



**Zachor**  
**Deuteronomy 25:17-19**

## Zachor

Deuteronomy 25:17-19

- This being the Shabbat before Purim, on which we celebrate the foiling of Haman the Amalekite's plot to destroy the Jewish people, the weekly Parshah is supplemented with the *Zachor* reading (Deuteronomy 25:17-19) in which we are commanded to remember the evil of Amalek and to eradicate it from the face of the earth:
- *Remember what Amalek did to you on the road, on your way out of Egypt. That he encountered you on the way and cut off those lagging to your rear, when you were tired and exhausted; he did not fear G-d. And it shall come to pass, when the L-rd your G-d has given you rest from all your enemies round about, in the land which the L-rd your G-d is giving you for an inheritance to possess it, that you shall obliterate the memory of Amalek from under the heavens. Do not forget.*

## Zachor

Deuteronomy 25:17-19

- **17. You shall remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you went out of Egypt,**
- **18. how he happened upon you on the way and cut off all the stragglers at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and he did not fear God.**
- **19. [Therefore,] it will be, when the Lord your God grants you respite from all your enemies around [you] in the land which the Lord, your God, gives to you as an inheritance to possess, that you shall obliterate the remembrance of Amalek from beneath the heavens. You shall not forget!**

# Zachor

## Deuteronomy 25:17-19

- **Parshat Zachor**
- This being the Shabbat before Purim, on which we celebrate the foiling of Haman the Amalekite's plot to destroy the people of Israel, the weekly reading is supplemented by Parshat Zachor ("Remember") in which we are commanded to remember the evil of Amalek and to eradicate it from the face of the earth. The reading is from Deuteronomy 25:17-19):
- *Remember what Amalek did to you on the road, on your way out of Egypt.*
- *That he encountered you on the way and cut off those lagging to your rear, when you were tired and exhausted; he did not fear G-d.*
- *And it shall come to pass, when the L-rd your G-d has given you rest from all your enemies round about, in the land which the L-rd your G-d is giving you for an inheritance to possess it, that you shall obliterate the memory of Amalek from under the heavens. Do not forget.*
- *Remember what Amalek did to you on the road, on your way out of Egypt. That he encountered you on the way (Deuteronomy 25:17-18)*
- [The Hebrew word *karcha*, "encountered you," also translates "cooled you off". Thus the Midrash says:]
- **What is the incident (of Amalek) comparable to? To a boiling tub of water which no creature was able to enter. Along came one evil-doer and jumped into it. Although he was burned, he cooled it for the others.**
- **So, too, when Israel came out of Egypt, and G-d rent the sea before them and drowned the Egyptians within it, the fear of them fell upon all the nations. But when Amalek came and challenged them, although he received his due from them, he cooled the awe of them for the nations of the world.**
- (Midrash Tanchuma)

# Zachor

## Deuteronomy 25:17-19

- **Parshat Zachor**
- *Remember what Amalek did to you on the road, on your way out of Egypt.*
- *That he encountered you on the way and cut off those lagging to your rear, when you were tired and exhausted; he did not fear G-d.*
- *And it shall come to pass, when the L-rd your G-d has given you rest from all your enemies round about, in the land which the L-rd your G-d is giving you for an inheritance to possess it, that you shall obliterate the memory of Amalek from under the heavens. Do not forget.*
- Amalek is thus the essence of chutzpa, of completely irrational challenge to truth. There are challenges to the truth that are based on rational argument. There are evasions that arise from subjective motives and desires. But then there is "Amalek," who neutralizes the most compelling evidence and chills the most inspiring experience with nothing more than his cynicism and audacity.
- There is only one way to defeat Amalek: to remember. Because his challenge is not rational, it cannot be rationally refuted; because it is immune to feeling, it cannot be repelled by a rousing of emotion. To counteract Amalek's poison, one must call forth the soul's reserves of supra-rational faith, instilled within it when it was first formed as a spark of the divine essence—a faith which, when remembered, can meet his every moral challenge.
- (The Chassidic Masters)

*The people of Israel journeyed... and they camped in Rephidim...*

*[Moses] named the place "Challenge and Strife" because of the strife of the people of Israel and their challenging of G-d, saying, "Is G-d amongst us or not?"*

*Then came Amalek and attacked Israel in Rephidim... (Exodus 17:1-8)*

*Remember what Amalek did to you on the road, on your way out of Egypt. That he encountered you on the way and cut off those lagging to your rear, when you were tired and exhausted; he did not fear G-d. Therefore... you must obliterate the memory of Amalek from under the heavens. Do not forget. (Deuteronomy 25:17-19)*

**The Jewish people had just experienced one of the greatest manifestations of divine power in history. Ten supernatural plagues had compelled the mightiest nation on earth to free them from their servitude. The sea had split before them, and manna had rained from the heavens to nourish them. How could they possibly question, "Is G-d amongst us or not"?**

**Yet such is the nature of doubt. There is doubt that is based on a rational query. There is doubt that rises from the doubter's subjective motives and desires. But then there is doubt pure and simple: irrational doubt, doubt more powerful than reason. Doubt that neutralizes the most convincing arguments and the most inspiring experiences with nothing more than a cynical shrug.**

**Such was the doubt that left the Jewish people susceptible to attack from Amalek. Amalek, in the spiritual sphere, is the essence of baseless, irrational indifference. In the words of the Midrash:**

*What is the incident (of Amalek) comparable to? To a boiling tub of water which no creature was able to enter. Along came one evil-doer and jumped into it. Although he was burned, he cooled it for the others.*

*So, too, when Israel came out of Egypt, and G-d split the sea before them and drowned the Egyptians within it, the fear of them fell upon all the nations. But when Amalek came and challenged them, although he received his due from them, he cooled<sup>1</sup> the awe of the nations of the world for them.*

**This is why Amalek, and what he represents, constitutes the arch enemy of the Jewish people and their mission in life. As Moses proclaimed following the war with Amalek, "G-d has sworn by His throne; G-d is at war with Amalek for all generations."<sup>3</sup> Truth can refute the logical arguments offered against it. Truth can even prevail over man's selfish drives and desires, for intrinsic to the nature of man is the axiom that "the mind rules over the heart" – that it is within a person's capacity to so thoroughly appreciate a truth that it is ingrained in his character and implemented in his behavior. But man's rational faculties are powerless against the challenge of an Amalek who leaps into the boiling tub, who brazenly mocks the truth and cools man's most inspired moments with nothing more than a dismissive "So what?"**

## The Bottleneck

Amalek attacked Israel "on the road, on [the] way out of Egypt," as they were headed toward Mount Sinai to receive G-d's Torah and their mandate as His people. Here, too, history mirrors the inner workings of the soul: the timing of the historical Amalek's attack describes the internal circumstances under which the pestilence of baseless doubt rears its head.

In the Passover Haggadah we say: "In every generation one must see himself as if he personally came out of *Mitzrayim*." *Mitzrayim*, the Hebrew word for Egypt, means "narrow straits"; on the personal level, this refers to what Chassidic teaching calls the "narrowness of the neck" which interposes between the mind and the heart.

Just as, physically, the head and the heart are joined by a narrow passageway, the neck, so it is in the spiritual-psychological sense. For while the mind possesses an innate superiority over the heart, it is a most difficult and challenging task for a person to exercise this superiority – to direct and mold his feelings and desires to conform with what he knows to be right. This is the "Exodus from *Mitzrayim*" that is incumbent on each and every generation: the individual challenge to negotiate the narrow straits of one's internal "neck," to overcome the material enticements, the emotional subjectivity, the ego and self-interest which undermine the mind's authority over the heart, and impede its influence on the person's character and behavior.

## The Bottleneck

As long as a person is still imprisoned in his personal *mitzrayim*, he faces many challenges to his integrity. As long as he has not succeeded in establishing his mind as the axis on which all else revolves, his base instincts and traits – such as greed, anger, the quest for power and instant gratification – may get the better of him. But once he achieves his personal "Exodus" from the narrow straits of his psyche, once he establishes his knowledge and understanding of the truth as the determining force in his life, the battle is all but won. He may be confronted with negative ideas and rationalizations, but free of the distortions of self-interest, the truth will triumph. He may be tempted by negative drives and desires, but if in his life the mind rules the heart, it will curb and ultimately transform them.

But there remains one enemy which threatens also the post-Exodus individual: Amalek. Amalek "knows his Master and consciously rebels against Him." Amalek does not challenge the truth with arguments, or even with selfish motivations – he just disregards it. To the axiom, "Do truth because it is true," Amalek says "So what?" Armed with nothing but his *chutzpah*, Amalek jumps into the boiling tub, contests the incontestable. And in doing so he cools its impact.

## Beyond Reason

How is one to respond to Amalek? How is one to deal with the apathy, the cynicism, the senseless doubt within? The formula that the Torah proposes is encapsulated in a single word: *zachor* - "remember."

In his Tanya,<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi discusses the faith in G-d that is integral to the Jewish soul. Faith is not something that must be attained; it need only be revealed, for it is woven into the very fabric of the soul's essence. Faith, continues Rabbi Schneur Zalman, transcends reason. Through faith one relates to the infinite truth of G-d in its totality, unlike the perception achieved by reason, which is defined and limited by the finite nature of the human mind.

Thus Rabbi Schneur Zalman explains the amazing fact that, throughout Jewish history, many thousands of Jews have sacrificed their lives rather than renounce their faith and their bond with the Almighty—including many who had little conscious knowledge and appreciation of their Jewishness and did not practice it in their daily lives. At their moment of truth, when they perceived that their very identity as Jews was at stake, their intrinsic faith – a faith that knows no bounds or equivocations – came to light, and overpowered all else.

Amalek is irrational and totally unresponsive to reason; the answer to Amalek is likewise supra-rational. The Jew's response to Amalek is to *remember*: To call forth his soul's reserves of supra-rational faith, a faith which may lie buried and forgotten under a mass of mundane involvements and entanglements. A faith which, when remembered, can meet his every moral challenge, rational or not.