


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 23 July 2010 - 12 Menachem Av 5770
Sedra Va-etchanan

THE DIVINE PLAN

THE BEGINNING OF THE SEDRA¹ HAS A POIGNANT QUALITY. The first word of the Sedra, giving it its name, means ‘I pleaded’. Moses describes how he pleaded with G-d to be permitted to enter the Holy Land. However, this could not be. Moses passed away in the desert and it was Joshua who led the Jewish people into the Land of Israel.

This drama might be viewed as the mysterious personal tragedy of a great leader. However, a different perspective given by the Sages is that it forms part of a wider scenario.

If Moses had entered the Land, they tell us, he would have built the Temple which then would have been a truly permanent edifice. This would mean that it could never be destroyed, and the Jewish people could never have been exiled. This would have been fine, if the Jewish people had been perfect. Then the positive glow of holiness would have radiated from the Land of Israel to the entire world, ultimately transforming all humanity and bringing about the time of the Messiah.

Unfortunately, G-d could see that the Jewish people were still



לזכרון נצח מרת טויה בת פרתה ע"ה
 In Loving Memory of Mrs Victoria Menashy ע"ה
 1 Tammuz 5770

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imperfect. They would sin in various ways. They would shame and defile their wonderful Temple. There would therefore be no great radiance shining to all nations from the Holy Land, or not as great as it should have been. We see this from the fact that the nations of the world continued their idolatry and often murderous behaviour.

Hence, G-d knew that the Temple would eventually have to be destroyed, and for the Jewish people to be exiled. Therefore, paradoxically, it was necessary for Moses to be held back from entering the Land, despite his pleading. Moses' Temple would have been permanent. Yet the time was not yet ripe for this.

Instead, led by Joshua, the people would enter the Land, and eventually build the Temple. After 410 years, because of the sins of the Jewish people, this would be destroyed. There would be exile. Later would follow the building of the Second Temple, and then again destruction and exile, with the scattering of the Jewish people to all parts of the world.

Through this process the Jewish people would themselves be refined, and gradually they would have an effect on humanity and on existence itself. Scattered in different countries, their dedicated observance of Jewish law would change the course of history. True, over the centuries they would also witness the most ugly and horrific expressions of human power.

Through their years of Exile they would express the most incredible dedication to Judaism, in ways which almost defy imagination. The crucible of exile would reveal the inner love of the Jew for the Divine.

Through this ultimately all evil will be dissipated, and a world of goodness will be revealed².

This is the Divine Plan, which will be realised with the coming of the Messiah. A bitter but necessary step was the moment mentioned in our Sedra, when Moses pleaded with G-d, but his request could not be granted. Yet this was for the sake of the greater good, to be revealed in the future.

1. Deut.3:23-7:11. 2. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's talks on Shabbat Nachamu, 5751, and on Yud Shevat 5734, sec.4.

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SEDRA VA-ETCHANAN

BAR MITZVAH

"It's only eleven months to my Bar Mitzvah" said Michael excitedly from the back seat of the car. "I know, we have to start making preparations for it" said his father.

"Well, what preparations?" asked Michael. "Well, you want a big event like your other friends in school, don't you. I will have to book a hall, a caterer and a band, and print invitations" answered his father.

"Could we get Mermelstein's caterer, it's my friend Sammy's father?", asked Michael enthusiastically.

"Good idea," responded his father. "But you know, Sammy, there are also the preparations that you need to do."

"I know, like learning my Sedra and Haftorah" said Michael. "You also have to prepare a speech" said his father. "And maybe you should also say a Pilpul, a discussion of a theme in the Talmud. Grandpa can help you prepare it."

"We'll see," said Michael. The caterer and the band sounded good, but some of the other bits sounded like hard work.

"There's one more thing you need to prepare for your Bar Mitzvah," said his father, parking the car outside their house. "But this one is easy."

“What?” asked Michael. “Oh, I know – Tefilin! That would really show I’m a man! When we go to the synagogue for the weekday morning service you can tell at once: all the men and older boys are wearing Tefilin, and the young boys are not”.

“You’re right,” said his father. They went inside. Michael’s mother and sister greeted them. Supper was on the table, and they were soon sitting and eating.

“Dad” said Michael thoughtfully, “what’s in Tefilin that makes them so important?”

Their mother brought out spaghetti and meat balls. “Oh yum” said Leah, “this is my best supper!” “Thank you!” answered her mother.

“Mom, dad and I were discussing my Bar Mitzvah, I am really excited to wear Tefilin” said Michael, while trying to pick up the spaghetti with his fork.

“Oh wow, you’re right, it’s not very far away now” said his mother. “In fact, this week’s Sedra gives the command to wear Tefilin, and we put inside the Tefilin a parchment scroll with that part of this week’s Sedra”.

“Oh really” said Michael, “what does it say?”

“It’s the Shema,” said Leah. “The Shema is in this week’s Sedra, and it tells you to wear Tefilin. The Shema also says that you have to love G-d with your whole heart, and about having a Mezuzah. So the parchment scroll of a Mezuzah also has the Shema.”

“Well,” said their mother, “you might have to wait till near your Bar Mitzvah to wear Tefilin, but having a Mezuzah on your door and loving G-d, and also learning Torah and praying every day, which it also says in the Shema – you don’t have to wait nearly a year to your Bar Mitzvah, or be a boy, you can both do all that right now!”

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