

Yitro 5774

BS"D Parashat Yitro

Last week's parasha (Beshalach) ends with the limited defeat of Amalek at the hands of the first Jewish army, under the command of Yehoshua Bin Nun, as the Torah relates (Shemot 17,13):

וַיַּחַדְּשׁ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת־אֲמֹלֵק וְאֶת־עַמּוֹתָיו בַּחֶרֶב׃

*.And Yehoshua **weakened** Amalek and his nation by the sword*

Rashi quotes the midrash (Michilta 17) that Yehoshua was commanded to weaken Amalek by killing their most powerful soldiers but allowing the others to continue living.

Why? Is there not a mitzva to destroy Amalek and eradicate anything associated with that evil nation down to its last Volkswagen?

And why does the episode of our war against Amalek immediately precede parashat Yitro which relates Hashem's elevation of the Jewish people to the exalted position of "His Chosen Nation" – the nation chosen to be Am Yisrael, living according to Torat Yisrael, in Eretz Yisrael?

The Gemara (Rosh HaShana 18a) cites two views regarding the method employed by the Almighty in judging humanity on Rosh Hashana. One view states that every person passes individually before Hashem, just as people traversing a narrow gorge – one by one. The other states that Hashem surveys entire nations as a single panorama, just as a general reviews huge numbers of troops passing before him.

My understanding is that these are not exclusive views but ones that compliment each other in describing the reality of how the ultimate Adjudicator judges humanity. Hashem views us

initially as individuals and then as members of the collective society in which we have chosen to live. A German who lived through the Second World War as a simple clerk in a shoe store is not held accountable for what he did not do in Bergen Belsen, but he is culpable because he chose to remain part of the German collective.

Each individual Jew, man and woman, was put in this life to serve the purposes of the Creator. Each of us must abide by the 613 mitzvot of the Torah and all the rabbinic ordinances and injunctions.

In addition, Am Yisrael as the aggregate of all Jews in the world, is commanded to fulfill three cardinal mitzvot which were placed upon the community of Israel: (1) to conquer the land in the name of Am Yisrael (as Yehoshua and his generation did), (2) to establish a monarchy and (3) to eradicate the nation of Amalek.

Within each of the two components of the Jewish nation – the individual and the collective – the Almighty, in His infinite wisdom, created adversaries, challengers, opponents and antagonists who are charged with trying to prevent us from fulfilling our mission.

For the individual Jew, the antagonist who challenges us to trespass Hashem's holy commandments is the "yetzer hara." For the national collective, Amalek is the cruel, unrelenting and obsessive opponent of our obligation to conquer and settle the land and build a holy Temple to Hashem.

Herein lies the answers to the above questions. Yehoshua was commanded to permit a portion of Amalek to continue living because of their future historical role in trying to prevent the Jewish nation from establishing a God-centered society in Eretz Yisrael.

The episode of our war against Amalek immediately precedes parashat Yitro, because our achieving nationhood at Mount

Sinai was the beginning of the 5000-year-long conflict between the children of Ya'akov and the children of Aisav.

The points and counterpoints are yetzer hara vs. the yetzer tov in our personal lives, and Amalek in all its forms vs. Jewish national and religious life in Eretz Yisrael. It is the yetzer hara that distracts an individual Jew from fulfilling a mitzva. It is Amalek that places stumbling blocks and obstacles to prevent the return of the Jewish nation to our God given land, when even passive non-cooperation for our return is stained with Amalekism.

The yetzer hara and Amalek, as formidable opponents to our divine missions on Earth, are devious, resourceful and very experienced. Chazal (Avot de'Rabbi Natan 1,16 and other sources) state that an individual's yetzer hara is active from birth, whereas the yetzer hatov begins to function only upon one's bar mitzva or bat mitzva. The yetzer hara (which is actually the ego of a person) has a headstart of 13 and 12 years respectively before the individual is able to go on the offensive.

In the unfortunate, ideologically brittle and fractured state of our collective Jewish nation, one hears rabbinic interpretations of the helpless Torah -especially in regard to the status of Medinat Yisrael in our spiritual lives. A survivor of Bergen Belsen once said to me that whoever was there for even one hour now recites Hallel in Eretz Yisrael every day of his life. I fear that the teachings of Amalek have taken hold of many religious-looking people who prefer to visit Teheran rather than Yerushalayim, and who recite a blessing in their synagogues for their gentile governments but refuse to utter a prayer for the holy soldiers of Tzahal or for the holy people who carry the weight of this Medina on their shoulders every moment.

May Hashem have mercy on His chosen nation and send us the leaders who will restore us to Jewish normalcy.

Shabbat Shalom!

Nachman Kahana

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