

PARSHAS ZACHOR

תשפ"ה

Amolek was the first nation who attempted to eliminate Klal Yisroel. The posuk in Tehillim tells us their intention was to wipe us out of history and for our names to never be mentioned any longer by anyone. In the Haggodo we read that in every generation there are nations who rise to destroy all Jews.

Earlier, in the posuk before Amolek came, the Torah describes how Klal Yisroel wondered if Hashem was with them and taking care of them. This isn't a coincidence. Rashi says that this itself was the prompt for Amolek to attack. Hashem reacted to this questioning by pulling back his Divine protection and letting Amolek attack. Even when our enemies attack us, it is not a sign that Hashem is not involved in our lives. It is a kind of message that Hashem is sending us to wake us up. Whenever Klal Yisroel need something, Hashem provided it. Klal Yisroel should have seen this and understood that they are protected by Hashem.

Why is the place called Refidim? Because they were weak in their limud Torah.

The Torah says after kriyas Yam Suf, Klal Yisroel went three days without water and they came to Moroh. They were given water and were given mishpotim and mitzvos. Chazal say three days without water meant three days without Torah. Moshe made a takono which has lasted till today that a person cannot go three days without limud haTorah – no matter what the circumstances.

But just imagine – they just left decades of intense slavery, and they are traveling to Har Sinai to get the Torah. But, regardless, they can't go three days without limud Torah. This is a new idea.

Until now, the Torah that Klal Yisroel had were the megillos from the Ovos that they brought with them to Egypt, to study on Shabbos while they rested from slave labor. But now limud Torah is being taken to a whole new level. Now they can't go anywhere without Torah – even while marching through the desert on the way to Har Sinai. If they are weakened from limud Torah, Amolek immediately comes and attacks. This dynamic continues throughout history.

The Netziv poses a contradiction between two gemaras. One gemara says the cause for the churbon of Bayis Rishon was the three major sins of avodo zoro, gilui arayos and shfichus domim, then it says Bayis Sheni was destroyed for sinas chinom, despite the fact that they were involved in Torah and chessed. But another gemara explains that the cause for the churbon Bayis Rishon was bittul Torah! And this is based on the posuk in Novi: על מה אבדה הארץ? על עזבם את תורתך אשר נתתי לך. So which is it? Bittul Torah? Or the three major sins?

The Netziv explains that the power of Torah is so great, that even if Klal Yisroel have done sins as severe as avodo zoro, etc., but if they are still learning Torah, then the zechus of limud Torah can protect them from punishment for their sins. But the moment they stop learning Torah, the protection is removed, and the beis hamikdash is destroyed.

Then there is step two – Chazal say there was a tremendous amount of limud Torah going on during Bayis Sheni. So why was it destroyed? Apparently, the power of Torah can stand up to those three major aveiros, but it still can't stand up to sinas chinom!

Moshe instructs Yehoshua to select a fighting force to battle with Amolek. But remember that we are talking about a people who had been slaves for generations! How are they supposed to know how to fight a trained army? Rashi explains that the gibborim are people who

have yiras cheit, whose spiritual merits will help them win. But then there is a whole other element introduced to this battle. Moshe goes up to a hill with his staff, accompanied by Aharon and Chur to daven to Hashem for victory. The posuk says that when Moshe lifted his arms Klal Yisroel started to win, and when his arms were lowered, Amolek started to win. The Mishna in Rosh Hashono asks: why would the positions of Moshe Rabbeinu's hands determine who was winning? Rather, when Moshe raised his hands and Klal Yisroel were inspired by this to look to shomayim and dedicate their hearts to Hashem, then they started winning. But when they stopped, they started to lose.

Jews don't just fight wars. Success or failure comes from Hashem's decision. And that decision depends on many different factors. One factor is why the war started in the first place. It came about because of a spiritual failing that needs to be corrected. If that failing is not corrected, they won't win the war. Another factor is the merits of the soldiers fighting – their righteousness. And the last factor is the attitude – the awareness that we don't win any battle, it is all coming from Hashem's decision.

These factors are always in operation in every situation. Our successes and failures depend on all these spiritual factors that Hashem takes into account.

A detailed investigation was recently released about the situations surrounding the massacres of October 7th. There were very clear signs of an impending terror attack before it started. The leadership of Hamas noticed that the IDF forces weren't doing any of the usual things they should do to prepare for an attack. It looked very suspicious – maybe it was a trap and they should cancel the whole thing. But in the last second, they made a decision to invade. It could have gone either way, and it was clear that Hashem tipped the scales.

The Sifri in Parshas Behaaloscho asks on the posuk: קומה ה' ויפוצו איויבך וינוסו משנאך מפני קומה ה' ויפוצו, why does the posuk refer to the enemies of Hashem? Does Hashem have people who hate Him? Chazal answers that the enemies of Klal Yisroel are the enemies of Hashem and vice-versa. Jews can be very far from Hashem, but in the eyes of the world, every Jew represents Hashem in the world. We represent an idea that they hate. They want to destroy us because they want to remove Hashem's influence from human society. This was true of Hitler and it is true of Hamas. They say this very clearly and explicitly.

After the battle is won and Yehoshua weakens Amolek to a significant degree, Hashem instructs Moshe to record a soon-to-be permanent remembrance of the struggle between Hashem and Amolek in a sefer. The one nation who introduced this concept of attacking Klal Yisroel in an attempt to eliminate them as a nation was Amolek. Hashem guarantees that He will ultimately wipe out the memory of Amolek from under the heavens. Moshe builds a mizbeach for Hashem and says: כי יד על כס ה' מלחמה לה' בעמלק מדר דר. This is a very difficult posuk. Why must this struggle last forever? Why does it say Hashem will destroy Amolek and not command Klal Yisroel to wipe out Amolek?

We know from the gemara that the identities of the nations of the ancient world have been obscured over time. Sancheirev made massive population transfers and we no longer know who is descended from Ammon and Moav in order to prevent them from marrying into Klal Yisroel. When the Rambam brings these halachos, he says we don't know who they are and the halacha is not applicable. But if so, how can we perform the mitzvah of wiping out Amolek anymore? Why do the

poskim bring it down as being applicable today? Rav Chaim answered that there are two dinim in Amolek. They are not just the physical descendants. They are also any group of people who adopt their philosophy. Hashem is fighting that war. This applies today – in every generation, people want to kill every Jew on the planet regardless of where they live. Hamas is very clear that they believe their messiah cannot come until every last Jew is dead. It has nothing to do with Israel.

The question is, how do we fight that war with Amolek today? Yes, there is the need for an army. But we can never forget the Mishna in Rosh Hashono. You will only win with your army when you are aware that the victory only comes from Hashem fighting your battles. This comes from the merits of Klal Yisroel and their limud Torah. The whole war with Amolek came as a result of a weakening of limud Torah, and this has to be rectified if we have any chance of Hashem giving us victory.

We will be reading the parsha of Zachor this Shabbos, taken from the end of Parshas Ki Seitzei. Here we find the command to Klal Yisroel to wipe out the memory of Amolek. In the Haftarah, we read about Shmuel's command from Hashem to destroy Amolek – hundreds of years later. Shmuel takes pains to emphasize that everyone must be killed – old, young, men, women, leave no one alive. Similar to the mitzvah to wipe out the seven nations of Canaan.

The night before this battle, Shaul had a struggle in the valley. Chazal tell us that Shaul had a problem with the mitzvah of Egloh Arufoh. What was the fight about? Shaul complained that this parsha tells us about the value of every human life. If the men and women of Amolek are evil and need to be killed, fine. But what about the newborn babies? Why do they deserve to die? The bas kol came out and responded: "Don't be such a tzaddik". Hashem knows what is just and fair.

Shaul isn't convinced. He leaves Agog and the animals alive, and Shmuel gets angry at his disobedience. He tells Shaul: Even though you feel insecure to Agog and you respect him, you have no right to feel that way – you are the king of Klal Yisroel, representing Hashem in this world. This isn't your position to treat as you please. Hashem made you a king and you need to take tremendous pride in that. You have no right to feel inferior. Shaul tries to defend himself by saying he did it l'shem shomayim – to bring more korbonos to Hashem!

Shmuel says something extremely important: Hashem wants obedience more than he wants your korbonos. And by leaving Agog alive, your rebellion is like sorcery and avodo zoro. What does this mean?

Shaul came into this battle with mixed feelings. He didn't think it was fair to kill all these seemingly innocent people. Once he went in with those mixed feelings, he felt compelled to leave some of them alive. This means Shaul thought there was another source of moral authority other than Hashem. Avodo zoro is the belief that there are other sources of power besides Hashem. Human morality is one example of this. If the Torah says it is moral, then it is by definition, moral. If you don't understand it, then try harder to understand it. You aren't allowed to place your morality above Hashem's morality. Hashem is the source of all physical power, all wisdom and truth, and all moral authority in this world. You are in no position to question and sit in judgment if it is right or wrong.

But let us try to understand, why must every trace of Amolek be destroyed? The Torah tells us something interesting about the mabbul. It says the waters of the mabbul were destructive and didn't leave behind any traces of the corrupt pre-mabbul civilization. Why was that? Because people have a perverse fascination with evil. And Hashem didn't want people to have the opportunity to occupy themselves with the evil of the dor hamabbul. Every now and then there are auctions of memorabilia from Adolf Hitler, and they are sold for lots of money. Why? Because people want to connect to that evil society. So Hashem commands us to wipe out any trace of that evil society.

What is the story of Purim based on? It is the fact that Homon was an Agogi – he descended from the sole survivor of Shaul's battle with Amolek – Agog. The piyut of Asher Heini says that had Agog not survived because of Shaul's and the people's misplaced mercy, Homon would never have been born hundreds of years later to take on his ancestor's legacy. This is why Hashem commanded us to totally wipe out any memory of Amolek.

When will the last battle with Amolek occur? It will occur at the end of history – the coming of Moshiach – when the world will be perfected with the Name of Hashem and we rise to the proper level. Once we are on the level of bringing Moshiach, Amolek will not have the power to exist and they will be destroyed.

Klal Yisroel are in a constant battle with Amolek. 80 years ago, we completed one battle with Amolek – who were the Nazis. And now we are in another battle with Hamas, who adopted the same philosophy of killing every Jew in the world. That battle will keep going until we rise to the proper level with our limud Torah and kiyum mitzvos. The outcome of conquering Amolek is up to us.