

PARASHAS ZOCHOR: DOOMSDAY AMALEK

by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene

The Mitzvah

There is the commandment to wipe out the nation of Amalek, destroying them without mercy, so that no memory of them ultimately exists. They have to be permanently erased out of all existence in this world (See Devarim 25:17-19).

Of all the hostile enemies that the Jewish nation has confronted, the one singled out as their deadliest foes, their nemesis, is Amalek.

Amalek, grandson of Eisav, arrogantly attacked the nascent Jewish nation in the wilderness. They met them in Refeidim on route to their accepting of the Torah at Sinai. Yehoshua was commanded to fight them as Moshe's arms were stretched up towards the heavens. Years later, Shaul failed his kingship by not destroying Amalek, permitting their king Agag to live long enough to bear an heir. Haman, the resulting descendant, secured the king's insignia to approve an edict for the genocide of the Jewish people in the Purim story.

The continual presence of Amalek, their very existence, is so severe that the name and throne of G-d Himself is not considered complete until they are obliterated. The memory of them has to be rubbed out.

Why the need for this mitzvah for this nation to be mercilessly targeted for "utter destruction"? And why was it imperative that no remnant of their existence be perpetuated?

The answer relates to how Amalek (and their national ideology) are the incarnation of evil. As the symbolism of sin, they stand diametrically against everything that G-d desires in the universe. From the outset, their evil is so concentrated and contaminated that it has to disappear. The Amalekite Haman, for example, is alluded to in connection with the primeval sin, the introduction of sin to the world as marked in man's eating from the Tree of Knowledge in defiance to G-d's instructions. Amalek is similarly synonymous with

Amalek's battle is a "war against G-d". Their suicidal attack against G-d's Chosen Nation was to challenge everything related to holiness and sanctity. (The word karcha, "chanced" you on the way, relates to word keri, denoting spiritual impurity). In their dispute with G-d, their hostility boiled over onto the Children of Israel, the selected standard-bearer of G-dliness in the world. Accordingly, it was up to Israel to go out into battle in their "war for G-d".

Can one fail to notice how, in the absence of Israel wiping out Amalek, Amalek later responds similarly with the plan to wipe out Israel? That was, after all, Haman's aim. He conspired to "destroy, uproot and wipe out" the Jewish people on one day. DOOMSDAY ISRAEL was scheduled for 13th Adar.

Of course, this boomeranged as Haman and his sons were hanged and the Jewish nation survived.

The Avnei Nezer beautifully explains why Amalek is per force doomed for destruction.

The mission of Amalek was to destroy Israel. It was this insistence to be present in a universe devoid of Israel that, ironically enough, led to their wishes being granted.

Creation was formed exclusively for Israel the possessors of Torah, as symbolized in the word reishis, "first" as alluded to in the Torah's initial word Bereishis. Take Israel or Torah out of the equation, however, and the world loses its ability to function. Very plainly, it then ceases to exist.

Judging them how they would like to be found, the national dream of Amalek to be in a world without Israel will be fulfilled. But not as they imagined it! Rather, they were effectively writing themselves out of existence.

Their defeat brings with it the joyous affirmation and celebrating the eternal nature of the Children of Israel. Furthermore, it facilitates the Jewish nation to undergo a reinvigorated devotion to Torah and with the implicit mission of proclaiming G-d in the world.

This mitzvah will only be completed in the future. Amalek - like all evil in the world - have to be expunged from existence. They are doomed! Their continuing presence contradicts the goodness of creation and for the glory of G-d to be manifest in the universe. Thus, their destruction is certain.

DOOMSDAY AMALEK will result in the Jewish people's redemption. May that day arrive imminently!

This week's dvar Torah is dedicated to the refuah shleimah of my school friend Shimon Elimelech ben Sima Rivkah (Marc Weinberg) who is undergoing a bone marrow transplant this coming Shabbos 8 Adar Sheni. The course is presented by Osher Chaim Levene, author of SET IN STONE (2004: Targum) about the meaning of mitzvah observance and PEOPLE OF THE BOOK (2007: Targum) about the biblical personalities. A London-based writer and educator, he learned at the Gateshead and Mir Yeshivas, holds a Bachelor of Science (Honors) business degree from London's City University, and is a Member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.