

That he happened upon you on the way, and he struck those of you who were hindermost, all the weaklings at your rear, when you were faint and exhausted, and did not fear G-d. (25:18)

We must endeavor to understand in what area Amalek stood out from among all of the other nations who were our enemies. Indeed, we had no friends – only those who paid lip service out of fear, but certainly not out of love or admiration. We were always tolerated, rarely respected, and hardly ever admired. This is quite possibly out of envy. We are Hashem's chosen people who have, despite the greatest odds and untold persecution, survived and thrived, growing, contributing and not acting obsequiously. We have a noble heritage and an exalted destiny. We do not bow to anyone – but Hashem.

Concerning Amalek, the Torah writes that he and his descendants are Hashem's eternal enemies. He will wage war with Amalek and his minions until the end of time. [This paper will not delve into the identity of Amalek and who falls under the rubric, Amalek. Let it suffice that Amalekites represent evil incarnate, a people, regardless of their roots, who are at war with Hashem and His People and everything that they represent.] Were they worse than Ammon and Moav, the Emori and, of course, the Egyptians – concerning whom there is no mention of an eternal war? The Torah posits that Hashem's instruction to wage war against Amalek until his name is obliterated is due to his not being a *yarei Elokim*, one who fears G-d. How did his lack of fear manifest itself – more so by him than by any other of our enemies?

The *Brisker Rav, zl*, quotes *Chazal (Bava Kamma 79b)*, who explain the Torah's stringency concerning the punishment of the *ganav*, robber, and *gazlan*, thief (usually armed). The *ganav* must pay reparations of principle plus, making it *keifel*, double, while the *gazlan* just pays back the principal. They say that the *gazlan* steals whenever he so desires – day or night. He neither fears Hashem nor any man! If someone has the misfortune of crossing his path during a robbery, it might well be the last time he crosses anyone's path. The *ganav*, however, is careful to steal only after dark, or when people are away and he will not be discovered. He fears public opinion. He seems not to care about Hashem's opinion of his actions. The *gazlan* does not distinguish between G-d and man. The *ganav* fears man, but does not fear G-d. Thus, the punishment of the *ganav* is more stringent.

The distinction between *ganav* and *gazlan* appears inconclusive. On the contrary, one who fears no man, one to whom society has neither meaning nor value, one who acts with total disdain and impunity should receive a greater punishment than he who still maintains a semblance of self-respect and concern regarding what people might say. The *Rav* explains that the distinction between *ganav* and *gazlan* goes much deeper than what *Chazal* touch upon. A *gazlan* acts wantonly. He needs or wants something, so he steals it. He neither stops to think about what he is

about to do, nor does he care about the ramifications of his actions. He steals because he wants something. The *ganov*, however, takes an “intelligent” approach to theft. He cares not about Hashem, but he cares very much if people label him a thief. His reputation is very important to him. So, he steals at night, under the cover of darkness, when no one will discover his reprehensible behavior.

These are people who act out of lust, desire, anger, lack of self-control. Their actions are not less repugnant, but the fact that they act without *cheshbonos*, calculations, is a sign that, underneath their negative character traits lies an individual that has a modicum of self-respect. Such a person wants to have his cake and eat it. He makes devious calculations to satisfy his desires, while maintaining his self-esteem. Such a person’s egregious behavior is worse than the *gazlan* – who has no self-control. Knowing what one is doing and not caring about it is not as bad as the individual who knows and cares enough to make sure that no one discovers his blatant act of larceny.

Let us return to Amalek, who calculated the most fortuitous time to attack and the most vulnerable members of *Klal Yisrael* to take down. He was well-aware of what he was doing and that it would have a damaging effect on the nascent Jewish nation. He made *cheshbonos*, and his calculations demonstrated his lack of fear in Hashem. True, other nations attempted to subvert and destroy us, but they acted out their hatred without thinking. They hated; they fought. Amalek hated, but he bided his time, searching for the area and time in which he would be most effective. What about Hashem? Amalek did not care. He had no fear of Hashem. This is why his is the only nation whose name we are enjoined to obliterate.