



# COINCIDENCE? I THINK NOT: THE LESSON OF AMALEK

There is a well-known video clip that opens with a scene in Thailand, as a less fortunate boy is caught stealing pain medication for his sick mother. When the owner of a soup bodega sees the commotion, he comes over and pays for the medication and tells his daughter to get the boy soup for his mother. Fast forward 30 years, and this same bodega owner is filling orders, and after giving a free soup to a homeless person, this kind man has a heart attack. After being rushed to the hospital for an emergency surgery, this man's daughter is left with a 792,000 baht hospital bill (the equivalent of \$24,300), and has to figure out how



to pay. With no other option, the daughter puts their bodega up for sale. Waiting by her father's bedside, she wakes up to find a letter. Inside, the letter there is a list of all of the

medical expenses, with each line item now showing 0 baht. The bottom of the document says, "paid for with an onion soup and pack of pain medication."

There are two ways to look at this powerful and moving clip. We can say this is a clear act of *midah k'neged midah*, of cause and effect, or we can say this was all one big coincidence.

When looking at the *pesukim* for Parashat Zachor, there a variety of things we learn.

זְכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֶק בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְךָ מִמִּצְרָיִם  
מִמִּצְרָיִם. יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר קָרָךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיִּזְנֶב בְּךָ כָּל-  
הַנְּחָשִׁים אֲחֵרֶיךָ וְאֶתְהָ עָנָךְ וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא  
אֱלֹקִים: יֵשׁ. וְהָיָה בְּהַנִּיחַ ה' אֶלְקֶיךָ לְךָ מִכָּל-

אִיבִיד מִסָּבִיב בְּאָרְץ אֲשֶׁר ה'־אֶלְקִיד נָתַן לָךְ  
נִחְלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחָה אֶת־זִכְר עֲמֶלְק מִתַּחַת  
הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח:

*Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt — how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. Therefore, when your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!*

From the first pasuk we learn the obligation to remember what Amalek did to us. You may wonder, what exactly did Amalek do to us? The second pasuk describes the way Amalek ambushed us, attacking the weak from behind. The final pasuk of Parashat Zachor ends with a seemingly contradictory commandment. After commanding us to remember that which Amalek did to us, the final verse commands us to erase the memory of Amalek. How can we understand this obvious contradiction?



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To answer this contradiction, we must first understand what was so bad about Amalek's actions.

Rashi sheds light on the depth of Amalek's actions with a mere two words. Rashi tells us that “*asher korcha*” means “*leshon mikreh*” — happenstance. Amalek believed everything was simply a coincidence, and that it was just a coincidence that they attacked when they did. However, it is difficult to understand how it could be a coincidence given the way Amalek attacked us, and when they attacked us. As the pasuk describes, Amalek attacked us from behind, showing it was a planned ambush, not some coincidental turn of events.

We may ask, even if it is true that it is hard to believe that Amalek's attack was simply a coincidence, how does that merit labeling Amalek as enemy number one, as our greatest enemy?

Rav Shamshon Rephael Hirsch explains that if we pay close attention to the context of this attack, and the way the attack was carried out as quoted in the pesukim, we will pick up on a fundamental theme. As discussed, Amalek attacked us from behind, attacking the weakest members of our formation. Ok, so it is an ambush. Does that make them the worst people in the world? Yes, it does. Ambushing us shows that Amalek was only afraid of one thing — people — but not Hashem. As the pasuk clearly states, Amalek attacked “**undeterred by fear of God.**”

We see this same theme when we pay attention to the timeline of Amalek's attack. Amalek attacked the Jews following the *makkot* and *keriyat Yam Suf*, and no other nation was willing to start up with them. In the same

Rashi that was mentioned earlier, he offers another explanation for *korcha*, coming from the word *kar*, as in cold. Quoting the *Midrash Tanchuma*, Rashi explains that Amalek “cooled” us down, since every nation was afraid to start up with us, and by fighting us, they showed that it is possible to pick a battle with us. Rashi explains it with a parable of a boiling bath that no one could possibly immerse in, and a *ben b'lia'al*, a good for nothing, jumps in. While this crazy person burns himself, he does make the bath more accessible for others. Rav Hirsch explains that by doing this, Amalek represented the idea of not forfeiting to a greater being, but rather acting based on their own thinking. It is one thing to think they can do whatever they want, but another to act on it.

Simply put, by attacking us when they did, and how they did, Amalek was attempting to send one message: the Jewish people are not more special because they have the Almighty on their side, because there is no supreme power controlling the events of the world. **There is no such thing as God, everything is one big coincidence.** *Asher korcha baderech*, they happened to have been in the right place at the right time. Nothing is or was orchestrated by Hashem.

We see this same theme of coincidence with Amalek in the haftarah we read for Parashat Zachor. In the haftarah we discuss Shaul's error in allowing Agag and other Amalekis to live. The haftarah ends there, but the story does not. At the end of Shaul's life, in the first perek of Shmuel II, the navi describes how David Hamelech found out that Shaul was dead. It describes a conversation David had with the informant, a little boy. The pasuk states:

וַיֹּאמֶר הַנֶּעֱר הַמַּגִּיד לוֹ נִקְרָא נִקְרִיתִי בְּהַר  
הַגִּלְבֹּעַ וְהָיָה שְׂאוֹל נֹשֵׁן עַל־חַנְיָתוֹ וְהָיָה הָרֶכֶב  
וּבָעֲלֵי הַפָּרָשִׁים הַדֹּבְקָהוּ.

The young man who brought him the news answered, “I happened to be at Mount Gilboa, and I saw Shaul leaning on his spear, and the chariots and horsemen closing in on him.”

The boy continues to tell David that Shaul called him to come, and the boy came, and when Shaul asked who he was, he responded he was from Amalek, and Shaul asked the boy to kill him and end his suffering. Shaul’s grave sin was leaving Agag, the king of the Amalekim alive, and Shaul’s life was ended by an Amaleki, and yet how does this boy view this clear act of *midah k’neged midah*? As the verse states, “*nikro nikreiti*,” “I happened to be there” — all one big coincidence.

Rav Hirsch uses this idea to help answer our original contradiction. It is true, Parashat Zachor starts off with the command to remember what Amalek did to us, and ends with the command to erase their memory, but it is no contradiction. The initial command to remember

what they did to us is a command to remember what they did, because of what the attack stands for, which is what Amalek stands for: everything is a coincidence, there is no God controlling the events of the world. The reason we need to remember this is to properly *timcheh et zecher*, eradicate this ideology from our lives. It is so easy to view the events of our lives as a coincidence. It is easy to look at a doctor saving the person who had helped save his mother 30 years earlier as one big coincidence. However, that is exactly what Amalek wants us to believe, and the Torah, in recognizing this, commands us to remember how easy it is to fall prey to the Amalek mentality. We need to remember what they stand for so that we can erase this ideology from our beliefs.

We read Parashat Zachor every year before Purim to help us get in the right mindset of what the Purim story is all about. Haman, also a descendant of Amalek, tried to destroy the Jews through a lottery, which is the definition of chance, of coincidence, to show his complete

rejection of Hashem and His people. Throughout the Purim story, without mention of Hashem, and the various turns of events, it is easy for us to read the story in the way Amalek would want us to, and simply see it as one big coincidence. Therefore, we read Parashat Zachor to help us understand the true way of looking at things, to not get fooled by the exterior, and to look deeper into every aspect of the Megillah, and *megaleh*, reveal, the hand of Hashem in every aspect of the story.

May we all merit to properly fulfill the commandment of *zachor*, so we can properly fulfill the mitzvot of Purim, all of which focus on this one goal of illuminating the hand of Hashem in our lives. We want to get to a point where we are *ad d’lo yada*, where we don’t know the reason everything happens in our lives, but we trust that it is no coincidence, and we can trust in Hashem to take care of us, and reach the greatest heights of simcha. Through that, we hope to merit seeing the coming of Moshiach speedily in our days.

