

Parashat Beshalach, 5779, 2019:

*Look to the Heavens*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheil, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Mordechai ben Miriam Tovah, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The concluding section of our *parasha* contains the account of our ancestors' mortal combat with Amalek, the marauding desert tribe that sought to destroy us after our departure from Egypt. The narrative begins with a *pasuk* that reverberates until our own historical moment: "Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim." (*Sefer Shemot* 17:8, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*). Moshe immediately recognized the gravity of the situation, and quickly responded to this existential threat against our fledgling nation:

So, Moses said to Joshua, "Pick men for us, and go out and fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of G-d in my hand;" Joshua did as Moses had told him, to fight against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur ascended to the top of the hill. (17:9-10)

Moshe's reaction is swift and immediately understandable. The next verse, however, is quite difficult to comprehend: "It came to pass that when Moses would raise his hand, Israel would prevail, and when he would lay down his hand, Amalek would prevail." The question is clear, "Why would Moshe raising or lowering his hand have anything to do with our people's success or failure in their battle against Amalek?" Not too surprisingly, parallel versions of this question have been asked by *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory) in both the *Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael* and *Mishnah Rosh Hashanah* III:8. The answer given by the *Mechilta* is particularly pertinent to our discussion:

And is it possible that Moshe's hands could make the Jewish people victorious, or could they destroy (literally, "break") Amalek? Rather [this is what the raising of Moshe's hands actually means]: Whenever Moshe would raise them toward Heaven, the Jewish people would look upon

him, and believe (*u'ma'aminim*) in the One who designated Moshe to act in this manner. For at those times, the Holy One blessed be He would perform miracles and mighty deeds for them. (*Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, Mesechta d'Amalek I, s.v. v'hayah ka'asher*, translation and brackets my own)

In my estimation, the *Mechilta* is teaching us that Moshe's hands pointing heavenward were heuristic devices to teach our ancestors to believe in Hashem and understand, "Not by military force and not by physical strength, but by My spirit, says the L-rd of Hosts." (*Sefer Zechariah 4:6*) After all, there appeared to be no way an untrained and inexperienced band of Jewish guerrilla fighters could possibly win a pitched battle against Amalek's impeccably skilled soldiers — whose stock-in-trade was murder and mayhem. Yet, when they looked toward *Shamayim* and focused upon the immanent presence of the Almighty in their lives, they won! Moshe passionately wanted the Jewish people to realize that there is one place, and one place only, from which authentic salvation will come. As *Dovid HaMelech* proclaimed:

I shall raise my eyes to the mountains, from where will my help come? My help is from the L-rd, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to falter; Your Guardian will not slumber. Behold the Guardian of Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The L-rd is your Guardian; the L-rd is your shadow; [He is] by your right hand. (*Sefer Tehillim 121:1-6*)

Although, thank G-d, the actual tribe of Amalek no longer exists, its successors continue to infect humanity with their vitriolic hatred. This idea was given powerful voice by my rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal*, in his synopsis of the dark forces that continue to drive the Amalek way of life:

At a Mizrahi convention I cited the view expressed by my father [Rav Moshe Soloveitchik *zatzal*] and master of blessed memory, that the proclamation, "The L-rd will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16) does not only translate into the communal exercise of waging obligatory war against a specific race but includes as well the obligation to rise up as a community against any people or group that, filled with maniacal hatred, directs its enmity against Kenneset Israel [the Jewish people].

When a people emblazons on its banner, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation: that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance" (Psalms 83:5) it becomes, thereby, Amalek. In the 1930's and 1940's the Nazis, with Hitler at their head, filled this role. They were the Amalekites, the standard-bearers of insane hatred and enmity during the era just past. ("*Kol Dodi Dofek*," pages 65-66 from the English translation entitled *Fate and Destiny*, underlining my own)

We must never forget that anti-Semitism, and the denial of the existence of Hashem, are the principles — by which and for which — Amalek lives. Moreover, Amalek has one undeniable goal: to destroy each and every one of the Jewish people so that G-d's name, *chas v'shalom* (G-d forbid), would be obliterated from the world. Therefore, we must ever be vigilant, and stand shoulder to shoulder to ensure the physical and spiritual safety of our fellow Jews, wherever they may be. Perhaps, then, no truer expression was ever spoken by *Chazal* than *kol Yisrael arevim zeh l'zeh* (all of the Jewish people are responsible for one another). May the time come soon when these words will serve as a beacon of light as we join together and witness the fulfillment of *Dovid HaMelech's* stirring words: "This was from the L-rd; it is wondrous in our eyes." (*Sefer Tehillim* 118:23) *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.