

CLASS 64 - PARSHAS ZACHOR

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

"Amalek said to Elifaz [his father]: who will inherit this world and the next?"

"Elifaz responded: the Bnei Yisrael will inherit this world and the next. Therefore, go now and dig for them wells and cisterns of water, so that they and their flock may drink, and prepare for them paths to travel. If you do, you will merit a portion in the next world."

"But, he did not do so. Rather, once he heard a hint of the matter, he was silent, and immediately, Amalek went out to destroy the world." (Tanna Devei Eliyahu 24:3)

The Jewish people have faced numerous enemies throughout the generations, but unlike our other foes, it is only Amalek whom we are commanded to wipe out without a trace. Amalek represents an evil that is irredeemable; his wickedness is for its own sake, despite the personal loss that he will suffer.

In our shiur this week, we will describe the unique nature of Amalek, and explain why his treachery must be remembered always.

1

There are two types of evildoers.

The first has difficulty combatting his inclinations, and easily succumbs to the temptation of worldly pleasures. At heart, he may be well-meaning and sincere, but still, his life is defined by the pursuit of creature comforts. This was Mitzraim - "Whose flesh is the flesh of donkeys....." (Yechezkel 23:20)

Another commits sin not to derive any benefit, but for the enjoyment of rebelling. He longs to behave inappropriately, and incites others to follow.

Amalek leads the seven nations that inhabit the land of the Canaan, and their prime force: "Reishis Goyim Amalek" (Bamidbar 24:20) He stands at the entrance to Eretz Yisrael, hoping to prevent the Bnei Yisrael from reaching their intended destination.

The Midrash defines the essence of Amalek. "Amalek - Am SheBa Laluk Daman Shel Yisrael - A nation that came to lick the blood of Israel." (Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Tetze 9)

Tellingly, the descendants of Esav are characterized not by their murderous tendencies, nor by their haste to attack the innocent, but as 'licking the blood of the Bnei Yisrael'. Meaning to say: while

eating is the general way to derive benefit and nourishment, a treat that is devoured for pleasure's sake, an ice cream cone, for example, might be licked, rather than swallowed.

Amalek sins for the fun of it.

Yaakov and Esav were identical twins, and for this reason, Yehuda refused to kill Esav in a frontal attack, out of respect for his father's image. Their speech and syntax was also similar, and Yitzchak was unable to identify either by the sound of their voices. Hence, while the distinction between the Bnei Yisrael and the nations is the difference between form and substance, the factor that divides Yaakov and Esav is between two competing forms, each with an ideology of their own.

Actually, all the world is divided in two. Every element of creation has both form and substance, otherwise known as 'Tzurah' and 'Chomer'. While Chomer describes the non-descript material of a physical entity, Tzurah provides the shape, purpose and objective that define matter's true essence.

Yaakov and Esav may look the same, as all men do, but their identities are worlds apart, and never the twain shall meet.

The true battle between Klal Yisrael and the nations is not a physical battle, but rather, an encounter between conflicting lifestyles. Against this foe, the Jewish people are confident and secure, knowing that their own lives of meaning and purpose will endure, while the vacuous and empty vanities of those who pursue passing pleasures will dissipate with the passage of time. These protagonists do not look the same at all. But the descendants of Esav propose more; they lay claim to the blessings of Avraham, and they believe in evil, not mere misbehavior. It is not merely different actions that separate us from Amalek, but we have entirely different outlooks on life, and two diverse views on existence itself.

The chasm between Klal Yisrael and Amalek will never be bridged.

Let us explain.

2

Man is the true Tzurah of creation, and his task is to utilize the world's Chomer and direct it towards its intended purpose. The material aspects of existence are subject to the demands of a higher realm, and are merely the means by which the Divine plan is actualized. Amalek, as well, understands that life has a Tzurah - only his conception of man's purpose does not extend beyond the boundaries of his physical existence. He uses concepts of meaning and direction to justify his lifestyle and enhance his world, not to elevate himself to a higher realm. He may perform Mitzvos, and he may express a coherent and defined sense of morality, but he will never admit that Mitzvos were not given for our pleasure, but are instead, a burden and responsibility.

Our lives are subject to the dictates of Hashem, and the word of G-d demands that we observe His law. In the world of Amalek, law and reason are directed towards improving man's world, and

enhancing his own ability to benefit from it, not as a means for improving himself.

While Yaakov uses the world to strengthen G-d Name; to illustrate sanctity, Torah, and good deeds, Amalek does the reverse, and uses the Torah to strengthen his world.

They look the same - but the Tzurah is different.

3

We are commanded to remember always the deeds of Amalek.

"...who greeted us with evil, and we should recite this always, and awaken the soul with words to do battle against him, and call people to hate him, so that it never be forgotten, nor should hatred of him weaken with time....as G-d has said: remember what Amalek has done to you" (Rambam, Sefer HaMitzvos)

Remembering the evil of Amalek is an integral element of the Mitzva to blot out his name, and is the guarantee that our hope to eliminate their ideas from the face of the earth will some day be fulfilled.

Why the emphasis on memory as a Mitzva of its own?

Chazal teach us that the words "Reishis Goyim Amalek" alludes to another aspect of Amalek's nature. The first letter of these words spells out 'Rega' - a moment.

Elsewhere, we learn that G-d is angered one 'Rega' each day, for 'Rega' is synonymous with Amalek, the enemy of Hashem.

'Rega' defines Amalek's entire being, for they cannot imagine that the physical world has an elevated purpose and direction.

The righteous man strives to: "Da MeiAyin Ba'sa U'L'An Attah Holech -Know from whence you come, and to where you are headed". He sees the entire expanse of time and space as one continuum. Beginning with the onset of creation, an existence that comes into being "Yesh MeiAyin", he recognizes that this world is but one element of a deeper process, and attempts to connect his own life to the greater whole.

When the Jewish people left Egypt, they did more than leave a life of physical bondage. They left behind a materialistic existence, where man is enslaved to the demands of his body, and headed for Eretz Yisrael, a land of spirituality and truth, a dimension where heaven and earth met in perfect harmony.

On the way, preventing them from reaching their intended destination stands Amalek, a nation that refuses to accept a life with goals and higher aspirations.

Amalek stands on the road that leads out of Mitzraim. They recognize no lofty purpose to existence, and no independent entity above and beyond their own. All of life is simply a moment in time; a

snapshot frame that stands on its own - his own personal 'rega'.

When Klal Yisrael remembers, they do more than simply recall an event that took place long ago - rather, they take assurance never to forget the plan and purpose of creation. This is not simply an empty declaration. Man never forgets events that are important to him, or ideas that are central to his identity. The Mitzva to remember the deeds of Amalek is one of the six constant Mitzvos, for we carry this concept always, and it is the lifeblood of our existence.

After two thousand years of exile, we still remember. Travelers we remain, with our eyes clearly focused on our eternal and unchanging objective.

Amalek licks our blood - "Ki HaDam Hu HaNefesh" - and this blood is the seat of our soul, transmitting the elevated vision of our spiritual essence, providing nourishment to the physical world, and direction to all of existence.

Have a Freiliche Purim.

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