

Beshalach: Two Wars

- Nisson Shulman.

Egypt tried to destroy us physically. So HASHEM YILACHEM LACHEM. But Amalek tried to crush us spiritually. So we had to fight that battle ourselves. It is not so clear-cut in history, but we can find many instances of this nevertheless. Israel's wars for survival vs. our war against assimilation, intermarriage and ignorance. The second victory is completely up to us. Hashem will not fight this battle for us.

BESHALACH: TWO WARS

In our early history, we fought two wars. The first was with the Egyptians, who chased after us when we left Egypt, and the Almighty drowned them in the sea; As Moshe said, Hashem will fight for you and you shall stand by in silence.

The second war was against Amalek. There we were commanded to choose men and go out to fight against Amalek.

There is an old question. Why were we to be passive against the Egyptians and active against Amalek? On the one hand we were to do nothing, *hityatzvu ureu et yeshuat Hashem*, and on the other hand, against Amalek Hashem required us to go out and fight: *Behor lanu anashim*. In fact in the Amalek war, the only connection with Hashem is Moshe's upraised hands...

Furthermore, doesn't it say, *milchama baHashem baAmalek midor dor*? It is a war of Amalek against Hashem, so why doesn't He fight His battles?

The answer is that it is as if there is a treaty, an agreement between Hashem and Israel, and the terms of the agreement, insofar as the wars in the Torah are concerned, are as follows:

1. Whenever the Jewish people are threatened physically, Hashem Himself defended them.
2. But when the honor of Hashem Himself was threatened, we Jews had to do the fighting.

In the war of Egypt, the Jews were physically endangered. They were between Pharaoh and the sea. So God fought for them.

Amalek fought against Hashem and what He stands for. *Vayisu miRephidim – rafu yedeyhem min hatorah, vayezanev.... Banehshalim*. In such a case Hashem requires the Jews to fight for Him.

So it is in the Torah. But to apply this to subsequent history is harder, because history, with all its seeming simplicity, is one of the universe's mysteries of which man only catches glimpses of explanations. But we can take examples from history and point out that:

1. All the wars Israel has fought during its existence, seem to be brilliant military campaigns, yet according to all logical calculations Jews could never have won the war of independence, the Six

Day War, the Yom Kippur war, to cite three examples. We would never have won but for God's intervention, because with all brilliance, courage, strategy, etc., when you consider the forces arrayed against us, as well as the potential forces that did not go out against us if Arabs had truly united, we can readily perceive the yeshuat Hashem.

2. But when the forces of intermarriage, assimilation, and ignorance threaten belief in Hashem itself, that war is surely against what He stands for and against the destiny and mission of our people. When we see vayezanev acharecha kal haneheshalim bach, we clearly recognize that the fight for the preservation of Judaism here and everywhere in the world, even in Israel, is a spiritual one. In such a case we cannot expect the Almighty to do battle for us. This is not a battle we can leave to the Ribono shel olam!

The Baal Shem Tov was once asked: Since the Talmud declares that for everything prohibited there is a parallel that is permitted, kol ma deasar rachamana, hitir lanu de kavatey; the converse is also true. If so, is there anytime you are not permitted to have bitachon? Is there any time when it is forbidden to say, "I have faith in Hashem?" And he answered, yes; when you see a Jew falling away from his people through ignorance or indifference; when you see our people losing our spiritual gifts, you are not permitted to say, "I have faith in Hashem. He will take care of us". We are required to do battle against these forces ourselves.

These words surely apply to us. We cannot complacently regard the frum world of Brooklyn, parts of Manhattan, New Jersey, and think that we have "made it". For every faithful Jew growing in Torah and Yirat Shamayim even in these communities themselves, there are many neheshalim. So this is not a time for bitachon! This is a time for care, concern, and outreach! Here we cannot say, with David as he faced Goliath, "The battle is the Lords!" the battle is ours, and only if we recognize this, will the victory be ours.