

# THE LESSON OF "SHMONEH ESREI" – 18 REPETITIONS OF "AS G-D COMMANDED"

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshas Tetzaveh

### The Lesson of "Shmoneh Esrei" - 18 Repetitions of "As G-d Commanded"

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 495, Reneging on a Tzedakah Pledge. Good Shabbos!

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There is a refrain that recurs throughout the construction of the Mishkan: All of the components of the Tabernacle were made "as G-d Commanded Moshe." This expression appears no less than 18 times in the four Torah sections dealing with the construction of the Mishkan! The Torah certainly goes out of its way to make a point of this by interspersing this statement so often in the narration, rather than merely mentioning it one time at the end of Parshas Pekudei. Why?

Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi offers an explanation (in his Sefer Birkas Mordechai): There is a lot to be said for people who do a Mitzvah exactly as they are told -- no more and no less. The nature of people is that they do not like to do exactly as they are told. People like to feel a degree of independence. They like to feel that they can at least bring some degree of personal creativity to whatever job they are doing. The natural inclination is to think "True, the Almighty told us to do it 'this way', but wouldn't it be nicer if we did it just a little bit better."

Of course, no one would consider doing less than the Ribono shel Olam Commanded. Heaven forbid! On the contrary, the tendency would be to do more. There is an inclination to say: "I want to show my own individuality. Maybe we can do it a little different." Doing a mitzvah in a "no more, no less" fashion testifies that the person is not doing it for his own sake, but simply as a servant following the orders of his Master.

This is akin to the Talmudic idea that "greater is one who is commanded and does than one who is not commanded and does." [Bava Kama 38a] There is greater challenge -- and hence greater reward -- for a man to recite Krias Shema daily in its proper time than for a woman to do so. This is somewhat counter-intuitive. We might have thought that a "volunteer" gets extra credit and is to be rewarded more than a person who is merely fulfilling an obligation. However, it is a higher spiritual level when a person does something not because he wants to, not because he enjoys doing so, not because he feels it is a form of self-expression, but because "I told you so!" That is a higher spiritual level.

People do not like to be "told you so!" That goes against a person's ego. That is why people like to be self-employed. "I don't want to take orders. I want to be my own boss." To be an employee and have to do it always the way the boss says is difficult. In Judaism, we are all employees. There is One Boss. He says something and that is the way it is. This is why the Torah repeats 18 times: "As G-d commanded Moshe."

It is written in Parshas Be'Ha'Aloscha (in connection with the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah in the Mishkan), "And Aharon did so." [Bamidbar 8:3] Rashi there makes the simple comment: "This teaches the praise of Aharon -- that he did not deviate." Anyone who ever picked up a pen to write a commentary on Chumash deals with this Rashi. What does it mean "This teaches that he did not deviate"?

The premise of the question is "Of course you do what G-d Commands you. What's the big deal?" But in fact it IS a big deal. It is in fact a great complement when the Torah testifies that Aharon did exactly like he was told regarding the lighting of the Menorah, day in day out, and year in year out. He never tried to stamp the lighting with his personality. He never tried to improve the process. He always did exactly as he was told, no more and no less.

### **Battling The Amalek Within All Of Us**

There is a mitzvah to verbally remember, at least once a year, what Amalek did to us. In truth, this does not specifically have to be fulfilled exactly on Parshas Tezaveh. Nor does it specifically have to be fulfilled on the Shabbos before Purim. However, the Rabbis instituted that this reading take place the Shabbos before Purim in order to juxtapose the reading of the Commandment to eradicate Amalek with the story of Purim.

There is a relationship between the story of Purim and Amalek. Haman the Agagi was a descendant of Amalek, who had previously tried to wipe the Jews out. Amalek has been our nemesis throughout the generations.

The mitzvah of destroying Amalek occupies a very important place in the Torah. The Torah discusses Amalek at the end of Parshas B'Shalach: "Amalek came and battled Israel... For there is a hand on the throne of G-d; Hashem maintains a war against Amalek from generation to generation" [Shemos 17:8-16]. The Torah discusses Amalek again in Parshas Ki Teitzeh: "Remember what Amalek did to

you ... you shall wipe out the remembrance of Amalek from under the Heaven -- you shall not forget!" [Devorim 25:17-19] There is something about Amalek that the Almighty cannot tolerate.

The Torah gives us a Biblical commandment to wipe out every aspect of Amalek. Something about being an Amalekite contradicts the essence of being a servant of Hashem.

Obviously, Amalek has something against us. "Nations heard and they trembled; fear gripped the residents of Pelashes." [Shemos 15:14]. Everyone was in awe of the Jews -- but Amalek started up with us. They started up when we were in the Wilderness. They started up in the time of King Saul. They started up again in the time of Haman. The conventional wisdom is that Hitler was also a descendant of Amalek. What is this epic battle between Klal Yisrael and Amalek all about?

Rav Hutner explains in his book on Purim that the battle is much more fundamental than merely the struggle of one nation against another. There is something about Amalek that is the antithesis of what it is to be a Jew. There is a sharp inclination within that nation, Rav Hutner writes, not to tolerate anything that is important (chashuv). There is an inclination to destroy, to denigrate, to mock and make fun of that which most people think is important, even awe-inspiring. They seek out the breach in any structure of importance, with the goal of demolishing the entire structure by attacking this crack in the wall. This concept, he writes, is called "laytzanus" (mockery).

When we say a person is a "laytz" (someone possessing the attribute of "laytzanus"), this is often incorrectly translated as "a joker", "a funny fellow", or "a person with a sense of humor." This is incorrect. A person with a good sense of humor is not a "laytz". Humor has nothing to do with "laytzanus." "Laytzanus" is more correctly associated with cynicism. A "laytz" is a cynic - someone who mocks and denigrates. He wants to show that there is nothing and no one in this world worthy of respect.

Klal Yisrael is on the opposite end of the spectrum, in the arena of "this and the corresponding opposite to this has the L-rd created" [Koheles 7:14]. Klal Yisrael's mission is to praise that which is praiseworthy, to give homage to that which is worthy, to revere and to honor that which is so deserving, and to build up and to respect that which is important in this world. In his inimitable fashion, Rav Hutner states: "This battle is about the ability to profane (koach haChilul) versus the ability to praise, show respect and revere (koach haHilul)."

All of us -- to a greater or lesser extent -- have a tendency to mock (be 'mevatel') and be cynics. It is so emancipating! If there is nothing important in the world then it releases me to do whatever I want. Think about it! If there is no institution or person in this world that is worthy of my respect then I am a free agent. What restrains me? I can do whatever I want, whenever I want, in whatever place I want. This is laytzanus in its worst form. This is the battle between Amalek and Klal Yisrael.

This is exactly what Amalek did. When the entire planet, the entire civilized world stood in awe of Klal Yisrael after the splitting of the Red Sea -- there was somebody who said "Agh! No big deal!"

When Chazal interpret "asher karcha b'derech" (literally "who cooled you off in your journey") they give an example -- that Amalek was like a person who jumped into a scalding hot bathtub, who cooled it off for everyone else who came after. Amalek is all about taking that which frightens everyone and saying: "It's no big deal!"

The battle is about scoring versus praising; about bitul versus respect. This is a timely message to us in the United States at this point in history. If one looks at the popular press, one of the most prevalent discussions among social commentators today is that Americans are a bunch of cynics. Someone did a Lexus-Nexus search for me. Between January 1997 and February 1998 the word cynic appeared either in the title or in the first paragraph of over 5000 articles. People are cynics. They like to be "mevateil" because they want to be free. They don't want to have the pressure of being in awe of someone whose standards they cannot personally live up to.

Amalek has the attribute of cynicism strongly implanted in his genes. Amalek is the descendant of Eisav. Eisav was the first cynic. Eisav traded the status of Bechora [first-born] for a bowl of soup! If it would have stopped at that, Eisav could be faulted for doing a stupid thing, but that was only half the problem. His real sin was that "he mocked the bechorah". "Agh! What is the Bechora worth? What is service of Hashem worth?" He mocked it! The attitude, the turn of the nose, the scorning - that is Eisav, that is Amalek, and that is Haman.

The Baal HaTurim points out that there are only two times in all of Tanach that "vaYivez" [and he mocked] is written. "vaYivez Eisav the Bechorah" [Shemos 24:34] and "vaYivez Haman to merely send his hand against Mordechai alone" [Esther 3:6]. The Medrash calls Haman a "mock the son of a mocker" (bozeh ben bozeh). He was a denigrator the son of a denigrator, a "letz" the son of a "letz", a cynic the son of a cynic.

This is Eisav. This is Amalek. This is Haman. This is what we need to battle. When the Torah commands us to eradicate any vestige of Amalek, we are challenged to battle not only the external, physical, Amalek. We must also battle the attribute of cynicism that is so present among all of us. This too is part of eradicating the memory of Amalek.

We have to show respect for those things in the world that are deserving of respect, and to thereby magnify the honor of Heaven. This is the task of the Jews who are the progenitors and propagators of the power of Hilul (praise) versus the destructive power of Chilul (desecration).

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Tezaveh are provided below:

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Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington.

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Yerushalayim.