

The CHASSIDUS PERSPECTIVE with Reb Yoel Kahn

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THE AMALEK WITHIN

In Parshas Zachor, we read Hashem's command to "Remember what Amalek did to you on your way out of Mitzrayim."

Why is it so important to recall Amalek's assault on Bnei Yisroel? We can understand why this was necessary in days gone by, when Amalek was still around. Through remembering what Amalek did, the Jews would retain their animosity toward them and fulfill the mitzvah of destroying them. But Amalek has since intermingled with the other nations, and even if we would know who they are, we currently do not have the power to destroy them. Why, then, is remembering Amalek still so significant?

In addition to being an actual nation, Amalek represents a negative spiritual concept. Just as a Jew possesses the Seven Nations on a spiritual plane—the seven negative character traits—he similarly possesses a spiritual Amalek, whom he must remember, so that he may detest it and do his best to eradicate it.

Amalek differs from the other nations in that while the other nations will ultimately serve Hashem (in the era of Moshiach), Amalek will meet a bitter end: "First of the nations is Amalek, and its end is to be destroyed forever." This is reflected in their spiritual counterparts as well. Other negative traits can be dealt with and solved; Amalek, however, has no antidote.

What exactly is this spiritual Amalek, and why is it so terrible and incorrigible?

THE RECKLESS BATHER

When the other nations heard about the miracles of Yetzias Mitzrayim and Krias Yam Suf, they all stood in awe of Bnei Yisroel and felt a tremendous respect towards them. It was in this context that Amalek launched their attack.

Rashi explains this by way of a *meshal*: "There was a hot bath that no one dared enter. Along came a reckless individual and jumped inside. Although he got burnt, he cooled it off before the others."

The rash bather was burnt from the scalding water, and the water remained just as hot as before. Yet, he "cooled it off" before the others by mitigating their fear of the water's heat.

"There's no need to fear," he demonstrated. "It's not that bad. So what if I got burnt? If I could do it, you can too!"

This was Amalek's intent when attacking the Jewish nation. They knew they would be defeated, but their goal was to cool off the prevailing feeling of respect toward the Jews. Amalek couldn't bear the fact that all the nations were in awe of Bnei Yisroel and their G-d. To undermine that sentiment, they launched what they knew was a foolhardy attack, with the goal of showing everyone that fighting the Jews was possible.

IRRATIONAL CHUTZPA

There are two reasons why someone can lack respect toward a man of great stature. For one person, the reason is because he fails to understand the man's greatness. If this is the reason

behind his lack of respect, there is a simple solution: All that's necessary is to explain to him the man's tremendous qualities. If he is on a higher level, he can be told that the man possesses great intellectual and emotional qualities; if these traits do not speak to him, he can be told of the man's physical strength

and so on. In any case, developing an awareness of the man's greatness will evoke feelings of respect.

But then there is the *mechutzaf*, the insolent mocker. He is aware of the man's greatness, and he knows full well that he is nowhere near his caliber. Yet, he has chutzpa, and is out to demonstrate that he will not be affected in the slightest. Explaining to him the man's outstanding talents will not deter him; to the contrary, he will react by showing everyone that he can still show disrespect.

These two attitudes can also be reflected in a person's self-image. If a person holds himself high because of a certain reason, it can be rectified simply by explaining to him that his view is incorrect. For example, if a wealthy man is arrogant due to his financial success, he can reflect on the idea that the money is not his but Hashem's. If one is blessed with a good head and has studied a lot of Torah, he can be told that there is no reason to feel

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haughty, as this is why he was created.

But say you have a person who is arrogant without any basis. He himself knows that he has no redeeming qualities, but he nonetheless holds himself high. Such irrational *yeshus* cannot be remedied.

Or to put it this way: If a person sins because of a *ruach shtus*, because he doesn't realize the true value of Torah, of Hashem, and of a Yid, he can simply learn about it and his conduct will improve. But if a person is aware of it all and still consciously ignores it, getting him to change his ways will be an uphill battle.

Amalek was the "first of nations" to start up with Bnei Yisroel, although they were aware of the Jews' greatness. Since their opposition was irrational, it cannot be cured: "its end is to be destroyed forever."

SEVERING THE HEAD

This can help us understand another statement regarding Amalek. After the war with Amalek, Moshe said: "Hashem has lifted His hand and sworn that He will fight against Amalek for all time." Hashem's name in this *possuk* is spelled *kah*, comprising of the first two letters—*yud* and *hei*—but not the last two, *vov* and *hei*. Rashi explains that this is because Hashem's name is incomplete until Amalek will be wiped out.

The first two letters of Hashem's name represent intellect (*chochmah* and *binah*), and the last two letters represent emotions and actual implementation (*midos* and *malchus*). By nature, when a Jew studies a concept in Torah, his emotions are aroused to act accordingly. The separation of the first two letters from the last reflects Amalek's goal: to detach intellect from emotions, so that what we learn should not have an effect on our feelings and conduct.

This concept is hinted to in Amalek's name, which includes the word *malak*, to separate the head (intellect) from the rest of the body (emotions and conduct).

FIGHTING AMALEK—TODAY

Amalek is not just an ancient nation, but exists today as well, in the form of a cooling-off attitude. As the Rebbe once expressed it, when a person sees a wondrous phenomenon, Amalek comes along and says: "Why are you getting excited? Don't you know that Hashem can do everything?" All of a sudden Amalek is professing Hashem's greatness, as long as he can succeed in cooling him off!

Every individual can find some form of Amalek within himself. There are some areas in which he is simply mistaken; if that is the problem, the solution is to study the subject—both the *halachos* and the depth of the issue as explained in Chassidus—and he

will improve his conduct. But sometimes he knows full well that a certain activity is wrong, and he is aware of its severity, yet he tells himself: "*Nu*, and therefore?" This attitude comes from Amalek and must be combated.

How do we combat Amalek? The Torah relates that Moshe instructed Yehoshua to "select men for *us* and go out to combat Amalek," indicating that the soldiers were to be *anshei Moshe*, men who lived up to Moshe's reputation. Moshe was the humblest of all men, possessing a *bittul* that surpassed intellect. This essential

bittul, a *kabolas ol* that extends beyond logic, is the antidote for the essential *yeshus* of Amalek, allowing Hashem's name to be complete.

For further study, see *Maamar d'h Zachor* 5718. *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 6, pp. 104-105

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