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PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Beshalach ✍️ Rabbi Akiva Niehaus

Is Amalek Within Us ?

In this week's parsha, we find the story of Amalek's attack. Rashi explains that the reason for the attack was that the Bnai Yisroel questioned and doubted Hashem's presence and authority by inappropriately demanding drinking water in the desert. Hashem, therefore, sent Amalek to attack them, thus requiring Bnai Yisroel to daven to Hashem and accept His power and authority. This is further explained with a mashal (parable) of a man walking on the road carrying his son on his shoulders. The son repeatedly asks his father to fetch him items, and then has the audacity to ask a passerby if he has seen his father in the vicinity. The father declares, "If you are unaware of my presence, then fend for yourself!" The son is then unceremoniously dropped on the ground whereupon he is bit by a dog.

Thus we see that Amalek was sent due to a lack of Emunah on the part of Bnei Yisroel. Elsewhere, Rashi gives an entirely different reason for Amalek's attack. In Parshas Ki Seitze, the Torah mentions the story of Amalek after discussing the obligation of businesses to have accurate weights. Rashi (Devarim 25:17) explains that from here we can deduce that dishonest business practices caused Amalek to attack. How can we reconcile these two reasons?

Rabbi Aryeh Finkel Shlita gives the following explanation. The Ramban (end of Parshas Bo) lists three groups of apikorsim. The third category consists of people that believe that although Hashem created the world and is aware of its continued existence, He has no control over day-to-day life. They do not believe in hashgacha pratit and do not fear Heavenly punishment. Amalek clearly subscribed to this theory as it says (Devarim 25:18), "V'lo Yarai Elokim," that Amalek did not fear Heavenly retribution.

When Bnai Yisroel questioned whether Hashem's presence was truly amongst them, they were doubting the existence of hashgacha pratit. By doing so, they were beginning to resemble the third category of apikorsim which was epitomized by Amalek. To combat this problem, Hashem sent Amalek to attack, thus forcing Bnai Yisroel to daven to Hashem and acknowledge His constant hashgacha.

Someone that does business with incorrect weights is guilty of the same flaw. By cheating a customer, especially in a fashion so undetectable, one is showing that he doubts Hashem's power. This fel-

low obviously does not believe in Heavenly punishment and is doubtful of hashgacha pratit. Although this is evident every time one does an aveirah, when one cheats in business matters, one is implying that he himself controls his material gains rather than Hashem. This attitude of "koichi v'oitzem yadi" shows a lack of emunah as it says (Devarim 8:11), "Take care lest you forget Hashem." Such an attitude reflects Amalek's mindset and requires a wake-up call.

We now see that the two previously mentioned reasons are truly one and the same. When one deals dishonestly in business, he is in effect denying hashgacha pratit. This is the same attitude shown by Bnai Yisroel when they questioned Hashem's ability to provide water. This mindset reflects that of Amalek, thus requiring Amalek to attack and force Bnai Yisroel to acknowledge Hashem's power and control.

This attitude can be a problem in our times as well. When one works to provide a livelihood for his family, he must be sure to have the proper attitude. If he feels that his income is predetermined and his work is simply hishtadlus (a necessary symbolic act), then he has purged Amalek from his ideology. However, if one feels that his hard work can affect greater and larger material gains, then Amalek has found a foothold inside him.

What is the best way to destroy any remnants of Amalek? The answer can be found in Rashi on Sanhedrin 106a. The Torah says that Amalek waged war in Refidim. The Gemara (ibid.) explains that the area received its name due to the fact that Bnai Yisroel weakened in their study of Torah there. Rashi says that this laxity caused Amalek to come and attack. We now have a third explanation for Amalek's attack. We can deduce from here that the underlying cause of Bnai Yisroel's weakened emunah was their lack of Torah study. If one wishes to strengthen his emunah and purge any shred of Amalek from within himself, one must increase his Torah study and its observance. If we increase the time we spend learning Torah and doing mitzvos, then Hashem will surely help us serve Him with purity and honesty.

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HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Shecheyanu Over Fruit

Rabbi Ari Friedman

Every year on Tu B'shvat, Jews all over the world have the custom to eat unusual or special fruit in celebration of the "New Year" for trees. The eating of these fruits is often accompanied by the bracha of Shechayanu, the blessing recited to express one's appreciation to Hashem for living to have experienced a joyous and momentous occasion. In addition to the custom of eating special fruits on Tu B'shvat, there is also a well known Yerushalmi quoted by the Mishnah Berurah which encourages us to partake of every new fruit available in order to enhance our appreciation of Hashem's world. The Korban Haedah (end of Kiddushin) explains that the specific intent of this gemorah is to enable one to recite the bracha of Shecheyanu. As with other brachos, Shechayanu requires various conditions in order for this bracha to be recited. Below, we will discuss these conditions and other laws which pertain to this brachah.

The Shulchan Orech (O.C. 225-3) states, "upon seeing a new fruit which renews itself yearly one recites the bracha of Shecheyanu. However the custom is to recite the bracha upon eating the fruit." Interestingly, the Mishnah Berurah quoting the Magen Avrohom writes that this bracha is not a chiyuv- obligation, but rather a Reshus- a voluntary bracha that one may recite if he wishes to express his thanks to Hashem. The poskim, however, urge one to recite the bracha unless he is uncertain regarding the classification of the fruit as a "new fruit".

What's New?

The bracha of Shecheyanu may be recited on any fruit or vegetable provided that it grows anew annually or semi-annually. Fruits which are grown throughout the year are exempt from the bracha of Shecheyanu even if one has not eaten that particular fruit for a long time. Today, with various advances in agriculture and the development of a global market, many fruits which are essentially seasonal fruits are now available throughout the year. Some fruits are grown in environmentally controlled greenhouses. Others are harvested during their season and then stored or frozen, while others are shipped around the world, thus enabling anyone anywhere to enjoy any fruit at any time! Most poskim (see Sefer Vzos habracha) are of the opinion that the constant availability of these fruits prevents them from being classified as "new fruit", and one may therefore not make a Shecheyanu on these fruits. A recent search at the fruit section at the Jewel supermarket here in Chicago revealed that one may now purchase coconut, papaya, peaches, plums, star fruit, watermelon, cherries, berries and many other exotic fruit during the winter, which in times past would have been ideal for

Shecheyanu fruit. It is therefore advised that before one recites Shecheyanu on a particular fruit, he should first ascertain the real status of the fruit i.e. when it is grown, when it is available etc.. If a particular fruit is available only at a specialty food store or at a very high price, there are some poskim who would permit reciting a Shecheyanu on it. One should consult their Rav if this question arises.

Dried, canned, or otherwise processed fruits are not subject to the bracha of Shecheyanu unless they are recognized as being from the "new" season which is usually not the case. The same is true regarding wines and juices.

Popular Tu B'shvat Fruit

It is customary to eat esrog and carob ("buksar") on Tu B'shvat. Both of these fruits present difficulties with regard to the bracha of Shecheyanu. The Esrog is unique in that it remains on the tree from year to year. Since one can observe an esrog on the tree at any time during the year, there is a lack of the excitement necessary when partaking of this fruit in order to recite the shecheyanu. Carob is a fruit which although is used as a flavoring for many food items, is itself a very hard and dry fruit which prevents most people from deriving any real enjoyment from it when eaten alone. This lack of enjoyment may present a problem with regard to reciting Shecheyanu. In addition, a fresh carob is hardly recognized as being from the new season.

Although the restrictions above may limit the possibility of making a Shecheyanu, one is still urged to partake of the many fruits Hashem has blessed us with. Perhaps we can be even more grateful to Hashem for providing us with a bounty of fruits all year long which in the past have not always been available.

The Bracha

According to the Mishna Berurah, the bracha of Shecheyanu should be recited prior to the bracha of Ha'etz which is made regularly on fruit. There are others who have the minhag of reciting Shecheyanu after Ha'etz, or after eating a bit of the fruit. If one failed to make a Shecheyanu when eating the fruit, he may not do so at a second occasion since the initial excitement of eating this fruit has worn off.

Note: Unlike the popular pronunciation and the spelling in this article, the proper pronunciation of the word is "Shehecheyanu".

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