

She shall bring a sheep within its first year for an Elevation-offering and a young dove or a turtle dove for a Sin-offering... and the Kohen shall provide atonement for her and she shall leave purified. (12:6,8)

The new mother is required to bring a *korban*, sacrifice, to atone – for what? This woman just brought a new *neshamah*, soul, into the world. She should be the recipient of accolades. Yet, she must bring a *korban* to atone for herself. *Chazal* teach that *Moshiach* will not arrive until all of the *neshamos* that are “waiting” in Heaven are born. She, in fact, was *mekareiv*, brought closer, the *geulah*, Final Redemption. Still, she must bring a *korban* for atonement. *Chazal* address this question and explain that, because during the extreme pangs of childbirth she had uttered an oath, “Never again.” Clearly, she regrets even the thought. Therefore, an atonement is required to expunge something that she articulated under duress and certainly did not mean.

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, offers another approach towards understanding the necessity for atonement. Concerning the *mitzvah* of *Mechias zeichar Amalek*, the Torah writes: *Zachar es asher asah lecha Amalek... timcheh es zeichar Amalek – Lo sishkach*, “Remember what Amalek did to you... you shall wipe out the memory of Amalek – you shall not forget!” *Chazal* explore the redundancy of the admonishment. Remember to wipe out – do not forget; *zachor* – remember – vocally; *lo sishkach* – do not forget – in your heart. Therefore, we must reiterate in our minds our animus for what Amalek did to us and express it. .

Rav Zaitchik takes a more practical approach. Indeed, there was a time when we had Amalek on our minds constantly. We were surrounded by enemies at every front. Even now, when we have finally been able to return to *Eretz Yisrael*, we must stand in readiness, never knowing when the next Arab terrorist will decide to wreak havoc on our lives. Let us imagine the following scenario. We have finally rid ourselves of our enemies. Hashem has seen to it that we are free of external adversity. The dogs are not just at bay; they are gone – forever. The defense minister has retired. We no longer need an army. His position is superfluous. The question is: Will we still remember to thank Hashem?

To this, the Torah responds: Even when you are at peace, and the threat of Amalek no longer looms over you – *Lo sishkach*, “Do not forget Hashem’s miracles.” It is easy to “remember” when we are surrounded by enemies on all sides. Will we, however, maintain this “memory” when it is only a “memory” – or will we forget? The Torah circumvents this problem by admonishing us – never forget what he did to you.

We quickly forget the pain, the sleepless nights, the torrent of tears that accompanied the *tzarah*, trouble, that had until recently enveloped and consumed our lives. Now that Hashem has listened to our prayers and the *tzarah* is in the past, we revert back to our lives of complacency, our

substandard *davening*, learning and *mitzvah* observance. I use the word substandard, because, for a short while, we had been able to show that, when necessary, we are able to be intense in our observance and passionate in our commitment. We forget too quickly. Life goes back to usual.

Rav Zaitchik applies this idea to explain the atonement for a *yoledes*, woman who gives birth. Prior to delivering, she was in intense pain, the pangs of childbirth driving her to pray, to cry out to Hashem to allow this to pass quickly, without pain. Hashem listened; a healthy child was born; mother and child are doing well. What about Hashem? Life returns to normal and, sadly, we begin to take Hashem for granted – until the next time.

Many of us are given reprieves or second chances at life. Do we understand the meaning and value of these supplemental opportunities? Some of us do – for a while, while others simply go on as if nothing has ever happened. I recently read a letter from a *frum*, observant, woman, who was at death's door until she was able to be the fortunate recipient of an organ from someone who was sadly not as fortunate. When we hear of the tremendous *mazel* of the recipient, we tend to ignore completely the fact that someone had to die in order for this transplant to take place. While the recipient's family is celebrating ecstatically, another family is lamenting the death of their loved one.

This woman wrote a loving, poignant letter to the family of the organ donor. She expressed her gratitude to them and to their tragically-mourned daughter whose lung now breathes in her body. She described how her life was at its end. She could not go on. Even the most elementary and simple projects had become impossible for her to perform. Then she received the call: "A lung is available." As she rode to the hospital, sharing the back of the ambulance with her own twenty-two-year old daughter, she realized that someone else's daughter had just died, and she was receiving her lung. So many ideas ran through her mind as she was being prepped for surgery and given anesthesia. The next thing she knew, she was awake and breathing – on her own! A miracle had occurred.

How much she thanked Hashem! All of this is no surprise. We all thank Hashem – initially, but does it continue? Do we remember that we have been given a second chance? I, therefore, close with the sentence in this woman's letter which was most moving and should be for us most memorable: "My promise to you is that I will never waste one moment of my life."