

ISRAEL'S SECRET WEAPON

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Even after the climactic conclusion of the Jewish nation's departure from Egypt with the Splitting of the Sea of Reeds, their journey to Mount Sinai was not without travail. The battle initiated by Amalek - intended more as a challenge to G-d than an attack on His chosen people - created a state of war that continues to this day. As soon as the Amalekite offensive commenced upon the weakest of the children of Israel, "Moshe said to Yehoshua (Joshua), 'Choose men for us and go out, do battle with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of G-d in my hand.'" (Shemos/Exodus 17:9) In all of the challenges Moshe faced during his heretofore-brief leadership, he had never before called on Yehoshua for assistance. Why did this crisis initiate Yehoshua's involvement?

The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Mayer Kagan; 1838-1933; author of basic works in Jewish law, philosophy and ethics; acknowledged as the foremost leader of Torah Jewry at the turn of the last century) explains that Yehoshua's strength was his constant involvement in Torah study. Thus, he was best suited to challenge Amalek whose strength was borne in the laxity the children of Israel demonstrated in toiling in Torah, as Mechilta notes that the name of the battle site - Refidim - came from the weakness ("rafah", in Hebrew) of the Jews in Torah, which allowed Amalek to approach. Furthermore, when Moshe specifically asked Yehoshua to "go out" to war, he used the command "tzei", a word which implies "you YOURSELF go out," to convey that the key to victory was in Yehoshua's hand and in his merit.

Rabbi Kagan continues that the primacy of Torah involvement in determining the victor in battle is indicated in the Torah's verbiage later in this chapter. During the battle with Amalek, Moshe kept his hands elevated to keep the focus of the warriors heavenward. When Moshe's strength faltered and his hands dropped, the momentum of the battle would switch to Amalek's favor, until Moshe raised his hands and the renewed focus on G-d would sway the battle to the Jews' favor. But the Torah's word choices that convey that Moshe raised his hands and lowered his hands are more literally translated as "when Moshe WILL raise his hands...when he WILL lower his hands". The Chofetz Chaim elaborates that this reference to the future tells us that in every generation the strength of the Jewish people is the strength of its Torah: when our Torah is strong, we win; when our Torah is neglected, we suffer (Heaven forbid).

Our fellow Jews around the world are threatened in ways not seen in over half a century. In Israel and in Europe Jewish lives are at risk, and many North American universities and media outlets come to the defense of our persecutors. At this time, the politicians cannot find a solution and the

military cannot find a solution...but we DO possess the solution. Another weekly parsha sheet, a weekly Jewish learning class, ten minutes of our lunch break reading a Jewish study text instead of the daily paper or our favorite web log. When we follow Moshe's example and we elevate ourselves with Torah, we fortify our own Jewish commitment while we buttress the security of the entire Jewish people.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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