

The Incredible Connection between Parshas Tetzaveh and Shabbas Zachor

Fulfilling the Vital Mitzvos of Remembering and Eradicating Amalek by Every Individual Engaging in Torah Study to the Best of His Ability

This coming Shabbas, which approaches auspiciously, is known as Shabbas Zachor. This designation reflects the fact that our blessed sages (Megillah 30a) instituted the reading of the passage in Parshas Ki Seitzei (Devarim 25, 17) — containing the command to always remember the actions of Amalek — on the Shabbas immediately preceding Purim:

“זכור את אשר עשה לך עמלק בדרך בצאתכם ממצרים, אשר קרך בדרך ויזנב בך כל הנחשלים אחריך ואתה עיף ויגע ולא ירא אלקים, והיה בהניח ה' אלקיך לך מכל אויביך מסביב בארץ אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך נחלה לרשתה, תמחה את זכר עמלק מתחת השמים לא תשכח.”

“Remember what Amalek did to you while you were departing from Egypt, how he happened upon you on the way, and he attacked at your rear, all the weaklings that straggled behind — while you were tired and exhausted; and he did not fear G-d. It shall be that when Hashem, your G-d, allows you to rest from all of your enemies that surround you, in the land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you as an inheritance, you shall eradicate the memory of Amalek from beneath the heaven — you shall not forget!”

We have learned in the Gemarah (Megillah 18a): “זכור יכול בלב, כשהוא אומר לא תשכח, הרי שכחת הלב אמור, הא מה אני מקיים זכור — כפה — one might have thought that it is only necessary to remember mentally, but it already states elsewhere: “You shall not forget.” So, the requirement not to forget mentally is already stated; so what is meant when the passuk states: “Remember”? Remember verbally. So, in order to fulfill the command to remember Amalek verbally, it was instituted to read the passage from the Torah quoted above. In fact, it would have been acceptable to fulfill this command of “remembering Amalek” verbally on the Shabbas when Parshas Ki Seitzei is read.

Yet, the institution to recite this passage specifically on the Shabbas preceding Purim was designed to associate this

command with the miracle that transpired on Purim. On Purim, the Jews vanquished Haman and his sons and waged war against their enemies — who were all descendants of Amalek. Let us note the sacred words of the Chinuch in Parshas Ki Seitzei (Mitzvah 603) concerning the command: “Remember what Amalek did to you”:

“מדיני המצוה מה שאמרו זכרונם לברכה שחיוב זכירה זו היא בלב ובפה, וכן הוא בספרי, זכור את אשר עשה וגו', יכול בלבבך, כשהוא אומר לא תשכח הרי שכחת הלב אמורה, הא מה אני מקיים זכור שתהא שונה בפיו... ודי לנו בזה לזכור הענין פעם אחת בשנה או שתי שנים ושלש.”

ואולי נאמר כי מנהגן של ישראל בפרשת זכור, לקרותה בשבת מיוחד בכל שנה תורה היא, ומפני מצוה זו היא שקבעו כן, והוא השבת שלפני פורים לעולם, ודין יהיה לקרותה ביום פורים, לפי שהוא מענינו של יום כי המן הרשע היה מזרעו, אבל להודיע שקודם נס זה נצטוונו בזכירה זו, קבעו הפרשה קודם לפורים, אבל סמכוה לפורים.”

He states that this mitzvah requires both mental and verbal remembering. Additionally, remembering once every two or three years would suffice to fulfill this mitzvah. Quite possibly, the Jewish custom to recite this passage specifically on Shabbas Zachor was established as a fulfillment of this mitzvah. The Shabbas before Purim is always designated as Shabbas Zachor. In truth, the passage should be read on the actual day of Purim, since they share a common theme; after all, Haman was a descendant of Amalek. Nevertheless, to inform us that the command to recall the incident with Amalek predated this miracle, it was instituted to read this passage prior to Purim, but close to the actual festival.

The Mitzvah of Eradicating Amalek after the Coming of the Mashiach

In Parshas Zachor, two Mitzvos aseh are mentioned. The first entails recalling what Amalek did: “זכור את אשר עשה לך עמלק.” The second entails eradicating all memory of Amalek,

as the Rambam writes (Hilchos Melachim 5, 5): **“מצות עשה לאבד זכר עמלק, שנאמר תמחה את זכר עמלק.”** While we are presently able to fulfill the mitzvah of “zechiras Amalek” — remembering what Amalek did to us; it will be impossible to fulfill the mitzvah of “mechias Amalek” — eradicating all memory of Amalek — until after Mashiach comes. This fact is expressed in the Hagahos Maimanios” on the Rambam as follows (ibid. 1): **“מצוה זו אינה נוהגת עד ימות המשיח לאחר כיבוש הארץ, שנאמר והיה בהניח ה' אליך לך מכל אויבך מסביב בארץ אשר ה' אליך נתן לך נחלה לרשתה תמחה את זכר עמלק — this mitzvah is not practiced until the days of the Mashiach, after the conquest of the land, as it states: “It shall be that when Hashem, your G-d, allows you to rest from all of your enemies that surround you, in the land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you as an inheritance, you shall eradicate the memory of Amalek . . . !”**

Nevertheless, while it is clear that we cannot actually fulfill the mitzvah of “mechias Amalek” today, it is incumbent upon us to strive and yearn to fulfill this sacred mitzvah in thought. Thus, we would at least fulfill Chazal’s dictum (Berachos 6a): **“חשב אדם לעשות מצוה ונאנס ולא עשה, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו עשה” — even if a person intended to perform a mitzvah and was prevented from doing so involuntarily and did not perform it, the Torah considers it as if he actually performed it.**

Thus, it is fitting at this time, in honor of Parshas Zachor, to explore intellectually the practical way of fulfilling the mitzvas aseh of “zechiras Amalek” in a manner that is pertinent to each and every one of us: **“זכור את אשר עשה לך עמלק”** — in thought, speech and deed. Additionally, it is vital to understand that according to our holy sources, we do have the amazing ability to fulfill the mitzvas aseh of “mechias Amalek” -- **“תמחה זכר עמלק”** — even in these times, to some minor degree. Doing so falls into the category of preparing for the complete fulfillment of the mitzvah at the time of the geulah.

Moshe Does Not Wish to Redeem Us if We Are Remiss in Our Adherence to the Torah

Let us begin to illuminate the matter by establishing the connection between the weekly Torah-reading from Parshas Tetzaveh with the reading from Parshas Zachor. Let us begin with the opening passuk of Parshas Tetzaveh (Shemos 27, 20): **“ואתה תצוה את בני ישראל ויקחו אליך שמן זית זך כתיב למאור להעלות נר — and you shall command Bnei Yisrael that they shall take for you clear olive oil, crushed for illumination, to light a lamp continually.**

The Ohr HaChaim explains by citing the Zohar Chadash (Bereishis 8:)

“רבי יוסי בן חלפתא ישב לפני רבי יצחק, אמר לו שמה שמע מר מדוע נתארך כל כך ימי המשיח בגלות זו. אמר לו רבי יצחק, כך שמעתי מרב המנוגא סבא, שלש גליות גלו ישראל ונגאלו מהן בזכות הג' אבות, אבל מגלות הרביעית יגאלו ישראל בזכות משה.

בא ואראה לך, שלא גלו ישראל אלא על ביטול תורה, שנאמר ויאמר ה' על עזבם את תורת. אמר הקב"ה, בגליות הראשונות חזרו בזכות אברהם יצחק ויעקב, עכשיו הם חטאו בתורה שנתתי למשה, כשישובו ויעסקו בתורת, בזכות משה אני גואלם.”

Rabbi Yossi ben Chalafta questions why the current exile is lasting so long. Rabbi Yitzchak answers, in the name of Rabbi Himnuna, that the first three redemptions were in the merit of the three Patriarchs; the fourth redemption, however, will be in the merit of Moshe. He adds that since this exile is the result of forsaking the Torah, which Hashem gave to Moshe, Hashem will redeem them when they occupy themselves once again with His Torah; He will do so in the merit of Moshe.

The Ohr HaChaim concludes: **כי כל עוד שאין ילדזה נתארך הגלות, — this is the reason for the lengthy exile; so long as Yisrael do not occupy themselves with Torah and Mitzvos, Moshe is unwilling to redeem a people who are remiss in Torah study.**

The Ohr HaChaim hakadosh is alluding to that which he writes in Parshas Vayechi (Bereishis 49, 11): **“הלא ידעת דברי הזוהר הקדוש (פרשת משפטים קכ.) כי משה הוא הגואל אשר גאל את אבותינו, הוא יגאל אותנו וישיב בנים לגבולם, דכתיב (קהלת א-ט) מ'ה ש'היה ה'וא שיהיה The words of the Zohar hakadosh are well-known (Mishpatim 120a). Moshe is the redeemer who redeemed our forefathers; he will redeem us and return the children to their proper place, as it is written (Kohelet 1, 9): “מ'ה ש'היה ה'וא שיהיה” [literally: “that which was, it will be”]; the first letters of this phrase spell Moshe. It is as if the passuk is stating by dint of allusion that “that which was” — i.e. Moshe — “he will be” once again.**

This, too, is the allusion contained in the passuk: **“ואתה תצוה את בני ישראל — and you shall command Bnei Yisrael.** You, Moshe, are destined to reunite with Bnei Yisrael at the time of the future geulah and you will be a unit, a team so to speak, once again; this is indicated by the term **“תצוה”** which can be interpreted as being related to the Hebrew word **“צוות”** or the Aramaic word **“צוותא”**, which imply being together again as a team.

There is a condition, however: **“ויקחו אליך שמן זית זך”** — they must engage in the study of Torah, which is compared to pure

olive oil free of dregs and impurities, which illuminates our existence for all eternity. In other words, the reference is to Torah l'shmah, with the purest of intentions — as opposed to Torah-study for the sake of being antagonistic or for the sake of self-esteem. Then the passuk adds: **“כתיב למאור”** — a person must be willing to endure physical hardship for the sake of Torah-study, as the Gemara (Berachos 63b) elucidates from the following passuk (Bamidbar 19, 14): **“זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל”** -- **this is the Torah concerning a man should he die in a tent** — Torah only exists and is retained by someone who is willing to sacrifice on its behalf. This concludes his remarks.

This, however, raises a minor difficulty which we must reconcile. Moshe Rabeinu was the loyal shepherd, who was willing to sacrifice his life on behalf of Yisrael. For, at the time of the “cheit haeigel,” HKB”H said to him (Shemos 32, 10): **“ועתה הניחה”** — **and now desist from Me! Let My anger burn against them and I shall annihilate them; and I shall make you a great nation.** Moshe did not acquiesce to HKB”H’s proposal and responds (ibid. 32): **“ועתה אם”** — **and now, if You would but bear their sin; but if not, erase me now from Your book that You have written.** So, why is he so obstinate and insistent with regards to neglect of Torah-study, to the point that he does not wish to redeem a people that are remiss in this regard?

The Ministering Angel of Amalek Is the Yetzer HaRa

It appears that we can explain the matter by introducing a valuable and enlightening idea concerning the klipah of Amalek; it is worthwhile for every Jew to study and review this idea especially on Shabbas Zachor. The Toras Moshe (Beshalach), authored by the Alshich hakadosh, explains at length why the war with Amalek was so intense and difficult. So much so that when all is said and done, HKB”H Himself will eradicate the name of Amalek, as it states at the end of our parsha (Shemos 17, 14): **“כי מוחה אמוחה את זכר עמלק מתחת השמים”** — **because I shall surely wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens.**

Based on the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Beshalach 243), he explains that HKB”H does not vanquish a nation below until its ministering angel has first been vanquished above. For the passuk states (Yeshayah 24, 21): **“והיה ביום ההוא יפקוד ה' על צבא”** — **and on that day Hashem will issue a command to the high army on high, and to the kings of the earth on the earth.** Note that Hashem first

commands the ministering angels on high and only afterwards the kings down on earth.

Accordingly, the Alshich teaches us a tremendous chiddush. The ministering angel of Amalek is none other than the yetzer hara, about whom the Gemara states (B.B. 16b): **“הוא יצר הרע, הוא”** — **he is the yetzer hara, he is the Angel of Death, he is Satan.** Thus, before defeating Amalek below, it is essential to defeat its ministering angel above, the yetzer hara. Yet, every time we sin, we empower the yetzer hara. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to overcome Amalek below. Hence, success in this battle depends solely on the performance of complete teshuvah — refraining from following the advice and temptations of the yetzer hara. Then, HKB”H will vanquish him above — allowing Him to erase the name of Amalek below.

The War with Amalek Comes as a Consequence of Being Remiss in Torah Study

Based on the holy words of the Alshich hakadosh, I believe that we can begin to comprehend an insight provided by Chazal. They teach us that Yisrael are subjected to the war with Amalek as a consequence and punishment for the sin of being remiss in Torah-study. We find the following elucidation in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 106a) concerning the passuk depicting the battle with Amalek (Shemos 17, 8): **“ויבוא עמלק וילחם עם ישראל ברפידים”**, **מאי לשון רפידים, רבי אליעזר אומר, רפידים שמה. רבי יהושע אומר, שריפו — Amalek came and they battled Yisrael in Rephidim.”** What is the meaning of “Rephidim”? Rabbi Eliezer says: **It is the name of the place.** Rabbi Yehoshua says: **It indicates that they were remiss regarding the study of Torah.** Rashi provides the following clarification: **“רפידים, רפיון ידיים הוא, כלומר מפני שרפו ידיים מן התורה בא עליהם עמלק”** — “Rephidim” implies a lax attitude; in other words, because they were lax in their attitude toward the Torah, Amalek attacked them. [Translator’s note: The name “Rephidim” is interpreted by some as a contraction of the two words “rifyon yadayim,” meaning a weakening of the hands, i.e. being lax.]

Based on what we have learned, the matter seems quite clear. For, Amalek’s ministering angel is none other than the yetzer hara; it is only eliminated by means of Torah-study. The fact that a person cannot overcome the yetzer hara except by means of Torah-study is expressed by the Gemara as follows (Kiddushin 30b): **“כך אמר הקב”ה לישראל, בני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי”** — **so said HKB”H to Yisrael: My children, I have created the yetzer**

hara and I have created the Torah as its antidote; if you engage in Torah-study, you will not fall prey to it.

It turns out, therefore, that if Yisrael are diligent in their Torah-study, it is impossible for the yetzer hara — the ministering angel of Amalek — to prevail over them. As a result, Amalek below also cannot prevail over Yisrael. Yet, at the very moment they became lax in their attitude toward Torah — the antidote against the yetzer hara — the power of the yetzer hara, Amalek's ministering angel in the heavens above, became stronger. Consequently, down below: **"Amalek came and they battled Yisrael in Rephidim"** — as a punishment for the sin of being remiss in their Torah-study.

This also enlightens us as to why Moshe Rabeinu is unwilling to redeem a people who are negligent and remiss in their attitude toward Torah. For, the very concept of geulah hinges on the elimination of the klipah of Amalek. This is the message conveyed by the passuk (Shemos 17, 16): **"ויאמר כי יד — על כס י"ה מלחמה לה' בעמלק מדור דור"** — **and he said, "For there is a hand on the throne of G-d: Hashem maintains a war against Amalek, from generation to generation."** Rashi comments: **"נשבע הקב"ה שאין שמו שלם ואין כסאו שלם עד שימחה שמו של — עמלק"** — **HKB"H swears that His name is not whole and His throne is not whole until the name of Amalek is completely eradicated.** In other words, so long as Amalek exists, the two letters ו"ה will remain absent from the name Havaya, leaving only the letters ה"ה. We can suggest that this is the allusion in the term גאול"ה, which is an anagram for ו"ה גאל — indicating that HKB"H will redeem the letters ו"ה, which have been absent during galut.

Thus, it turns out that the only way to merit the geulah is by means of engaging in Torah-study — the antidote to the yetzer hara, which is the ministering angel of Amalek. Therefore, Moshe Rabeinu is unwilling to redeem a people that are remiss in its attitude towards Torah; because if they are negligent in their Torah-study, chas v'shalom, the yetzer hara — Amalek's ministering angel above — prevails over them. Consequently, the power of Amalek is fortified down below, and it is impossible to hasten the geulah by making the holy name complete in keeping with the notion of גאול"ה - גאל ו"ה.

Neglecting Torah Study Led to the Heresy of: "Is Hashem amongst us or not?"

Seemingly, we can raise a question concerning the viewpoint of Rabbi Yehoshua. He stated that Amalek came to battle Yisrael

in Rephidim, because they were guilty of being lax in their attitude toward Torah. Yet, from the juxtaposition of pesukim related to the battle with Amalek, we learn that this battle was precipitated by Yisrael's thoughts of heresy. Let us review the text (Shemos 17, 8): **"ויקרא שם המקום מסה ומריבה על ריב בני ישראל"** — **ועל נסותם את ה' לאמר היש ה' בקרבנו אם אין, ויבא עמלק וילחם עם ישראל.** — **He called the place Massah U'Merivah, because of the contention of Bnei Yisrael and because of their test of Hashem, saying, "Is Hashem in our midst or not?" Amalek came and battled Yisrael in Rephidim.**

Rashi comments: **"ויבא עמלק וגו'." סמך פרשה זו למקרא זה לומר, תמיד אני ביניכם ומזומן לכל צרכיכם, ואתם אומרים היש ה' בקרבנו אם אין, חייכם — שהכלב בא ונושך אתכם, ואתם צועקים אלי ותדעון היכן אני."** — **the Torah juxtaposed this passage with the preceding passuk to say, "I am always among you and available for all of your needs, yet you say, 'Is Hashem in our midst or not?' I swear by your lives that the dog (Amalek) will come and bite you; and you will cry out to Me and know where I am."**

It appears that we can explain the connection between these two reasons given for the war with Amalek -- being remiss with regards to Torah-study and lack of emunah — based on a statement in the Zohar hakadosh (Acharei Mos 73a): **"ג' דרגין: -- אינון מתקשרן דא בדא קוב"ה אורייתא וישראל"** — **three entities are interconnected — HKB"H, the Torah and Yisrael.**

Let us explain. The Torah connects Yisrael down on earth with their Father in Heaven. In the words of the Sefas Emes (Kedoshim 5657): **"כי התורה ממוצע בין קדושת הקב"ה לקדושת בני"** — **the Torah acts as an intermediary between the kedushah of HKB"H and the kedushah of Bnei Yisrael.**

We can expand on this notion based on what the Bnei Yissaschar writes (Sivan 6, 2) in the name of the great Rabbi Pinchas of Koritz, zy"a. He explains that for everything in the world, an intermediate stage exists connecting the two polar extremes. The monkey represents the intermediate stage between the animal kingdom and human beings possessing the power of speech. The "kri u'chsiv" — the way the Torah is actually written and the way it is read — represents the intermediate stage between Torah she'b'chsav and Torah she'b'al peh. "Tosefes Shabbas" — the extension of the actual Shabbas — represents the intermediate stage between Shabbas and the weekdays. The neshamos of "gerim" — converts -- represent the intermediate stage between Yisrael and the nations of the world.

It is precisely for this reason that HKB”H gave us the Torah. For, it represents the intermediate stage connecting man — a lowly, corporeal creature — with HKB”H — a spiritual entity beyond all human comprehension and physical comparisons. By engaging in Torah-study, Yisrael connect with their Father in Heaven. This is the message conveyed by the Zohar’s statement: **ג’ דרגין אינון** — **מתקשרן דא ברא קוב”ה אורייתא וישראל** — via the Torah, these three entities are connected — HKB”H, the Torah and Yisrael.

This helps us understand a fundamental principle regarding emunah in Hashem. A person can only sense or feel HKB”H through engaging in Torah-study, which connects Yisrael with their Father in Heaven. If a person fails to engage in Torah-study, chas v’shalom, he lacks any connection with HKB”H. As a consequence, he is distanced from HKB”H and does not sense His presence to the point that he is liable, chas v’shalom, to entertain sacrilegious thoughts and beliefs.

An explicit source for this notion can be found in the wonderful teachings of the Noam Elimelech (Yisro). He explains the juxtaposition of the following pesukim related to Matan Torah (Shemos 20, 1): **וידבר אלוקים את כל הדברים האלה לאמר, אנכי ה’ — אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים — G-d spoke all these words, to say: I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Mitzrayim, from the house of slaves.** Here are his hallowed words: **דהנה על ידי התורה אדם בא לידי דביקות, וזהו את כל — דהנה על ידי התורה אדם בא לידי דביקות, וזהו את כל** — by means of the Torah, a person achieves an intimate relationship and attachment with G-d; this is the implication of the juxtaposition of these pesukim. By means of **“these words,”** you will appreciate that **“I am Hashem”**; they will enable you to develop an intimate attachment and sense of emunah.

Through Torah Study We Call upon HKB”H

Now, let us present an incredible insight from the author of the Tanya in Likutei Amarim (end of Chapter 37). Our blessed sages employ the term “kriah” (קריאה) to refer to studying the Torah, as we see in the Mishnah (Berachos 13a): **“היה קורא בתורה” — he was “korei” in the Torah** (he was studying Torah). This term teaches us that through our study of Torah, we call upon HKB”H to come to us. Here are his hallowed words:

“עסק התורה נקראת בלשון קריאה, קורא בתורה, פירוש, שעל ידי עסק התורה קורא להקב”ה לבוא אליו כביכול, כאדם הקורא לחבירו שיבוא אליו, וכבן קטן הקורא לאביו לבוא אליו להיות עמו בצוותא חדא, ולא ליפרד ממנו ולישאר יחידי ח”ו. וזה שכתוב (תהלים קמה-יח) קרוב ה’ לכל קוראיו לכל אשר יקראוהו באמת, ואין אמת אלא תורה, דהיינו שקורא להקב”ה על ידי התורה דוקא, לאפוקי מי

שקורא אותו שלא על ידי עסק התורה, אלא צועק כך אבא אבא, וכמו שקובל עליו הנביא (ישעיה סד-ו) ואין קורא בשמך.”

Study of the Torah is referred to as “kriah”; we say that a person was “korei baTorah.” In other words, by means of engaging in Torah-study, a person calls out to HKB”H to come to him, so to speak, like a man calling his friend to come to him; and like a small boy calling his father to come to him, and to be together with him and not to leave him alone, chas v’shalom. This is the meaning of the passuk (Tehillim 145, 18): “Hashem is close to all who call upon Him, to all who will call upon Him in “emet.” As we know, the only real “emet” is the Torah. Thus, the passuk is speaking of a person who calls upon HKB”H through the study of Torah specifically. This excludes someone who calls out to Him by some other means, not through the study of Torah; rather someone who cries out, “Father, Father.” Such a person is chastised by the navi (Yeshayah 64, 6): “There is no one to call out (‘korei’) in Your name.”

Let us add to this insight an idea presented in Toldot Adam. There, the great Rabbi Yehoshua of Ostravah, ztz”l, (Shabbas HaGadol), presents the words of a particular tzaddik who explained the significance of the phrase recited on Rosh HaShanah at the conclusion of the pesukim of Malchiyos: **“ובתורתך — כתוב לאמר שמע ישראל ה’ אלקינו ה’ אחד” — and in Your Torah, it is written: “Listen Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One.”** He explains that the purpose of the entire Torah is to achieve the level of unity of **“שמע ישראל”** to reveal the sovereignty of Heaven and the recognition that **“ה’ אלקינו ה’ אחד.”**

In this manner, we can explain very nicely why Rabeinu hakadosh began the very first Mishnah in Torah she’b’al peh with the mitzvah of Kriat Shema (Berachos 2a): **“מאימתי קורין — את שמע בערבית” — from when may we recite the Shema in the evening?** He wished to emphasize and to teach us that only by means of Torah-study can a person get close to Hashem and actually feel the Oneness of Hashem: **“שמע ישראל ה’ אלקינו ה’ אחד.”** For, it is the holy Torah that connects us to HKB”H and creates our intimate bond with Him.

Thus, we can comprehend how the two reasons leading up to the war with Amalek go hand in hand. In truth, the reason for the war with Amalek is that which is alluded to by name of the place Rephidim — indicating that they were lax in their attitude towards Torah. Nevertheless, this neglect of Torah caused them to drift away from Hashem. As explained, the Torah is the intermediary connecting HKB”H with Yisrael. So, at the very moment that they became lax in their attitude toward Torah, they no longer felt their

intimate bond with HKB”H and no longer sensed His Presence. This prompted their sacrilegious thoughts and inquiry: **‘היש ה’ בקרבנו אם אין — is Hashem in our midst or not?**

When Moshe Raised His Hand Yisrael Triumphed

I was struck by a wonderful idea concerning the passuk related to the battle with Amalek (Shemos 17, 11): **“והיה כאשר ירים משה ידו וגבר ישראל וכאשר יניח ידו וגבר עמלק”** -- **It happened that when Moshe would raise his hand Yisrael was stronger, and when he lowered his hand Amalek was stronger.** We learned in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Megillah 12b) that the young children would expound on the double letters **ך** **מנצב**. [Each of these five letters has both an open form and a closed form.] Regarding the two forms of the letter “kaf,” they expounded that they allude to the Torah which was given: **“מכף ידו של הקב”ה לכף ידו של משה”** — **from the “kaf yad” (palm of the hand) of HKB”H to the “kaf yad” of Moshe.** According to this exposition, we learn that Moshe received the Torah in his hands. This is why the passuk states (Shemos 32, 15): **“ויפן וירד משה מן ההר ושני לוחות העדות בידו”** — **Moshe turned and descended from the mountain with the two “luchos” of testimony in his hand.** Similarly, we find several other references in the Torah to Moshe’s hand (Bamidbar 4, 37, ibid. 45, ibid. 9, 23, ibid. 10, 13): **“על פי ה’ ביד”** — **at the word of Hashem, by the hand of Moshe.**

[Translator’s note: To truly appreciate the idea presented in the next few paragraphs, it is important to recall that the name “Rephidim” conveys the notion of “lax hands.”] Now, we can suggest that since Amalek came to battle Yisrael in Rephidim — because they were lax in their Torah-study — the passuk emphasizes: **“It happened when Moshe would raise his hand”** — referring to the holy hand with which he received the Torah on Har Sinai. By raising his hand in tefilah to Hashem, Moshe was able to influence all of Yisrael with the kedushah of his Torah — causing them to accept upon themselves the obligation to engage in Torah-study. In this merit: **“Yisrael prevailed”** — because the reason that triggered the war with Amalek — the neglect of Torah-study — was eliminated. Yet:

“When he lowered his hand” — because he was unable to influence Yisrael with the kedushah of his Torah — **“Amalek prevailed”** — because they attacked on account of the sin of “bitul Torah” — neglect of Torah-study.

Regarding this passuk, we find an incredible insight from the Sefas Emes (Parshas Zachor) that touches the core of the matter. The passuk states: **“והיה כאשר ירים משה ידו וגבר ישראל וכאשר יניח ידו וגבר עמלק”** — why does the passuk employ the terms **“ירים”** (“he will raise”) and **“יניח”** (“he will lower”) in the future tense? Seemingly, the passuk should have employed the past tense of these verbs.

However, the holy Torah is teaching us a vital lesson for all future generations: **“והיה כאשר ירים משה ידו”** — in each and every generation, when at talmid-chacham, representing Moshe, will raise his hand to engage in Torah-study: **“וגבר ישראל”** — **Yisrael will prevail.** On the other hand, **“וכאשר יניח ידו”** — when he will fail to engage in Torah-study, chas v’shalom, he will cause the undesirable outcome of: **“וגבר עמלק”** — **Amalek will prevail,** G-d help us!

The take-home message from this discussion is that the inherent lesson of the mitzvah of “zechiras Amalek”: **“Remember what Amalek did to you”** — is to always remember that Amalek came to battle Yisrael in Rephidim, because they were remiss in their Torah-study. As a consequence, they drifted away from Hashem and reached a point of heresy where they entertained the blasphemous notion that Hashem was no longer in their midst: **“היש ה’ בקרבנו אם אין”**.

This should teach us that the tikun for this undesirable consequence is to cling to Hashem and His Torah. By studying the holy Torah — the antidote to the yetzer hara, the ministering angel of Amalek -- with vigor and dedication, we will fulfill the mitzvah of “mechias Amalek” in part. This will have to suffice until we merit the coming of the Mashiach when HKB”H will fulfill His promise (Shemos 17, 14): **“כי מוחה אמוחה את זכר עמלק מתחת השמים”** — **because I shall surely wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens** — swiftly, in our times! Amen.



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