

CHAGIM U ZEMANIM: PARSHAS ZACHOR

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

Trumah-Zachor, 5683 Israel was commanded three mitzvot to be observed when they entered the Land; to appoint a king, to eradicate the memory of Amalek and to build the Bet Hamikdash (Sanhedrin, 20b).

The Avnei Nezer taught that Amalek in his tumah is the opposite of Yaakovs kedusha. His very name reflects his essential tumah, since it is derived from deviousness and crooked- akakal, whereas Yaakov is Yisrael and Jeshurun, both meaning straight and correct. To this we may add that Yaakov is truth even as we read, Thou show truth to Yaakov (Michah, 7:20). In contrast Amalek is thoroughly falsehood and concealment; our sages taught that Amalek stood outside the Clouds of Glory and called out to Israel that he came to trade with them, when in reality the purpose was war. That is why the punishment for false weights and measures is attacks by our enemies (Rashi explaining the linkage between the verses concerning weights and measures: (Devarim, 25:13-16) and the following ones telling of Amalek].

There is a further lesson to be learnt from the names of Yaakov and Amalek that reflects the very essence of their beings and their spiritual identities. Yaakov and Yisrael, at first sight, seem to speak of conflicting qualities within him. Yaakov, from the one who grasps the heel of his brother, is the symbol of submission and humility, while the name Yisrael denotes elevation and ruler-ship, coming from, for you have struggled with G-d and with men and have prevailed (Bereishit, 32:29). However, this dichotomy is only apparent whereas in reality there is no conflict between the two attributes. Yaakovs submission was that of one who negates and humbles himself before G-d while his power to prevail and ruler-ship was that of one who is able to rule over the desires and forces of the heart and to conquer them; he who rules over the forces of his heart is better than he who conquers a city(Mishle,17:32) The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah, chapter 34) tells us that the Tzaddikim rule over their hearts and this gives them sovereignty over their fellowmen.

We find submission in Amalek too, but that is the submission that is meant to bring despair and leads to a spiritual coldness that is the opposite of ecstasy and yearning for G-d, and so is the converse of the submission of Yaakov. The Avnei Nezer taught that both Amalek and Yaakov had the midah of da at, that is the ability to know the value of one-self and how far removed one is from Hashem; as we learn from Moshe who even though he built the Mishkan, nevertheless held himself apart from its holiness and only went there when he was summoned. However, Amalek used his daat to spread spiritual coldness, despair and the equating of oneself with negativism; his humility

leading to nihilism and ultimately to nothingness. In regard to Amalek it is written, asher karkha, that is the absence of wonderment, ecstasy and spiritual fulfillment. His daat does not bring with it the power, sovereignty and striving to control and master ones thoughts and passions, but rather arrogance and cheekiness, while his humbleness brings nihilism and despair, rather than a desire to draw closer to Hashem. So both his midot are the very converse of those of Yaakovs..

Now it is clear why the appointment of the king had to precede the destruction of Amalek. The entry of Israel into Eretz Yisrael is the trait of submission and modesty while the king is that of rule and majesty. Why is it called eretz? Because it runs [ratz] to do the will of Hashem (Bereishit Rabbah, chapter 5). Furthermore, it is written, And you shall be brought low and shall speak out of the ground and your speech shall be low out of the dust; [will talk of the submission of the land] (Isaiah, 29:4). Thus their entry into the land created in them a desire to submit themselves to Hashem and to draw close to Him. At the same time, the king is the heart of Israel and he induces in them the trait of power and sovereignty to control and rule over their desires and emotions, while simultaneously submitting themselves to Hashem. A king, when bowing done during his tefilah does not stand erect until he has completed his prayer (Berachot, 34b); that is evidence of exceptional submission. Therefore, in order to be able to overcome the 2 traits of Amalek that are the essence of variance with those of Yaakov and to transform them from tumah to kedushah, the eradication of Amalek had to be preceded by the entry of Israel into the Promised Land and the appointment of a king.

We still need to appreciate why the reading concerning the war with Amalek (Smot, 17:8-16) on Purim itself should have to be preceded by the special Torah reading of Zachor on the Shabbat before Purim. Surely it would have been appropriate to read both of them on Purim? We read with regard to the consecration of Aharon, And Moshe took of the blood that is on the altar and of the oil of anointment and sprinkled them on Aharon (Vayikrah, 8:30); blood being the symbol of din and the anointing oil that of absolute mercy, as it is written (Mishleh, 27:10), Oil and incense rejoice the heart. The reason that Aharon required these sprinkling whereas the Mishkan, its vessels and its utensils did not require the sprinkling of blood at all, was that he was consecrated for Avodah; [Rashi, the word Cohen denotes the avodah]. For that Avodah he required the oil to draw people to rising degrees of kedusha and the blood to lead away from unholy things. Aharon was a man of chesed and the powerful spiritual love that chesed creates, is of itself sufficient strength to create anger against anything that comes to disturb kedusha; the greater the love for the Divine, the greater will be the abhorrence of any thing or anyone that comes to destroy or disturb it. So it is fitting to kindle the anger and the abhorrence against Amalek from the Shabbat before Purim, since Shabbat is the day of Israels love and acceptance of their Father in Heaven and as a result of that yearning the hatred for Amalek and the desire for his eradication will grow.

Shem Mi Shmuel, Trumah-Zachor, 5683 ; Tetzaveh-Zachor 5674.

[The teaching that Amalek and his grandfather Eisav are the spiritual opposites of Yaakov is a common theme with the Shem Mi Shmuel. The degree of spiritual difference is heightened by the

physical similarities; their common parentage as distinct from Yitschak and Ishmael, and by their being twins, according to some authorities even identical twins as evidenced by killing of Eisav by from the back, because his face was identical to Yaakovs. The Shem Mi Shmuel regards Eisav as the vinegar of Yaakov, both being made from grapes harvested from the same vine. Both have the same yearning, tsukah, for Heaven but whereas Yaakov strove to elevate the Earth till it reached Heaven, Eisav and Amalek battled to degrade the Heavens down to the level of the Earth. Thus Eisav and Amalek are the eternal perversions of midot and symbols of falsehood and spiritual lies; so eternally enemies of Israel and of G-dl.

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