


**CHABAD**  
  
**RESEARCH UNIT**

שבת..... *for Friday nights* ..... קדש

**Friday 11 April 2014 - 11 Nisan 5774**  
**Sedra Acharei - The Seder Nights Shabbat**

**TWO KINDS OF HOLINESS**

**T**HE SEDRA<sup>1</sup> THIS SHABBAT AND THE FORTHCOMING SEDER NIGHTS<sup>2</sup> CELEBRATE TWO COMPLEMENTARY kinds of holiness. On the one hand there is the Temple or Sanctuary, the place where the Divine Presence dwells. On the other there is the family and the home. This too is a realm of holiness, a ‘small Temple’.

The beginning of the Sedra mentions the deaths of the two sons of Aaron<sup>3</sup> who tried to enter the Holy of Holies in an unguided way. The Sedra then continues with the idea that it is actually possible to enter the Holy of Holies, but this is only once a year, on Yom Kippur. However, even then only the High Priest is permitted to enter, as part of the atonement procedure for the Jewish people.

This clearly shows the great holiness of the Sanctuary. A later passage in the Sedra<sup>4</sup> emphasises this further, by warning against bringing offerings anywhere but the Sanctuary. The Sanctuary, later the Temple in Jerusalem, is clearly a focal point for Judaism.

This was seen very clearly during the Pesach Festival. In Temple times thousands would flock to Jerusalem to celebrate Pesach. The Seder Plate has a shank-bone (or chicken neck) commemorating the Paschal lamb which would be offered in the Temple on the eve of the Festival, and also an egg, which represents another festive offering

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called Chagigah. The Haggadah depicts aspects of the Pesach experience in Temple times, such as the 'sandwich' of Paschal lamb, Matza and bitter herbs which Hillel would eat.

Marriage, the family and the home, are also celebrated in the Sedra and the Pesach Seder nights. Discussing the tragic deaths of the two sons of Aaron, one explanation for this given by the Sages is that they did not marry nor have children<sup>5</sup>. This was because of their great quest for holiness which led them away from the world<sup>6</sup>.

The Talmud also emphasises that the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur must be married. Further, the last chapter in the Sedra gives a list of forbidden relationship including adultery and incest, stressing the sacred nature of marriage and the family.

The Seder nights have many functions: they remind us of our origin as a people, and they stress the significance of our Jewish identity. They also celebrate the home and the family. The very first Seder night took place in Egypt. The Paschal Lamb was slaughtered at home, making it into a kind of Temple. Then it was roasted and eaten together by one or several families, with Matza and bitter herbs<sup>7</sup>. Round midnight came the Redemption.

On Monday and Tuesday<sup>8</sup> evening, in Jewish homes round the world, families will be gathering for the Seder. Those who are alone or far from their families, try to join a Seder as welcome guests: after all, the entire Jewish people is one great family.

At the Pesach Seder these two points of holiness join: each family and home is revealed as a mini-Temple, where the Divine Presence dwells. The Divine dwells in the home and also in the heart of each individual<sup>9</sup>. Experiencing this together at the Seder, with the Matza, the wine and the story of the Exodus, is a true moment of liberation!

1. Leviticus chs.16-18. 2. Monday and Tuesday 14-15 April. 3. This event is described earlier in Lev. 10:1-7. 4. Lev. 17:3-7. 5. See Midrash Vayikra Rabba 20:9, Tanchuma on the Sedra, 6-7. 6. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Torah Studies* p. 191 ff. 7. See Exodus 12:3-13. 8. Outside Israel. 9. See the Rebbe's talks on Shabbat Acharei 1981, secs.22-31, and in 1984 sec.11. In fact, the Divine Presence is in the home and within each person throughout the year.

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### THE SEDER NIGHTS

*Try reading this out loud at the table*

#### **EGYPTIAN DREAMS**

Life seemed glum as they sat round the table eating supper. Dad was really tired from a full day of work at the pyramids and store-cities. He was in an especially foul mood because the task-masters had stopped supplying straw for making the bricks. And they had to keep up the same work quota as before, when they were getting straw for bricks. Then there was this terrible business of throwing baby boys into the river! It didn't bear thinking about.

Mum, however, always seemed enthusiastic about things. They had, thank G-d, a big family. Even though there were problems, with Egyptian soldiers coming to look for newborn boys, she still didn't give up. Ben remembered his little baby brother being hidden in a cupboard for a few days.

"Pass the Matza" said Dad.

Ben was puzzled, wasn't that in a different part of the story?

Yes, of course it was. They were again sitting at the table, all together, as well as their cousin Arnie and his parents. All the bother with bricks and straw and store-cities was past. A year had gone by with the most crazy things happening. The river changed to blood, a month later there were frogs everywhere, then lice. Mind you, it didn't bother the Jews that much.

Then there was Moses telling everyone to get a lamb and roast it, and eat it with Matza and bitter herbs. That's what they were doing now, late in the evening. It was nearly midnight.

"So what are we doing here?" Arnie was asking. "Don't you think our Egyptian neighbours are going to get very upset because we slaughtered their idol?"

Yes, it's true, thought Ben. The lamb was the idol of the Egyptians.

"Don't worry" he said. "Mum already explained to them that soon all the Hebrews will be leaving Egypt... You should have seen their faces, they didn't believe it at first, but after a while mum managed to convince them."

"But Ben" Arnie was asking, "how does your mum know that we will be going out of Egypt, maybe this is all just a hoax and we will just end up in even worse slavery?"

"I don't know" Ben said. "To tell the truth, I sometimes find it hard to believe myself, but my mother says don't worry, it's all happening right now. We're going to go free, we're going to go and get the Torah and live in the land G-d gave to Abraham."

"RRRRRIINNGG" the sound slowly cut into his consciousness. "Midnight!"

"Where am I?" thought Ben. "At midnight we all go free!" He sat up in bed. "Oh, I was just dreaming," he said to himself, disappointed.

"Come on Ben," called his mother, "QUICK! We're going out of Egypt NOW!"

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