



Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

פרשת זכור

INNER STRENGTH

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TAMARA KAHN ('17)

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The Shabbat before Purim is known as Parshat Zachor. We substitute the usual maftir and haftorah for Parshat Vayikra for a section of pesukim that discussed the commandment of

eradicating the memory of Amalek. This obviously correlates to Purim, when Amalek made yet another unsuccessful attempt at ridding the world of Jews.

In the maftir, we are instructed to remember what Amalek did to us and urged to erase their memory. The haftorah tells the story of Shaul, who is commanded to attack and wipe out Amalek without leaving survivors. On a superficial level, the connection seems obvious: both the maftir and haftorah deal with our eternal battle to rid the world of Amalek. However, when one looks at the details of the story of Shaul, there seems to be a deeper connection between

these events.

When Shaul and Bnei Yisrael attack Amalek, they leave King Agag and the cattle alive. Hashem is angry about this and sends Shmuel to rebuke and punish Shaul. Initially, Shaul explains that this decision was lesheim shamayim -- they would use the cattle to sacrifice to Hashem, and they would use Agag's wisdom to build a stronger Jewish kingdom. However, Shaul eventually admits that he made these decisions because of his inability to withstand the pressure placed upon him by Bnei Yisrael. Shmuel responds:

“הלא אם קטן אתה בעיניך”

“Are you so small in your own eyes?”

Shaul's failure stemmed from his lack of self-confidence and subsequent inability to stand up to Bnei Yisrael. Ultimately, this episode caused Shaul to lose the kingship.

The Sefer Hachinuch explains that the mitzvah of wiping out Amalek exists today, even though we no longer know who this nation is! But if we cannot actually wipe them out, how do we fulfill this mitzvah? The Sfat Emet explains

that the essence of zechira is a person's inner awareness. Your memories exist within your consciousness. Therefore, the way to obliterate Amalek is through living our lives in a state of awareness. How does this accomplish our goal? When the Torah discusses the way Amalek attacks us, it says "asher korcha baderech" -- "they 'happened' upon you when you were on the road" after leaving Egypt. Chazal add that korcha can also mean to cool. After leaving Egypt the nations feared the Jewish people and our God; after Amalek attacked they "cooled us off," and nations were no longer as afraid. Additionally, they cooled off the relationship between Bnei Yisrael and Hashem by making it seem like our victories are by happenstance, or chance, rather than Divine providence. Therefore, in order to erase Amalek, we need to lead lives of awareness, in which we recognize that life is not happenstance, nor should our decisions depend on the pressures of society around us. We have the ability to build a relationship with Hashem and influence the world for the better.

With this understanding of what it means to erase the presence of Amalek, we can explore a deeper connection to the story of Shaul. Shaul was unable to withstand the pressures of society due to his lack of self-confidence. He was unable to stand up to the people, who had misplaced mercy for the king and animals. This misplaced mercy led to a future descendant of Agag, Haman haAgagi, who would once again attempt to destroy the Jews and convince the world that life is governed by chance without divine intervention. It takes confidence to recognize that we have the ability to create a relationship with Hashem, but it takes even more self-awareness and inner-strength to stand up for Hashem's role in our world. We will be successful in this endeavor only when we can erase the Amalek, the inner doubt, within ourselves.

DOUBT IT

ELI LITWIN ('18)

THIS SHABBAT, THE SHABBAT BEFORE PURIM, we read the maftir portion describing how Amalek attacked the Jewish people as they left Egypt -- even though Amalek lived in a distant land and was under no imminent threat.

So why did Amalek attack? The Torah says that Amalek attacked the Jews "karcha" - which literally means by way of happenstance. Amalek's entire philosophy is that there is no design or providence in the world. Everything is haphazard, dictated by chance, luck, and fate. That's why Haman, a direct descendant of Amalek, decided to kill the Jews based on a lottery, from which the name "Purim" is derived.

Philosophically, Amalek and the Jewish people stand at opposite ends of the spectrum. Judaism believes that the world has purpose and meaning, and that God is intimately involved in our lives. Indeed, that is the very lesson of Purim: Even when things seem bleak, God is there, guiding events. With Haman's decree, it seemed that the Jews were doomed. But then there was a dramatic turnabout. In our own lives, the extent to which we may doubt God's involvement is the extent that Amalek's philosophy of randomness is part of us. The Kabbalists point out that the numerical value of Amalek, 240, is the same as safek, meaning "doubt." The energy of Amalek is to create doubts about what is true and real in this world, doubts about God's role in directing events in the best possible way.

This concept is so important that one of the 613 mitzvot is to remember what Amalek did and that's what we do, every year, on the Shabbat before Purim. We should all try and take this message to heart, and do our part to fight Amalek's idea of a random world.

HUMBLE AND HOLY

TAMARA KAHN ('17)

THIS WEEK'S PARSHA BEGINS WITH THE WORD "vayikra," which means, "and He called," referring to Hashem calling upon Moshe from the Ohel Moed. Hashem's calling to Moshe when Moshe failed to enter the Mishkan on his own emphasizes Moshe's humility, his most prominent attribute, on various levels.

Despite the unique connection he maintains with Hashem, Moshe does not become too comfortable with Hash-

em and Hashem's holy sites; instead, he continues to respect the boundaries separating him from Hashem and does not push the limits of their relationship. While it is arguable that Moshe was valued enough by Hashem to enter Hashem's sacred locations, Moshe's humility motivated him to believe otherwise and refrain from overestimation of his worth in Hashem's eyes. Targum Yonatan's approach to Moshe's hesitation before entering the Mishkan pertains to the amount of kedusha present at Har Sinai during Matan Torah and Moshe requiring explicit summons from Hashem in order to ascend Har Sinai, which was a location of temporary holiness. If Hashem summoned Moshe to Har Sinai, how much more so should He summon Moshe to the Mishkan, a place of more permanent holiness and the resting place of the Shechina; therefore, Moshe expected summons to the Mishkan as he had received summons at Har Sinai. Moshe recognized the significance of the Mishkan and Hashem's kedusha and did not violate or taint the holiness with selfish actions and opinions of self-worth.

The actual word, "vayikra" in the parsha is spelled with a miniature aleph at the end to further suggest Moshe's humility in this situation. Moshe was not inclined to write about Hashem calling upon him to enter the Mishkan due to his humility, and when Hashem insisted that the word "vayikra" be written, Hashem allowed Moshe to inscribe the aleph in a smaller size to represent how Moshe humbled himself and diminished his presence.

If Moshe was able to maintain his humility in spite of his close relationship with Hashem, which would seemingly guarantee him privileges and exceptions to the humble standard, we who strive to attain a close relationship with Hashem, should humble ourselves and recognize that we serve a greater purpose in this world.

CALL ON ME, BROTHER

LANA ROSENTHAL ('17)

NOW THAT THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURE OF THE MISHKAN is completed, Hashem must give Moshe further instructions. Parshat Vayikra therefore opens with the words, "And He called to Moshe, and God spoke to him from the

Tent of Meeting, saying..." This phrase, however, seems redundant—why must the Torah tell us that Hashem first called to Moshe and then spoke to him? Shouldn't the Torah emphasize God's actual message as opposed to His call for Moshe?

Rashi explains that when God calls for Moshe, He is singling Moshe out as the person with whom He desires to speak, thereby highlighting the closeness of their relationship. Rashi adds that whereas here, God first calls to Moshe and then converses with him, He just "happens upon" Bilaam, the non-Jewish prophet tasked with cursing the Jews in Sefer Bamidbar. In contrast to the deliberate request for Moshe, the circumstances of Bilaam's conversation with God seem coincidental, and therefore less special.

The word "vayikar", used to describe God's happenstance meeting with Bilaam, is eerily close in spelling to the word "vayikra", which demonstrates Moshe's closeness to God. All that separates the two words is the letter aleph. And in fact, in the Torah this aleph in "vayikra" is written smaller than the other letters in the word. The words suggest completely opposite relationships, but are quite similar in spelling.

Rabbi Shimon Felix suggests that God's different relationships with each of these two neviim correlates to each navi's value system. Moshe has a strong moral compass, possessing the same values as God even before meeting Him at the burning bush. He kills the Egyptian who is beating a Jew; he runs after and protects the small sheep that runs away while he is shepherding. Hashem therefore has an incredibly close relationship to Moshe; he calls on Moshe personally, genuinely wanting to converse directly with him. Bilaam, on the other hand, does not possess the same ethics. In fact, his actions are contrary to God's desires. He goes to curse the Jews, not because God commanded it, but because he and the Midianim want to. As a result, God does not truly desire a relationship with Bilaam; he does not call to him.

The little aleph that distinguishes the word "vayikra" from "vayikar" demonstrates the fine line between aligning ourselves with Hashem and disregarding His word in favor of our own desires. If we follow Hashem's Torah and mitzvot, we will develop close relationships

with Him. But if we act contrary to His commandments, He will not desire personal relationships with us. May we all strive to achieve a relationship with Hashem in which He calls to us.

TAKE (KORBA)NOTE OF THIS LESSON

SARA MERKIN ('17)

LAST WEEK IN SHUL WE FINISHED SEFER SHMOT with the reading of Parshat Pekudei, which discusses the completion of the Mishkan. The Mishkan was built as a means of bringing Bnei Yisrael closer to Hashem. It was a physical space where Hashem's presence could rest and the nation could enter to bring sacrifices to Hashem.

In particular, after the incident with the golden calf where Bnei Yisrael ran to a physical god because they thought Moshe would not return, the Mishkan was necessary to maintain the nation's spirituality and closeness to Hashem. Hashem realized the nation had come to a point where they needed that physical focal point in order to continue their faith.

Vayikra, although beginning a new sefer, continues right where Shmot left off, by introducing the korbanot and the laws that pertain to them. The word 'korban', according to the Sefer Ha'ikarim, means to come close, which allows us to understand why Hashem gives the commandment to bring korbanot. Whether through atonement or praise, by giving korbanot, Bnei Yisrael were automatically bringing themselves closer to Hashem.

Not only does the introduction of korbanot bridge the gap between the two sefarim, but the parsha also sets up the theme of Sefer Vayikra. Sefer Vayikra is all about different types of mitzvot. The Talmud (Bava Metzia 28a) teaches us that 'mitzvah' comes from the word 'tzvata', which can be understood as companionship (see Brachot 6b). This definition explains the purpose of the mitzvot which were put in place to further our companionship with Hashem. Therefore, it is only fitting that Parshat Vayikra begin the sefer with its introduction of korbanot.

Even though we don't have korbanot or a Mishkan today, the other mitzvot that the Torah has commanded us to follow are there waiting in the remainder of the sefer and beyond to help bring us closer to Hashem.

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