



LEVELS OF REDEMPTION

DO YOU LIKE “LEVELS”? THERE ARE DIFFERENT LEVELS IN GAMES, IN EXAMS, AND also in Torah. A brief statement at the beginning of the week’s Sedra¹ gives us an insight into the different levels in the idea of the Redemption from Egypt. This helps us understand not only our past but also our present and our future.

At the end of last week’s Sedra, Moses complained to G-d. Moses had obeyed the Divine instructions, given at the Burning Bush, to go to Pharaoh and demand the release of the Jewish slaves. However, this had resulted not in freedom but in increased oppression. Now the slaves would not even be given straw to make their quota of bricks; they were understandably angry with Moses and Aaron. Moses asked G-d “Why have You treated Your people badly? Why did You send me? Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, things have got worse for the people, and You have not saved them!”

At the beginning of our Sedra an answer is given to Moses. G-d assures him that the

Jews will really be redeemed from Egypt; as promised. However, G-d also tells him that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not experience the highest level of Divine revelation. The full power of G-d’s true Divine Name was not revealed to them. It will, however, be revealed to Moses and the Jewish people.

This is a bit puzzling. What is meant by the revelation of the Divine Name? Surely the main thing is to get away from Egyptian

slavery? What is the extra idea that G-d's Name will be revealed?

We can understand this by considering that the Torah is speaking of different levels of redemption.

One level, the simplest and most straightforward, is the redemption from slavery. Instead of being an oppressed people, suffering terribly, the Jews will be given their freedom.

A second level of redemption is more profound and far-reaching. The Jews will not simply be released from slavery: they will go with Moses to Mount Sinai. There they will hear the Ten Commandments and receive the Torah. Through this they will become a nation with a sacred purpose: to keep G-d's law, and through this to transform the world.

The third level of redemption will be gained through the fulfilment of this goal. This may seem infinitely remote. As remote as freedom of any kind seemed to the Jews in Egypt. Yet focus on the quest for this ultimate freedom is an integral and important part of Judaism.

The third level is that the world will truly be transformed, reaching a higher level of development, then the Divine Name will be revealed in every aspect of life. Wherever a person looks they will perceive the Divine, the spiritual essence of everything. This will be expressed by genuine lovingkindness and social unity, by complete cessation of war, and also by an end to other kinds of suffering. This is the ultimate Redemption for which the Jewish people pray.

G-d's statement to Moses was emphasising these higher levels of the redemption. Certainly, G-d told him, there will be the practical reality of going free from slavery. But more profound will be the revelation of G-d achieved through the Giving of the Torah and, even more, by the eventual highest level of redemption. Then the full power of the Divine Name will be revealed, in every aspect of life, and as Jews and as humanity, we will begin for the first time to taste true freedom².

1. Exodus 6:2-9:35. 2. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.31 pp.23-7.

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*SEDRA VAERA***GRATITUDE**

Chaim was sitting in his classroom, writing his essay for English class. Mr Markson had given them the title: Grateful For What We Have.

“You can write whatever you want. Write about what you are grateful for in life,” Mr Markson had told the class at the beginning of the lesson. “There’s a lot to write about on this subject. I want it to be a well thought-out essay. Do an essay plan first.”

Chaim looked around the room. All his classmates were scribbling furiously on their papers. He was the only one sitting there with nothing to write about.

What am I grateful for? he wondered silently to himself. He didn’t know. He didn’t get the bike he wanted for his birthday last week. His sweater had ripped that morning. His lunch yesterday had been soggy. His parents were going on vacation to Israel and he was supposed to stay with his Aunt Golda alone. “Nothing good happens in my life. I have nothing to be grateful for,” he thought.

The rest of the lesson passed with Chaim sitting and staring at the wall, trying to think of something he was grateful for. Finally, as the bell rang, he wrote, “I am grateful for the new ball Uncle Irving bought me two weeks ago.” He looked down at his paper and thought how lame it sounded. Then he shrugged carelessly and stuffed his paper into his bag.

On his way out of class, Mr Markson stopped him. “Chaim, please wait here for a minute. I would like to talk to you.” Chaim shuffled over to the teachers desk. Mr Markson waited

until all the boys had left the classroom and then sat down opposite his student.

“Chaim, I noticed that you weren’t writing much during class. Do you have an explanation for that?”

Chaim scratched his head. “Yes. I, um, couldn’t really think of any things that I was grateful for. So I had nothing to write down.”

Mr Markson’s eyebrows shot up. “You couldn’t think of any things to be grateful for?” he asked in surprise. Chaim nodded, lowering his eyes.

“You know Chaim, it talks about being grateful in this week’s Torah portion. Do you know who bought the first plague onto the Jewish people?”

“Moses, of course!” Chaim answered straight away. “No, it was Aharon, his older brother. Do you know why?” When Chaim shook his head, Mr Markson said, “Because the water had saved Moses from the Nile when he was a baby so Moses didn’t want to strike the water to turn it into blood. Moses was grateful to the water for saving him from drowning.” “Oh. I never knew that!” Chaim said.

“Yes, and the same with the next plague, frogs,” Mr Markson continued. “They came out of the river, so again, because Moses was grateful to the river, it was Aaron who made the plague happen. And also with the next plague, Lice, which came from the earth. Moses was grateful to the earth which had buried the wicked Egyptian he killed, many years before. So Aaron was the one to hit the earth with his rod, and make the lice come. So you see the importance of gratitude.”

“I see what you mean,” Chaim said. “But that was Moses. He was special.” “That’s true. But we have to learn from him. You have so much to be grateful for, Chaim. For your health, for your family, for your friends ... There is so much! You just have to realize it.”

Chaim smiled. “I think I’ve got some ideas for my essay now!”

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