

What Is Happening?

Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

Monsters. There is no other way to describe them. Bloodthirsty killers. How long will the world continue to play games with them, supporting them, agitating for them, condoning them, lying for them, and demanding a country for them? Anyone who advocates for monsters is a monster.

Don't expect any change. Across Europe, there are marches in support of the killers. In New York City as well, there are rallies and protests backing baby killers. The Western nations welcomed evil people into their lands and stood by in silence as their numbers swelled, leading European states to be overrun by them.

On Sunday, Germans voted out the so-called center-left party and elected the rightist party, with many voting for the ultra-right party. Who can blame them? You call them anti-Semites, but the leftists who welcomed Hamas supporters into their countries and constantly condemn Israel are just as guilty.

Despite everything that has happened to Israel since October 7th, its citizens remain strong and resilient. They still feel empowered and proud of their army and the Shin Bet. Patriotism is commendable, but realism is even more vital and necessary. Yes, we all care deeply about the only Jewish state and pray for its people. We visit there, we send our children there to learn, and our hearts are there. We daven three times a day that Hashem will return us there and bring us together.

This is not a time to attack or criticize. But it is a time to reflect on what is happening and consider what we can do to help.

Let us imagine that the Torah was describing this period, from October 6th until today.

How would the Torah record these events? We no longer have prophets, but it seems that we don't need a prophet's vision to understand our current situation.

In two weeks, we will celebrate Purim, commemorating the defeat of Haman the Amaleiki. The nation of Amaleik was the first to strike the Jewish people after their miraculous exodus from Mitzrayim.

Though the battle fought may seem conventional, the Torah and Chazal offer a deeper perspective. The verse tells us that Amaleik attacked the Jewish people in the city of Refidim. Chazal teach us that the reason Amaleik was able to attack was because the Jews had slackened in their observance and study of Torah.

There is another reason implied by the verses that precede the war with Amaleik. The Torah tells us that the Jews complained of thirst and ends the discussion with the posuk (Shemos

17:7) stating that “the place where the Jews complained about a lack of water was called Massah Umerivah, because they fought there with Hashem and tested Him, saying, ‘Is Hashem among us or not?’” The next posuk tells us that Amaleik came to fight with Am Yisroel.

Rashi explains that the two pesukim are connected, with Hashem saying, “I am always among you and always prepared to help with all your needs, and yet you have the audacity to question whether Hashem is with you or not. I swear that a dog will come and bite you, and you will cry out to Me for help, and then you will know where I am!”

Rashi offers a parable to illustrate Hashem’s words. A man was carrying his son on his shoulders and they went on their way. The boy saw something he wanted and asked his father to pick it up for him. The father did so. This happened a second and third time.

They then met someone on the road, and the boy asked if he could see his father. The father intervened and angrily rebuked his son, saying, “How can you not know where I am?” Then he threw him off his shoulders and onto the ground. A dog came along and bit the boy.

In the same way, the Jewish people, who doubted Hashem, were cast aside and left vulnerable to attack.

Thus, there are two reasons Amaleik attacked the Jews after Krias Yam Suf: they were not diligent in their Torah study and their belief in Hashem had weakened.

Amaleik, and all the nations that followed in attacking and tormenting us throughout the ages, did not appear by chance. Hashem removed His protection from us due to our misdeeds, and thus they were permitted to attack.

We have no shortage of enemies seeking to harm, wound, and kill us, but when we are deserving, Hashem protects us from them. Soon, at the Seder, we will proclaim in the reading of Vehi She’omdah that in every generation, enemies arise to destroy us, but Hashem saves us from them.

Moshe Rabbeinu stood on a mountain leading Klal Yisroel in prayer while the battle raged. When the people repented and prayed properly, they won, and when they faltered, Amaleik gained ground.

Although Amaleik’s attack and Klal Yisroel’s victory took place thousands of years ago, they remain an eternal lesson on how to exist in a world that hates us, how to defeat our enemies when they attack, and how the Torah records our battles, victories, and defeats. It doesn’t report like a newspaper, lehavdil, simply stating who was stronger militarily and who was weaker. Rather, it tells us what Klal Yisroel was doing at that time—whether they were close to Hashem and deserving of victory or had drifted away and lost their zechuyos.

Israel has been fighting a war with terrorists for many decades, even prior to its founding. For years, the terrorists have carried out attacks, including brutal assaults on civilians, wanton killings, widespread violence, destruction, and abductions. The Jews in Israel have been suffering at the hands of Arabs for centuries, but the attacks on October 7, 2023, were the worst Israel has faced in modern history, and the worst anywhere since the Holocaust.

Israel declared war on Hamas, vowing to destroy those wicked people and rescue the hostages. The war dragged on for over a year, and Hamas remains in control of Gaza, dictating terms for Israel to follow if it wants to secure the return of its hostages, both dead and alive. As part of the deal, many hundreds of the world's worst people have been released from Israeli prisons.

Since that awful day, when so many Jews were killed, wounded, and kidnapped, the images of the Bibas family came to symbolize the tragedy. A father, mother, and two young children were taken on October 7th. The photo of a terrified mother trying to protect her sons as they were dragged from their home in Nir Oz by savages and taken to Gaza became a haunting image. The photos of the two young boys, Ariel, who was 4, and 9-month-old Kfir, became ubiquitous, seen worldwide wherever good people expressed grief over the catastrophe.

The story took an even more tragic turn when the terrorists held a macabre ceremony last Thursday in returning the bodies of the mother and two boys to Israel. The tragedy deepened when Israel discovered that the body said to be that of Shiri Bibas was not hers. Eventually, her body was returned a day and a half later.

The very symbols of the hostage crisis were violated yet again. There was little anyone could do other than mourn.

The proud Zionist nation, which views itself as strong and powerful, was left at the mercy of a far inferior group they had sworn to eradicate.

How did such things happen? What can Israel do to regain its pride and eradicate the terrorists who seek its destruction in Gaza, Lebanon, and Israel? What can it do to free all of the hostages?

The answer came the evening the Bibases were returned. West Bank terrorists had planned a mass murder for Friday morning. They placed bombs on five Tel Aviv-area buses, timed to go off at 9 a.m., when they would be packed with morning commuters and shoppers doing their pre-Shabbos errands.

But a miracle happened. Three of the bombs exploded on the buses Thursday evening at 9:00, while the buses were still empty in their depots. A quick inspection was carried out, and two more bombs were found and deactivated before they could do any damage.

Who saved the lives of the hundreds who would have been on those buses? Was it the police? The army? The Shin Bet?

It was none of the above, even though they are spread across the West Bank fighting terrorists and trying to thwart their plots.

The tragedy was prevented by Hakadosh Boruch Hu. It was the One Above who intervened and ensured that the massacre did not take place.

Very often, heavy rain storms are accompanied by thunder and lightning. Meforshim explain that since we are not always worthy of the blessing of rain, Hakadosh Boruch Hu causes thunder and lightening to shake the storm area so that people should be shaken out of their complacency and do teshuvah as they become awed by Hashem's power.

So it happened last week, that following the tragic morning, in the evening Hashem brought a tremendous nes, which forced even doubters to recognize that everything that happens is from Hashem.

On a day that began with sadness, Hashem showed us that He is our Father, carrying us on His shoulders. When we merit, He protects us from those who seek to harm and destroy us.

When we acknowledge that He is carrying and shielding us, we merit His protection. But when we doubt Him and falter in emunah and bitachon, He drops us, and the murderous dogs come charging at us.

The image of the invincible Israeli army and soldiers, born from the miracles of the Six Day War, is deeply ingrained in the minds of Israelis and Jews worldwide. Nothing that has happened since has tarnished that image. Everyone remembers Israel's unimaginable victory over multiple enemies, but many forget that those victories were forged by miracles. Hashem carried all of Israel on His shoulders that week and caused a tremendous victory.

But when that is forgotten, and people wonder where Hashem is, He drops us and leaves us at the mercy of the beasts. And in the Middle East, there are regrettably many such beasts.

As believers, maaminim bnei maaminim, it is our duty to rationally examine what has happened and understand that everything that takes place is done by Hakadosh Boruch Hu for reasons He understands, reasons that we will one day comprehend. When Hashem wants the Israeli army to win, they are invincible superfighters. When He does not want them to win, they don't.

Some wars were miraculously won, as any objective study will show, while others were lost due to various reasons: poor intelligence, inadequate planning, weak generals, tactical errors, and more. This past war displayed all of the above.

People still wonder how it is that the Israelis didn't see the terrorists coming on October 7th or why they weren't able to stop them. People just don't understand. How can it be that Israel couldn't defeat Hamas, despite the mesirus nefesh of its soldiers? How can it be that the

American president is more aggressive about Israel's enemies than Israel itself seems to be? How can it be that despite the Israeli prime minister's eloquent speeches over the past three decades about the danger of Iran, that country is on the verge of manufacturing nuclear weapons?

How can it be?

For those blessed with emunah and bitachon, the answer is obvious. Sometimes Hashem helps the Jewish army, and sometimes He doesn't. It's plain and simple.

You may ask: Why does Hashem carry us at some times and drop us, so to speak, at others?

Although we no longer have a novi to guide us to the real reasons and direct us on the path of teshuvah, we can deduce from the pesukim of the Torah what we must do.

When the Jewish country battles Torah, when the Jewish country seeks to destroy the foundation of our people, dismantling yeshivos and forcing those whose merit sustains the nation to exchange their Gemaros for M16 assault rifles, Divine anger is stirred.

When the country's political and military leaders fail to acknowledge Divine assistance, they add to Hashem's wrath and bring harm upon their people.

When the Jewish prime minister, who rarely expresses gratitude or references G-d, visits the United States, and the non-Jewish president publicly acknowledges and thanks G-d for keeping him alive and for his victory in the recent election while praying for Divine guidance in leading the country, yet the prime minister neither learns from this example nor mentions G-d at any point during his stay, only doing so occasionally after returning to Israel, it raises concern.

As Purim approaches, let us take to heart the lessons from the battle with Amaleik, the evil Haman's ancestors, and work to strengthen Torah. May we increase our own emunah and bitachon, and work to help strengthen the emunah and bitachon of those around us, and of all Jews, here and in Eretz Yisroel, as we seek to free ourselves from our evil enemies and merit shalom and shalvah, peace and deliverance.

May we all merit the final defeat of Amaleik and the coming of Moshiach, who will return us all very soon to where we belong.