

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Ki Teitzei
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Parashat Ki Teitzei – Don’t be influenced by Amalek

In this week’s Parasha of Ki Teitzei, we are taught to remember Amalek and what they did to Bnei Yisrael soon after Yetziat Mitzrayim. They did not fear Hashem and they attacked the weak stragglers at the rear of the camp.¹ We are commanded to blot out the memory of Amalek. And we are commanded not to forget to do so.

What is it about Amalek that requires their memory to be blotted out? Bnei Yisrael have had many enemies over the course of our history, and only Amalek was singled out for this treatment. The pasuk states that Amalek ‘happened’ upon Bnei Yisrael while they were on their way (אשר קרר בדרך).² Rashi brings a few explanations for the word ‘קרר’ each of which sheds some light on the nature of Amalek. Let’s look at two of those explanations.

The word קרר is related to the word קור which means cold. When Bnei Yisrael were redeemed from Mitzrayim with wonders and miracles, they were considered by other nations to be untouchable. The other nations saw them as being protected by Hashem and therefore ‘too hot to handle’. Amalek wanted to ‘cool down’ Bnei Yisrael and bring them into the realm of ‘touchable’. The Midrash³ compares this to a tub of boiling water of which everyone is scared. A man comes and jumps into the water. Though he burns himself, he cools down the water for everyone else. Similarly, even though Amalek lost the battle against Bnei Yisrael, they demonstrated to the other nations that Bnei Yisrael were able to be attacked.

The word קרר is related to the word מקרה which means a chance occurrence. Even though Bnei Yisrael were miraculously redeemed from Mitzrayim, Amalek claimed that all the miraculous events were just random.⁴ In fact, the gematria of the word Amalek is the same as the gematria for the word safek (doubt).⁵ Amalek represents doubt in our emunah. An ‘Amalek-type’ view would suggest that perhaps Hashem doesn’t really care about what I do. Perhaps He is not amongst us and is not really that involved in our daily lives. Perhaps He doesn’t even exist (G-d forbid)!

Obviously, there is an ideological struggle between Amalek and Bnei Yisrael. Amalek stands for the antithesis of spirituality and holiness. If someone has a ‘cold’ attitude towards Torah and mitzvot, and if he doubts Hashem and instead believes in chance, his Yiddishkeit is at best on very shaky ground.

Interestingly, we are commanded to not only remember Amalek but also to blot out their name. As well as just remembering what Amalek did to Bnei Yisrael, we need to blot out their influence and their insidious effect on our own Divine service. As long as we have a coldness in our Avodat Hashem and

¹ Due to their sins, these stragglers were not protected by the clouds of glory, like the rest of the people.

² Devarim 25:18.

³ Mechilta on Shmot 17:8.

⁴ By the way, we can re-arrange the letters ‘מקרה’ to form the words ‘מה רק מה’ which means ‘everything is from Hashem’. Thus, what seems like a mikreh (random occurrence) is in reality ‘מה רק מה’, or ‘only from Hashem’.

⁵ ‘Amalek’ consists of the following letters: ע (70) + מ (40) + ל (30) + ק (100) = 240.

‘Safek’ consists of the following letters: ס (60) + פ (80) + ק (100) = 240

as long as we entertain doubts about Him, His existence, His involvement in our lives and His love for us, we have not succeeded in blotting out Amalek.

Let's discuss how our own behaviour might reflect Amalek-like characteristics (albeit in a subtle manner).

How are we guilty of 'cooling down' members of Am Yisrael, Torah or mitzvot in the eyes of others? Consider the following scenarios:

Wife: How was the Rabbi's sermon at shul today?

Husband: Ehh. I've heard better.

The Barmitzvah boy walked excitedly into shul for Shacharit, proudly clutching his brand new tefillin. He couldn't wait to put them on. But he couldn't help noticing some of the other congregants joking around while wearing their tefillin, not treating their tefillin with respect, and rushing to take their tefillin off as quickly as possible after Shacharit.⁶

It was the first day of school, and the little year 7 kids sat nervously at their desks, listening to their teacher with awe. Then a confident year 12 kid swaggered in to the classroom with a message for the teacher and spoke to the teacher in a manner that was less respectful than it should have been.

If we disparage holiness, we diminish it in the eyes of others. What might have been untouchable becomes fair game. The same applies when we act with light-headedness in a holy place like a shul. Conversely, by treating holy people and holy places with reverence, we encourage other people to act the same. (Of course, this doesn't just apply to 'holy people' and 'holy places'. It applies to the way we treat everybody.)

And what about Amalek's trait of seeing everything as chance? Every time that we fail to see Hashem behind the scenes, we are guilty of emulating Amalek in our own way. This can be manifested in the way that we talk. For instance, when we say "good luck" instead of "b'ezrat Hashem" we have lost an opportunity to recognise Hashem's role. Often, it requires hard work on our part to recognise Hashem, but if we make the effort we will notice Him, and this can have a positive effect on others.

Sometimes, Hashem sends us little coincidences to remind us of His presence. Perhaps we open a book at random and it falls open exactly to the page that we were looking for. Maybe we hear two different people using the same unusual phrase. Sometimes we notice the same idea being discussed in two different contexts. These are small coincidences that are easily missed. And even if they are noticed, they are often dismissed as nothing but chance. But we can look at these coincidences as little notes from Hashem, reminding us that He is right here, watching over us. Building up our awareness of hashgacha pratit (Hashem's personal involvement in our lives), for example by discussing it with our families, is a powerful way of combatting the influence of Amalek.

Let's try something this week:

1. Reflect on Amalek's sin of 'cooling off' Bnei Yisrael in the eyes of the nations. Are we guilty of a similar sin at our own level, in our own lives?
2. Avoid believing, talking about or revering luck and coincidence.
3. Look out for hashgacha pratit and the little coincidences in life. When you notice them, say thank you to Hashem for taking the trouble to send you this little message, and share your experience with others.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

⁶ The Mishnah Berurah (siman 28, seif katan 6) writes that one should remove their tefillin shel rosh with their weak hand to demonstrate that they are reluctant to remove the tefillin.