

Parashat Zachor 5783, 2023:

Zachor!

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon HaKohane, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Gittel Malka bat Moshe, Alexander Leib ben Benyamin Yosef, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

This Shabbat we read Parshiot Tetzaveh and Zachor. According to the *Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chaim* (146:2 and 685:7), the public reading of Parashat Zachor enables us to fulfill two of the three *Taryag* (613) commandments associated with Amalek. As cited by the Rambam (1135-1204) in his *Sefer HaMitzvot*, these are: “*Zachor mah sh’asah lanu Amalek*—Remember what Amalek did to us,” (Positive Commandment 189) and “*Hizharnu mishchoach mah sh’asah lanu zerah Amalek*—We are warned not to forget what ‘the seed’ of Amalek did to us” (Negative Commandment 59).

Amalek exemplified malicious and unmitigated evil like no other ethnic group in history. As the Torah states: “*v’lo yarah Elokim*—and he did not fear G-d.” (*Sefer Devarim* 25:18) In other words, Amalek acted as if G-d did not exist, and there would be no response to his malevolent and sadistic behavior against our people. As such, there must ever be a: “*...milchamah l’Hashem b’Amalek m’dor dor*—a war of Hashem against Amalek throughout all the generations.” (*Sefer Shemot* 17:16)

Chazal teach us that, with the exception of the Jewish people, King Sennacherib of Assyria (720-683 BCE) destroyed the ethnic cohesion of all the nations of his time. (*Mishnah Yadaim* 4:4) Since

this is the case, why does the Torah give us three separate and eternal *mitzvot* regarding a tribal entity that no longer exists?

My rebbi and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as “the Rav” by his students and followers, answers this question in his seminal essay of 1956 entitled: “*Kol Dodi Dofek*.” Therein, he presented a profound idea from his father, Rav Moshe Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1879-1941):

Divine providence is testing us once again via the crisis that has overtaken the land of Israel. Let it be clearly stated: The matter does not just affect the political future of Israel. The designs of the Arabs are directed not just against the political sovereignty of the State of Israel but against the very existence of the *Yishuv* (settlement) in the land of Israel. They wish to destroy, heaven forbid, the entire community, “both men and women, infant and suckling, ox and sheep.” (1 Samuel 15:3) At a Mizrahi convention I cited the view expressed by my father and master (Rabbi Moses Soloveitchik) of blessed memory, that the proclamation, “The L-rd will have war with Amalek from generation to generation” (Exodus 17:16) does not only translate into the communal exercise of waging obligatory war against a specific race but includes as well the obligation to rise up as a community against any people or group that, filled with maniacal hatred, directs its enmity against *Keneset Israel*. When a people emblazons on its banner, “Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation: that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance,” (Psalms 83:5) it becomes, thereby, Amalek... (*Fate and Destiny*, translation, Rabbi Dr. Lawrence Kaplan, pages 65-66)

According to Rav Moshe Soloveitchik *zatzal*, Amalek is not a tribe or an ethnic entity, but, rather, a state of mind. As such, Amalek has existed since time immemorial and will continue to exist until *Mashiach Tzidkanu* (the righteous Messiah) comes and destroys evil. (Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim* 11:4) The Rav underscores this point in footnote 23, in the original Hebrew text of *Kol Dodi Dofek*: “...Amalek still exists in the world. Go and see what the Torah says: ‘a war of Hashem with Amalek throughout all of the generations.’ If so, it is impossible that Amalek will be destroyed from this world before the arrival of the Messiah.” (Translation my own) Therefore, the Rav writes: “In the 1930’s and 1940’s the Nazis, with Hitler at their head, filled this role. They were the Amalekites, the standard-bearers of insane hatred and enmity during the era just past.”

We must make no mistake about it. The ever-changing persona of Amalek has one undeniable goal: to destroy each and every member of the Jewish people in order to, *chas v'shalom*, obliterate Hashem's name from the world. The Torah therefore commands us “*Zachor!*—Remember!” In so doing, we will join the Almighty in His battle against the forces of evil.

May Hashem grant us the strength to join Him in His righteous war against Amalek, and may we witness the time of *Mashiach* when the entire world will stand shoulder to shoulder in recognizing His truth and glory. Then, the words of Zechariah the prophet will finally be realized: “And Hashem shall become King over all the earth; on that day shall Hashem be one, and His name one.” (14:9) May this time come soon, and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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Please contact me at rdbe718@gmail.com to be added to my weekly email list.

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

*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav](#)