

RISING ABOVE IT ALL

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Remember that which Amalek did to you on your way when you left Egypt, encountering you along the way and attacking the weak who straggled after you, while you were tired. He came after you and did not fear G-d. (Devarim 25:17-18)

Remember the good old days, when Amalek was a nation and easily identifiable? In biblical times, you didn't have to wait for Amalek to come along and blow himself up while killing Jews to know who and where he was. All you had to do, was march in the direction of where they lived, and attack:

Shaul had all the people summoned, and he counted them through lambs: two hundred thousand infantrymen, and the men of Yehudah were ten thousand. Shaul came to the city of Amalek, and he fought [them] in the valley... (I Shmuel 15:4-5)

So he led him [Dovid HaMelech] and there they (the Amalekites) were! Spread out across the face of the entire land, eating and drinking and celebrating with all the great spoils they had taken from the land of the Philistines and the land of Yehudah. Dovid conquered them from twilight until the evening of the next day; not one survived, except 400 youth who were riding camels and fled. (I Shmuel 30:16-17)

However, those days are long gone, and the people of Amalek no longer exist, at least in any readily identifiable form. Which is a pity, for they will remain to be the most formidable enemy of the Jewish people.

He [G-d] has said, "Because the hand is upon the Throne of G-d it is a war for G-d with Amalek in each generation." (Shemos 17:16)

- That is, until Moshiach comes and ends their existence completely.

Perhaps, the reason we could not do away with Amalek when we could recognize him was because he was always more than just a people. According to the Vilna Gaon, the war against Amalek encompasses three components: 1) ridding ourselves of Amalek in our hearts, that is, the yetzer hara and bad character traits; 2) destroying the spiritual reality of Amalek, which means doing away with "the destroying satan, the enemy of the Jewish people, the Sitra Achra and his legions who uprooted

our strength from the gates of Jerusalem while the land remained desolate; and 3) doing away with the physical Amalek, within whom is Eisav, Yishmael, and the Erev Rav. (Kol HaTor, Chapter 6:6)

In fact, historically, Amalek has always represented more than just your average nation, as his name alludes. To begin with, the numerical value of 'amalek' is 240, the same gematria value of the Hebrew word 'sufek,' which means 'doubt.'

Thus, when the Talmud asks:

Where is Haman in the Torah? "From the tree (heh-mem-nun)...?" (Bereishis 3:11), (Chullin 139b)

It is really alluding to the very spiritual source of Amalek, from whom Haman descended. The Talmud refers to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil as 'Ilana d'sfeika,' the 'Tree of Doubt,' since it was a mixture of good and evil.

The name 'Amalek' can also be broken up into two parts: ayin-malak (mem-lamed-kuf), which means 'severed eye.' This is an allusion to Amalek's desire and ability to fool onlookers into believing that G-d does not involve Himself in the affairs of man.

Encountering (korchecha) you along the way: Yet another explanation is that it is language of "kur v'chum" (cold and hot), as if to say that he made you cold and lukewarm after you had been boiling. For, all the nations were afraid to war against you and this one came and led the way for others. It is like a boiling hot bath into which no living being could enter, until a wild person came and jumped into it. Although he scalded himself, he made it cooler for others (Rashi, Devarim 25:18) - reducing the need for moral responsibility. For, as the Midrash explains, Amalek's intention in attacking the Jewish people was to 'cool' them down spiritually, and then to make them and others doubt Divine Providence and the existence of the World to Come, as we will now discuss, b'ezras Hashem Yisborach.

Shabbos Day:

Remember that which Amalek did to you on your way when you left Egypt, encountering (korchecha) you along the way. (Devarim 25:17)

The word 'korchecha' is connected in meaning with 'mikreh,' a 'sudden happening.' (Rashi) - A word we understand from another Rashi:

And He called (Vayikra) to Moshe... (Vayikra 1:1)

AND HE CALLED TO MOSHE: A 'calling' preceded all sayings and commands. It is an expression of love, an expression that the Ministering Angels use, as it said, "One called to the other" (Yeshayahu 6:3). However, to the gentile prophets He revealed Himself with an expression of happenstance and

uncleanness, as it said, "G-d happened (vayikar) upon Bilaam" (Bamidbar 23:4, 16). (Rashi)

Now, Bilaam came from Hevel, as it says:

The evil of Hevel's Nefesh is represented by the letters 'bais-lamed,' which is the sod of the posuk, "Such judgments, they know not (bais-lamed)" (Tehillim 147:20). For, these two letters refer to the K'lipos and the 'bais-lamed' of Bilaam (Bais-lamed-ayin-mem). (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 29)

- And so did Moshe Rabbeinu:

Later, the Neshamah (of Hevel) reincarnated into Moshe Rabbeinu since it never contained an element of evil. Thus, it says regarding him, "She saw that he was good." (Shemos 2:2), (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 29)

Bilaam was a prophet, and so was Moshe Rabbeinu. However, with respect to Moshe it says,

He [G-d] said, "Listen to Me. To the prophets amongst you, when I appear, I reveal Myself only in a vision, and speak in a dream. Not so with My servant Moshe, who is the most trusted in all My house. With him I speak face-to-face, while he is conscious, and not in riddles; he has a true vision of G-d. (Bamidbar 12:6-8)

But, regarding Bilaam, it says:

WHO ARE THESE MEN WITH YOU? He (G-d) intended to delude him (Bilaam, by asking this question as if He didn't already know the answer). He [therefore] said [to himself], "It seems, then, that there are times when everything is not manifest to Him; His knowledge is not always the same. I will select a time when I can curse and when He will not notice it." (Rashi, Bamidbar 24:9)

Similarly, we find the same thought mistakenly crossing the mind of Kayin:

G-d said to Kayin, "Where is your brother Hevel?" He answered, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" (Bereishis 4:9)

WHERE IS YOUR BROTHER HEVEL? He (G-d) began a pleasant conversation, that perhaps he would repent and say, "I killed him and sinned against You." [However, instead he responded,] I DO NOT KNOW: [and] he became a deceiver of the Upper Knowledge. (Rashi)

In other words, Bilaam had not been the first one to misunderstand G-d's intention in asking superfluous questions. Like Kayin before him, he had used an important chance to be honest and rectify himself, to instead further bury himself on the side of spiritual impurity. Unlike with respect to man, G-d's silence is not tantamount to admission.

Finally, the circle is closed with the following quote:

The Neshamah from the bad side [of Kayin], which had some good combined in it, went to Amalek ben Elifaz, (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 38) - and with it, the inherent ability to deny G-d's

omniscience.

Thus, Bilaam inherited the impure aspect of Hevel that blinded him to G-d's omniscience, and Amalek inherited the same from Kayin which formed an integral part of his own inability to properly relate to the Divine Providence. The truth be known, the Zohar Hakodesh on this week's parshah, finds an earlier, even more spiritual connection between these two antagonists of the Jewish people:

What is the (spiritual) root of Amalek Above? We see that the souls of Bilaam and Balak come from there. For this reason, he (Amalek) is included in their names, in the 'ayin-mem' of Bilaam (bais-lamed-AYIN-MEM) and the 'lamed-kuf' of Balak (bais-LAMED-KUF)... (Zohar, Ki Seitzei, 281b)

However, though this has worked against us throughout history, since we have suffered horribly at the hands of the non-Jewish world, and even at the hands of traitorous Jews, it really represents something positive. In fact, though we do not appreciate it at this point in history, relating to Divine Providence on a high level is something that makes the Jewish people unique and a light unto nations, for:

The evil of Hevel's Nefesh is represented by the letters 'bais-lamed,' which is the sod of the posuk, "Such judgments, they know not (bais-lamed)" (Tehillim 147:20). These two letters refer to the K'lipos and the 'bais-lamed' of Bilaam (Bais-lamed-ayin-mem). (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 29)

Rebi Ami said: One is not allowed to give over Torah to a gentile, as it says, "Such judgments, they know not." (Chagigah 13a)

It will take a little bit of Kabbalah to understand just what this means.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

G-d said to Avram, "Go from your land, your birthplace, and your father's house, to the land which I will show you. I will make you into a great nation; I will bless you and I will make your name great. You will be a blessing; I will bless those who bless you; the one who curses you, I will curse. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you." (Bereishis 12:1-3)

Is it a coincidence that the parshah that speaks of Amalek contains the most amount of mitzvos than any other parshah? First of all, we don't believe in coincidences, and second of all, we have the following. However, before delving into the following complicated but illuminating quote, we will set up the analogy.

Any large business is made up of a hierarchy of command. At the top of the totem pole sits the president of the company, whose will steers the company. The level of authority below him is paid to implement his will in such a way that the production of the company reflects that very will. The levels of authority, however, may be too important and busy to deal with the average employee, so they use another level below them to implement their will, which, of course, is their interpretation of their president's desire.

Eventually, the employee is told what to do, and how to do it. Sometimes, the instructions are clear enough to reflect company policy, but are not necessarily complete. Other times, the employees may find themselves scratching their heads as they try to make heads-and-tails of what the upper brass has planned for the future of the company.

If they ask their boss, he will know more than them, but not the whole story, having been told only as much as he needs to know to run the production line. If he, in turn, asks his boss, he will get more answers, but depending upon how many superiors he has above him, his knowledge may increase but still be quite limited.

Thus, the closer one is to the president of the company, the more accurate his vision will be of the will of the president, and what the company actually plans to do. And, the more accurate his version of the company policy is, the better his decisions about his own future can be, especially in terms of doing that which might catch the attention of the upper brass and bring him a promotion.

Creation is also a system with a hierarchy. At the top of it all, of course, is The Holy One, Blessed is He. Creation is His company, and it is He Who establishes company policy, that is, the purpose and goal of creation. However, we are taught in many places, because of His inherent goodness, He likes to take in partners, so-to-speak, people willing to work hard to implement His will in everyday life and bring the purpose of creation to fruition.

There was a time in history when everyone acted only like employees, people doing their own thing without realizing that they were being made to fulfill the will of G-d, unwittingly. However, then a man named Avraham was born, and after much thought and effort, he chose to be more than just an 'employee' of creation. He wanted to be a partner with G-d, on whatever level G-d would grant him.

G-d noticed this. As a result, G-d promoted Avraham to the level of 'Partner-in-Creation,' and revealed to him the will of G-d on levels previously unknown to mankind. This created an added advantage for Avraham, for it allowed him to organize his life in such a way as to maximize his reason for being created. It allowed him to correctly arrange his priorities in life, earning him untold reward in the World-to-Come, the purpose of creation.

And, as we are now ready to see, it made him POWERFUL.

Melave Malkah:

He [G-d] brought him [Avraham] outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them," He said to him, "so will be your descendants." (Bereishis 15:5)

Rabbi Shlomo Elyashiv wrote: "The mazalos (constellations) in the heavenly sky were established by G-d with all that was made with Adam below; also with levels of DTzCh"M on the land..."

These letters stand for the Hebrew words, Domaim, Tzomayach, Chiyah, and Medabehr. In English, they refer to the Mineral World, the Vegetation World, the Animal World, and the world of Man. Whatever the constellations represent, they were set in motion at the beginning of creation, and have acted according to the will of G-d since then.

"The mazalos that were set up in the heavenly sky were on the level of cause-and-effect regarding all that happens to them; the mazalos are on the level of second of the seven heavens, as it says in Chagigah 12b. The mazalos and the entire heavenly system are in the World of Asiyah, which is the general Nefesh of all the worlds."

Thus, the mazalos represent the program, if you will, for physical creation. It seems that G-d set into motion a certain system of cause-and-effect, action-and-reaction, which governs the world in which we live. It is an extremely intricate and detailed system, finely tuned by G-d Himself, capable of implementing His will without His overt involvement in history.

Thus: "There it is revealed what is going to occur to all the portions of DTzCh"M on earth."

And, this is the way it was for ALL of mankind, until Avraham Avinu came along:

"However, He elevated the entire Assembly of Israel, the children of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. They are G-d's portion and His inheritance. For them, He established and revealed the foundation of all that occurs higher up in the World of Yetzirah, the general Ruach of all the worlds"

For choosing G-d, G-d chose Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, and all of their (loyal) descendants. He promoted them, and their greatest reward was to become privy to a less filtered version of G-d's will..

"The reason behind the way of the world, even in the World of Yetzirah, which is the level of angels and many elevated beings, putting them on the level of cause-and-effect with the children of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov..."

That is, He made the angels on this level sensitive to the actions of Avraham and his descendants, so that they would be responsive to them. This gave Avraham greater control over his own destiny, as the Talmud records:

Avraham said before The Holy One, Blessed is He, "Master of the Universe! 'A member of my household instead is my heir' (Bereishis 15:3)!" He answered him, "'One who will go out from your own bowels' (Bereishis 15:4)." He said before Him, "Master of the Universe! I have viewed my astrology, and I am not fitting to father a son." So, He answered him, "Leave your astrology, for there is no mazel for Israel!" (Shabbos 156a)

In other words, G-d told Avraham you can rise above your mazel and even go against it. How? <[>
"To Israel He revealed the foundation of the cause-and-effect also of the general Ruach..."

That is, the higher level of cause-and-effect behind the cause-and-effect that runs our physical

world.

"...Which He did not do for the rest of the DTzCh"M, for whom He only revealed the reason behind things on the level of the mazalos of the heavenly sky only, the level of the World of Asiyah only, the general Nefesh of all the worlds." (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 62 - 63)

How and when did G-d do this? He revealed the Torah first to Avraham and then later to his children at Mt. Sinai. Through the holy Torah a Jew can elevate himself above the world of Asiyah, into the world of Yetzirah, and in doing so, rise above his personal mazel. It is to this, ultimately, the posuk refers when it says:

"Such judgments, they know not." (Tehillim 147:20).

However, most important of all, to rise above the mazalos is to rise above Eisav, Yishmael, and the Erev Rav. For, as powerful as they have become, and as much damage as they have been able to inflict on the Jewish people throughout the ages, they can only operate in the World of Asiyah. Through Torah we can transform 'vayikar' into 'vayikra,' randomness into direct and specific Divine Providence - and end this long and arduous exile once and for all.

May it come soon in our time, b'ezras Hashem Yisborach.

Have a great Shabbos,

K'siva u'chasimah tova,

Pinchas Winston