

## 5781: Heading for a Showdown

*...and their lifeblood is dashed against My garments and I have stained all My raiment. For the day of vengeance is in My heart and the year of My redeemed has come.” (Isaiah 63:3-4)*

These two verses in the portion of Prophets read on the Shabbat before *Rosh Hashanah* always awaken our hopes: Perhaps this is the year that we have anticipated for so long? Perhaps this is the year of redemption?

“For the day of vengeance is in My heart.” God has a passion to take vengeance. The vengeance in this verse refers to Edom, but the essence of Edom is Israel’s age-old archenemy, Amalek. The numerical value of Amalek (אֶמְלֶק) is the same as doubt (פְּסָק), *safek*. Amalek represents doubt. These verses are particularly relevant this year.

The coming year is 5781 since the creation. It is customary to designate the year by discarding the thousands and thus this year is known as, תשפ"א, or 781, which is (among other important things) the numerical value of Israel-Amalek (יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶמְלֶק), together. This means that the coming year is a decisive one. We might go so far as to say that this year will see the final showdown between Israel and its archenemy, Amalek. God’s spirit will rest upon Israel “And the spirit of *Havayah* will rest upon him,” [the value of the words, “Israel” (יִשְׂרָאֵל) and “God’s spirit” (רוּחַ הוֹי) together also equals 781] and Israel will defeat Amalek. Israel will defeat doubt.

Vengeance on Doubt

What is the doubt that we must defeat? After the Israelites in the desert asked, “Is God in our midst or not?”<sup>[1]</sup> the following verse says, “And Amalek came and made war with Israel.” Amalek attacks us with the most painful and destructive doubt of all: Is God here, present, and with us, or is He not? Amalek has the power to make us doubt the existence of that which is clearly here.

“For the day of vengeance is in My heart.” The commentators explain that “in My heart” means that the desire to take vengeance on Amalek has been in God’s heart for generations, as is written, “God’s war with Amalek from generation to generation.”<sup>[2]</sup> It is as if God has restrained Himself throughout the years, but now the time has come. The entire movie is nothing more than a backdrop for the showdown. The showdown, the climax of the movie, is upon us.

The heart is the seat of desire. “The day of vengeance in My heart” means that God has a desire for that day to arrive. If God has this desire, why does He restrain Himself? God fulfills the teaching in the holy Zohar and the holy Tanya: “The mind controls the heart.”<sup>[3]</sup> This means that the intellect controls one’s passions and desires. We generally think of passion or lust in negative terms, as the evil inclination or the animal soul. But there are also positive passions: “The cravings of the righteous are strictly good.”<sup>[4]</sup> God is the *Tzaddik*, the Righteous of the world, and certainly, His desires are all positive. But the mind also controls positive desires. It reins them

in if the time has not yet come. The mind sees the possible outcome of the fulfillment of a particular desire and knows when the proper time has come. It controls the desire of the heart so that it will wait for the exact moment—for “the year of My redeemed has come.”

#### The Mind's Inner Dimension is Pleasure

Sometimes, however, the desire is so strong that the person's mind cannot overcome it. An example of this would be when Joseph could no longer hold himself back and revealed his identity to his brothers. It is then that the inner dimension of the heart enters the arena to control the mind. In spite of the power of the heart's inner dimension wanting to reveal the year of redemption, the mind's inner dimension can still exercise control over the heart's inner dimension. So, the wait may continue until the mind's inner dimension has decided that the time is right.

What is the difference between the mind's inner dimension and the 'regular' mind that controls the heart? When we say that the mind controls the heart, we mean that the mind, which sees the potential repercussions or outcomes of a particular action, perceives that the time is not yet ripe—the mind judges that the world is not yet ready. The perfect, precise backdrop is needed for “the year of My redeemed has come.”

The inner dimension of the mind is about something entirely different. It represents the feeling of Divine pleasure—it senses the exact moment when revealing, “the year of My redeemed” will cause the most pleasure. In Kabbalistic terms, the mind's inner dimension is described as “the inner dimension of *partzuf Abba* [the father principle]” and this is equated with, “the inner dimension of *Atik*” (פְּנִימִיּוֹת אֲבָא פְּנִימִיּוֹת עֵתִיק), which in Chassidic thought is called “pleasure.” Thus, though in His heart, God desires “a day of vengeance” upon Amalek, in the inner aspects of the mind, God's essential pleasure dictates otherwise. The time has not yet come for the manifestation of this essential pleasure. And so, we wait... until now. The showdown is always the movie's climax, the high point of the entire story. It is “the year of My redeemed has come.”

#### Amalek's Conversion

There is an important debate between the sages as to whether it is permissible to accept converts from Amalek. Maimonides determines that it is permissible, but there are many others who say that it is forbidden and that Amalekites must literally be killed, as in the verse, “Erase the memory of Amalek from beneath the heavens, do not forget.”<sup>[5]</sup> Maimonides writes that before going to war with Amalek, we offer peace. If he is willing to fulfill the seven Noahide commandments and to be subservient to Israel, he is accepted as a *ger toshav*, a foreign resident who accepts the Torah's authority and the seven Noahide laws. Some sages say that if an Amalekite is willing to accept the conditions for becoming a *ger toshav*, he can then proceed to full conversion.

We see from this that there is a rectification for Amalek. It is written that the descendants of Haman (the Amalekite) taught Torah in Bnai Brak.<sup>[6]</sup> If they were

teaching Torah in Bnai Brak, somebody must have converted them. There are opinions that they were accepted without knowledge of their lineage, which only became known after they converted. Nonetheless, we see that something good can come of Amalek—he can even become a Jew! Interestingly, the numerical value of “an Amalekite convert (גַּר עַמְלֵקִי) is equal to that of “the King Mashiach” (מֶלֶךְ הַמְּשִׁיחַ)!