

Menucha V'Simcha Ohr LaYehudim: Commemorating Shabbos & Amalek

While the custom of reading Parashas Zachor on Shabbos may be based on practical considerations, the *Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Seitzei*, finds a connection between the ideas of Shabbos and destroying Amalek. Based on the similar command, “zachor”—to remember—that is used for each obligation, the midrash concludes that “*sh'neyhem shavin*”—the two mitzvot are equivalent. In what ways are these ideas similar? Is every idea we are told to remember equivalent, or did Chazal see some special connection between Shabbos and Amalek?

If we look carefully at Parashas Zachor, there is another word that the Torah uses that also reminds us of Shabbos. We only are commanded to destroy Amalek “*b'haniach Hashem Elokecha oscha mikol oy'vecha misaviv*”—when G-d allows you to rest from all those around you (Devarim 25:19). Like Shabbos, the mitzvah of *zechiras Amalek* must be accomplished in a time of *menucha*, rest. This connection between Amalek and *menucha* is furthered in Megillas Esther. The celebration of Purim does not commemorate the days that the Jews were actively fighting the war against their enemies. Even though these are the days when the Jews were victorious in overturning Haman's decree and defeating their enemies, Purim celebrates the day when the Jews rested from their enemies—“*v'noach mei'oyveihem*.” (Esther 9:16) Why must this holiday, like the battle against Amalek, only occur when there is time to rest?



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In the modern world, rest and relaxation are valued as a way to take time off, forget about the rush of our daily routine and simply enjoy ourselves. While that certainly is part of the “*menucha*” we experience on Shabbos, resting on shabbos also gives an opportunity to take a step back and consider the previous and upcoming weeks. When Hashem rested on the first Shabbos of creation, He was able to look not only at the events of the previous day or two, but at “*kol asher asah*” (everything He made) and proclaim “*v'hinei tov m'od*” (behold it is very good). Only after the six days of work are complete and “we throw away our hammer with nothing left to do” (as one famous song tells us), can we reflect and internalize the lessons of our successes and challenges. Psychologists tell us that true change requires shifting perspectives which in turn requires time to consider the “bigger picture” of things.

Attacking the weak and weary, Amalek preyed on the Jews when they were “*ayef v'yagea*,” lacking the time or energy to be “*yarei Elokim*.” According to Chazal, Amalek questioned the Jews' spiritual commitment to Hashem and did so to those who were incapable of reflecting or examining how to

properly respond. Therefore, our battle against Amalek not only seeks physical destruction but uprooting the opportunism that Amalek represents. Similarly, throughout the Megillah, Achashveirosh and Haman are both presented as characters who make decisions without considering the broader implications of their decisions. Achashveirosh is angered by Vashti's refusal to appear before him, and in his anger, chooses to send her away (the next chapter begins by telling us that after “the king's anger subsided” he regretted his decision regarding Vashti). Haman is angered by Mordechai's refusal to bow down, and chooses to run to the king and demand Mordechai's execution. For the Jewish People to appreciate the true miraculous nature of their being saved, they must be capable of looking beyond the moment and recognizing Hashem's hand in the entire story.

Amalek can only be destroyed “*b'haniach Hashem Elokecha oscha mikol oy'vecha misaviv*,” when G-d provides rest from all of your enemies. Purim may only be celebrated on the day after the battle, the day of “*noach me'oyveihem*.” It is only befitting that on the day of reflection and commemoration we celebrate each week, we have the custom of remembering those who attempted to take opportunities like these away from us.