

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT VAYIKRA

DVAR TORAH: GAMBLING ON G-D'S WILL

One of the sacrifices in our parshah is referred to by Chazal as an אשם תלוי, a “hanging” guilt offering. It is offered by someone who is not sure he sinned, so his guilt is “hanging,” depending on whether he actually sinned or not. For instance, someone who ate one of two pieces of meat – one kosher and one non-kosher – but wasn’t sure which of the two he ate, offers an אשם תלוי.

Harav Ovadiah Sforno, זצ"ל (1475-1550, Italy), asks a powerful question. If the piece of meat the man ate was actually the kosher one and there was really no need for atonement, doesn't that make the sacrifice itself problematic? Is it not prohibited to bring חולין, non-sacrificial animals into the עזרה, the inner area of the Beit Hamikdash? If he did not actually sin, the sacrifice was really unnecessary. It follows that the animal would be prohibited to bring into the Beit Hamikdash and certainly could not be offered on the altar as a sacrifice.

The Torah itself, says the Sforno, answers this question. The Torah closes the passage of the doubtful sin offering with a verse that seems totally repetitive: "אָשָׁם הוּא, אָשָׁם אָשָׁם לָהּ" – “It is a guilt offering; he incurred guilt towards G d” (Vayikra 5:19). Explains the Sforno: Even though there are times that this sacrifice will end up being brought even though the person didn't actually transgress – in our case, because he might not have eaten the non-kosher meat – one should not be worried that this constitutes the prohibited action of bringing non-sanctified items into the Beit Hamikdash. This is because "אָשָׁם הוּא" – he is guilty merely for doing a questionably prohibited act, even though he did not necessarily commit the sin in question (eating non-kosher meat). This is because "אָשָׁם אָשָׁם לָהּ" – he incurred guilt towards G d for not being careful about questionable activity.

This comment by the Sforno is quoted in the halachic literature about the halachic principle "ספק דאורייתא לחומרא" – “When there is doubt about a biblical level law one must err on the side of stringency.” Apparently the Torah itself sometimes demands steering clear of the gray area. We should not gamble on whether we'll go against G-d's Will or play halachic Russian Roulette.

Rabbeinu Yonah, זצ"ל, the author of the Shaarei Teshuvah, (quoted on the first page of his students' commentary on the Rif in Berachot) echoes this warning. He cautions that after Shabbat – especially on a cloudy day – people should wait until they are absolutely certain that Shabbat is over before they do any of the prohibited Shabbat activities.

He points out that the Torah treats doing a doubtful sin with more severity than [unknowingly] doing a certain one; the minimum required sacrifice for a doubtful sin is 48 times more expensive than that for a certain sin. He explains why: One who knows he sinned will regret and repent. But one who is not sure he actually sinned is likely to rationalize that he really has no need to do teshuvah. Avoiding doubtful sins, says Rabbeinu Yonah, is an expression of our fear and awe of G-d. Our relationship with G-d is precious enough that we do not want to gamble on whether we go against His Will.

SOURCE GUIDE: STRAIGHT THINKING, CROOKED THINKING

The Shem Mishmuel (Harav Shmuel Bornshtein, זצ"ל, the Sochotchover Rebbe, 1855-1926) raises the following five questions about Amalek and Parshat Zachor:

1. Why do we fulfill the mitzvah of remembering Amalek specifically on Shabbat?
2. Why does the Midrash compare Amalek to a glass of vinegar?
3. Why does the Torah place remembering Amalek immediately after the unjust weights and measures?
4. What is the meaning of the name "Amalek"?
5. What characteristic made Amalek such an arch-enemy of the Jewish People and G-d Himself?

The answers all connect to a theme developed in a number of passages throughout the work.

A. Shabbat and Amalek: Wine and Vinegar

1. Shabbat and Amalek: Even though, as the author of the Sefer Hachinuch explains, the biblical obligation to remember Amalek need not be fulfilled on Shabbat, and perhaps remembering Amalek once every few years would be sufficient, Chazal instituted doing it on Shabbat through Parshat Zachor:

<p>1. Sefer Hachinuch – Mitzvah 603 In all Jewish areas we read the entire Torah scroll over one, two, or at least in three years; so they fulfill this mitzvah (through reading the passage in the Torah about Amalek). Perhaps we can suggest that the custom to read Parshat Zachor on one special Shabbat each year is a fulfillment of this mitzvah on a biblical level – and that is why they instituted it. It is always read on the Shabbat preceding Purim. Really it would have been appropriate to read it on Purim itself because it is in line with the theme of the day; but in order to make it clear that even before that miracle we had been commanded, they instituted to read it before Purim ...</p>	<p>ספר החינוך - מצוה תרג והנה בכל מקומות ישראל קוראים ספר התורה בשנה אחת או בשנים או שלש לכל הפחות והנה הם יוצאים בכך מצוה זו. ואולי נאמר כי מנהגן של ישראל בפרשת זכור לקרותה בשבת מיוחד בכל שנה תורה היא ומפני מצוה זו היא שקבעו כן, והוא השבת שלפני פורים לעולם, ודין יהיה לקרותה ביום פורים לפי שהוא מענינו של יום כי המן הרשע היה מזרעו, אבל להודיע שקודם נס זה נצטוינו בזכירה זו קבעו הפרשה קודם לפורים ...</p>
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[The Shem Mishmuel suggests a reason why they chose to institute reading it specifically on Shabbat – see below.]

2. Wine and vinegar: remembering Shabbat and remembering Amalek:

<p>2. Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer Chapter 4 A cup of fine wine is not the same as a cup of vinegar. One is a cup and the other is a cup; [but] one is "Remember to keep and sanctify the Shabbat day," and the other is "Remember to destroy and cut off the descendants of Amalek."</p>	<p>פרקי דרבי אליעזר פרק מג לא דומה כוס של קונדיטון לכוס של חומץ, זה כוס וזה כוס, זה זכור לשמור ולקדש את יום השבת וזה זכור להשמיד ולהכרית את כל זרעו של עמלק.</p>
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3. Unjust weights and measures and Amalek – the Torah juxtaposes them:

<p>3. Devarim 25:15-17 (13) You should not have in your pouch two different weights, one big and one small. (14) You should not have in your home two different ephah measures, one big and one small. (15) You should instead have a full and honest weight; you should have a full and honest ephah measure, in order that your days will be prolonged on the land which Hashem your G-d gives you. (16) For anyone who does these, anyone who does injustice, is an abomination of Hashem your G-d. (17) Remember everything that Amalek did to you when you left Egypt. Rashi's Commentary on Devarim 25:15-17 If you lie about measures and weights be worried about the enemy attacking.</p>	<p>דברים כה:יג-יז (יג) לא יהיה לך בכיסך אבן ואבן גדולה וקטנה. (יד) לא יהיה לך בביתך איפה ואיפה גדולה וקטנה. (טו) אבן שלמה וצדק יהיה לך איפה שלמה וצדק יהיה לך למען יאריכו ימיך על האדמה אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך. (טז) כי תועבת ה' אלקיך כל עשה אלה כל עשה עול. (יז) זכור את אשר עשה לך עמלק בצרד בצאתכם ממצרים. רש"י על דברים כה:טו-יז אם שקרת במדות ובמשקלות הוי דואג מגרוי האויב.</p>
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Why, though, is specifically Amalek the enemy the Torah chooses to mention here?

B. Amalek and Crookedness

The following selection, where the Shem Mishmuel quotes his father, Harav Avraham of Sochotchov, זצ"ל, leads to an answer of our second, fourth, and fifth questions:

<p>5. Shem Mishmuel Tetzaveh-Zachor 5672 My honored and holy father and rebbe said that the name Amalek is associated with עקל, crookedness. This is the opposite of Yaakov, who is referred to as Yisrael and Yeshurun, both connected with ישר, straight and upright. This explains why the Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer says that Amalek is the opposite of Shabbat, highlighted by "remember" being written in conjunction with both. Shabbat is compared to a cup of wine and Amalek to a cup of vinegar, for vinegar began as wine, became spoiled.</p>	<p>שם משמואל פרשת תצוה וזכור שנת תרע"ב והנה עמלק אמר כ"ק אבי אדומו"ר שהוא מלשון עקל ועקלקלות, היפוך יעקב הנקרא ישראל וישרון מלשון ישר. וזה שאיתא בפדר"א שעמלק הוא היפוך לשבת, שבוה כתיב זכור ובוה כתיב זכור, ומשל את שבת לכוס של יין ועמלק לכוס של חומץ, שחומץ הוא נמי מתחילתו יין אלא שמקולקל.</p>
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The Shem Mishmuel was the grandson of the Kotzker Rebbe, זצ"ל, Harav Menachem Mendel Morgenstern (1787-1859 Poland). He quotes a sharp comment by his grandfather:

<p>6. Shem Mishmuel Tetzaveh-Zachor 5672 Through this I understood what he told me in confidence that he heard from my honored and holy grandfather, of holy and blessed eternal memory of Kotzk. He said that there is a negative force (קליפה) that draws a man to crooked thinking in Torah and one must be wary of it. I assume that this stems from the negative force of Amalek.</p>	<p>שם משמואל פרשת תצוה וזכור שנת תרע"ב ובזה הבנתי מה שאמר לי ביהוד ששמע מפי כ"ק זקני צללה"ה מקאצק שיש קליפה המושכת את האדם לשכל עקום בתורה וצריכין להשמר מזה, ולפי השערתי מסתעף זה מקליפת עמלק.</p>
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Of course Shabbat is a natural choice for scheduling a public Torah reading, but there are also inner reasons to fulfill the mitzvah to remember Amalek specifically on Shabbat:

<p>7. Shem Mishmuel Tetzaveh-Zachor 5672 Shabbat is referred to as Yaakov's inheritance, for he is upright, the opposite of the negative force of Amalek. On Shabbat we merit pure mind, for Shabbat is referred to as holy, the source of wisdom, as is known through the Zohar ... Therefore we begin remembering Amalek on Shabbat.</p>	<p>שם משמואל פרשת תצוה וזכור שנת תרע"ב והנה שבת היא נחלת יעקב שהוא ישר היפוך קליפת עמלק, ובשבת זוכין לשכל הנבדל, כי שבת נקרא קודש מקור החכמה כידוע בזוהר ... ע"כ מתחילין זכירת עמלק בשבת.</p>
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Amalek reaches a level of falsehood that his grandfather Esav did not:

<p>8. Shem Mishmuel Tetzaveh-Zachor 5675 Esav is likened to a pig stretching forth its hoofs showing how kosher it is (though it does not chew its cud and is therefore non-kosher, see Bereishit Rabbah 65). Esav is the source of falsehood. ... From Esav falsehood, flattery, and hypocrisy comes into the world. Nevertheless he at least knew that he was lying and consciously tricking people. But the negative force of Amalek is even worse. Amalek began by inheriting the trait of falsehood from Esav. The Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer describes how Amalekites stood outside of the cloud, called out to Israel by name to do business; and after deceitfully convincing them to leave the cloud, killed them ... Therefore, if you cheat in measures and weights worry about the enemy attacking, as Rashi says. But besides this, Amalek has a double falsehood, that is so crooked that they call bad good, and deceive even themselves into thinking that even with all of the abominations in the world they are still righteous and upright. That is utter falsehood, the exact opposite of Yaakov Avinu who was totally true and upright.</p>	<p>שם משמואל פרשת תצוה וזכור שנת תרע"ה והיינו דהנה עשו הוא כמו חזיר פושט טלפיו ומראה שהוא טהור (כבב"ר פ' ס"ה), והוא מקור השקר, ובמד"ר (שם פ' ס"ג) ויקראו שמו עשו הא שוא שבראתי בעולמי, כי ממנו מדת השקר והחנופה והצביעות בעולם, ומ"מ בעצמו עכ"פ ה' יודע שהוא שקר אלא שמרמה לבריות, וקליפת עמלק עוד קשה הימנו, שחוזק מזה שיש בו מדת השקר ירושה מעשו ובא ברמאות ושקר, כמ"ש בפדר"א שעמד לו מחוץ לענן והי' קורא לישראל בשמם לעשות אתו מסחר וקנין עד שרימה אותם לצאת מן הענן והרגם ... וע"כ אם שקרת במדות ומשקלות הוי דואג מגירוי האויב כברש"י (סוף פ' תצא), עוד הוא שקר כפול ומכופל שהוא מעוקל כ"כ עד שאומר לרע טוב, ומטעה את עצמו ג"כ שעם כל התועבות שבעולם מחזיק עצמו לצדיק וישר, והנו שקר מוחלט מכל צד היפוך יעק"א ע"ה שהי' אמת וישר לגמרי.</p>
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The swindler who cheats through false weights and measures brings on an attack by the ultimate cheater, Amalek. Amalek's power is felt wherever truth is perverted. Amalek, the height of falsehood, is the exact opposite of Yaakov, the symbol of truthfulness. Amalek's vinegar stands in sharp contrast to Shabbat's cup of fine wine, especially on Shabbat Zachor, when during Shabbat, the holy source of pure wisdom, we remember to avoid anything associated with Amalek's crooked way of thinking.

CONTEMPLATE TO ILLUMINATE BY RABBI YITZCHAK HIRSHFELD

Rashi, at the beginning of Parshat Vayikra, tells us how Hashem taught Moshe the laws of the Torah. After each law, before going on to the next, He would stop speaking to give Moshe ample time to consider and contemplate what he had just heard. And, adds Rashi, if this is true of the greatest prophet learning directly from G-d Himself, how much more so when ordinary people learn from ordinary people.

What is the point of this contemplation, this התבוננות? Why is it so important?

The Navi Yirmiyahu proclaims in the name of Hashem, "כִּה דְבַרִי כַאֲשֶׁר נֵאֱמָר" – "My word is likened to fire, says Hashem" (Yirmiyahu 23:29). The Ramchal in Derech Eitz Hachaim explains: the analogy is to a hot coal. On the surface the coal may seem dark and lifeless, but when we blow on it, when we fan that coal, a flame of life and light emerges. The more we blow, the more the inner flame bursts forth and illuminates.

תורה אור – Torah is light. But the light is inner, concealed. Words of Torah, to use another metaphor, are מתוקים מדבש, sweeter than honey. Yet the nectar is available only to those who toil to know her secrets. Contemplation is the search for that inner light which we know exists even before we've begun to hear the word.

We are approaching Purim and Pesach. We are approaching Purim and Pesach. Words of Torah, in halachah and in aggadah, abound all about us – but don't just listen passively. Take those words. Repeat them. Roll them over in your tongue. Fan the coal with your very own breath. With Hashem's help, the light of Torah will be your constant source of light.

We conclude with a prayer. May the redemption, hidden deep in the recesses of our difficult times soon burst forth to illuminate the dawning of a new day, the era of Mashiach Tzideinu, may he come speedily in our day.

We continue to pray for a רפואה שלימה, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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