

PARSHAS SHOFTIM

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

With the appointment of judges and court officers, comes the injunction against an altar of the single memorial stone- matzevah, rather the altar had to be built of a number of stones. It is well known that the memorial stone was a favorite altar in the days of the Patriarchs. Each of the Patriarchs was an individual: 'Only one is Abraham' (Ezekiel, 33: 24) and when Jacob came down to Egypt, it is written, '70 nefesh-soul', not nefashot-souls. They, like each of the people mentioned in the book of Bereishit, acted as individuals; indeed the very purpose of that book was to teach that individuals are able to reach and connect to G-d. This was the purpose of the matzevah. Now, however, it had become a means for idolatry, so had to be replaced by the altar of many stones. Elijah at Mount Carmel took 12 stones corresponding to the 12 Tribes, the sons of Jacob whom G-d had called, Israel (1 King's, 18: 31). If the stones of the altar correspond to the tribes, then it is obviously required that they act in unison. Therefore, the verse concludes with the name Israel that is the unitary form of the Jewish People. So we learn that it is not possible for the individuals of them-selves to approach G-d [matzevah]. Nevertheless, the worship at the altar of many stones is possible, even when each individual has a singular and specific character of their own, since they have become transformed into one unified body.

There are three mitzvot that Israel are commanded to do when they enter the Land. These are to appoint a king, to wipe out the memory of Amalek and to build the Bet HaMikdash (Talmud, Sanhedrin 20a). This is because the Land of Israel unites all the bodies into a physical unitary nation, while the king unites all the souls- nefashot and the Temple unites the spirits- neshamot. However, Amalek is called the divider. They divide Jew from Jew- they attacked the stragglers who were neglected by the rest of Israel. They separate the Jews from G-d- 'and did not fear HaShem'. They also disrupt the Unity of G-d, separating between the first two letters, Yod-He and the last two letters, Vav He of His Name even as it is written in Shmot 19: 17. Therefore before the Temple could be built they needed to wipe out the memory of Amalek. However, after the defeat of Amalek by Saul and David there were spiritual laggards amongst them. This is the complete contrast of the essence of the Jews who have a passion for carrying out HaShem's commandments (MaHaral, Gevurot chapter 19) and that is why the building of the Temple was delayed. The Talmud (Shabbat, 55a) tells us that if King David would not have accepted lashon harah concerning the sons of Saul (2 Samuel, 9:4) then the kingdom would not have been divided into two after the death of Solomon, the Jews would not have worship idols and we would not have been exiled from our country. David would have rectified the sin of the laggards and built the Temple, and the unity would have been

complete- king, destruction of Amalek and the Bet HaMikdash.

A king is warned in the Torah [in our parshah] against increasing money, horses and wives. The Hebrew initials of these three words spell chair, kisei, to teach that this will ensure the throne of kingship. Every person can learn from this verse, how to strive to be a ruler over their appetites. In this way they will prevent spiritual damage to the body, the soul and the mind. Money refers to the mind, as the MaHaral explains 'with all your strength', in the Shema to mean the mind, the horse corresponding to the soul, as a multitude of horses was a symbol in the Tanach of arrogance and pride, and the sexual relationship referring to the body. The way to be a ruler and a king over ones emotions is exactly the same as that commanded to the king; to write a Sepher Torah and then to study it all of their days.

Just as the Jewish king unites all the people of Israel, so too does Rosh HaShanah unite us in anointing G-d as King of the universe. Such unity can only be achieved by each individual merging themselves in the union of the people, even as done by the Bet HaMikdash and the altar of many stones. Then, each can abrogate their own opinion and will, before G-d's Will. This is the purpose of the month Ellul that comes before Rosh HaShanah to enable each one of us to turn to that which unites us.

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