

Defeat Amalek

The end of the book of Shemos dealt with the construction and assembly of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle). The book of Vayikra begins with the sacrifices that were offered in the *Mishkan*. "From the cattle or from the flock you shall bring your offering," (Vayikra 1:2). Rabbeinu Bechaye elaborates on the types of animals that are fitting to be offered on the *Mizbeach* (Holy Altar). Domesticated animals that dwell in inhabited areas are brought as sacrifices to Hashem. They are the hunted ones, not the hunters. These kosher animals serve as a role model for the Jewish people. They are settled and live peaceful lives. Yaakov Avinu, a shepherd, chose to work among them. We are the descendants of Yaakov, *Ish Tam*, a straightforward person. Like these peaceful animals, and the *Mizbeach* that they are sacrificed upon, we bring peace into the world. Predatory animals that live in the wilderness are not suitable for sacrifices. They are the hunters. Eisav chose to live among them. He was a hunter who lived in the wilderness. His descendants and their way of live stand opposed to peacefulness. For the same reason, the Torah prohibited the use of iron on the *Mizbeach*. Iron and the weapons made from it are the instruments of war. They shorten the life of a person. They are the lot of Eisav.

Kinderlach . . .

On Purim, we celebrate the victory of the Jewish people over Haman, a descendant of Eisav and Amalek. Hashem with His Hidden Hand guiding the events, showed that the path of Torah is correct. "Its ways are pleasant, and all of its paths are peaceful" (Mishlei 3:17). Weapons, even if they are toys, are for Eisav and Amalek, not us. How ironic that Purim has become a time when many children frighten people with cap guns and firecrackers. The Torah forbids frightening a person, even if you do not endanger him. Throwing a firecracker or sparkler at someone is very dangerous and a much more serious sin. Purim is a time of happiness. Cap guns and firecrackers do not make anyone happy. This Purim let us celebrate our victory over Amalek by abandoning his ways and seeking only peace and happiness for everyone.

True Beauty

Esther was "*yifas toar vi'tovas mareh*" (very beautiful in appearance), (Megillas Esther 2:7). The Vilna Gaon zt"l in his commentary on the Megillah explains that *yifas toar* means her mitzvos and *tovas mareh* means her *middos tovos* (good character traits.) He elaborates that the appearance of the person is a reflection of their heart. One who has good *middos* is called beautiful. A good heart is the source of all good *middos*, as the Mishna says in Pirkei Avos (2:9). Later the Megilla (verse 2:15) tells us that Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her. The Vilna Gaon writes that she was constantly distressed, having been forced to marry Achashverosh. This anguish caused her skin to turn green. A woman with green skin is usually not very pretty. Even so, Vilna Gaon explains that Esther's inner beauty was able to overcome her physical appearance and she found favor in everyone's eyes. From here, we learn what true beauty is.

Kinderlach . . .

We certainly must take care of our appearance. We should not be dirty or sloppily dressed. Our clothes should be neat and clean and our hair combed. However, our clothes and our outward appearance are not the real beauty. Our good heart and good *middos* (character traits) are what make us genuinely beautiful. If we truly want to be beautiful children, we should not spend our time in front of the mirror perfecting our clothes and our physical appearance. We should rather put our efforts into perfecting our *middos*.

"Poor" Chance

Who is going into the shower first? Hmmm. I see that we have no volunteers. Okay, let's draw lots. Everyone pick a straw. The one with the shortest straw goes in first." "Abba are these that same kind of lots that Haman drew?" "Not exactly Shimi, but it's the same idea." "Abba, I have a question. All of the other holidays are named after an important part of the event. Pesach is named after the *Korbon Pesach* (Pesach sacrifice). Succos is named after the Sukkah that we live in

during the holiday. Why is Purim named after the *pur*, the lot that Haman used to determine the date of his evil decree? The *pur* is such a small detail.

"Shimi, Rav Chaim Friedlander zt"l answers your question. Drawing lots is one way to make a decision. Haman and his nation, Amalek, do not believe that Hashem runs the world. They 'cooled off' the fear that the nations had of Hashem and the Jewish people (Devarim 25:18). The word for 'cooled off' *karah*, also means 'happen'. That is Amalek's view of the world. Things just happen. Drawing lots is letting 'luck' determine the outcome of things. Our view stands diametrically opposed to Amalek's. We know that Hashem guides all events. We also used a lottery when dividing the land of Israel among the tribes in the times of Yehoshua (Bamidbar 33:54). The lottery revealed Hashem's will that each family got the plot of land that was right for them. Shimi, the *pur* is not an insignificant detail of the holiday. It represents the essence of the difference between Amalek and the Jewish people; the difference between chance and *hashgacha* (Divine Guidance)."

Kinderlach . . .

We know that Hashem is guiding the events of our lives. We sometimes think things should be different. We had some bad luck. Better luck next time. After a while we realize that what happened was actually the best possible thing. Hashem was and is taking care of us. Let us all go around the table and think of some examples. We are doing our part to reveal Hashem's "hidden hand" and increase His Glory in this world.



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