



Beshalach – Hand to Hand Combat

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

Dedicated by the Schreck family in memory of Fraida bas Moshe Yosef z'l

It was the first of many battles. The fledgling Jewish nation was acclimating to its newfound freedom and emancipation. After 210 years of barbaric servitude and mistreatment we witnessed the demise of our former tormentors. We had hoped for peace and tranquility; unfortunately, this was not meant to be.

“Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim. So, Moses said to Joshua, ‘Pick men for us, and go out and fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.’ Joshua did as Moses had told him, to fight against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur ascended to the top of the hill. It came to pass that when Moses would raise his hand, Israel would prevail, and when he would lay down his hand, Amalek would prevail. Now Moses’ hands were heavy; so they took a stone and placed it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one from this [side], and one from that [side]; so he was with his hands in faith until sunset. Joshua weakened Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.” (Shemos 17:8-13)

Amalek attacked us without cause or reason. We did not threaten their nation or land. They attacked the stragglers, the weak and elderly, and so we were forced to fight. Moshe tasked Yehoshua with organizing and leading the army into battle. Yehoshua mobilized the fighting force and Moshe ascended the mountain to pray on behalf of the people. Moshe raised his hands in supplicatory prayer, yet the Torah tells us, that his “*hands were heavy*.” Why the need for this piece of information? What is the Torah trying to teach us? Rashi comments, “*Since he had been lax in [the performance of] the commandment [of warring against Amalek] and had appointed someone else in his stead, his hands became heavy*.” Why did Moshe delegate this responsibility to Yehoshua instead of leading the army himself? What is the deeper message to be gleaned from this entire episode?

Rav Kalonymos Kalman haLevi Epstein (1751-1823) in his sefer Maor V'Shemesh says, “What does it mean that Moshe’s hands were heavy? It means that Moshe’s strength weighed him down.” Moshe’s hands were filled with so much potential, strength and ability. He was carrying around so much power that his hands felt heavy. He didn’t think he could lead the army out, but he was wrong. He was weighed down with potential he didn’t even realize he had. Moshe appointed Yehoshua because he felt that he (Moshe) did not possess the requisite skill set to meet this challenge. Moshe was wrong. His hands were laden with the potential.

This is the profound message the Torah is trying to convey. We each possess so much incredible potential of which we are profoundly unaware. At times we find ourselves enveloped by the Amalek of life and we look to others to solve our problems and fight our battles. Life Amalek can only be vanquished with hand to hand combat – and it must be our own hands. We must realize that like Moshe, our hands are heavy with potential. Even if at times we feel unprepared and unqualified for the challenges which arise we must remember that the strength to succeed is somewhere within. May we find the strength to lift our hands, discover this potential and find success on the battlefield of life.