

# WE DRINK TO STEP OUT

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

*God spoke unto Moshe, saying, "Command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the law of the burnt-offering ..." (Vayikra 6:1-2)*

This Shabbos is Parshas Zachor and tonight is Purim for everyone except those who live in cities whose walls date back to the time of Yehoshua bin Nun. And, though at first glance the parshah seems to have little to do with the mitzvah to eradicate Amalek, and the holiday of Purim, in truth, they are all speaking about one and the same matter.

Purim is about appearances. As the Talmud explains, because we acted disloyal to God on the outside, while remaining true to Him on the inside, He gave the appearance of abandoning us to Haman, when in fact He was working behind the scenes to protect us from him. In the end, when the truth about us was revealed, the truth about Him was revealed too.

Hence, we drink until we don't know the difference between 'cursed Haman and 'cursed Mordechai,' because by that point we are supposed to have come to realize that everything is a function of Hashgochah Pratis—Divine Providence—and all power belongs to God. There are really no Hamans, or Hitlers, ysv"z for that matter, at least as they actually appear to us, just the will of God.

Of course, it is easier to believe just the opposite. Many people would rather believe that evil people are able to somehow work around the will God for a time, rather than believe that God can allow, if not actually perpetrate Himself, the worst evils known to mankind. To think that Hitler ysv"z and his Nazi followers were just emissaries of God is more than most people can emotionally handle, especially if they choose to believe in a benevolent God.

Granted there is a concept called 'tough love.' Which parent or teacher hasn't had to be tough on a child for his or her own good? Sometimes, we're even tough on ourselves when we realize that today's sacrifice is tomorrow's growth and gain. We even get pleasure sometimes from actually making the sacrifice, feeling nobler because of it.

But tough love has its limits. It is only meant to benefit a person in the long run, during his or her present lifetime. Near genocide by Haman was tough love. But, what about the cruel extermination of 6,000,000 Jews?

It says that after Adam HaRishon was forced from the Garden of Eden because of his sin that he fasted for 130 years in order to rectify the damage he had caused (Eiruvin 18b). And yet, after he was

finished, he still did little to change the world that he brought into being, so severe was the impact of his sin.

Anyone looking on might have wondered what the big deal was. True, the world was no longer paradise, but it had lots of promise. The new world had plenty of potential, and it wasn't long before man adapted and learned to manipulate Creation to his liking. It wasn't long before mankind created its own version of the Garden of Eden.

It's like people visiting an old house that clearly had been something in its day. Walking around the home, which had not been perfectly kept over the years, they are still impressed with what they see, until they wander it a room that has pictures of what the house looked like when it was still in use. "Wow, that is really something," they say looking at the pictures in awe. Even their imaginations could not have pictured such grandeur from what remained.

Likewise, people born outside of the Garden of Eden, though they could still see it from the outside at first, could not have possibly imagined what being in the Garden had been like. They could not appreciate how much the world had been transformed because of mankind's initial sin. They could not visualize the tremendous gap between the world that once was and the world that had since emerged.

And that is the way it has been throughout history. We know that a sin is a bad thing, and many people try to avoid them. However, we are almost totally unaware of the impact that it has on Creation; we don't see the full extent of the damage that is done. If we could, not only would we probably not sin, but if we did, we probably would be unable to live with ourselves, like a person who slowed down too quickly on a icy highway, causing a 100-car pile up with many people injured.

That is Amalek's work. Amalek is antimatter, that is, he is anti all that matters to God. In one form or another, he exists to desensitize mankind from the impact of sinning, so that people will be less careful about what they do and constantly damage the world and themselves. How this benefits him is another story, especially since Amalek seems bent on destroying the world even if it means that he will ultimately go down with the ship as well.

The point of sacrifices, which take the life of an animal, is to reverse the impact of Amalek. It is to re-sensitize the Jew to the impact of sin by working on rectifying the four layers of existence that are affected by sin. They are: the mineral world, represented by the salt of the sacrifice, the plant world, represented by the firewood, the sacrifice itself represents the animal world, and the person performing it is on behalf of the human level.

And even then, a sacrifice could only rectify a portion of the damage done to the world. But, it was all that God expected from us, and by doing our share God corrected the rest, as much as He was willing to do so. However, the fact that the Temples were destroyed and history has seen man descend spiritually over the millennia indicates that rectification was lacking, and so the world has degenerated.

As we know, the physical world reflects the spirit world. And, just as anything good in Creation, if left in a state of disrepair will eventually rot and become destroyed, likewise if the spiritual world is not maintained, a spiritual rotting eventually occurs, resulting in the growth and flourishing of evil, until eventually it springs forth into history and the physical plain.

If you want to know the state of the Creation, just take a look at the evil in the world, and what it is able to do. If it is being kept at bay, the spiritual weather is good. If it is increasing in power, doing more damage, and brandishing its sword, no matter how righteous we may think that we are, the bottom line is that the world is in rapid decline, as it is today, much to Amalek's joy.

Purim means that God maintains the right of veto. It is God's way of telling us, "Look, if you are not going to re-sensitize yourself to what matters most in life and take the initiative to teach others as well, then I will do it Myself. I will raise up Hamans who will force you to re-examine lives that you should have been re-examining all the time on your own. At the end of the day, there will be redemptions, but the cost at which they come will be based upon how much you rectify your situations yourselves."

Clearly Jewish history is a testimony to this sobering reality. Indeed, both the Ramchal and the Vilna Gaon stated that whether or not Moshiach Ben Yosef dies in battle is dependent upon where the Jewish people are holding at the time that he comes. The more we prepare the way for his arrival, the less danger he will be in as he arrives.

And since Moshiach Ben Yosef represents so much more than simply a single individual, his death would be a very troubling event for the entire Jewish people, clearly something to be avoided at all cost.

However, Purim is supposed to deliver another message, this time through the drinking of wine. For, as the rabbis teach, though one can become intoxicated on Purim using any kind of kosher spirit, the essential mitzvah is to use wine, because many miracles happened through wine.

For example, had Achashveros not been drunk, he wouldn't have requested Vashti to appear before his guests, especially without clothing. And, had he not been drunk, he certainly wouldn't have had her executed for not doing so, leaving Esther and the miraculous redemption of Purim in the backstage of history.

Had Achashveros acted reasonably? For a sober person, no. For a drunk person, yes. In other words, that Vashti received her comeuppance (the Talmud says that she made Jewish women undress and break Shabbos) and was moved out of the way for Esther in such a weird way because the king was drunk did not appear like a miracle. Achashveros' drinking gave Heaven room to do its thing without attracting any additional attention.

In other words, wine was a device that pushed Achashveros out of the way so that God could work His wonders. It neutralized his da'as, that is, his perception of reality and his personality. It distracted

him, pulled the proverbial wool over his eyes, which is why the next morning, once he sobered up and realized what he had done, he had such regret.

It is an important message for all of us. "Where was God when I needed Him most?" people have often ask. "Why did He allow this to happen to me," people have moaned after experiencing some kind of personal catastrophe. Many agnostics have been made based upon such questions which they believe have gone unanswered.

However, the truth is that God was there when we needed Him, and always is. And, with few exceptions, He wants to help us and perform the miracle we need, but not in a way, necessarily, that it will appear as a miracle. Such clarity can unnecessarily reduce the free-will of those involved. Only a few times in history has God worked so overtly that even those undeserving to see such Divine Providence were party to it.

The problem is that we tend to get in the way. Either because we get too involved in our crises, or not involved enough, we limit the avenues that God can and will use to save us. There may be trillions of ways that God can solve our problems, but only a few of them serve the purpose of Creation while serving us at the same time.

Righteous people know how to balance out the situation, how to do their part to solve crises, while leaving God enough room to do His part without revealing too much about His involvement. They know what it means to live with such a level of da'as, of Godly knowledge, and how to implement it in everyday life. They know when to step in, and how to step out.

For the rest of us, it may not be so easy. Between worrying about the worst scenarios and doing everything we can, and more, to avert them, we tend to push God out of the picture, an Amalekian approach to life and Divine Providence. Therefore, at least once a year on Purim we drink to feel what it is like to not care so much, to be willing to give over some of our personal providence back to God; to step out of His way so that He can move history as He deems fit for all of Creation.

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