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הב

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 20 July 2012 - 1 Menachem Av 5772
Sedra Mattot-Mas'ei

THE MOSES WITHIN

MANY BATTLES ARE DESCRIBED IN THE TORAH. THE SEDRA¹ this week describes that of the Israelites against the nation of Midian. G-d told Moses that he should attack them². The Sedra describes the way Moses mustered people for an army and gives many details about the battle and its aftermath.

There are two ways of looking at this. The first is the literal historical fact. In order to survive, the Jewish people has had to battle against a variety of forces. The Midianites sought the destruction of the Jews, hence action had to be taken against them. The Torah tells us this because in different ways in different times we are faced with similar battles. Sometimes they are military battles, sometimes cultural. In the case of the Midianites, part of the problem was their attempt to entice the Jewish men with the Midianite women.

The second way of understanding this event is on an internal level. The hostile nations whom the Jewish people encounter in the pages of the Bible signify negative forces within *oneself*. The constant battles of the Jewish people represent the constant struggle of the individual against internal negative qualities. Midian, the



In Loving Memory of v"g l bhv l ubj , c tekg tbgv
Mrs Henny Sufirin ז"ל - Yahrzeit 4 Menachem Av
Dedicated by her Family ז"א

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Rabbis tell us, relates to the word *madon* meaning 'strife'. This negative trait is expressed in hostile antipathy to others. One feels the other person is taking up one's own territory. His very existence is irritating. This is the quality of 'causeless hatred' which, says the Talmud, brought about the destruction of the Temple. Rabbi Shalom Dovber, the Fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe (1860-1920) discusses the battle against Midian as an internal struggle against one's own selfishness and rejection of others³.

A key aspect of the battle is the fact that G-d tells Moses himself that he should be personally involved. Each of us has the quality of 'Moses' within us⁴. This inner Moses represents the power of selflessness: the very opposite of the selfishness and self-centredness which causes us to reject others.

Each of us has an inner potential to go beyond our own self. It is expressed in acts of heroism, and also in times of intense dedication. A group of people staying up late planning a charity event; a lone individual selflessly caring for an elderly relative - there are countless ways in which our inner, pure 'Moses' might be expressed in our lives.

This inner Moses helps us break down the inner force of Midian. Rather than resent and despise people, we accept them, and even come to love them as is demanded by the Torah command: "love your neighbour as yourself"⁵.

The battle against Midian described in the Sedra is therefore a crucial struggle which continues in our own time. It particularly relates to the 'Nine Days', which began today (Friday), culminating in the fast of the Ninth of Av, this year pushed from Shabbat to Sunday (29 July), mourning for the destruction of the Temple.

The Sages tell us that the Temple was destroyed as a result of causeless hatred - the expression of the inner force of Midian, strife, negativity. The Temple will be rebuilt through causeless love. This is effected by the arousal of the inner Moses, for each of us, our deepest essence.

1. Numbers 30:2 – 36:13. 2. Numbers 31:1-3. 3. In his book *Tract on Ahavat Yisrael (Hechaltzu)*. 4. See Tanya, beginning of ch.42. 5. Leviticus 19:18.

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SEDRA MATTOT-MAS'EI

BOTH ARE PRIORITIES

The door to Eli's bedroom opened and in walked his younger brother Michael. 'Eli,' Michael said, 'do you think you can help me out?' Eli, who was sitting at his desk, looked at him questioningly.

'Well,' explained Michael, 'Rabbi Levy asked me to organise some sort of charity campaign, which I'd love to do; but I don't know the first thing about it. I was wondering if you could give me a hand?'

He looked hopefully in Eli's direction. Eli was older than him and he had experience in organising this sort of thing. But to Michael's dismay Eli shook his head.

'I'm sorry, but I can't help'. Eli saw how disappointed his brother was and he tried to explain. 'You see, I study Torah with my friend David in the evenings. By the time I get back home I'm too tired to think about anything else...'

Later that evening Eli was sitting in his friend David's home and they were studying that week's Torah portion together. David was giving a summary:

'Moses and the Jewish people had conquered some of the land on the eastern side of the Jordan. Now the tribes of Reuven and Gad requested from Moses that they should be allowed to stay in that region rather than cross over the river and settle in the main part of the Land of Israel. The point was

that the tribes of Reuven and Gad had many sheep and cattle, and on the east side of the Jordan there was very good pastureland. Moses got upset with them.'

'So they were just interested in growing rich from sheep farming,' said Eli. 'Well,' said David, 'one of the commentators explains that the real reason was that they thought, if they could have good pasture land, then they could support themselves with their herds of sheep and devote all their time to the study of Torah.'

'I see', said Eli, 'so why did Moses get upset? I mean, that seems like a good idea, considering that they wanted to study Torah'.

David explained. 'Moses was worried that they wanted to stay on the east of the Jordan, studying Torah, rather than come and help the rest of the Jewish people conquer the Land of Israel. So he said they first had to be together with the other Jews and help them in their battle. Then, when the whole land of Israel was conquered, they would be able to return to the region on the east of the river and live there. Even though Torah study is very important, sometimes the right action comes first.'

'You know,' said Eli suddenly, 'I feel bad now'.

'Why?' asked David.

'My brother asked me earlier today if I would give him a hand with a charity project and I told him that I couldn't help him out because I was busy studying Torah with you...'

'So? What's wrong with that?' David didn't understand.

'Don't you get it?' said Eli. 'Torah study is important, but so is organising a charity project. My brother was so upset when I told him I couldn't help... I think I'll talk to him tonight and tell him that I've changed my mind. I'll try and fit in both...'

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