

Parashat Ki Teitzei, Rabbi James Proops

At the conclusion of *parashat Ki Teitzei* we read the well known passage, read each year on the *Shabbat* preceding *Purim*, detailing the commandment

זְכוֹר אֵת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בְּדַרְךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם - **“Remember what Amalek did to you, on the way, when you were leaving Mitzrayim”**.

We know that *Amalek* represents the worst kind of Jew hatred, yet we can ask the question, why do we need to have a *mitzvah*, a positive commandment, to remember *Amalek* when it has never really gone away? Throughout our history there has always been *Amalek*, in some form or other, lurking. Whether in Greece, Rome, the Crusades, Spanish Inquisition, the pogroms of Czarist Russia, the horrors of the *Shoah*, why then do we need a *mitzvah* to remember that anti-semitism exists?! However, while we may empathize with the question we know it is not a good one. Memory is not always mankind’s strongest suit and while for connected Jews our knowledge of the past may be taken for granted, for others it is simply not the same.

A survey in 2018 by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, showed that 70% of American adults agreed that “fewer people seem to care about the Holocaust than they used to”. In France, an astonishing 20 percent of 18-34 year-olds said they had never heard of the Holocaust. It is reported more worryingly, that young Jews across the world are now, not only disconnected from their heritage, but without real knowledge of our history.

With this in mind we can better understand the definitive phrase “לֹא תִשְׁכַּח - You Shall Not Forget”, which ends the *parasha*. We must remember. We can never forget what *Amalek* did to *Bnei Yisrael* “בַּדֶּרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם” on the way from mitzrayim” and we must remember what *Amalek* has done ‘on the way’ in the lives in every generation of the Jewish People.

In contrast to this *mitzvah*, there is another positive commandment of remembrance, which we read a couple of weeks ago, in *parashat Re'eh* - “לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת-יְוִם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ” - Remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt all the days of your life”. The difference however with this *mitzvah*, is that we are required to remember not only every day, but as the *Gemmara* teaches, twice a day every morning and evening.

Why is there such a difference between the *mitzvot*? On the one hand twice a day and it can be fulfilled individually, compared with *Zecher Amalek* only once a year and from a *Sefer Torah*?

Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that the purpose of remembering *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is to strengthen our faith in God's might and can be accomplished by merely recalling the miracles associated with what happened. The only way that we can ensure that we will remember something constantly is through continuous repetition hence twice a day. However such a process does carry the danger that it will become habitual and we will not give it the proper thought and reflection it deserves. He suggests that this is why the *mitzvah* of remembering *Amalek* can be fulfilled just once a year, to ensure that when the time comes, either on Shabbat

Zachor, in *Parashat Ki Teitzei* or when *Amalek* rears its dangerous head once more we will take it very seriously and draw the correct conclusions

Despite living in an age when there are repeated calls for racial justice and intolerance of discrimination, there seems to be a near constant flow of anti-semitic rhetoric or action taking place. A recent report from the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, shows that anti-Semitic hate crimes in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago — the nation's three largest cities — have hit an 18-year peak. Just last weekend here in LA, a banner was hung over the I-405 citing anti-semitic trop and earlier this week we learnt the devastating effects of the arson at the University of Delaware Chabad House.

Following the reasoning of Rav Moshe, the *mitzvah* of *Zecher Amalek* is to ensure that we pay heed to events like these, that we need to take a stand and not brush them under the carpet, accepting them as a part of life. We cannot ignore the ever-growing trend that Jew hatred is deemed acceptable in society. We must take note of it, stand up to it and do all we can to end it.