

SEE NO EVIL

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

Dedicated in Loving Memory of Harry Mitnick [Tzvi Herschel bar Moshe] A"H, by his granddaughter, Rita Matcher Silverman.

"YOU SHALL SURELY OBLITERATE THE MEMORY OF AMALEK FROM UNDER THE HEAVENS"

One of the 613 commandments of the Torah is called "Zakhor" - that is, to mention and thereby remember what Amalek did when the Jewish people left Egypt and crossed safely through the sea. Hashem also commanded that we physically annihilate the nation and all of its possessions completely.

What makes this nation so different from all our other enemies that they were singled out for destruction? Our Rabbis explain that although the rule is that even a really bad person is not completely wicked - the people of Amalek were totally evil - they were the essence of evil in the world.

After Shaul was anointed as King of the Jews, the prophet Shemuel instructed him to carry out this commandment. He gathered his troops and fought a successful battle but stopped short of completing the task. He did not kill the cattle and left Agag, the King, alive. His misplaced mercy resulted in the birth of Haman - the villain of the Megillah, many centuries later.

Why did Shaul, who was the most righteous Jew, disobey the direct command of Hashem through His prophet? Our sages teach that he questioned the validity of totally wiping out everybody. He had doubts as to whether or not to destroy healthy sheep. He made calculations that lead him to the wrong conclusions. The lesson is that one should accept the word of Hashem regardless of whether or not one understands or agrees with the instruction. The numerical value of the letters of the word Amalek is equal to the numerical value of safek - doubt. The technique used by one's evil inclination to get one to violate the Torah is to inject a little question into one's good sense and slowly build a strong case against the performance of a misvah or for the violation of a restriction. The sin begins with doubt.

The unique treatment of this essentially wicked nation was not meant to be limited to a time when we could identify and destroy the bodies of their people. Even had Shaul destroyed them completely we would still have an eternal command to obliterate Amalek from under the Heavens. How is one to do that today? We don't know who they are?

A person must realize that evil is manifest in different forms throughout history. One must decipher and identify evil in the world and work to obliterate it. If one were standing in a dark room it would be impossible to physically defeat the darkness or to push it out of the room. To rid oneself of the dark one could, however, light a candle, and the black would be driven away.

On the holiday of Purim, the people reaccepted the Torah with joy. We too have a chance in every generation to recommit to the Torah through study and performance of its misvot. Every word studied and every commandment that is kept lights another candle of truth and drives back the evil from another spot in our World.

That is our task at hand. Accept Torah joyously. Commit to learn more and at set times. Accept the Word of Hashem without doubt and bring a salvation that is final. The erasure of evil is accomplished by the performance of good.

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