Eradicating the Amalek Within Us

This week we read Parshat Zachor: ‘zachor et asher asa lecha Amalek baderech betzeitchem miMitzrayim ... ’remember what Amalek did to you, on the way, when you were leaving Egypt’ (Devarim 25:17). The pasuk continues to describe what Amalek did: ‘asher korcha baderech’ - there are several approaches in Chazal and in the commentaries regarding the meaning of korcha. Some say it is from the word kor meaning cold, until now the other nations feared Am Yisrael, as they said in the shirat hayam: 'people's heard, they were agitated, terror gripped the dwellers of Plishtim' (Shemot 15:14).

Suddenly Amalek shows that it is possible to wage war against Klal Yisrael. Although they did not emerge unscathed, they showed that it is possible to wage war against Klal Yisrael. Another possible interpretation is that it is from the word keri, they inflicted impurity into Klal Yisrael. Another possibility is that the word korcha comes from the word mikreh - coincidence. All that happened in Egypt, all the plagues, the splitting of the sea, the drowning of the Egyptians - Amalek tried to makes us think that it was all mikreh - a coincidence.

The radio reported these events as if they were matter-of-fact natural happenings - the firstborn
happen to all die at the same time. Amalek tried to inflict Bnei Yisrael with the idea that there is no Divine Providence. Amalek does not deny Hashem's existence but feels that he can overpower Him. The proof for this is that they battled Bnei Yisrael in Refidim, the last stop before Matan Torah. The Gemara teaches us that Amalek tried to prevent the nation from receiving the Torah. If they did not believe in Hashem, why should it matter whether or not they receive the Torah? Amalek was trying to prevent a nation from receiving the Torah and believing in Hashem, they wished to fight the Divine Plan - this is Amalek.

Haman was a descendant of Amalek - just as Amalek said everything is coincidence, so too with Haman. Haman knew that Hashem brought salvation to the Jewish people, but that was then - Hashem is now old and does not have the same capability as before. After all, He was unable to prevent the Beit Hamikdash from destruction by Nebuchadnezzar. Haman therefore said, Hashem is old and there has no power, chas veshalom.

Chazal teach us that Haman was glad that the lottery fell on the month that Moshe Rabenu died. We see therefore Haman believed in Moshe Rabenu having received the Torah. Furthermore, Chazal teach us that whenever the megillah states 'hamelech' not followed by the name Achashverosh it means, the King of kings, not only the king Achashverosh. When Haman said 'lemi yachpotz hamelech laasot yekar yoter mimeni' 'whom would the king want to honor especially more than me?' (Esther 6:6). Thus Haman thought that Hashem wished to honor him as well.

We are commanded to destroy any remnants of Amalek - timcheh et zecher Amalek. How do we do this today, we do not know who is a true descendant of Amalek. There is however an added dimension to this mitzvah which still exists today and that is to destroy the Amelekite within us, the part within us that questions whether everything has come about through Divine Providence. We must work on ourselves to believe that it is all from Hashem and not through what is called natural - there is no nature.

The battle is against the Amalek which is within us.

Amalek believes in Hashem as we mentioned but does not fear Him, we must wipe this out and work on our Yirat Shamayim.

Chazal teach us that there were many prophets for the Jewish nation and many prophecies, but the only prophets recorded were those which had relevance to all generations. If so, why were there prophecies involving so many nations such as Edom, Amon, and Moav which do not exist anymore? Why were they recorded? I believe we can compare this to what we have just said about Amalek. Every person is a miniature world, every person is comprised of parts of all these nations, we must emphasize our Jewish side and downplay any influences of the other nations. These prophecies were recorded because a part of them is within us thus they do have relevance for generations later.

The Gemara discusses whether in a leap year Purim is celebrated in the second or the first Adar. The reason for the first Adar is ein maavirin al hamitzvoth, we do not pass over mitzvoth, we perform a mitzvah at the first opportunity to do so. Thus given that the first Adar comes first so we celebrate Purim in the first Adar. However, the halacha follows the opinion that Purim is in the second Adar. What is the reason for delaying Purim until the second Adar? The Gemara explains in order to have one redemption adjacent to the other, so that the redemption of Purim is adjacent to Pesach. Why should this be? Why not make Purim near Tu BiShvat and celebrate it during the first Adar?

I believe the reason is that the story of the Megillah on a superficial level does not contain any miracles - a king quarrels with his wife, this is not the first time this has happened and probably will not be the last. The servants plot to kill the king is also not unusual. A prime minister who wishes to annihilate the Jews, unfortunately this is not the only time this has happened. Finally the Jewish lobby has him deposed, also not unusual. Unlike other parts of Jewish history, the story of Purim appears like a natural story there are no open miracles. However, when it came to the redemption from Egypt, the miracles and the hand of Hashem were clear to all. In one minute the water turned
to blood, therefore frogs, and other things. The firstborn died on the night of the Seder, Moshe Rabenu walked through a sea on dry land while the Egyptians drowned in that same sea.

When it came to the redemption from Egypt, nobody could say that there were no miracles from Hashem. In order to understand that Purim was not coincidental we must remember the miracles in Egypt. This is the idea of Purim being adjacent to Pesach. The redemption from Shushan came about when the king could not sleep and rather than reading the evening newspaper decided to take out the chronicles. Although it all looks so matter of fact, we must work on ourselves to believe that it was not, that Hashem orchestrated everything.

A person has free choice, He can choose what to do - we must choose to be servants of Hashem, and we see that in the end it was Hashem's will that Mordechai be given all the honor. The Jewish people realized that it was all part of the Divine Plan. The people therefore prayed and they won the war against Amalek.

Following this victory, they accepted the Torah a second time, unlike at Matan Torah when it was under coercion. A primary part of the simcha of Purim is this acceptance of the Torah, thus Purim is a celebration of Matan Torah.