



HALACHA WEEKLY

Parshas Vayikra

March 15, 2019 Vol. I, Issue 15

PARSHAS ZACHOR

Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

The Torah commands us (Devarim 25:17-19), “Remember what Amalek did to you on the way when you were leaving Egypt...You shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heaven – you shall not forget.”

The Sifri comments, “Remember” – with the mouth, “Do not forget” – in the heart. The Gemara (Megillah 18a) echoes this interpretation of the verse and states that it must be read from a *sefer*. This is the source for the mitzvah to read the section of the Torah that discusses this mitzvah (Devarim 25:17-19) to remember what Amalek did, also known as *Parshas Zachor*. Tosafos (Brachos 13a s.v. *bilashon*; Megillah 17b s.v. *kol*) includes the reading of *Parshas Zachor* in a short list of sections of Torah whose reading is required by the Torah. Other Rishonim (medieval Torah authorities) including the Rashba (Brachos 13a s.v. *laima*), the Ritva (Megillah 17b s.v. *laima*) and the Rosh (Brachos 7:20), as well as other *ba’alei Tosafos* (see Magen Avraham Orach Chaim beginning of 585 and Taz *ibid.*:2) all state that there is a *mitzvah midiOrayso* (Scriptural mitzvah) to read this parsha. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 685:7) states that there are those who say that this is indeed a *mitzvah midiOrayso*. According to most *poskim*, this obligation is fulfilled annually. The Maharam Shik (mitzvah 605:2) explains that the Gemara says that people tend to forget after twelve months. Therefore, one must re-remember Amalek’s deeds every twelve months. This article will attempt to examine some of the details of this mitzvah.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 685) discusses the order and proper time for the reading of the four special *parshios*. The second of these *parshios* is *Parshas Zachor*, and the Shulchan Aruch rules (*ibid.*:4) that it should be read on the Shabbos before Purim. Rashi (Megillah 29a s.v. *umafsikin*) explains that we want to place the destruction of Amalek before the destruction of Haman (who is descended from Amalek). The Taz (Orach Chaim *ibid.*:1) explains in a slightly different fashion that *Zachor* should be read prior to the reading of Megillas Esther on Purim because Purim is the time of the fulfillment of the mitzvah to physically destroy Amalek, so we first fulfill the mitzvah to speak about Amalek’s egregious deed.

What is the proper way to fulfill the reading of *Zachor*? The Terumas Hadeshen (108) says that one must be careful to read *Zachor* in public, meaning in the presence of a *minyan*

(ten Jewish adult males). The Terumas Hadeshen bases this ruling upon the words of the Rosh (Brachos 7:20) who says that there is a Scriptural mitzvah to read *Zachor* in the presence of a *minyan*. This ruling is cited by the Magen Avraham (*ibid.*) as well as the Taz (*ibid.*). However, the Sha’ar Hatziyun (685:5) cites this Terumas Hadeshen and says that he is unaware of a source for this ruling; he rejects the Rosh cited by the Terumas Hadeshen, saying that the Rosh simply means to say that there is a *mitzvah midiOrayso* to read *Zachor*, and Chazal (the Sages) enacted that this be fulfilled in the presence of a *minyan*. Regardless, it emerges that one needs to hear *Zachor* with a *minyan*; the debate is simply whether the obligation is *midiOrayso* or *midiRabanan*.

The Mishna Berura (685:14) rules that since the reading must be done from a Sefer Torah, everyone must fulfill their obligation of reading by listening to the *ba’al koreh* (reader) with intent to be *yotzei* (fulfill the obligation), while the *ba’al koreh* must have in mind that his reading be *motzi* (discharge the obligation of) those listening. The listeners are thus regarded as having said the words themselves through a concept called *shome’a ki’oneh* (listening is like responding). One should also try to hear every word, for if one failed to hear a word, he is not considered to have recited it. If one did miss a word, there are varying opinions as to whether one has fulfilled the obligation; Rabbi Moshe Feinstein is quoted (Mo’adei Yeshurun pg. 47) as ruling that as long as one’s hatred is aroused against Amalek through this reading, the mitzvah has been fulfilled; a similar ruling is cited from Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo ch. 18 ha’ara 4).

There is an interesting discussion regarding the *brachos* made before and after the Torah reading by the person who receives the *aliyah*; must those listening also hear every word of the blessings and intend to be *yotzei* through the *oleh*, and must the *oleh* have in mind to be *motzi* them, or is this unnecessary? There is a three-way dispute between the Maharshal, the Taz and the Bach. The Maharshal says that although a *katan* (minor) may generally be called for *maftir*, for *Zachor* he cannot, as the *brachos* are an integral part of the reading. The Bach disagrees and rules that any minor may be called up, while the Taz opines that a minor who knows Whom he is blessing may be called, while a minor who doesn’t cannot be called. (See Taz *ibid.* for full discussion.) Rabbi Shmuel Felder (Shiurei Halacha-Hilchos Purim, 5767 ed., pg. 2-3) notes that the Taz clearly does not require that the

listeners be *yotzei* the *brachos*, since he validates some minors for the *aliyah*, and a minor cannot be *motzi* adults. The Bach, who allows a minor to receive the *aliyah*, certainly does not require the listeners to be *yotzei* with the *brachos*. (Rabbi Felder does not discuss the Maharshah's opinion, though this author believes that the Maharshah's position that a minor never be given the *aliyah* is not proof that the *tzibbur* (public) must be *yotzei* with the *brachos*; it is possible that the blessings simply validate the Torah reading itself, and without them, it would not be considered a proper Torah reading with which to fulfill the mitzvah of reading *Zachor*.)

The Rema (Orach Chaim 282:4) states that the custom is to allow a *katan* to read the four *parshiyos*. The Mishna Berura explains that although *Zachor* is a *mitzvah midiOrayso*, and a *katan* cannot be *motzi* adults, this is not an issue, since in our times there is a designated *ba'al koreh* who reads from the Torah, and he is being *motzi* the *tzibbur*. Rabbi Felder (ibid.) proves from this that the *brachos* are not an integral part of the actual *Zachor* reading. However, there are those who are stringent on this matter. Rabbi Akiva Eiger in his glosses to Shulchan Aruch, commenting on the aforementioned Rema permitting a *katan* to read the four *parshiyos*, says that the Perach Shoshan disagrees since one must be *yotzei* with the *brachos*. Rabbi Eiger's son-in-law, the Chasam Sofer, would announce in shul that everyone should have in mind to be *yotzei* with the *brachos* (Minhagei Chasam Sofer, cited by Shiurei Halacha ibid.). Rabbi Shmuel Vosner (Shevet Halevi 10:107:1) says that since this reading is *midiOrayso*, one should have intent to be *yotzei* the *brachos* (and, by extension, the *oleh* must have intent to be *motzi*).

There is yet another discussion as to whether one must understand the meaning of the words being read. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 193:1) rules that one who is listening to *Birchas Hamazon* from another in lieu of reciting it himself must understand the meaning of the words, even though it is being recited in *Lashon Hakodesh*. The Mishna Berura (193:5) says that there are those who are lenient if it is being said in *Lashon Hakodesh*, and comments that we must conclude that people who do not understand nor read *Lashon Hakodesh* rely on this opinion. Nonetheless, the Mishna Berura concludes that if one does not understand the words, he should say the words quietly along with the person reciting the *bracha*. This stringency seems to apply specifically to a *diOrayso* obligation. Based on this, Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch (Mo'adim Uzmanim 2:165) says that one should be careful to understand the meaning of every word of *Parshas Zachor*. However, other halachic authorities (and Rabbi Shternbuch himself) point out that this does not seem to be something people are careful about. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein is quoted as having said that so long as one hears *Parshas Zachor* and

through that one's hatred toward Amalek is aroused, one has fulfilled the obligation (see Shiurei Halacha ibid. pg. 1-2).

There is considerable discussion regarding the obligation of women to hear *Parshas Zachor*. The Sefer Hachinuch (mitzvah 603) says that since women are not included in the obligation of going to war against Amalek, they are similarly excluded from the mitzvah of remembering what Amalek did. Many later authorities agree that women are exempt (Avnei Nezer Orach Chaim 509; Shu"t Torah Lishma 187; Chazon Ish, cited by Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky in Ta'ama Dikra, Hanhagos Chazon Ish 23). Other, though, disagree. Shu"t Binyan Tzion (Chadashos 8) cites Rabbi Nosson Adler as saying that women are obligated. The Maharil Diskin (Kuntres Acharon 102) says that according to those who say that the reading of *Parshas Zachor* is *diOrayso*, women are included in the obligation. The Minchas Yitzchak (9:68:1) says that most authorities rule that women are obligated and that the custom is for women to attend shul to hear the reading of *Zachor*. Halichos Bas Yisrael (pg. 297) cites Rabbi Moshe Feinstein that women should attend shul to hear *Zachor*. However, Sefer Moa'dei Yeshurun (pg. 63) quotes Rabbi Feinstein as saying that women may fulfill their obligation by reading *Parshas Zachor* from a regular printed *chumash*. Rabbi Shmuel Felder (Shiurei Halacha ibid. pg.4-5) explains that a *chumash* may suffice because, as noted earlier, the Sha'ar Hatziyun is rather dubious as to the need of reading *Zachor* in the presence of a *minyan* on a *diOrayso* level; if it is only *midiRabanan*, women may not be included in this additional requirement. Furthermore, there are those who say that while the Gemara says *Zachor* must be read from a "sefer," this may not mean specifically a kosher Sefer Torah but any halachically-valid written or printed *Parshas Zachor*. Rabbi Felder concludes that women who find it difficult to attend shul to hear *Zachor* may fulfill the mitzvah by reading it from a *chumash*. The Kaf Hachaim (685:30) says that women needn't hear the reading of *Parshas Zachor* from a Sefer Torah, but they are obligated to remember Amalek's deeds.

Some communities have a custom to have a separate reading of *Zachor* from a Sefer Torah for women. However, this is no simple matter; some authorities rule that this should *not* be done. The Minchas Yitzchak says that it is preferable not to do so, but if it is done, no *bracha* should be made on this reading, since the entire obligation of women is controversial. Halichos Bas Yisrael (pg. 296) quotes Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv as saying that one should have a *minyan* of ten adult males present, in accordance with the opinion that a *minyan* is required *midiOrayso*.

In conclusion, there are many details and opinions regarding the proper fulfillment of this once-a-year mitzvah, and one is encouraged to consult with his halachic authority for clarification on which opinions to follow.