

Parsha Tetzaveh

Presented By Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky Shlita, Dean

1. *The Antidote is only Effective When Taken Properly*

The Gemara in *Tractate Yoma* tells us that the First Bais HaMikdash (Temple in Jerusalem) was destroyed because the Jewish people violated the three cardinal sins: adultery, murder, and idol worship. The Gemara states that the Second Bais HaMikdash was destroyed because of *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred) among Jews. The Gemara in *Meseches Nidarim* states that when Hashem was asked why the First Bais HaMikdash was destroyed He responded that it was because Jews did not recite the blessing of the Torah before its study.

The Ran (an earlier commentator on the Talmud) explains that the omission of the blessing of the Torah prior to study indicates that the Torah was not studied for its own sake and for doing the Will of Hashem, but rather for the sake of intellectualism. If they had studied with the proper intent they would have said a blessing as one does before performing any Positive Commandment.

So we see that in one location the Talmud tells us that the Bais HaMikdash was destroyed because of the violation of the three cardinal sins and in the other the Talmud tells us that it was because the Jews did not recite the blessing of the Torah before studying. How do we reconcile these two contradictory statements given by the Gemara?

We find in the Torah that Hashem refers to His Wisdom with the appellation of “Torah” rather than the term “*Chachma* (Wisdom)”. As the verse states, “*Torah tziva lonu Moshe moresha Kehilas Yaakov*” (The Torah was commanded to us by Moshe which is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov). The Maharal of Prague asks – if the Torah itself is G-d’s Wisdom seemingly the appropriate appellation for His Wisdom should have been *Chachma*. Why did Hashem choose the term “Torah?” The Maharal answers that the word “Torah” is used to indicate a direction in our lives as Jews. Meaning, to study with the intent to fulfill the Will of Hashem and not merely for the sake of intellectualism.

The Gemara tells us that Hashem created the *yetzer hara* (*the evil inclination*) and the Torah as its antidote. We understand this to mean that regardless of one’s intelligence, wisdom, or ability one cannot subdue or incapacitate the *yetzer hara* without the study of Torah. It is only through its clarity and internalization that one can overcome the evil inclination. In what context is the Torah the antidote for the evil inclination?

The Maharal explains that the Torah is an antidote only if one studies it with the intent to live one’s life according to its teaching and for the sake of performing mitzvos and not for the sake of intellectualism. Although the Torah contains the wisdom of Hashem, if one studies the Torah purely for the sake of its intellectualism (*lilmode al minas l’aasos*) and not for the sake of gaining direction in one’s life, the Torah will not be the antidote. With this understanding we can reconcile the seemingly contradictory passages in the Gemara.

During the First Bais HaMikdash period the Jewish people did in fact study Torah diligently, yet they degenerated to a level that they violated the three cardinal sins. How is it possible to fall to such a level when engaging in Torah study at such an intense level? The answer is by not saying a blessing prior to the study of Torah it was indicated that their pursuit of Torah was purely for the sake of knowledge and not for the sake of leading a life according to its precepts. As a result of this, the Torah could not be an antidote to one’s *yetzer hara*. Thus the Jewish people fell to a degenerative level and the Bais HaMikdash was destroyed. One must study with the intent of applying what we learn because only then will “Torah” give direction to our lives and not merely wisdom.

2. Does Hashem Need Our Light?

In this week's parsha, the Torah states that the Menorah (the Candelabra) should be placed, **"In the Tent of the Meeting, outside the Curtain (*Paroches*) that is near the Testimonial-tablets."** The Torah specifically states that the Menorah is to be located on the outside of the *Paroches* which is the location of the Holy (the outer part of the covered Sanctuary).

The Gemara in *Meseches Bava Basra* explains that the illumination of the Menorah symbolizes the Oral Law, which is the elucidation of the Written Law. It would seem according to this understanding that the proper place for the Menorah should be along side the Ark that contained the Tablets and the Torah which is the Written Law. If this is the case then why does the Torah insist that the Menorah should be placed on the outside of the Curtain (*Paroches*)?

The *Yalkut* (Midrash) explains that since the Divine Presence, (*Shechina*), was located in the Holy of Holies which is the location of the Ark, the Menorah must be placed on the outside of the *Paroches*, so that one should not say that G-d needs our light.

He continues by telling us that when Moshe was told about the mitzvah of kindling the Menorah, he was taken aback and astounded. He asked Hashem, **"Since You are the light of the world why do You need our light?"** (by the kindling of the Menorah). Hashem responded, **"To elevate the Jewish people in the eyes of the nations of the world. So that they should see that G-d needs their light."** This seems contradictory to the first *Yalkut* that we cited which stated explicitly that the Menorah was placed on the outside of the *Paroches* so that one should not think that G-d needs our light. Also, how is it possible for an intelligent person, especially one who has an appreciation of spirituality and G-d, to think for a moment that G-d needs our light?

Even if we had the Menorah next to the Ark how could one make the mistake to think that Hashem needs our light? The answer is that there is a pagan belief that although G-d created the universe and all that is contained within it, He is "locked and bound" by the system that He created. He is constrained by nature in a way that He could not alter or override the infrastructure of His own creation. If one succeeds the world advances and if one fails the world regresses automatically without G-d's intervention. Since a basic tenet of existence is "reward and punishment" the world must rise and fall based on this principle. Therefore according to this limited belief, Hashem relies on the Jews' performance for Him to interact with existence. Thus placing the Menorah on the outside of the *Paroches* is intended to count this belief, confirming that Hashem does not need our light.

However, if in fact G-d does not need our light why did He tell Moshe that He wants us to kindle the Menorah to demonstrate to the world that He does in fact *need* the light of the Jews. As we explained, the answer is that Hashem does not *need* our light because He is not constrained or bound in any context including existence. However, under normal circumstances G-d's interaction with existence is based on the spiritual level of the Jewish people. If we succeed spiritually the world receives blessing. If we fail, blessing is withheld. With this understanding the Jewish people will be elevated in the eyes of the world.

In many places we find terminology that would seem that we empower Hashem. For example, in our daily morning prayers we say, **"Give strength to Hashem!"** Does Hashem need us to empower Him? The Torah states in Parshas *Hazinu* that Hashem says, **"You made me weak!"** How is it possible that we make Hashem weak? The answer is that we can strengthen or weaken G-d's interaction with the world depending on our behavior.

If we do the Will of Hashem by studying Torah and performing Mitzvos then we strengthen Hashem's influence on the world. If however we do not do His Will then He withdraws His influence from existence. Although there are no constraints or limitations to Hashem's ability, and He acts as He chooses; nevertheless, He wants us to empower Him by doing His Will.

3. *The Importance of Having Pure Intent*

In this week's parsha, the Torah states, "Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they take for you pure, pressed olive oil (*shemen ziyis zoch*) for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually." Rashi cites the Gemara that explains that *shemen ziyis zoch* (pure pressed olive oil) means that only the first droplet of oil extracted from the olive qualifies for the kindling of the Menorah. The remainder of the extract is used for the meal offerings.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh states that in the merit of the Patriarchs we were redeemed from three exiles: the Babylonian exile in the merit of Avraham, the Persian (Maadai) exile in the merit of Yitzchak, and the Greek exile in the merit of Yaakov.

The redemption of the Jews from our current exile, the Edomite exile (Roman), will be in the merit of Moshe. However Moshe Rabeinu will not allow his merit to be utilized until the Jewish people properly engage in Torah study and observance. Since our redemption has not taken place it is obvious that we have not yet achieved that level of Torah study.

The Ohr HaChaim explains that *shemen ziyis* symbolizes the study of Torah and the word *zoch* (*pure*) alludes to the purity of that study for its own sake (*l'shmah*). Just as only the purest olive qualifies for the Menorah, so too does one's Torah study need to be pure in its intent. Studying Torah for its own sake means that one should not study for his own glory nor should he utilize his Torah study as a sinister tool against others. He continues to explain that the words "*kosis l'mohr*" (*crushed for illumination*), alludes to one's willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of Torah study.

The Gemara tells us that the reason why Jewish people were attacked by Amalek at Rafidim was because [as the name of the location indicates (*Rafoo yadaim min HaTorah*)] the Jews were weak in their study of Torah. If the Jews would have been fully engaged in Torah study, then Amalek could have not attack them. It is interesting to note that Amalek is a descendent of Edom (which is our current exile). As the verse states, "*Ha kol kol Yaakov v'ha yadei Esav (the voice is the voice of Yaakov, the hands are the hands of Esav).*" Chazal explain that as long as we use our "voice" as the "voice" of Yaakov (symbolic of Torah study) then the Jews will not fall into the hands of Esav (who is the forefather of Edom and Amalek). Amalek only has the upper hand when we are not engaged in Torah study. Thus, we can understand the Ohr HaChaim's explanation that the ultimate redemption will come only when the Jews will be fully engaged in studying Torah for its own sake (*l'shmah*).

In the blessing of the Torah, which we recite each day, we ask G-d to help us to study Torah *l'shmah*. This seems to be the only blessing that we recite before performing a Positive Commandment in which we ask to perform it with this intent. This is because the Men of the Great Assembly, who promulgated the blessings that we recite, understood that in order for the Torah study to have its greatest effect on existence it must be studied this way. If Torah is studied for its own sake it will affect every aspect of existence and ultimately it will bring about our redemption from the Edomite exile.

The essence of Torah is truth (*emes*); therefore if it is not studied with its proper intent it does not have the desired effect. Moshe, the "Pillar of Torah," is the embodiment of truth and purity and will not allow his merit to be utilized unless the Torah is studied with that same level of purity. Therefore if our study of Torah is not *l'shmah* then unfortunately we will need to continue to await the ultimate redemption.

4. *The Ability to Valuing One Another*

The verse in *Mishlei* (Proverbs) states, "A deprecator (*letz*) you should smite, but a fool (*pessi*) you could be made wise." The Midrash explains that "A deprecator (*letz*) you should smite (*sakaah*)" refers to Amalek and "a fool (*pessi*) you could make wise (*yaarim*)" refers to Yisro

What is a *letz* and why does the Midrash say that it is a reference to Amalek?

Chazal tell us that at the time of the splitting of the Sea the presence of G-d was palpable to the degree that even the maidservant was able to sense G-d as a reality. As a result of the miracles in Egypt and the splitting of the Sea, the nations of the world trembled and were in awe of the Jewish people. They realized that the Jews had an intimate relationship with Hashem as sons to a father. Despite this, the Torah tells us that Amalek attacked the Jewish people soon after the splitting of the Sea. How could Amalek consider attacking G-d's children when it was so obvious that they would incur G-d's Wrath?

The Midrash explains that Amalek's attack on the Jewish people is analogous to a person entering into a scolding hot bath when others are too frightened to go near it out of fear of being burned. The fool, who immerses himself in the bath, although he is scolded, nevertheless cools the water down for others to enter. Similarly Amalek attacked the Jewish people, who were feared by the world to the degree that no one would even dare approach them. Subsequently after the attack the aura of the Jew was diminished in the eyes of the world. How is it possible for Amalek not to see the obviousness of G-d's relationship with the Jewish people as the rest of the world did? The answer is communicated to us with the words of *Proverbs* "*letz sakaah.*" It is because of Amalek's classification as *letz* (*deprecator*) that they did not and do not have the capacity to appreciate and understand the spirituality of G-d. Therefore the only way to deal with the deprecator is not through reason but only by smiting him.

"*Pessi yaarim*" (the fool you could make wise), the Midrash tells us refers to Yisro (Moshe's father-in-law). Despite the fact that initially Yisro was a pagan (not monotheistic), when he had heard of the splitting of the Sea and the war with the Amalekites he perceived the truth of G-d's existence. Thus causing him to abandon his glory and join the Jewish people.

The Gemara in *Meseches Megillah* tells us that Haman (the viceroy of the Persian Empire) was the expert par excellence in *Lashon Hara* (evil speech). Haman, was able to seal the fate of the Jews to bring about a decree of total annihilation through his expertise in *Lashon Hara*. He approached King Achashverosh and informed him that the Jews had many strange customs that mocked his kingship. Haman told Achashverosh that a Jew would drink a glass of wine even after removing a fly which had fallen into it, but if the King were to touch the wine of a Jew he would have pour it out and not drink it. After hearing Haman's words Achashverosh acquiesced to the wishes of Haman to annihilate the Jews. Why was Haman such an expert in speaking *Lashon Hara*?

Haman, who was in the direct descent of the Amalekite King Agag (as he is referred to in the Megillah "**Haman Ha'Gagie**"), possessed and personified the characteristic of the Amalekites which was deprecation. He could not appreciate or perceive the value of the Jewish people to any degree and therefore was able to deprecate them with the greatest level of intensity. Haman thus exemplifies the *letz* par excellence.

If a Jew speaks *Lashon Hara* about an individual, G-d forbid, he is assuming the posture of the Amalekites. This is because it is an indication that he does not value any positive aspect of this individual's accomplishments or existence. G-d says that His Throne is not complete until the name of Amalek is completely obliterated. So if a Jew speaks *Lashon Hara* he mimics the characteristic of Amalek and thus contributes to the instability of G-d's Throne. We must value and view people in their totality (which includes much good) and not merely focus on their shortcomings. It is through seeing our fellow Jew in this light that we will contribute to securing Hashem's Throne and thus be able to destroy Amalek.

5. What Should We Always Remember?

This Shabbos, in addition to the regular parsha reading Tetzaveh, we read Parshas Zachor (Devarim, 25:17), which is the second of the four special Torah readings before Pesach (Passover). In addition to the Positive Commandment to "Obliterate Amalek", we have the obligation to "Remember Amalek" by reading the portion of Zachor that reminds us of how

Amalek attacked the Jewish people after they had left Egypt. Where did the Jews fail making them so vulnerable to the attack by Amalek?

The Torah tells us that after the splitting of the Sea and the receiving of the *Mun* (Mana-spiritual food) the Jews camped in *Refidim* where they did not have water to drink. When they complained and quarreled with Moshe, he chastised them for testing G-d. Subsequently they were attacked by Amalek. Seemingly, the Jews were attacked by Amalek, a people who did not fear G-d, because the Jews themselves at this moment had a lack of faith in G-d. Thus, they were punished “measure for measure.”

The Jews wanted for water in a location called *Refidim*. Chazal explain that the name “*Refidim*” alludes to the fact that the Jews were weak in their study. In other words they were not fully engaged in Torah study. As a result of this failing they were vulnerable to the attack by Amalek. The words of the Midrash seem to contradict the reason given in the text – which is because they were thirsting for water they questioned G-d. How do we reconcile the Midrash and the text?

The answer is if the Jewish people were fully immersed in Torah study their faith would have been strong and the lack of water would have not caused them to question G-d. It is only because they were lackadaisical in their Torah study that their faith was not strong. It is through the lack of Torah study that one’s sense of G-d fades and therefore it becomes easier to question Him in trying circumstances.

“Dabbling” in Torah is not sufficient to maintain one’s faith in G-d and to keep one strong against attack from the forces of Amalek. One must be completely immersed in Torah study at all times. Of course one should not earn a living; however, it is necessary to have the proper priorities. Torah should be the primary focus with all other activities being secondary. As it is stated in *Perkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers)*, “One should make his Torah study primary and his work secondary.”

The Gemara in Megillah cites a verse in *Mishlei*, “**Through laziness, the supporting beam of a house if not repaired, the entire house is in jeopardy of collapsing.**” If one does not attend to the crack in a supporting beam it will eventually lead to the collapse of the house. If Torah is not strengthened it will ultimately undermine the stability of Judaism. Since the Jewish people were lackadaisical in their Torah study, which is the mainstay and the “supporting beam” of the Jews they were subjected to the attack of Amalek.

The Gemara quotes the verse of the Megillah, “*La Yehudim hoisa ohra v’simcha v’sasson v’kor.*” It explains the verse to mean that after the miracle of Purim the Jews recommitted themselves to *ohra* “light” which is Torah, to *sasson* “joy” which is circumcision, and to *v’kor* which is the mitzvah of wearing Tefillin. Evidently it is indicated that before the miracle of Purim the Jews were deficient in all of these areas. How is it possible that the Jews were lax in these fundamental mitzvos?

Mishlei tells us that through the weakening of the supporting beam the house eventually collapses. The erosion of one’s observance of mitzvos starts with the lack of proper Torah study. For example, a person who does not maintain a set time for studying Torah could easily also lose perspective of the value of praying or even wearing Tefillin. One shortfall leads to another until one is left with almost no Torah observance. As the Gemara tells us in *Meseches Kiddushin*, “Great is the value of Torah study because it brings to action.”

Throughout Jewish history the Jewish people experienced great challenges and tragedies only when they were not properly engaged in Torah study. As was case with the Jews at the time of Purim when we were on the verge of physical extinction and at the time of Chanukah when we were on the verge of spiritual extinction. Our purpose in existence is to follow the Will of Hashem; however, the only way we are able to comprehend and understand His Will is through the study of Torah.

When we read Parshas Zachor we are meant to remember how we were attacked by the Amalekites when we left Egypt. However, simultaneously we must be cognizant of why we were subjected to their attack. Therefore, the reading should be an inspiration for us to strengthen our commitment to Torah study.

6. *Can Evil Exist without Good?*

The Gemara in *Meseches Megillah* states that one has an obligation of eating a festive meal on Purim (*seudas Purim*) during the daytime and not at night. In addition to eating the festive meal one has an obligation to become intoxicated to the point where one cannot distinguish between, “Cursed is Haman” and “Blessed is Mordechai” (*Arur Haman baruch Mordechai*). Are Chazal suggesting that that one should become intoxicated to the point of saying “Blessed is Haman and Cursed is Mordechai” (G-d forbid)? Or are Chazal telling us something else?

Some *poskim* (decisors of Jewish Law) rule that one does not need to become intoxicated in order to fulfill the mitzvah of “drinking” to the point of non-discernment between Haman and Mordechai, as Chazal describe. One can drink a *reviis* (measure of 2.9 oz) of alcohol followed by a nap. This is because when one is asleep one cannot discern between Haman and Mordechai. However many *poskim* take the statement of the Gemara at face value to mean that one has to reach a point of intoxication that he cannot discern between “Cursed is Haman” and “Blessed is Mordechai.”

The Gemara states, **“Every act of deprecation is forbidden except for the deprecation of idolatry.”** One should not even deprecate those things that are negative. Seemingly the Gemara is teaching us that the act of deprecation itself is a characteristic that is inherently damaging to our spiritually. Therefore we must not engage in acts of deprecation. If this is the case, then why is one permitted to deprecate idolatry?

Rav Hutner zt”l explains in his work *Pachad Yitzchok* that when one chooses to deprecate idolatry, he is simultaneously declaring his fervent belief in Hashem. In other words, the act of deprecating idolatry is in actuality a validation of one’s valuing and believing in Hashem. With this approach it is possible to understand the passage of the Gemara.

When the Gemara states that one needs to be intoxicated on Purim to the point that he is not able to discern between “Cursed is Haman” and “Blessed is Mordechai” it does not mean to say that one says “Cursed is Mordechai” and “Blessed is Haman”; but rather, when one declares “Blessed is Mordechai” he is affirming what is inherently “good” and worthy of blessing and simultaneously declaring what is truly “evil” and worth of deprecation. Meaning- anything that is the antithesis of Mordechai should be cursed.

Because there is an absolute “good” there is absolute “evil”. Because “evil” is only evil because it is the antithesis of good. When one says, “Cursed is Haman” one is actually saying “Blessed is Mordechai”, because Haman only deserves to be cursed because there is a Mordechai who represents the good which deserves to be blessed.

On Purim one needs to reach a level of understanding that “good” and “evil” do not exist independently from one another. Therefore when we cursing evil, we are simultaneously blessing good.

If we do not come to this level then we are performing the mitzvah of drinking on Purim in a per functionary manner- by rote. By comprehending the intent of Chazal we understand that the mitzvah of *drinking on Purim* is not drinking to the point of intoxication; but rather, the *drinking* is a mechanism to enable us to reach a higher level of understanding of the fundamental nature of holiness and evil. We should come to the understanding that blessing Mordechai is one in the same as cursing Haman.

