

21<sup>st</sup> of Adar, 5781

## Nature, Miracles, and the War Against Amalek

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### Introduction

Today is the *yahrzeit* of Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk who is also referred to as the little Ba'al Shem Tov. He is the greatest Rebbe in the Polish and Galicianer branches of Chassidut and was the Rebbe of all the great masters of Chassidut in those areas of Europe.

It is most appropriate to begin with one of his *niggunim*. Many of these were preserved. There is a special niggun that was passed through the tradition of Chabad and I myself heard it from Rabbi Eliyahu Rivkin, here in Kfar Chabad. We will listen to a rendition performed by R. Mordechai Brodsky. As we listen to this *niggun*, let us try in our minds to connect ourselves with Rabbi Elimelech, the disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch and of the Ba'al Shem Tov.

*[Nigun Dveikut from Rebbe Elimelech<sup>1</sup> was played]*

I hope that everyone heard the niggun well. We will try to inscribe it on our hearts, for longing for Hashem, for unity for all the souls of the Jewish people.

### Connecting Purim and Pesach

We are now between Purim and Pesach, between the redemption of Purim and the redmption of Pesach. The sages say we should join the two together—that we should connect the two redemptions<sup>2</sup> (למסקנך גאולה לגאולה). There are many meanings explaining this phrase. One of them has to do with the continued battle that we have with Amalek. On Purim, we commemorate that battle and the victory of Mordechai and Esther over Haman, the descendant of Amalek. But the battle continues, as the Torah says, that God Himself will make war with Amalek, “from generation to generation” (דור ודור). The literal meaning of this phrase, “from generation to generation” is that this war goes on in every generation. Amalek appears in a new garment in each generation. He is like the evil inclination, which changes its appearance in each generation and it is up to us to recognize both Amalek and the evil inclination. We are a wise people and we have to recognize both in order to be able to serve God.

This ongoing war will continue until the time of Mashiach. Mashiach will have the final victory over Amalek. Joshua—who was sent by Moses himself to fight Amalek—only weakened Amalek. Afterwards King Saul, even though he was commanded to completely annihilate Amalek by the prophet Samuel, in the end also only weakened them, because he let their king, Aggag live; before Samuel could fix the situation by killing Aggag, he had born progeny whose descendant ended up being Haman.

1. To listen go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEDQcQZe2mA>.

2. *Megillah* 6b.

Certainly Esther and Mordechai wielded great power over our enemies, but they too did not totally annihilate the evil root of Amalek. So Amalek remains. The simple meaning is that in every generation there is an Amalek and Hashem Himself swears, He puts His hand on His throne as it were, and swears to fight him from generation to generation.

As we know, the Torah has seventy facets, seventy different interpretations. Another way to understand the phrase, “from generation to generation,” is that it is referring to “from year to year.” Every year, the generation renews itself. This happens on *Rosh Chodesh* Nissan—the first day of the month of Nissan—which is described in the Torah as the the first of the months with regard to the festivals and the kings. For the festivals and for counting the years of a Jewish monarch, the year begins on Nissan. When it comes to nature and for non-Jewish kings, the year begins on Tishrei. The inner dimension and reality of the Jewish people begins on Nissan.

The first day of Nissan is thus a new year and every new year is like a new generation, a new face of reality. Just as Nissan is the spring and nature renews itself, so there is a new manifestation in reality. How is this alluded to in the phrase “A war for God with Amalek from generation to generation”? The two words “generation to generation” in Hebrew are (דָּר). These two letters, dalet and reish, are the root of the name of the month of Adar (אָדָר). In relation to Adar, the two letters, דָּר, refer to power and strength, as in the verse, “God is great in Heavens”<sup>3</sup> (אֲדִיר בְּמָרוֹם הוּא). The sages say that if one wants to be known and recognized, he should plant a giant powerful tree called an Eder (אָדָר) on his property. Likewise, God is powerful and great in the “heights” in the Heavens. Because of this, the month of Adar is described as having a healthy and strong fortune or *mazal*. The influx from above during the month of Adar is from a strong and healthy place. So the two-letter root, דָּר, stands for might and strength.

But, there is another meaning to these letters. They also are the root of the word, דְּרוֹר, one of the synonyms for “freedom.” This word (pronounced *dror*) alludes to the generation or year that begins anew with every first of Nissan. The redemption of Nissan, the Exodus from Egypt, is from servitude to freedom. We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and we were set free. There are two basic synonyms for freedom in Hebrew, חֲרוּת and דְּרוֹר. The second (דְּרוֹר) is used to describe the freedom in the Jubilee year. All servants were set free. There was no more confinement of any type.

This word, דְּרוֹר, is also used in the Bible as an adjective for a bird—a bird that is free. Sometimes a bird is put into a cage, and when it is released it becomes a free bird, a *dror* bird. The sages say that *dror* can also mean “home” (דִּירָה) and a person who is free can now go and live wherever he wants. He can fly where he wants. So these are the two basic words for freedom, חֲרוּת and דְּרוֹר and the second indicates a freer state than the first.

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<sup>3</sup>. Psalms 93:4.

Freedom to be myself

One of the streams of Chassidut that stems from Rebbe Elimelech is Izhbitz. In Izhbitz, the most important teaching is that a person on the one hand should have tremendous fear of Heaven, but should also feel 100% free to do whatever he wants to do. The freedom is needed in order to spread Yiddishkeit, to spread faith. Each individual is receiving as it were a message from the Almighty in the form of his or her mission in life. So all the directives that seem to enter our will from above are meant to expand (התפשטות) our reach and to expand our influence as much as possible. To attain a state of such freedom is to be free in the sense of *dror*, which is above and beyond just the freedom from Egyptian slavery, called *cherut*.

These two synonyms for “freedom” go together. One of the signs for this is that their numerical value is a square number. In this case, *cherut* (חרות) equals 614 while *dror* (דרור) equals 410 and together they equal 1024 which is 32 squared. The fact that their sum is a square value shows that they are indeed deeply connected. In fact, 1024 is not just 32 squared, it is also 2 to the 10<sup>th</sup> power.

Where does this number appear in our daily service? In the Shema, it is the number of letters. We are taught in the *Tanya* that the *Shema* is the spiritual equivalent of the Exodus from Egypt. It makes us one with God who is Infinite. There are 1024 letters in the full *Shema*—the combination of these two synonyms for freedom.

Another observation about these two words is that their initials are *chet* and *dalet* (חד). Those are the two final letters of “one” (אחד) as we say in Shema, Hear O’ Israel, *Havayah* is our God, *Havayah* is one (אחד). The sages teach us that the *dalet* at the end, which is a big dalet, represents the expansion of Godliness in all four directions of reality. What then is the *alef* (א) that starts the word “one” (אחד)?

By finding the average value of these two words, we can calculate the “wings” from the average out to each number. The average value is 512 (1024 divided by 2) and the wing from the average, 512, to *cherut* (חרות) 614 is 102, the value of “faith” (אמונה). The second wing from 512 to *Dror*, which is 410 is also 102, the value of “faith” (אמונה). The wing is also half of the difference between the two numbers, which in this case is 204, the value of *tzaddik* (צדיק). The *tzaddik* himself, like Rebbe Elimelech, possesses two levels of faith, because the word *tzaddik* (צדיק) equals twice the value of “faith” (אמונה).

The word “faith” (אמונה) begins with an *alef* (א), so it is very appropriate in this meditation we are doing on the word “one” (אחד) to correspond the letter *alef* with faith. With this mediation for the *Shema*, we are coming out of Egypt, out of our bondage. It does not yet mean that we have reached the state of the freedom of the Jubilee which is the freedom to do all that your heart desires, all with a deep commitment to God, to spread out as much as you like. That level of freedom is symbolized by the *dalet* (ד) of “one” (אחד).

So we have here faith-*cherut-dror* (אמונה חרות דרור). Faith is thus the beginning of freedom. Not to be a slave to heresy. To believe in God is to believe in miracles. To be a slave means to be enslaved to nature—to feel and think that there is nothing except for

nature, which can be described in certain respects as cruel. The laws of nature are cold, cruel, and heartless. To be free means to live in faith. There are many ways to define faith. I can say that it means to believe in God, in the Torah, etc. But the simple meaning and expression of faith is that I believe in miracles. The miracles we experienced on Purim and Pesach are of two different types. We are now connecting the two—Purim and Pesach—through their common denominator: the belief in miracles. If I believe in miracles, there must be God here who is responsible for them. So freedom begins with faith. Faith is being freed from being a slave to the laws of nature, to be able to overcome nature (לשדד את המערכת). God of course controls nature. But, by clinging to God, every Jew can rule nature through his faith. Every Jew also has the same power to manifest miracles. That is the function of the true *tzaddik*.

Rebbe Elimelech's innovation: Connecting to a *tzaddik*

So let us talk about Rebbe Elimelech whose *yahrzeit* is today and in his merit the *Mashiach* should come. His innovation was the teaching of the meaning of the true *tzaddik* and how we should connect to him. All the effluence that comes from above goes through the *tzaddik* as a channel. He himself feels that he is nothing, and because of that he can pass everything and distribute all the good and blessing that passes through him.

The Ba'al Shem Tov taught great levels of clinging to God, but in the next generation it was already clear that these levels were not attainable by every individual without guidance. Thus, there were two main variations on how to bring the Ba'al Shem Tov's into practice. The Alter Rebbe taught that we have to be connected to a *tzaddik*, who like the Ba'al Shem Tov is on a lofty spiritual level, but that in addition, every individual has a personal responsibility to serve God with his own power. To help each individual personally, the Alter Rebbe wrote the *Tanya*, which is also known as the Book of the Intermediates (ספרן של בינונים). The intermediate according to the *Tanya*'s definition is almost an ideal type of person who is absolutely clean in his thought and his actions and one can only hope to reach this level.

But, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk, in his book, the *Noam Elimelech*, taught that even if you cannot attain the level of a *tzaddik* yourself, you can reach tremendous levels by thinking about the *tzaddik* and connecting yourself to him. Through him, you can receive all the effluence that God is bringing down. God Himself saw that the world was not going to be all *tzaddikim*. This is related to another statement by the sages that God created the world with the attribute of judgment, meaning that only a consummate *tzaddik* would be able to live in the world. But, then he saw that the world could not be sustained only upon judgment, so God added the attribute of compassion. What this means is that even though He created the world for those who are perfect, for the perfect souls of the *tzaddikim*, we too can find our place in it by being *ba'alei teshuvah* and connecting with a *tzaddik*. Even the *tzaddik* feels himself imperfect in order to be close to we who are *ba'alei teshuvah*. By feeling that he himself is imperfect, the *tzaddik* has compassion on all those who really are.

What we explained is that two generations after the Ba'al Shem Tov it became necessary to explain to the Jewish people, to the millions who were becoming connected to the Ba'al Shem Tov's teachings, how to follow the Ba'al Shem Tov's path. And there were two ways to do this. Either through the *Tanya*, the Book of Intermediates, that stresses the demand that we each have to strive to serve God by our own power (and, as we said, also states that you should connect yourself to the tzaddik, so that you receive the effluence from the front-side). Or, through Rebbe Elimelech and his book the *Noam Elimelech* which stresses that you should connect to a tzaddik and in that way you might be able to reveal something of the tzaddik in yourself. The *Noam Elimelech's* main theme is the explanation of the paradoxical state in which the tzaddik exists, where he is the conduit and yet feels himself to be the most distant of all from God.

#### Faith-Freedom-Freedom

This all connects to our meditation this evening, that the word "one" (אחד) is the initials of faith-freedom-freedom, or in Hebrew: אמונה חרות דרור, where the faith entails connecting with God, even unto self-sacrifice, which merited us the miracle of Purim, advancing that war that God has with Amalek from generation to generation in Adar. But, in the next month, in Nissan, the stress of the war changes to freedom. This is not to say that there is no faith in Nissan, for even the matzah that we eat is called in the *Zohar*, "the food of faith." Through eating matzah we integrate faith into freedom. But, the stress is that from the attribute of faith in Adar, we come to the first type of freedom, *cherut* (חרות) in Nissan. The value of "faith" (אמונה) and "freedom" (חרות) together is 716, which means that their average value is 358, the value of Mashiach (משיח). Faith and freedom equal "Mashiach Mashiach," corresponding to the two attributes of Mashiach—Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben David. From there, we come to the total absolute freedom to be wherever you want and do whatever you want like a free-flying bird, which is the word *dror* (דרור). All this is the secret of the word, "one" (אחד) in our meditation.

Now if we add 102, the value of "faith" (אמונה) to the sum of the two synonyms for freedom (חרות דרור) 1024, we get 1126, which also the value of another important phrase in the Torah describing redemption, "I will lead you to a higher stature"<sup>4</sup> (ואולך אתכם קוקמיות). The meaning of this word "higher stature" (קוקמיות) is actually like saying that it is a level upon a level, and we can liken them to the two levels of freedom we have been talking about that are one above the other.

#### The tzaddik's role

Let's now explain another teaching from the *Noam Elimelech*. The entire book describes different levels of *tzaddikim*. One of his teachings is to meditate on the form of the letter *tzaddik* (צ), the 18<sup>th</sup> (יח) letter of the *aleph-bet*, indicating that the *tzaddik* is a living soul. If we contemplate the *tzaddik's* form (צ), we see that it is a combination of a *yud* (י) on

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<sup>4</sup>. Leviticus 26:3.

the upper right which is connected to a *nun* (נ) which is bending over. It's important to try and picture this in our mind. How does he explain this?

He says that the *yud* is connected to the back of the shoulder of the *nun*. The *tzaddik* himself is the bent over *nun* (נון כפופה), because in this world, the *tzaddik* is bent over. [The form of the final *tzaddik* (ז) letter—the *tzaddik* as it is written when it comes as the last letter in a word—is the form of the *tzaddik* of the future, who will stand upright. It is extended, free to go wherever it wants.] In this world, the *tzaddik* is in a state of existential lowliness (שפליות). But, he has the *yud* on his shoulder representing his mission in life (שלחות) which he feels descending as a weight on his shoulder. His Divine mission is on his shoulder from the back. It is not only his mission that is on his shoulders, but also all the effluence that he brings down into the world for all those souls that are connected to him.

Now, from the point where the *yud* connects to the *nun*, extending to the left, there is a small line. The *Noam Elimelech* explains that this little line that extends upwards represents the *tzaddik's* consciousness, which is always thinking and striving towards God's oneness, God's unity (which we alluded to in the very beginning of our words). God's oneness is actually the unity of all creation. So, whatever the *tzaddik* does and wherever he goes, he is striving to reach oneness. The secret of "one" that we saw as *faith-cherut-dror*.

From the connection point between the *yud* and the *nun*, there is a large base. Rebbe Elimelech explains that this is like the *tzaddik's* realization that he is the conduit for bringing down the extended and wide blessing in all material and spiritual matters. He doesn't need any of this for himself. But, because of his great love of Israel, he succeeds in bringing down to the broad base of the *tzaddik*—the bottom of the *nun*—a broad blessing in all matters: family, health, and livelihood.

The *tzaddik* has consciousness upwards, towards the source from where all the Divine effluence originates from. And at the same time his consciousness is also downward to bring everyone these blessings. This is what the *tzaddik* is—a conduit.

#### Faith in miracles

Faith at the simplest level is the faith in miracles. Believing in miracles is freedom from being a slave to the laws of nature that in and of themselves can seem lifeless. Every Jewish soul was created in order to break through the laws of nature. Still, God created nature. Nature is not evil. Since God created it, it must be good. Even God's Name *Elokim* (אֱלֹהִים) has the same value as "nature" (הטבע). This ties in with the Torah's first verse, "In the beginning God created," which is hinting that there is something Divine in nature.

The negative side of nature—the Amalek outlook on nature—is to not believe in nature as revealing miracles. Non-Jews who are not Amalek also believe in God and also believe in miracles. That is why they pray. That is the justification for prayer. But, one who believes in miracles, believes in the infinite that is engarbed in reality. This

realization alone can be a very strong motivator for non-Jews to convert—what we call the Fourth Revolution (in Torah learning).

Four levels of perceiving nature

There is a whole spectrum of faith here: all the way from miracles to no miracles. Still, even in the case of believing in miracles, people can believe in limited miracles. To convert means to give complete absolute freedom to the infinite that is within nature. To understand the full spectrum of possible miracles, we will correspond the different levels of the four Worlds in Kabbalah: Emanation, Creation, Formation, and Action (from the highest to the lowest). Each of these represents a state of consciousness, and in this case, a level of faith in miracles.

The world of Emanation is the level at which one has faith in unlimited miracles. The three lower worlds, in which consciousness is experienced as being separate from God, represent three different conceptions of nature and its relationship with the supernatural. All three, the super-natural is somehow engarbed in nature. In the three lower worlds, even though nature exists, it is like clothing for the miracle. Some scenario happens and it is perfectly clear that even though it is engarbed in natural events, a miracle happened. *Recognizing the miraculous within nature, that itself is the battle that God is fighting with Amalek.* An example of such a miracle is the miracle of the book of Esther. All you need is a little spiritual sensitivity to see that all that happened there from the beginning was from the Creator, who saves us and redeemed us.

But, in the World of Emanation, the miracle is completely open and clear. The miracle breaks nature and one cannot see nature, only God. A miracle such as this is called a revealed miracle and an example of it is the Splitting of the Red Sea.

Mordechai, one of the two protagonists of the Book of Esther is described as the light that descends from the world of Emanation into the World of creation.

In the World of Formation, one can recognize that nature itself is a miracle. This is dependent upon feeling that God is recreating the world at every moment *ex nihilo*, something from nothing. So this is the feeling that nature is the continued and ongoing miracle.

Finally, there is the lowest level. There is a split or gap between the World of Formation and this lowest level, called the World of Action. The experience in the World of Action is therefore that the world is normal. All that is normal is nature and nature seems to be lifeless and at times, cruel laws. This is the experience of consciousness at the level of the world of action.

So we have now explained another basic meditation on the four Worlds which correspond to two levels of miracle—revealed and concealed in the Worlds of Emanation and Creation—and two levels of nature—nature as a miracle and nature as normal, in the Worlds of Formation and Action. Our task is to always strive to ascend to higher levels of appreciation of God and we do this by ascending the ladder of the Worlds through contemplation. By our contemplation, the soul itself ascends.

The first ascent is from nature as being lifeless and harsh by experiencing continual recreation. The second ascent is from nature to miracles. We can achieve this for instance by thinking about history. Every day is like a page in the book of history, every story is a film that is being directed right now by God, for a purpose. Recreation (the level of Formation) does not necessarily imply that there is a purpose—thus, nature can be alive, but remain directionless. But a story has a purpose behind it. There is some satisfying resolution that will be reached at the end of a story. So ascending from the World of Formation to the World of Creation, from nature as a miracle to miracles engarbed in nature is achieved by thinking about the purpose of every moment in history—be it our own personal history or the history of entire nations, and the entire world. Such is the story of the Book of Esther. It is actually a history where you realize the miracle manifested through historical events.

These three lower levels from Action to Creation can be summarized then as follows:

The highest level of perceiving nature is the level of the World of Creation, where you can see the miracle unfolding through the garment of nature. This is the secret of God's Name *Shakai* (ש-ד-י). Experiencing the ongoing creation in the World of Formation, is the secret of God's Name *Elokim*, which we said is equal to "nature." The final lowest level in the World of Action cannot see that nature was created (or places the creation in the very distant past, too distant to be relevant) and this is described as "the world follows its regular path" (עולם כְּמִנְהַגּוֹ נוֹהֵג). In this state of mind, the laws of nature seem to be working just by inertia.

Flight of the tzaddik

But, there is a third ascent from the consciousness of the World of Creation to that of Emanation. This ascent in the mind leads us from history to the absolute freedom (even from history), which is the true meaning of miracles in the World of Emanation. Indeed, in Hebrew, the word for "miracle" (מוֹט) means something that is ascending. In Emanation, the miracles ascend without any limitations. The sky is not the limit and you can fly where you want from Israel to the US and back.

Being able to fly today in an airplane is not a miracle. The real miracle is to be able to take flight in your mind and to elevate your consciousness to a higher world. The *tzaddik* is always flying in his mind and as the Ba'al Shem Tov explains, wherever one thinks one is in his mind, that is where he actually is. The *tzaddik* flies through all the worlds.

This is the meaning of the *tzaddik* flying wherever he wants, a description used by the sages to describe the World to Come.

Conclusion

We have a lot to contemplate now: the secret of the word "one" (אמונה חרות דהור) and to realize that in Pesach to we are fighting Amalek who wants to be an evil monarch that we are all enslaved to. Amalek fights us to make it so that even if we have left Egypt, we should not be able to fly. He wants to prevent us from having perfect faith in the



absolute freedom that comes from our strength of conviction which was displayed in Adar.

So may we all merit to connect the generation of Purim with the generation of Pesach and that God should be 100% victorious over Amalek. Thereby we should merit to the revelation of Mashiach, who is as we said likened to a free bird, which can reach from the highest state to the lowest in order to bring down infinite blessing to reality. To reveal good for us and for the whole world and we should merit to see Mashiach now. This should be a continuation of Purim.