“REMEMBER WHAT AMALEK DID TO YOU”

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Throughout history many enemies have risen up against the Jewish people, yet no other nation, save Amalek, has had the “distinction” of being declared such a mortal enemy against whom there exists such a deep and intense war. “Hashem maintains a war against Amalek from generation to generation” (Shemot 17:16). This hatred towards Amalek is so deep and so unique, that Hashem commands us to destroy their descendants and to constantly remind ourselves of what they did to us.

As we approach the reading of Parshat Zachor, in our enthusiasm to fulfill the mitzvoth of the Creator it is incumbent upon us to attempt to understand what this mitzvah all about. On a simple level, the commandment “remember what Amalek did to you” (Devarim 25:17) is simply that – remembering Amalek is the catalyst aimed at encouraging us to wage a battle against him. The primary purpose of the mitzvah may therefore be understood as a commandment to pass on the message of remembrance from generation to generation until the final generation when we will merit having our own king. At that time, as a result of this message that will have been passed down throughout the generations, we will remember the command and proceed to annihilate the descendants of Amalek.

Perhaps there are other aspects of this mitzvah that we should explore. We cited the pasuk above: “Hashem maintains a war against Amalek from generation to generation” where the Torah implies that the war must be waged in every generation, not only in the final generation. The words of Torah are eternal and if the Torah writes that this battle must be waged from “from generation to generation” then it is clearly not limited to that final generation. The mitzvah to remember the acts of Amalek, in addition to reminding us of the mitzvah to annihilate him, is also intended to inspire us to battle the Amalek of our generation.

What is this battle and what is the nature of the remembrance required in every generation?

It is imperative that we properly understand the nature of this mitzvah because for many people remembering the deeds of Amalek may be summed up as follows: Amalek is fuel for special Purim songs while remembrance of Amalek is the high-quality oil which kindles the joy associated with this month in the manner of battle cries which raise the flame higher and higher.

REMEMBERING AMALEK – SHAKING US FROM OUR COMPLACENCE AND SHARPENING OUR SENSES TO BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY THE DANGER

We find in the holy sefarim that Amalek, in addition to comprising a nation also has a spiritual component. It is the root of evil, it forms a layer of impurity and decadence which attempts to harm Bnei Yisrael in any way possible. Amalek wages a spiritual battle and attempts various ways to impinge
upon the sanctity of Bnei Yisrael. The battle against Amalek throughout the generations is the battle against this outer layer of impurity, the root of evil in the world.

This is a battle which must be fought throughout the generations, and the mitzvah to remember applies in each and every generation as well. The Torah commands us to remember, this remembrance has a profound effect on our spirit and our soul in numerous ways—let us analyze some of these effects:

Firstly, remembering what Amalek did to us is our protection from complacency. Amalek is wise and very cunning and if we do not exercise caution they are liable to strike and harm us. The mitzvah of zachor, of remembering, is an alarm clock. This may be compared to an officer accompanying his soldiers in a section of enemy territory which appears to be silent and tranquil. The officer warns them of the danger of ambush which an illusion of silence disguises. Constant remembrance of Amalek tells us to pay attention, to be cautious, not to fall into the trap of his ambush.

Amalek is a very evasive enemy who changes his complexion and hides behind disguises in many shapes and forms. He is never silenced, he waits with his poison on the sidelines watching for the opportunity to ambush. We must remember. Remembering makes us more alert and it is the alertness which helps us identify the enemy within what we perceive as reality—the reality in which it is difficult to distinguish between enemy and friend, between good and bad. Remembering Amalek helps us identify the enemy hiding behind different disguises, when we are alert we are able to recognize that behind what appears friendly territory is hiding a dangerous enemy. Being alert and recognizing the spiritual danger of Amalek will sharpen our senses to identify the impurity which hides in various forms and tries its hardest to inflict us with harm.

The commandment to remember Amalek is therefore intended to open our eyes and to let us understand the reality in which we live, a reality in which there is a constant battle against an evasive enemy whose entire purpose is to harm the sanctity of Bnei Yisrael, an enemy who does not rest for a moment. Remembering Amalek may be viewed as correctly reading the map of this world. Our world is a world of toil, not a world of tranquility which is all good. There is evil here and it is this evil that we must battle. When man does not realize this then he lacks the readiness and clarity to identify the lurking dangers. Mesillas Yesharim and Tanya open with a discussion of man’s place in this world and his need to fight against evil. Ramchal writes (Mesillas Yesharim chapter 1)

‘Hakadosh Baruch Hu placed man in a world with many elements which can distance us from Hashem Yitbarach ... he is placed in the midst of a battle, for anything relating to the world, no matter how good are all tests of faith ... this is a battle from both directions.’

Every Jew must be aware of where he is. Anyone in this world who is not aware of the presence of these enemies who do not rest for a moment and who channel all their energies to battling against the sanctity of Klal Yisrael, exposes himself to danger—complacency is very dangerous.
ADVANTAGES OF BEING ALERT AGAINST THE LAYER OF IMPURITY OF AMALEK

What is the advantage of being alert? Firstly, it is known that the best defense is offense. One who is aware of the presence of enemies does not wait for them to attack, rather he is always on active patrol trying to advance. A Jew needs to constantly sanctify himself and cleave to Hashem Yitbarach. In truth, when G-d forbid, a person is attacked and suffers a blow, he is overcome by thoughts of teshuva which awaken within him a desire to ascend to a higher level.

The mitzvah to remember Amalek teaches us to take the initiative, to constantly have thoughts of teshuva and a constant desire to grow. Our teshuva must not only come on the heels of defeat – we must not wait for sin to awaken us to teshuva rather we must arouse ourselves to teshuva to prevent us from coming to sin.

When a person lives his life as if he exists in beautiful pastoral rose-colored surroundings and imagines himself in Gan Eden where all is good, he is liable to fall into a deep slumber. Remembering Amalek reminds us of the negative aspects of reality causing man to open his eyes and become aware of his own shortcomings and the fact that if he is not careful he may sin. When this recognition comes from a place of contemplation and self-introspection it can bring man to a state of humility, intensifying his tefillot to Hashem and coming closer to his Creator.

In addition, one who feels vulnerable does not wait for terrorists to infiltrate before waking up rather he keeps a great distance from the border fence. So too, one who is astute and recognizes the enemy, is able to identify the weak points where the enemy may infiltrate and does his utmost to bolster those weak links. Certainly he will not “play with fire”.

Remembering Amalek sharpens our senses to help us identify that which is rotten and impure, this includes not only the prohibitions which are transgressed but the negative atmosphere as well. This remembrance helps man develop his sense of kedusha and in this way, the ability to sense even the slightest outer layer of impurity as it hides behind a positive façade.

The purpose of the mitzvah of remembering Amalek is to provide us with defense mechanisms against this archenemy. Hashem’s commandment is meant to awaken us and to strengthen us and gird us for war. Amalek’s tactics are the opposite – their goal is to induce the victim into slumber with an illusion of rosy euphoria masking reality.

Perhaps, part of the fulfillment of this mitzvah includes those points that we have mentioned. Let us therefore gather strength and fulfill the mitzvah of remembering Amalek in the best way possible.
AND HE STRUCK THOSE OF YOU WHO WERE HINDMOST

AND HE STRUCK THE HINDMOST – THE AMALEKITE SERPENT

After discussing the mitzvah of remembering Amalek, let us attempt to understand the enemy and his scheming tactics. One should never mock or underestimate the enemy as this may expose one to great danger.

It is with this in mind that immediately following the commandment to remember what Amalek did to us, the Torah informs us of his war strategy:

“Remember what Amalek did to you, on the way, when you were leaving Egypt, that he happened upon you on the way, and he struck those of you who were hindmost, all the weaklings at your rear, when you were faint and exhausted, and he did not fear G-d” (Devarim 25:17-18).

The Torah here wishes to deepen our recognition of of Amalek’s modus operandi. Perhaps this understanding is part of the mitzvah of remembering what they did to us.

The pasuk mentions a number of points. Let us analyze two of these: 1) “he happened”, and 2) “he struck those of you who were hindmost”. We will begin with the latter point: “he struck those of you who were hindmost”.

The Torah’s expression for striking the hindmost is בך ויזנב which is from the word זנב meaning tail. We find here an allusion to the ancient serpent who appeared in a deceitful manner and in the end brought about the downfall of Adam Harishon with his slippery and poisonous tongue. His next appearance was in the guise of Esav, an ancestor of Amalek, who deceived his father Yitzchak Avinu by presenting himself as a righteous and pious tzaddik. Here as well, after the Jewish nation leaves Egypt, we find a third appearance of the serpent – in the guise of Amalek who entices and draws the weak ones after him.

The weak ones are referred to as הנחשלים which is comprised of the letters מילה נחש (see Emek Hamelech 14:134). The serpent’s goal was to harm the purity of the Brit Milah of Bnei Yisrael, the bond between Bnei Yisrael and their Father in Heaven.

The Torah is teaching us that a war with Amalek is in fact a war against the serpent – not a bear and not a frightening tiger whose roar is heard at great distances with his mouth dripping with the blood of his victim. The serpent is evasive and cunning, he hides among the bushes, sees but is not seen. He is able to kill his victim with a light sting which is not heard and is scarcely felt. His poison penetrates deep in the body while on the outside everything appears fine and calm. Inside, however, the poison moves quickly and burns the heart, the lungs, and the mind.

While on the outside everything appears protected, beautiful, and taken care of, the serpent manages to extinguish all internal life. It is like a mere plastic covering. Perhaps we can compare this to a stuffed animal in a museum – there is nothing left on the inside. Amalek does a “clean job”, leaving no trace
and furthermore the presence of the enemy in the vicinity does not arouse panic. He has a silencer which not only silences his cry, but silences the anger which should be the reaction of the kedusha which has been struck by the poison he has injected.

The tiger, on the other hand, try as he does to hide, is unable to, for moving his large size generates sounds which signal the victim to flee. The tiger therefore must pursue and hunt while the serpent does not move quickly, discovering him will signal his end. His strength lies in his camouflage, he arrives quietly without being noticed, and stings. Only then does he emerge from hiding, after the enemy has been injured and unable to escape.

This is the way of Amalek – an enemy who hides his evil under a veil of good, who works hard to insure that we are unable to identify the spiritual poisons he wishes to inject into our hearts. Only after he succeeds in defeating and stinging us, does he expose his evil. Our defense-mechanisms have already been harmed and without difficulty he is able to drag the victim into its trap.

AMALEK – AMBUSH ON THE SIDES OF THE ROAD

The Zohar poses the following question: why is it that out of all the enemies who rose up against Bnei Yisrael, Hashem was most bothered by Amalek and therefore commanded Shmuel to wage a war against them (see Shmuel I 15). The Zohar explains that the battle against Amalek involved all of the worlds – those above and below. When Amalek emerged on the scene the root of all evil – the serpent of the upper worlds, gathered strength to fight Bnei Yisrael. His representative in the lower world was Amalek. Amalek acted towards Bnei Yisrael in the manner of a serpent which lies in wait on the side of the road and ambushed them when they left Egypt. Just as the serpent above schemes to inject impurity into the upper sanctuary so too Amalek below creates an ambush in order to inject impurity into Bnei Yisrael – this is a synopsis of the words of the Zohar.

The Zohar is teaching us why we are commanded to battle Amalek and why we must harbor such a deep hatred towards him – because he is the serpent who wishes to ambush Bnei Yisrael and inject them with his poisonous impurity. The primary method of the serpent is to blur the fact that there is an enemy and that there is great danger. When an enemy is visible we activate all our defenses, while when there is an illusion of safety and we are totally unaware of the dangers lurking, we let our guard down allowing the enemy to ambush us.

The Zohar teaches us that this is precisely the reason Hashem commanded us: “Remember what Amalek did to you” – Amalek is the serpent. The mitzvah teaches us in no uncertain terms – there is an enemy, he is present at all times and is not by any means passive. Do not think for a moment that he lives in some “clubhouse of impurity” enjoying himself as a drunkard, doped with drugs, welcoming anyone who wishes to join his party. No! He is sharp as a razor, wise and cunning, and is in constantly searching for schemes of how to penetrate the kedusha. He enters quietly without anyone noticing, and manages to sting, disappear, and leaves his poison to do the work for him. Amalek is not a door to door salesman selling poison, he is no fool. He injects his poison into the water reservoir – he is not an Arab, he was born in Germany.
Fulfillment of this mitzvah in the ultimate fashion requires an awakening: “remember what Amalek did to you” – remember! The enemy is waiting to ambush us, he is extremely jealous of our lifestyle of kedusha and tahara and of our mutual love and respect for each other. He would love nothing more than to drag us down to a life of impurity - “do not forget!”

Amalek’s strategy begins with camouflage, following in the footsteps of the serpent in Gan Eden. The cunning serpent presented himself as a loyal and devoted friend until he finally succeeded in becoming Adam’s chief advisor. He developed such a close relationship that he was closer to Adam and Chava than they were to Hashem such that they sought his counsel on how they should relate to Hashem. Amalek often cloaks himself as a tzaddik where his entire purpose is to inject the Jews with the poison of self-despair, or self-hatred, or even thoughts which could lead to disunity and hatred among Klal Yisrael.

WEAPONS OF DECEIT

The serpent made his second appearance in the guise of the deceitful Esav. Esav passed himself off as a tzaddik who even separates ma’aser from salt – according to the Torah description: “Esav was a man who knew hunting … game was in his mouth” (Bereishit 25:27-28). In a cunning manner, he was able to gain the trust of others whom he later robbed and killed. This is the way of the serpent – enticing, trapping. He accomplishes this by concealing the evil in the clothing of good, making sure that evil will never stand out on its own. He is aware that nothing angers the pure souls of Bnei Yisrael as much as evil.

If the evil was out in the open, streets would be filled with signs warning people to keep away, therefore he hides himself within good in order to blur the distinction between good and evil, his bitter poison is hidden within the sweetness of good “for the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey and her palate is smoother than oil, but her end is as bitter as wormwood as sharp as a double-edged sword” (Mishle 5:3-4).

Amalek uses the complex makeup of this world to his advantage. He creates a situation where one who battles against him feels he is fighting an enemy who has an element of truth, this serves to weaken one’s attack. Amalek makes sure that claims of righteousness will work in his favor. The claims are therefore in the name of advancement, in the name of freedom, at times in the name of Torah itself, and at times in the name of “derech eretz”.

Tremendous strength is required to fight this battle. He is like a poisonous scorpion in a store full of earthenware vessels – he hides himself among an innocent population. It is very hard to strike hard at an enemy that is absorbed among the population at large. This is a very difficult combination – to wage a strong attack against evil without any complacency, against an enemy who hides within that which is good and proper. It is very hard to employ one’s full strength to fight evil when there is the possibility of harming that which is good at the same time.

Wisdom, sharpness, and yirat Shamayim is required in order to identify the rotten elements hidden inside outer layers of good. Esav’s deceit thought that it could defeat Yaakov in his innocence. The pig
stretches out its hooves claiming it is pure, however Yaakov taught us: “with the crooked you act perversely” (Tehillim 18:27).

This is the first ingredient in Amalek’s strategy.
THAT HE HAPPENED UPON YOU ON THE WAY:

The second ingredient of Amalek is stated in the pasuk: "that he happened upon you on the way". The midrash and the Zohar present us with two seemingly contradictory interpretations of the word קרך – we will try to show that in fact they are both correct. The revealed and hidden elements of the Torah are in essence two sides of the same coin, the distinction being that the revealed relates to that which is visible on the outside, while the hidden relates to the internal. It would therefore not be incorrect to surmise that both interpretations are indicative of Amalek’s scheming ways. In short, the midrash sharpens our awareness of the tactics of Amalek which are exposed, while the Zohar exposes the tactics which are invisible and hidden.

The midrash interprets קרך as being an expression of קירור – cooling down - he made you as cold as water. On the other hand, the Zohar presents a totally opposite interpretation – Amalek not only did not cool down but actually heated up Bnei Yisrael with the heat of impurity. We find in the Torah: "anything similar to קרך (קרך הואbris which refers to one who is not doing anything constructive) – emptiness, boredom, one who is not doing anything constructive. Chazal teach us ‘idle time brings one to licentiousness’ (Ketubot 59b). As the Rambam writes:

“most of all a person’s thoughts must focus on Torah and wisdom, thoughts of illicit relations can only gain a stronghold when the heart is free of wisdom, regarding wisdom we are taught: “a beloved hind inspiring favor, her breasts will sate us at all times, you will always be intoxicated with her love” (Mishle 5:19) (Hilchot Isurei Biah 22:21)

When love of Hashem, love of Torah and love of the Jewish people are burning within man’s heart, the heat of illicit relations is unable to enter. The heat of impurity can deflect a cold feeling of kedusha, it cannot deflect heat for the fire of kedusha has the ability to devour other fires.
THE COOLING DOWN BY AMALEK

Let us attempt to analyze this element of Amalek’s strategy – to use cold in order to heat. We learned above that the way of the serpent is to insure that its victim does not suspect any danger. Amalek begins with cold because cold does not arouse one’s anxiety, it does not make one wary. Being heated with a feeling of impurity can only be the result of exposure to sin, while simple cooling down hearts from feelings of kedusha does not appear to be anything negative, it is parve. After all, the person reasons, burning with a feeling for kedusha is perhaps recommended for the average person but in reality remains in the domain of tzaddikim. If burning with desire for Hashem is nothing more than an act of piety, cooling down need not be viewed as anything negative or sinful.

It is not easy to discern that a cool feeling towards kedusha can lead to grave danger, thus awakening ourselves to teshuva from the depths of our heart to fight this attitude is very difficult indeed. Waging such a war is far more difficult than a heart which shouts at the infiltration of impurity. Amalek’s tactic of cooling us down therefore faces little opposition.

The serpent coils round and round its victim. The poison of the snake destroys a person’s immune system – Amalek injects its victim with the poison of complacence thus destroying any defense mechanisms. At first it works on insuring that the victim not generate any heat of his own, generating a cold feeling in the service of Hashem, until finally the victim falls into a slumber making him penetrable to infiltration by the heat of impurity.

Cold is instilled in a number of stages – it begins with a cold feeling towards cleaving to Hashem, an indifference towards kedusha. This feeling of cold then causes us to descend into the realm of impurity as the heart lacking sanctity feels empty and the soul yearns for nourishment. In comes the serpent and begins to feed the soul with his impurity. The victim has not violated any transgression, for if the serpent would convince one to transgress, his defense mechanisms would immediately trigger a reaction. All that has been done so far is to bring the person into an atmosphere of impurity. There is movement within the atmosphere of impurity without actual contact. The more one succumbs to being surrounded by tumah, the more the warning signs are removed. At a certain point a person finds himself in an atmosphere totally devoid of sanctity.

Amalek’s tactic of putting a person’s desire for kedusha to sleep makes him more susceptible to impurities. The distinction between good and evil becomes less clear, the defense mechanisms are not on alert, and now Amalek is now able to generate the heat of impurity within the victim. As we mentioned, the Zohar’s interpretation of א灰尘 כיון in the pasuk, is to heat up with impurity.

The Amalekite serpent employs methods of ambush aimed at defiling the sanctuary by bringing impurities into the holy. As we mentioned, the pasuk describing nocturnal impurity generated by being heated up to sin is כיוון הקור מתכתו, ייohon בך איש אשר איש יהודה מקרה לה, where the word מקרה is similar to קרך which Amalek inflicted upon us.
“THE COLD WAR” – VARIOUS STAGES OF COOLING DOWN

The serpent continues his “cooling down” strategy throughout his war against sanctity. At first a person develops a cold and indifferent attitude towards anything sacred, then he enters into an atmosphere of impurity, the victim has no idea that he is on the verge of sin because his ability to distinguish between good and evil has been blurred. In what appears to be a matter of fact manner, the victim is injected with the heat of impurity. These are the three stages of cooling down.

Following these three stages is the final stage of being heated up with impurity. The Amalekite serpent deals a very hard and sophisticated blow. As we know Jewish souls cannot stand the heat of impurity, the moment it has been scathed with the fire of sin, the G-dly soul shouts out – this is an awakening to teshuva. This is a powerful force stored deep within the Jewish soul.

Nothing can stand in the way of the fire of kedusha from our souls which are carved out from under the Holy Throne and are filled with fire of serving the Creator. Thus, even if G-d forbid one were injected with the poison of tumah, the sacred fire of kedusha can overcome any attack from the poison injected by the snake or the choking by a python. Nothing can stand in the path of kedusha which is represented by teshuva.

The serpent is fully cognizant of the fact that the fire of kedusha is able to devour the fire of tumah. In his cunning ways he continues his strategy of cooling down the victim’s feelings of kedusha. What does he do? He now dons the clothing of Esav, he appears as a tzaddik who separates ma’aser from salt. He enters the empty part of man’s heart and arouses thoughts of despair and self-blame. The weapon of cold is now clothed in despair, they type of despair a person may feel when seeing a tzaddik and bemoaning the fact that he has not reached that level. He thinks to himself – Hashem does not like you, teshuva will not help someone like you who has sunk to such a low level. You are not worthy of greeting the Shechina, etc. Such poisonous talk can destroy any impetus for teshuva, cooling down the person thereby chilling his weapon of kedusha which burns within him and which could easily destroy the tumah. If only he would just have the opportunity to emerge from the freezer.

קרך אשר - the serpent’s abilities lie in his ability to cool us down. נר א’ נשמת אדם - A man’s soul is the lamp of Hashem” (Mishle 20:27), the lamp refers to the זוועה ותפקידה - נר א’ נשמת אדם - a permanent fire shall remain aflame on the Altar, it shall not be extinguished” (Vayikra 6:5). There is nothing which can contend with this fire of kedusha, for the fire of impurity is unable to instill life into Bnei Yisrael and cannot offer any alternative to the kedusha burning within us.

Amalek is fully aware of this and constantly employs the four stages of cooling down we highlighted above. The impurity of The impurity of קרך is an automatic result of one who cools down, the only way to battle Amalek is with the heat of kedusha.

This strategy must be applied both by the individual battling Amalek as well as by the entire community wishing to deflect its poisonous attempt to infiltrate our community.
THE GOAL OF AMALEK – BLEMISHING THE COVENANT BETWEEN YISRAEL AND THEIR FATHER IN HEAVEN

We discussed the war strategy of the serpent, instilling within us cool and indifferent feelings aimed at the ultimate result of כֹּר – the heat of tumah. The serpent wishes to construct an alternative to the flame and the heat of kedusha. His primary yearning may therefore be described as infiltrating the Jewish nation with impurity, which is accomplished through blemishing the sacred brit, the brit which symbolizes our cleaving to Hashem like a burning fire:

“For the sake of my love, place me like a seal on Your heart, like a seal to dedicate Your strength for me, for strong till the death is my love; though their zeal for vengeance is hard as the grave, its flashes are flashes of fire, the flame of G-d. Many waters of heathen tribulation cannot extinguish the fire of this love, nor rivers of royal seduction or torture wash it away” (Shir Hashirim 8:6-7).

Love for Hashem, the depth of our belief is a burning fire. The brit, the foundation of this belief, is awakened through heat – when in an atmosphere of kedusha it is very dear, however when chas veshalom this heat comes from impure sources then the brit is harmed transferring the fire of love to an impure place which creates a rift between Hashem and Klal Yisrael.

The heat of tumah blemishes the brit and extinguishes the heat of deep love for Hashem within our heart. The life has been removed from our tefillah and the sweetness is removed from our Torah. The hearts turn to foreign loves, to hollow and superficial cultures, attaching themselves to the animalistic and impure ways of the other nations.

The root of all impurity is in the blemished brit, while the root of cleaving to G-dliness lies in its preservation. Protecting the brit creates a bond, this bond manifests itself in our Torah, our tefillah, in our simcha at performing mitzvoth, and in our yearning for a life of kedusha.

Amalek attempted to blemish our brit, to instill impurities into the foundation thereby extinguishing the feelings of love between the loved ones (Hashem and His people). Hashem therefore despises Amalek with a passion, as a husband would act zealously upon suspicion of his wife’s inappropriate behavior wishing to bring the one who caused this separation to justice. The Zohar teaches us that Amalek wished to destroy this covenant and Hashem therefore declared war against him for generations to come.

BILAAM AND AMALEK – THE DAUGHTERS OF MOAV, THEN AND NOW

We have discussed the strategy of Amalek, both from the perspective of יִזְנוּב בֵּר and from the perspective of אֵטָר קָרָר. We have discussed their different interpretations and how their intent is to inflict a blemish into the brit. Let us now touch upon a very vital point which has great application for our generation.
The Zohar in his discussion of Amalek mentions Bilaam whose goal was as his name בלעם implies, to swallow a nation (בלעם). In the section of the Torah devoted to Bilaam’s attempts we note that his many attempts to curse the Jewish people and blemish them spiritually were doomed to failure. A spiritual and ideological battle against Bnei Yisrael is to no avail. Bilaam therefore counseled Balak to try an entirely different strategy using the women of Moav, taking advantage of a person’s yetzer hara for illicit relations.

The Gemara describes the cunning manner in which Bilaam hid his depraved intentions and thereby brought about the downfall of many members of Bnei Yisrael. Had his intents been open and revealed, he would not have succeeded in causing Bnei Yisrael to stumble. Bilaam, however managed to drag them down not only into illicit relations but into the trap of Avoda Zara and causing them to leave Torah altogether, as the Gemara (Sanhedrin 106a) describes:

“Behold, I go to my people, come let me advise you what this people should do to your people” (Bamidbar 24:14) ... The G-d of these Jews hates immorality, furthermore I know that they have a penchant for linen garments. Come, let me give you a piece of advice, set up tents for them and place harlots inside them, an older one outside each tent and a young one inside and have them sell the Jews linen garments.

Taking Bilaam’s advice, Balak set up tents for the Jews throughout the territory controlled by the Jews, all along the Jordan from Snow Mountain in the north to Beit Hayeshimot in the south and placed harlots inside them, an older one outside each tent and young one inside. When the Jews would eat, drink, and be merry and go out for a walk in the marketplace set up by the Moabites, the older harlot would say to the Jew “are you not interested in buying linen garments?” The older harlot would offer the linen garment at its full price while the young harlot would call to him from inside and offer it for less, thereby persuading the Jew to purchase it.

Pleased with his bargain purchase, the Jew would begin to frequent the store and the same episode would reoccur two or three times. Afterwards, after they had become friendly in this manner, the young harlot would say to the Jew: “behold you are a preferred customer, sit down and choose for yourself from our merchandise at your leisure.” Pitchers of Ammonite wine were placed near her and at that time the wine of gentiles had not yet been prohibited. She would say to him “would you care to drink a cup of wine?” Once he drank and became intoxicated, passion would rage within him. He would say to her: “yield yourself to me.” At that point she would bring forth her idol and would say to him: “worship this and I will yield myself to you.” He would say to her: “but I am a Jew how can I worship an idol.” She would say to him: “what do you care, are we asking you to do anything other than defecate before the idol?” He would do so, for he would not realize that it was worshipped in that manner, and not only that, she would continue: “but I will not permit you to cohabit with me until you repudiate the Torah of Moshe your teacher, and he would do so as it is stated: “they came to Baal-Peor and they strayed into shame, in their lust they became detestable” (Hoshea 9:10)
Bilaam’s advice as we see was twofold – firstly, the way to bring about the downfall of Bnei Yisrael is by encouraging one’s base desire for illicit relations, leading to falling further and denying the entire Torah of Moshe. Secondly, the lure must be masked. This allows a slow and gradual process of heating up the impurity of sin within them by removing the mechanism of restraint making them unable to fight against the negative influence. The yetzer hara eventually takes hold of them like fire in chaff. This poisonous strategy employed by Bilaam brought about the downfall of the Jewish people causing them to sin with the daughters of Moav, a victory he was unable to accomplish in a purely spiritual battle.

THE DANGERS OF THE INTERNET – COMBINING ALL THE STRATEGIES OF AMALEK

Perhaps one can say that our generation is witnessing a new round of the daughters of Moav, in the guise of the depravity found in the internet and the media. When we consider all of Amalek’s strategy which we have discussed, we will find that this is precisely the battle being waged against our pure souls by the internet which closes the eyes and seals the hearts of many who once had strong belief, “for she has felled many victims, the number of her slain is huge” (Mishle 7:27).

Firstly it involves יזנב מכ ‘And he struck those of you who were hindmost’. The serpent conceals the enemy, hiding behind a mask of good within an atmosphere which is comprised of good as well as evil. The internet in fact has blurred this distinction and conceals the evil within. Jewish youth begin in a proper manner, viewing sites which appear harmless and pareve, eventually “surfing” until chas veshalom they reach the depths of depravity – the daughters of Moav. The anonymity, the concealing of the true goal blurs the difference between good and evil. All of this helps to add more impurity and to fell many victims.

The internet has many positive and constructive aspects, it leads to advancement and quality of life and it is a great disseminator of Torah on a very large scale. There are many points in its favor. However the mixture of good and evil with its associated impurity creates one of the greatest enemies of the Jewish people, enemies of the holy covenant between the Jewish people and their Father in Heaven.

The strategy of using cold and heat, קרך אשר, which we cited above, is employed by the internet and poses great danger as well – precisely in the manner of the story of the daughters of Moav. Slowly but surely the serpent leads its pray to the most depraved of websites. It begins with a cold and indifferent feeling towards kedusha, the heart is then drawn to visiting seemingly harmless sites which manage to channel one’s energy away from kedusha. In this roundabout manner, a person is lead to the territory of the impure. After that, chas veshalom, a person cannot protect himself from sinking into the depths of depravity. It all began with a cooling off of our feelings to sanctity and a blurring of the dangers we are leading ourselves into.

The fact that these downfalls are very well concealed and are even erased from the “history” causes many to live in the euphoria of “this will never happen to me”, “my children are tzaddikim”. This type of innocence assists the serpent in his work of putting us into a slumber and continuing what we think is a life of serenity even while our hearts have been poisoned and the kedusha within us is being
extinguished. It is not for naught that the Gemara relates a story of the saintly R’ Akiva, R’ Amram Chasida and others regarding how they almost did not succeed in withstanding the challenge of the yetzer hara of illicit relations. Chazal have taught us that one cannot say that he will not fall in this area. Rav Amram Chasida permitted Rav Ashi to relate an uncomfortable story about him in order to endow future generation with a great lesson – if even Rav Amram needed to protect himself with all sorts of defenses and barriers, what does that say about us?

A person should not be embarrassed to be concerned with falling into danger, one who feels there is nothing to worry about is simply naïve.

Sometimes a person does not place a filter on his internet because he is still in the middle of a contract with another provider. Tell me, if the brakes of a car were totally worn out would anyone even consider waiting until he found a cheaper garage? This attitude stems from a blurring of reality which hides from us the terrible damage that exposure to these sites can cause. This is manner of the serpent, to hide the danger and to delay as much as possible the taking care of it. It has already been stated in jest “go out and do battle with Amalek! Tomorrow ...” (Shemot 17:9)

Perhaps precisely during these days of redemption, days of returning to Hashem, days in which we are standing on the threshold of the Beit Hamikdash and the return of prophecy that Amalek draws one of its more powerful weapons, weapons that can inflict terrible pain in almost every Jewish household.

Almost all of Amalek’s strategies which we have enumerated here are present in the internet. There is ויזנב, whether manifesting itself in the blurring of who the enemy is – an innocent machine in an honorable place in almost every Jewish household, anonymous, hidden, or whether manifesting itself in its mixture of good and bad which puts down the opposition with all sorts of excuses that the internet contains positive things as well.

The internet also contains an element of קרך אשר in all the stages we have enumerated until now – at first we become desensitized to the amount of Torah that we could have been learning rather than wasting time on it, then we become desensitized at what is happening to us as we spend time visiting sites that may appear borderline, then we begin to be heated with tumah, chas veshalom. Worst of all, our brit becomes blemished – this is goal of Amalek.
THE WAY TO WAGE WAR AGAINST AMALEK

THE WAR AGAINST COMPLACENCE

Until now we have discussed “remember what Amalek did to us”, aimed at providing us with a realization of the enemy and his methods. Let us now touch upon Hashem’s war against Amalek from generation to generation.

As we mentioned, the intention of the mitzvah to remember Amalek is to prepare us to fulfill the mitzvah of eradicating him. The Torah describes for us the ways of the serpent to enable us to develop our own weapons in defense. If his manner is to cool us down to serving Hashem, then we must develop a heated weapon which will awaken us to crush his head.

Before anything else we must understand that it is far more difficult to battle the serpent once the heat of tumah has been aroused, chas veshalom. We must work with greater alacrity than the serpent and fight the feeling of complacence, not only because of the difficulty in battle but to repair the damage that cooling down serving Hashem can cause. The war must be waged with our hearts which have already suffered from the presence of slumber in our relationship with him, burning with love for Hashem.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR IGNITING OUR FEELINGS OF KEDUSA

Are there practical suggestions for how to battle against this feeling of complacence? Firstly, complacence is passive – to emerge from this complacent feeling requires a person to initiate, not to be “dragged along” but rather to be a leader. The heat of the kedusha is its own self-awakening. We must not wait to be pricked by a thorn or for some other failure, to reignite. Rather we must constantly awaken ourselves anew. Alacrity, strength, and awakening are all results of the burning fire of kedusha.

If so, the first step against the complacency of the serpent is to ignite the flame, to awaken our yearning to rise higher and higher in levels of sanctity. A person can rise to a higher level by hearing stories of tzaddikim, speaking with talmidei chachamim, or getting together with others to speak about serving Hashem. Thus what is of importance is awakening our yearning for kedusha.

Each person must find his own path in Torah and serving Hashem which will awaken him to love Hashem, and yearn to cleave to Him. This applies to each person on an individual basis – it may be Torah, tefillah, talmidei chachamim, visiting holy sites, learning with scholars, whatever is needed to gird his mind and his thoughts to awakening himself to serving Hashem.

Success is a function of how much importance one gives to this. A person is endowed with tremendous power and he has the ability to succeed in anything he considers dear and important. Most important of all is to pray to Hashem to bring him closer: “Hashem is close to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him sincerely (Tehillim 145:18)

An important element is “make for yourself a Rav”, cleave to Torah scholars who will awaken within you a desire for purity and sanctity – this could mean a close relationship with a talmid chacham or even
being in a Torah environment where life is guided by serving Hashem. This will awaken us from our slumber and carve for us a path towards serving Hashem and elevating our level of kedusha. Feeling the pain of sin awakens our feelings of teshuva, however one can avoid all this by cleaving to tzaddikim and thereby being filled with thoughts and yearnings for sanctity.

Rav Nachman says that Amalek’s principle task is to cause a rift between a person and the tzaddik, to isolate the tzaddikim such that they are unable to influence others and others will therefore not be able to learn from their good deeds. The separation from the tzaddik, the foundation upon which the world stands, is a blemishing of the brit (see Mesillat Yesharim chapter 21).

Love for Hashem is the foundation of warming ourselves up with kedusha, this love must be a fire that burns from the depths of our soul. Such love will result in caring for the sanctity of the Jewish people.

A desire to feel the heat of kedusha is not only from the perspective of טוב עשה – doing good - in Torah, tefillah, running to perform mitzvot, but also from that of מרע סור - “desist from evil” – we must be pained by the presence of evil and do our utmost to eradicate it from this world. Complacence and lack of caring about the downfalls of Bnei Yisrael is Amalek’s cooling down of our hearts. We must rise up against him and destroy him as we destroy the chametz in our midst.

This feeling of love must be pleasant and sweet on the one hand, but tough and strong on the other hand. We must not remain cool when foreign ideas enter our camp. Eliyahu Hanavi, the angel of the brit, referred to the Jewish people as his loved ones yet took them to task for their negative behavior as well: “how long will you dance between two opinions” (Melachim I 18:21). This all stemmed from great love and the recognition of how special the Jewish people were and their lofty level of kedusha.

May we merit being filled with sanctity burning within us and cleaving to the One Above. May we be blessed with a pure fear of Hashem and be able to eradicate from the hearts and minds of ourselves and the entire nation even the minutest influence of Amalek. May His greatness be revealed on the day that “He is One and His Name is One, Amen veAmen.”