

REMEMBER WHAT?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Remember what Amalek did to you on your way out of Egypt, when he chanced upon you on the way . . . (Devarim 25:17)

You can truly feel Purim knocking loudly when Parashas Zachor arrives. Parashas Zachor recalls what Amalek did to us on the way out of Egypt, and Purim recalls what Haman, a direct descendant of Amalek tried to do us on our way out of Bavel, 960 years later.

The truth is, until Haman came along, we weren't going anywhere, physical or spiritually. We had been quite content to live under a foreign ruler in a foreign land, and we didn't seem to be in too big a rush to go back to Eretz Yisroel and rebuild the destroyed Temple. However, Haman's rise and fall led to the Purim Miracle, redemption, and a new direction in history.

Once Ezra finally made the move back to Eretz Yisroel, he had difficulty convincing the vast majority of Jews to follow him. The 70 years of Babylonian exile had taken their toll, and even though the Purim Miracle resulted in a deeper commitment to the Oral Law (Shabbos 88a), it did not result in a deeper commitment to the ultimate goals of the Jewish people. Thus, the Second Temple failed to become the final one, and the Jewish people have never again enjoyed complete independence and security in their service of G-d.

When we arrived in Babylonia after Nebuchadnetzar destroyed the First Temple (3338/423 BCE), we intoned:

By the waters of Babylon -- there we sat and also wept when we remembered Tzion . . . (Tehillim 137:1)

And we vowed:

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill. Let my tongue adhere to my palate if I fail to recall you, if I fail to elevate Jerusalem above my foremost joy. (Ibid. 5-6)

Well, so much for that. With the exception of a few, the generation that had felt that way must have died out by that point. Most of the Jews of the Purim story had probably been born and raised in exile. How can you remember something you never experienced? You can remember what the Torah says about them, as we do each day as we say the "Six Remembrances" found after the morning service in most siddurim. And what Amalek did to us is one of them. But to remember them

emotionally, is not possible.

Yet, didn't someone wise once say quite ominously, "Those who forget are doomed to repeat"? And, isn't that what life is basically about, not being doomed to repeat past mistakes? And, shouldn't it really say, "Remember what you did to bring on Amalek," because as we saw a few parshios ago, he was a result of OUR actions, as Rashi says:

They traveled from Refidim and came to the Sinai Desert . . . (Shemos 19:2)

What does the Torah teach us by stating again that they came from Refidim? . . . In order to make a comparison between their journey from Refidim to their arrival in the Sinai Desert: just as their arrival in the Sinai Desert was in teshuvah, so too they left Refidim having done teshuvah. (Rashi)

Teshuvah for what? Again, Rashi provides the key:

THEN CAME AMALEK: The Torah places this section immediately after this verse (when they said, "Is G-d among us or not?") to imply, "I am always among you and ready at hand for everything you need, and yet you say, 'Is G-d among us or not?' By your lives, that dog shall come and bite you, and you will cry for Me and then you will know where I am!" It is like a man who carried his son on his shoulders and went on a journey. The son saw an article and said, "Father, pick up that thing and give it to me." He gave it to him, and so a second time and also a third time. Yet, when they met a certain man along the journey, the son asked him, "Have you seen my father anywhere?" Therefore, the father said to him, "You do not know where I am?" At which point he put him down and a dog came and bit him. (Rashi, Shemos 17:8)

Thus, teshuvah for having questioned G-d's loyalty to the Jewish people. Teshuvah for having lacked trust and faith in G-d and His Providence. Teshuvah for having created a reality that made the attack of Amalek possible.

SHABBOS DAY:

Amalek came and battled Israel in Refidim. (Shemos 17:8)

Why was it called Refidim? He said to me, "That was its name." Actually, it is a point of disagreement between Rebi Eliezer who says Refidim was its actual name, and Rebi Yehoshua who said that they weakened (reefu) themselves in Torah, as it says, "Fathers will not attend to [their] children because of feebleness (merifyon) of [their] hands" (Yirmiyahu 47:3). I also asked him, "Why was it called Shittim?" He said, "Shittim was its actual name." Rebi Yehoshua said, "[It was called this] because they were involved in something senseless (shtus)." (Bechoros 5b)

To support Rebi Yehoshua's answer, there is another gemara that says:

They should read Mondays and Thursdays. Ezra established this. From the beginning it was fixed, as it says in a brisa, "They traveled three days in the desert and did not find water" (Shemos 16:22); the Dorhsei Reshumos said, "The only water is Torah, as it says, 'Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water'

(Yeshayahu 55:1). Since they went three days without Torah they complained, and therefore the prophets among them established that they should read on Shabbos, skip Sunday and read on Monday, skip Tuesday and Wednesday and read on Thursday, skip Friday and read on Shabbos, so that three days should not pass without any Torah. (Bava Kamma 82a)

Now, that was before the Jewish people arrived at Mt. Sinai. However, just before the attack of Amalek, it says:

The entire assembly of the Children of Israel journeyed from the Sin desert to their journeys, according to the word of G-d. They encamped in Refidim and there was no water to drink. The people contended with Moshe and said, "Give us water that we may drink!" (Shemos 17:1-2)

Thus, in Refidim, there had been no water, which, according to the Dorshei Reshumos means there had been no Torah. Thus they lost it again and turned against Moshe, which Moshe called a rebellion against G-d. And then Amalek attacked, but not only did he attack, he attacked in a place called Refidim - the only "place" Israel could be attacked, the only place Israel was vulnerable to his attack, as Amalek's name proves. For, the gematria of Amalek is the same as that of the Hebrew word for doubt, suffek (Samech- Peh-Kuf) = 240.

What is also interesting is the fact that the Talmud juxtaposes the incident in Refidim with the one in Shittim, the latter being the result of Bilaam's advice, who had been contracted by Balak to stop the Jewish people from entering Eretz Yisroel:

Their intention was based upon the following. If the Jewish people entered the land, then they would perform the mitzvos dependent upon the land, which would have the effect of purifying all physicality and sanctifying the ENTIRE earth . . . Then all bounty would become holy, and the nations of the world, who survive off a portion of this, would have to humble themselves to the side of holiness, or not prosper. This would force them to abandon their evil and detestable ways in order to become fitting to receive blessing from holiness. (Shem M'Shmuel, Balak, 5670)

For, although Amalek was nowhere to be found in this episode, his presence still lurked and was actually the root of what occurred:

What is the [spiritual] root of Amalek above? For, we see that the souls of Bilaam and Balak come from there. For this reason, [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)

And, with this idea is a fascinating occurrence of Hashgochah Pratis. For, without fail, in a normal, non-leap year, Parashas Zachor falls on Parashas Tetzaveh, in which there is no mention of Moshe's name, deliberately. This is because when Moshe was pleading for the lives of the Jewish people after the sin off the golden calf, he asked that his name be removed from the Torah if G-d carried through with his threat to wipe out the Jewish people.

In the end, G-d heeded Moshe's request to spare the nation, but followed through, at least partially,

with his request to be unwritten from the Torah. Thus, in Parashas Tetzaveh, there is no mention of Moshe Rabbeinu anywhere. With Moshe Rabbeinu missing, the prism through whom G-d shone His light to the Jewish people, and the wellspring of Torah from which the Jewish nation drank the waters of Torah, how could Amalek NOT attack?

And, let us not forget who Moshe's spiritual ancestor was, the very source of his soul: Hevel. And what was the source of Amalek's soul?

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)

This personalizes the battle between Amalek and the Jewish people as one between the "ancestors" of Kayin and Hevel, and between Amalek and Moshe Rabbeinu. No wonder victory over Amalek was dependent upon the strength of Moshe's hands:

Moshe, Aharon, and Chur, went up to the top of the hill, [and] when Moshe lifted up his hand, Israel prevailed; when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. (Shemos 17:10-11)

And in a place whose name means: reefu yadaim - weakened hands.

However, as the Mishnah itself asks:

Is it the hands of Moshe that make or break war? Rather, this tells you that as long as the Jewish people looked upwards and committed their hearts to their Father in Heaven they were victorious; when they did not, they fell. (Rosh Hashanah 29a)

In other words, the Mishnah is teaching us, as long as the Jewish people REMEMBERED what kind of battle they were really waging, Amalek was powerless against them. However, the moment they forgot this sod, this mystery, they were weakened, and Amalek conquered them. And THAT was, and is, an issue of a different hand altogether.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

Moshe built an altar and called it Adon-ay-Nissi [G-d is my banner] saying, "The hand is on G-d's Throne. G-d will be at war with Amalek for all generations." (Shemos 17:15-16)

There is always this duality to Torah, almost a game. On one hand, G-d is G-d, Omniscient, Omnipotent, the Creator of everything and the Maker of all rules. He can do whatever He wants in whichever way He wants to do it. There really is no reason for the laws of man to apply to Him.

Yet, on the other hand, not only does He allow the term "man" to be applied to Him (Shemos 15:3), but He even acts as if He is bound by the same rules by which man must abide. Thus, just as a man is obliged to give weight to his oath by holding a holy object at the time of its administration, so too did G-d put His hand, so-to-speak, on His Holy Throne at the time He swore to be at war with Amalek until Amalek's complete and utter demise.

So says Pshat. However, what does Sod have to say about G-d's hand and the war against Amalek? After all:

For, 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 seventy 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. (Eiruvin 65a)

And, as the Vilna Gaon pointed on the previous posuk:

G-d told Moshe, "Write this as a memorial in the Book, and repeat it carefully (literally, b'aznei -- in the ears) to Yehoshua. I will completely eradicate the memory of Amalek from under heaven." (Shemos 17:14)

The gematria of b'aznei is that of Sod, because the way of war against Amalek begins in the way of Sod. No wonder that, of all the four mitzvos of Purim - Megillah, Matanos L'Evyonim, Mishloach Manos, and Mishteh - it is the latter, at which we drink until we no longer know the difference between Mordechai and Amalek (well, actually Haman who descended from Amalek), that corresponds to the letter Yud of Hashem's Name (Pri Tzaddik), which corresponds to the level of Sod of Pardes.

Sod says this:

If there are five levels, from Adam Kadmon to Asiyah, and each have ten levels of their own, then there are fifty levels from the top of the Sefiros to the bottom. If the Light of G-d had come all the way to the bottom, then there would have been no place for evil to exist. Therefore, as the Light traveled downward, G-d stopped it at a certain point from the bottom, to allow a place for evil (and free-will) to exist. How many levels from the bottom did the Light stop? According to Kabbalah, FOURTEEN levels (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 188), the gematria of the "Dalet-Yud" - which, according to Rashi means "Enough!" - G-d's Name, "Shaddai." Thus, when G-d takes a vow to eliminate Amalek, who draws his life force from these fourteen levels, the Torah says, "The hand is on G-d's Throne" (Shemos 17:16), a reference to the FOURTEEN levels. (The Light of Thirty-Six, page 29)

Thus, the word yad - hand - spelled Yud-Dalet, is a reference to the existence of the fourteen levels at the bottom of Creation, so-to-speak, where Amalek festers like mold in a not sterile environment. Thus, when the Torah testifies earlier in Parashas Beshallah:

G-d hardened the heart of Paroah, the king of Egypt, and he chased after B'nei Yisroel, and B'nei Yisroel left with an exalted HAND (b'YAD Ramah). (Shemos 14:8)

And the Leshem tells us that:

They could not remain a moment longer in Egypt lest the Sitra Achra become completely eradicated and free-will become eliminated, the basis for Creation. For, Egypt was the chief of all the

K'lipos (another name for the body of spiritual impurity) and if she became destroyed then, so would the Sitra Achra and the yetzer hara have become destroyed completely, and free-will would no longer have existed. For this reason they could not delay. This is what the posuk says, "The Egyptians pressed the people to leave, saying 'We are all dead men!' " (Shemos 11:33). Therefore, they had to leave quickly in order that evil could still exist so that free-will could remain and justify Creation. (Drushei Olam HaTohu, 2:5:2:5)

And, at the same time, that Amalek had not been faring all that well, since the light of G-d had, at least for one night, descended to the final fourteen levels of Creation, it is said that the YAD was exalted; and therefore, Amalek was almost destroyed.

EXALTED HAND: They made themselves a flag and a banner for display, and they went out "with excitement and with songs, with tabret and with harp" (Bereishis 31:27), like people who are redeemed from bondage to freedom, and not like slaves who expect to return to servitude. (Ramban, Shemos 14:5)

And that's the way they would have remained, if only they had remembered what Amalek did to us along the way, or in their case, what he was about to do to us along their way.

MELAVE MALKAH:

I will completely eradicate the memory of Amalek from under heaven. (Shemos 17:14)

Regarding that which is written in Pesachim (54a), that the fire of Gihennom that was created on the second day will never be extinguished was already explained by Rama m'Pano, in Chikur Din, 5:5. It means that as long as the zuhama and presence of evil remain, so will the fire of Gihennom, since the fire is judgment for the sake of refining and whitening existence from any trace of impurity and evil - zuhama. But the cessation of the filth and zuhama that will occur at the time of the Final Tikun when evil will be annihilated, is what it means to eradicate the name of Amalek completely, as it says, "I will completely eradicate" (Shemos 17:14), and "Your enemies shall perish" (Tehillim 92:10). Then the fires of Gihennom will finally be extinguished. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 183)

Sounds simple enough, no? No, as the Leshem goes on to explain:

As a result of the 974 generations [prior to Creation] who willingly chose to do evil, the K'lipos came into existence to an awesome extent. And, even though they were destroyed, some of it remained for the generations that followed [after Creation], and it has grown stronger through sinning. No one can eradicate it now, except for The Holy One, Blessed is He, as it says with respect to the war of Amalek, and as it is says, "I alone have trodden a winepress" (Yeshayahu 63:3), as will be the case at the time of the Final Tikun. Then evil will be completely eliminated, as it says, "I will remove the impure spirit from the land" (Zechariah 13:2). (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 186)

But could we ever have defeated Amalek on our own? Remember what the Mishnah said:

Is it the hands of Moshe that make or break war? Rather, this tells you that as long as the Jewish people looked upwards and committed their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they were victorious; when they did not, they fell. (Rosh Hashanah 29a)

Remember what Rashi said:

THEN CAME AMALEK: The Torah places this section immediately after this verse (when they said, "Is G-d among us or not?") to imply, "I am always among you and ready at hand for everything you need, and yet you say, 'Is G-d among us or not?' By your lives, that dog shall come and bite you, and you will cry for Me and then you will know where I am!"

Remember what the Talmud wrote:

Rebi Eliezer said, "If Israel will repent then they will be redeemed, and if they will not, then they will not." Rebi Yehoshua said to him, "If they do not repent they will not be redeemed?! Rather, The Holy One, Blessed is He, will cause to rise a king who will make decrees as difficult as Haman's were and Israel will repent and return to the right path." (Sanhedrin 97b)

Haman? Why not Pharaoh, or Nebuchadnetzer, or Antiochus, or all the evil Roman caesars? They not only decreed, but they carried out! Haman made a big noise, created a lot of fear, brought us to the brink of destruction, but was history after SEVENTY days, in SEVENTY possukim (see last week's PERCEPTIONS about this number). The gematria of yai'in - wine - and the gematria of Sod.

To answer this question, we have the following elusive statement from the Talmud:

Where is Haman hinted to in the Torah? In the verse, "Did you eat from (ha- min) the tree?" (Chullin 139b)

Is this merely a play on words, or the real source of Amalek?

According to the Pri Tzaddik, the real question of the Talmud is, what source shows that Haman was rooted in basis of the Oral Law? Through a brilliant discussion, he shows how Haman triggered the new acceptance of the Oral Law spoken about in the Talmud (Shabbos 88a), which deals with good and evil and is therefore associated with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. It had been his intention to do just the opposite, which is why he built his "aitz" to hang Mordechai fifty amos up in the air - as in the Fifty Gates of Understanding which are the basis of the Oral Law.

After all, what did we lose as a result of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? Paradise, or rather, in Hebrew, Pardes (the source of the English word), the roshei teivos of Pshat, Remez, Drush, and Sod, the latter of which is called Kabbalah, because it is the essence of THE Kabbalah - the tradition as received by Moshe Rabbeinu from G-d at Har Sinai.

And thus, in conclusion (but not in completion, since there is much more to say about this), it is Amalek's prime objective to keep our hands weakened by the forces of nature, in the realm that we, as a supernatural people, are most vulnerable. It is his desire to keep the bottom fourteen levels of

Creation free of G-d's light, and free of the light of Torah, so that he can grow and spread like a deadly virus, infecting and taking over everything in its path.

But, in doing this, he writes the end to his own story. For, it is His Creator's desire that he do this in order to bring about a renaissance in Jewish thinking, not to change Torah, G-d forbid, but to delve deeper into it, to move from Pshat, to Remez, from Remez to Drush, and eventually, from Drush to Sod. On each level, as the GR"A revealed, Amalek becomes weaker.

And, ultimately, it is THIS that we are supposed to remember each year when we recall what Amalek did to us on our way out from Egypt, when he tried to undo what had been accomplished when we left "Meitzer Yum" b'YAD Ramah.

Having remembered this, we are ready for Purim and its holy light of Sod.

Have a great Shabbos and a joyful Purim,
Pinchas Winston

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