

## **KI TETZEI: REMEMBER - DO NOT FORGET**

- Rabbi David Gutterman, of the Philadelphia Federation, deals with the redundancy of the words "Remember what Amalek has done to you", "Do not forget". He suggests that the first phrase is directed towards implacable enemies. The second is directed towards our people, "Do not forget the purpose for which you were placed here". He sees in this a lesson for the High Holiday Season as well.

### Time to Re-Member

Perhaps no other people is as intoxicated with the notion of memory and remembering as is the Jewish people. The noted historian Professor Yosef Yerushalmi even wrote a book entitled *Zakhor* (Memory). He notes that the word appears no less than 169 times in the Bible. Our texts are suffused with this notion even as our psyches are bathed in it. But there is only one time that we find a curious combination of a positive command "to remember" accompanied by its negative formulation, "not to forget." And it appears at the end of this week's Torah reading.

"Remember (Zakhor) what Amalek did to you on the way when you were leaving Egypt, that he happened upon you on the way, and he struck those of you who were in the rear, all the weak ones at the rear, when you were faint and exhausted and did not fear G-d... You shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heaven - Do not forget (Lo Tishkhach)"

The tradition and commentators galore have been bothered with this seeming superfluosity; if I am 'remembering' I am ipso facto 'not forgetting.'

Keep in mind that Amalek is the paradigmatic anti-Semite. And so, if I ask the question: Was Amalek a person, a nation or a concept? The answer is, yes. Amalek and his philosophical minions (and I invoke this term advisedly) are dedicated to the destruction and decimation of the Jewish people. It is very understandable that we need to be exceedingly vigilant in our transmission of this event and of its memory. But why this strange formulation?

Allow me to share a story. In his book, *The Making of a Jew*, Edgar Bronfman records a vignette that to me speaks volumes. Bronfman, as you know, is one of the megaphilanthropists of the Jewish people and involved with a host of Jewish organizations. In the early 1980's, he became president of the World Jewish Congress and writes that he went to visit with "Rabbi Soloveitchick, the preeminent sage of Jewish life." Mr. Bronfman said, "Sir, what advice can you give me now that I've been elected president of the WJC?" Rabbi Soloveitchick responded, "Mr. Bronfman, remember, Jews were not put here just to fight anti-Semitism!"

Maybe that is what is being intimated here. Yes, remember the tragic reality of Amalek; Zakhor, there are people out to get us. (And didn't Henry Kissinger remark, "even a paranoid has enemies.") But, Lo Tishkhach, "don't forget," that you are to remain a people - a people with a purpose, a people who has a way of being, a people with a sacred story which has informed the world. In other words, "Jews were not put here just to fight anti-Semitism."

Though the eminent thinker Emil Fackenheim spoke of not giving a posthumous victory to Hitler

(and Amalek) as the 614th commandment, don't forget the other 613 mitzvot either.

As we are on the cusp of the Yamim Noraim -Days of Awe - it is always worth remembering that we have an opportunity to re-member, reacquaint and reconnect ourselves with the source of that which has "kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us" to another new year.

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(Submitted by Nisson Shulman)