

**Parshat Ki Tetze**  
**Remember What Happened on the Way Out of Egypt**  
**Susan Hornstein - Class of 2025**

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Parshat Ki Tetze contains part of Moshe Rabbeinu's charge to B'nai Yisrael before entering the Promised Land. This charge comprises a review of the 40 years of Jewish history with an eye toward laws that will help them establish a just and effective society. The parasha includes two strikingly similar statements:

זָכוֹר אֵת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה יְקוּקָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְמִרְיָם בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם:

Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on the journey when you left Egypt. (Devarim 24:9)

זָכוֹר אֵת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם:

Remember what Amalek did to you on the journey when you left Egypt. (Devarim 25:17)

These statements share two segments in common: each one starts with “*Zachor*,” making it a positive commandment to “remember” something, and each one ends with “*baderech b'tzeitchem miMitzrayim*,” framing both occurrences as happening “on the journey when you left Egypt.”

The command *Zachor* or *Zechor* occurs nine times in the Torah, almost always referring to important occurrences in Jewish history from which we are supposed to derive a lesson. (The exceptions: in two instances, Moshe asks God to remember his covenant with us, and once, famously, we are commanded to remember Shabbat.) The two examples in our parasha definitely fall under the category of historical occurrences from which we should learn a lesson. The commentators agree that God's punishment of Miriam is intended to teach us not to speak ill of others. Ramban emphasizes that this command to remember is as important as the command to remember Shabbat, because slander, like Shabbat, is of great importance: slander is considered to be tantamount to murder.

As for Amalek, the command to memorialize the war was given back in Shemot, and there God expresses an intent to wipe them out. Abarbanel explains that our pasuk adds another dimension. Amalek's war with B'nai Yisrael was distinctive because they did not actually have any reason to attack B'nai Yisrael. They attacked simply because this was the people of God. This would suggest that it is God who should avenge this wrong, since it was really a sin against God. The command in our parsha comes to teach us that we, the Jewish people, have a responsibility to avenge the enemies of God. This fits nicely with the theme – reviewing history with an emphasis on the responsibilities of the Jewish people going forward. The Chatam Sofer, the 19th century Chassidic master, says that both *Zachor* pesukim teach us God's kindness: that God weakened the Amalekites and kept them from destroying B'nai Yisrael, and that God made B'nai Yisrael wait seven days for Miriam to be released from her quarantine before resuming their travels.

The ending phrase of both pesukim, “*baderech b’tzeitchem miMitzrayim*,” “on the journey when you left Egypt,” occurs only one other time, also in this parsha. It is mentioned in the justification for the prohibition against marrying an Ammonite or Moabite:

על־דבר אשר לא־קדמו אתכם בלחם ובמים בדרך בצאתכם ממצרים ואשר שָׁכַר עֲלֶיךָ אֶת־בָּלְעָם בֶּן־בְּעוֹר  
מִפְתוֹר אָרָם נְהָרִים לְקַלְלָךְ:

Because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey after you left Egypt, and because they hired Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Aram-naharaim, to curse you.  
(Devarim 23:5)

Curiously, there is no explicit mention in the Torah of encounters with the Ammonites or the Moabites in which they refused to help the wandering B’nai Yisrael. They interact with Moab during the story of Balaam, in the second half of the book of Bamidbar, during the 40th year of wandering. The incident of Miriam’s slander takes place shortly before the sin of the spies, placing it in the second year of wandering, before the additional 38 years had been decreed. The war with Amalek was the first encounter with another nation after the Exodus, making it literally “on the journey when you left Egypt.” If these incidents didn’t all happen on their way out of Egypt, why are they all referred to as “*baderech b’tzeitchem miMitzrayim*,” “on the journey when you left Egypt?”

Rashi’s comment on the pasuk about the Ammonites quotes the Midrash Sifri Devarim, explaining that *baderech*, on the way, refers to the state of the people while they were in the wilderness, that they were בְּטָרוֹף, messed up, or tossed about. Rashbam, Rashi’s grandson, commenting on the pasuk about Miriam, says that the phrase refers to the place – that they were in the inhospitable desert but waited for her anyway. What these explanations have in common is that the people were vulnerable to the elements, or to their state of distress. In fact, in the description in our parsha of the war with Amalek, the Torah explicitly states that the Amalekites targeted the most vulnerable:

אֲשֶׁר קָרָה בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיִּזְנַב בָּהּ כָּל־הַנְּחָשָׁלִים אַחֲרֶיהָ וְאַתָּה עִיִּף וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹקִים:

How, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. (Devarim 25:18)

Rather than interpreting “*baderech b’tzeitchem miMitzrayim*” as a time marker, it seems that we should interpret it to mean “when you were vulnerable,” regardless of when it occurred. The take-home lesson, then, is that we must remember how we were treated when we were vulnerable, and how we responded when others needed our support, even when we were vulnerable.

We are nearing the month of Tishrei, which is full of holidays. We look forward to spending time with family and friends during this time, eating delicious meals. Celebrating is a special mitzvah of its own: וְשִׂמְחַת בְּחַגְךָ – “you shall rejoice in your holiday.” However, we mustn’t forget the rest of the pasuk – the whole pasuk reads:

וְשִׂמְחַת בְּחַגְךָ אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ וְהַלְוִי וְהַגֵּר וְהִיתוּם וְהָאֵלֶּמְנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעֲרֶיךָ:

You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female servant, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities. (Devarim 16:14)

While we are joining together with our own folks, let's not forget the vulnerable folks in our communities, the ones who don't have the resources to celebrate, the ones who don't have folks of their own, the ones who are *baderech*. Make a donation, invite someone who is alone. Then you will truly rejoice.



*Susan Hornstein views her Yeshivat Maharat studies as the synthesis of her professional and avocational work to this point. Susan holds a BA from Brandeis University and a PhD in Cognitive Psychology from Brown University. She grew up in Boca Raton, Florida, where her family was instrumental in founding the Jewish community. The values she learned from her parents of seeing a need and discovering how your own talents can help to fill it have been hugely influential throughout her life. Susan had a long career in User Experience Design, and a stint as a teacher and administrator at Sinai Special Needs Institute. Both of these endeavors involve designing systems and experiences for recipients who are often underserved. A passionate student of Jewish text and Hebrew language, she has learned at Hebrew University, Michlelet Bruria and Yeshivat Har Etzion, and has taught in Hebrew Schools, synagogues, and groups around Central New Jersey. She has tutored several dozen Bar and Bat Mitzvah students, some of whom have gone on to tutor students of their own. Susan is also a musician in voice, piano, and guitar, and is the conductor of the Central Jersey chapter of HaZamir, The International Jewish Teen Choir. She is on the board of her synagogue and is a founder of the over 30-year-old Women's Tefillah Group of Raritan Valley. She lives in Highland Park, New Jersey with her husband, and has three grown children, one in Washington, DC, and two in Israel, all working in Jewish education.*