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Teshuva* (Mosaica 2021)

Shabbos Zachor: Never Forget!

The *heiligh* Rebbe Dovid of Dinov was a brilliant scholar, charismatic *darshan* and miracle worker. The son of Reb Zvi Elimel-ech, the *Bnei Yisaschar*, he was renowned throughout the region, revered by Jews and non-Jews alike. Rebbe Chaim of Sanz related that anyone who gazed into Reb Dovid's eyes would be inspired for a lifetime.

Dinov was known for the holy joy of its Purim celebrations. All year, the townsfolk looked forward to the exalted atmosphere in the presence of the *tzadik*, whose lofty and sublime *avodah* on that great day deeply uplifted them. One year, at the height of *seudas Purim*, when those gathered had reached the highest level of *ad d'lo yada*, one of the leaders of the community interrupted the exuberant singing and ecstatic dancing with a desperate plea. "Holy Rebbe, *chevreh*! Please listen! I was just informed that there is a group that is planning a full-scale pogrom in our city, on Seder night. As we speak, they're on the other side of town plotting their own *Gezeiras Haman*, to destroy us, men, women, elderly and children!"

Despite the inebriated elation, the music stopped and everyone fell into a shocked silence. All eyes were on the Rebbe. Reb Dovid stood up, lifted his wine goblet, closed his eyes and cried out with a booming voice: "*Teshuasam hayisa la-netzach*! Our salvation is eternal! Know, dear friends, the Throne of Hashem is not complete until Amalek is

totally erased! Whoever is ready to erase him, to complete this great fixing of evil, follow me!" The intoxicated chasidim burst into shouts of joy and danced behind the Rebbe as he strode confidently out the door. They piled onto wagons and continued the raucous *farbrengen*, *baderech*.

Reb Dovid's carriage stopped in front of a tavern at the edge of town. All the chasidim leapt out of their wagons, geared for a showdown, and followed the Rebbe as he pushed the door open and entered the tavern. The air was thick with the smoke and dark whispers of the anti-Semites, who were also drinking. Tension filled the air as Reb Dovid, in his golden *bekisheh* walked right up to their menacing leader. He grabbed the hand of the brutish man and looked him in his eyes, which were now wide with terror — but then abruptly smiled and motioned to the *chevreh* to strike up a *niggun*.

Once more, the chasidim burst into singing and clapping, and the Rebbe started dancing with the bewildered head of the anti-Semites. Just as unexpectedly, everyone in the tavern began singing along and dancing, and within a few seconds, all were stomping, and raising their cups of *mashkeh* into the air with joy.

The *Yidden* joined hands with the peasants and started jumping up and down, swept into an ecstasy that grew and grew. Then, shining with *kedushah*, the Rebbe raised his hand and

everyone was quiet. “My dearest brothers,” he said to the gentiles, “dancing together is such a delight! Have any of us ever felt such joy, such brotherhood?! Could it possibly be that...someone here...hates us Jews?”

The leader of the anti-Semites turned red, looked down at his feet and shook his head in denial. Reb Dovid continued, “I’m sorry to break the news to you, then! We heard the strangest, most terrible rumor — I’m sure it’s not true — that some people in this part of town were planning a pogrom against us, to attack us on the Eve of Passover?!”

Filled with remorse and shame, the peasants in the tavern pleaded, “No, no, Rebbe! It wasn’t us! We would never do that!”

“So tell me then, since we are having such a sweet get-together” said Reb Dovid, “why shouldn’t we be the best of friends, forever?”

Moved to tears by the tzadik’s awesome holiness and love, they all cried, “Yes, Rebbe, yes! Please be our best friend! Forever and ever!”

Then the *real* dancing began....

תִּמְחָה אֶת יִזְכָּר עַמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח

“Erase the remembrance of Amalek from under the Heavens — do not forget!”

(Devarim, 25:19)

We are a nation consumed with a desire to fix the world, a people who love life, yearn for peace and have a collective heart filled with love for Hashem’s creations. My brother, Rav Elie, has suggested that in commanding us to constantly remember Amalek’s hatred, it is as if the *Ribbono shel Olam* foresaw how difficult it would be for His merciful, spiritually sensitive nation to confront the painful reality that an entire society can become so cruel, evil and destructive, that it is actually

worthy of complete annihilation.

Indeed, for many of us, it is hard to face the reality that we face an un-uniformed enemy dedicated to the murder of Jews. In crowds of tens of thousands, our Jihadist neighbors throughout Eretz Yisrael — and their supporters across the globe — gleefully celebrate the heinous, bloodthirsty crimes perpetrated against us. This, then, is our *mitzvah* today: *Zachor*, “Remember — do not forget!”

A teaching from Rav Joseph Soloveichik zy’a makes this directive exceedingly clear:

Our faith in man’s goodness should not blind us to the latent demonic in man. Civilized men can become the personification of evil. The thin veneer of social restraint can suddenly be lifted, exposing the ugly, brutish potential of man. Created “in the image of God,” man can also assume a satanic identity. He is capable of going berserk, of turning into a monster.

The edict was given in Shushan the Capital, and the king and Haman sat down to drink, and the city of Shushan was perturbed. (Esther, 3:15)

Their bewilderment was due to the traditional naivete of the Jew who cannot believe that human beings may act like predatory beasts of the jungle. This was a traumatic discovery for the Jews of Persia. The Jew believes intuitively in man’s inherent goodness, that a Divine spark inhabits every human being, even the habitual sinner and criminal. This is the basis of *teshuvah*, that the kernel of man’s soul remains ever uncontaminated, and may yet induce a moral regeneration. The sudden confrontation with total ‘Amalek-style’ cruelty is therefore a painful, rude awakening, whenever it happens in our times.

Amalek is obviously more than a nomadic

tribe. He is more than a particular group, nationality or people. He is Everyman gone berserk, who has shed his Divine image for that of Satan. Any nation which declares that its core mission statement is to destroy the Jewish people is an extension of Amalek, for it has emblazoned on its banner the slogan of impassioned hatred: *Come, let us destroy them from (being) a nation, and the name of Israel will no longer be remembered (Tehillim, 83:5).*

This is the persistent treachery against humanity that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* bids us to combat and against which He has sworn eternal enmity. It is for this reason that there is a positive Torah commandment: *You shall (always) remember what Amalek did to you... do not forget!*

The ethical sensitivity and respect for man, which was so successfully imprinted upon the Jewish personality by the Egyptian experience and reinforced by the preaching of the Prophets, should not blind Jews to stark realities. A sober awareness of dire possibilities will hopefully lead to vigilance and to precaution. Amalek is (not just a spiritual *mashal*, but) a historic phenomenon; *Lo tishkach* – the lesson must *never* be forgotten.

(Adapted from *Reflections of the Rav*)

וְהַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה נִזְכָּרִים וְנַעֲשִׂים בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדוֹר
מִשְׁפָּחָה וּמִשְׁפָּחָה מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וְעִיר וְעִיר וְיָמֵי
הַפְּנוּיִם הָאֵלֶּה לֹא יַעֲבְרוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַיְּהוּדִים וְזָכָרָם לֹא
יִסּוּף מִזֶּרַע־ם:

“These days are recalled and observed in every generation: by every family, every province, and every city. And these days of Purim *shall never cease* among the Jews, and *the memory of them shall never perish among their descendants.*” (*Esther, 9:28*)

We all yearn for the great day, when we

will pile into the *kretchmer* and dance, sing and celebrate the sweetening of judgments and the Oneness of the brotherhood of all mankind. Until then, may we fulfill the *mitzvah* of defending ourselves, and wiping out our enemies. May we take pride and rejoice in the the decimation of Amalek in all of its manifestations, כפשוטו, in the simple, literal meaning of those words. And as in the days of Shushan, may we be blessed to experience and witness with our own eyes, the sweetness of vengeance and fulfillment of the words of the Megillah:

וַיָּכּוּ הַיְּהוּדִים בְּכָל־אֹיְבֵיהֶם מִכַּת־חֶרֶב וְהָרָג וְאֶבְדָּן
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְשִׁנְאֵיהֶם כְּרָצוֹנָם:

“The Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, slaying and destroying; they wreaked their will upon their enemies.” (*Ibid, 9:5*)

Then... the *real* dancing can begin. ■



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