



Bet Horaah בית הוראה Shaare Ezra שערי עזרא

Parshat Tetzaveh

Zmanim for New York:

Candle Lighting: 5:31pm

Shabbat ends: 6:31pm

R"T 7:12pm

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MAZAL TOV TO OUR DEAREST FRIEND EZRA GUINDI UPON BECOMING BAR MITZVAH. MAY WE CONTINUE TO SEE YOU GROW IN TORAH, YIRAT SHAMAYIM, AND SPREADING KIDUSH HASHEM AROUND THE COMMUNITY. MAZAL TOV TO YOUR DEAR PARENTS AND SIBLINGS.

ARE WE REALLY YOTZE THE MITZVAH OF PARASHAT ZACHOR??

RABBI SHAY TAHAN

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This week is Parashat Zachor, which we all know is a Mitzvah D'Orayta—a Torah obligation. While there are a lot of people saying a lot of "halachot" regarding the recitation of Parashat Zachor, there's a famous expression: "Don't believe everything you hear." That being said, let's touch upon a few points that seem to be the opposite of what most people think the Halacha is.

While most of us assume that the Mitzvah of Zachor is to hear the words from a kosher Sefer Torah; the truth is that the Mitzvah is not to read or hear the Parsha—but to remember the evil things that Amalek did to us after we came out of Mitzrayim. This is made clear in the way the Rambam writes (מצוה קפט) that the Mitzvah is to remember the evil things Amalek did to us, and to encourage our nation to hate them. The Torah commands that we remember that, by reading the Parsha of Zachor from a Sefer Torah.

Therefore, if one merely listens to the reading and pays attention to every word, but he doesn't think of what Amalek has done, he doesn't fulfil the mitzvah.

Another concern which is very relevant to most people, is that in order to properly fulfil the obligation of hearing Parashat Zachor, one must understand—entirely—the simple meaning of what the Ba'al Kore is reading.

This Halacha is learned from the laws of Berchot and Tefillah. For example, when one says a Bracha on fruits, with an intention that others who are listening should be Yotze with his Bracha, is the person listening required to understand the words? Rabbenu Asher, known to most as the Rosh, says that the one listening must indeed understand the words to fulfil their obligation. Although the person who says the Bracha himself can be Yotze even without understanding, but in

order to be Yotze through listening, one must understand the words.

Rashi on the other hand is more lenient and holds that they can be Yotze even without understanding the words.

Who do we follow for Halacha? The Shulchan Aruch (סימן קצג,א) rules like the Rosh, that one must understand the reading. The Shulchan Aruch brings this concept by the laws of saying Birkat Hamazon for someone who doesn't know how to read. He writes that a person must

understand every word he is hearing to be Yotze. This is more of a concern for Sephardim who follow the rulings of the Shulchan Aruch (see Kaf Hachaim who's Machmir, but Yalkut Yosef is lenient) than the Ashkenazim, since some Ashkenazi poskim wrote that the Minhag is to be lenient. (מג"א סק"ב, משנ"ב סק"ה).

The exception to this rule is the Megillah reading, which the Gemara points out that even if one doesn't understand the words, he still fulfils the Mitzvah since the Megillah obligation is only to read even without any understanding, since by reading the Megillah, we express the miracle of Purim. We see that the Megillah reading is an anomaly, and in other places the Halacha would require one to understand the words one is hearing.

Accordingly, there is a Machloket whether one must understand every word in Parshat Zachor or merely understanding the purpose of the reading. Rav Elyashiv (אשרי האיש פרק מא ה"ה) Rabbi Yaakov

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ARE WE REALLY YOTZE THE MITZVAH OF PARASHAT ZACHOR??

Kaminestky (אמת ליעקב סימן תרפה בהערה) and Rabbi Gavriel Zinner (נטעי גבריאל עמוד קמה) held that it's sufficient to understand the matter without understanding the words.

Rabbi Shternbuch argues and writes (מועדים וזמנים ח"ב סימן קסה) that one must understand all the words in Parashat Zachor and their meanings.

This would be relevant not only to the English/Russian speaking people who have a hard time understanding the basic meaning of the Pesukim, but also for the Israelis who speak and understand fluent Hebrew, as many of the words we read in those verses are not understood in simple Hebrew.

Here are a few examples from several Pesukim in Parashat Zachor:

וַיִּזְנוּ בְּכָל הַנַּחְשִׁים אַחֲרָיו. No Israeli would be able to understand what this Pasuk means unless they learn Rashi. In the word נחשלים the verse turned the letters from חלשים which means weak.

One wouldn't be able to put those words to a meaning without our Rabbis explaining them to us correctly.

Here, this pasuk means that Amalek attacked those who were weak because of their sins, which caused them to be pulled away from the clouds that protected the nation.

Another example is the pasuk וְלֹא יִרָא אֱלֹקִים which is read to mean that the Jewish Nation wasn't fearing Hashem, but Chazal tell us this Pasuk actually refers to Amalek who didn't fear Hashem.

Rabbi Aurbach (הליכות שלמה פרק יח ה"ב) says that if one understood this to mean on Am Yisrael, he is still Yotze since some Mefarshim say that those words refer Am Yisrael. He

also adds that, regardless, it's not required to hear all the words but rather the main parts of the reading (as we'll see soon BH).

Sefer Birkat Avraham (מובא בכף החיים סק"ה) says that when one reads in a setting of ten people, then he can be Yotze even without understanding the words. Still, one should try to avoid this leniency since from the Shulchan Aruch, it seems that he disagrees and requires one to understand even in a minyan setting.

Another point to keep in mind is the Chidush of the Taz (סימן תרפה סק"ב) who wrote that one can't fulfil this Mitzvah without a Bracha, therefore one must listen to the Beracha of the person who says it with the intention to be Yotze the Bracha as well, while the one reciting the Bracha should have them in mind as well. Although the majority of the Poskim didn't agree with the Taz on this Halacha, but since it's very easy to fulfil the Taz's requirement and have in mind the Bracha, one should make that extra small effort.

Rav Elyashiv said (אשרי האיש פרק מא ה"ז) an interesting insight: when a person recites the Bracha he should have in mind not only to say the Bracha on the Torah, but also on remembering the commandment to wipe out Amalek.

As people tend to feel that if a word was not heard at the time of the reading they don't fulfil their obligation, the poskim (רש"י אורבך בהליכות שלמה פרק יח ה"ב) seem to say not so. Although one should try to hear every word, but if he missed some words, he is still Yotze as long as he heard the main parts of the reading.

STOMPING OF THE FEET WHEN HEARING AMALEK

Immediately upon their exit from Mitzrayim, the Nation of Israel was attacked and harassed by the people of Amalek. This act was so evil, that the Torah commands us duly to always remember it, and never forget. Therefore, before Purim we read the Parasha of 'Zachor' which speaks of that brutal attack of Amalek while we were in that state of weakness.

While we are all familiar with the tradition of stomping our feet and making noise upon hearing Haman's name by the recital of the Megilat Ester, many of us are not so familiar with doing the same while hearing the name of Amalek at the reading of Parashat Zachor.

In many Sefaradi shuls, the congregants indeed stamp their feet, albeit quietly to make sure the noise of the stamping isn't heard.

The history of how this custom had formed and why the stamping is purposely done quietly is very interesting.

In order to correctly understand this, we need to travel back in time to a city near Thessaloniki, Greece which had a prominent Sefaradi congregation. That city is called Rhodes, which was led by Harav Rachamim Chaim Yehudah Israel, a scholar of the highest caliber, held in very great esteem.



At the time of reading the Parasha of Zachor, the entire congregation, young and old, would make a big commotion—the adults would clap their hands and stomp their feet, while the children would bang loudly with their toy hammers. The noise sounded so loud that it was heard from afar and it would even scare the people walking outside the synagogue.

This practice continued for years until Rabbi Israel decided to limit the noise because of a story that happened at the time.

Some of the neighbors in that town used to make a doll with the image of a Jew and beat it on a certain day of every year. On the same day, angry

mobs would come out looking for Jewish people to beat. No need to explain the fear and sorrow that was felt at the time. Unfortunately, this continued until the rabbis of the town got together and pleaded with the judge of the Supreme Court to put a stop to it, and with the help of HaShem, so he did. But when he heard about the custom to kick and bang upon hearing the name of Haman and Amalek, he got angry, feeling this was the precise act that he just ordered halted the other way. When it came to the attention of Rabbi Israel, he immediately decided to end this custom in hopes that this judge wouldn't reverse his previous decision.

The Rabbi had another issue with the stamping, a ha-

STOMPING OF THE FEET WHEN HEARING AMALEK

lactic concern. Fearing it may interfere with the actual hearing of the Zachor reading, thus wanting to abolish it to ensure that not a single word of the Parasha is missed.

Upon inquiring from his colleagues in other towns, he found that in Izmir, Turkey they had the same custom, which the city's rabbi, Harav Avraham Palacci wasn't pleased with as well.

When he was ready to annul this custom, he was challenged with a clear ruling of the Bet Yosef, Rabbi Yosef Karo (author of the Shulchan Aruch), in which he discussed (O.H 690) a custom where the children would take wooden boards and write Haman's name on them, followed by which they would knock stones against them until Haman's name would get erased. He writes that such customs have authentic sources and therefore one shouldn't attempt to ridicule them in any

way.

Rabbi Israel deduced from the above that the custom was just as described, but with the intention being the only difference; in an attempt to erase Haman's name, but not in order to create noise and commotion. Therefore, felt Rav Israel, he had adequate grounds to halt the custom immediately.

Rav Israel gathered a group of eight of the greatest Sefaradi Rabbis of the time, all signing a letter stating that no noise of any sort be made at the time of the reading or after. Another letter was subsequently written by two other Torah giants, as described at length in the Responsa Ben-Yamin.

Since then, the loud clapping and stomping had completely stopped; this custom was all but forgotten, save for the few communities who still keep doing so, albeit very quietly, so as to commemorate the old tradition.

BAR MITZVAH DERASHA FROM EZRA GUINDI

It's well known that the Mitzvah of Tefillin represents the event of the Bar Mitzvah. But since on that day, the Bar Mitzvah boy becomes obligated in all the other Mitzvot as well, one might wonder, why does the Mitzvah of Tefillin stand out more than other Mitzvot, and what is the connection between this day and the Mitzvah of Tefillin?

We also see that the Torah puts a special emphasis on the Mitzvah of Tefillin—more so than any of the other Mitzvot. For example, in Parashat Ki Tetse, the Pasuk describes the preparations of the nation before going to war. A Cohen stands in front of the warriors and proclaims: "Whoever is frightened to go out to battle, leave at once and go back home!" Chazal interestingly explain that the fear in question, is actually those who were scared because of their sins. The Gemara says that the sin they were afraid of was the fact that they spoke between donning the Tefillin shel yad (donned on the arm, corresponding the heart) and the Tefillin shel rosh (donned atop the head).

We need to clarify, why is it so bad to speak in between and why did Chazal point to this more than any of the other sins?

The explanation is the following: the Tefillin shel Rosh hints to the Neshama, soul, which dwells in the place of the mind, while the Tefillin shel Yad represent the desires of a person which dwell by the heart.

The Zohar writes that the real war mentioned above is the war against the Yetser Hara. When going to fight a war one must fight with the correct weapon; and in the war against the Yetser Hara, the weapon to be used is to allow the Neshama to control the desire by connecting the hand to the head.



Now we can understand why one shouldn't have any interruption between the shel rosh and the shel yad—this is because we must connect the heart with the mind. Hence, the Tefillin represent exactly that. The reason is because a

person needs to realize that the only way he can perform all 613 Mitzvot of the Torah, is if he elevates his mind and heart and makes them holy. The way this is done is by connecting them.

This idea connects beautifully to the 7th day of Adar which is the day of passing of Moshe Rabenu, and the reading of Parashat Zachor which will be taking place this

Shabbat. In Parashat Zachor, we read that Am Yisrael went to fight a war against Amalek and although Moshe Rabenu stayed behind, he was really the one conducting the war. Whenever he picked up his hands the nation was victorious, but when he lowered them, the nation got defeated. The Mishna in Rosh Hashana asked the following question: do the hands of Moshe make or break a war? The Mishna answers that whenever Moshe would lift his hands, the nation would put their faith and trust in Hashem and were able to win, but when he lowered his hands, the nation stopped and they would be defeated.

According to the explanation given above, we can understand this to mean that whenever the hands are lifted towards the mind, they can connect with the mind and the Neshama without any interruption. But when the hands are lowered, there is a disconnection between the heart and the mind which allowed Amalek to enter our hearts.

When one connects the heart with the mind, he can then perform all the Torah laws, and therefore the Mitzvah of Tefillin is appropriately the Mitzvah which demonstrates this connection.

