


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 17 July 2009 - 25 Tammuz 5769
 Sedra Mattot—Mas'ei

THE PATH TO REDEMPTION

EVERY SUMMER WE ENTER THE PERIOD OF TIME KNOWN AS THE “THREE WEEKS”. They extend from the fast of 17th Tammuz (9 July this year), till that of 9th Av (30 July). It is a time when we are given an opportunity to reflect on the fact that we are in Exile, for it was during this period that both the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem were destroyed. The double Sedra¹ this week is always read at this time. This time of the year connects with the story told in Mattot regarding the war against the Midianites².

The background to this war concerns the heathen prophet Balaam, whom we met in Sedra Balak. When he saw that his attempt to curse the Jewish people had not worked, he tried to find another way to harm them. Balaam knew that G-d wants all peoples, and especially the Jews, to have a high level of morality. So, as our Sedra mentions³, Balaam advised the Moabites and Midianites to entice the Jewish men into immorality. He advised that they should send their daughters into the Jewish camp with the intention of leading the men astray. The plan was unfortunately successful and many Jews fell into the trap.

This week the Sedra tells us that G-d instructed Moses to take vengeance against the Midianites. This raises a question, asked by the Sages. Why was Moses told to attack only the Midianites and not the Moabites, who were equally involved, if not more so? Further, why is there the special concern to take vengeance at all? There have been many awful things done to the Jewish people by other nations, but rarely is “vengeance” sought by G-d.

The Sages tell us that the great difference between Midian and Moab was that the Moabites were justifiably afraid of a Jewish attack. The Jewish people were passing near their land. But the Midianites were further South, not in the path of the Jewish advance. The Jews were not threatening the Midianites at all! Why did *they* want to destroy the Jewish people? This was not their quarrel.

This is why G-d told Moses to take vengeance against the Midianites. They express the force of causeless hatred. This is even seen in their name, "Midian". The root in Hebrew is *madon*, meaning "strife". A book of Chassidic teaching⁴ by Rabbi Shalom Dovber Schneerson, the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, explains that the Torah tells us about the ancient people of Midian because they represent the power of hatred for no reason, merely for the sake of it. They hated the Jews simply because they existed.

We might be reminded of some groups who apparently have a similar stance today. Rabbi Shalom Dober was writing in 1899 in Tsarist Russia, at a time when pogroms were frequent. But the focus of his book is not on the enemies outside the Jewish community, but inside the heart of each individual within it. He explains that a similar capacity for causeless hatred exists within each one of us. We are able to loathe another person, for no real reason: just because he exists. Or we can ignore his existence, not recognising him or her as a person. Rabbi Shalom Dober's book explores ways to overcome this inner power of hatred and to replace it by love.

The Sedra links with the fact that at the time of the destruction of the Temple, two millennia ago, many Jews, even in the holy city of Jerusalem, showed great hatred to each other. Our Rabbis point to this 'causeless hatred' as leading to the destruction of the Temple⁵.

This is the attitude which requires complete eradication through "vengeance". This means getting rid of any hint of such hatred within ourselves. How do we do this? By following the path of causeless love: loving another Jew simply because he or she is there, and recognising every human being. This is the path to Redemption⁶.

1. Numbers 30:2-36:13. 2. Num. ch.31. 3. Num.31:16. See Rashi on that verse and also to Num. 24:14. 4. See Rabbi Shalom Dober Schneerson's *Tract on Ahavat Yisrael*. The author is known as the RaShaB (1860-1920). 5. See Talmud Gittin 55b. 6. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.34 p.229.

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SEDRA MATOT-MAS'EI

WAR AGAINST WAR

"Alright! It's Colour War!" yelled Benjy, as he punched an ecstatic fist into the air!

Colour War was the yearly summer camp experience where the camp divides into two teams, team red and team blue. Each team earns points for competing in different exciting activities in a bid to be the winning team at the end of the week. Colour War usually begins with some kind of mock alarm in the camp. Then someone shouts "Colour War!" and everyone knows the alarm was a fake, but what is real is - Colour War!

"Yeah!" Mendy came up from behind, "And what an awesome Colour War break out! Oooh, imagine if they really did have to helicopter us out of the campsite because of a plague of bugs!"

Suddenly the two boys began wriggling. "Get off! Get off me! Ahhh get it off me!" they both yelled, pulling at their Camp T-shirts. Finally a few little black spiders went flying out of their shirts and landed motionless on the grass.

"Wait a sec," Mendy murmured quizzically, scrutinizing the creepy looking insects, "these are the plastic bugs they spread all around the campsite for the colour war breakout!"

"Hey you're right! Who stuck these down our backs?" Benjy cried. The boys turned around to find themselves facing the culprit - their good friend Eli, convulsed in a fit of laughter. The victims couldn't help but see the humour in it all. Soon all three were laughing together, as they got rid of the last of the plastic bugs. Then the three boys got talking about how much they enjoy Colour War.

"Speaking of teams, you're lucky we're your friends," Mendy pointed out to Eli. "If we were anyone else on the red team I reckon we would have got really mad at you for being on the blue team and trying to have a go at us."

"You know," Benjy said thoughtfully. "That's a problem. I mean the way Colour War can get so competitive. In a way it can get like a real war where people are against each other for no reason except for that they're on opposite sides."

"True," Eli paused. "But why does the Torah speak so much about war? Look at this week's Sedra where Hashem commands the Jewish people to wage war against Midian. "

"Yes!" Mendy said excitedly, "We just learnt about that yesterday! Our counsellor explained that each of us has the job to fight the very same war inside ourselves. The Midian that we fight is the part inside each of us that leads us to fight with others. The Midian inside stops us from being friendly and welcoming."

Benjy seemed puzzled. "So you mean, when we fight against our own Midian, we are fighting against.... err *fighting*?"

"Exactly!" exclaimed Eli. "We're fighting against the very things that stop us from loving and accepting every Jew no matter what. Our counsellor said that every person has a Midian to fight inside themselves, in some way or another."

"So here in camp, could that mean not wanting to cheer on another camper simply because they aren't on our team?" Benjy suggested. "You've got it! Or like not wanting to help a kid in the year below because we feel they're not cool enough" Eli added.

"Okay! What we are waiting for?" Benjy yelled, springing to his feet. "There's plenty of Midian to fight in this Colour War. Let's go spread some Achdut, Unity!"

"And you know the best part about this type of Colour War?" Eli said with a smile, "no matter what... we're all on the same team!"

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