

Mussar Gathering - January 26, 2025

Holding Each Other Up in Crisis

By Dr. Erica Brown



What are you noticing in this painting?

Shemot / Exodus 17:8-16

Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, "Pick some troops for us, and go out and do battle with Amalek. Tomorrow, I will station myself on the top of the hill, with the rod of God in my hand." Joshua did as Moses told him and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Then, whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; but whenever he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur, one on each side, supported his hands; thus his hands remained steady until the sun set. And Joshua overwhelmed the people of Amalek with the sword. Then are said to Moses, "Inscribe this in a document as a reminder, and read it aloud to Joshua: I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven!" And Moses built an altar and named it *Adonai-nissi*. He said, "It means, 'Hand upon the throne of God,' God will be at war with Amalek throughout the ages."





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וַיָּבָא עֲמָלֵק וַיִּלָחֶם עִם־יִשְׁרָאָל בִּרְפִּידְם:נּיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יִהוֹשַׁעַ בְּחַר־לְנוּ אֲנָשִׁים וְצֵא הּלְחֵם בַּעְמָלֵק מָחָׁר אָנֹכִי נִצָּבֹ עַל־רָאשׁ הַגִּבְעָה וּמֵשֵה הָאֵל-ים בְּיָדִי: וַיִּעשׁ יְהוֹשַׁעַ כַּאָשֶׁר אָמַר־לוֹ מֹשֶׁה לְהִלְחָם בַּעֲמָלֵק וּמֹשֶׁה אַהַרְן וְחוּר עָלוּ רָאשׁ הַגִּבְעָה: וְהָיָה כַּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וְגָבָר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכַאֲשֶׁר יָנִים יָדוֹ וְגָבָר עְמָלֵק: וִידִי מֹשֶׁה כְּבַלִּים וַיִּקְחוּ־אֶבֶן וַיִּשִּׁימוּ תַחְהָיו וַיִּשֶׁב עָלֶיהָ וְאַהַרֹן וְחוּר תַּמְכָּוּ בְיָדִיו מָזֶּה אָחָד וּמְזֶּה אֶחָׁד וִיְהִי יָדָיו אֱמוּנָה עַד־בָּא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ: וַיִּחְלֹשׁ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּי־מָחָה אֶמְחֶה לְפִי־חֶרֶב: וֹיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹה אֶלְה מֹשֶׁה כְּתֹב זְאֹת זִכָּרוֹן בַּסַפֶּר וְשִׂים בְּאָזְנִי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כִּי־מָחָה אֶמְחֶה לִיתֹּלָת בְּעְלֵק מִהָּת הַשְּׁמֵים: וַיָּכֶן מֹשֶׁה מִזְבֵּח וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמִּוֹ יְהֹּוָה נִסִי: וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־יָדֹ עַל־כֵּס יָּה מִלְחָמָה לֵיהֹוָה בַּצְמְלֵק מִדְּר דְּר.

Text Questions

- 1. This occurs only two chapters after *Bnei Yisrael*, the Israelites, were saved and the Egyptians pursuing them were killed. Can you think of other examples in *Tanakh* or in modern Israeli history where deliverance/salvation is followed by crisis? Why do you think this is so often the case?
- 2. Discuss the symbols in these verses: the hill, the staff, and the stone.
- 3. Why must Moshe specifically write this all down?
- 4. Who works the hardest in this story?

A Rabbinic Reading

Incidental to the discussion of the required intent when sounding the *shofar*, the Mishna cites the verse: "And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed" (Exodus 17:11). It may be asked: Did the hands of Moses make war when he raised them or break war when he lowered them? Rather, the verse comes to tell you that as long as the Jewish people turned their eyes upward and subjected their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they prevailed, but if not, they fell. (*Mishna Rosh Hashana* 3:8)

וְהָיָה כַּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים משֶׁה יָדוֹ וְגָבַר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגוֹ' (שמות יז), וְכִי יָדָיו שֶׁל משֶׁה עוֹשׁוֹת מִלְחָמָה אוֹ שׁוֹבְרוֹת מִלְחָמָה. אֶלָּא לוֹמַר לְךָּ, כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִסְתַּכְּלִים כְּלַפֵּי מַעְלָה וּמְשַׁעְבְּדִין אֶת לבָּם לַאֲבִיהֶם שֶׁבַּשָׁמַיִם הָיוּ מִתְגַבְּרִים. וְאִם לָאו, הָיוּ נוֹפְלִין. כַּיּוֹצֵא בַדְּבָר אַתָּה אוֹמֵר





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(במדבר כא), עֲשֵׂה לְךּ שָׁרָף וְשִׂים אֹתוֹ עַל נֵס, וְהָיָה כָּל הַנְּשׁוּדְ וְרָאָה אֹתוֹ וָחָי. וְכִי נָחָשׁ מֵמִית, אוֹ נָחָשׁ מְחַיֶּה. אֶלָּא, בִּזְמַן שֶׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל מִסְתַּכְּלִין כְּלַפֵּי מַעְלָה וּמְשַׁעְבְּדִין אֶת לִבָּם לַאֲבִיהֶן שֶׁבַּשָׁמַיִם, הָיּוּ מִתְרַפְּאִים, וְאָם לָאו, הָיוּ נִמּוֹקִים. חֵרֵשׁ, שׁוֹטֶה, וְקְטָן, אֵין מוֹצִיאִין אֶת הָרַבִּים יְדֵי חוֹבָתָן. זֶה הַכְּלָל, כֹּל שֶׁאֵינוֹ מְחָיָב בַּדְּבָר, אֵינוֹ מוֹצִיא אֶת הָרַבִּים יְדֵי חוֹבָתָן:

Questions for Break-out Discussion

- 1. When you are down or in crisis, what holds you up?
- 2. Who holds you up?
- 3. Which middot might you lean upon at these times?
- 4. Who can you be holding up right now?

