

Dear Chavraya,

In the midst of our Torah learning on a recent early morning at JP Licks, a deep silence enveloped us, each one of us seeming to be touched in the same moment by the same awareness. Held in each other's presence, looking within our selves, all together and each one alone, we came upon the intersection of Torah and life, the Torah of life. A brave acknowledgement had been made among us, the realization shared of so many years ago of a terrifying line nearly crossed, the ceaseless screaming of an infant, one's own baby, nearly driving the young parent to violence. We are filled with so much good, doing and knowing the way of good, the way we strive and want to be, but in one teetering moment nearly crashing down into the ravine of all our jagged fears that yawns on the other side.

So many of the Torah portions during these weeks, calamity and comfort interspersed, are filled with violence, the drawn sword, going forth to battle. Sometimes from within the Torah itself, sometimes from sensitive reading and wrestling brought from outside in, the violence is challenged, a model of response to violence in the world as well as in the word. Going forth, going out to battle, especially in Chassidic teaching, is turned around and becomes a turning within to do battle, an act of engaging with self.

In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Ki Tetze*, the shift happens immediately, as though the intended meaning is what lies underneath, the words themselves calling us to look deeper if we would find the truth. The Torah offers its own hint, subtle, not so subtle, challenging us with its language, *ki tetze lamilchama al oyvecha/when you go forth to battle against your enemies*. It is in the singular, *when you go forth*, each one of us, *against your enemies*, plural, but *your* is singular. Who is it about, who is being addressed, who are the enemies? Drawing on a long tradition, the Slonimer Rebbe responds to the challenge, the battle is *im oyvo ba'nefesh hu ha'yetzter horah/with the enemy in one's soul, which is the evil inclination*. We each have our own unique enemies within, *ha'oyev ha'm'yuchad*, our own demons, as it were, that block our path, that we need to overcome in order to fulfill the unique role and purpose for which we are in this world.

At the end of the portion we encounter Amalek, the evil chieftain who attacked Israel at our weakest as we left Egypt. We are told to remember what Amalek did and to blot out the memory of Amalek, not to forget. Even here, if we would make a better world, a world in which evil is finally overcome, Rebbe Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev challenges us to look within, each one *to blot out that portion of evil that is known by the name Amalek that is concealed in one's heart*. Rebbe Levi Yitzchok then goes further and says, *the reality of Amalek is in the potential for evil that is in every person/l'cho'ach ha'ra b'chol adam*.

Changing the world begins within ourselves, whether in acknowledging our own potential for evil, or in seeing the ways in which the goodness we might do is blocked. Just as the spirit of Amalek may dwell within each of us, then so too does the inner angel, or as one teacher suggests, the inner Messiah. Rebbe Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, known as the Me'or Eynayim, teaches that *each*

one needs to nurture that aspect of the mashiach that is an inherent part of one's own soul/tzarich kol echad l'hachin chelek b'chinat mashiach ha'sha'yech l'chelek nishmato.

Brought to look within ourselves by one person's brave acknowledgement around the learning table, so we saw ourselves in the mirror of Torah. Recognizing the potential for evil, for violence within ourselves, so we can also see the greater possibility for good. As Amalek dwells within, so too does the Messiah. Meeting the challenge of our own inner struggles, may goodness emerge more fully in the world, that aspect of Mashiach that is each of ours becoming one as the Mashiach that is all of us.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor