

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Yoram Ben Meir, Nechama bas Ozer, and Shmuel Favish ben Michael HaLevi, z"l by Mrs. Barbara Dahav and family. "May their Neshamas have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

Double Vision

Remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you came forth out of Egypt; how he attacked you on the way and struck at your rear those who were feeble [...] (25:17-18).

This week's *parsha* ends with a short retelling of the story of Amalek attacking Bnei Yisroel after leaving Mitzrayim, and the exhortation that we never forget what they did to us. Rashi (ad loc) explains that the word "*korcha* – attacked you" has its roots in the Hebrew word "*kor*," which means cool. In other words, they cooled off the Jewish people. Meaning, until now the other nations were afraid of the Jewish people and wouldn't fight them, but when Amalek came and attacked them it "cooled them off" and showed the other nations that it was possible to fight Bnei Yisroel.

Rashi continues with the following analogy: There was a bath that was scalding hot, to the point that it was unusable. One fellow came along, jumped into the bath, and got severely burned. However, since he had bathed in it, he succeeded in cooling it sufficiently to be usable for others. So too, Amalek attacked us and cooled us to the point where other nations were now able to conceive of the idea that they too could fight us.

Superficially, this sounds like an acceptable way of looking at what Amalek achieved. But if we probe just a bit deeper we begin to see how perplexing the logic behind this analogy really is. Amalek came and fought with Bnei Yisroel and Amalek

was decimated. Wouldn't their epic failure serve as an incredible statement and proof of the power of Bnei Yisroel? In fact, logically, this story seems to convey quite the opposite – that the Jewish people are absolutely **not** to be messed with. Amalek's defeat literally showcased the power and might of the Jewish people! What can Rashi possibly mean that "they cooled us off?"

When Bnei Yisroel left Mitzrayim they were supposed to get the Torah and go right into Eretz Yisroel and begin the era of messianic times with Moshe as King Moshiach. The splitting of the Red Sea, according to Chazal, reverberated across the world to the point that everyone was aware of it. The Jewish people were supposed to lead a revolution against idol worship and fulfill Avraham's vision of monotheism for the world. We were supposed to bring everyone back to Hashem. When we left Mitzrayim, we were on an unstoppable mission of bringing the world to its final resolution.

Then Amalek came and made an incredible statement. They attacked knowing that they would be annihilated – which was EXACTLY their point. Their startling statement was: This world is not worth living in if it is to be the world of the Jewish people – we would prefer to die than live in a world where God is revealed and



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relevant. This is a powerful statement (and the obvious precursor to suicide murderers), and resembles those who perform self-immolation to bring attention to their cause; suicides are powerful arguments against the status quo. Amalek succeeded in saying that there is an alternative to living in this world according to the vision of the Jewish people.

What Rashi means by "they cooled us off" is that other nations then contemplated whether or not our vision was right for them. Once Amalek attacked, we no longer had the overwhelming singular truth of our world vision because Amalek succeeded in placing doubt in other people's minds. Even though they lost terribly, they succeeded in raising the question as to whether or not this world was worth living in if it was a world according to the Jewish vision. They gave credence to other nations; allowing them to consider fighting us and our vision for the world. This was a devastating loss of credibility – something we can never forgive.

Family Interest

You shall not lend upon interest to your brother; [...] to a stranger you may lend upon interest; but to your brother you shall not lend upon interest (23:20-21).

This week's *parsha* contains the prohibition of lending money with interest to another Jew. It is prohibited to charge interest or pay interest to another Jew. Yet at the same time, the Torah makes it very clear that it is permissible to lend money to non-Jews and charge them interest. In fact, Maimonides (*Yad – Malveh Veloveh* 5:1) rules that it is a positive commandment to charge non-Jews interest. This dichotomy in lending practices has often been used as a pretext to attack Jews all over the world during the last two millennia.

In truth, the laws against charging interest and paying interest require a deeper understanding. As an example: Reuven needs money to pay for his daughter's wedding, and he happens to know that his friend Shimon has a lot of money sitting in the bank earning 2% interest. Reuven wants to borrow some of that money but he feels very uncomfortable asking Shimon, especially knowing that Shimon would be losing

that two percent interest that the bank is paying him. Reuven also realizes that he is already asking for a big favor because he knows that Shimon is taking a bigger risk by withdrawing it from the bank and lending it to him. Moreover, by Shimon lending Reuven the money and thereby losing his two percent earned interest, Reuven now feels like a charity case.

In reality, Reuven would MUCH prefer to pay interest so that he isn't uncomfortable asking Shimon for the loan and isn't made to feel like he is receiving charity; so why should Reuven not be allowed to pay interest?

The answer is that the Torah is teaching us that paying interest between two Jews isn't appropriate. Why not?

Let's say that a person's mother needed money; would a healthy person charge his own mother interest? Or his son, or a brother? Of course not. Functional families are devoted to each other even at a cost. Moreover, a son asking his parents for a loan doesn't feel like he is

receiving charity by not paying interest. The Torah is teaching us that the reason you aren't allowed to charge interest isn't because one should take advantage of another; the reason is because one Jew is obligated to treat another as family. This is why the Torah characterizes the borrower as family (23:20-21), "***You shall not lend upon interest to your brother; [...] to a stranger you may lend upon interest; but to your brother you shall not lend upon interest.***"

This also explains why it is not only okay to charge non-Jews interest but actually a *mitzvah* to do so. We need to internalize that they aren't our family. Obviously, we shouldn't charge exorbitant interest, just something reasonable that they are happy to accept. Non-Jews understand that they aren't family and they, in fact, are more comfortable asking for a loan and paying interest because otherwise it would be like receiving charity.

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