


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 27 December 2013 - 24 Tevet 5774
 Sedra Va'era

TO BE CALM AND TO CARE

IN OUR LIVES AS HUMAN BEINGS AND PARTICULARLY AS JEWS WE often have to face a paradox, such as a situation in which two almost contrary responses are demanded from us at the same time. In an emergency, like a mountaineering accident, for example, one both has to keep calm and also act swiftly and boldly. Another kind of paradox concerns our relationship with G-d in which sometimes two quite different responses seem to be required simultaneously.

The Torah gives us an example of this, at the end of the Sedra last week and the beginning of our Sedra¹. In last week's Sedra we learn how Moses began the process to bring freedom to the Jewish slaves in Egypt. The first step was to approach Pharaoh.

Pharaoh's response was anger against the Jewish people and a redoubling of their work load. Previously they had been supplied the straw to make bricks. Now they would have to find the straw themselves, and produce the same quota. The Jews complained bitterly to Moses and Aaron.



In Memory of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi ז"ע
Founder of Chabad - Yahrzeit 24 Tevet - 1812

Moses was shocked. He cared deeply about the suffering of the Jewish slaves, and now saw that his own actions had intensified their suffering. He cried out to G-d: “My L-rd, why do You mistreat your people?”

G-d’s initial rejoinder was that he should not worry, the Jews would eventually go free. But then at the beginning of our Sedra, as explained by the Sages, comes a rebuke. G-d says that He was revealed to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but not in terms of His ultimate Divine Name. In other words, explain the Sages, G-d promised things to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and although these promises were not fulfilled in their lifetime, and they had to face many difficulties at every step of their lives, they did not complain².

Was Moses wrong to complain? Surely, if the Torah writes his complaint, this too must be teaching us something. The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that both responses are necessary.

We have to show the calm fortitude of the faith of Abraham , Isaac and Jacob, and we also have to care when we see the gloom of Exile. Our daily prayers include earnest and powerful exhortations to G-d. Three times a day we say “We hope for Your deliverance every day”, “let our eyes see Your return to Zion with mercy”. We *do* have to care, especially when we see the threats which face our people in Israel and the suffering of all kinds which exists worldwide.

But despite the care and the concern, at the same time, we need to have the calm faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. G-d is with us, and everything will be transformed to good. We need simply to strengthen our personal bond with G-d, in the details our own lives, through the Mitzvot of the Torah, and help other Jews do the same.

Through the combination of calm, joyful Jewish life, and at the same time deeply felt empathy for pain and longing for Redemption, we follow the example of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob *and* also Moses, who cried out to G-d and who brought the Jewish people to freedom³.

1. Exodus 6:2-9:35. 2. See Midrash Shmot Rabbah 6:4 and Rashi on Exodus 6:3,9.
3. See the Rebbe’s talk on Shabbat Va’era 5743 (Hitva’aduyot, sections 10-16).

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SEDRA VA'ERA

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Benjy could feel himself getting angry. That was the third time David had cheated in this game. He was doing it on purpose! Benjy felt the rage grow inside him, and explode.

“That’s it, I told you before! Those dice added up to nine, not eight! You should have landed on Fleet Street, on my hotel, but you cheated as usual, just because you’re scared of losing!”

He threw his wad of Monopoly money onto the board, upsetting the pieces. Getting up, he stalked out of the room. Rachel and David gazed after him in amazement.

“Benjy, I didn’t do that on purpose, I’m just not so good at adding, you know that.” David pleaded. But his older brother ignored him.

Stalking into the kitchen, he went to get himself some orange-squash. By the time he had finished, he had already calmed down. Rachel came into the kitchen.

“Benjy, now David’s very upset. Why did you do that? He didn’t mean to cheat.”

Benjy reddened. “I don’t know, I just have such a bad temper. I just can’t help it. I know I’m getting angry, and that I shouldn’t, but there’s nothing I could do, and then I say things that I regret later.”

As he said this, he suddenly remembered what he had been taught in school that day. They had been learning about the plagues that G-d brought upon the Egyptians because Pharaoh would not let the Jewish people leave.

Their teacher told them that we are supposed to relive the going out of Egypt as if we were there ourselves. "How is that possible," a boy had asked, "it all happened so long ago?"

"Well, that's why we're studying this topic now," their teacher explained. "For example, do you know we are in Egypt now?" The class looked a bit blank. Wasn't Egypt a long way away?

"Look at the Hebrew word for Egypt, Mitzraim!" The teacher wrote it on the board. "If you read it a different way, can also be read as Metzarim, boundaries or limitations."

The teacher gazed round the class. A few pupils did seem to be listening. Then he went on.

"We all have limitations - we might be lazy by nature, or shy, or quick-tempered. But we must work to get out of these limitations, in order to have our own personal going out of Egypt. It might not be easy - but nor was getting out of Egypt. Pharaoh needed a lot of persuading, with ten plagues, and even when the Children of Israel finally left he still came chasing after them."

Now, recalling this, Benjy realized what his limitation was. Losing his temper! Could he really get beyond this limitation? Benjy frowned, and then he smiled. It might not be easy to control his temper, but it could be done.

He would escape from the limitation of his temper, his own Egypt - and Pharaoh wouldn't be able to catch him!

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