

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Tetzaveh- Zachor 5786

Mordechai Schlachter

Hashem commands that Bnei Yisroel recall what Amalek did to Klal Yisroel.

זְכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בְּדַרְךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם:

“Recall all that Amalek did to you on the way upon your leaving from Egypt.” (Devarim 25:17).

Who is Amalek? Why does the verse change tenses in middle (“to you” is singular, “your leaving” is plural“)?

The next two pesukim continue in singular. “Surprised you” on the road, “and he cut you down, all your stragglers in your rear.” (Ibid 25:18). “Your safety, from all your enemies...in the Land He will give to you.” (Ibid 25:19). Every “you” is singular. The only plural is “upon your leaving.” There are several other examples of the Torah shifting tense in middle of a pasuk. “For you (plural) have not yet come to the resting place as an inheritance that Hashem, your (singular) Lord, will give to you (singular).” (Ibid 12:9). Also, “I will give timely rain in your (plural) Land, on both ends of the season, and you (singular) will gather your (singular) grain, your (singular) wine, and your (singular) oil.” (Ibid 11:14). Then the tense shifts again to plural, “Beware lest your hearts go astray, and you turn away, and you serve other almighties.” (Ibid 11:16). Why the shifts in tenses?

The shift in tense is specific and it teaches personal responsibility in the presence of the collective experience. Moshe told each individual that Hashem does not bring the individual to Eretz Yisroel. Hashem brought the nation. However, each individual has a specific inheritance in the Land, and that is why it is singular. Similarly, Hashem provides rain in Eretz Yisroel. The land is yours collectively. Each individual, though, gathers their own allotment of produce. Then punishment occurs if the collective turns away from Hashem. Unless the collective sins, there is no collective punishment. In fact, the few sinners may even get benefit because of the collective good. However, regardless of what the collective earns, the individual benefits to what he or she deserves. The system of justice that Hashem provides is with kindness and mercy, but an individual never is bereft of what he or she earned. Another reason for the change in tense is in regards to the national experience. Leaving Mitzrayim and going to Eretz Yisroel is a collective experience. The nation was saved so that the nation and can enter and inherit the Land.

“Today you are going out in the spring month.” (Shmos 13:4). This pasuk is plural. Then the next pasuk says that “When Hashem brings you to the Land...that He swore to your forefathers to give to you.” (Ibid 13:3). That is all singular. The rest of the narrative is singular, too: “you shall eat matzo,” “you may not see unleavened foodstuff in your houses.” This is because so you shall tell your son that “Hashem took me out of the Land of Egypt.” (Ibid 13:7). Hashem took the entire nation out. However, when it comes to the experience in relation to keeping the mitzvos, then it has to be felt personally.

Further, “Recall this day! That you are going out from Egypt from the house of bondage.” (Ibid 13:3). This pasuk is very similar to our pasuk. Both use the words “recall” and “your going out” and “from Mitzrayim.” Part of the recalling of the incident of Amalek is tied to that mitzvah to recall leaving from Mitzrayim. It is a mitzvah aseh to recall what they did. (Sefer Mitzvos Katan 147, Chinuch 603, and Sefer Hamitzvos 189). Yet, none of these sources bring the positive commandment to recall leaving Mitzrayim, based on the pasuk in Shmos. The Torah says not to eat chometz on Pesach, “so that you can recall that day you left the Land of Mitzrayim.” (Devarim 16:3). On that pasuk, too, neither Rambam (Sefer HaMitzvos) nor Sefer Chinuch cited a mitzvah to remember leaving Mitzrayim. Baal Tosfos, though, (S.M.’K.) does bring this as a separate mitzvah to recall leaving Mitzrayim, (fulfilled daily by reciting the final pasuk in kriyas shema).

This mitzvah to recall what Amalek did is the main mitzvah to recall that Hashem took Bnei Yisroel out of Mitzrayim. Since it is an individual mitzvah, the pasuk says, “recall what Amalek did to you” personally, “when you” as a nation “were leaving from Egypt.” (Devarim 25:17). The experience is to be felt personally and each individual is commanded to recall it individually, however, leaving Mitzrayim was a national event. Further, what Amalek did, and the command to recall it, is tied to leaving Mitzrayim. It was not just any time. It was tied to that event. Why? Who was Amalek?

An Amalek is Esav’s grandson, born to Elifaz through Esav’s wife Adah. (Bereishis 36:12). Amalek is also the last clan of the son of Elifaz, in the land of Edom. (Ibid 36:16). Amalek attacked Bnei Yisroel at Refidim. (Shmos 17:8). Is this the same Amalek? The Torah does not give this Amalek’s lineage. Contrarily, the Torah calls the sons of Esav kin to Bnei Yisroel. “You are about to pass the boundary of your kin, sons of Esav.” (Devarim 2:4). They were not to provoke the sons of Esav. (Ibid 2:5). The sons of Esav are again called kinsman when Bnei Yisroel departed that area. (Ibid 2:8). “You shall not despise the Edomites, for he is your kin.” (Ibid 23:8). There is no exception mentioned for Amalek. If Amalek was from Esav, then there should be no broad affection for Edom without staying, except for Amalek for he attacked you upon leaving Mitzrayim.

Instead, there is another Amaleki people. They were involved in the War of Four vs Five kings. (Bereishis 14:7). They are said to be living on the Land’s southern border. (Ibid using Kadesh as a reference). These Amalekites fell to the Four Kings. Avraham went and chased away the Four Kings and restored everyone’s possessions. (Ibid 14:16). It is these same Amalekites who later had no courtesy toward Avraham’s children. They attacked as Bnei Yisroel entered the wilderness. There was no sense of danger. There was still time to find out where Bnei Yisroel were headed. Yet, they did not wait. They were violent and they attacked, unprovoked, without cause, and without appreciation for what Avraham did for them. The nation was still heading toward Har Sinai, not Amaleki territory. Amalek thought they could pick off vulnerable individuals (stragglers). The nation left Egypt with signs and wonders, crossed the Yam Suf, had water come from a boulder, and Amalek still felt bold enough to strike at individual stragglers. The power is in the nation as a whole. Each person in Klal Yisroel is tasked to personally recall that they were under personal attack and they have to stick with the klal who left Egypt together. There is personal responsibility but strength in community.