

“For the hand is on the Throne of G-d: Hashem maintains a war against Amalek from generation to generation.” (17:16)

No people is so reviled by Hashem as Amalek, the archenemy of the Jewish People. Regarding no other nation do we have a commandment to obliterate their name (*Devarim* 25:17-19). Only Amalek has that “distinction.” Why? What is there about Amalek – his hatred of the Jews and everything that they represent – that differentiates him so? I think the answer lies in Amalek’s attack on us. We were leaving Egypt after two centuries of bitter, brutal persecution. We were not bothering anyone. Yet, for some reason, Amalek felt it necessary to attack us. Why? We were not threatening them at all; nor were we even traveling through their land. The Jewish People were basically minding their own business. Yet, Amalek attacked them for no apparent reason.

Perhaps the answer lies in *Megillas Esther* (which relates the *Purim* story) in which we read that Haman, a descendant and heir to the evil Amalek, attempted to wipe out the Jewish population of Persia. How did he plan to do it? What was his convincing argument? *Yeshno am echad m’fuzar u’meforud bein ha’amim... v’daseihem shonos mi’kol am*, “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples... Their laws are different from every other people’s” (*Megillas Esther* 3:8). Haman’s “reason” for hating the Jews was that they are different! And Haman was intolerant of the Jews’ distinction.

This is Amalek. The Jewish nation that was liberated from Egypt had no issues with them. Amalek was not suffering because of something they did to him. Yet, the mere fact that they were not like him was reason enough to hate and to wage war against them. *Halachah, Eisav sonei es Yaakov*, “It is *Halachic* axiom, that Eisav hates Yaakov.” No rhyme or reason – just simple hatred. Why? Eisav’s insecurity cannot tolerate anyone who is different than he is. In the womb, Eisav was already out to destroy Yaakov *Avinu*. Why? Because, when Rivkah *Imeinu* passed a *shul* or *bais ha’medrash*, Yaakov wanted out. This agitated Eisav, since the house of *avodah zarah*, idol-worship, is where he would gravitate. For Eisav this was cause enough to hate Yaakov.

Hashem declared that His Throne is not complete as long as Amalek exists. The Almighty wants Amalek’s name obliterated. World society is comprised of a multiplicity of people with dissimilar cultures and beliefs. This is the world. *Klal Yisrael* has its little niche in which we are isolated from the world society. Our way of life, the Torah way of life, is distinct. As a result of our mandate to be exclusive, we enrage the forces of evil represented by Amalek and his ilk. Throughout our history, the Amalekites have hounded and persecuted us for no reason other than *Eisav sonei es Yaakov*. In fact, our point of divergence, our individuality is our badge of honor, our source of pride. This troubles Amalek.

The problem does not end there. I think the issue is much more acute, with grave ramifications reaching into our own insular society. I was reading recently how a prominent European *Rav* of *Chassidic* persuasion was walking through a vibrantly *chareidi*, observant, neighborhood one

Shabbos afternoon, together with his family. He was shocked to hear the taunting voices of little children poking fun at his grandson's *payos*. At first, he thought that some gentile youths must have moved into the neighborhood. We can all imagine his shock and utter disbelief when he saw that the ridicule was coming from a group of *frum* children. The *Rav* writes how disturbed he was about this outrage. It is one thing to suffer the derision of anti-Semites, but to hear it from the mouths of innocent Jewish children was quite distressing. After all we have gone through collectively as a nation, how can children raised in fully observant homes make fun of another Jewish child's appearance? Furthermore, it would be wrong to place the onus of guilt on the children alone. Children reflect what they hear and observe from their parents and other adults with whom they come in contact. Apparently, for some people manifesting a different appearance than one's own is reason for ridicule. This is subtle Amalekism creeping beneath the veneer of religiosity.

I will take the liberty of a writer's license to submit that these feelings exist across the board. Right wing, left wing, centrist, modern, traditional, *yeshivish*, *heimish*; these are some of the labels by which we identify other *frum Yidden* who are "different" from us. We determine one's level of *frumkeit* based upon the *shul* in which he *davens*, the rabbi he supports, the school or *yeshivah* to which he sends his children, the color, texture and shape of his hat or *yarmulke*. It has gotten to the point that we are intolerant of people for no reason other than that they are different. Since when do we have the right to question someone's preference concerning which *minhagim*, customs and traditions, they want to observe? How are our children being affected by our petty, obtuse perception of one another?

Klal Yisrael is comprised of twelve *Shevatim*, Tribes, each with its own individual blend of attributes, qualities, and religious devotion. They all have one goal in common: serving Hashem. The individual approach may vary, but the goal and devotion remains the same. If their observance does not totally adhere to the purview of the Torah that is a legitimate concern. While throughout history all factions under the religious umbrella have not always seen eye to eye, for the most part there were still elements of respect manifest between them. There were, and always will be, individuals who are extreme and who do not prioritize respect for their fellow Jew, but that is why I call them "extreme." They are beyond the pale. Everyone needs "his" place, his comfort zone, where he feels in-sync with others. It should not be reason for disparagement if another's choice is not just like ours. It is an expression of insecurity when one belittles others who are "different," who dance to a different tune. This is how Haman commenced his campaign against the Jews: "They are different from us." We have enough enemies from without. Why should we have to contend with enemies from within?