

"MEMAAYAN HACHAIM"

Mussar talks from the Masgiach Rabbi Chaim Walkin shlit"a

The Way to Fight Against Amalek's 'Asher Karcha'—Happenstance, Coldness, and Impurity: Serenity and Equanimity

"Remember what Amalek did to you, on the way when you leaving Egypt, that he happened upon you on the way, and he struck those of you who were in the back (of the camp), all the weaklings at your rear. . . It shall be that when Hashem, your G-d, gives you rest from all your enemies all around, in the Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you as an inheritance to possess it, you shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heaven—you shall not forget!" (Devarim 25:17-18)

"What Amalek did to you, on the way. . ." the words 'did to you' (Heb.--karcha) connotes 'happenstance' (Heb. --mikreh). This is from the Midrash Sifri 296. Another interpretation is that it is a language which connotes seminal emission (Heb.—keri) and moral impurity (Heb.—tuma'ah). This is from the Midrash Tanchuma 9. . . Another interpretation is that it connotes 'cold' (Heb.—kor) as opposed to warmth (i.e. enthusiasm) . . . this can be compared to a boiling bath which no one could touch (i.e. the Jews in their zeal for Hashem) . . . and this abominable person jumps in (i.e. Amalek) . . . even though he gets burnt, the bath seems cooler to everyone else . . . " Rashi loc. Cit.

We see in these verses of "Parshas Zachor" how the Torah commands us to recall our obligation to obliterate the memory of Amalek. It is striking that when the actions of Amalek are described in the Biblical text, over and over Scripture uses the phrase "he happened upon you on the way", that is, Amalek met the Jewish people as they traveled "on the way". Indeed, we can ask: what is the connection between our commandment to blot out Amalek's name with the reality that they attacked when we were "on the way"? What is the connection between Amalek and "the way" (Heb.—derech)?

We can understand this with an explanation cited by Rabbi Dessler zt"l, in the fourth volume of Michtav M'Eliyahu p. 288. Rav Dessler notes how concerning various verses

in Megillas Esther where the word "the king" is used, the Sages explain that it really refers to "the King of the Universe", the Almighty Himself. Thus, in the Gemora Megilla 15b states concerning the verse "That night, sleep eluded the King . . ." (6:1) "the word 'king' refers to the King of the Universe". Similarly, Midrash Esther Rabba (3:15) explains the verse (7:10) ". . . and the King's anger abated" actually refers to "the anger of the King, the King of Kings HaKadosh Boruch Hu"; there are many other instances of this idea in the words of Chazal. If so, asks Rav Dessler, if king really means to refer to Hashem, why does Scripture only write the word "king", with no indication of the verse referring to the King of Kings, the Almighty?!

Rav Dessler answers: "The heart of kings and princes is in Hashem's hand (cf. Proverbs 21:1), that is, the Almighty directs the desires of the kings according to the needs of the broader society, as they (i.e. the kings) are only tools for His purpose. However, their hearts remain evil as it was in the beginning, as the Sages taught: "Achashverosh hated the Jewish people more than Haman, but he was forced against his will (by Hashem) to save them (cf. Megilla 14a) . . . and all of the actions and supplications of Esther to Achashveirosh were directed to the Almighty, Blessed be He, that he would guide Achashveirosh's heart in the way she was requesting. . . And it is for this reason that G-d's name is not mentioned explicitly in the Scriptural text of the Megilla, as a powerful lesson in of itself—along the intent of the verse in Psalms, "I shall place Hashem before me, always"—to see that Hashem's Providence controls literally every aspect of Creation. Indeed, this is what is meant by the phrase of our Sages, "the revelation of Hashem's Presence (the Shechina) in exile", that is, that His Providence is manifest in all aspects of life. Further, this is the opposite of the concept of "happenstance" which lies at the root of the character of Amalek: 'What Amalek did to you on the way' (Heb.—asher karcha ba'derech): explain our Sages, a. this is

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‘coldness’ (the antithesis of zeal and enthusiasm), this is ‘happenstance’, this is ‘impurity’. This is what defines the root of our obligation to obliterate the memory of Amalek.”

From Rav Dessler’s words, we understand that Scripture chose to use the word “king” instead of G-d’s explicit name to make crystal clear for all future generations the idea of “the heart of kings and princes are in the hand of Hashem”, requiring that Achashveirosh not harm the Jews even though his hatred—even more than Haman—remained. Hashem “directs their will according to the needs of the broader society . . . for they are only tools for His purpose.” This is the meaning of the idea of the “revelation of His presence even in the exile”, that Divine Providence guides absolutely everything in life, albeit in a hidden fashion, and this is the deeper understanding of “I shall place Hashem before me always.”

To emphasize this idea, the Megilla does not use Hashem’s name, only “king” to stress to us the truth that what appears to us simply as a human leader of a government with his own view of the world, is actually a vessel guided by the hand of G-d. Thus, when we read that Esther turned to “the king”, she was really focusing her prayers to the King of the Universe whose Presence stood behind the human ruler, to the will of the Almighty which beats within the king’s heart, to request that He change Achashveirosh’s will to prevent him from executing the Jewish people, G-d forbid.

With these insights from Rav Dessler, we can now understand the profound connection between Amalek and the idea of “derech,” of “the way”, in Scripture. The inner profundity of Megillas Esther serves to teach that all history unfolds according to Divine Providence and that nothing, absolutely nothing in this world happens by chance. Even the heart of the most evil oriental potentate is but a tool in the hand of the King of Kings to carry out His plan for His people. Therefore, specifically during the days when we focus on the obligation to erase Amalek and his offspring’s name from history, it is incumbent upon us to recognize the fundamental distinction between the Jew and Amalek.

The Jew accepts the principle of Divine Providence which provides for him a “way”, a path in which all Creation revolves around His direction, and Amalek believes that no “way” exists. Rather, he trusts in his own wicked designs and assumes that happenstance is the overriding force in life; he sees no guiding Hand in the Universe, as Rashi explains “What Amalek did to you, on the way. . .” the word ‘did to you’ (Heb.--karcha) connotes ‘happenstance’ (Heb.--mikreh). Moreover, the essence of Amalek is further defined by this phrase, again, as Rashi

explains: “it connotes ‘cold’ (Heb.—kor) as opposed to warmth (i.e. enthusiasm, zeal for the Almighty’s guidance.) an insensitivity to G-d’s Providence. From Amalek’s point of view, no such guidance exists; he rebels against any concept of Divine superintendence. These two ideas go together, for if one denies the existence of a Heavenly Guide, then everything that happens is only by chance. This in turn leads to a spiritual deadness, a coldness of heart. Without a Heavenly Guide, Amalek remains distant from His spirit, and thus, the final connotation of the words used to describe Amalek in Rashi’s commentary: “... (Karcha) is a language which connotes seminal emission (Heb.—keri) and moral impurity (Heb.—tuma’ah). . . .” All of the above follows from Amalek’s disdain for holiness and the reality of Divine Providence in world history, as explained at the end of Rav Dessler’s comments cited above.

We have always cited in this context the Biblical passage concerning Hagar (Breishis 21:16). After Avraham Avinu sent Hagar away from his home, the Torah tells us: “She departed, and she strayed, lost, in the desert of Be’er Sheva.” Rashi explains (loc. Cit): “She returned to the idolatrous practices of her father’s house.” A young student once asked me how Rashi could derive Hagar’s return to idol worship from the simple meaning of the text. The verse only says that she strayed in the desert, lost?! It seems to me that I heard from the Gaon R’ Isaac Ausband, zt”l., the following explanation:

The Sages tell of an incident (Devarim Rabba 3:16): Rabi Tanchuma taught, once there was a boat completely filled with non-Jews, except for a single Jew. (The boat had just survived a terrible storm where all of the non-Jews had prayed to their deities to no avail. They then saw how when the Jew beseeched Hashem to save the boat, he was answered. Hence--) when the boat arrived at an island port, the non-Jewish passengers went to the Jew and asked him to go on shore and purchase something for them. He responded, “Am I not a guest here (like you)? (As such,) how should I be familiar with the place to know where to go to purchase anything?” They then told the Jew: “A Jew is never ‘a guest’ (i.e. a Jew is always at home with his surroundings.). Wherever you go, your G-d is with you” This is the meaning of the verse “(it is a nation) whose G-d is close to it.”

The principle we learn from this midrash is the fact that a Jew is never a “guest” in his surrounding, he is never unfamiliar, lost and abandoned in the land. A Jew is never alone, as the midrash quotes the non-Jews—“wherever you go, your G-d is with you.” The Jew knows that he is always underneath Hashem’s protection and all of his deeds are directed and arranged from above. With this

insight, Rashi's words become clear. If the possuk testifies that Hagar was lost in the desert, that she had given up hope and had no spirit left within her, then it is apparent that she must have "returned to the idolatrous practices of her father's house", for confusion and desperation are fundamentally contradictory to the nature of a Jew. These emotions are not part of the Jewish people's psyche. They are a people who never give up under any circumstances.

We now understand on a deeper level the principles we've laid out above. When the Torah states that Hagar was lost in the desert, it is not only indicating that she had abandoned her Jewish teachings and replaced Jewish values with those of her idolatrous family. Rather, the reason why she abandoned these teachings and became "lost", straying in the desert, can only be because she stood at this moment deeply disconnected from the truths of G-d's Divine Providence, His "way" for her in her life. Therefore, being "lost", "without a way" in the desert is only an expression of rejection and denial of Jewish fundamental principles of the path and way the Creator lays out for each and every one of us, for every single step in our lives. This is absolutely the philosophy of Amalek, the idea of "on the way" (i.e. Heb. *karcha*, with the connotations described above); the result of such an attitude is nothing other than—being lost. If Hagar was lost, then she must have re-adopted the ideas of Amalek, of idol worship, where the foundation of both is impurity (Heb. *keri*—again, the idea of *karcha*—happenstance on the way, denial of the Almighty's guidance).

The Navi Shmuel (I, chapters 20-22) describes how Yehonason and David arranged a sign to warn Dovid if King Shaul was pursuing him to kill him. If this indeed was the case, Yehonason said he would shoot his arrow away at a distance and send his servant "away". In this way, Dovid would recognize that he, too, had to go "away" to save himself from Shaul's wrath. Yehonason then added, if this was the sign, then Dovid should "go, for Hashem has sent you." It would seem that this language is incorrect. Yehonason's intent is to warn Dovid of a life-threatening situation. Shouldn't he say, "Flee for your life!" What is the implication of a simple, "Go, for He has sent you" ?

The meaning of this specific language is clear from our previous discussion. A person never has to feel his must "flee". Rather, one must know that Hashem is sending him on a personal, unique mission to fulfill his life's purpose. Yehonason teaches that even if one is going away for reason not of his own making, unclear in its purpose, nonetheless he must recognize he is "being sent" by his Heavenly Guide. We too must live with the awareness that even in situations which require our rapid departure, we are not "fleeing"; everything is being arranged by

Heavenly fiat. For this reason, Yehonason was telling Dovid, even if it has been ordained in Heaven that you should be chased by King Shaul, nonetheless this is nothing but a fulfillment of your life's mission, how you are being "sent" in the world. You are not "fleeing"! As the Mesillas Yescharim tells us: "A person should always be aware in his heart that the Almighty is sending him out in this world." As we've explained above, this is nothing other than the "way" (*derech*) that Divine Providence is laying out for us.

We must also be aware that the 'way' to protect ourselves from and to fight against the philosophy of "*karcha*"—happenstance, coolness, and impurity—is serenity and equanimity. We see this fact in the same passage we cited above about Amalek, in verse 18: . "It shall be that when Hashem, your G-d, gives you rest from all your enemies all around . . . you shall wipe out the memory of Amalek". After the Torah defines the pernicious nature of Amalek in verse 17, "*asher karcha*"—rejection of Heavenly Guidance, lack of zeal for G-d's closeness, and impurity—it tells us what is the way to fulfill the command of exterminating Amalek: when Hashem gives you rest! Only through the power of serenity can one attain the required spiritual level to fulfill "wipe out the memory of Amalek", to overcome the coolness of his zeal for Hashem's nearness and not fall prey to his spiritual impurity. The means to acquire such serenity and equanimity is through the Toras Mussar which our teachers have bequeathed to us through the generations . Through the study of Mussar we can sanctify and dedicate time for personal introspection, the sole path to attain true serenity and an awareness of truth which lies at the deepest reaches of our hearts.

Thus, we see that during the days of Purim, we mention over and over this quality of serenity (Heb. *Menucha*, *nachu*—rest). In the Megilla (9:21-22) we read: "(Mordechai was) charging them that they should observe annually the fourteenth and fifteenth day of Adar, as the days on which the Jews gained relief (lit. rested) from their enemies". All of the establishment of the joyous days of Purim stems from "days on which the Jews rested". Indeed, this is the central theme of the holiday of Purim—the expunging of the memory of Amalek and his offspring for all generations only comes from serenity as a result of rest, and equanimity, mental clarity. Hence, the language of the Scripture is precise, linking the charge to observe the Yomim Tovim of Purim with the awareness that they are "days on which the Jews rested". This is the way to true victory over Amalek.

Further, all of the tragedies of the days of Mordechai and Esther only occurred because the Jews had lost their "rest",

their serenity and peace. When the Jewish nation violated the serenity of Shabbos and enjoyed the meal of Achashveirosh, then the evil Persians took their serenity and their decrees began. On the other hand, the deepest realization of the miracle only began when "That night, sleep eluded the king". In other words, when the evil goyim began to lose their rest, it was a sign that the Jews, through their teshuva, had begun to reclaim their rest and serenity. Serenity is the inheritance of the Jewish people. When they violate it, it moves over to the nations of the world.

In the Sefer Shem Mi Shmuel, the author quotes a profound principle available to us on Purim, an awesome gift for these holidays. " (Megillas Esther 5:14) '(Zeresh said to Haman). . . tomorrow morning speak to the king . . .' We can ask why the Scriptural text does not say that Haman should ask the king, or request from the king. Rather, the text says that Haman should say to the king, a language which implies a command. Similarly, a few verses later, the Megilla says, 'and Haman came to the outer courtyard to say to the king to hang Mordechai on the gallows which he had prepared for him' again implying that Haman was then at a higher level than Achashveirosh. . . From here, every person with a deep intellect should recognize, from the fact that Haman's house was given to Esther and that the entire plan had turned upside-down, giving the Jews the power to rule over their enemies, that Purim hides within it a tremendous spiritual impression. During Purim it is within the power each and every Jew to say, that is, to command (so to speak) the King, the King of Kings the Holy One Blessed be He, (just as our Sages tell us that the Righteous can demand, and the Almighty fulfills their demand) to hang Haman and to wipe out his name from each Jew's heart, or at least, from his own heart. However, this "saying" must not be insincere, but with the entire desire of his soul . . . and this is what the earlier Chasidim used to say, "On Purim, every individual Jew can be saved, and can be blessed."

We see from the words of the Sochatchover, zt"l., that Haman possessed an incredible power of speech, ". . . to say to the king", a power to command even Achashveirosh. That very power was transformed, to the extent that even Haman's house was given to Mordechai and Esther. We

must realize that every year, during Purim each and every Jew has this power "to say to the King of Kings", to command Him, so to speak, for his own benefit! Just as a Tzadik can command, so can each and every Jew and receive all of the inspiration and blessing which had been difficult for him to obtain the rest of the year. Such is this wonderful talisman, tried and true. We also see from the Sochachover the same idea we cited from Rav Dessler, zt"l., that one can be in direct contact with the Almighty, the King of Kings, in conformance with His Divine Guidance, as we have explained above.

These days of Purim, with their unique quality, should be used to the fullest extent. We should know that it is within our reach to be able, no less!—to "command" the Almighty so to speak. Whenever the text says "the king" in the Megilla, it refers to the King of Kings, and when we, like Esther, turn to him, we are really turning to "the Will of Hashem which beats with the king's heart." For we are Jews, and we believe in a philosophy of a Divinely-Guided "way" for each and every person, we are never lost and wandering, for that is the path, the essence of Amalek, "asher karcha baderech", who denies Divine Providence, and tries to influence us by his "happenstance" way of life, by his lack of enthusiasm for closeness to Hashem, and by his impurity. Finally, we must remember that the way to counter these pernicious influences of Amalek is our spiritual serenity and equanimity, as we seen in Parshas Zachor, only "when Hashem, your G-d, gives you rest from all your enemies all around . . . you shall wipe out the memory of Amalek". Then, we will merit the blessings of "days on which the Jews rested."



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