

In this week's *Parashah*, Aharon and his sons are appointed to serve as *Kohanim*. Hashem commands Moshe (28:1), "And you, bring Aharon your brother near to yourself . . ." On this, *Midrash Rabbah* comments: Thus it is written (*Tehilim* 119:92), "Had your Torah not been my preoccupation, then I would have perished in my affliction." [Until here from the *Midrash*]

What is the connection between our verse and that verse in *Tehilim*? R' Moshe Shick *z"l* (1805-1879; a leading rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Hungary) explains:

Pirkei Avot (1:2) teaches that the world stands on three pillars: Torah study, *Avodah* / the sacrificial offerings, and *Gemilut Chassadim* / performing acts of kindness. Moshe Rabbeinu excelled in two of these--he taught *Bnei Yisrael* Torah and he performed *Chessed*, looking out for *Bnei Yisrael's* material needs. The third pillar needed to keep the world going was not Moshe's responsibility--it was Aharon's. Therefore, Hashem told Moshe, "And you," who are responsible for two of the three pillars, "bring Aharon your brother near to yourself."

R' Shick continues: That is all very well when there is a *Bet Hamikdash*. However, when there is no Temple, what becomes of the *Avodah* pillar? The *Gemara* (*Menachot* 110a) answers that if one learns the laws of the sacrifices, it is as if he as offered them. This is what the *Midrash* alludes to: Bring Aharon, the pillar of *Avodah* close. And, when there is no *Avodah* in the literal sense, Torah study takes its place. "Had your Torah not been my preoccupation, then I would have perished in my affliction." (*Derashot Maharam Shick* No. 76)

Parashat Zachor & Purim

"Moshe said to Yehoshua, 'Choose people for us and go do battle with Amalek . . .'" (*Shmot* 17:9--from the Torah reading for *Purim*)

Rashi z"l comments on the word "us": "For me and for you." Moshe placed Yehoshua on the same level as himself. Our Sages derive from here the teaching: "Let your disciple's honor be as dear to you as your own." [Until here from *Rashi*]

R' Shmuel Yaakov Borenstein *z"l* (1946-2017; *Rosh Yeshiva* of *Yeshivat Kiryat Melech* in *Bnei Brak*, Israel) asks: Why is this lesson taught in this context? Surely it is not by chance.

He explains: *Midrash Rabbah* refers to Amalek as a "Letz," a scoffer and mocker. A *Letz* has the ability to destroy a moment of inspiration. [Imagine, for example, hearing an inspiring *Derashah* / sermon and resolving to act on the rabbi's message, only to have your enthusiasm cooled by a wisecrack from the person sitting next to you.] That is what Amalek did. We read in the aftermath of *Kri'at Yam Suf* / the Splitting of the Sea (*Shmot* 15:14-15), "Peoples heard--they were agitated; terror gripped the dwellers of Philistia. Then the chieftains of Edom were confounded, trembling gripped the powers of Moav, all the dwellers of Canaan dissolved." But not Amalek! Our Sages liken Amalek to someone who jumps into a scalding bath; though he gets burnt, he cools the water for others. Similarly, Amalek was defeated, but its attack stripped the aura of invincibility from *Bnei Yisrael*, cooling off the fear of G-d that had gripped all of the nations.

R' Borenstein continues: We read (18:1), "And Yitro heard," and then he came to join *Bnei Yisrael*. What did Yitro hear? *Rashi* writes: "*Kri'at Yam Suf* and the war of Amalek." R' Borenstein explains: From the fact that Amalek was not moved by *Kri'at Yam Suf*, Yitro understood how low a person can fall when he does not have a connection to a *Rebbe* / spiritual mentor. Therefore, he came to Moshe.

R' Borenstein concludes: The encounter with Amalek teaches us the importance of having a mentor. Therefore, it is also an appropriate place to remind mentors of the respect they should show their students.

(*Zot L'Yaakov: Megillat Esther* p.131)

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“This is the *Davar* / thing that you shall do for them to sanctify them to minister for Me . . .” (29:1)

Midrash Rabbah on this verse states: The Jewish People say to *Hashem*, “Without *Korbanot* / sacrificial offerings, how will we achieve atonement?”

Hashem answers: “I want your *Devarim* / words, as it is written (*Hoshea* 14:3), ‘Take *Devarim* / words with you and return to *Hashem*.’ ‘*Devarim*’ means *Divrei Torah*, as it is written (*Devarim* 1:1), ‘These are the *Devarim* that Moshe spoke’.”

The Jewish People reply: “What if we do not know words of Torah?”

Hashem responds: “Cry and pray before me, and I will accept it. Is this not what I did when your ancestors were subjugated in Egypt? Is this not what I did in the days of the *Shoftim* / Judges? Is this not what I did in the days of the prophet Shmuel? etc. I do not ask for *Korbanot*, only for *Devarim* / words [of prayer].” [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R’ Chaim Friedlander z”l (1923-1986; *Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Ponovezh Yeshiva) writes: The importance of prayer is one of the key lessons of *Megillat Esther*, as well. We read (*Esther* 4:1), “Mordechai learned of all that had been done, and Mordechai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes. He went out into the midst of the city, and he cried loudly and bitterly.” Mordechai’s sackcloth with ashes and his crying were modes of prayer. Only after beginning to pray did he communicate with Esther about a plan to defeat Haman’s plot.

This is the opposite of how we typically behave, R’ Friedlander observes. When we are in trouble, we usually devise a plan to save ourselves, and then we pray that our plan should succeed. That is not what Mordechai did. He understood that *Hashem* often brings troubles upon us as a way of getting our attention when we have become distant from Him. *Hashem* wants us to pray and return closer to Him. Therefore, while Mordechai needed to engage in *Hishtadlut* / making an effort to overturn the decree, he knew that the most important thing he could do was to pray.

We read further (*Esther* 4:4), “She sent garments to clothe Mordechai so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them.” The *Vilna Gaon* (R’ Eliyahu z”l; 1720-1797) explains that Esther wanted Mordechai to remove his sackcloth and enter the palace, so together they could devise a plan to overturn the decree. Even for that purpose, Mordechai refused to interrupt his prayers, for the reason just explained.

This explains, as well, why Mordechai re-donned his sackcloth after Haman had led him through the streets on Achasveirosh’s horse, R’ Friedlander writes. We sometimes make the mistake of stopping to pray when we see that our troubles are about to pass. But, if we understood that the purpose of troubles is to reconnect us with *Hashem*, we would want to hold on to our new connection to Him even after our troubles have passed.

(*Sifte Chaim: Mo’adim* II p.179-181)

“In the *Ohel Mo’ed* / Tent of Meeting, outside the *Parochet* / Partition that is near the *Edut* / Testimonial-tablets, Aharon and his sons shall arrange it from evening until morning, before *Hashem* . . .” (27:21)

Here, the *Ohel Mo’ed* is mentioned before the *Parochet*, but when the *Menorah* is discussed in *Parashat Emor* (*Vayikra* 24:3), the order is reversed: “Outside the *Parochet* of the *Edut*, in the *Ohel Mo’ed*, Aharon shall arrange it, from evening to morning, before *Hashem*, continually . . .”

R’ Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z”l (1865-1935; first *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*) explains: *Mitzvot* can be divided into two categories--those that primarily involve action and those that primarily involve the “heart.” [Examples of the former include *Lulav*, *Tefilin*, and *Tzitzit*. Examples of the latter include believing in, loving, and fearing *Hashem*]. When a *Mitzvah* primarily involves action, one fulfills it on some level even if he does not have the proper thoughts. However, a *Mitzvah* of the “heart” is not fulfilled without using the intellect.

The *Mishkan* and *Bet Hamikdash* each consisted of three areas: (1) the *Chatzer* or *Azarah* outdoors, where nearly all of the physical activity relating to the sacrifices took place; (2) the *Kodesh Ha’kodashim* / Holy of Holies, the innermost sanctum where the Torah was stored; and (3) the in-between area, known as the *Kodesh* or *Heichal*, where the *Menorah*, among other things, stood. R’ Kook writes: The *Menorah* was not placed in the *Azarah*, the place of action, to teach us that physical *Mitzvot* are acceptable to *Hashem* even when they are not coupled with the “light” of the intellect, which the *Menorah* represents. On the other hand, the *Menorah* was not placed in the *Kodesh Ha’kodashim*, because that would imply that the light of the intellect is completely beyond the reach of, and irrelevant too, nearly all Jews. Instead, it was placed halfway, in the in-between area--“In the *Ohel Mo’ed*, outside the *Parochet*,” as our verse states.

That was from *Bnei Yisrael*’s perspective, R’ Kook continues. But, from the perspective of someone like Moshe Rabbeinu, whose intellect was completely attached to *Hashem*, the *Menorah* could just as well have been inside the *Kodesh Ha’kodashim*. Therefore, the Torah describes it also as being “Outside the *Parochet* of the *Edut*, in the *Ohel Mo’ed*,” i.e., not in the *Kodesh Ha’kodashim*, but not all the way outside either. (*Me’orot Ha’Rayah: Chanukah* p.64)

“They shall make the vestments of Aharon, to sanctify him to minister to Me.” (28:3)

Midrash Rabbah derives from the verse (*Tehilim* 119:89), “*Hashem* exists forever; Your word stands firm in heaven,” that the sanctity of the *Kohanim* is eternal. R’ Shmuel Wosner z”l (1913-2015; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Bnei Brak and a leading *Halachic* authority) explains: The sanctity of the *Kohanim* is passed down from generation to generation. Who is to say that it will always be preserved? Therefore, *Hashem* says: Just as I decreed that there should be a Heaven, so I am decreeing that the sanctity of the *Kohanim* will exist eternally.

(*Tehilim Shevet Ha’Levi*)

– Our focus on “*Shabbat*” will resume *iy”H* after *Pesach*. –