

## Parshas Zachor – Part II

- I. Introduction.** Last week we began our discussion of *Parshas Zachor*. We explored the source and the nature of the *mitzvah* of “*zachor*”. We then listed various approaches in the *Rishonim* as to how one goes about fulfilling this *mitzvah*. Finally, we discussed the many reasons that we do not make a *beracha* on this *mitzvah*. This week we will *im yirtza Hashem* conclude our discussion of *Parshas Zachor* by examining the obligation of women in the *mitzvah* of “*zachor*”. We will also briefly discuss the pronunciation controversy that arises in *Parshas Zachor*.
- II. Are women included in the biblical obligation of “zachor”?** It would seem that most *Rishonim* would agree that a woman’s obligation in the *mitzvah* of “*zachor*” is equal to a man’s obligation. Indeed, the *mitzvah* is not a time bound positive commandment (as biblically it may be fulfilled at any time of the year). However, the *Sefer Hachinuch* (603) posits that the entire purpose of the obligation to remember *Amalek* is to ultimately engage in “*mechiyat Amalek*” (destruction of *Amalek*). Being that women do not fight in wars, the *Sefer Hachinuch* suggests, there is no need to obligate them to remember *Amalek*.
- III. Difficulties with the Sefer Hachinuch.** The ruling of the *Chinuch* is based upon two assumptions. Firstly, he assumes that the *mitzvah* of *zechirat Amalek* is contingent on the *mitzvah* of *mechiyat Amalek*. Secondly, he assumes that women are indeed exempt from “*mechiyat Amalek*” because they are generally not commanded to wage war. Later commentators question both assumptions:
- A. The *Minchat Chinuch* (*ibid.*) questions the first assumption of the *Chinuch* by pointing to the fact that we are not permitted to speculate what the reasons are for certain mitzvos and apply special exemptions based on our own reasoning. Who is to say that *zechirat Amalek* is at all related to *mechiyat Amalek*? Maybe even when *Amalek* is completely obliterated we will still be commanded to remember them.
- B. The *Minchas Chinuch* (*ibid.*) also questions the second assumption of the *Chinuch* by citing the *Gemara* (*Sotah* 44b) that states that for a *milchemet mitzvah* all of *K’lal Yisroel* must go out to help the cause, even a *Kallah* from *chuppah*. The clear implication of the *gemara* is that when it comes to a *milchemet mitzvah* (such as the war with *Amalek*) even women are obligated to fight. (See *Marcheshet* 1:22 who answers this question by suggesting that the *Gemara* only requires women to fight wars with the seven nations who inhabited the land of Israel, but women are in fact exempt from waging war with *Amalek*.)
- C. There is a third objection raised to the opinion of the *Chinuch* by the *Avnei Nezer* (O”H 509) who points out that the *mitzvah* to destroy *Amalek* is not limited to the battlefield. In fact, any Jew who encounters a descendant of *Amalek* is required to kill them on the spot. Therefore, even if women are exempt from war, they should still be obligated in *zachor* to remind them of their obligation to destroy *Amalek*. The *Avnei Nezer* himself addresses this issue. He points out that the obligation to kill people from *Amalek* does not override the *Shabbos*. Consequently, it is considered a time bound positive commandment that women would be exempt from.
- IV. How do we pasken?**
- A. The practice of most women is to make a special effort to hear *Parshat Zachor*. Most *poskim* assume that we do not *pasken* like the *Sefer Hachinuch*, and women are obligated to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *zachor*. Rabbi Yakov Etlinger ZT”L (Responsa *Binyan Tziyon HaChadashot* 8) records a rumor that the great Gaon Rabbi Nosson Adler (rebbe of the *Chatam Sofer*) would even encourage his maidservant to go hear *Parshat Zachor* in shul. (See *Torat Chesed Mi’Lublin* O”H 37)
- B. The *Marcheshet* (1:22) seems to pasken that women are exempt from *zachor* in accordance with the opinion of the *Chinuch*. He claims that the opinion of *Behag* (cited by *Rema*) that women may not read the *megilla* for men is contingent on the opinion of the *Chinuch*. The logic is that women may not read for men because one aspect of *megilla* is to remember *Amalek*. Being that this aspect only applies to men (like the *Chinuch* says) a woman’s reading cannot suffice to help a man fulfill all aspects of his obligation in reading *megilla*.
- V. Assuming that women are obligated in the biblical commandment of zachor; are they also obligated in the rabbinical obligation to hear the parsha read in shul before Purim?** The obligation to read *Parshat Zachor* in shul before *Purim* is a time bound positive commandment, and women should be exempt (see, however, *Berachot* 20b *Tosafot d”h B’tefilla* who quotes Rashi

Rashi that women are obligated in *mitzvot derabanan* even if they are positive time bound commandments). Indeed, Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch *SHLIT" A* (Responsa *Teshuvot V'hanhagot* 2: 344) says that a woman who is unable to come to shul should read *Parshat Zachor* by herself from a *chumash* in order to discharge her obligation. He speculates that even Rav Nosson Adler *ZT" L* would agree to this, but he encouraged women to go to shul to hear *zachor* because in his time most women were illiterate and unable to read it themselves at home. Perhaps one can suggest that the rumor about Rav Nosson Adler was specifically about his maidservant and not the women of his family, because his family members were most likely capable of reading Hebrew. [I later spoke to Harav Schachter *SHLIT" A* and he strongly believes that if women are obligated at all in the mitzvah of "zachor", they are also obligated to go to shul and hear it being read "mitoch ha'ksav". Reading from a chumash is insufficient as that is not called "mitoch ha'ksav".]

**VI. The Pronunciation Controversy.** Most versions of our *Tanach* have the word "zecher" with a *tzeiric* under the *zayin* (this, in fact, is the correct reading as determined by our *ba'alei ha'mesorah*). *Ma'ase Rav* (134) records that the *Vilna Gaon* used to read it with a *segol* under the *zayin*. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin *ZT" L*, however, writes in his approbation to *Ma'ase Rav* that he heard the *Vilna Gaon* read it with a *tzeirei*. Due to the confusion the *Mishna Berura* (685:18) recommends that the parsha be read twice; once with a *tzeirei* under the *zayin*, and once with a *segol* under the *zayin*. [Rav Shachter *SHLIT" A* mentioned to me that the Rav *ZT" L* used to read the passuk in Ashrei of "zecher rav tuvcha etc. twice, once with a *segol* and once with a *tzeirei*, for the same reason. Interestingly, many siddurim have the *zecher* in Ashrei with a *segol*. *Piskei Teshuvos* quotes from the chumash "heichal ha'bracha" who quotes that the gaon from Kumrana concluded based on the passuk in Ashrei that the passuk in parshas zachor should also be read with a *segol*.] It is important to note that the change of pronunciation does not affect the meaning of the word. (See *Baba Batra* 21b for earlier, and far more consequential pronunciation controversy surrounding the same word.)

**VII. Conclusion.** Over the past two weeks we analyzed various halachik aspects of *Parshat Zachor* including: it's source, how to fulfill the *mitzvah*, why we do not make a *beracha* on the *mitzva*, a woman's biblical and rabbinical obligation, and the pronunciation controversy. May our increased understanding of the details of this *mitzvah* help us perform the *mitzvah* with greater fervor.