

A WELL OILED SYSTEM

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT: *Command the Children of Israel to bring clear olive oil, beaten for the light, so the Menorah can burn continuously. (Shemot 27:20)*

One again, Parashat Tetzaveh is also Parashat Zachor, when we recall the roots of Haman. Ironically, since Tetzaveh begins speaking about the Menorah, it is really more akin to Chanukah than to Purim. However, this too has to be a function of Hashgochah Pratit (Divine Providence) which means it is no coincidence about this, and that there has to be meaning in this as well.

What is also ironic is that, of all the parshiot that Zachor lines up with, Tetzaveh is the one in which Moshe Rabbeinu is not mentioned, for having told G-d to erase him from the Torah if G-d destroyed the Jewish people because of the sin of the golden calf. It's almost like going to battle against Amalek without our main warrior, the one person who knows how to actually battle Amalek.

However, upon giving this matter further thought, you might recall that when it came time to the actual fight against the people of Amalek, Moshe Rabbeinu was indeed absent from the battlefield. And, it was not because he was some kind of paper-pushing general out of harm's way, because when it came time to fight Sichon and Og, he led the charge himself.

Yet, in the war against Amalek, it was Yehoshua who was appointed and led the troops into battle, while Moshe Rabbeinu climbed the mountain and raised his arms Heavenward to help the Jewish army succeed. In other words, he was there but behind the scenes, so-to-speak, which is not what one might expect in such a crucial battle, unless, of course, that was the whole point of the battle.

In fact, the Vilna Gaon explains that when G-d told Moshe Rabbeinu, at the end of Parashat Beshallah, to speak "b'aznei Yehoshua" (in the ears of Yehoshua) regarding the ongoing war against Amalek, it was an allusion to the necessity of Sod (Hidden Torah) to defeat Amalek. For, the gematria of "b'aznei" is 70, the gematria of Sod, and even the act of "whispering" into the ear of Yehoshua is symbolic of the hidden. And, as we say with respect to Purim: "When wine goes in, secrets come out", since the gematria of "yaiin" (wine) and "sod" (secret) are the same.

This is also exactly what the shemen zayit (olive oil) in this week's parshah represents as well, especially with respect to Chanukah and the Menorah. The olive itself represents the world of Pshat, which conceals the hidden mystical reality of the oil inside, only made visible once it is "squeezed" from the olive and then ignited. Thus, the overall message of Chanukah is: Nothing is necessarily on the inside what it seems to be on the outside, or in more colloquial terms: "You can't judge a book by

its cover".

This was and is, certainly true about Amalek. Indeed, Yehoshua had to find soldiers who knew how to deal with Black Magic since the Amalekians were experts at it. The war against Amalek was far from being conventional, and it is always unconventional, which is why we often don't know that we're in the middle of a battle against him until, unfortunately, it is too late. For, like an iceberg, most of which is below the surface of the water, hidden from view, Amalek does most of his fighting behind the scenes and only goes out in the open once all of his groundwork has been laid.

That is why Megillat Esther traces Haman's rise to power, from obscurity to second-in-command over all of Persia. He was not born into power, explains the Talmud, but actually began as a slave. Likewise, Hitler, y"s, began as a bar-room brawler, and then all-of-sudden one day, he and his cohorts rose to power until he actually became chancellor of one of the most important and powerful European countries, with his cohorts who became his all-powerful commanders.

"If only we had known what they would all become, then we might have..."

Wishful thinking, but after the fact.

SHABBAT DAY:

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)

It is like comparing the taking of vitamins to antibiotics. We take vitamins to maintain our health, but we take antibiotics to restore it. There is a big difference between the two approaches, since to maintain health one need only to make sure his body is getting all its proper nutrients, which are natural and healthy, so that the body can do its job of warding off attacks from vicious bacterial or viral invaders.

Not so with antibiotics. Antibiotics contain the very bacteria that we are trying to remove from our bodies. However, since the bacteria is already in the system and attacking it, the immune system has to be coaxed into overdrive to push it out. Therefore, we inject our bodies with a safe amount of the bacteria in order to "kick-start" our immune system against the real intruders.

Not only this, but since the body is already beset with illness, it may tire more easily and show other signs of breaking down, such as watery eyes, etc. The unwell person has to change his eating habits and increase the amount of sleep he gets, and may be unable to accomplish even a fraction of what he does when he is feeling good. So much time, energy and focus has to be shifted to the new demands of the body, which can be very disheartening.

The thing is that we can be in the midst of becoming ill for an entire week and not even know it, since most of the attack takes place internally. It is only after the illness has more or less vanquished

our bodies already that we are finally forced to take note of our health status and tend to it in order to recover our health, well after the fact, a process that can sometimes take weeks to complete, if not longer. The rules that apply for maintaining health no longer apply during the times of regaining it.

It's all about signs, and about being able to read them. Just like countries have early-warning systems, bodies do as well. They may be small, and they may be subtle, but they are the only "eyes" we have into the future, and to remain healthy and safe one must become sensitive to them and be prepared to deal with them as early as possible. This is why the first gate about which the Ramchal writes in "Mesillat Yesharim" is called "Zehirut", often translated as "Watchfulness".

The trouble is that, in order to maintain such vigilance, requires an ongoing act of will. It is so easy to fall asleep on the job, especially when the world around us, on the surface of things, seems so quiet and stable. Of the many dangerous assumptions about life that we make, one of the most dangerous is that if we can't actually "hear" the battle taking place, we assume that there isn't one. However, history has proved that by the time a battle becomes evident to the eyes and the ears, it is well after the fact and we usually find ourselves vulnerable and on the defensive.

To avoid such negligence, countries send spies out to settle in the countries of concern to keep an eye on the potential dangers. While the rest of the citizens back home go about their daily activities with a sense of safety and security, the spies live their lives as if they are secretly at war, looking at whatever they can see or listen to, and whatever they can hear to know if an enemy exists, in order to know what he is doing behind the scenes in advance of an overt attack. This is especially true when it comes to Amalek, who, apparently, never takes a break from his battle against the Jewish people.

If Amalek doesn't take a break in the battle, how can we? If he works behind the scenes to attack and destroy us, shouldn't we be doing the same to at least prepare ourselves for what he has planned for us, and try to eliminate him altogether?

Encountering (korchecha) you along the way: Yet another explanation is that it is the 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)

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

Now we can appreciate the role of Sod, and Moshe's hiddenness in this week's parshah and in the battle against Amalek. You can't fight what you can't see, and you can't see what you don't understand. They say that, at first, the original tribes of America could not see the approaching ships even though they were there, since they had never before seen any ships of that size. All they saw were ripples in the water, until eventually their minds adjusted and they could perceive the big boats much to their surprise and shock. We don't see the bacteria or viruses in our body that are

there every day, all the time. We don't know about the raging battles taking place in our immune systems, so oblivious to the reality below the surface, that we may live our lives in such a way that jeopardizes our very success in that battle. If only we could see what is going on in our bodily system on a microscopic level, we'd live a whole different existence. We're just not quite at that point, technologically-speaking, where we can be attune to that, out in the streets or just sitting on our living room sofas. So, instead we go to doctors and do blood-work on a regular basis to try and catch microscopic anomalies while they are still microscopic and before they get out of hand, in order to deal with them with a minimal amount of disruption of our daily lives.

There is a lot of curiosity about Kabbalah today, what it is and what it can do to empower a person. However, the real point of Kabbalah is to provide a Jew with a glimpse of the hidden world of Creation, the inner mechanism that makes it all work, in order to better equip a person that he take responsibility for his actions, and to recognize the signs early on before things don't go the way they ought to go. It is the true blueprint for Creation so we can see why and what can go wrong.

Armed with such knowledge, one's vision of reality is different. It's almost like putting on special glasses that provide x-ray vision. As a result, a person is able to get a glimpse of the hidden world of Amalek, and see what he is up to even before he brings his war to the actual battlefield. This is what gave Mordechai his ability to see what Haman was before he came into power, and the foreknowledge with how to deal with him, avoid Haman's plans to destroy him, and eventually do away with Haman himself.

This is because we are living in Amalek's world only on the level of Pshat. Therefore, by ascending the mountain, Moshe Rabbeinu rose above the reality of Amalek, and worked to elevate the Jewish people. By holding his arms upward, the Jewish people were only victorious when their vision of reality became elevated to a higher spiritual plan, neutralizing the power of Amalek.

In this way, both Chanukah and Purim represent the same idea: victory over the enemy comes not from without, but from within. For, the process of going from Pshat to Remez, and then to Drush, and finally to Sod is the same as going from Nefesh to Ruach, and then to Neshamah, and finally to Chiyah. The deeper one penetrates Torah, the higher the level of soul they access until they become so spiritual, they move themselves out of the reach of Amalek completely.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Nefesh HaChaim, Chapter 22 (Final Chapter)

The audio translation can be heard on OU radio (www.ou.org).

When Moshe brought the Torah down to earth, it was no longer considered to be in Heaven, lest a great man of understanding say, "I, who sees the secrets and the reasons behind the mitzvot as they pertain to the forces and the upper worlds, determine that it is right for me, according to the root of my Neshamah, or for someone else, according to his root, to transgress a particular mitzvah, G-d forbid, or to ignore some detail from its performance, or to perform with less stringency that which

the rabbis have stipulated, or to alter its designated time, G-d forbid.

Thus, the Torah concludes by saying, "No other prophet has arisen like Moshe..." (Devarim 34:10). From the verse, "These are the mitzvot" (Vayikra 27:34), the rabbis learn that a prophet is not allowed to create any new [mitzvot] (Shabbat 104a). The Torah itself states, "All that I have commanded you... you must not add to or detract from. When a prophet arises among you..." that is, to add or to detract from the mitzvot, G-d forbid, "Do not listen to the words of that prophet... After G-d, your G-d, you must go...". (Devarim 13:1-5)

Chizkiah HaMelech saw through Ruach HaKodesh that an unfitting child (Menashe) would come from him, and therefore he didn't want to marry (Brochot 10a). His pure intention was to reduce the amount of evil in the world, yet Yeshayahu brought word to him from G-d that "You are going to die... and you will not live" (Melachim 2:20:1); that is, you are not even going to the World-to-Come since you did not fulfill the mitzvah to have offspring. His superlative righteousness was not enough to bring him to the World-to-Come, because he did not fulfill one mitzvah from Torat Moshe, even though he saw with Ruach HaKodesh that an unfitting son would come from him, and all he did was to abstain [from having children]. The reasons and purpose of the mitzvot have yet to be revealed to anyone in this world except for Moshe Rabbeinu and Adam HaRishon, before he transgressed. This is what the Talmud refers to as, the "wine that is guarded within the grapes since the six days of creation" (Brochot 34b), and the "light that served on the first day allowed Adam to see from one end of the world until the other". (Chagigah 12a) The holy Torah in our midst is beyond us, beyond our intellectual grasp. Does man understand and possess the knowledge to begin to change its laws and its appointed times? This is what Yeshayahu told Chizkiah:

"What business have you with the secrets of G-d? What you were commanded to do you must fulfill; that which is good to G-d you must do."

And though, while prophecy was still amongst the Jewish people, a prophet could do something novel based upon the demands of the moment, even if it meant violating a command of G-d, as in the case of Eliyahu on Mt. Carmel. This too is part of Torat Moshe, which commands us "to listen to him" (Devarim 18:15), a warning to heed the words of a prophet even if he says in His name to violate a command when the moment requires it, except as the rabbis learn, to perform idol worship. (Yevamot 90b)

But, G-d forbid, that he should establish the novelty for all generations. When Esther, who is counted as one of the seven prophetesses (Megillah 14a), requested from the Chachamim to record the events for the generations, they answered her, "It has already been recorded three times" (Mishlei 22:20); [in order to record this particular "war" against Amalek] they had to find another verse to rely upon (Megillah 7a). And, in order to justify the obligation to light Chanukah candles, they also relied upon a verse... Ever since the time that our transgressions caused an end to prophecy amongst the Jewish nation, even should the wisest among Israel, to whom the secrets of Creation and the

Merkavah have been handed over, with their deep understanding and pure minds try to change even a single detail of any mitzvah, or only to advance or delay its time of performance, we cannot listen or consent to them — even though a Heavenly voice calls out, "Torah is no longer in Heaven"! (Bava Metzia 59b)

During the period of the redaction of the Talmud, it was still permissible for the leaders to create new decrees, like the lighting of the Chanukah candles or like the "Eighteen Decrees" (Shabbat 13b), if they found a source for such in the Torah. However, once the holy Talmud was closed, it is only for us to protect and perform that which is written in the holy Written Law and the Oral Law, according to their judgments, their laws, their times, their details, and their specifics, without the slightest deviation. When a Jew performs mitzvot as they ought to be done, even though he lacks intention, and even though he lacks knowledge of their reasons and their secret meanings, but nevertheless he does the mitzvah, then he rectifies worlds and he increases their holiness and light, each mitzvah according to its source and its role; he "strengthens" G-d. This is the way G-d established the world, that it should respond to the actions of man, and every mitzvah functions to achieve a unique purpose.

For the person who merits to understand the secrets of our holy Torah, which were handed to us for by the heavenly rabbis of the Talmud, such as Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his colleagues and students, and from those who drank from his waters in subsequent generations, such as the holy and awesome man of G-d, the Arizal, who enlightened our eyes with some of the reasons and intentions of the mitzvot; it is only to allow each individual, according to his mind and ability to fathom, to realize just what an impact each act, word, or thought can make on the worlds and forces both above and below.

It is for the sake of inspiring him to fulfill each mitzvah, and all aspects in the service of G-d properly and carefully, in awe and in fear, with a deep love and a holy, happy and pure heart. In this way, a greater rectification can occur than that which would have occurred, had the mitzvah been performed without such holy and pure intentions. However, the essence of each mitzvah is in the specific way it was meant to be carried out [since the time Torah was given, and explained by the rabbis of the Mishnaic and Talmudic period].

Have a great Shabbat,
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Text

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