

# Ah Freilichen Purim

*By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz*

The story of *Purim* is intertwined with Amaleik, the archenemy of the Jewish people. Last *Shabbos*, we read the passage (*Devorim* 25:17) referring to Amaleik and the obligation to remember that they attacked us following our exodus from Mitzrayim. The *posuk* recounts that encounter: “*Asher korchah baderech – They attacked you while you were on the road.*” The *parsha* concludes with the admonition to remember to eradicate the memory of Amaleik.

We recently studied *Parshas Beshalach*, at the end of which (*Shemos* 17:8-16) the Torah tells of the battle that Amaleik waged against the Jewish people at Refidim. Moshe appointed Yehoshua to lead the defense and he alighted atop a high area with Aharon and Chur. When Moshe raised his hands, the Jews would win, and when he tired and lowered them, the Jews began losing the battle. Ultimately, Yehoshua succeeded in repelling the attack. Hashem told Moshe to write what happened with Amaleik and promised that He will eradicate the memory of Amaleik. Moshe constructed a *mizbeiach* to thank Hashem for the victory and said that Hashem would battle Amaleik in every generation.

How does the story of *Purim* tie in to Amaleik? How can we hate Amaleik and seek to eradicate him when we don't know where he exists? What is there about Amaleik that resulted in the *mitzvah* to hate him and seek to destroy him if we are able to? What is more evil about Amaleik than the other nations who sought our destruction?

The answer is often given that following *Krias Yam Suf*, everyone was in awe of the wonders of Hashem and nobody dared to do something against His will. The *posuk* describes Amaleik's crime as “*asher korchah*.” This is commonly understood through the root of the word “*kor*” to mean that Amaleik “cooled off” the world's wonder at the supernatural act that Hashem did, splitting the sea and allowing the Jewish people to walk where the water had flowed.

But at the root of “*korchah*” is also the word “*mikreh*,” which means happenstance. Amaleik said that the sea just happened to split at the time the Jews needed to escape from Paroh. It wasn't a miraculous escape; it was easily defined by the laws of nature. Amaleik told the nations that there was no need to fear the Jews and their G-d, even waging war against them to prove their point.

The foundation of our belief is that everything that happens to us and the world is done by Hashem. There is no such a thing as happenstance. If something happens, it is because Hashem willed it so. When things go well for us, we have to thank Hashem, and when we think that what is happening is not good, we need to first remember that it was done by Hashem and ultimately it is for the good. Moreover, Hashem speaks to us through what He does, and if we have some type of setback, Hashem is sending us a message that we must do *teshuvah* and engage in *tefillah* so that we may be forgiven for our misdeeds.

The concept that the world operates on its own according to forces of nature and coincidence is the influence of Amaleik. That is what Moshe meant when he said that there is an ongoing battle between Hashem and Amaleik in every generation. Amaleik plants and promotes the idea that everything happens by itself; it just evolved that way and occurred by accident. This serves to undercut the proper perspective and prevents people from engaging in *teshuvah* and *tefillah* in times of tragedy. It causes people to become sad and depressed instead of recognizing that everything occurs because that is what Hashem wanted. It causes jealousy and hatred among people and causes people to be led astray from living a life of Torah and *mitzvos*.

When the Crusades swept across Europe, killing thousands of Jews, it was explained as a Christian religious pilgrimage gone amok. But the *rabbonim* of the time saw the Hand of Hashem in the terrible bloodletting. The *Tosafos Yom Tov* saw that it was caused by people speaking during *davening* and composed a special *tefillah* to be said for those who refrained from discussing mundane topics during *davening*. Where others saw natural forces at work, *yorei Shomayim* perceived Divine punishment and encouraged acts of repentance to bring an end to the maddening massacres.

This goes on in every generation. Take a look at what is happening now in our world.

In a flash, this country has gone from the Trump philosophy of America First to Biden's philosophy of America Last. From years of plenty, the country is headed to years of less. There will be more taxes, more illegal immigrants, more regulations, and more maddening laws and rules. How did that happen? Amaleik would say that it was because Biden had a better message and his campaign resonated better with American voters. "That's just the way it works in a democracy," say people who believe that things happen by natural design. But if you believe that *Yad Hashem* controls everything, then you know that something deeper is afoot.

Eretz Yisroel is closed to us. Nobody from *golus* can get into the country. Do we realize what a terrible *gezeirah* that is? Can you imagine if the Turks were still in control of the Holy Land and they barred our entry? It would be a global scandal. There would be demonstrations, proclamations, days of prayer, speeches at the UN, and more. But now, we are locked out of *Artzeinu Hakedosha*. People say that this step was taken to save lives and we must therefore accept it. That's just what happens when there's a pandemic, they say. And why is there a pandemic? Because a sick bat got loose in China and infected the world.

But if we would realize that everything that happens is *Yad Hashem*, we would recognize that we are being punished. Being locked out of Eretz Yisroel is a punishment. We would seek to find an *eitzah* to earn reentry. We would pay heed to the various *gedolim* who are calling out to us to improve different aspects of our behavior and conduct ourselves as if the wrath of Hashem is upon us.

Amaleik is like the person who has a problem with something he thinks you said or wrote. He may be totally wrong about what you said and why. He begins debating you about that or some other topic he knows very little about, but he is convinced that he is correct and that you are wrong. He is sure that the facts are the way he states them and refuses to listen to anything you say.

Facts are facts. They are stubborn things that cannot be shoved aside when they get in the way of an argument. However, in our day, it appears that facts are fungible and not definite. At most, they are uncomfortable things that are easily twisted or discarded. Information based on assumptions and hearsay becomes as valid as established fact and proven reality.

To them, nobody can be trusted. Anyone who doesn't agree with their position is corrupt and under the influence of crooked people. There is always a story behind the story, which you are too foolish to know, because you are naïve and unwise to the ways of the world. There is always a conspiracy of people who make sure that the wrong narrative takes hold. You, of course, are too fixed in your position to see what is plainly visible to them. You, your books and your teachers are closed-minded and foolish. To these people, facts are unrelated to the truth and truth doesn't really matter anyway. It is only their position and their agenda that have any value.

That is the way of Amaleik. From his earliest roots, his father, Eisov, portrayed the danger of our eternal enemy. The *posuk* (*Bereishis* 25:34) speaks of when Eisov sold the *bechorah* to Yaakov: "*Vayivez Eisov es*

*habechorah.*" *Rashi* explains that the Torah was attesting to the wickedness of Eisov, who mocked what was important.

The *Baal Haturim* connects this *posuk* to the *Megillah*, which uses the same term, "*vayivez b'ainov*" (*Esther* 3:6), in reference to the way Haman mockingly viewed Mordechai. When all the nations were respectful and fearful of the Jews, Amaleik, as is his nature, mocked the Jews and declared war upon them. He did so to mock Hashem in front of His own people and in front of the world.

It was immediately following *Kabbolas HaTorah* that Amaleik appeared to show his hatred for the truth as represented by the Torah. He pounced upon the Jewish people and sought to separate them from the Torah, mocking its essence and mocking them for abiding by its laws and truths. They had a natural explanation for everything, and to prove that they were right, they went to war against the Jews, so convinced were they that they would quickly defeat the nascent nation.

Amaleik's arguments are proven hollow time and again, yet that doesn't stop the lies against the Jews. Every couple of years, we struggle against a new group, led by a lunatic who peddles populist narratives introduced to the world by Amaleik and repeatedly disproven over the ages.

They formulate alternative facts, sell fiction as non-fiction, and spin wondrous tales of how much better off mankind would be if they would find a way to be rid of the awful Jews. If people believe in space aliens and a secret cabal that controls the world, why is it so difficult to convince people that the reason they are poor and unhappy is because of the Jews?

The more intelligent people become, the more wealth there is in the world, and the more democracy and capitalism expand opportunities for all, the more you would think people would respect the Jews for their accomplishments. In fact, the opposite is true. Over the ages, the more successful Jews became, the more people hated them. This is because Amaleik, who is at the root of the hatred for the Jewish people, is not concerned with the truth. All he cares about is destroying the absolute truth and the Jews who cling to it.

The internet empowers him. There was a time when misguided people were a minority and were often unable to find intellectual support for their failed theories. They were lonely and had no voice. Many

faded into oblivion. Today, though, any crackpot with a smartphone can connect to other misguided persons. They offer each other support and are no longer lonely in their senseless conspiracy theories.

A Jew-hater with no audience can now sit in anonymous comfort and engage in a daily dissemination of acrid poison against a group of people. He gains followers, who grow exceedingly brazen in their cantankerous language and calls for violence. We never hurt them, we never interfered with them, and nothing we did impacted their lives. When we meet them and see the hatred pour out of their staring eyes, when we read their dribble online, we wonder about their antagonism and venom.

We read the history of Germany, a fine, advanced, cultured nation, yet it didn't take more than one madman to strike a match and a horrific lust for blood overtook the country. The people turned into killing machines in a mad dash to erase the Jews and their memory from the face of the earth. Such is the abhorring abomination of Amaleik, ever-present, hiding under a veneer of gentility, awaiting its resurrection.

The *Mishnah* at the beginning of the second *perek* of *Maseches Megillah* states, "*Hakorei es hamegillah lemafreia lo yotza* – Someone who *lains* the *pesukim* of the *Megillah* in reverse [order] has not fulfilled his obligation." Many *seforim* explain that the *Mishnah* is hinting that someone who reads and considers the story of the *Megillah* – the danger and subsequent salvation – to be "*lemafreia*," ancient history, has missed the point of the *Megillah* and has to read it again.

*Purim* is a holiday of redemption. It is also the day when we read the *Megillah* and are reminded that even occurrences that appear to be natural are Divine. Even when it appears that we are forsaken, Hashem is hidden but in control. We should never give up hope.

In *Al Hanissim*, we thank Hashem for the miracles "*bayomim haheim bazeman hazeh*." We are proclaiming that in these days, just as in those back in Shushan, Hashem is guiding every detail that takes place with us. As we are reminded that He is controlling the destinies of the nations of the world, we then take heed that when the story plays out, the saga will be as comforting for us in our day as it was to the Jews back then.

This, perhaps, is the meaning of the words we declare, “*Teshuosom hoyisa lonetzach* – You were their savior for eternity.” Each year, on *Purim*, the Divine intervention that saved them back then is present and has the ability to rescue us.

“*Vesikvosom bechol dor vador.*” This is our hope in each generation. Each period has its distinct challenges, obstacles and problems, but the hope remains one and the same.

One year, during the course of the *Purim seudah*, the *Chiddushei Horim* began addressing the *chassidim* who had gathered around him. He said that when reading the *Megillah*, we encounter all sorts of seemingly insignificant and random incidents, tales of political conspiracy and palace backroom betrayal.

When you begin to read the *Megillah*, you wonder why we are being told these tales of palace intrigue regarding a Persian king and about a feast he held to commemorate his third year on the throne. Why is the *Megillah* writing about a queen who didn’t want to appear at the feast, and why does it spend so much time discussing the search for a new queen after the first one was killed?

Why do we care, asked the *Chiddushei Horim*, and why do we have to know all that?

The *rebbe* was quiet, lost in thought, as the questions sunk in. Then he continued and said that this is how it will be when *Moshiach* will come. Strange occurrences will be taking place. The news will be confounding. Then, suddenly, out of nowhere, *Moshiach* will arrive and everyone will recognize that all that transpired was tied to the *geulah*.

If we are worthy, we will perceive one day soon how the threats from Iran, the pandemic and plagues of other deadly diseases, the fearful political climate and everything else that is occurring to us now will be tied together, and it will be evident that they were precursors for the great day for which we all wait.

It was at that last *Purim* hour, during the moments when day slowly recedes and the sky begins to darken. Inside the crowded room, a *rebbe* and *talmidim* surrounded a table, as songs, Torah and quips joined into a burst of sound, the holy noise of *Purim* rising heavenward.

At one end of the long table, its surface covered with a wine-stained cloth and festively-arranged bottles, a *talmid* raised a question. He quoted the well-known *Gemara*, referred to extensively in *halachic* discussion of the obligations of the *Purim seudah*, which recounts how Rabbah rose and slaughtered Rav Zeira (*Megillah* 7b).

Rav Zeira had accepted Rabbah's invitation to join him for the *seudas Purim*. Rabbah fulfilled the dictum of *Chazal* to drink, and he became inebriated to the point that he actually slaughtered his guest. When he realized what transpired, he begged for Divine mercy and Rav Zeira was revived.

*Rishonim* and *Acharonim* utilize *p'shat*, *remez*, *drush* and *sod* to explain the *Gemara*. But the *talmid* had a basic question. Once Rav Zeira's soul had left him, what was Rabbah thinking when he rose to *daven*? Can a person request *techiyas hameisim*? Can one ask that the order of creation be reversed?

The *rebbe* smiled, enjoying the question, and the *talmidei chachomim* present offered various interpretations. Then the *rebbe* spoke. "It was Purim," he said, "and when we understand the message of *Purim*, then we know that it is not a question, for we then perceive, on the deepest level, that there is no *teva* and *neis*, there is no natural and miraculous. It's all one. It's all in the Hands of Hashem, who directs the world according to His understanding and will.

There is no *teva*. There is no law that governs who lives and who dies and when; who wins battles and who loses; who gets rich and who gets poor. It is all *Yad Hashem*.

Let's all pay heed to that message and conduct ourselves accordingly so that we may be happy all year round and merit the coming of *Moshiach* very soon.

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*Ah gantz yahr freilach.*