



# MISHNAS CHAYIM

# משנת היום

## MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

A project of CHEVRAH LOMDEI MISHNAH • Parshas Vayikra 5768

There is a well known story about two friends—let’s call them Moishe and Yankel—who meet up for the first time in years. Not having seen each other for a while, they have lots to catch up on. After a time, Moishe interrupts their chat.

“Nu, Yankel, you didn’t ask me about my business.”

“Oh, sorry, Moishe...I didn’t get to it yet. So, how’s business?”

“Oh, don’t ask!”

In a certain sense, we find a similar dichotomy surrounding the directive of *mechiyas Amalek* blotting out the memory of the wicked Amalekite nation, the theme of the special Torah reading of this *Shabbos Zachor*.

A brief examination of the topic reveals a paradoxical phenomenon. The Torah does not harbor the fondest feelings towards the nation of Haman—to say the least. In light of their utter wickedness, and the grave atrocities that they perpetrated against Hashem and His people, the Torah commands *Devarim 25:19* :

תִּמְחָה אֶת זֵכֶר עֲמֹלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח :

“You shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens; do not forget to adhere to this command .”

Some manifestations of this dictum are reflected in the following practices:

The Rama *Orach Chaim 690:17* promotes the time-honored custom wherein the congregation responds to the mention of Haman’s name in the *Megillah* with various bangs and smashes. Apparently, the *minhag* developed from an earlier one in which the children would inscribe Haman’s name or draw a picture of his likeness on rocks or sticks. They would then repeatedly knock these objects against each other, thus wearing ‘Haman’ down, in consonance with the aforementioned directive to ‘wipe out the memory of Amalek’.

The Chasam Sofer *Annotations to Orach Chaim, ibid.* proffers an original explanation for the *minhag* of ‘*klopping* Haman’. We make a racket when Haman’s name is cited in an attempt to avoid even *hearing* that reviled name. The *seforim* clarify that, of course, the name must actually be heard—just as is required with every other word of the *Megillah*—in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of the reading. A disciple explains the Chasam Sofer’s intent as follows: The act of noise-making is a demonstration of our pain in being forced to hear Haman’s name. By raising a ruckus, it is as if we are declaring that we are resigned to suffer through it for the sake of fulfilling the *mitzvah*, but we wish we could have avoided hearing his name altogether *Milei D’avos, vol.3, sec. 13* .

These types of activities were not limited to *Purim* alone. The *Kav Hayashar ch. 99* describes the practice of the venerated R’ Heschel of Krakow. Whenever he wanted to ascertain if a writing implement was in working order, he would scribble down the names of Haman and his progeny, and proceed to erase them, in fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of blotting out the name of Amalek.

In light of the sentiments delineated above, the following Gemara should come as quite a surprise.

Before beginning a *sugya* comprised of multiple sections, the Gemara frequently employs a *siman* mnemonic device . Often, this will take the form of a word composed of an arrangement of letters selected from the key words of the various upcoming subjects.

The Gemara in Bava Basra 46b initiates a discussion about the ability of the following individuals to testify in *beis din*: the cosigner עֶרֶב , creditor מְלוֹנֵה , buyer לוֹקֵחַ , and substitute debtor קַבְּלָן . What do you think the Gemara chose as the *siman* to introduce these topics? You guessed it—**עמלק!**

Dedicated in loving memory of Mrs. Miriam Kalmuk, מרים בת מנחם מנדל ע"ה,  
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Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of

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a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her Neshamah.



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# משנת חיים

What's going on here? Could there be a more counterproductive method for extinguishing the memory of Amalek other than enconcing it as the introduction to a classic *sugya* smack in the middle of *Chezkas Habatim*?

In truth, as ironic as it may sound, granting Amalek such a station may very well be one of the best ways to combat it.

The Mishnah in Avos 4:10 states:

רבי מאיר אומר...אם בטלת מן התורה, יש לך  
בטלים הרבה פגגגגג.

“R’ Meir says: If you idle yourself from Torah study, you will be confronted by numerous ‘idlers’.”

Rabbeinu Yonah *ibid.* explains: Hashem will send forth the unproductive—and consequently dangerous—elements against an individual who is generally unoccupied when it comes to learning Torah, as fitting punishment. These elements include wild animals and wicked, destructive people. In the words of R’ Yonah, Hashem employs these elements as His “rod of chastisement with which to exact punishment from those who neglect Torah study.”

Why and how did Amalek first come to confront the Jewish people? It appears from *Chazal* that the whole episode followed the pattern laid out in the above Mishnah in *Pirkei Avos*. The *Medrash Pirkei D’R’ Eliezer*, 44 compares the situation of Amalek’s attack on Yisrael to that of an orchard owner who unleashes his attack dog against an intruder. Similarly, Amalek served as Hashem’s agent in confronting the Jewish people on account of a particular transgression.

What was the Jews’ offense? The *Gemara* in *Sanhedrin 106a* finds an allusion to their misdeed in the name of the location where the confrontation took place: *Refidim Shemos 17:8*. According to the *Gemara*, the Jewish people, at that juncture, had actually been slackening in their Torah studies: *Rafu yedeihem min haTorah*. As a result, Amalek was summoned to serve as the ‘rod of chastisement’ which is wielded when Torah study is neglected.

R’ Yaakov Emden *Bava Basra, ibid* explains that it is for this very reason that the *Gemara* made use of

‘Amalek’ to serve as the mnemonic for an integral *sugya*. Amalek, as we have seen, derives its strength from *bitul Torah*—the neglect of Torah study. By choosing Amalek to serve as a memory aid for Torah study, *Chazal* took the proverbial bull by the horns. They utilized Amalek to strengthen and increase Torah knowledge, thereby using Amalek to *weaken* themselves.

In essence, this is a fundamental aspect of the *mitzvah* of reading *Parshas Zachor*, which begins: “Remember what Amalek perpetrated against you” *Devarim 25:17*. As R’ Aharon Kotler explains *Mishnas R’ Aharon, vol. 3, p. 93*, ‘remembering’ what Amalek did entails focusing on the reasons which prompted their hostility, and attempting to rectify these failings. One of the best ways to completely wipe out the power and memory of Amalek, is to adopt R’ Yaakov Emden’s approach: A strengthened commitment to toil in Torah study, which will eliminate Amalek’s entire essence of being.

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