

ABSOLUTELY

by Rabbi Label Lam

You shall remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you went out of Egypt, how he happened upon you on the way and cut off all the stragglers at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and he did not fear G-d. [Therefore,] it will be, when HASHEM your G-d grants you respite from all your enemies around [you] in the land which HASHEM, your G-d, gives to you as an inheritance to possess, that you shall obliterate the remembrance of Amalek from beneath the heavens. You shall not forget! (Devarim 17-19)

Here we have a Mitzvah opportunity to recall what Amalek did to us when we went out of Egypt. Even though there is a general admonition against holding grudges this one is an exception. We are reminded to remember it forever and that is what we do each year on the Shabbos prior to Purim. The puzzlement of this practice is that we seem to be countermanding another important principle.

King Solomon, the wisest of all men, was the one who coined the phrase, "The memory of the righteous will be for a blessing, but name of wicked will rot!" (Mishlei 10:7) Wisdom dictates that the name of the wicked should naturally disappear. Yet we find ourselves reviving the memory of Amalek. We are told to never forget to remember to obliterate the remembrance of Amalek. We may be better off forgetting about Amalek and let his memory just fade like a bad dream.

We can perhaps employ a few brief approaches. Amalek is an ever present and lurking danger. We are being told not to fall into a false sense of security and to remember as a cautionary note. Don't forget there's a criminal still at large. There is also a clear mandate here to actually to lead him to his ultimate destiny which is total annihilation, as Bilaam too prophesized, "The first nation (to attack was) Amalek, and his ultimate end is destruction." Bamidbar 24:20)

The Malbim on Mishlei offers a different type of solution. We have here a distinction between the "memory" of a person versus his "name". He explains that the memory refers to the reputation that a person's deeds create in the world while the name refers to the essential identity of a man. "The verse sharply contrasts the righteous person with the wicked. Even the impression left by the mere deeds of a righteous man will be remembered for a blessing while the not merely their deeds but the very essence of the wicked, the entire record of their being in this world will rot away leaving no trace."

It seems there is a huge distinction to be made between being famous and being infamous. Himmler, his name should be erased, said about Hitler, his name should be erased, "In the 1930's he

was a mentch (a man). In the early 1940's he was an uber mentch (a superman), and in the mid 1940's he was os mentch (he wasn't even human)." Adolph was a common German name that has fallen seriously in popularity. No person could feel comfortable walking the planet now with a family name Hitler. The name is widely known but the reputation is one of one of infamy. He is poster child of wickedness and cruelty in the annals of history. That is a rotten name.

At the dinner table some 9 years back my little son asked casually, "Will Avraham Avinu still be known 1000 years from now?" We chuckled. It was so cute. We discussed that maybe it was charming and funny because a little 5 years old was speaking of such large numbers or maybe it was funny because of course he will be known 1000 years from now. He has been known for the past 3700 years. Why should it ever desist? Avraham is a famous name. He was blessed, his reputation is blessed, his memory is a source of blessing and his blessed children should never forget and remember always to oppose the absolute opponents of blessing **absolutely**.