everything, Uncle Moshe! Isn't that a miracle!"

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