



57

THE TEMPLE WITHIN

A CONSTANT THEME IN THE TORAH IS THAT OF the bringing of offerings to G-d on the Altar. In fact, this is the central topic of our Sedra¹ this week. This subject might sound rather remote from our lives today. However, the Rabbis give us a way of understanding it in personal, psychological terms.

Within each of us there is a very basic level of motivation and activity. It is potentially brutal, violent and selfish to the extreme. It is like an animal dimension of our being.

At the same time we have within us a Divine dimension. These two aspects of our inner self are usually in conflict. We struggle to control our selfishness and our anger. Sometimes we succeed; sometimes it seems too difficult! Our teal aim, however, is more. We do not want just to control the animal part of ourselves. We want to *transform* the animal force into something positive and holy.

Now let us consider the Sedra's description of the Temple service and apply it to ourselves. Within each of us is an Altar and the Divine fire burning on it. This is the Divine power within each one of us. We bring our animal self to the inner Altar. What happens to it? It loses its brutality and coarseness and, infused with Divine fire, it becomes an offering to G-d².

In practical terms this means that there are inspiring aspects of Judaism which, like the fire burning on the Altar of our heart, have the effect of infusing and transforming our more materialistic and selfish qualities. One of these is the festival of Purim which begins straight after Shabbat.

117 GEORGE STREET, LONDON W1H 7HF
cru@lubavitchuk.com - www.chabadresearch.net

THE SECRET OF OUR EXISTENCE

On Saturday night Purim will begin. One hears the Megillah scroll telling the story of the festival, both on Saturday night and on Sunday (20 March) during the day. On Sunday one gives a gift of at least two items of food to a fellow Jew, and at least two donations of charity. One also has a festive meal, beginning on Sunday afternoon.

Purim is often regarded as a children's festival: certainly, children enjoy dressing up and waving the *gragger* (noise-maker) when Haman's name is mentioned in the Megillah. Yet the Sages tell us it is far more than this. In the time of the Messiah, they say, when all the sacred writings of the Torah will be very accessible and understandable, the Megillah will still retain a mysterious power³.

Why is this? When we read it today, it seems a straightforward story of what happened. And yet... One intriguing detail which the Sages point out is that the Megillah is the only Book in the Bible which does not contain the Name of G-d. This is a clue. Purim gives us access to the *hiddenness* of G-d, the essence of the Infinite beyond ordinary Knowledge. G-d's Name is absent from the Megillah, yet the very word Megillah means both 'scroll' and *reveal*. On Purim the hiddenness of G-d is somehow revealed. How? How can the unknowable be known? Through dedication and through joy. The special atmosphere of the festival is described by the Sages as reaching exalted spiritual heights.

On Purim our existence was threatened, simply because we were Jews. Then Esther said to Mordechai: "Go, gather all the Jews..."⁴ We stood up for being Jewish and, miraculously, evil was transformed into good, darkness into light.

Today, focused on Israel, but also to some extent on the Jewish people round the world, there are echoes of a rather similar threat. Our response is the same: to stand up for being Jewish; to make a step forward in recognising our special identity, expressed through practical observance of the Mitzvot.

When we recognise our responsibility as Jews, G-d will help us break through to the future, as He has done for thousands of years. Purim is the story of the secret of our existence.

1. Leviticus Chs. 1-5. 2. See *Bati LeGani* ch.2 3. Jerusalem Talmud Megilla 1:5. 4. Esther 4:16.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

SPONSORED BY DR REUVEN JOEL



SEDRA TZAV - ZACHOR

REMEMBERING AMALEK

Miss Cohen was trying to teach the class about Amalek. She took a red marker and wrote in big red letters on the whiteboard a single word: REMEMBER.

Several girls in the class looked with interest, but also slightly puzzled, at Miss Cohen. Goldie, the girl who usually knew all the answers, was frowning. "There are so many things we have to remember!" she was thinking.

Rachel, who had forgotten to do her homework, blushed red. "Why does she have to put me to shame in front of the whole class?" she thought to herself.

"Well, what am I trying to say?" asked Miss Cohen, gazing at the girls in the class. This was her first real teaching job after getting her teachers' diploma. She could remember one of her instructors saying loudly: "Make the lessons interesting! Don't send your pupils to sleep!" She looked at the girls sitting meekly in their desks. "If only *one* of them would know..." she prayed silently.

Goldie put up her hand. Miss Cohen smiled with absolute relief. "Yes, Goldie. What does it mean?" "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

Miss Cohen stopped smiling. It hadn't worked. "Yes Goldie, that's a very good point and very important. But that's not quite what I was thinking of... Can you guess?"

She made an effort and turned on a new smile, which she directed at Goldie. The problem was that Goldie was now looking down at her desk, refusing to meet her eye.

Rachel put up her hand. “Yes Rachel?” “We have to remember to do our homework.” A few girls laughed.

In desperation, Miss Cohen had an idea. She turned back to the white-board and drew six dashes, one for each letter of the word Amalek. They would play ‘Hangman’. “Come on, girls,” she said. “Who is going to try the first letter?”

“A” said Estelle. To her surprise, Miss Cohen wrote ‘A’ on the first and third dashes. “B” said another girl. Miss Cohen drew the vertical line of the gallows. A few more girls called out letters, and the gallows grew a base, a top bar, a diagonal holding the top bar firm.

“M” said Goldie. Happily, Miss Cohen wrote M as the second letter of the word. Now several girls put up their hands excitedly. “Amalek! Amalek!”

“Yes, quite right. This Shabbat we read in a second Torah Scroll the command to remember Amalek. Why do we read it *this* Shabbat?” Goldie put up her hand. “Because it is the Shabbat before Purim, and Haman was an Amalekite”. “And he wanted to hang Mordechai and made a gallows, just like we have”, said Estelle.

“Yes,” said Miss Cohen, with a flash of inspiration, “if you forget about Amalek, then the gallows are made. So we have to remember Amalek. And then what happens?”

“I know,” said Goldie. “My father told me. It is true that Haman and his ten wicked sons were killed, hung on the gallows he intended for Mordechai. But the Midrash also tells us that later on, descendants of Haman became Jewish and studied Torah in Bnei Brak. That means bad became good!”

“Thank you Goldie,” said Miss Cohen. “The goal is not to destroy bad, but to transform it into good. We play our part, doing what G-d tells us to do, in this case remembering Amalek and everything else in Jewish teaching, and as a result – bad becomes good!”

The girls in the class cheered. Miss Cohen felt truly happy for the first time that day.

***Torah teachings are holy –
please treat this page with care***