

REMEMBER THE AVODAH

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

And He called (vayikra) to Moshe, and G-d spoke to him from the Appointed Tent. (Vayikra 1:1)

Sefer Vayikra is also called, "Torah Kohanim," which is a good indication about the theme of the sefer: Avodah, which translates as "service (of G-d)," which was the work of the Kohanim in the Mishkan. This will also be the topic of this week's PERCEPTIONS.

As we mentioned last year, one of the most important distinguishing features between the Jewish People and the nations of the world, is represented by a single letter at the beginning of this week's parshah: aleph. Rashi explains:

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)

In other words, if you look into a Sefer Torah at the very first word of this week's parshah, you will see the word "And He called" spelled: vav-yud-kuf-raish-aleph, as it ought to be, except that the aleph is written smaller. Thus, the first four letters - vav-yud-kuf-raish - stand out on their own almost as an independent word, vayikar, which means: He happened upon. This, tradition tells us, is to make a distinction between the way G-d relates to the Jewish People and the rest of the world.

However, why would the Torah choose this location to make this point? Such a lesson could easily have been built into Parashas Ki Sisa, where Moshe pleaded with G-d to make such a distinction (Shemos 33:15; see Rashi). The answer to this question emerges when we consider the exclusion of a different aleph, back in Parashas Beshallach, which literally defines the avodah of the Jewish People.

After the Jewish People's initial encounter with the people of Amalek, which unfortunately only started the job but did not finish it, G-d vowed to be at war with Amalek until his demise at the End-of-Days. He "used" His own Throne as the "holy object" to be the basis of His oath, as the posuk quotes:

... The hand is on G-d's Throne ... (Shemos 17:16)

However, as Rashi points out, there is an anomaly in the verse:

THE HAND IS ON G-D'S (YUD-HEH) THRONE (KUF-SAMECH): The hand of G-d is [raised] to swear by His Throne to have eternal war and hatred against Amalek. Why is it [Throne] written kuf-samech and not kuf-samech-ALEPH . . . G-d swore that His . . . Throne will not be whole until the name of Amalek is completely obliterated. (Shemos 17:16)

In other words, the aleph of "kisei" (Throne) was left out of the word as a sign that Amalek still exists. And, using the process referred to as, "If A equals B, and B equals C, then A must be equal to C as well," which can show that, as long as the "aleph" is missing from "kisei" it is, for all intents and purposes, missing from "vayikra" as well.

SHABBOS DAY:

Remember what Amalek did to you on the way, as you departed from Egypt. When they chanced upon you (korchehah) en route . . . (Devarim 25:17-18)

In fact, we could even call "vayikra" and Amalek oxymorons. For instance, when the Torah recounts the attack of Amalek after the Jewish People, Rashi explains:

WHEN THEY CHANCED UPON YOU (KORCHEHAH) EN ROUTE: Another interpretation: The meaning is "cold" (kuf-raish) as opposed to heat. They cooled you, warming you down from boiling heat. For, all the nations were afraid of waging war against you until Amalek began preparing the way for others. This is compared with a boiling bath into which no creature could enter. Came one rebellious person who leaped into it, and although he was scalded, he cooled it for others. (Rashi)

In other words, Amalek represents the whole concept of "vayikar," of which the "kuf-raish" of "korchehah" is the root. He epitomizes doubt in G-d's Providence, that which cools the heart of a Jew from his willingness to follow G-d with abandon, the ultimate in service of G-d, as defined by the Torah. Whatever Amalek does, whenever he does it, however he does it, it will always be to have this effect, to pull the heart of the Jew away from the service of G-d.

For example, there was Haman who convinced Achashveros to allow him to exterminate the entire Jewish population of Babylonia:

So the king removed his signet ring from his hand, and gave it to Haman son of Hamdasa the Agagite, enemy of the Jews. Then the king said to Haman, "The silver is given to you, the people also, to do with as you see fit." (Esther 3:10-11)

That's Agagite, as in "Agag," king of Amalek.

In other words, this was not just persecution of a minority by a ruling class; this was an Amalekian attack against the Jewish People. That is why Haman turned a personal battle against one man who did not bow down to him (Mordechai) into a war against his entire people:

However, it seemed contemptible to him to send [his] hand against Mordechai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordechai. So Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout

the entire kingdom of Achashveros - the people of Mordechai. (Esther 3:6)

In other words, the commentators explain, once Haman discovered that Mordechai did not bow down to him on religious grounds, he wanted to take revenge against Judaism itself, which meant the entire Jewish People. ANY attack against Judaism - waged by Gentile OR Jew - is Amalekian in nature.

Further proof that the battle between Haman and the Jewish People of his time was an attack against the foundations of Judaism is the following:

They stood at the bottom of the mountain (Shemos 19:17): Rav Avidimi bar Hama bar Chasa taught: The Holy One, Blessed is He, held the mountain over them like a barrel, and said to them, "If you accept the Torah, it is good. If not, this will be your burial!" Rav Acha bar Ya'akov said, "This is a great proclamation for Torah (Rashi: An opening for those who did not keep Torah and are called to judgment)!" Rava said, "Nevertheless, they accepted it in the days of Achashveros, as it says, "The Jews confirmed and undertook upon themselves . . ." (Esther 9:27). (Shabbos 88a)

Thus, according to Rava, somehow the events of Purim are tied back to the events of Har Sinai. According to Rava, somehow the defeat of Haman, which is the defeat of Amalek - and the reason for Parashas Zachor the Shabbos before Purim each year - is tantamount to the acceptance of Torah in the best way possible.

And, it all has to do with the little aleph hanging on for dear life, onto the first work of this week's parshah.

SEUDOS SHILSHIS:

Speak to the Children of Israel, and say to them, "When a person (adam) will offer a sacrifice (yakriv) to G-d . . ." (Vayikra 1:2)

The Torah has many ways to refer to a person. In this case it uses the generic term, "adam." However, in the realm of Kabbalah, every nuance in Torah makes a big difference, and the use of one term when another could have been employed, is taken as a signal that something special is going on.

According to the Arizal, the use of "adam" in the Torah is often a reference to Adam HaRishon himself (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 31). Therefore, on the level of Sod, the posuk would mean: When Adam will offer, or rather, come close, which is what the word - yakriv- literally means.

When Adam will come close? What does that mean? Well, if you recall what happened all the way back at the beginning of mankind's history, just after Adam HaRishon ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, it will all make sense. The Torah says:

God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I am naked, so I hid."

And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?" (Bereishis 3:9-10)

In other words, the main impact of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was to place a barrier between man and G-d. The main tikun, or rectification, therefore, is to remove that barrier and once again come close to G-d. That is the main avodah of man in general, and the Jewish People in particular.

Thus, it cannot be considered a coincidence that the Talmud asks:

Where is there an allusion to Haman in the Torah? (Chullin 139b)

And answers with the following verse:

Have you eaten of the tree (hamin ha'aitz) from which I commanded you not to eat?"

Eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was tantamount to defeat at the hands of Amalek, the result being a reduced aleph, that is, distance between man and G-d. Our avodah, therefore, is to battle Amalek and restore the aleph to its full glory, as we shall now conclude. And the timing couldn't be better, with Purim being this week, b'ezras Hashem Yisborach.

MELAVE MALKAH:

So says G-d, that after seventy years of Babylon are completed, I will remember you and perform My good word concerning you to make you return to this place. (Yirmiyahu 29:10)

It took 70 years from the time that Jerusalem had been destroyed until Darius, the son of Achashveros and Esther, ordered the construction of the second Temple. It takes 70 amos to walk from the opening of the Mishkan Courtyard to the curtain, marking the Holy of Holies in the Mishkan itself.

Furthermore, it took only 70 days for Haman to rise and fall in Megillas Esther, and the story is told within 70 verses.

And wine, which plays a central role in the Purim celebration - A person is obligated to drink on Purim until he doesn't know the difference between cursed Haman and blessed Mordechai (Megillah 7b; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 695:2) - is equal in gematria to 70.

You could write an entire book on the meaning of the number 70 in terms of the Purim redemption. However, for this essay, it is sufficient to know that the name, "Amalek" (ayin-mem-lamed-kuf), can be read: ayin-malak, which means the "severed eye," or in this case, the "severed 70."

The question is, what does 70 represent that it is connected to avodah and redemption? What does it have to do with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the creation of Haman? What is so

important about it that the Talmud states:

Anyone who becomes settled through wine has the knowledge (da'as) of his Creator . . . has the knowledge (da'as) of the SEVENTY Elders; wine was given with 70 letters (Rashi: the gematria of yai'in - wine - is 70), and the mystery (of Torah) was given with seventy letters (sod - mystery - also equals 70) - when wine goes in, secrets go out. (Eiruvim 65a)

The answer is that all that goes wrong in creation has to do with the eyes. Now, at first hearing, it sounds like I mean our physical eyes, which on some level, I do. The question is, how far do we want to go back in time? Back to the Garden of Eden and Adam HaRishon? - And how his "looking" led to the first and most catastrophic mistake of history.

Or, even further back in time, to the pre-creation period of history, when the pre-Sefiros Sefiros went out through the eyes of Adam Kadmon? What's an Adam Kadmon and what are its eyes? I don't know if we'll go that far, but at least we have a starting point to discuss how our avodah has the effect of eliminating Amalek, and why it is great Hashgochah Pratis that Purim comes just as we enter Sefer Vayikra - next week.

Have a great Shabbos and a freilechen Purim,
Pinchas Winston

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