

Parshas Zachor

- I. Introduction.** God willing next *Shabbos* we will read *Parshas Zachor*. The *Torah* (*Devarim* 25: 17-19) warns us to remember what *Amalek* did to us when we left Egypt, and to eradicate any remaining remnant of *Amalek*. For the next two weeks we will explore many aspects of *Parshas Zachor* with the hope of coming to a fuller understanding the *halachik* details of this *mitzva*.
- II. How to fulfill the obligation.** The Talmud (*Megilla* 18a) teaches us that it is not sufficient to merely remember what *Amalek* had done to us; rather, we must verbalize these memories in order to fulfill our *mitzva* of *zachor*. The *Terumas Hadeshen* (108) adds that we are biblically required to read this *parsha* with a *minyan*. (See *Responsa Binyan Shlomo #7 for dissenting opinion*.) The *Torah* itself, however, never specifies which particular *parsha* must be read to fulfill the *mitzva* of *zachor*. The *Magen Avraham* (685; 1) writes that one can discharge his obligation by reading any *parsha* that recalls the evils of *Amalek*. Therefore, the *Magen Avraham* concludes, the section of “*va’yavo Amalek*” that is read on the morning of *Purim* will also suffice to discharge the obligation of *zachor*. However, many *poskim* (*Mishna Berura* 685:16; *Aruch Hashulchan* 685:5; and *Responsa Maharil Diskin 2 Kuntros Acharon 5:111*) disagree with the *Magen Avraham* and maintain that the reading must include the obligation to destroy *Amalek*, and any mention of this obligation is absent in the *parsha* of “*va’yavo Amalek*”.
- III. How often should the mitzva be preformed?**
- A. The *Minchas Chinuch* (603) understands the language of the *Rambam* (*Hilchos Melachim* 5:5) to indicate that this is a constant *mitzva* that must be fulfilled at every moment (see *Rosh Yosef Megila* 18a).
- B. The *Minchas Chinuch* continues to say that the language of the *Sefer Hachinuch* seem to indicate that it is sufficient to fulfill this *mitzva* once in a lifetime.
- C. Most *poskim*, however, understand that we are obligated in this *mitzva* once a year. If we were to accept this view we must examine why we require a special reading prior to *Purim*, instead of discharging our obligation when we read *Parshas Zachor* in *Parshas Ki Teitzei* during the annual cycle of *Torah* reading. The *Aruch Hashulchan* (*ibid.*) cites many *poskim* who say that we do fulfill our obligation during the annual *Torah* reading cycle. The rabbis only required this special reading before *Purim* to juxtapose the eradication of *Amalek* with the fall of *Haman*. The *Maharam Shik* (*mitzva* 605; 2) points out that on occasion one must read the *parsha* of *Amalek* both during the normal cycle and before *Purim* in order to fulfill his biblical obligation. He explains that the obligation to read the *parsha* once a year is based on a Talmudic passage that says that after twelve months people tend to forget things. During a Jewish leap year more than twelve months pass between the reading of *parshas zachor* from one *purim* to the next. The *Maharam Shik* concludes (in the name of the *Chasam Sofer*) that on a leap year one must have intent to fulfill his obligation of *zachor* during the normal reading of *parshas Ki Teitzei*.
- IV. Why don’t we recite a blessing over this mitzva?** Most positive commandments require a blessing to be recited immediately prior to their fulfillment. That being the case, the question arises why we do not recite a *beracha* of “*asher kid’shanu etc. al kriat parshat zachor*”.
- A. The *Yafeh L’lev* (3: 688) writes that we were only vulnerable to the attack of *Amalek* because we did not show proper diligence in our observance of *mitzvos* during our travels in the desert. It is therefore considered to be inappropriate to make a *beracha* on a *mitzva* that came about due to laxity in our religious observance.
- B. The *Kaf Hachaim* (685: 29) says that we do not make a *beracha* on *zachor* because we never make a *beracha* on destruction, even the destruction of our enemies.
- C. Rav Herschel Schachter SHLIT”A often quotes from Rav Soloveitchik ZT”L that just as one does not recite a *beracha* on a *mitzva* that itself is performed through the recitation of a *beracha* (i.e. *birchat hamazon, havdala*), so too one does not recite a *beracha* over a *mitzva* that is generally performed within a framework of *berachos*. Examples of this latter category are *keriat shema* which is recited within the framework of the *birchos keriat shema* and *sippur yetziat mitzrayim* which is said within the framework of *berachot* on four cups of wine. Similarly, one may suggest that we do not recite a *beracha* on the *mitzva* of *zachor* because it is generally fulfilled within the framework of the *berachot* that are recited on the *keriat ha’torah*.
- V. Conclusion.** We have discussed the source of the obligation to read *parshat zachor*, how one may fulfill this obligation, how often the *mitzva* must be performed, and why we do not recite a blessing on this

mitzva. Next week, God willing, we will discuss whether women are obligated in the *mitzva* of *zachor*, the nature of such an obligation, and what a woman who is unable to make it to *shul* for the reading of *parshas zachor* may do to fulfill her obligation.