

JEWISH SURVIVAL

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The appearance of Amalek and the war that Yehoshua and the Jews are forced to wage against it ends this week's parsha on a most jarring note. After all of the miracles that are described in the previous parts of the parsha - the splitting of the sea, the sweetening of bitter waters, the oasis of the seventy palms discovered in the desert, the gift of the heavenly bread of manna, the pillar of cloud during the day and the pillar of fire that lights the night - one would think that the Jews are home free. Since the Lord has intervened miraculously on their behalf so often, why should they have to fear any further encounters with enemies? Amalek's appearance on the scene is an intrusion of cold and dangerous reality in this idyllic scene of post-Exodus history. God has provided the basis for Jewish survival through the Exodus and its subsequent miracles. But the Jews would have to fight to protect that basis and exploit to achieve greater heights of achievement. Having been saved from Pharaoh's army does not mean that there will not be other armies that will nevertheless still come against the Jews. Amalek is seen as an eternal enemy of the Jews. Amalek takes on many different forms and names. But Amalek is always omnipresent in Jewish history. It is Amalek that does not allow the Jews to rest upon previous laurels and rely upon earlier miraculous salvation. In every generation, the struggle for Jewish survival is to be fought for over and over again. No Jewish generation has ever been spared that struggle - certainly not our generation.

Part of the struggle against Amalek falls upon Moshe's upraised hands. The Talmud interpreted Moshe's upraised hands as the symbol of Jewish prayer to heaven and recognition of the role of the Divine in everyday life. It is not Moshe's upraised hands so much that decide the war against Amalek, as it is the upraised faces and eyes of Israel heavenward that decide the issue. Amalek reminds us how vulnerable we are. Without Divine aid we are subject to the ruthless laws of nature and historical processes. Nations are ground under and disappear. Only a people - Israel - that is willing to follow supernatural law and, so to speak, live a supernatural life style will be exempted from these rules of natural law and history. That is the message of Moshe's upraised hands and Yehoshua's weakening of Amalek. Amalek is never completely destroyed, not by Yehoshua, nor by King Shaul or by Esther and Mordechai. Amalek is only weakened, pushed away, but always returns again to the fray. Are we not witness to Amalek's rejuvenation today in Europe and other parts of the world? Amalek is therefore to be fought on two fronts. Directly, it is fought with Yehoshua's army, with direct confrontation and, when necessary, with battle and violence. Indirectly, but just as important, Amalek is fought by looking heavenward and living as a Torah people. By these means shall we in our generation also be successful in weakening Amalek.

Shabat Shalom.

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