

CHABAD  
  
 RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 2 March 2012 - 8 Adar 5772  
 Sedra Tetzaveh - Remembering Amalek

### AMALEK WITHIN

**WE** THE JEWISH PEOPLE HAVE HAD MANY ENEMIES THROUGH THE AGES. SOME have been worse than others. This Shabbat, coming shortly before Purim, is special. The scent of hamantaschen is in the air. We also spend some time on Shabbat morning remembering one of our great enemies of old: Amalek. Does this sound negative? Let us see.

In Synagogues round the world, this Shabbat two Torah Scrolls are taken from the sacred Ark. In the first we read the Sedra<sup>1</sup>, largely concerning the clothes of the Priests in the Sanctuary. In the second we read a passage called “Chapter of Remembering” (Parshat Zachor)<sup>2</sup>. This section commands us to remember what the cruel tribe of Amalek did to us on our way out of Egypt: how they attacked us and tried to destroy us.

The reason why this is read on the Shabbat before Purim is because Haman, the villain of the Purim story, was a descendant of Agag, who was a King of Amalek, ruling in the time of the Jewish King Saul. The saga of Amalek’s battle against the Jews thus began in the time of Moses, continued in the time of Saul, and reached a further stage at the time of Purim.

What did Amalek do in our first encounter with him? The Torah

tells us that he “met you” when we were on our way out of Egypt and he focused his attack on the helpless at the tail end of the camp. The Torah tells us to remember this always: hence we have the special Torah reading this Shabbat. Some people recite it every single day.

Now, the people of Amalek are no longer an identifiable nation. There may be individual Amalekites here and there (and many Jews believe that Hitler was from that nation), but where is Amalek today? The Torah teaches us on many levels of life. If a certain law cannot be carried out in practical terms, we must look for a spiritual level of meaning. So what is the spiritual significance of remembering Amalek?

Amalek is described as having “met you”, ie: he met us, on our way out of Egypt. The Hebrew word for “met you” - *karcha* is explained as relating to *kar* meaning cold. The text can be translated with the meaning that Amalek “made you cold”<sup>3</sup>. So, on a spiritual level, what does this mean?

Judaism is full of warmth and vitality. Torah is called ‘life’ and ‘fire’. The Sages tell us we should have an internal fire of enthusiasm for Judaism. But sometimes there are things that cool off our ardent resolve. Seeds of doubt are sown. Indeed, it is pointed out that the numerical value in Hebrew of ‘Amalek’ is the same as that of the word *safek*, which means ‘doubt’<sup>4</sup>.

Judaism teaches us a great deal about spiritual struggle, changes of mood, quest and discovery. In this process of spiritual development, *doubt* is the internal Amalek. It pours cold water on our warm feelings and enthusiasm. You think you can leave Egypt? Don’t be ridiculous! You think you can start eating kosher? Don’t be old-fashioned! You think the Messiah will come? Don’t be so naive!

The Torah is reminding us to beware of our internal Amalek, which is trying to limit us, cooling off our approach to Jewish teaching. Even if we feel we are ‘cold’ by nature, a warm, caring, loving and even enthusiastic approach to everything Jewish, to everything the Torah tells us, is just what we need!

1. Exodus 27:20-30:10. 2. Deuteronomy 25:17-19. 3. See Midrash Tanchuma, end of Ki Tetze, and the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot* vol.1.2 p.387-8. 4. Both add up to 240. See the Rebbe’s *Collected Letters*, vol. 11 p. 338.

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## SEDRA TETZAVEH

### **PROOF OF PURIM**

It was Sunday afternoon, three days before Purim, and Yoni and Michael were just walking back from Sunday Hebrew school. 'That was good', said Michael, 'I love doing arts and crafts!' They had made real greggars, big like football rattles, to make a noise when hearing Haman's name mentioned during the reading of the Megila. Wow, did they make a noise! 'Yes,' said Yoni, and he made a face, but my greggar came out a little bit funny though'.

They were about to cross the road when they noticed Mr. Green, the old man who sat at the front of the synagogue, trying to cross the road. He had several heavy bags with him. 'Oh, look!' said Yoni, 'Poor Mr. Green, he has so much to carry, he won't be able to cross the road! Let's go and help!' 'Sure!' said Michael, and they hurried over to him.

They took his bags and helped him cross the road. 'Thank you so much!' said Mr. Green. He sounded so elderly. 'You are welcome!' said Yoni. 'Would you like us to help you carry your bags all the way home?' he said, feeling sorry for the old man. 'Oh, that's so kind of you!' replied Mr Green. 'It is so nice to see young boys ready to help someone,' said Mr. Green, 'that is how it used to be in the old days, before the war'. Michael's ears pricked up, he had heard that Mr. Green had been in the Holocaust; maybe he would tell them something about it.

'Will you tell us something about the war?' Yoni asked nervously. He didn't want to make the old man feel sad. But Mr Green seemed very willing to talk, and the boys listened carefully. It wasn't every day they were able to listen to people with his experiences. 'You see, the Nazis tried to kill all the Jews, they didn't want Judaism to survive, that's how much they hated us!'

'But even though they tried to get rid of all of us, G-d worked a miracle for me and other Jews, making sure that they wouldn't succeed.'

'A little like Purim?' asked Yoni. 'Yes', said Mr. Green, 'it was a bit like Purim. Haman wanted to wipe out the Jews, in the same way that the Nazis did. The Jews stood up for being Jewish, and G-d completely overturned Haman's plan. He and his sons were killed. So today here we are, the Jewish people, still enjoying Purim.'

'And the war?' asked Yoni, not quite sure what the comparison would be.

'Yes,' said Mr Green. 'There was the war, and many Jews were killed. But the question was after the war. Would Judaism survive? Yes, thank G-d, it has survived. The Jews have stood up for being Jewish, and you kind boys are an example. I noticed you in the Synagogue last year, listening to the Megila, making a nice noise with your graggers to blot out Haman's name. Will you be there this year again?' The boys both nodded.

'See,' said Mr Green, 'this is the modern miracle of Purim. There was the terrible war but Judaism continues, stronger than ever before. You boys are the proof!'

They were already at Mr. Green's house. The two boys took his bags inside and said goodbye. They had a warm feeling inside, from helping an old man, and from the idea that they themselves are the proof that Judaism is alive.

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