
פרשת בשלה

פרק יז פסוק ח

וַיִּבֹּא עֲמֶלֶק וַיִּלָּחֶם עִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרַפְיָדִים:

חז"ל

מאי לשון רפידים? רבי אליעזר אומר: רפידים שמה, רבי יהושע אומר: שריפו ידיהם¹
(עצמן) מדברי תורה, שנאמר (ירמיהו מ"ז:ג) לא־הִפְנוּ אַבּוֹת אֶל־בְּנִים מִרְפִּיּוֹן יָדִים:

מושג

רפידים: שריפו ידיהם מדברי תורה

Translation: They weakened their hands from the words of the Torah.

Explanation: רבי יהושע is of the opinion that the name רפידים is not simply the name of the place at which עמלק attacked בני ישראל, but carries within the name the reason they were attacked. The ancestor of עמלק was Eisav, who saw himself as a completely physical being; הנה אנכי הלך למות. This focus on his physical existence led to his fatigue – עיף אנכי – and to his willingness to ‘sell’ his first-born status, and thus relinquish his rights to the service of Hashem which was the exclusive domain of the בכור. Yaakov Avinu, whose voice of Torah and Tefilah – הקול קול יעקב – focused his energy on the spiritual, was thus able to negate the ידי עשיו. However, when בני ישראל weakened their connection to Torah in רפידים, thus severing themselves from the source of their spiritual strength, they too became fatigued – עיף ויגע – and endangered their hold on the rights to serve Hashem. This allowed Amalek to regain their ידי עשיו, and to attack.

Looking in the Pasuk: It is possible that רבי יהושע reads a deeper meaning into the word רפידים because we had previously been told that בני ישראל were in רפידים, why would the Torah repeat this fact if not to teach the lesson of our Musag? He knew that this was a result of a weakening of their connection to Torah by the fact that we are told that they lacked water, which is a metaphor for lacking Torah. Additionally, the fact that they were fatigued and questioned whether Hashem was still in their midst, likewise points to a lack of connection to the Torah.

¹ See Notes 1

NOTES

1. When our Musag is quoted it is almost always quoted as שריפו ידיהם מדברי תורה. However, that wording may not be accurate. The Musag is mentioned twice in the גמרא, the first in מסכת (קו.) and the second in מסכת בכורות (ה:). In both places the text reads שריפו עצמן, not שריפו ידיהם. However, there are many reasons to justify the more popular version:

A. Rashi in מסכת בכורות (ה:), reads the text as שרפו ידיהם.

B. The מכילתא, which also teaches our Musag reads:

אחרים אומרים אין רפידים אלא רפיון ידים לפי שרפו ישראל ידיהם מדברי תורה לכך בא שונא עליהם לפי שאין השונא בא אלא על רפיון ידים מן התורה.

The מכילתא thus explains that the word רפידים is actually a combination of two words, רפיון and ידים. Rashi in מסכת בכורות seems to follow the מכילתא and writes:

לא הפנו אבות אל בנים - להטיב להם. מפני רפיון ידים של תורה ומצות, והכי נמי רפידים רפיון ידים הוא, כלומר מפני שרפו ידים מן התורה בא עליהם עמלק.

C. Finally, the Pasuk which the גמרא brings as a support also speaks of רפיון ידים.

In light of the above, we will follow the wording of the מכילתא and Rashi and present the Musag as שרפו ידיהם.

2. The גמרא which is the source of our Musag brings a difference of opinion between רבי אליעזר and רבי יהושע as to the meaning of the word רפידים mentioned in our Pasuk. According to רבי אליעזר it is simply the name of the place in which the battle between בני ישראל and עמלק took place. רבי יהושע reads deeper significance into the word and says that it describes the spiritual state of the people at that time. We might ask: Why would רבי יהושע assume that the word is anything more than what it seems to be, the name of a place? One possible answer is that the Torah repeats twice that בני ישראל were in רפידים. In Pasuk א' of our Perek the Torah has already told us that the people had camped in רפידים. Why would the Torah tell us again in our Pasuk that עמלק attacked in רפידים? Therefore, רבי יהושע, there must be an additional or different meaning of the word.

While we might therefore understand why רבי יהושע would seek a deeper meaning to the word רפידים we might ask: How did he know that it was because they had slackened or weakened themselves from Torah? We do know that בני ישראל had begun to doubt whether or not Hashem was still within them – *הֲיֵשׁ יְהוָה בְּקִרְבָּנוּ אִם-אֵין (פסוק ז)* – but we do not know why they should have felt so.

I believe the answer is found in the גמרא (בבא קמא פב.) which teaches²:

דתניא: (שמות ט"ו:כב) וילכו שלשת ימים במדבר ולא מצאו מים. דרשי רשומות אמרו: אין מים אלא תורה, שנאמר: (ישעיהו נ"ה) הוי כל צמא לכו למים, כיון שהלכו שלשת ימים בלא תורה נלאו³.

At the beginning of our Perek the Torah tells us of a lack of water: *וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ מִיַּם לְשִׁתּוֹת הָעָם*. Thus, רבי יהושע explains that not only is the word רפידים a description of the people's spiritual state, but the words *מִיַּם לְשִׁתּוֹת הָעָם* are to be understood in the same sense. בני ישראל had weakened their connection to Torah thus severing themselves from their connection to Hashem. The purpose of the Torah and its מצוות is to connect us to God in our every action and every thought. The Torah takes the spiritual, heavenly, world and brings it down to earth, ensuring that Hashem is a real presence in our lives. When בני ישראל reached a state of *מִיַּם לְשִׁתּוֹת הָעָם* they naturally began to question *הֲיֵשׁ יְהוָה בְּקִרְבָּנוּ אִם-אֵין*; severing our connection to Torah severs our connection to God.

It is, therefore, no wonder then that the Torah (דברים כה:יה) describes the people before the attack of עמלק as: *וְאִתָּה עָיִף וְנֹגַע וְלֹא יֵרָא אֱלֹהִים*. Interestingly, the Pasuk connects their lack of fear of Hashem to the fact that they were tired and exhausted. What was the source of this fatigue? Again, we may

² The גמרא is discussing the obligation to read the Torah not only on שבת but on every Monday and Thursday as well. The גמרא answers that the purpose of the obligation is so that we do not go three days without hearing דברי תורה.

³ They became exhausted.

connect this episode to the גמרא in בבא קמא mentioned above. The גמרא there tells us that when they went three days without Torah they became tired; ונלאו. It is clear that it is our connection to Hashem through His Torah that is the source of our strength. Therefore, here too, at רפידים, when they weakened their connection to Torah – רפו ידיהם מן התורה – they weakened their connection to Hashem – היש'ה בקרבנו – and became tired, עיף ויגע. This, in turn, invited the attack from עמלק.⁴

There is another interesting connection between being tired and the attack of עמלק. The word עיף rarely appears in the Torah. In fact, there is only one other instance where the word appears. In פרק לכה:כט-ל, we read:

כט ויגד יעקב נזיד ויבא עשו מן-השדה והוא עיף: ל ויאמר עשו אל-יעקב הלעיטני נא מן-האדם האדם הזה כי עיף אני על-כן קרא-שמו אדם:

The fact that the word עיף is used only by עשו and by עמלק, the descendants of עשו, points to a strong connection between the two.

I believe the connection is explained in the commentary of the Sforno. He comments that Yaakov's insistence that Eisav sell his rights to the בכורה was a direct result of Eisav's fatigue. The Sforno writes:

מכרה כיום: כי בהיות היום כל מגמת פניך אל מלאכתך, באופן שאתה כל כך עיף שאינך מכיר הנזיד, אין ספק שלא תוכל להתעסק בעניני הבכורה, לשרת לאל יתברך ולעשות את הראוי לבכור.

The Sforno explains that Eisav's fatigue, which was so severe that he could not even recognize (or possibly did not care to recognize) the food in front of him, would not allow him to undertake the role of the בכורה who were destined to dedicate themselves to the service of Hashem (until they were replaced by שבט לוי after the העגל). In light of the above, we can now easily understand why עמלק, Eisav's descendants, attack when בני ישראל display the exact same character flaw that caused Eisav to lose the בכורה in the first place: עיף!

I believe, however, that the connection goes beyond a similar word. It is not only the fatigue that typifies Eisav's approach to life, rather it is that which leads to the fatigue that describes the nature of Eisav. Eisav himself clearly communicates his approach towards things spiritual when he says (שם:לב) הנה אנכי הולך למות ולמה זה לי בכורה (שם:לב). Eisav displays a disdain for the spiritual and claims himself to be a physical being, one that will surely die and therefore have no use for things beyond the material. This approach leads to terrible fatigue. A person burdened by the demands of the physical world, in which one cannot find meaning beyond his or her next paycheck, will quickly tire of the 'rat race', never achieving a feeling of contentment; a feeling that the material world simply cannot supply⁵. When בני ישראל they are echoing Eisav's claim that we are purely physical beings without a spark of spirituality within us. Their ensuing fatigue mirrors Eisav's state when Yaakov demanded he relinquish the exalted spiritual status of a בכור. The subsequent attack by the descendants of Eisav should have, therefore, come as no surprise.

It is thus clear that our battle with Eisav and that which he represents is won by strengthening our connection to Hashem through Torah and Tefilah. It is the קול of Yaakov that defeats the ידים of Eisav as the מדרש (ילקוט שמעוני רמז קטו) teaches:

הקול קול יעקב, בזמן שקולו של יעקב מצוי בבתי כנסיות ובבתי מדרשות אין הידים ידי עשו⁶.

⁴ Rashi brings the תנחומא which connects their question of Hashem residing in their midst to the attack from עמלק:

ויבא עמלק וגומר. סמך פרשה זו למקרא זה לומר, תמיד אני ביניכם ומזמן לכל צרכיכם, ואתם אומרים 'היש'ה בקרבנו אם אין' (לעיל פסוק ז), חייכם שהקלב בא ונושף אתכם ואתם צועקים לי ותדעו היכן אני. משל לאדם שהרפיב בנו על קתפו ויצא לדרכו, והיה אותו הבן רואה חפץ ואומר, אבא טול חפץ זה ותן לי, והוא נותן לו, וכן שננה וכן שלישיית. פגעו באדם אחד, אמר לו אותו הבן, ראית את אבא. אמר לו אביו, אינך יודע היכן אני, השליכו מעליו, וקא הקלב ונשכו.

⁵ As our Rabbis teach יש לו מנה רוצה מאתים.

⁶ There is a similar מדרש רבה which teaches: בקולו ידי עשו שולטות, (מהליש) בקולו ידי עשו שולטות. דכתיב וילך העם על משה ויבא עמלק, ובשעה שהוא מצפצף (מגביה) בקולו אין הידים ידי עשו שולטות.

Interestingly, the מדרש does not simply say that when the voice of Yaakov is found in the Batei Knesset and the Batei Midrash then Eisav's hands are rendered powerless, but rather that his hands are not his hands: אין הידים ידי עשיו. Perhaps the Midrash is teaching that when we connect to Hashem through Torah and Tefilah, then the hands of Eisav are not his, but ours. Not only is Eisav rendered powerless, we receive the power that was his.

With this understanding of the Midrash the words of our Musag become clear. Our Musag taught that the name רפידים was a combination of two words רפו ידיהם. Since we are talking about a weakening of their Torah study would not the term רפו קולם be more appropriate? However, according to the Midrash it was not only their voices that weakened, but as a result of their lack of קול, their ידיים, the very same ידיים which they took from Eisav, were weakened as well. The term רפו ידיהם thus teaches a significant lesson in what we lose when the voice of Yaakov – הקול קול יעקב – is silent.

While it is obvious that Jewish strength is found in our connection to Hashem, this is even more manifest in the battle against the descendants of Eisav. Whenever we are lax in our Torah observance, we give Eisav back his 'hands' and allow him to challenge our spiritual mission and thus disrupt the spread of מלכות שמים. This is what the Torah (שמות יז:טז) means when it says כִּי־יָדָהּ בְּעַמְלֶקָה. However, as long as our voice of Torah and Tefilah remain strong we retain the upper hand in this monumental struggle and firmly establish Hashem's presence in our midst.

3. Questions for Further Thought:

- a. The battle against עמלק seems to be won by Moshe raising his hands and lost when he lowers his hands; (שמות יז:יא) וַיִּגְבַּר עַמְלֶק (שמות יז:יא) וַיִּגְבַּר יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּכָּאֶשֶׁר יְנִיחַ יָדוֹ וַיִּגְבַּר עַמְלֶק (שמות יז:יא) The משנה (ר"ה כט.) corrects this notion and teaches:

וכי ידיו של משה עושות מלחמה או שוברות מלחמה? אלא לומר לך: כל זמן שהיו ישראל מסתכלין כלפי מעלה, ומשעבדין את לבם לאביהם שבשמים היו מתגברים, ואם לאו היו נופלים.

How might our explanation above help us understand this משנה?

- b. The story of Purim also tells of our struggle with עמלק. Can you find in the Purim story the same challenges and successes that we find in the original battle?