

## **The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld**

*B'shalach 5781*

In the battle between Israel and Amalek, Yehoshua is commanded to lead the troops into combat while Moshe ascends the mount to pray for the People (17:9-11). There, the Torah relates that when Moshe held his hands aloft, Israel was assured of victory. The Mishna (Rosh HaShana 3:8) elaborates: "Did the hands of Moshe actually alter the course of the war? Rather, whenever the Israelites looked up and dedicated their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they prevailed; otherwise, they faltered."

The late and much-lamented, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l, had this perceptive observation to make:

"The Mishna is clear. Neither the staff nor Moshe's upraised hands were performing a miracle. They were simply reminding the Israelites to look up to heaven and remember that Gd was with them. This gave them the confidence and courage to win. In the case of the battle against Amalek, the first battle the Israelites had to fight for themselves, Moshe had a vital role to perform. He had to give the people confidence by getting them to look up.

In 1875 an amateur archaeologist, Marcelino de Sautuola, began excavating the ground in a cave in Altamira near

the north coast of Spain. At first, he found little to interest him, but his curiosity was rekindled by a visit to the Paris exhibition of 1878 where a collection of Ice Age implements and art objects was on display. Determined to see whether he could find equally ancient relics, he returned to the cave in 1879.

One day he took his nine-year-old daughter Maria with him. While he was searching through the rubble, she wandered deeper into the cave and to her amazement saw something on the wall above her. "Look, papa, oxen", she said. They were, in fact, bison. She had made one of the great discoveries of prehistoric art of all time. The magnificent Altamira cave paintings, between 25,000 and 35,000 years old, were so unprecedented a finding that it took twenty-two years for their authenticity to be accepted. For four years Sautoula had been within a few feet of a monumental treasure, but he had missed it for one reason. He had forgotten to look up.

One of the ongoing themes of Tanach is the need to look up. "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things", says Yeshayahu (40:26). "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where will my help come" said King David (T'hilim 121:1). In D'varim, Moshe tells the Israelites that the Promised Land will not be like the flat plain of the Nile Delta where water is plentiful and in regular supply. It will be a land of hills and

valleys, entirely dependent on unpredictable rain (11:10-11). It will be a landscape that forces its inhabitants to look up. That is what Moshe did for the people in their first battle. He taught them to look up.

Looking up and cultivating BITACHON, trust and faith in HaShem, can be a formidable challenge. When faced with adversity - be it an illness, a financial misfortune, an ambition gone sour - the tendency is often to turn inward and become depressed and then despair of all hope. True, when dealing with such defeats, it's quite natural to feel sorry for oneself, but that's hardly a long-term solution. In fact, such self-absorption only makes matters worse. The right answer - so simple and yet so profound - is to recognize that HaShem runs the world, and trusting in Him, believe that all is for the best. This supreme act of faith can both calm a troubled soul and then inspire that person to partner with Gd in meeting the trial head-on. In other words, when you feel the stresses and anxieties of life dragging you down, that's precisely the time to look up.

A hitchhiker with a heavy suitcase found a ride with a farmer in his pickup truck. The hiker sat in the front seat with the heavy suitcase on his lap. The driver, noticing the clear discomfort of his passenger, said: "Son, if you place the suitcase on the floor, the truck will carry you and your suitcase." The take-away: when you look up, you feel flushed with

the certainty that your heavy load of worry and fear is being borne by Someone Else!

The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that his aim in philosophy was "to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle." The fly is trapped in the bottle. It searches for a way out. Repeatedly it bangs its head against the glass until at last, exhausted, it dies. Yet the bottle has been open all the time. The one thing the fly forgets to do is to look up. Are we like that fly?

So, what does it mean to look up? It begins, as we've said, with a categorical trust in Gd - BITACHON. When that trust is activated, we are able to step outside of ourselves and consider the greater picture. And within that broad canvas, from that high celestial perch, we find - and it's not always so easy - that we can endure far more than we ever could have imagined, so much more than simply cope with our sufferings. Amazingly, we discover we can tap into our deeper strengths, reframe our own circumstances, and part the dark curtains of our life to reveal new and bright horizons.

When we conflate our past experiences with our future expectations, when we reflect upon more than just ourselves, and when, into this deep awareness, we factor in what we feel HaShem would want of us, we inevitably begin to see things differently. All at once, our tomorrows are brimming with possibil-

ities we scarcely ever considered. Our values change; our priorities come in for a makeover. What was seemingly important only yesterday, today appears trivial, and what we've so long neglected, for whatever reason, now looms large and compelling. In a word, we have looked up!

Once, long ago, a just emancipated people - still slaves and unskilled in battle - found themselves faced with a threatening enemy bent on their annihilation. All seemed hopeless. But then, their leader stood on high and with hands aloft, signaled to his flock and roused them to look up. And they did! They still had to bravely persevere and fight, but with their gaze looking up, they emerged victorious!

If we can remember this moving and impelling lesson, then what Moshe taught Israel can - and should also - be our lodestar going forward. No obstacle, no setback, no hardship can ever withstand the sheer power and magnificence of looking up!