


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש


Friday 30 March 2012 - 7 Nisan 5772
Sedra Tzav - The Great Shabbat

FLAMES ON THE INNER ALTAR

EVERY WORD IN THE TORAH IS SIGNIFICANT. THE SAGES discuss cases when there is an extra word or even an extra letter. In the case of our Sedra¹, speaking of the daily service in the Temple, the Torah seems to add an unnecessary word. It states that “Fire should be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out”². The Jerusalem Talmud comments on this. Why does the Torah write specially the word “continually”? It states clearly that the fire “shall not go out”. So what extra information is conveyed by the word “continually”?

The Talmud answers as follows: I might think that this fire should not have to burn on Shabbat. Further, I might think it should not be kindled if the community is impure. Therefore the Torah adds the extra word “continually”: to emphasise that also in these circumstances the fire should burn on the altar³.

This might seem simply to add some technical details about the service in the Temple, but in fact it has another dimension. The Torah is speaking to every individual in every generation - if we can only learn to understand what it means.



In Loving Memory of Mrs Jeanne Gewolb-Sostrin
 (Yenta bas Devora) ע"ה - 15 Tevet 5772
 Dedicated by her Son Dr Roger Gewolb שי'

The demand to kindle the fire on the altar applies to each one of us, man or woman. We all have a private “altar” within our hearts, and lighting the fire on that inner altar means that little extra step of enthusiasm, observance and dedication.

Our response to this demand very often takes one of two forms, both problematic. Either we say “For me, it is Shabbat”. By this we mean - “I am already very holy and very observant. I do not need to make any further steps. I do not need any further warmth and fire. The status quo is sufficient”.

Or, we make the opposite statement. “I am too remote from the Jewish ideal. There is no hope for me, and no point in my bothering to kindle the fire. Anyway it will not be acceptable to G-d”.

The Torah responds to both these extremes. The extra word, “continually”, tells us that even on Shabbat, and even when the community is impure, the fire is necessary and certainly will be fully acceptable. Whatever one's level of Jewish observance, and whatever one's false illusions about oneself - whether positive or negative - there is always the challenge to discover a new dimension of excitement and enthusiasm, to make a new step forward in service of G-d⁴.

This is particularly relevant on the Shabbat before Pesach. Pesach is the birthday of the Jewish people. In the life of a family, whether the birthday is of a child, or of one of the parents or grandparents, a birthday⁵ is an opportunity for gathering together with a sense of family unity and of purpose, renewing our sense of direction, as an individual and as a group. Our gathering at the Seder next Friday and Saturday evenings will be times for strengthening our dedication to G-d and for making sure that our inner fire is truly burning, with a sense of love for and unity with every single Jew, throughout the world.

1. Leviticus chs.6-8. 2. Lev.6:6. 3. Jerusalem Talmud Yoma 4:6. 4. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.1, p.217. 5. There are a number of famous birthdays near Pesach. The Lubavitcher Rebbe was born on 11 Nisan, and the Rambam was born on the eve of Pesach. 14 Nisan.

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SEDRA TZAV – THE GREAT SHABBAT

BEING BOLD

Benjy, Dina and Rachel were lost. They had gone shopping for a birthday present for their mother, in a district fifteen minutes walk from their house. Now, having successfully purchased a beautiful necklace, they were heading home. But it seemed they had taken a wrong turning and were in a very unfamiliar district. Not only that, dusk was rapidly approaching and menacing looking groups of youths seemed to be loitering on almost every corner.

The three of them were very scared indeed. And Rachel had a mobile phone, but its battery was dead so it could not be used. They didn't even have any money left to make a telephone call from a phone booth.

"I'm scared." Dina said "What if they don't like Jewish people, Rachel? Maybe Benjy should take off his kippa".

"No way!" Benjy said firmly. "I'm surprised at you for saying that Dina. Don't you remember what daddy was saying about the "Great Shabbat", *Shabbat Hagadol*, yesterday - about how the Jewish people risked their lives to take the Pesach lamb? They were brave enough to do what G-d said, and so should we be".

Yesterday had been "The Great Shabbat", the Shabbat before Pesach. Their father told them how, just before the Jews were about to leave Egypt, G-d had commanded them to take a

lamb - which happened to be the main Egyptian idol - and prepare to slaughter it.

You might think this was very dangerous. How would the Egyptians react if the Jews say they are going to slaughter their favourite idol?

However, the Jews bravely followed this command. Not only did the Egyptians not attack the Jews, they even began fighting among themselves, with some of them arguing that they should let the Jews go free.

Dina felt reassured as she remembered this. Hopefully they would be protected just like the Jews in Egypt.

“Let's ask someone how to get home” suggested Rachel. But who could they ask?

Then Benjy spotted a friendly looking lady with a little girl. Rachel spoke to her, and the lady not only told them how to get back onto the right way home but offered to walk them to the right turning. She said it was very easy to lose one's way.

“Thank you so much, you're so kind”. Benjy said.

“It's my pleasure” the woman said. “I see by your kippa that you're Jewish. I'm Jewish too, so it is my particular pleasure to help you!”

“Will you be going to a Seder?” asked Rachel, wondering if they should invite her to their own Seder at home.

“Yes, with my married daughter, both nights!” said the lady. “I'm sure you will be having a nice Seder yourselves”, she added. The three children smiled, wished her a happy Pesach, and then hurried home.

“See” Benjy said happily as they entered their welcoming front door, twenty minutes later. “My wearing a kippa actually helped us get home safely!”

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