

## The Secret to Fighting Amalek

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Understanding our enemy can be extremely enlightening. What motivates our enemy's enmity towards us can sometimes help crystallize our life's mission. As the Jewish people came out of Egypt, following the splitting of the sea we are told that Amalek came and attacked the Israelites. What motivated this attack? The Torah does not give us an explicit reason. The commentators explain that there is a connection between the attack and what had preceded this event.<sup>1</sup> After the splitting of the sea, the Israelites came to Refidim and had no water. They complained and ultimately Hashem ordered Moshe to hit the rock and the rock supplied them with water. After this event,<sup>2</sup> the Torah tells us that the Israelites questioned whether Hashem was with them. It is at this time that Amalek attacked. Rashi explains<sup>3</sup> that this questioning opened the Israelites to the attack. Hashem said "You questioned where I was, I will show you." While we do not have any explanation for Amalek's motives to attack the Israelites, Yehoshua, rather than Moshe, was sent to fight Amalek. Why is it that Yehoshua was chosen to fight Amalek? At the end of the battle Hashem commands Moshe to "put into the ear of Yehoshua" the memory of the defeat of Amalek<sup>4</sup>. Why the focus on Yehoshua? Some explain that, at the time, Yehoshua was given the directive to wipe out Amalek which will be necessary when Yehoshua leads the nation into the land of Israel. This, however, does not explain why he is chosen to fight Amalek.

Perhaps I can suggest another approach. The Torah clearly tells us that Amalek presents an eternal obstacle to Hashem's presence in the world. It will only be with the complete destruction of Amalek that Hashem's name can be complete.<sup>5</sup> What makes Yehoshua the most qualified to lead this struggle to overcome Amalek? There is a teaching of Chazal that makes mention of Yehoshua way before we are introduced to him in Exodus. The Torah tells us that Hashem came to Avraham to tell him that he was going to have a child with Sarah.<sup>6</sup> At the time Sarah's name was Sarai. Hashem tells

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**ויבא עמלק וגו'.** סמך פְּרִשָׁה זוּ לְמַקְרָא זֶה, לומר, תמיד אני ביניכם ומזמן לְכֹל צְרִיכֵיכֶם וְאִתְּם אוֹמְרִים הֲיֵשׁ ה' בְּקִרְבָּנוּ אִם אֵין **THEN CAME AMALEK** — Scripture places this section immediately after this preceding verse (they said, "Is the Lord among us or not?") to imply, "I am ever among you and ready at hand for everything you may need, and yet you say, "Is the Lord among us or not?" By your lives, I swear that the hound (Amalek) shall come and bite you, and you will cry for Me and then you will know where I am!"

Exodus 17;7<sup>2</sup> וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם מַסָּה וּמְרִיבָה עַל־רִיב וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נִעַל נַפְתָּם אֶת־יְהוָה לֵאמֹר הֲיֵשׁ ה' בְּקִרְבָּנוּ אִם־אֵין:

The place was named Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and because they tried ה, saying, "Is ה present among us or not?"

<sup>3</sup> Rashi Exodus 17;8 as quoted above in Footnote 1

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 17;14 וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כְּתֹב זֶאת זְכוּרֹן בְּסֵפֶר וְשִׂים בְּאָזְנוֹ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כִּי־מָחָה אֶמְחָה אֶת־זְכוּר עַמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם: **Then ה said to Moses, "Inscribe this in a document as a reminder, and read it aloud to Joshua: I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven!"**

<sup>5</sup> The name of Hashem is how we experience His presence.

Genesis 17;15<sup>6</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָהָם שְׂרֵי אִשְׁתְּךָ לֹא־תִקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמָהּ שְׂרֵי כִי שְׂרָה שְׁמָהּ:

And God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, you shall not call her Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah.

Avraham that her name will no longer be Sarai, but rather Sarah. This name change was different than that when Avram's name was changed to Avraham in that Avram's name had a letter added, while Sarai had one removed and another added. Midrash Bereshis Rabbah <sup>7</sup> explains in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochi that when Hashem removed the letter yud from Sarah's name it soared and flew up before the throne of the Holy One Blessed be He. It said before Him, Master of the Universe because I am the smallest of the letters You have removed me from the righteous Sarah? The Holy One blessed be He said to it "In the past you were part of the name of a female and at the end of the letters now I shall place you into the name of a male and at the beginning of the letters, as it is stated Moshe called Hoshea son of Nun, Yehoshua." Rabbi Shimon bar Yochi is linking Sarah to Yehoshua. What is the connection between the two? Why are they connected through the letter yud? We see from the midrash that the unique characteristic of the yud is that it is the smallest of the letters. On the simplest level this conveys an element of humility. We see this trait in Sarah when the angels come to tell Avraham about the birth of Yitzchak. In this encounter they ask Avraham "where is Sarah your wife?"<sup>8</sup> Avraham replied she is in the tent. Rashi comments that this is a reference to her modesty, her tzniut. <sup>9</sup> Interestingly we find a similar description of Yehoshua <sup>10</sup> in that he would not leave the tent of Moshe. What is incredible is that we see from here that Yehoshua was called a נַעַר youth even though at the time he was over 50 years of age. Chazal sees as a continuation of what Sarah had been with Yehoshua's willingness to humble himself for the sake of learning from his master Moshe.

The question though is how the trait of Tzniut, modesty, helped Yehoshua be the best person to battle Amalek. The Gemarah in Megilah 13b <sup>11</sup>tells us that in the merit of Rachel's Tzniut she begot Saul. In

<sup>7</sup> 47:1

אמר רבי שמעון בן יוחאי יו"ד שנטל הקדוש ברוך הוא משרי הנה טס ופורח לפני כסאו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, אמר לפניו רבוננו של עולם בשביל שאני קטנה שבאותיות הוצאתני משנה הצדקה, אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לשעבר היית משמה של נקבה ובסופן של אותיות, עכשיו אני בנותנה בשמו של זכר ובראשון של אותיות, שנאמר (במדבר יג, טז): ויקרא משה להושע בן נון יהושע.

Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai said: The *yod* that the Holy One blessed be He took from Sarai soared and flew up before the throne of the Holy One blessed be He. It said before Him: 'Master of the universe: Because I am the smallest of the letters, You have removed me from the righteous Sarah?' The Holy One blessed be He said to it: 'In the past, you were part of the name of a female and at the end of the letters; now I shall place you into the name of a male and at the beginning of the letters, as it is stated: "Moses called Hoshea son of Nun, Joshua [Yehoshua]" (Numbers 13:16).

Genesis 18:9<sup>8</sup>

ויאמרו אליו איפה שרה אשתך ויאמר הנה באהל:

They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he replied, "There, in the tent."

<sup>9</sup> הנה באהל. צנועה היא:

BEHOLD, IN THE TENT — She is a modest woman.

<sup>10</sup> Exodus 33:11

ומשרתו יהושע בן-נון נער לא ימיש מתוך האהל:

but his attendant, Joshua son of Nun, [serving as] deputy, would not stir out of the Tent.

<sup>11</sup> "He withdraws not His eyes from the righteous; but with kings upon the throne, He establishes them forever, and they are exalted" (Job 36:7)? This teaches that **in reward for the modesty shown by Rachel she merited that Saul,**

the merit of Saul's tzniut he begot Esther. The gemarah asks what is the tzniut of Rachel. When Yakov came to Charan, he met Rachel for the first time and proposed marriage. He gave Rachel signs so that Lavan would not be able to deceive Yakov and switch the sisters on him. When it came to the day of the wedding, Rachel gave her sister Leah the signs. The Gemarah explains that Rachel was protecting her older sister who was vulnerable and that merited her begetting Saul who also had this trait of tzniut. This is found in Esther as well. We usually translate tzniut as modesty. The way the Gemarah is understood, the common trait found in the house of Rachel is more than modesty, as it is the ability to protect another person's vulnerability at the sacrifice of one's own interests. If we look back, we realize that Sarah exhibited this trait as well.<sup>12</sup> Multiple times Avraham asked her to tell people that she was his sister rather than his wife. She was subjected to tremendous risk as we see she was taken by Pharaoh and Avimelech. It was only because of divine intervention that saved her from harm. In these cases, Avraham was extremely vulnerable, and Sarah protected him from harm at risk of her own wellbeing. This attribute of protecting someone else's vulnerability is found in Yehoshua as well.<sup>13</sup> When Eldad and Medad were prophesizing that Moshe would not lead Bnei

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who was also modest, **should descend from her, and in reward for the modesty shown by Saul, he merited that Esther should descend from him.** The Gemara explains: **What was the modesty shown by Rachel?** It is as it is written: **“And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father’s brother, and that he was Rebecca’s son”** (Genesis 29:12). It may be asked: **Was he, Jacob, in fact her father’s brother? But wasn’t he the son of her father’s sister? Rather,** it must be understood that when Jacob met Rachel, **he said to her: Will you marry me? She said to him: Yes, but my father, Laban, is a swindler, and you will not be able to outwit him.** Jacob alleviated her fears, as **he said to her** that he is her father’s brother, referring not to their familial affiliation but rather to his ability to deal with her father on his level, as if to say: **I am his brother in deception. She said to him: But is it really permitted for the righteous to be involved in deception? He said to her: Yes,** it is permitted when dealing with deceptive individuals, as the verse states: **“With the pure you will show yourself pure, and with the perverse you will show yourself subtle”** (II Samuel 22:27), indicating that one should deal with others in the manner appropriate for their personality. Jacob then **said to her: What is the deception** that he will plan to carry out and I should be prepared for? Rachel **said to him: I have a sister who is older than I, and he will not marry me off before her,** and will try to give you her in my place. So, Jacob **gave her** certain **distinguishing signs** that she should use to indicate to him that she was actually Rachel and not her sister. **When the wedding night arrived,** and Laban planned to switch the sisters, Rachel **said to herself: Now my sister will be embarrassed,** for Jacob will ask her for the signs and she will not know them. So **she gave them to her. And this is as it is written: “And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah”** (Genesis 29:25). Does this imply **by inference that until now she was not Leah? Rather, due to the distinguishing signs that Rachel had given to Leah, he did not know until now,** when it was light outside, that she was Leah. **Therefore, Rachel merited that Saul should descend from her,** due to her act of modesty in not revealing to Jacob that she had shown the signs to Leah. **And what was the modesty shown by Saul? As it is written: “But of the matter of the kingdom, of which Samuel spoke, he did not tell him”** (I Samuel 10:16). Saul expressed his modesty by not revealing Samuel’s promise that he would be king, and thereby **merited that Esther would descend from him.**

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 12:13 and Genesis 20:2

אמר יצחק אשתו את למען ייטב עלי בעבורך ותינתה נפשי בגלגלך:

Please say that you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may remain alive thanks to you.”

ויאמר אברהם אל־שרה אשתו אחתי הוא וישלח אבימלך מלך גרר ויגח את־שרה:

Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” So King Abimelech of Gerar had Sarah brought to him.

<sup>13</sup> Bamidbar 11:27-28

Yisroel into the land of Israel, we see Yehoshua running to Moshe to stop them from what they were doing as he was concerned for Moshe's wellbeing at the expense of himself, who was the beneficiary of the prophecy.

How does this trait of Tzniut, protecting someone else's vulnerability at the expense of one's own benefit, help counter Amalek? The Torah tells us that Amalek attacked the vulnerable ones. Normally we would think that this is a normal strategy of an attacking army to attack the ones who are not able to defend themselves. In truth Amalek's attack on Bnei Yisroel goes much deeper. Hashem came to Avraham at the beginning of Lech Lecha and instructed him to go to the land of Israel. The directive was "Go for yourself" (to become you). This move would enable him to maximize his potential. The optimal place for him and his offspring was in the land of Israel. The mission required building. To build himself and the those around him. His partner on this mission was Sarah. The only way that one can grow and become is by willing to open oneself up and be vulnerable. The mission of Avraham that he handed down to Yizchak and Yaakov, is for the children of Israel to go out and build. Build oneself, others, communities and worlds. It is Amalek that is the force in the world that fights this positive energy and light with all its being. Their initial attack of the children of Israel is described as snake like. This takes us back to the garden of Eden where the snake creates doubt and cynicism. Amalek wants to create a world of darkness and deconstruction. It starts with attacking the vulnerable because, as we saw with Sarah and Rachel, prioritizing protecting the vulnerable, rather than oneself, is where potential growth and light come from. It is the trait of tzniut, the desire to protect those who are vulnerable, that is the specific trait needed to fight Amalek. Hashem's presence in the world is magnified when a person grows and develops and becomes a giver, creator, and builder. It is when we take the Tzelem Elokim, the likeness of Hashem, and ascend to great heights that we bring the G-dly light into this world. Amalek is the force that fights this goodness and always tries to deconstruct that which is being built. It is the element of Tzniut that came from Sarah and bequeathed to Rachel and given to Yehoshua and Esther that will allow us to overcome and triumph over Amalek.

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נגרץ הנער ונגד למשה ויאמר אלדד ומדיד מתנבאים במחנה:

An assistant ran out and told Moses, saying, "Eldad and Medad are acting the prophet in the camp!"

ויען יהושע בן-נון משרת משה מכהן ויאמר אלגי משה קלאם:

And Joshua son of Nun, Moses' attendant from his youth, spoke up and said, "My lord Moses, restrain them!"