



Parshat Vayikra

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STARTING POINT

Sacrificing a Bird - by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

The text of the first chapter in the book of Vayikra raises an obvious question. The chapter, related to the subject of voluntary sacrifices, starts with the declaration, "If a man from among you offers a sacrifice to G-d, you shall bring your sacrifice from animals, from cattle, or from sheep" [Vayikra 1:2]. This seems to imply that the only permitted sacrifices from living creatures are from animals, such as cattle, and sheep. Further on, however, after the alternatives of cattle and sheep are described, it is written, "And if the sacrifice will be from a bird" [1:14]. Why wasn't this possibility of sacrificing a bird mentioned from the very beginning?

Evidently the reason is that the opening sentence refers not only to the "Olah" sacrifices described in the first chapter but to all voluntary sacrifices, including the "Shelamim" in Chapter 3. The Shelamim can only be brought from cattle or sheep, not from birds. Thus, when the Torah discusses voluntary sacrifices as a group it takes note of the common denominator of them all, and that means restricting the discussion to cattle and sheep. But this raises another question: Why in fact is there no Shelamim sacrifice from any type of bird?

The answer to this second question is related to the characteristics of the sacrifice of a bird on one hand and to the characteristics of the Shelamim on the other hand. A sacrifice of a bird seems to be of a relatively low status, as can be seen with respect to the Chatat sacrifice in Chapter 5 (an "increasing or decreasing" sacrifice). In that case, the ideal is to bring "a female sheep or a goat" [5:6]. Only "if he cannot afford a sheep" is there a possibility to "bring for his guilt, because he sinned, two turtledoves or two doves" [5:7].

Thus, while the Torah is lenient with one who cannot bring the most respectable sacrifice, it only makes this concession with respect to sacrifices that are related to atonement. This is relevant not only for the Chatat, which is an obligation if a sin was committed, but also for the Olah, which includes an element of a penance even though it is brought voluntarily. (Note that we are told with respect to the Olah "it shall be accepted for him, in order to provide atonement" [1:4].) There are various opinions as to what type of sin is atoned by the Olah, but it is clear that the reason behind the sacrifice is

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forgiveness. And it is necessary to provide an opportunity even for a poor person to give such a sacrifice.

The Shelamim sacrifice is different in essence. This sacrifice is completely voluntary, without any element of atonement or forgiveness at all. In two places, this sacrifice is described as "bread" [3:11; 3:16], implying that a Shelamim is an expression of giving something to G-d, without expecting anything in return. This sacrifice represents the principle of love, and for this reason the owner joins in eating it, as opposed to all the other sacrifices. Therefore, this sacrifice cannot be brought from a bird, which would show a lack of respect. The Shelamim should be brought only from a feeling of plenty and giving thanks to G-d, and one who is too poor to bring the best alternative is not expected to offer such a sacrifice. And that explains why there is no Shelamim consisting of a bird.

POINT OF VIEW

Eradicating the Memory of Amalek - by Prof. Shalom Rozenberg

The special Shabbat of "Zachor" and the associated holiday of Purim are times when we must struggle with the memory of Amalek, who represents the arch-type of anti-Semitism in all its forms. "Amalek is the first among nations" [Bamidbar 24:20]. Anti-Semitism is a phenomenon that has been with us from the very beginning of Jewish history. We tried to fool ourselves after the Holocaust into thinking that the world would begin to understand how barbaric this unreasonable hate is and would mend its ways. We were wrong. Evidently anti-Semitism will accompany us until the end of history, until the world will be redeemed and will undergo a complete and drastic improvement. And this is the second half of the above verse, "his end will be destruction" [ibid].

In his sermons for Chanukah in "Kedushat Levi," Rabbi Levi-Yitzchak of Berdichev teaches us that the conflict of Jewish existence fully appeared on three occasions: on Chanukah, Purim, and Pesach. According to Rabbi Levi-Yitzchak, these three struggles can be related to three basic traits of humanity: thought, speech, and action. On Chanukah we remember the struggles and the salvation which occurred within the framework of the war of wills between Athens and Jerusalem. The struggle of ideas is symbolized by the light of the candles. On Pesach, we remember the evil decrees about killing the male children and the terrible oppression, which is symbolized by the matza, which also symbolizes the redemption. On Purim, we remember the terrible danger and the salvation. The process of pursuit at the time of Purim began with hate, expressed in the declaration, "There is one nation, distributed

and divided among the other nations in all the lands of your kingdom, and their laws are different from those of any other nation, they do not observe the laws of the king, and it is not good for the king to leave them alone." [Esther 3:8]. This vicious statement led to subsequent actions. According to Rabbi Levi-Yitzchak, this is the reason that the main mitzva of Purim is performed "by speaking, that is, reading the Megillah." Our generation, the generation of electronic communication, must be especially sensitive to sins of language, which has now been augmented by pictures, making the poison even more dangerous. And now the latest and newest innovation has appeared, and the unlimited wilds of the internet have provided a much broader environment for developing hate.

Our sages have taught us to stay away from the sins of speech. "Rabbi Yirmiyahu Bar Abba said, four groups will not be accepted by the Shechina: cynics, flatterers, liars, and slanderers" [Sottah 42a]. Rabbi Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin gave a very accurate description of the difference between cynics and flatterers: "A flatterer describes something that is bad as being good, and this includes himself, in that he considers himself to be good. A cynic... describes something that is good as being bad." This is a reversal of values. Flattery transforms the worst possible acts into something good. Language is a perfume that can hide the most vile smells and rot, especially if they include the odor of petroleum. Cynicism, on the other hand, implies that every good and noble action is motivated by the worst possible motives.

According to Rabbi Tzakod, the sins of the cynics and the flatterers are both linked to interpreting information. The third evil group is the liars, which represents distortion of the information. This is done by complete lies, by telling half truths, or by "innocently" quoting lies of others, as was done in the despicable movie, "Jenin, Jenin." The fourth group is those who spread slander, "lashon hara." Rava teaches us that Haman was the arch-type of slanderer: "Nobody else can be compared to Haman in knowing how to slander" [Megillah 13b]. According to this approach, slander is an example of incitement. The hated person is demonized, and his life becomes forfeit. The classic example of this approach is "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" – an anti-Semitic conspiracy that accuses the Jews of a colossal conspiracy.

There are four groups in all, but the last one, that of the liars, has not finished its development! It is in the process of achieving its highest level ever. Now it has taken on the right to fabricate a new version of reality. This is the provocation known to us from the blood libels, when infants who had died were planted in the homes of our ancestors in order to accuse them of ritual murders.

We are not the people of Amalek, and we never will be. Let the sins come to an end, but not the sinners. However, in spite of everything, we still maintain within us a small trace of "the memory of Amalek." The only way to completely vanquish this "memory" will be to win the struggle against lies and incitement. Wise men should be very careful what they say, lest they be sent to exile for their mistakes. Even one who is convinced that a person needs a harsh operation in order to improve the situation, and that he alone can perform this

operation, must tell the truth. It must be the truth, not flattery that transforms the enemy into a peace-loving righteous person. It must be the truth, and not cynicism which moves the guilt for evil from the enemy to the political adversary, who is also a brother. It must be the truth and not a distorted lie or slander which accuses the adversary of "lashon hara." It must be the truth and not incitement which accuses all opposing opinions as incitement. Above all, what is needed is truth without any artificial staging. Even his strongest political opponents must agree that it was for this truth that the late Adir Zik fought so hard. If one tries to intoxicate the truth with champagne made up of lies, by staging incitement and provocations, he should not be surprised that theories of conspiracies suddenly become less outrageous than they were in the past. In the name of democracy and freedom of speech, the mouths of those who hate us and accuse us have not been silenced, but the mouths and the broadcasts of brothers who are political adversaries have been silenced based on flimsy pretexts. This is also a sin of misuse of speech, and it must also be rooted out.

SERMON BY A GUEST

"Do Not Forget" - by Rabbi Michael Broom, Head of Yeshivat Hesder, Shilo

The mitzva of remembering the actions of Amalek, which happened about 3,500 years ago, when our forefathers left Egypt, teaches us how to look at events with a proper perspective. In spite of the fact that this took place in the distant past, we have been commanded to remember for all future generations in our hearts and with our mouth the terrible injustice that the nation of Amalek did to Bnei Yisrael. The objective is "to make us understand that anybody who causes Yisrael to suffer is hated by the Almighty, and that the degree of evil that will befall him is proportional to the level of his evil and the damage that he caused" [Sefer Hachinuch 603].

Quite often, it seems that our natural tendency is to forget harsh actions that other nations have done to us, and that we are sometimes all too willing to forgive them, in an exaggerated way. This trait may well have developed within us as a defense mechanism, a way to help us forget the bitter experiences of the past, giving us the opportunity to turn our attention to a more optimistic present and future. Modern man – and certainly one who is "post-modern" – tends to "live for the moment," in the present, which often leads to ignoring the past. The Torah teaches us to see the present through the far horizons of the past and the future. Only one who has the ability to develop such a wide-ranging vision will know how to correctly interpret current events of Bnei Yisrael.

The mitzva to remember the actions of Amalek teaches us that as Jews we are forbidden to forgive the nations that have harmed Bnei Yisrael throughout many past generations. The better we know to identify with our own culture and traditions, the more we will be able to guard our power and our pride. A nation that shows exaggerated forgiveness with respect to past events will not know how to guard its honor and its position.

The demand not to erase the memories of the past is mainly relevant to nations that harm Yisrael only because of its

character as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Every generation has its own brand of Amalek. It seems that even today, in spite of the harsh terrorist attacks that we have experienced during the last four years, which caused such great loss of life, the phenomenon of forgetfulness and forgiveness has once again returned in our midst. Every time some new imaginary hope rises, we once again find ourselves in the same familiar situation of being ready to erase the past – even with respect to very recent events.

It is important for us to understand that a nation which does not know to guard its honor and disregards the past will also be treated with contempt by the other nations. Specifically on this Shabbat we must be aware that our status in the world depends on how well we remember our nation's history, both recent and in the distant past.

TORAH, SOCIETY, AND GOVERNMENT

Jew Haters, Then and Now - by Rabbi Uri Dasberg

When the Rambam and the author of the Sefer Hachinuch discuss the mitzva of defeating the Seven Nations of Canaan, they note that these nations no longer exist. Why don't they repeat the same comment with respect to the mitzva of eradicating Amalek?

In addition, there is another question, asked by the Avnei Nezer: According to the Rambam, before war is declared an offer of peace is made, even to Amalek, and if the enemy agrees to the offer they are accepted among us. But if this is the case, why did King David kill the Amalekite convert? By converting, didn't he show that he had repented and wanted to live in peace? David did not kill him because he had murdered Shaul (which he evidently claimed but did not really do), but rather, as is written in the Mechilta, "your mouth betrayed you," that you are from Amalek, and the fact that you have converted will not save you.

Finally, the Avnei Nezer asks one more question: Why did the Sefer Hachinuch write that women are not obligated by the mitzva of eradicating Amalek but only the men, since they are the ones who wage war? Why is this different from the war against the Seven Nations, where Sefer Hachinuch writes that everybody is obligated by the mitzva?

The answer given in the name of Rabbi Chaim of Brisk is that in referring to Amalek the Rambam does not mean the original nation, which disappeared in the distant past. Rather, it refers to those who oppress the Jews in any generation. Unfortunately, these evil people have not disappeared. Since this refers to one who actively oppresses us, he continues to be defined as "Amalek" as long as he does not repent. However, once he responds to a call for peace he ceases to be an oppressor, and the mitzva of eradicating Amalek no longer applies.

Many details of the laws pertaining to the original nation of Amalek do not apply to the modern reincarnation. For this reason, the Rambam does not mention that the property of Amalek must be put into a "cherem" and destroyed. This is

relevant only for the original nation of Amalek, not for the modern ones. In addition, the obligation for women is only for the original Amalek.

Reference: Rabbi Avshalom Katzir, "Mipeirot Hakerem," pages 173-176

A LESSON FOR THE CHILDREN

Reading the Megilla in the Holocaust - by Rabbi Yikhat Rozen, Merkaz Neria, Kiryat Malachi

Night after night, we would meet on the pallet high above, discussing some words of Torah and trying to forget the terrible experiences of the camp at least for a short time.

But it was not easy to forget the camp. This was during the Holocaust. The Germans moved us into the camp at Buchenwald together with thousands of other Jews, in order to utilize the remainder of our strength for their hard labor and then to destroy us. In the barracks where we lived there were row after row of wooden pallets stacked one above the other, where we were meant to spend a few hours in sleep, before we were to rise for the next day of harsh labor and suffering. Almost all the prisoners would fall onto the hard pallet and immediately fall asleep completely out of strength. However, we, the members of the Chassidic sect, managed to retain something for our anguished souls.

One member of the group reminded us, "Purim is approaching. What will we do? We do not have a Megillah and certainly no gifts to send each other." But I said, "In any case, we will organize a Purim gathering."

That very day I started energetically to gather materials in order to write a Megillah. If I saw a piece of paper that a German officer had used to write a note, it immediately found its way into my pocket. A torn edge of a bag of cement, a scrap of a Nazi newspaper which had a small open space – all of these became part of my collection. In this way, I managed to collect a hidden treasure of waste paper. We even found some lead from a broken pencil. And then we began the work.

We distributed the scraps of paper to our friends, and we tried to write out the Megillah from memory. The "pencil" went from hand to hand, and everybody added a few verses that he could remember. In the end, we had a "glorious" copy of the Megillah, ready and waiting for the observation of the mitzva.

The night of Purim arrived. The camp was ruled by the modern version of Haman, and of course nobody around us had any thoughts of celebrating Purim. The routines of fear filled the camp, taking their daily toll of hunger, suffering, and cruel death. If anybody had even dared to make the smallest hint about the Jewish holiday, he would certainly have paid with a heavy fine of lashes, and possibly even with an execution at the camp square.

We did not care. In complete silence, we arranged to read the Megillah at midnight. Somehow, the matter became known to

our friends, the other occupants of the barracks, and many of them wanted to join us for the reading.

In silence, everybody gathered around Moshe. He started to read from the scraps of paper in his hand in a trembling voice. "After these events, King Achashverosh promoted Haman..." [Esther 3:1]. The words had special meaning for us. "For the Jews, there was light and joy, and happiness and honor" [8:16]. But what about us?

Happiness and honor were as far away from us as east is from west. But in our hearts, there was a fire of hope and a Jewish spark that had not died. Enthusiastic singing erupted from our mouths at the end of the reading, as one man, with a single heart: "The rose of Yaacov was joyful and happy... Cursed is Haman who wanted to destroy me, blessed is Mordechai the Jew!"

Thank G-d we were not discovered. In the same secrecy that we started, we finished, but with a happy heart, and with the feeling that our spirit would not be broken. Perhaps we would yet be able to hold out until the good ending that lay in store.

That very day, a rumor spread through the camp. The head of the Ukrainians, the most evil and dumbest of them all, could not contain himself, and he whispered the most unbelievable thing to one of us: "Hitler is lost. The end of the war is near..."

(Source: Yaacov Frankel, "I Believe")

THE WAYS OF THE FATHERS (Pirkei Avot)

Chapter 5 Mishna 25 - by Rabbi Yehuda Shaviv

"Ben Bag-Bag says: Delve into it and delve into it again, for it has everything in it; look at it, and grow old with it; do not move from it, for there is no better portion than it."

The previous Mishna established time periods in a man's life for studying Torah, Mishna, and Talmud. All are during the early part of life. Now this Mishna adds that even at a much later stage in life one should continue to study Torah: "Look at it, and grow old with it." That is, "Until old age you shall continue to be involved with it, and do not turn away from it for anything else" [Rambam, commentary on the Mishna].

One might think that there is no reason to return to material that he has already studied and with which he is already familiar. Against this feeling, it is written, "Delve into it and delve into it again." That is, it is a good idea to delve again and again into the words of Torah – one can be sure that he will always find new things in his study, because "it has everything in it." In "Derech Etz Hachaim," the RAMCHAL sees the phrase "Hafoch ba" as a parable comparing the Torah to burning charcoal. Even if it seems to be extinguished, it can once again become lit if it is fanned, "for those who are involved in it must turn it over and over, until it lights up like a flame. And as the flame grows, I have already said that it glows in different hues, and similarly many great issues can be found in the flame of this light..." Thus, the "new discoveries" in the Torah are a result of repeatedly returning to study in depth,

thus revealing understanding and knowledge that was hidden until now.

In this way, one who studies will fulfill the wise advice of Mishlei: "curl it and it will raise you up" [4:8]. This corresponds to the definition given in the "Aruch" – "Curl: Delve into it and delve into it again, that is, be occupied constantly with the Torah." Whoever acts in this way will be raised up by the Torah.

And what if somebody applies himself to the Torah but does not discover anything new? This case is addressed by the last phrase of this Mishna: "Ben Ha-Ha says, The reward depends on the effort." The reward is not related to the final result but rather to the effort which is expended. In addition, the Rambam interprets this to mean that "the only study that will survive is what has been studied with great effort... Study that was performed in an indulgent and calm way will not survive." This implies that the "reward" mentioned in the Mishna is itself the net benefit that results from the study.

With this Mishna, the original tractate of Pirkei Avot has come to an end (Chapter 6, which follows, was added at a later date). Thus, the tractate of Avot begins with the receipt of the Torah at Sinai and ends with the Torah of somebody who makes an effort to study.

LAND OF MY BIRTH

"Purim" at Biria - by Zev Wallack

Purim has become a general name for times when a miracle occurred to a community of Bnei Yisrael. For example, in the Middle Ages, there was a concept of "Purim in Teveria." Later on, two days were established as Purim in Chevron. There was also a Purim in Biria, and we will tell about this below.

Dr. Chaim Palace, who studied the history of the place, wrote an exciting pamphlet about the subject, and we base our discussion on this booklet. In the winter of 4705 (near the beginning of 1945), a small contingent of young men from the religious section of the Palmach was sent to Biria. Their mission was to establish a permanent settlement and enhance the security of the small number of Jews who lived in the area. David Tzweber (who fell three years later when he was the medic of the Thirty Five who attempted to reach Gush Etzion) described the harsh conditions of the religious members of the Palmach:

"We were organized into separate shifts, half working and half doing guard duty... The mud reached our knees... Our clothing was wet... Everything was centered around a single shack, which held the tools and the wheelbarrows, where the 'Solel Boneh' office was, which had the room for the guards, which contained the kitchen and also the laundry. Yet nobody complained that the place was too small... Every night we would check and count again to see how many stones and how many layers had been added to the tower and the walls..."

More than a year passed, and Biria became a well defined group with 25 members. The future looked promising, but the British

did not concur. In reaction to gunshots that were heard in the area, they searched the site and found two hidden stashes of weapons. All the members of the group were arrested and put in prison in Acco. There they were treated like criminals, cruelly tortured, and readied for trial. The prisoners declared a hunger strike.

The whole land was in an uproar. This was the first time that an entire settlement had been taken in custody, and had been put in such a degraded position and then put on trial. Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Neria wrote a lamentation called, "Biria, do you not ask about the wellbeing of your prisoners?" Punsters said: the destruction of shacks in Biria is not a noble British act ("Abir" in Hebrew). Or, the name of the place should not be Biria, but Siberia.

The trial was held in the Mount Canaan police station. The commander of the group, Yehuda Bloom (Nitzan) made the following emotional statement:

"Your honors, these weapons (that were seized) are meant for defense. We went out to the desolate land in order to clear it, to plant on it, and to build a fruitful settlement, in order to make a strong house for ourselves and for our pursued brethren (from the Holocaust). When we ascended to the heights of Biria, we knew that we were going to a dangerous place. Near our settlement, two other Jewish outposts were destroyed by dark forces (from Ein Zeitim). Men were murdered, some of them burned alive. We decided not to leave our lives forfeit, and we turned towards labor, building, and peace. Our weapons are only meant for defense."

This was a precedent that the Jewish community was not ready to accept: An entire settlement was to be expelled. The Haganah therefore made plans to establish Biria B near the site of the first settlement. In order to fool the British, the day picked for starting the new settlement was the eleventh of Adar, the anniversary of the battle at Tel Chai, a day when many people were expected to visit the Gallil. About 3,000 people from all sectors came to the rocky land on a stormy winter night. At dawn, they rushed to erect a tent camp, surround it with a fence, and even plant some trees. However, the British arrived in tanks and armored vehicles, moved the young people away by force, and destroyed Biria B.

That same night, Thursday night, the eve of the twelfth of Adar, hundreds of young men came and established Biria C. On Sunday, which was Purim, the British surrendered and agreed to leave the settlement in place, with twenty young men allowed to stay. Michael Chazani, the head of the Settlement Department of Hapoel HaMizrachi at the time, wrote an article titled "Purim at Biria:"

"There was a great miracle here at Biria... with no blood spilled... These days of Purim have shown us... and the authorities who so stubbornly hold on to the White Paper – that the entire population of the land... have made a firm decision not to abandon any small portion of land... The method was to 'go and gather them' [Esther 4:16]... They all marched shoulder to shoulder ... The man from Hapoel HaMizrachi with Tefillin in his hand next to the man from

Hashomer Hatzair... Elderly next to youths, Sephardi and Ashkenazi... Bareheaded next to one wearing a 'shtreimel'... All joined together into one group named the community of Yisrael... One old man said, 'Such days of Purim were never celebrated in the city of Tzefat.'"

THE CHAIN OF HALACHA

Is It Necessary to Hear the Entire Megilla? - by Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon, Rabbi of Southern Alon Shevut and a teacher in Yeshivat Har Etzion

The Talmud differentiates between writing and hearing the Megillah. "If a scribe left out some letters or some verses but the reader filled them in, following the translator, the obligation has been fulfilled... If one enters the synagogue and finds that the congregation has already read half the Megillah, he may not say, 'I will read this half with the congregation and then read the first half later.' Rather, he should read it from start to finish." [Megillah 18b]. Thus, a Megillah which has some missing words can be used, but a person who did not hear several words of the Megillah has not fulfilled the requirements.

With respect to writing a Megillah, then, if the scribe has missed several letters or even complete verses, it can still be used, as long as most of the text appears. According to the RAN, quoting the RASHBA, if the scribe has left out the first part, from the beginning of the Megillah up to the verse, "A Jewish man..." [Esther 2:5], the Megillah is invalid, even though the majority of the text exists. This was accepted by the RAMA, who wrote that a Megillah is invalidated if an entire passage (or the beginning or the end) is omitted (690:3). Of course, this law is only after the fact – the initial goal is to have the entire text of the Megillah written properly.

However, hearing the Megillah is different, as noted above. Whoever has missed hearing even one verse has not fulfilled the obligation. What if somebody missed hearing a single word? The RASHBA in his response explains that one who misses a single word or a single letter must read the Megillah a second time, but the RI'AZ wrote that this is only relevant to a letter or a word that changes the meaning of the verse. According to the Mishna Berura, most of the commentators feel that one has not fulfilled his obligation if he misses as little as a single word. It seems from Bei'ur Halacha that one who misses a single word must recite a new blessing when reading the Megillah for a second time (unless he was not distracted and reread it immediately, in which case he should not recite the blessing). Thus, it is important to pay careful attention to every word of the Megillah. This is especially important in the morning, when people are tired, since somebody who falls asleep has not fulfilled the obligation of reading.

Somebody who misses several words of the Megillah (either because of the noise surrounding the name of Haman or because he was distracted) can repeat them from a book, since one who reads a single word or phrase by heart still fulfills his obligation. This has led to the following conclusion: "It is therefore very important that everybody have a Chumash

available, since when the children make noise for Haman it may be impossible to hear several words by the reader, and at least after the fact one can fulfill the obligation by reading from a book." [Magen Avraham 690:19; Mishna Berura 690:19].

Even though a Megillah is invalidated if the first or last verses are missing, one who reads these missing verses by heart has fulfilled his obligation. Therefore, one who has not heard the beginning or the end of the Megillah can read the missing parts from a book (Bei'ur Halacha 690:3). Of course, it is best as a first choice to hear the entire Megillah read from a kosher scroll, and therefore anybody who has a scroll should hold it in front of him and follow the reading by repeating any words he does not hear directly (Mishna Berura 689:19).

Why do we insist that one must hear every letter in the Megillah? An explanation given in the Otzar Hagonim (Megillah 6a) is based on the fact that the name of G-d does not appear at all in the Megillah, in order to emphasize that the miracle at the time was a hidden one. This means that every single detail, every dot and line, no matter how insignificant it may seem, is linked to Divine guidance. All the details that at first glance seem of no importance become very significant, and they are all gathered together to form the great miracle, which was planned in advance by the Almighty.



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