

# Ki Seitzei

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Over his past *Shabbos* during a *shiur* I give on *Shabbos* afternoons, I was explaining that there will always be an attack from Amalek before a historic influx of Divine light. Amalek attacked the Jewish people in Rephidim before the giving of Torah, and Haman attacked us in Persia right before the *Purim* miracle and *Kabbalas HaTorah*, Part 2 (*Shabbos* 88a). Some would argue that the Holocaust before the establishment of the modern state of Israel is also an example of this.

Why is this a historical imperative? Because every light needs a vessel to be noticeable in this world, and Divine light requires a humble one. Ego may be important for self-confidence, but too often it makes a person self-focused, spiritually blemishing them as a *kli*—vessel. This is why the *Gemora* says that Torah can only flow down from Heaven to a lowly vessel, that is, to a humble person (*Eirwin* 54a). It's the only way to assure that God's light will remain undefiled from personal abuse.

Therefore, when the Torah reports that Moshe *Rabbeinu* was “*the humblest person on the face of the earth*” (*Bamidbar* 12:3), it wasn't just being complimentary. It was telling us why he was chosen for the awesome task of transmitting the word of God to mankind. It is how we can know that what he gave over was what he received, and not just his personal version of it.

This is why the *mitzvah* to eradicate Amalek at the end of the *parsha* follows the *mitzvah* to keep legal weights when doing business. A “balanced” person knows what is important in life and what is not, and deals with every situation accordingly. Even when they are being subjective it is for an objective reason, meaning because the *balachab* has told them to be that way in that particular situation. The *Gemora*

about the two people in the desert with one canteen of water is a perfect case in point (*Bava Metzia* 62a).

It is Amalekian to upset that balance and develop incorrect priorities. When someone puts their own personal priorities before God's, they have become Amalekian on some level. That is dangerous because that invites an actual attack from some form of Amalek, by something that will help restore their humility. . . if that is, they are worthy of it.

### **Shabbos Day**

MY EXPLANATION PROMPTED one of the men in the *shiur* to tell a story about someone he had met recently. He smiled as if he just had an important insight and said, "I didn't understand it at first, but what you just said explains everything." Then he told us the story.

He had just met someone who was not only a known *talmid chacham*, but he was even a *Rosh Mesivta*, one of the main rabbis of a *yeshiva*. But when he met the *rav*, he was working in a local grocery store stocking the shelves and bagging produce, seemingly very inappropriate for a man of his spiritual stature. Why was he there?

"Years back," he told my friend, "they found a large tumor in my stomach. The doctors said it was very advanced and I didn't have much time to live. I went to Rav Chaim Kanievsky, *zt"l*, at the time, and he told me there was nothing he could do. The Heavenly decree was sealed. I went to Rav Shteinman, *zt"l*, and he said pretty much the same thing. Finally, I went to Rav Abuchatzira in Nahariah, and after being made to wait about a half hour, he told me that the only thing to do was to accept upon myself humiliation. So I took this job about four years ago and here I am, still alive and doing well, thank God."

We fear humiliation. We make great efforts to avoid it. But we also fail to understand and appreciate its spiritual value. *Kabbalistically*, humiliation is one of the most effective ways to become spiritually cleansed, and that is crucial for a more profound relationship with God. You don't have to go out of your way to be humiliated, though some have gone into self-imposed exiles to be so. You just have to know how to properly deal with a humiliating situation if and when it occurs.

The verse says, "*But the humble shall inherit the land, and they shall delight in much peace*" (*Tebillim* 37:11). The arrogant may build the land, but it will be the humble who will inherit it. Just as it happened to the people who built the Tower of Babel, and who were subsequently exiled from their land in every direction.

And lest one thinks that their disgrace means that God disdains them, they have only to recall Dovid *HaMelech* who complained bitterly to God about the humiliation he constantly suffered (*Bava Metzia* 59a). Those who embarrassed him accomplished little in life and have been forgotten by history, or remembered for bad. Dovid *HaMelech* was the premier king of the Jewish people and ancestor of the final one, *Moshiach Ben Dovid* himself.

### **Seudas Shlishis**

EVEN THE FIRST *mitzvah* of the *parsba* is connected to this idea. It is the *halachah* of the *yafas toar*, the gentile woman taken captive by a Jewish soldier for the sake of converting and marrying her. As the *Gemora* says regarding this particular *mitzvah*, the Torah is addressing a person's *yetzer bara* with this *halachah* (*Kiddushin* 21b).

Long story short, the Torah says yes, but only on condition. The soldier can't marry her right away, but must let her mourn her situation for a month and become physically unattractive. Only then, if the soldier still wants to, can he marry her. The hope was that after his *yetzer bara* had time to cool off from the disruptive conditions of war, he would return to his senses and end the relationship.

Not just return to his senses, but see the extent to which he had spiritually descended and hopefully regain his personal pride once again. Everyone is capable of spiritually lapsing from time to time. It is the spiritually strong person who recognizes this and course-corrects before a sin is committed.

The *Gemora* makes a similar point here:

Rav Elai *HaZaken* said: If a person sees that their *yetzer bara* is overcoming them, let him go to a place where they are not known and put on black garments. . .and do what their heart desires, so as to not profane the Name of Heaven publicly! (*Chagigah* 16a)

If you only learn the *Gemora* it sounds as if the Torah is telling a person how to sin with a limited amount of damage. If you read *Tosfos*, you learn that the *Gemora* is actually telling you how to get around the *yetzer bara* and not sin. *Chazal* knew, as does the Torah in this week's *parsba*, that saying no flat-out to the *yetzer bara* is a recipe for disaster. So they instead gave advice how to say "no" in a roundabout way to undermine its power and save oneself from sin.

What is that advice? De-glorify the sin. *Tosfos* says that *Chazal* are saying that, rather than just capitulate to your *yetzer bara*, do it in a way you won't be proud of. If you're a decent person who tries to live a decent life, it should wake you up and give

you the courage to force your *yetzer hara* to stand down. You should catch yourself and say, “Am I so desperate to commit this sin that I am prepared to go to a foreign place and dress in clothes of mourning just to do it?! I sure hope not!”

### **Melave Malkah**

WE’RE EASILY FOOLED. Dovid *HaMelech* complained to God about the humiliation he was suffering at the hands of his detractors, but God could have answered him by saying, “Who do you think sent them? Who do you think put it into their heads to say to you what they did? I did.”

We can assume that Dovid *HaMelech* knew that and never forgot it. That’s what *ain od Milvado* means, that everything is from God no matter how much it looks as if it isn’t. Dovid was a prophet as well as a *talmid chacham*, so he could never have forgotten it. So why didn’t he just cut to the chase and ask God, “Why are You allowing them to do this to me? After all, as the *Gemora* says, no one lifts a finger or wags a tongue if it isn’t first decreed by You.”

Perhaps this is why Dovid *HaMelech* wrote, and we’re saying it twice a day now until *Sbemini Atzeres*: “One [thing] I ask of God, that I seek. . . that I may dwell in the house of God all the days of my life. . .” (*Tehillim* 27:4). It’s the only safe place to be when it comes to *ain od Milvado*.

The outside world is extremely distracting, intellectually and especially emotionally, and “Amalek” uses that to his advantage and our disadvantage. How many times do we get into a situation with someone and forget that they are just God’s messenger when it comes to what they do for or against us? It’s just so hard, in the heat of a moment, to see the hand of God behind the hand of the person impacting our lives.

Unless a person does the work and prepares themselves. Being real with *ain od Milvado* must be a daily project. If you only remind yourself once or twice a day of it, you’re doing well. But to be super real with the idea you have to practice it, and that means stepping back from every situation you find yourself in and trying to see God behind it. It has to become second nature if you’re going to be able to do it under pressure.

*Rosh Hashbanah* is fast approaching. For two days, and really for the entire ten days of repentance, we have a chance to “dwell in the house of God,” if not physically then at least spiritually. Consider it to be a re-ed course in *ain od Milvado*, and you’ll probably never need to be humiliated again to bring you to this level.