

Parashat Zachor 5780, 2020:

*The Amalek Within*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Jewish history has many authentic heroes who reached the ultimate heights of spirituality.

This special group includes, but is not limited to, the *Avot* (Patriarchs) *Emahot* (Matriarchs), Moshe, Aharon, the *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Chazal* (Torah Sages throughout the ages). These individuals created the foundations of the Jewish world in which we live, and modeled the ethical behavior that we should ideally emulate.

In my estimation, one of the truly great heroes of the spirit was the Chasidic Master, Rav Levi Yitzchak ben Meir of Berdichev, Russia (1740-1810). His most famous work, *Kedushat Levi*, contains Torah analyses that are quite often novel and always thought-provoking. One such example occurs in reference to Parashat Zachor. Rav Levi Yitzchak was challenged by a conceptual and psychological problem regarding Amalek: “How can we maintain such a strong emotional revulsion against a people that no longer exists and whose heinous behavior took place in the 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE?” After all, according to *Mishnah Yadayim* 4:4, Sennacherib, the King of Assyria (720-683 BCE approx.), destroyed the ethnic cohesiveness of nearly all the nations of his time. They were decimated, and their members cast to the wind and consequently lost in the sands of time.

Since this is the case, why does the Torah instruct us to “Remember what Amalek did to you,” and mandate three separate and eternal *mitzvot* regarding a people that is no more? How are we to understand this seeming anomaly?

In his analysis of these issues, Rav Levi Yitzchak suggests that remembering what Amalek did to us and blotting out his accursed memory are only a part of the obligations that are incumbent upon us. Rather, in an interpretive tour de force, he removes the concept of Amalek from its historical roots and transfers it to the innermost part of our being: “Each and every individual among the Jewish people is mandated to wipe out the evil portion [of his personality] that is called ‘Amalek’ that is hidden in his heart.” (All translations my own) Suddenly, these three *mitzvot* are very relevant, since Amalek is no longer a historically bound figure, but a very real psychological challenge that each of us must encounter:

As long as the “seed of Amalek” is found in the world, as man is considered to be a “small world [unto himself],” there therefore exists the reality of Amalek [as the causative element of] the power of evil in each person. This [power ceaselessly] awakens anew to cause a person to sin. This is precisely why the Torah reminds us: [“Remember what Amalek did to you...”]

Rav Levi Yitzchak further suggests that when we are involved with Torah study and heartfelt prayer, the Amalek that lurks within can do us little harm, for at these holy moments we are surrounded by Hashem’s divine light and holy presence. When, however, we are not immediately engaged in these *mitzvot*, whereby we experience an overflow of the Almighty’s *chane v’chesed v’rachamim* (favor, kindness, and mercy), we run the risk of falling under Amalek’s hypnotic spell. Rav Levi Yitzchak therefore teaches us that we must never deviate from the path of serving Hashem, for when we live

lives as authentic *ovdei Hashem* — servants of Hashem — then, and only then, do we have: “a formidable reminder to never allow the great power of Amalek to cause us to err.”

May Hashem give us the wisdom to recognize our true Jewish spiritual heroes, and may we develop the heartfelt desire to emulate them in all that we do. Then, too, may He help us recognize the Amalek that resides within, and may we overcome its overwhelmingly pernicious power through Torah study, wholehearted prayer and the joyous fulfillment of Hashem’s holy Torah. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>  
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha*’s name.

The email list, *b’chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdb718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of **Rav Soloveitchik’s** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.