



**ALEPH
INSTITUTE**
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

TORAH WEEKLY

ת"וב

27 August -

2 September, 2017

5 - 11 Elul, 5777

Torah:

Deuteronomy 21:10 - 25:19

Haftorah:

Isaiah 54:1 - 10

■ GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH

Aleph offers free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll, it is available to all prisons.

■ ROSH HASHANAH, YOM KIPPUR SUKKOT

The high holidays are weeks away! Make the necessary arrangements with your Rabbi and institutional chaplain, to ensure you are able to celebrate.

■ TORAH STUDIES

Aleph offers many Judaic topics for study. Aleph Institute will provide the material and courses. Please write for more information.

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VINEGAR FOR THE SOUL

Memory is a terrible thing to lose, a fact that becomes painfully clear when you reach middle age. But forgetting can have its uses as well. For one thing, it keeps the mind from being cluttered with irrelevant information. And memory loss can even be therapeutic—such as when we overlook past hurts and agree to forgive and forget. For survivors of trauma, the ability to let go of frightful memories is essential to the healing process.

One of the most traumatic events in early Jewish history was the ambush of Amalek on the newly liberated people, fresh out of Egypt. Amalek was the first nation that dared attack the Jews after G-d miraculously redeemed them, and in their vulnerable state, this attack was particularly devastating. In this week's Torah portion, we find a curious mitzvah: Remember to forget Amalek.

You shall remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you went out of Egypt . . . You shall obliterate the remembrance of Amalek from beneath the heavens. Do not forget (*Deuteronomy 25:17-19*.)!

This mitzvah is one of the "Six Remembrances," events recorded in the Torah that we are commanded to remember

every day, including the exodus from Egypt, the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, and the Shabbat day of rest (*six remembrances*).

If you are wondering how remembering an attack by Amalek fits in with remembering sanctified occasions such as the Shabbat and the exodus from Egypt, you're not alone. The Midrash writes that after the commandment to remember Amalek was given, the Jews said to Moses: "One Scripture text says, 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,' and it is written, 'Remember what Amalek did unto you.' How can both these texts be fulfilled (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, ch. 44*)?"

The question the Jews were asking was: how can we keep such opposite thoughts in mind at the same time? Sanctifying the Shabbat helps to implant in our heart the awareness that G-d is the Creator of all existence. Amalek, in contrast, is a nation that "knows its Creator and deliberately rebels against Him. (*Torat Kohanim, Bechukotai 26:14*)" How can we remember the holiness of Shabbat at the same time that we call to mind the evil of Amalek?

And to this, Moses answered, "The glass of spiced wine is not to be compared to the glass of vinegar! One 'Remember' is in order to observe and to sanctify the Sabbath day, and the other 'Remem-

ber' is in order to destroy."

Why does Moses compare the memory of Amalek to a glass of vinegar?

Vinegar on its own is excessively sour and not fit to drink. Mixed with other foods, however, it adds flavoring, and even has health benefits. Furthermore, since vinegar is derived from wine, it has some of the properties of the wine itself.

What this means in spiritual terms is that even an experience as sour as our encounter with Amalek has a source in holiness. In fact, the very existence of an entity that "knows its Creator and intentionally rebels against Him" is a testimony to G-d's omnipotence. G-d created a world with dueling, conflicting powers to give us the opportunity to vanquish the evil and channel its energy to good.

This is why Moses compared both the Shabbat and Amalek to a glass. Both are vessels for containing G-dly energy. However, the vessel of Shabbat, the "glass of spiced wine," requires no special preparation. It is ready to drink as is. The cup of Amalek, on the other hand, is not a suitable container for G-dliness until it undergoes some refinement—its tendency to rebel must be tempered and channeled appropriately. Then it, too, is a vessel for G-dli-

ness, with life-sustaining power of its own.

In the Tanya, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi describes two types of delicacies: those that are sweet, and those that are sharp or sour, but when properly prepared can be tasty condiments (*Tanya*, ch. 27). As it is written in Proverbs, “The L-rd made everything for His praise—even the wicked man for the day of evil (*Proverbs 16:4*).” When the evil man repents for his evil and returns to G-d, then the energy that he put into his wickedness becomes converted into holiness—the darkness of his past deeds becomes a greater light.

And this is how we can remember Shabbat and Amalek in the very same breath. On the one hand, celebrating Shabbat is a time to disconnect from worldliness for a short while. We might think that it would be best to let the memory of Amalek fade into the background for the time being. We want to enjoy our sweet wine with no taint of vinegar. Yet the power of Amalek is so great that it can disturb the tranquility of Shabbat—so even on Shabbat, we must be vigilant and protect ourselves against it.

On the other hand, there are times when we are not in a Shabbat mindset. Perhaps we are in a state when we are completely absorbed in the “Amalek” aspects of our lives—the pain, the turmoil and the trauma. We need no memory of Amalek, since it surrounds us constantly. In this situation, holding on to the memory of Shabbat will help us rise above our circumstances. It will even help us recognize that this period of evil that we are going through is temporary, and it, too, has a source in holiness. Life may have dealt us a glass of vinegar—but we can draw strength from it and turn that glass of vinegar into a life-sustaining brew.

(Based on an address of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 19, pp. 221–226.)

By Chaya Shuchat

THE DIVORCE MINDSET

“We’re getting divorced. But we’re doing it amicably, with mutual respect.” When ex-spouses (or ex-es) describing their divorce sound like “we’re withdrawing our offer on the house we looked at Thursday,” you can get the idea that they never invested enough to be hurt by the loss. But listen again: you’ll hear emptiness in the voice; pain in the heart. Yes, the stigma is lost. Yes, some koffee-klatch and water-cooler conversations have an “everybody’s-doing-it” attitude. No. No one who went through divorce thinks it’s painless.

But if pain-free divorce is a myth (in the shattering), divorce is a reality, an option more than it ever was. To be sure, the option was always there. But as my father puts it, so was a tourniquet. When the body is facing death you use the tourniquet; otherwise it can do more damage than good. (Many first aid courses no longer teach tourniquet application because of

its overuse.) Complementing the legalization of divorce by the Torah is the frustration of the Talmud: “When husband and wife divorce, the Holy Altar sheds tears.”

Why bother with gut-wrenching screaming matches when you can just stroll away? Husbands and wives are not the only things getting divorced. Divorce is not just a legal proceeding; it’s a way of life, a mindset. You got in a fight with a friend? Send them a letter telling them why you’re not going to have anything to do with them anymore. Your family gives more sting than honey? Don’t feel bound or stifled by them. And divorce, disengagement, isn’t always such a bad idea. But when to walk and when to talk is not a question that gets a lot of attention. It can’t. It’s too easy to walk: Why bother with gut-wrenching screaming matches when you can just stroll away?

There is no pat answer as to when to hang up the phone or when to give back the ring. But the tourniquet overuse is worth reflection. For marriage to work, divorce cannot be considered a possibility. Call it the D-word. The ineffable, unthinkable. Forget that it exists. Relationships can’t work when breaking-up is knocking on the door. Not with spouses, friends, cousins, brothers, in-laws, grocers or gardeners. (Tip: Treat everyone as your most important client.)

And a fight does not necessarily mean a break-up is on the way; it can just as soon (if not just as easily) be a stepping-stone to a balanced, strong, fulfilling and happy relationship. Better an acrimonious relationship than a non-combative drifting. Not always, but when in doubt throw out the tourniquet. And remember tears are being shed.

By Rabbi Shimon Posner

In Jewish History

Sunday, 5 Elul, 5777 - August 27, 2017

First Chassidic Aliya (1777)

The first Chassidic aliyah (“ascent” - immigration to the Holy Land), led by Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk and Rabbi Yisroel of Polotzk, reached the Holy Land on Elul 5 of the year 5537 from creation (1777 CE). They were all disciples of the 2nd leader of the Chassidic movement, Rabbi DovBer, the “Maggid of Mezeritch” (who had passed away five years earlier) and colleagues of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad. Initially, Rabbi Schneur Zalman was part of the group; but when the caravan reached the city of Moholiev on the Dnester River, Rabbi Menachem Mendel -- whom Rabbi Schneur Zalman regarded as his teacher and mentor after the Maggid’s passing -- instructed him to remain behind to serve as the leader of the Chassidic community in White Russia and Lithuania. Rabbi Schneur Zalman retained close ties with the settlers in the Land of Israel and labored to raise funds for their support.