

# SPIRITUAL WEAKLINGS

*by Shlomo Katz*

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Today's Learning:

Eruvin 8:5-6

Orach Chaim 264:9-265:1

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yevamot 109

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Nedarim 24

This week, for Parashat Zachor, we read: "Remember what Amalek did to you, on the way when you were leaving Egypt, that he happened upon you on the way, and he struck those of you who were hindmost, all the weaklings at your rear, when you were faint and exhausted, and did not fear G-d." (Devarim 25:17-18)

R' Yitzchak Eliyahu Landau z"l (Vilna, died 1876) writes: We are expected to remember more than the fact that Amalek attacked us. We are expected to remember why this happened.

Why did Amalek attack? Because you were "on the way when you were leaving Egypt," i.e., you allowed your travels to cause you excessive worry about where your next drink of water would come from. As a result, you did not pay proper attention to spiritual matters.

In particular, you did not protest that some members of the tribe of Dan -- the tribe that traveled "hindmost" -- had an idol traveling with them. This caused those individuals -- "the [spiritual] weaklings at your rear" -- to be expelled from within the Clouds of Glory. Having lost the protection of the Clouds, they became "faint and exhausted," not only physically, but spiritually. They began to feel that serving Hashem was tiresome, and they "did not fear G-d."

It is important to remember this entire chain of events, because only if we rectify the types of faults that brought Amalek upon us can we eventually eradicate Amalek. (Patsheggen Ha'dat: Mashal U'melitzah p. 146)

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*"When adam/a man among you brings an offering . . ." (2:1)*

Why did the Torah choose to refer to the man bringing a sacrifice as an "adam," rather than by one of the other words for "man," e.g., "ish" or "gevver"? R' Avraham Aharon Yudelevitch z"l (see page 4) explains:

Of all the words for man (or mankind), "adam" is the only one that has no plural form. As such, the word "adam" signifies man when he is united with his peers. Thus, the gemara (Yevamot 61a) says that the Jewish people are called "adam," a reference to the unique solidarity of which the Jewish people is capable.

When a person sins, he distances himself from the Jewish people. When he repents and brings a sacrifice to the Bet Hamikdash, he reaffirms his solidarity with his nation. This is why the term "adam" is used in our verse.

A "midrash pliah"/"astonishing midrash" states regarding our verse: "Thus it is written, 'Shema Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One'." In light of the above, we can understand this as follows: When one recites Shema, he not only affirms his acceptance of G-d, he reaffirms his own unity with the Jewish people. This is exactly what a person does when he repents from his sins and brings a sacrifice. (Darash Av: Drush 123)

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*"If a person will sin and commit a treachery against Hashem and lie to his comrade . . ." (5:20)*

In a lecture delivered in 1970, R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik observed: a socialist economic system is inherently more ethical than a capitalist system, yet, in the hands of Marxist governments, it has turned into a system of brutality and tyranny. Why?

He explained based on the above verse. These governments were not aware of the insight of Chazal (in the Mechilta) that the Ten Commandments were uttered in one sentence. The Aseret Hadibrot, including those that address man's obligations to man and those that address his obligations to G-d, are indivisible. When you "sin and commit a treachery against Hashem," you will inevitably "lie to

[your] comrade." (The Rav: Section 13.02)

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*"I have set Hashem before me always; He is at my right hand, I shall not falter."* (Tehilim 16:8)

R' Meir Marim Saphit z"l (see page 4) explained this verse as follows: "Faltering" refers to sinning unintentionally. Although people act with both their right and left hands, the right hand is more likely to be involved in an unintentional sin because it is (for most people) more active and, therefore, more likely to act without a person premeditating.

How can one avoid this? If one sets Hashem before him always, if one truly feels that Hashem is at his side at all times, then he will never act unthinkingly, and his right hand will not falter. (Quoted in Marbitzei Torah Me'olam Hachassidut Vol. 1, p. 108)

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Parashat Zachor / Purim

*"The Jews confirmed and undertook upon themselves . . ."* (Esther 9:27)

The gemara (Shabbat 88a) teaches that although Bnei Yisrael had said (Shemot 24:7), "Na'aseh ve'nishmah" / "We will do and we will obey," Hashem held Har Sinai over their heads, forcing them to accept the Torah. Technically, Bnei Yisrael were not obligated to observe the Torah, as they had accepted it under duress. Later, in Mordechai and Esther's time, the Jews accepted the Torah willingly, as it is written, "The Jews confirmed and undertook" - "They confirmed what they had undertaken before."

Another gemara (Megillah 7a) interprets this verse differently: "The Jews confirmed and undertook" - "They confirmed above what had been undertaken below," i.e., the Heavenly court above confirmed that which the Jews had undertaken.

R' Yehonatan Eyebchutz z"l (Germany, died 1764) writes that these two interpretations are closely related. He explains:

When Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah at Har Sinai, they did so outwardly because they were scared by the awesome revelation that they witnessed. They did not accept the Torah fully in their hearts. Only later, at the time of the Purim miracle, did the Jewish people accept the Torah fully, even in their hearts. Why?

Haman was a descendant of Esav, about whom the Torah writes (Bereishit 25:26), "Game was in his mouth." Rashi explains that Esav used to "hunt" Yitzchak's love with his (Esav's) mouth, pretending outwardly to observe mitzvot and asking Yitzchak questions about how he could be more stringent in his mitzvah observance.

Thus, writes R' Eyebchutz, when Haman threatened Bnei Yisrael, Hashem was, so-to-speak, faced

with a dilemma: should Bnei Yisrael be saved because they accepted the Torah? They accepted it only outwardly! Should Hashem then give them credit for what they did outwardly? But then Haman, the descendant of Esav, who honored his father outwardly, will deserve Hashem's kindness as well!

The only solution to this dilemma was for the Jewish people of that generation to accept the Torah anew with a full heart. Only then would they merit to be saved.

Just before Amalek, a grandson of Esav and ancestor of Haman, attacked Bnei Yisrael in the desert, Bnei Yisrael wondered (Shemot 17:7), "Is Hashem among us or not?" Literally, they asked, "Is Hashem within us or not?" meaning, according to some commentaries, "Does Hashem know our innermost thoughts or not?" This is why Amalek, of all nations, was sent to attack them. It was as if Hashem said, "You wonder whether I know what is in your hearts? I will punish you with one (Esav) who performed mitzvot only outwardly."

All of the foregoing has a practical application, R' Eyebschutz writes. Most people pray with their mouths, but not with their hearts. Their lips hurry through the words, while their hearts have no idea what the words mean. Maybe (only maybe!) a person prays two or three proper shemoneh esreis in his entire lifetime.

Ironically, while we pray every day for an end to our exile, we have the power to weaken the hands of our oppressors, and we do not use that power. The verse says (Bereishit 27:22), "The voice is Yaakov's voice, and the hands are Esav's hands." When prayer is done with Yaakov's (i.e., a Jew's) mouth, but not his heart, then the hands of Esav are strengthened. Conversely, if we would pray with our hearts, we would weaken the hands of Esav. (Ya'arot Devash Part I, No. 2, )

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#### Rabbis of the New World

R' Avraham Aharon Yudelevitch z"l was born in Novardok, White Russia, in 1850. His mother was a sister of R' Meir Marim Saphit (died 1873), the rabbi of Kobrin, White Russia, and author of "Nir," a famous commentary on the Talmud Yerushalmi. R' Yudelevitch began his rabbinic career on Motzai Shabbat Shuvah, 1874, and he served in several Russian towns before moving to Manchester, England. From England, he moved to Boston, where he served as rabbi. Finally, he settled in New York. He died on 4 Shevat 5690/1930.

R' Yudelevitch was a prolific author. His works include the multi-volume Darash Av, sermons on chumash and the festivals, and the multi-volume halachic responsa, Bet Av. R' Yudelevitch also wrote other works. In one of them, Av Be'chochmah, he defends what was probably his best-known and most controversial ruling.

Specifically, the Torah states that when a man dies childless, his brother should perform the mitzvah of yibum, i.e., he should marry his widowed sister-in-law. If, for any reason, they do not marry, they must perform an act called chalitzah. However, during the decades that the Soviet Union existed, it

happened many times that a widow was in the United States (or elsewhere) while her brother-in-law was behind the Iron Curtain. Faced with such a case, R' Yudelevitch argued that the chalitzah act could be performed by an emissary, while the words that the Torah requires the widow and her brother-in-law to say could be said before batei din/rabbinical courts in the couple's respective cities and transmitted by mail or by two-way radio. Many of the leading European sages, including R' Isser Zalman Meltzer and R' Yosef Rosen (the "Rogatchover"), opposed R' Yudelevitch's ruling, and he carried on an extensive correspondence on the subject with various rabbis in Russia.

In another responsa in Av Be'chochmah, R' Yudelevitch discusses and condemns the actions of a certain Reform "rabbi." In that letter, R' Yudelevitch mentions the sad state of the Jewish youth in his day: "Their lack of knowledge of the Torah of Israel is great. They almost do not know anything, even a bit, of the holy Torah, and the spirit of the Torah is foreign to them in the extreme." (Sources: Otzar Harabbanim; Darash Av, Vol. III, Introduction; Av Be'chochmah; Marbitzei Torah Me'olam Hachassidut Vol. 1, p. 96)

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