



Titzaveh/Zachor: No Straggler Left Behind

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

“Without memory, there is no culture. Without memory, there would be no civilization, no society, no future.”
(Elie Wiesel)

This Shabbos we remember. We remember what *Amaleyk* did to us thousands of years ago and we remember their hatred which has followed us through the millennia.

“You shall remember what Amaleyk did to you on the way, when you went out of Egypt, 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. [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 Amaleyk from beneath the heavens. You shall not forget (Devorim 25:17-19).”

Amaleyk was the first nation to wage war against us. There was no disputed territory or perceived slight, their attack was motivated by pure and unadulterated hatred. This hatred which defies comprehension has reared its ugly head throughout the generations. From our first encounter with this war-mongering nation to this very day, we must contend with enemies who seek our annihilation and destruction. We read this section on the Shabbos before Purim as the Talmud relates that Haman the archenemy of the Jewish people (in the Megillah) was a descendant of *Amaleyk*. What is it that we are supposed to remember? Is God telling us to remember that there are individuals and nations who hate us? Is the Torah reminding us to never forget that anti-Semitism exists? I do not believe we need a Biblical directive to remind us of this reality. We have struggled with it for thousands of years and we have seen a resurgence of this vitriol and hatred. Furthermore, on a textual level, if the Torah tells us to “remember”, why must it state, “you shall not forget”?

The Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760) explains that in order to appreciate the obligation to remember we must examine the initial episode. The Torah does not merely tell us that *Amaleyk* attacked; rather we are told how they attacked. *“How he happened upon you...and cut off all the stragglers at your rear...(Devorim 25: 18).”* *Amaleyk* did not launch a frontal assault; they chose to attack the weakest link, those who could not keep up with the rest of the camp. Apparently, there was a group who fell behind. Perhaps, it was the elderly, the sick or the very young? Perhaps, it was those who had no one to look after them? They were the first to feel the brunt of *Amaleyk*'s hatred. The Rebbe explains that this piece of information is intended to be a form of stinging rebuke. How could we have allowed people to be left behind? How could we have moved forward when there were still stragglers who couldn't keep up? How could we have allowed precious Jewish souls to fall between the cracks? The Torah tells us why this happened, *“v'ata ayef v'yagey'a* (you were faint and weary).” We were too tired. We were too busy with our own lives and our own needs to be worried about those who couldn't keep up. And so, we kept moving at a pace that suited us and assumed that the stragglers would somehow catch up.

“Zachor es asher asa lecha Amaleyk (Remember what Amaleyk did to you)” – *Amaleyk* saw that we did not look after those who couldn't keep up and took advantage of this vulnerability. We must remember that there was a time when we were not sensitive enough to the other, when we did not look out for the needs of the stragglers. *“Lo tishkach”* - Don't forget our lapse in proper conduct, don't forget about the other.

We don't need to be reminded that there are nations that despise us and yearn for our destruction. We need to be reminded to never again leave anyone behind. We must become sensitive to the needs of those who may not be able to keep up with the camp. We must be attentive to the needs of our elderly and make sure that our communities are empathic and embracing. We must care for the handicapped making sure that they are part our greater *kehilla*. We must make sure to extend a helping, loving and nurturing hand to those who suffer from



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physical and emotional illness. We must make sure that no Jew is ever left behind, no matter how slowly he or she needs to travel.

On Purim we will share packages of food with one another, *Mishloach Manos*. I recently heard someone bemoaning the fact that upon arriving home on Purim day they have difficulty getting in their front door because of all the baskets and food parcels left for them. If you have that problem, how fortunate you are. But there are many who are forgotten, overlooked and left behind. This Purim use your *Mishloach Manos* as a tool of inclusivity and love. Think about those who aren't as socially connected and popular. Think about those who are struggling and alone. Use this *mitzvah* to help bring someone back into the camp.

It is on this Shabbos before Purim that we pledge to ourselves and to one another that no matter how vicious our external enemies may be - our national camp will always be a place of love, acceptance and refuge for all.