

RELENTLESS

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Of the seventy four mitzvos (Divine commands) recorded in this week's Torah reading, three appear in the final three verses. "Remember what Amalek did to you, on the way when you were leaving Egypt...It shall be that when G-d, your L-rd, gives you rest from all your enemies all around, in the Land that G-d your L-rd 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/Deuteronomy 25:17,19). Because we are in an era which does not have a Bais Hamikdash (Holy Temple in Jerusalem) and the Jewish Nation is not living collectively in the Land of Israel, the central mitzvah - that of wiping out the Amalekite nation - cannot be fulfilled. What about the mitzvah of remembering? If the purpose of remembering is to facilitate the command to annihilate, does that mean that remembering is also not relevant at this time?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor of his time and one of the principal leaders of Torah Jewry through much of the last century) clarifies that the obligation to remember is very much incumbent upon us. We are obligated to remember the potential for evil inherent in every human being. Medrash Tanchuma (Ki Seitzei 9) relates that the Amalekites witnessed all that G-d did to extricate the Children of Israel from the tyranny of Egyptian bondage, but with a passionate contempt for G-d strove to demonstrate that the Jews were not invincible. G-d allowed Amalek to succeed because of sins of the Jewish nation, and Amalek knew that if they would succeed, the Jews would repent and avenge the attack in battle. Nevertheless, they STILL assailed the Jews because of the opportunity it offered to disgrace the Divine name. For this, the Medrash compares Amalek to one who jumps into a tub of boiling water, knowing that he will be severely burned, to merely succeed in cooling the waters within. Such evil is latent in the souls of everyone.

It is easy for us to believe, warns Rabbi Feinstein, that such evil is only in the hearts of the barbaric, that we must only concern ourselves with the "fine tuning" of our interpersonal relationships and our service of G-d. Not so. Seeing the descent of the Amalekites into such a spiritual abyss must create a cognizance that it can happen to anyone. We, too, must focus on our spiritual resolve in the areas of theft, murder and licentiousness. He concludes that in the Neilah (Closing) service of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) - in the waning moments of the holiest day of year, after countless hours of prayer, confession and repentance - we STILL need to implore that G-d grant us special assistance in "withdrawing our oppressive hand". We are no less flesh and blood than Amalek and must never become complacent in the scrupulous attention given to any mitzvah. As Hillel taught, "Do not

believe in yourself until the day you die." (Pirkei Avos/Ethics of the Fathers 2:5) The Yetzer Hara (evil inclination) is a tireless foe.

The month of Elul that precedes Rosh Hashana (the Jewish New Year) is a time dedicated to introspection and taking spiritual inventory. While our focus is continued growth and strength in our relationship with the Creator of the Universe, we must appreciate that none of our past achievements are securely "ours". But a tenet of the human experience is that life's greatest pleasures - a thriving business, successful children, a strong marriage - demand the greatest effort. The battle with the Yetzer Hara is fierce and relentless, but the reward - the most sublime pleasure available: a relationship with the Divine - could not be more worth it!

Have a good Shabbos!

Please forward your questions for Rabbi Avruch to RabbiAvruch@MilwaukeeKollel.org

Kol HaKollel is a publication of the Milwaukee Kollel Center for Jewish Studies 5007 West Keefe Avenue; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; 414-447-7999

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