

SHABBAT ZACHOR 5774

In Memory of Yocheved Leba Dardik

ZEH L'UMAT ZEH

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Based on the writings and shiurim of Rav Matis Weinberg: www.thelivingtree.org

"In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; G-d hath set one thing against the other (zeh l'umat zeh)" - Koheleth 7:14

This Shabbat Zachor finds itself at the nexus of three parshiot that frame our eternal war with Amalek. Beshalach introduces Amalek, and identifies who we're fighting against; Ki Tetzei is the parsha from which the pasuk of Zachor is taken, and defines what we're fighting for; and today's parsha, Tzav, describes the nature of the battle itself.

Parsha **Beshalach** opens with a quick ascent to great heights with the miracle of the Sea, in which the people declare their unending faith in Hashem and Moshe. But from there begins a rapid descent into complaints and worries about desert life, culminating in the question, "Is G-d amongst us or not?" The turnabout seems inexplicable, unless one considers that miracles themselves cause faith and doubt to go hand in hand. As Rav Matis Weinberg explains:

"Miracles are not only insufficient rationale for belief, they are actually inimical to the significance of belief. Miracles imply a world in which G-d must *assert* His presence – and if miracle is proof of the presence of G-d, then tragedy is proof of the eclipse of G-d." (FrameWorks, Beshalach)

The very next pasuk that follows "Is G-d amongst us or not?" reads, "And then came Amalek..." It is doubt that brings on Amalek, and doubt that becomes Amalek's chief weapon. Amalek did not attack Yisrael to acquire spoils or defend territory. It attacked to show the world that, Divine Providence notwithstanding, Yisrael was vulnerable. Amalek's main objective, however, was to prompt Yisrael to doubt *itself* and the specialness of its relationship with HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

"Amalek are enemies of belief, all right. But it is not philosophical belief that they battle – it is the care and significance implicit in belief. Their skepticism and doubt is only as regards the *meaning* of belief, not its veracity... This battle against significance is why Amalek's weapon of choice is cynicism – nothing more effectively dampens care, deflates significance, and cheapens relationship." (FrameWorks, Beshalach)

Beshalach, then, defines our enemy – the peddlers of cynicism and doubt, those who seek to demean us in the following sense: “demeaning by being anti-meaning, through the very detachment and indifference it presupposes.” (FrameWorks, Beshalach)

Parsha **Ki Titzei** ends with the injunction to remember Amalek who attacked us,

You shall remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you went out of Egypt (Devarim 25:17)

but opens with a war in which Israelite soldiers, as the protagonists, capture a *yefas to'ar* (beautiful woman).

If you go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your G-d, will deliver him into your hands, and you take his captives, and you see among the captives a beautiful woman (*yefas to'ar*) and you desire her, you may take [her] for yourself as a wife. (Devarim 21:10-11)

According to the Zohar Chadash, this “beautiful woman” is a “beautiful soul.” As the Ohr HaChayim elaborates:

The soldier in question is not infatuated with the body of the woman but with something inside her, her holy soul which he was able to recognize. This explains why such a woman is permitted even if she is outwardly ugly... The reason the Torah describes it as *yefas to'ar*, (beautiful) is because this soul is intrinsically very beautiful indeed and it has only disheveled herself by means of the sins committed by the body it inhabits.

Rav Matis goes a step further:

“The *yefas to'ar* is your *own* soul which has been captured and is living in a milieu that you sense is alien and you wish to free it. You find yourself in a war for it day after day. There is no way to win that war; there is only a way to fight that war. And in the fighting comes redemption, and discovery of the self. (Ki Tezei 5768)

We can now understand why parsha Ki Tezei is bookended by the battle for the *yefas to'ar* at the beginning, and the war against Amalek at the end: the only way we can defeat Amalek is by first capturing the soul of what it means to be ourselves and to be Yisrael.

Today's parsha, **Tzav**, with the *mizbeach* as its centerpiece, depicts the “field of battle” upon which the war between Yisrael and Amalek is fought. The *mizbeach* is described by the Talmud and Zohar as “a wolf” based on its position within the territory of Binyamin:

“Binyamin is a *ze’ev yitraf* (ravenous wolf); in the morning it devours its prey...”
(Bereishis 49:27)

Further, “*ze’ev yitraf*,” a ravenous wolf – for the altar was in his portion, and the altar is a wolf. For if you say that Benjamin is a wolf, not so! Rather, the *altar* in his portion was a wolf, consuming flesh every day; and Benjamin would feed it since it was in his portion. It was as if he were sustaining and feeding this wolf!
(Zohar 1:247b)

The *mizbeach* is the ultimate predator. The *korbanot* brought upon it are products of billions of years of competitive evolutionary pressures sustained by predator-prey relationships “red in tooth and claw,” resulting in species of increasing complexity, with the human being at its apex. The war between Yisrael and Amalek is merely an extension of this process, a continuation of the evolution in human consciousness.

Yisrael and Amalek are intertwined in a relationship of “*zeh l’umat zeh*” (one thing set against another). The Zohar views the concept of “*zeh l’umat zeh*” as the basis for the duality present within the universe:

“The benefit of light comes only from darkness. What always enhances white? Black. For were it not for black, white could not be recognized...R. Yitzchak said, “This may be compared to sweet with bitter, for a person does not know the taste of sweet until he tastes bitter...this corresponds to what is written: *Zeh l’umat zeh* – “One against the other G-d has set” (Zohar 3:48a)

Zeh l’umat zeh is also understood by Chazal to represent the struggle between forces of good and evil: the greater the evil, the greater the good that must be brought to overcome it. Therefore, as Amalek’s tactics in sowing doubt against Yisrael become more subtle, more cunning, more dangerous – Yisrael must respond with an increasingly discriminating and sharper understanding of itself and its purpose within Creation in order to survive:

“There’s no question that what has been achieved by Yisrael is specifically because of the threat of Amalek in the deepest sense,...an outgrowth of greater and greater pressure of selecting what it means to be Yisrael...For the first time in history, it can be appreciated what *zeh l’umat zeh* means – it’s a predator-prey relationship...” (Rav Matis: Tzav, 5771)

One might think there is a wide distance between good and evil with obvious distinctions between them. However, as the Midrash tells us, the separation can be very slight:

“*Zeh l’umat zeh*” = Hell and the Garden of Eden. What is the distance between them? A handbreadth...The Rabbis say, “They are parallel so that they will gaze at one another.” (Koheleth Rabbah 7:22)

Amalekites have honed their ability to approximate the truth so closely, that theirs often stands nearly eye-to-eye with the truth of Yisrael. A “stare-down” ensues that is part and parcel of the predator-prey relationship:

“Wolves and prey remain absolutely still while staring at each other... I think that what transpires in those moments of staring is an exchange of information between predator and prey...I call this exchange the conversation of death.” (Barry Lopez, “Of Wolves and Men”)

How does Yisrael survive this contest? Only through the antithesis of doubt: Emunah. Emunah is loosely translated as “faith” or “belief.” But it does not mean belief in the existence of G-d (Amalek, too, believes that G-d exists). Emunah cannot be a function of intellect, because any “idea” is subject to doubt. In fact, the more profound the idea, the more second-guessing it engenders. (Therefore, the greatest Torah scholars are not the ones who *have* the most emunah, but who *require* the most emunah.)

The seat of emunah is not in the brain, the organ of intellect – but in the heart, the organ of responsiveness. Indeed, our relationship with HaKadosh Baruch Hu and the Torah He gave us through Moshe Rabbeinu is all about heart:

The most important element in relating to Torah and how one observes it is in the heart. The entire written Torah is bracketed between the letters of the word, “*lev*” – i.e. between the *beis* of Bereishis and the *lamed* in Yisrael at the end. (Rabbeinu Bachya)

The heart is the core (*coeur*) that provides clarity amidst the fog of doubt:

The issue is always to define the core – not to define the immediate – because the immediate is much too complex whenever it deals with anything that’s in the gray area. Much too complex for you to be given guidelines, or to know what to do *unless* you are sure of that core. And then – the things that speak to you, the things that are demanded of you – you’ll know them. (Rav Matis, Ki Tezei 5768)

The only things we can really know, that truly speak to us, that we can absolutely trust, are affairs of the heart – experiences of love. Thus, the memory that stands as the “*zeh l’umat zeh*” against the remembrance of Amalek (“*Zecher Amalek*”) is that of the romance between G-d and Yisrael which began in the wilderness: “*Zecharti lach chesed ne’urayich.*” - “I remember for you the lovingkindness of your youth, the love of your espousals, your following Me in the desert, a land not sown.” (Yirmiyahu 2:2).

We are G-d's *yefas toar*. We are held captive in what sometimes feels like a grip from which we can't escape, but which is actually the loving embrace of one long, grand Purim story that extends from the first moments of Creation to the coming of Mashiach. And just as occurred in Shushan, we will come to discover that nothing is without meaning. Every lie, deception, tragedy, and injustice we've suffered from personally and nationally throughout history will all have its place – and one day, they will be seen to be *zeh l'umat zeh* against a truth that will burst forth with unimaginable joy and splendor:

No choreographer, no architect, engineer, or painter could plan more thoroughly and subtly. Every action and every scene has its purpose. And the less power one has, the closer he is to the great waves that sweep through all things, patiently preparing them for the approach of a future signified not by simple human equity (a child could think of that), but by luminous and surprising connections that we have not imagined, by illustrations terrifying and benevolent – a golden age that will show not what we wish, but some bare awkward truth upon which rests everything that ever was and everything that ever will be. There is justice, Peter Lake, but it cannot be had without mystery.” (Mark Helprin, *“A Winter’s Tale”*)