

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd He called to Moshe, and G-d spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying:” (Vayikra 1:1) Usually, the additional word "saying" is understood to be permission (or a request) to say these words to the nation. However, since the next verse continues with "speak to the Children of Israel and say [the following] to them," this can't be the meaning or purpose of its inclusion here.

Rashi therefore brings two possible explanations as to why the first verse ends with the word "saying," with the gist of the first being that Moshe should tell the nation that G-d speaks to him for their sake. The commentators explain these words as words of encouragement. After all, the nation as a whole contributed the materials and their time and expertise to build the Mishkan. Yet, when it was completed, only Moshe was able to enter, and (as Rashi points out earlier on this verse) only Moshe heard G-d's thunderous voice. To ensure that the nation didn't become discouraged at being seemingly excluded from the inauguration process (and, in their minds, possible after that as well), Moshe was told to make sure they realize that they were an integral part of the Mishkan, as the communication he received from G-d there (or at least the high level of communication) was only in their merit.

The Tzaida Lederech questions the expression used by Rashi (and the Sifra Rashi is based on) for these words of encouragement. Rather than being called "divrei phius" (words of encouragement or appeasement), they are referred to as "divrei khivushin," which usually connotes "musser" (chastisement) or rebuke. Why would our sages classify such words of encouragement as being a reproof?

Answering as if he is unsure this is the full answer, the Tzaida Lederech says that "perhaps one can say that from these words it comes out that the [divine] word will not be with him except for the sake of Israel when they are innocent and loved before G-d but not when they sin; these [words] are therefore words of rebuke and chastisement, [telling them] that they shouldn't sin and [thereby] cause that G-d won't communicate with him." In other words, telling them that they are important also tells them that they have some

responsibility, and if they don't live up to their responsibility there will be consequences.

This idea is certainly valid, as rather than relying on Moshe for their spiritual fulfillment, they are being told that things are in their own hands. And, as Rashi points out (as well as the Midrash), we see that after their subsequent sins, G-d didn't communicate with Moshe for 38 years - until that generation died out. The hesitation in using this to explain why it is considered rebuke may stem from the timing of such rebuke. Why warn them now, on such a happy occasion, when words of encouragement seem more needed than words of rebuke? Even if rebuke is inherent in all encouragement, why classify it as such?

When Moshe was on Mt. Sinai for the first period of 40 days, his intimate experience with G-d was interrupted by the sin of the golden calf. Even though he was about to descend with the "luchos" (tablets with the 10 commandments engraved in them), Rashi (Shemos 32:7) tells us that G-d told Moshe to "descend from your great stature, [for] I only gave you such stature on their behalf." This conversation is based on Berachos 32a, but Rashi continues based on the Tanchuma (22) that "at that moment Moshe was banned from the heavenly court." The rebuke was therefore not only about what might happen if they sin, but also about what had already happened. Because Moshe's connection with G-d, on the extremely high level that it was, was only because of the nation he represented, when they were not worthy of having such a connection he lost that extra level.

The Mishkan was designed not only to atone for the sin of the golden calf, but also to reestablish the relationship with G-d that had been so adversely affected by it - to the extent that the communication experienced via the Ark containing the luchos was a recreation of the experience on Mt Sinai. As Moshe was relaying the first message communicated from the Mishkan, he reminded the nation about their special relationship with G-d, including the awesome responsibility that comes along with it. The consequences of sinning were not an abstract "what if," but an allusion to what had actually taken place. By alluding to the repercussions of not maintaining this relationship - and specifically to what had already occurred and was now first being repaired - Moshe's words could more accurately be described as a rebuke that contained within it encouragement, rather than

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encouragement that (automatically) contained rebuke.  
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### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**F**undamental to the idea of the korban, which we begin reading about this week, is the power to change oneself. After all, the term korban comes from the word karov, meaning coming closer to God. Yet change is not easily accomplished. On its most basic level, the process involves a belief that one has the capacity to transform.

This capacity is implicit in the Purim story. Note how Queen Esther undergoes a fundamental metamorphosis in chapter four of the Megillah.

When told that Mordechai was in sackcloth, she wonders why. (Esther 4:4-5) At that point, Esther does not even know that the Jewish people had been threatened. She had become so insulated in the palace of the King that she did not feel the plight of her fellow Jew. Furthermore, when asked by Mordechai to intercede on behalf of the Jewish people, she refuses, claiming that the rules of the palace did not allow her to come before the King. (Esther 4:7-11)

Yet, when Mordechai rebukes her, declaring that she too would not be able to escape the evil decree, perhaps the most powerful moment of the Megillah takes place. Esther courageously declares that she would come before the King, even if it means that she would perish. (Esther 4:13-16)

Esther's Hebrew name was Hadassah. Once she becomes Queen, she adopts the Persian name Esther. This name, which means "hidden," reminds us that at the outset of her rulership, she abides by Mordechai's request to hide her Jewish identity. (Esther 2:20) But, as the narrative in chapter four reveals, she returns to her roots. At a key moment she is ready to speak out powerfully on behalf of her people. Esther

provides an important example of how change is possible.

Rabbi David Silber notes that one of the smallest words found in the Megillah, dat, is used often and teaches an important lesson about Purim. Dat means law. In Persia, the law was immutable, it could never change. And so, when Vashti refused to come before the King, Ahashverosh asks, "according to the law (dat) what shall be done to Queen Vashti. (Megillah 1:15) And when it is decided that a new Queen be selected, the Megillah once again uses the term dat-the law of selection. (Megillah 2:8) And when Haman accuses the Jews of not keeping the King's laws, again the word dat is used. (Megillah 3:8) Indeed, the decree that the Jews be killed is also referred to as dat. (Megillah 3:14-15)

Even when told of Haman's plan to destroy the Jews, Ahashverosh declares that he cannot change the prior decree that the Jews be killed. (Megillah 8:8) The law must remain. All Ahashverosh could do is allow the introduction of a new dat, a new law that stands in contradiction to, but cannot take the place of the first. (Megillah 8:13)

Rabbi Silber points out that not coincidentally, when Esther agreed to come before Ahashverosh, she declares, "I will go to the king contrary to the law (lo khe-dat)." (Esther 4:16) Esther had been so transformed that she is prepared to defy the immutable law of Persia.

The confluence of this week's portion and the Megillah reminds all of us of capacity to forge a new destiny even in the face of seemingly impossible obstacles. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

### RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

## Shabbat Shalom

**“A**nd He called to Moses and the Lord spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting" (Leviticus 1:1).

The formulation of this first verse of the third book of the Bible seems rather strange. Why does the Bible have G-d (as it were) call - or call out - to Moses and then "speak" to him? Why did the Bible merely not open with the words "And the Lord spoke to Moses" without having called him beforehand? The most classical commentary of Rashi notes that whenever a (Divine) speaking or saying or commanding is preceded by a Divine "calling" it is a sign of special love, since "calling" is the verb used by the angels who obviously had a special relationship of love with G-d.

The Midrash Sifra goes one step further, suggesting that whenever the verb of calling (Hebrew Kara) is used, it means that G-d called the individual by name twice and that the individual responded with the word hineni, which means total acceptance and acquiescence to carry out the bidding of the One who is summoning him. This midrash specifically defines G-d's calling as implying special love and encouragement of a

quick response. The proof text is the Divine call to Moses at the burning bush: "...And G-d called to Him from the midst of the bush and He said, 'Moses, Moses' and he said, 'hineni' (here am I, ready to do Your bidding with alacrity)".

What I find difficult about this exclamation is the assumption that calling one's name twice is a signal of special affection. When I think back to my childhood, when my mother of blessed memory (who was the disciplinary in the family) would call out my name once, I responded in a relaxed fashion; however, when I heard her call, "Steven, Steven" (and the second time was usually louder and even with a bit of a threatening voice), I knew I was in trouble. So what is the Midrash teaching when it insists that the calling of a name twice is a sign of special love?

I believe the meaning of the Midrash will become clear when we take note of a time honored mystical concept - which even finds expression in our Selichot prayers during the ten days of Penitence - that there are two images for every individual: the image of the person as he/she is - and the image of the person as it appears in the Divine throne of glory as part of the ethereal chariot (merkava). As Rav J.B. Soloveitchik once explained, there are in reality two yous: you as you are in this world at present, and you who you have the potential to become; this second potential image is engraved on G-d's throne of glory. Ultimately (after 120 years) we are judged in terms of how great a distance there is between those two yous, between who we are in reality and who we could have been in potential.

In the seven nuptial blessings recited under the marriage canopy and repeated at the conclusion of every festive meal during the first marital week (Sheva Berakhot), there are two blessings which seem to have the same subject, although one is short and to the point and the other is much more descriptive. The first of the two is, "Blessed are You ... who forms the human being". The one immediately following reads, "Blessed are You .... Who has formed the human being in His image, and in the image of the form of his mold has He prepared for him from it an eternal building". The first of these blessings refers to the individual as he is, who is in love and who loves his/her marriage partner; the next blessing refers to the individual as he/she can potentially become, in accordance with each of their Divine images imprinted on the throne of G-d's glory. It is this potential image that links the individual with eternity that gives the individual the potential to contribute towards the eternal building of Israel. It is also this potential image which can truly come to be realized now that each of the two individuals comprising the couple is completing his/her own being with having chosen a life's partner.

I believe that when the Almighty calls out to an individual referring to him or to her by name twice, the first name refers to the individual as he/she is and the second name refers to the individual's image imprinted

on G-d's heavenly throne; the very fact that G-d mentions the names together means that the Almighty believes that the image of the individual on earth is approaching - and certainly has the possibility of becoming identical with - his potential image of an eternal building. This is certainly a sign of Divine love, of a special relationship which must of necessity exist between such an individual and his/her Parent in Heaven. In no instance is this more evident than in the case of Moses, who developed himself to such spiritual and intellectual heights that he was able to communicate the Divine will and even the Divine words. For an individual such as Moses, the Divine call is really a vocation, a calling which will always bring the response of hineni, immediate and total fealty. © 2005 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

### RABBI NOACH WITTY

## Tayvas Noach

**S**oken English, and most languages, have slurs, diphthongs or liaisons, which join sounds and even words in order to make the flow of language smoother and less choppy. Indeed, there are many places where commentators point out that words are differently vowelized to make reading easier. However, reading the Torah requires care because there are also many words that require precision in pronunciation and where a slur would be erroneous.

In the Hebrew language, when a word ends with any one of the letters Ches, 'Ayin, or Hai, and there is a patach under the letter, we arrive at the matter of the "patach genuva," the "stolen" patach. (We deal this week with letters ending in Ches and 'Ayin, leaving the Hai for another time.)

The patach (the "ah" sound) is placed under the final consonant, but the patach does not govern that consonant, rather it is "stolen away" from the final letter and used to vowelize an invisible Aleph that is "inserted" (by pronunciation) just before the final letter. The example from this week's parsha is the word "mizbay-ach," altar. Thus, the word is not "mizbay-cha," but "mizbay-ach" (just as my name is not "No-cha") despite the presence of the patach under the last letter of the word..

In the case of a patach genuva, the emphasis when pronouncing the word is always on the penultimate (an SAT word meaning "second to last") syllable, and what Jewish grammar calls "me-le-ayl," i.e. above, retrograde, earlier in the word. In transliteration, we can show the correct stress by capitalizing the syllable as follows: miz-BAY-ach. Words with a patach genuva appear several times in Megillas Esther as well: uv-ha-GEE-'a (2: 15), ve-nish-LO-ach (3:13), he-GEE-'a (9:1), ve-NO-ach (9:17, 18), u-mish-LO-ach (9:19, 22).

Another point: when the vowel sound before the last consonant is a tzairai or chirik, there is a tendency

to add a "y" consonant sound to the middle syllable, as if there were a Yud before the last letter. Thus, the word is not "mizbai-yach" despite the tendency to bring the sounds of the syllables together. Likewise, when the penultimate (that word again) vowel is a cholam (watch a person's lips when they say Noach), you may see a "w" forming. Care should be taken when reading the Torah (and the haftarah and Megillas Esther) to pronounce the last syllable properly and precisely.

With respect to Torah reading, beauty is in the precision of the reading and not necessarily in the mellifluous succession of sounds.

Two aliyos in this weeks parsha end with HaShem's name. The unique German trop has a special way of ending the aliya in such a case, so that the notes ascend rather than descend. It is possible to adapt the general Ashkenazic trop can also be modified to signal an aliyah ending with HaShem's name.

There are at least two verses in Megillas Esther that are generally re-read with a change because we are uncertain as to how certain words are to be read. (8:11; 9:2). It is worthwhile to mark these verses in whatever edition of the megilla you are following from so that you can follow the reading as it repeats the verse without thinking that the ba'al korei has managed to elude you.

The gematriya of Amalek is 240, the same as the word "safek," doubt. It is somewhat ironic that the reading of Esther marking the eradication of Amalek should have in it these uncertain verses. I should like to suggest the following: Passion to fulfill God's will is a good thing. Amalek is marked by our Sages as the nation that tried to cool off our passion to serve God ("asher karcha baderekh," meaning "he cooled you off." See Rashi, Devarim 25:18). Perhaps by addressing the doubt and demonstrating our willingness to "go the extra mile," and avoid doubt and ensuring that we have fulfilled our obligation, we do our part to defeat Amalek and re-ignite our passion to perform God's will. © 2005 Rabbi Noach Witty

#### **MACHON ZOMET**

## **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

*by Rabbi Amnon Bazak*

**T**he text of the first chapter in the book of Vayikra raises an obvious question. The chapter, related to the subject of voluntary sacrifices, starts with the declaration, "If a man from among you offers a sacrifice to G-d, you shall bring your sacrifice from animals, from cattle, or from sheep" [Vayikra 1:2]. This seems to imply that the only permitted sacrifices from living creatures are from animals, such as cattle, and sheep. Further on, however, after the alternatives of cattle and sheep are described, it is written, "And if the sacrifice will be from a bird" [1:14]. Why wasn't this possibility of sacrificing a bird mentioned from the very beginning?

Evidently the reason is that the opening sentence refers not only to the "Olah" sacrifices described in the first chapter but to all voluntary sacrifices, including the "Shelamim" in Chapter 3. The Shelamim can only be brought from cattle or sheep, not from birds. Thus, when the Torah discusses voluntary sacrifices as a group it takes note of the common denominator of them all, and that means restricting the discussion to cattle and sheep. But this raises another question: Why in fact is there no Shelamim sacrifice from any type of bird?

The answer to this second question is related to the characteristics of the sacrifice of a bird on one hand and to the characteristics of the Shelamim on the other hand. A sacrifice of a bird seems to be of a relatively low status, as can be seen with respect to the Chatat sacrifice in Chapter 5 (an "increasing or decreasing" sacrifice). In that case, the ideal is to bring "a female sheep or a goat" [5:6]. Only "if he cannot afford a sheep" is there a possibility to "bring for his guilt, because he sinned, two turtledoves or two doves" [5:7].

Thus, while the Torah is lenient with one who cannot bring the most respectable sacrifice, it only makes this concession with respect to sacrifices that are related to atonement. This is relevant not only for the Chatat, which is an obligation if a sin was committed, but also for the Olah, which includes an element of a penance even though it is brought voluntarily. (Note that we are told with respect to the Olah "it shall be accepted for him, in order to provide atonement" [1:4].) There are various opinions as to what type of sin is atoned by the Olah, but it is clear that the reason behind the sacrifice is forgiveness. And it is necessary to provide an opportunity even for a poor person to give such a sacrifice.

The Shelamim sacrifice is different in essence. This sacrifice is completely voluntary, without any element of atonement or forgiveness at all. In two places, this sacrifice is described as "bread" [3:11; 3:16], implying that a Shelamim is an expression of giving something to G-d, without expecting anything in return. This sacrifice represents the principle of love, and for this reason the owner joins in eating it, as opposed to all the other sacrifices. Therefore, this sacrifice cannot be brought from a bird, which would show a lack of respect. The Shelamim should be brought only from a feeling of plenty and giving thanks to G-d, and one who is too poor to bring the best alternative is not expected to offer such a sacrifice. And that explains why there is no Shelamim consisting of a bird.

#### **"Do Not Forget"**

*by Rabbi Michael Broom, Head of Yeshivat Hesder*

The mitzva of remembering the actions of Amalek, which happened about 3,500 years ago, when our forefathers left Egypt, teaches us how to look at events with a proper perspective. In spite of the fact that

this took place in the distant past, we have been commanded to remember for all future generations in our hearts and with our mouth the terrible injustice that the nation of Amalek did to Bnei Yisrael. The objective is "to make us understand that anybody who causes Yisrael to suffer is hated by the Almighty, and that the degree of evil that will befall him is proportional to the level of his evil and the damage that he caused" [Sefer Hachinuch 603].

Quite often, it seems that our natural tendency is to forget harsh actions that other nations have done to us, and that we are sometimes all too willing to forgive them, in an exaggerated way. This trait may well have developed within us as a defense mechanism, a way to help us forget the bitter experiences of the past, giving us the opportunity to turn our attention to a more optimistic present and future. Modern man—and certainly one who is "post-modern"—tends to "live for the moment," in the present, which often leads to ignoring the past. The Torah teaches us to see the present through the far horizons of the past and the future. Only one who has the ability to develop such a wide-ranging vision will know how to correctly interpret current events of Bnei Yisrael.

The mitzva to remember the actions of Amalek teaches us that as Jews we are forbidden to forgive the nations that have harmed Bnei Yisrael throughout many past generations. The better we know to identify with our own culture and traditions, the more we will be able to guard our power and our pride. A nation that shows exaggerated forgiveness with respect to past events will not know how to guard its honor and its position.

The demand not to erase the memories of the past is mainly relevant to nations that harm Yisrael only because of its character as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Every generation has its own brand of Amalek. It seems that even today, in spite of the harsh terrorist attacks that we have experienced during the last four years, which caused such great loss of life, the phenomenon of forgetfulness and forgiveness has once again returned in our midst. Every time some new imaginary hope rises, we once again find ourselves in the same familiar situation of being ready to erase the past—even with respect to very recent events.

It is important for us to understand that a nation which does not know to guard its honor and disregards the past will also be treated with contempt by the other nations. Specifically on this Shabbat we must be aware that our status in the world depends on how well we remember our nation's history, both recent and in the distant past.

### **Is It Necessary to Hear the Entire Megilla?**

*by Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon, Rabbi of Southern Alon Shevut and a teacher in Yeshivat Har Etzion*

The Talmud differentiates between writing and hearing the Megillah. "If a scribe left out some letters or some verses but the reader filled them in, following the

translator, the obligation has been fulfilled... If one enters the synagogue and finds that the congregation has already read half the Megillah, he may not say, 'I will read this half with the congregation and then read the first half later.' Rather, he should read it from start to finish." [Megillah 18b]. Thus, a Megillah which has some missing words can be used, but a person who did not hear several words of the Megillah has not fulfilled the requirements.

With respect to writing a Megillah, then, if the scribe has missed several letters or even complete verses, it can still be used, as long as most of the text appears. According to the RAN, quoting the RASHBA, if the scribe has left out the first part, from the beginning of the Megillah up to the verse, "A Jewish man..." [Esther 2:5], the Megillah is invalid, even though the majority of the text exists. This was accepted by the RAMA, who wrote that a Megillah is invalidated if an entire passage (or the beginning or the end) is omitted (690:3). Of course, this law is only after the fact—the initial goal is to have the entire text of the Megillah written properly.

However, hearing the Megillah is different, as noted above. Whoever has missed hearing even one verse has not fulfilled the obligation. What if somebody missed hearing a single word? The RASHBA in his response explains that one who misses a single word or a single letter must read the Megillah a second time, but the RI'AZ wrote that this is only relevant to a letter or a word that changes the meaning of the verse. According to the Mishna Berura, most of the commentators feel that one has not fulfilled his obligation if he misses as little as a single word. It seems from Bei'ur Halacha that one who misses a single word must recite a new blessing when reading the Megillah for a second time (unless he was not distracted and reread it immediately, in which case he should not recite the blessing). Thus, it is important to pay careful attention to every word of the Megillah. This is especially important in the morning, when people are tired, since somebody who falls asleep has not fulfilled the obligation of reading.

Somebody who misses several words of the Megillah (either because of the noise surrounding the name of Haman or because he was distracted) can repeat them from a book, since one who reads a single word or phrase by heart still fulfills his obligation. This has led to the following conclusion: "It is therefore very important that everybody have a Chumash available, since when the children make noise for Haman it may be impossible to hear several words by the reader, and at least after the fact one can fulfill the obligation by reading from a book." [Magen Avraham 690:19; Mishna Berura 690:19].

Even though a Megillah is invalidated if the first or last verses are missing, one who reads these missing verses by heart has fulfilled his obligation. Therefore, one who has not heard the beginning or the end of the Megillah can read the missing parts from a

book (Bei'ur Halacha 690:3). Of course, it is best as a first choice to hear the entire Megillah read from a kosher scroll, and therefore anybody who has a scroll should hold it in front of him and follow the reading by repeating any words he does not hear directly (Mishna Berura 689:19).

Why do we insist that one must hear every letter in the Megillah? An explanation given in the Otzar Hageonim (Megillah 6a) is based on the fact that the name of G-d does not appear at all in the Megillah, in order to emphasize that the miracle at the time was a hidden one. This means that every single detail, every dot and line, no matter how insignificant it may seem, is linked to Divine guidance. All the details that at first glance seem of no importance become very significant, and they are all gathered together to form the great miracle, which was planned in advance by the Almighty.

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

It is well known that the last letter in the Hebrew word "vayikra" - the aleph, that begins this week's parsha, is written in miniature. The small aleph is a matter of note and discussion amongst biblical commentators throughout the ages. It was always seen as a symbol of the intense modesty of Moshe. It also represented the fact that God's voice, so to speak, was only heard by Moshe within the confines of the mishkan/Tabernacle and not outside of it. God is able, so to speak, to "contain" His presence in the universe in order to allow room for nature and humans to operate. This power of tzimtzum - containment, withdrawal - is the basis of kabalistic thought and its view of life and the world. But there is another explanation of the small aleph that I wish to concentrate upon.

God, so to speak, is to be seen and heard in the small things in life and not only in the large, great events. The Lord tells the prophet Eliyahu that He is not to be found in the wind, the noise of a quake, the brightness of a burning fire but rather in the still, small voice, in the sound of a whisper and not of a shout. The first luchot - the tablets of stone that Moshe brought down from Sinai were given with great noise - thunder, lightning, volcanic explosions - and they ended up being smashed to bits. The second luchot, given quietly and privately to Moshe, and from him to all of Israel, endured and were the centerpiece of the mishkan and the Temple. The still, small voice is most representative of God and his omnipotence. Science has shown us in our time that our physical appearance, if not even our longevity and health, lie in small almost invisible strands that make up our DNA. God calls out with a small aleph to his creatures - to see Him in every aspect of life, no matter how small and insignificant it may appear on its surface.

The believing Jew feels God in every step that one takes, in every smile and tear, in all of the events of

life. There are many who wait to see God only in great events, in wars and diplomacy, in natural disasters and mighty natural wonders. There is no doubt that God is to be found there but His true abode is in the still, small voice that is with us at all times and in all places. People often attempt to improve themselves, physically and spiritually, in gigantic leaps and with superhuman efforts. The surer way is to take small steps and to deal with one's self with increments of improvement and commitment. The small and modest way in life leads to the great achievement. The book of Vayikra that we begin to read this week contains hundreds of mitzvot and details of halacha. It concentrates on "small" things in order to raise us to the level of great things and Jewish eternity. May we hear the small aleph in our lives, loud and clear. © 2005 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

#### **YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

### **Virtual Beit Medrash**

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT" A .

*Adapted by Dov Karoll*

"**G**od has sworn that He will have war with Amalek from generation to generation (Shemot 17:16)."

In the reading of Shabbat Zakhor, the Torah uses the word "karekha" ("met you"-Devarim 25:18) to describe Amalek's encounter with the Israelites. The Maharal connects this word to "mikreh," chance, and explains that Amalek represents the ideology that everything in the world takes place by chance; there is no sense, order or plan to the world. Whatever you suggest or believe, the opposite is also possible and feasible. There are no absolutes, no standards.

The Torah's decree that all Amalekites need to be destroyed applies only to those Amalekites who adhere to this ideology. The Rambam rules that battle is only waged against Amalekites who have not accepted the Noachide laws (Hilkhot Hilkhot Melakhim 6:4, as interpreted by the Kesef Mishneh s.v. aval). If an Amalekite rids himself of this ideology, he is no longer deserving of death, and is to be treated like any other person.

It is important to realize that Amalek in the technical sense no longer exists, for the Gemara teaches, "Sanheriv king of Assyria long ago came and mixed up all the nations" (Berakhot 28a). Therefore, the formal mitzva no longer applies. Nevertheless, the ideology of Amalek persists, and it is represented today by postmodernism. This ideology maintains that there are no objective standards, everything is acceptable, and nothing is out of bounds.

We sometimes encounter these claims today with regard to religious pluralism. While we are open to different approaches, and we are not afraid of interaction, we need to recognize that not everything is acceptable. Some things are out of bounds, some things are invalid, and we must come out against them.

This is not to say that we do not try to understand people, to recognize where they are coming from and what they are suggesting. But it is saying that we need to realize that some things are so basic that they are not negotiable or open to debate. Even if we understand, appreciate and work with other groups, this does not mean that we accept their doctrines as viable alternatives.

The Zohar (Bereishit, Hashmatot, page 254b) on Parashat Noach tells us that after Noach exited the ark following the flood, he broke down crying, turned to God and asked God why He had destroyed the entire world rather than showing mercy upon them. God responds:

"Your foolish shepherd! Now you say this? Why did you not say this earlier?... All the warnings I gave you were meant to prompt you to ask for compassion upon humanity, yet it never crossed your mind to pray for your fellows. And now that I have destroyed the world, you open your mouth to bring requests for mercy before Me?"

The Zohar then cites Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, who asks why Noach indeed did not pray. He answers that Noach was afraid that if he prayed for the others, he might not be saved himself.

In order to pray on someone's behalf, you need to understand where they are coming from, why they are the way they are. You need to have compassion on them, for the fact that they were brought up the way they were, and for all the mitigating circumstances that led to the way they turned out. Noach was afraid that if he would try to understand the people, he would be caught up in their culture. The Charedi world largely takes this approach. We strive to take the approach advocated by God in that passage from the Zohar, to strive to understand our fellow Jews, to pray on their behalf. We need to have compassion on people who were not privileged to be raised in a religious environment, or whatever other circumstances led to their difficulties.

The Amalek approach is to consider every possibility as equally legitimate, to allow every value, along with its inverse, equal weight. We believe in absolutes, in good and evil, in making distinctions. There is one thing for which I give the current US president credit. He speaks of "evil" and not merely of the "enemy." He calls terrorism wicked, and calls for its destruction on objective grounds, rather than speaking in purely subjective terms.

We believe there is meaning in the world, and therefore oppose the ideology of Amalek even when it dresses in religious garb-for example, the claim that

everything in the world is the way it is simply because God arbitrarily and randomly decided it should be that way. This kind of approach denies the world reason and meaningfulness, and while it presents itself as "religious," it is actually the opposite.

Yet the fact that the world is meaningful does not mean that one can fully understand it rationally. Today people recognize that the mystery of the world cannot be solved fully through rational means. Neither faith nor apostasy can be proven in a laboratory, so each remains a belief based on equivocal evidence. The person who lacks faith has also reached a conclusion based on objective doubt. Nevertheless, God has "planted" within us a feeling of faith that does not demand proof.

In the Middle Ages, the Rambam and others provided objective proofs for the existence of God. In our day, some people try to provide objective proof from Bible Codes and the like. I do not engage in this, for it is not the tradition we have inherited from our forefathers, and our great commentators did not deal with things like this. Furthermore, some claim you can apply these codes equally to other books, and that you can establish all sorts of ridiculous things through them.

Regarding the creation of the world, I do not even understand the meaning of the terms "tohu" and "vohu." All I know is that God created the world with direction, giving it a purpose.

We need to give thanks to God for the fact that He provided us with the feeling of faith, and we need to have compassion on those who were not granted this gift. We need to pray for them, learning from Noach's mistake. [*This sicha was delivered at se'uda shelishit, Parashat Vayikra-Zachor 5763 (2003).*]

#### THE SALANT FOUNDATION

## Parsha Insights

by Rabbi Zvi Miller

**T**he Midrash (Vayikra Raba 1:15) says: "If a Talmid Chacham does not have a sense of discretion-a non-kosher animal is better than him. We learn the importance of discretion from Moshe. He was the father of wisdom; the father of the Prophets; he took the Jewish people out of Egypt; he brought forth many miracles in Egypt; he split the Red Sea; he ascended to the Heavens and taught the Torah to B'nai Yisrael; and he assembled the Mishkan-despite all of this! "he did not enter the Mishkan until Hashem called to him! As the Torah (Vayikra 1:1) says: And He called to Moshe."

Concerning the trait of discretion, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Lutzato writes (The Path of the Just, chapter two): "A person should contemplate and reflect on his ways and deeds...he should not follow his routine habits. Neither, should he allow himself to pursue the ongoing propensities of his life- like a horse, running headlong into battle."

The foundation of discretion is to master oneself-so that he controls and supervises all of his personality traits and natural tendencies. In light of this, if Moshe Rabenu had not withheld himself from entering the Mishkan before Hashem beckoned to him-all his numerous worthy attributes would have been nullified. For the essential quality of man is his ability to master his nature in order to act with sensitivity.

The Divine Service of the Mishkan rendered the ultimate closeness to Hashem. Indeed, the very word *korbon* means close. We can imagine how enthusiastic Moshe was to enter this unique dimension of holiness and oneness with Hashem. Nevertheless, he displayed the respect and decency to wait for Hashem to grant him permission to enter the inner sanctum.

In light of this, the secret to successful relationships is sensitivity and control of our whims and emotions-in order to best benefit others. A good sense of discretion paves the way to a harmonious interaction with the world at large, and with our friends and family, in particular.

Implement: Before acting-consider how your deeds or words will effect others. *[Based on Da'as Torah Rabenu Yerucham HaLevi, Parshas Vayikra]*

#### **RABBI LABEL LAM**

## **Dvar Torah**

**R**emember what Amalek did to you, on the way when you were leaving Egypt, that he happened upon you on the way, and he struck those who were hindmost, all the weaklings at your rear, when you were faint and exhausted, and he did not fear G-d. It shall be that when HASHEM, your G-d gives you rest from all your enemies all around, in the land that HASHEM your G-d, gives you as an inheritance to possess it, you shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heaven- you shall not forget. (Devarim 25:17-19)

That he happened upon you - ( Korchah): An expression of incidental happening; Also an expression of moral pollution...; Alternately ...They cooled you off from boiling...All the nations were afraid to battle with you and this one came and started up and showed a way for others. Like a boiling bath that no one was able to enter and comes this reckless one and just jumps in, and even though he's burnt in the process he cools it off for others. (Rashi)

On the surface it seems like a mixed message. Are we to remember Amalek or to erase his name? Maybe we would be better off to just forget, forgive, and move on. Why remember forever and then forget?

The verse asks of us to remind yourself what Amalek did to you. It is not just an historical memory as much as an environmental impact statement. Each person should take a personal accounting of how his life would be different had Amalek not been an agent in the world. We are given a profile of a movement that

opposes all that is holy and good, that preys on the weak and vulnerable, who will inject moral corruption wherever possible, and doubt about G-d when we might be tempted to be inspired. All this he does for the express purpose of diminishing the stature of G-d and His people. His opposition is so desperately rooted in his being that he hates Jews and G-d and goodness more than he loves his own life. He is portrayed as willing to burn him self in the process as capable of suicidal devotion to his ignoble cause.

Let us estimate if possible how the world, our world, our lives would look if these forces had not been active over the many centuries. How many good people have become corrupted or were destroyed?! How the goodness and the purity of the world around us is diminished as a result!? Who can measure the ever widening gap of darkness that surrounds us and the dimming affect it has- had on that light that is to be the light unto the nations!?

The story is told of baal teshuvah- returnee to Judaism that bore a hideous tattoo on his arm a symbol of his dark past that he tried to hide with all his ability. He would avoid any situation where it might become exposed but Erev Yom Kippur everyone was going to the Mikvah-ritual bath and he didn't want to deprive himself of the opportunity. He planned to go at a time when it would be least crowded and to keep a towel on his arm till the very last moment and then enter and exit as quickly as possible. When he got there it was a little more crowded than he had expected. He decided to continue with the rest of his plan, but the tile floor was wet and he was in too much of a hurry. He slipped in a dramatic way and the bustling room was suddenly deathly silent as his worst fear was realized. He was paralyzed with shame no longer able to hide when an elder Jew picked him off the floor by the hand and showing him the numbers he had etched onto his arm told him in a kindly way, "This was my *gehinom*-hell! Probably that was yours! Let us go into the Mikvah together!"

We cannot yet afford to forget or forgive. "...HASHEM maintains a war with Amalek, from generation to generation" (Shemos 17:15), and we have the scars to prove it! © 2005 Rabbi L. Lam & [www.torah.org](http://www.torah.org)

