


CHABAD  
  
 RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday night*..... קדש

Friday 6 November 2009 - 19 Cheshvan 5769  
 Sedra Vayera




**EVIL TRANSFORMED TO GOOD**

**WE CAN SEE LIFE AS DIVIDED BETWEEN GOOD AND BAD, or we can look at it in a more complicated but ultimately more meaningful way. There is good, and there is - not evil, but hidden good.**

According to Chassidic teachings, that force which creates evil originates in a realm of good. It has effect as evil, because somehow, something is wrong with the way the force is transmitted into our world. Its manifestation in our world may indeed be evil to the extreme, and we have to defend ourselves from it and try to eradicate it. Nonetheless, the spiritual origin of that force is good, and eventually that goodness will be revealed.

This idea relates to a famous section of the Sedra<sup>1</sup> this week, the destruction of the evil cities of Sodom and Gemora. The Sages explain that the inhabitants of these cities were renowned for their inhospitality and cruelty. The text of the Torah gives us an idea of their barbaric immorality<sup>2</sup>.

G-d revealed to Abraham that these cities were going to be destroyed, and Abraham pleaded on their behalf. Abraham represents the attribute of Kindness, seeking to find a point of merit even when this seems impossible<sup>3</sup>. So Abraham argued with G-d: If there are



Dedicated by Mrs Tzipora Sufrin װ j , to the memory and merit of her father k"z ihætk rgcus hfsrn װ װ j "vrv

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fifty righteous people in the cities, let their merit save everyone else. If there were forty, thirty, twenty, ten - let their merit prevent destruction<sup>4</sup>. G-d agreed, but Abraham realised that there were not even ten, and after Abraham's nephew Lot and his family were rescued, the cities were indeed destroyed. The Torah describes an unprecedented cataclysm combining elements of an earthquake and a form of volcanic eruption. The bleak vista around the Dead Sea remains as a monument.

Now comes an intriguing postscript. In the Book of Ezekiel (16:53) we find a prophecy that the city of Sodom will somehow be redeemed: "[G-d] will return the captivity of Sodom...". Despite the obvious evil of the inhabitants, and the total destruction described in the Sedra, some aspect of Sodom will be recovered in a positive way.

Here we come back to the question of the origin of evil. The Jewish mystics tell us that there is an intense Divine radiance termed the 'Radiance of Chaos'. This radiance has tremendous power, but it is usually manifested, as its name suggests, in a chaotic way. This can take the form of utter, horrific evil, and we have to battle against its manifestations with all our might.

However, the source of this energy is actually Divine. For all comes from G-d, both good and evil. Jewish teaching promises that eventually the Divine source of everything will become apparent, including the source of evil. Then the 'Radiance of Chaos' will cease to be chaotic and dangerous. It will be channelled in positive ways, and will provide the energy for the manifestation of good, called Repair, *Tikkun*. Everything negative will be transformed to good.

The prophets and the Sages depict the time of the Messiah as an epoch when all evil of any kind will disappear. For then the very source of evil, the flow of energy which now takes chaotic form, will be transformed into healing and Repair. At last the hidden good of every kind of Sodom will be redeemed<sup>5</sup>.

1. Genesis chapters 18-22. 2. See Gen. 19:4-10. 3. In order to attempt to save the people of Sodom, Abraham, who expresses love and kindness, also acted out of character and *argued* with G-d. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol.10 pp.58-9. 4. Gen 18:17-33. 5. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol.135 pp.745.

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SEDRA VAYERA

### **OUT OF CHARACTER**

Ari was shy. He was so shy that when his 1st Year teacher spoke to him on his very first day of school ever, he ducked down and hid under his desk and wouldn't come out for the rest of the class. Not much changed since then. He almost NEVER raised his hand, and if the teacher called on him he would turn a funny shade of red. After a while, the teachers stopped calling on him. During the break, he would stand at the edge of the playground with his one good friend, and they would play their own games. The other kids didn't pay too much attention to him. They just let him be.

So when the new boy came, Ari wasn't particularly excited. He thought to himself that he would just slide by unnoticed, like he did with everyone.

The new boy was one of those people who was immediately popular. He was like a magnet...Whoosh!...all the boys were drawn to him that first break time, and formed a circle around him, chattering and asking him questions. Except Ari, who was like a shadow, hovering on the edge of the playground, trying to look invisible.

The next morning the boys shuffled into the school synagogue for morning prayers. Ari might be shy talking to his classmates, but he loved speaking the words of the prayers. He imagined them leaving his mouth and evaporating up into the sky. There they ascended to the throne of...G-d Himself! All his secrets and hopes and fears...G-d cared about each one....

Ari had just opened his prayer book when he noticed that the new boy was standing next to him. He also noticed that the new boy was holding the Hebrew prayer book upside down! That meant he could not read Hebrew. No one else had noticed. So all Ari he had to do was gently to point this out to the new boy, in a way which would not embarrass him, and show him what page they were on. Maybe he could also find a prayer book for him with an English translation. But Ari was shy. Being shy, he did not want to do anything at all.

Now Ari remembered Abraham in Sedra Vayera. Usually, Abraham expressed pure love of G-d. Love of G-d means accepting whatever G-d does. But when G-d was going to destroy the people of Sodom, Abraham suddenly began arguing with G-d in his attempt to save the people. "What if there are fifty good people in Sodom?" he asked G-d. "Will you kill the good people together with the wicked? Will the Judge of the whole world not be just?" In the end, G-d convinced Abraham there were no good people at all in Sodom.

For Ari, the main point was that Abraham was able to act out of character, in order to help others. I am shy, thought Ari, but so what! Ari noticed a prayer book with an English translation on a nearby shelf. He picked it up and then took a small step towards his classmate. He felt his hands trembling. *I am so shy!* he thought. But here was a boy who never prayed before. Who didn't know the excitement of sharing all his thoughts and feelings with G-d who ALWAYS listened and cared. *So what if I step out of character for a few seconds,* he thought. He took another step closer and quietly gave his classmate the new prayer book, open at the right page. "Later," he whispered into his ear, "we can talk about what it all means."

The boy looked back at him and smiled and nodded. Ari realized that he was excited to teach this boy about the amazing words inside this book. He also realized that he might even have made a new friend.

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