

*Walk through the Parsha*

with **Rabbi David Walk**



ZACHOR

## The Never-Ending Enmity

People that know me may assume that this week's title refers to rivalry, like the Yankees-Red Sox rivalry (Go Sox!). Others may assume their favorite rivalry is being referenced (Dodgers- Giants, Bears-Packers, and according to Britannica the world's greatest sports rivalry: New Zealand All Blacks vs. South Africa Springboks). But, indeed, the world's supreme rivalry is clearly B'nei Yisrael vs. Amalek. This competition is about 3300 years old and, sadly, is still going strong. Or is it?

There is a problem describing our people's conflict with Amalek as 'ongoing', because Rabi Yehoshua has said, "Sanheriv has intermingled all of the nations' (Mishna Yadayim 4:4). So, how can we continue to fight an enemy who no longer exists?

Before we answer that central conundrum, I must point out that the statement of Rabi Yehoshua isn't just a Midrashic or metaphorical statement. He states it as a Halacha with major ramifications. Specifically, his statement allows converts from the four nations prohibited in the Torah

(Ammon, Moav, Edom, and Egypt). Since the four prohibited nations were mixed among all the other nations - who are permitted to marry a Jew after conversion - all converts are therefore permitted. Therefore, nowadays, whenever a non-Jew converts, whether he or she is Edomite, Egyptian, Ammonite, Moabite, Ethiopian or any other nationality, they're immediately permitted to join the general Jewish marriage pool.

So, what's the big deal about Amalek? They're already gone, eliminated, no longer relevant. Indeed, there is a verse clearly stating that the war with Amalek is eternal: 'Because', he said, 'a fist (YAD) has been raised in defiance against the throne of the Eternal, the Eternal will wage war against Amalek **from generation to generation** (Sh'mot 17:16).

Which is it? Are they gone or do they still exist, waging impious war against God, the Torah and the Jewish people?

Obviously, I'm not the first person to recognize this conundrum, and there are therefore many suggestions to resolve this quandary. One of the earliest and most famous is the explanation of the RADBAZ (Rav David ibn Zimra, who was amongst the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492).

He knew Anti-Semitism and Amalek-like behavior, and believed that since the time of Sancheriv (8th century BCE) there was a significant change in one aspect of the Amalek Mitzva:

(a) [for the individual] it is incumbent on everyone to slay any individual member of Amalek that he encounters, and

(b) [for the community] to engage in communal military preparedness for war against Amalek.

With relation to any other nation that stands ready to destroy us, we are commanded to wage war against it while it prepares for war against us, and our war against it is a MILCHEMET MITZVA (a war which it is a Mitzva to wage). However, the destruction of individuals refers only to the biological descendants of Amalek, who can no longer be found.

Okay, there is an eternal struggle with Amalek, but it only pertains to nations no longer to individuals. Any nation state which threatens Jews must be considered as an Amalek situation, which obliges all of us to go to war. In some way, the mitzva to destroy Amalek will continue until the arrival of the Mashiach.

There are indeed many other opinions about the nature of this Mitzva to eradicate Amalek. I will describe two.

Rav Yehuda Amital z"l of Yeshivat Har Etzion suggested that the key to

understanding the continued struggle against Amalek is based on the word KORCHA in the verse: Who happened upon you (KORCHA) on the journey (to Eretz Yisrael, D'varim 25:18).

Rav Amital explains the unusual expression KORCHA to mean 'by happenstance'. There was no specific plan. Amalek just happened to bump into them on the road. That is their ideology, everything is coincidental. He elucidated: Amalek represents the ideology that everything in the world takes place by chance; there is no sense of order to the world. Whatever you suggest or believe, the opposite is also possible and feasible. There are no absolutes, no standards

This Amalekite sense of total randomness is seen in the Purim story, and in the very name of this celebration. Haman draws PURIM, 'lots' to see when to eradicate the Jews. There is no logical time or place; it's just the 'luck' of the draw, the throw of the dice. That nihilistic approach permeates every aspect of their thoughts and actions.

Rav Amital concludes: We see here that what characterizes Amalek throughout the generations is the concept of MIKREH - attributing everything to randomness and coincidence - while Am Yisrael is permanently "on the way" (BADERECH), a concept denoting continuity. Amalek maintained an

ideology of non-ideology: everything is permissible; there is no journey, no direction; everything is coincidental; there is no absolute value that must be held dear.

We, on the other hand, must have perfect faith that God has a plan. Furthermore, the Jewish nation's continued existence is the central reality of that plan.

That idea solidifies the reality of the Purim celebration as the commemoration of the firm belief in HASHGACHA, Divine supervision over the Cosmos. Haman the Amalekite is the counterpoint to our profound adherence to the Torah model of a universe created and controlled by God.

Rav Yitzchak Hutner (in his Pachad Yitzchak) proposes a different approach to the Amalek phenomenon. Amalek wants our children. The bedrock of Judaism is the chain of tradition from our Patriarch Avraham to us and our progeny. What was Amalek's plan? To disrupt that continuum. To make this generation the last gasp of Jewish continuity. He notes:

Picking up on the text's emphasis on the intergenerational nature of this battle, "God will be at war with Amalek from generation to generation." ... The obligation to "blot out the memory of Amalek" means

engaging in the fight against the distancing of generations from one another. This battle is won by binding parents to children, and likewise, teachers to students.

When all is said and done, our Torah giants demand that we fight the threat of Amalek on two battlefields. We must physically fight the ever present reality of those who want to kill every Jew which has a different face in every epoch. Today, probably, best seen in the Iranian (the old Persia) quest for nuclear weapons.

However, we must also combat the insidious Amalekite threat to our spiritual legacy and our intellectual MESORAH heritage. This eternal struggle requires imaginative, creative leadership in both the battlefield and the study hall. May God bless our efforts in both theaters! 🙏