

WE HAVE THE SCARS TO PROVE IT!

by Rabbi Label Lam

Remember what Amalek did to you, on the way when you were leaving Egypt, that he happened upon you on the way, and he struck those who were hindmost, all the weaklings at your rear, when you were faint and exhausted, and he did not fear G-d. It shall be that when HASHEM, your G-d gives you rest from all your enemies all around, in the land that HASHEM your G-d, gives you as an inheritance to possess it, you shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heaven- you shall not forget. (Devarim 25:17-19)

That he happened upon you - (Korchah): An expression of incidental happening; Also an expression of moral pollution...; Alternately ...They cooled you off from boiling...All the nations were afraid to battle with you and this one came and started up and showed a way for others. Like a boiling bath that no one was able to enter and comes this reckless one and just jumps in, and even though he's burnt in the process he cools it off for others. (Rashi)

On the surface it seems like a mixed message. Are we to remember Amalek or to erase his name? Maybe we would be better off to just forget, forgive, and move on. Why remember forever and then forget?

The verse asks of us to remind yourself what Amalek did to you. It is not just an historical memory as much as an environmental impact statement. Each person should take a personal accounting of how his life would be different had Amalek not been an agent in the world. We are given a profile of a movement that opposes all that is holy and good, that preys on the weak and vulnerable, who will inject moral corruption wherever possible, and doubt about G-d when we might be tempted to be inspired. All this he does for the express purpose of diminishing the stature of G-d and His people. His opposition is so desperately rooted in his being that he hates Jews and G-d and goodness more than he loves his own life. He is portrayed as willing to burn him self in the process as capable of suicidal devotion to his ignoble cause.

Let us estimate if possible how the world, our world, our lives would look if these forces had not been active over the many centuries. How many good people have become corrupted or were destroyed?! How the goodness and the purity of the world around us is diminished as a result!? Who can measure the ever widening gap of darkness that surrounds us and the dimming affect it has had on that light that is to be the light unto the nations!?

The story is told of baal teshuvah- returnee to Judaism that bore a hideous tattoo on his arm a

symbol of his dark past that he tried to hide with all his ability. He would avoid any situation where it might become exposed but Erev Yom Kippur everyone was going to the Mikvah-ritual bath and he didn't want to deprive himself of the opportunity. He planned to go at a time when it would be least crowded and to keep a towel on his arm till the very last moment and then enter and exit as quickly as possible. When he got there it was a little more crowded than he had expected. He decided to continue with the rest of his plan, but the tile floor was wet and he was in too much of a hurry. He slipped in a dramatic way and the bustling room was suddenly deathly silent as his worst fear was realized. He was paralyzed with shame no longer able to hide when an elder Jew picked him off the floor by the hand and showing him the numbers he had etched onto his arm told him in a kindly way, "This was my gehinom-hell! Probably that was yours! Let us go into the Mikvah together!"

We cannot yet afford to forget or forgive. "...HASHEM maintains a war with Amalek, from generation to generation" (Shemos 17:15), and we have the scars to prove it! Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.