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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It is by any standards a strange, almost incomprehensible law. Here it is in the form it appears in this week's parsha:

"Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. When the Lord your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget." (Deut. 25:17-19)

The Israelites had two enemies in the days of Moses: the Egyptians and the Amalekites. The Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. They turned them into a forced labour colony. They oppressed them. Pharaoh commanded them to drown every male Israelite child. It was attempted genocide. Yet about them, Moses commands: "Do not despise an Egyptian, because you were strangers in his land." (Deut. 23:8)

The Amalekites did no more than attack the Israelites once, an attack that they successfully repelled (Ex. 17:13). Yet Moses commands, "Remember." "Do not forget." "Blot out the name." In Exodus the Torah says that "God shall be at war with Amalek for all generations" (17:16). Why the difference? Why did Moses tell the Israelites, in effect, to forgive the Egyptians but not the Amalekites?

The answer is to be found as a corollary of teaching in the Mishna, Avot 5:19: "Whenever love depends on a cause and the cause passes away, then the love passes away too. But if love does not depend on a cause then the love will never pass away. What is an example of the love which depended upon a cause? That of Amnon for Tamar. And what is an example of the love which did not depend on a cause? That of David and Jonathan."

When love is conditional, it lasts as long as the condition lasts but no longer. Amnon loved, or rather lusted, for Tamar because she was forbidden to him. She was his half-sister. Once he had had his way with her, "Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her." (2 Sam. 13:15). But when love is unconditional and irrational, it never ceases. In the words of Dylan Thomas: "Though lovers be lost, love shall not, and death shall have no dominion."

The same applies to hate. When hate is rational, based on some fear or disapproval that-justified or not-has some logic to it, then it can be reasoned with and brought to an end. But unconditional, irrational hatred cannot be reasoned with. There is nothing one can do to address it and end it. It persists.

That was the difference between the Amalekites and the Egyptians. The Egyptians' hatred and fear of the Israelites was not irrational. Pharaoh said to his people: "The Israelites are becoming too numerous and strong for us. We must deal wisely with them. Otherwise, they may increase so much, that if there is war, they will join our enemies and fight against us, driving [us] from the land." (Ex. 1:9-10)

The Egyptians feared the Israelites because they were numerous. They constituted a potential threat to the native population. Historians tell us that this was not groundless. Egypt had already suffered from one invasion of outsiders, the Hyksos, an Asiatic people with Canaanite names and beliefs, who took over the Nile Delta during the Second Intermediate Period of the Egypt of the pharaohs. Eventually they were expelled from Egypt and all traces of their occupation were erased. But the memory persisted. It was not irrational for the Egyptians to fear that the Hebrews were another such population. They feared the Israelites because they were strong.

(Note that there is a difference between "rational" and "justified". The fear of the Egyptians was in this case certainly unjustified. The Israelites did not want to take over Egypt. To the contrary, they would have preferred to leave. Not every rational emotion is justified. It is not irrational to feel fear of flying after the report of a major air disaster, despite the fact that statistically it is more dangerous to drive a car than to be a passenger in a plane. The point is simply that rational but unjustified emotion can, in principle, be cured through reasoning.)

Precisely the opposite was true of the Amalekites. They attacked the Israelites when they were "weary and weak." They focused their assault on those who were "lagging behind." Those who are weak and lagging behind pose no danger. This was irrational, groundless hate.

With rational hate it is possible to reason. Besides, there was no reason for the Egyptians to fear the Israelites any more. They had left. They were no

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longer a threat. But with irrational hate it is impossible to reason. It has no cause, no logic. Therefore it may never go away. Irrational hate is as durable and persistent as irrational love. The hatred symbolized by Amalek lasts "for all generations." All one can do is to remember and not forget, to be constantly vigilant, and to fight it whenever and wherever it appears.

There is such a thing as rational xenophobia: fear and hate of the foreigner, the stranger, the one not like us. In the hunter-gatherer stage of humanity, it was vital to distinguish between members of your tribe and those of another tribe. There was competition for food and territory. It was not an age of liberalism and tolerance. The other tribe was likely to kill you or oust you, given the chance.

The ancient Greeks were xenophobic, regarding all non-Greeks as barbarians. So still are many native populations. Even people as tolerant as the British and Americans were distrustful of immigrants, be they Jews, Irish, Italian or Puerto Rican. What happens, though, is that within two or three generations the newcomers acculturate and integrate. They are seen as contributing to the national economy and adding richness and variety to its culture. When an emotion like fear of immigrants is rational but unjustified, eventually it declines and disappears. So far is the United States from persistent hostility to Jews that, as a result of recent research, Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam has shown that Americans have warmer feelings toward Jews than to the members of any other faith.

Antisemitism is different from xenophobia. It is the paradigm case of irrational hatred. In the Middle Ages Jews were accused of poisoning wells, spreading the plague, and in one of the most absurd claims ever-the Blood Libel-they were suspected of killing Christian children to use their blood to make matzot for Pesach. This was self-evidently impossible, but that did not stop people believing it.

The European Enlightenment, with its worship of science and reason, was expected to end all such hatred. Instead it gave rise to a new version of it, racial antisemitism. In the nineteenth century Jews were hated because they were rich and because they were poor; because they were capitalists and because they were communists; because they were exclusive and kept to themselves and because they infiltrated everywhere; because they were believers in an ancient, superstitious faith and because they were rootless cosmopolitans who believed nothing. Antisemitism was the supreme irrationality of the age of reason.

It gave rise to a new myth, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a literary forgery produced by members of the Czarist Russia secret police toward the end of the nineteenth century. It held that Jews had power over the whole of Europe-this at the time of the Russian pogroms of 1881 and the antisemitic May Laws of 1882, which sent some three million Jews, powerless and impoverished, into flight from Russia to the West.

The situation in which Jews found themselves at the end of what was supposed to be the century of Enlightenment in emancipation was stated eloquently by Theodor Herzl, in 1897:

"We have sincerely tried everywhere to merge with the national communities in which we live, seeking only to preserve the faith of our fathers. It is not permitted us. In vain are we loyal patriots, sometimes superloyal; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow citizens; in vain do we strive to enhance the fame of our native lands in the arts and sciences, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In our native lands where we have lived for centuries we are still decried as aliens, often by men whose ancestors had not yet come at a time when Jewish sighs had long been heard in the country... If we were left in peace... But I think we shall not be left in peace."

This was deeply shocking to Herzl. No less shocking has been the return of antisemitism to parts of the Middle East and even Europe today, within living memory of the Holocaust. Yet the Torah intimates why. Irrational hate does not die.

Not all hostility to Jews, or to Israel as a Jewish state, is irrational, and where it is not, it can be reasoned with. But some of it is irrational. Some of it, even today, is a repeat of the myths of the past, from the Blood Libel to the Protocols. All we can do is remember and not forget, confront it and defend ourselves against it.

Amalek does not die. But neither does the Jewish people. Attacked so many times over the centuries, it still lives, giving testimony to the victory of the God of love over the myths and madness of hate.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The love between God and His people is often compared to the marital relationship. So the prophet Hoshea describes God, declaring: "And I will betroth you to Me forever." (Hoshea 2:21) The Song of Songs is similarly viewed as an allegory for the relationship between God and Am Yisrael (the Jewish people).

Indeed, throughout the year this imagery prevails. For example, every Friday evening we recite the Lekha Dodi-Come my Beloved (referring to God), let us greet the Sabbathbride.

And the holidays of the Jewish year evoke the picture of God's love for us. On Passover we recall walking through the sea with the help of God, much like bride and groom walking to the huppa (wedding canopy). On Shavuot (the festival commemorating receiving the torah), we reenact our hearing the Aseret Ha'Dibrot (Ten Declarations) which can be viewed as the ketubah, the marital contract between God and His people. On Sukkot (the feast of booths) we eat and some try to live in a sukkah, beneath the skhakh (Sukkah roof), which can be seen as a kind of bridal canopy.

But, of course, this comparison has its limits. This week's parsha records the right of husband and wife to divorce. And if following the divorce the wife marries another, she may never remarry her first husband. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) Taking the analogy to its fullest, does this mean that we, the Jewish people, can permanently separate from God? Doesn't it mean that if we separate from God, and, if you will, "wed" to another albeit false god, that we can never return to God Himself.

It is here during the days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that a new picture of love between God and His people emerges. It is the idea that we are God's children and God is a parent figure. Thus, we recite Avinu Malkeinu - referring to God as our Father. So, too, do we speak of God as Hashem Hashem Keil rahum (the Lord is a God of mercy). The word rahum comes from the word rehem which means womb, conveying the idea of a mother's infinite and endless love for her young.

The difference is obvious. A husband and wife relationship can be terminated. But no matter what happens in life a parent always remains a parent. Similarly, God's love for us is limitless. Even if we separate from Him, even if we "marry another," we can always return- and God will always embrace us.

One last thought. Even the parental relationship has its limits since no one lives forever. God is however, the Eternal Parent. Hence during these days we recite Psalm twenty-seven, in which we proclaim, "Even if my father and mother have left me, God will gather me in."(Psalms 27:10)

Our relationship to God parallels the deep love between husband and wife. It intersects with a parent's love for a child. In fact, it transcends all. It is as deep and deeper than a spousal encounter, and it is beyond the endlessness of a parent's love for a child-it is eternal. *Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns.*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Rashi in his commentary to this week's parsha emphasizes the idea of cause and effect. Rashi points out that this is true in both a negative and positive sense. In the words of the rabbis of the Mishna, a mitzva causes other mitzvot to occur while a transgression automatically drags along other sins in its wake. This is why the rabbis describe a wise person as being one who can see the future consequences of events and human behavior.

It is not only the individual act itself that is of consequence and importance. It is rather the sequence of behavior and related consequences that flow from that individual act that are just as important. The Jewish soldier who takes the captive woman unto himself in a moment of temporary passion is not intending that the end result of this act will be enduring domestic strife, hatred and eventually a dissolute and dangerous child.

But all behavior creates a ripple effect in life and many unintended consequences are derived from an intentional act of poor judgment and base desire. And the opposite is also true. A positive act of tradition and Torah service brings to the person performing that act of goodness and kindness unforeseen opportunities to perform other acts of goodness and kindness.

The performance of mitzvot leads to there being a protective fence that surrounds one's home and is redemptive in so many other unforeseen ways. Again, Judaism is committed to a far sighted view of life and behavior and the understanding that nothing that a person does or says is truly to be deemed inconsequential.

The charitable person will be given many continuing opportunities to be charitable. The miser will soon realize that no one will frequent his home or office. Initially he may feel relieved at this situation, but he will eventually regret it for it brings with it a loss of stature, a poor reputation and a loneliness of the soul.

The story is told about a wealthy man who, because of his wealth, gave much charity and had many visitors and was held in great esteem in his community. People came to him for advice and succor, though he was not particularly noted for his wit or wisdom. One day he decided that he would no longer give any charity. As this news spread, the visitors soon dwindled and eventually stopped altogether. The man complained to his wife: "I don't understand why people stopped coming. My funny jokes and good advice are still available to them!"

People often mistake honors and attention paid to them as being their personal right when that honor or attention is only given to them because of their good deeds. It is clear that a person's actions and behavior

propels his reputation and standing in the eyes of humankind as well as Heaven.

The Psalmist put it most bluntly: "If only humans would be wise and discerning and appreciate what their end will look like." It is not only about our eventual mortality that the Psalmist speaks. It is also certainly about the consequences here in our lifetime-of our acts, attitudes and behavior.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And it shall be, when Hashem your G-d gives you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land that Hashem your G-d gives you an inheritance to take ownership of, you shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from beneath the heavens; do not forget" (Devarim 25:19). There are two instances where the Torah commands us to commit what seems to be genocide. We are commanded to wipe out the nation of Amalek, and were commanded to wipe out the nations living in Canaan (20:16-18). The latter applied when we started our initial conquest of the Promised Land, while the former did not apply until we conquered the Land and had appointed a king (see Rambam, Hilchos Melachim 1:2). Murdering one person is a serious enough crime; the sanctioning of, and instructions to, wipe out an entire nation-men, women and children-easily offends rational human beings, especially those who have recently been the target of attempted genocide. How can G-d, Who is described as "good," "gracious" and "merciful," have issued such commandments?

War is never pretty; the unique aspect of these wars is that even after successfully defeating the enemy we are still required to kill everyone. Therefore, even after explaining, minimizing, and/or mitigating the severity of these commandments, we would still be left with the issue of killing the women and children, the aspect which makes it a genocide rather than a military victory. Nevertheless, it is important to understand the limits of these requirements, and why they were necessary.

First of all, the Canaanites could have left, and we would not have had to hunt them down. Or, they could have stayed, but under our rules (being subservient to us and keeping the Noachide Laws, see Rambam, Hilchos Melachim 6:1-5). We could not allow any idol-worshipping Canaanites to stay because of how they would impact us (see Shemos 34:11-16), impeding our ability to fulfill our national mission, thus preventing the purpose of creation from being completed. The Promised Land was always intended for the people who would take on this mission, and the Canaanites were given the task of caring for this land until we were ready for it. Instead, they took possession of it for themselves (see http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/lechLecha.pdf), necessitating having to conquer it from them. After they refused to leave and refused to change their idolatrous ways, the only options were to either destroy them or let them impede the mission for which the world was created.

The necessity of assuring that we wouldn't be distracted from our mission (if we lived side-by-side with idolaters) is painfully obvious when studying the history of the Northern Kingdom, which was destroyed and exiled because they copied the idolatrous behavior of the remaining Canaanites. The Southern Kingdom was also severely influenced by the idolatrous Canaanite culture, and in retrospect, the wisdom of completely clearing the Promised Land of those who would prevent the purpose of the world from being fulfilled can be easily understood. And it wasn't just the idol worshippers themselves that had to be removed, but anything used to worship idols had to be obliterated as well (see Bamidbar 33:50-56 and Devarim 6:5). We couldn't build a "museum of idol worship" to recall the cultic practices of the Canaanite culture; the Canaanites were hated (by G-d) because they had initiated many of the forms and styles of idol worship in the world (see Chinuch Mitzvah #425). Allowing family members of these idol worshippers to survive would also serve as a memorial to these disgusting practices, at least for a few generations.

The nations of Canaan acted out of their own self interest. They didn't want to be guests/workers/servants of the nation that the Promised Land really belonged to, so tried to become the "owners" of the land instead. They wouldn't have prevented the Children of Israel from building a different homeland, and their idol worship wasn't intended to tempt the Children of Israel to abandon the One True G-d; it was done because they thought it gave them their best chance for success. Amalek, on the other hand, didn't attack the Nation of Israel to protect their own interests, but because they hated what Israel stood for, and wanted to undermine their mission. G-d's "throne" could not be "complete" as long as those who defied Him-and tried to prevent His mission from being completed-were still around (see Rashi on Shemos 17:16). Any remnant of Amalek contradicts the messianic concept that "G-d will be King over the entire land; on that day G-d will be One and His name will be One" (Zecharya 14:9), for as long as the idea that someone can contradict G-d exists, His "name" can't be "One."

When King Sha'ul, whose obligation it was to obliterate Amalek, returned from demolishing them, he was convinced that he had fulfilled G-d's commandment (Sh'muel I 15:13), even though, despite having been explicitly commanded to destroy every living Amaleki-including their animals (15:3)--he didn't kill every animal (15:15) or their king (15:20). After all, there was no

longer an Amaleki nation that could undermine the Jewish people or its mission (or so he thought). Nevertheless, people could point to the animals and say "these belonged to the nation that tried to defy G-d." Any remnant of Amalek was an affront to G-d and His "completeness." We are commanded to remember what Amalek did, to be aware that such evil-for the sake of evil, not for personal gain-exists in this world, and do our best to counter it.

As a concept, this works; the issue at hand is that included in this concept is the still-existing obligation to obliterate this evil by killing any descendant of Amalek. Is the commandment to destroy any descendants of Amalek more civilized than a "fatwa" to commit a terrorist act? Is the exhortation to kill any infidels worse than killing every Canaani and Amaleki based purely on his or her lineage? We may say we have a divine commandment backing us up, but they think they do too. Is the only real difference between our brutality and theirs our assessment that our belief system is really true?

One of the fundamentals of our belief is that G-d not only created the world, but still runs it. How He runs it makes for a fascinating study (and discussion), but that He runs it is unquestionably a primary tenet of Judaism. G-d's involvement is sometimes on a macro level ("hashgacha k'lalis") and sometimes, for those individuals worthy of divine protection, on a micro level ("hashgacha p'ratis"). Something done on a macro level could impact the entire world (such as instituting the force of gravity), or just a specific population within it (such as giving fins to fish and wings to birds and insects; it affects every member of the species, but was not intended for any specific member of that species). Things that happen to a defined population could be the result of a new "intervention" or the result of numerous old "interventions" working together. Is a hurricane a new, specific, divine intervention meant as a message to those affected by it, or the culmination of many of G-d's "interventions" (laws of nature) requiring a new intervention in order to minimize the damage it could cause? Obviously, there is no way for anyone who is not a prophet to know. We can (and should) do a self-examination, finding ways to improve and thereby merit G-d's protection and intervention, but we can't know for sure why G-d specifically caused or allowed something to happen.

As a general rule, the more people affected by something, and the more harshly they are affected, the greater the likelihood that there was divine involvement, or that there was a reason why there was no additional divine involvement to prevent it from happening. King Sh'lomo teaches us that "the heart of a king is in G-d's hand" (Mishlay 21:1). Decisions made by leaders affect their entire community, and G-d takes into account how each member of that community (and the community as a whole) is affected before allowing any decision to be made (see Ralbag and Malbim). The larger the "community" affected by a decision (and the extent to which they are affected), the greater the likelihood that G-d will intervene in the decision-making process. Since most decisions made by kings affect so many people so drastically, their "hearts," i.e. the decisions they make, "are in G-d's hand," ensuring that the results of each decision are just. Therefore, when a king makes a decision or institutes a policy that has wide-ranging affects, we can be confident that G-d "reviewed" the decision before allowing it to be reached.

One of the decisions reached by Sancherev, the Assyrian King who exiled the Northern Kingdom, was to displace all of the inhabitants of the nations he conquered, and replace them with the inhabitants of another nation he had conquered (and needed to displace). This was a brilliant strategy; it is much easier to rule over people who are out of their element than to keep natives from trying to regain their autonomy. It also made it impossible to know for sure who belonged to which nation, as Sancherev "mixed up all of the nations" (Berachos 28a). As a consequence of Sancherev's policy, we no longer can know who descended from Amalek. Even an admission of being an Amaleki is inadmissible evidence (see Berachos 28a, where an admitted Amoni was allowed to convert because his admission wasn't accepted), and without knowing for sure that someone came from Amalek, killing them would be murder, murder that is unsanctioned by the Torah or Jewish law.

If G-d's intent was for the obligation to kill every Canaani and Amaleki to remain in force forever (or at least until Moshiach comes), He wouldn't have allowed Sancherev to make identifying an Amaleki impossible. There was a need to end the existence of Amalek as a nation, and any remnant of that nation as long as it could be identified as being from Amalek. There was also a need to remove any memory of the idol-worshipping Canaanites from the Promised Land. Once those needs were no longer relevant, and the direct prophecy needed to maintain the obligation was no longer operating, G-d made sure it couldn't, from a practical standpoint, be fulfilled. The obligation to erase the remnants of evil are still valid, as a concept, but the ability to fulfill that obligation has been obliterated.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"You shall make ritual fringes on the four corners [literally wings, kanaf in Hebrew] of the garment with which you cover yourself. When a man marries a woman and he cohabits with her..." (Deut. 22:12, 13) .

These two commandments - for a male to append ritual fringes on each four cornered garment he puts on and for a male to betroth a woman - follow each other in our Biblical text. Is there a connection? I would

like to explain the juxtaposition by analyzing an interesting Sephardi custom which has become part of many Ashkenazi wedding ceremonies, especially in Israel.

The traditional Jewish wedding is composed of two distinct ceremonies: the betrothal (engagement, or kiddushin), whose major characteristic is the groom's declaring, "Behold, you are consecrated unto me with this ring, in accordance with the laws of Moses and of Israel." and giving a ring to his bride in front of two witnesses while from that moment on, the couple cannot enter any other romantic relationship.

In Mishnaic times, and perhaps even beyond, the bride and groom did not live together after the betrothal. The respective families would get to know each other, the groom would arrange a home for his bride and the bride would gather her trousseau. Generally, after one year had passed, the second ceremony - the marriage itself (nissuin) took place. The groom would then take the bride into their new home, supply a feast for family and friends, the seven nuptial blessings would be recited, and then - in the privacy of their new dwelling - the marriage would be consummated.

Later, in Amoraic times (200 - 750 CE), the sages felt it was impractical to keep a couple apart for an entire year, so the two ceremonies were merged. In order to retain the separate nature of each, the reading of the ketuba (in which the husband obligates himself to love and respect his wife, and provide her with a life insurance and alimony policy) is read aloud between the giving of the ring and the act of marriage, in which the seven blessings are recited under the nuptial canopy. The nuptial canopy symbolizes the new home they are about to enter.

The Sephardi custom is for the bride to give her betrothed a new tallit with ritual fringes appended to its four corners; the groom wraps himself in the tallit for the first time at the conclusion of the reading of the marriage contract, just before the recitation of the seven blessings under the nuptial canopy.

Just prior to his donning the tallit, the groom makes a special blessing (sheheheyanu), thanking God for granting him the privilege of celebrating this event. The blessing marks both the acquisition of the new tallit and the advent of the new marriage. The groom wraps the tallit around himself and his wife; both stand together under the tallit and under the nuptial canopy, where they listen to the seven nuptial blessings which conclude the ceremonies.

Two questions beg to be asked. First of all, one object cannot be used for two mitzvot - and here the prayer shawl is being used both for a blessing over a new garment as well as for a blessing over a new marriage. Secondly, how can one compare the acquisition of a new garment to the acquisition of a new life partner? The source of the custom of the tallit is derived from the Scroll of Ruth. When this sincere Moabite convert has a nocturnal meeting with Boaz in the silo - and in effect informs him that she is ready to marry him - she makes herself known to him as "Ruth, your servant, over whom you have spread your wings [or more literally "corner of protection"], because you are [my] redeemer" (Ruth 3:9).

Hence, by means of the Hebrew word kanaf, the ritual fringes are symbolic both of the 613 commandments - the "wings" which enable every Jew to soar to supernal spheres - as well as of the protective covering provided by the Almighty. That's why Boaz used the same word in praising Ruth for forsaking her homeland and family in order to come "under the protective wings [corners] of the Lord God of Israel" (Ruth 2:12)

The second part of the marriage ceremony - the nuptial canopy - symbolizes the new home. But what is truly the new home of a young couple? In Jewish tradition, it is the 613 commandments, the "wings of protection" which God provides, the tallit with its ritual fringes, which must become the spiritual walls of the home and family which the bride and groom are now building together.

Our only true home is the house of God, and this is the home provided by the tallit and its "wings," the four corners of the nuptial canopy.

The blessing over the tallitis the blessing over the marriage relationship; one must define the other. And therefore, the biblical connection between the commandment of ritual fringes and the commandment to marry finds a most worthy expression.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah displays Hashem's boundless love for the Jewish people. In the end, after a long painful exile, the Jewish people will be granted permission to return to Eretz Yisroel. Most appropriately, the prophet Yeshaya opens and invites Yerushalayim to rejoice over the ingathering of her exiles. He says, "Rejoice barren city who never expected such an overwhelming influx within your walls...Extend your annexes without interruption...Because your children will inherit the cities of the nations and settle the desolate areas." (54:1-3) The proportions of the Jewish redemption will be so overwhelming that Eretz Yisroel won't be capable of containing it. Yerushalayim will overflow from her newly acquired inhabitants and the surrounding areas will rapidly fill to capacity. The entire Judean hills will be saturated with newly sprouted neighborhoods but the Jewish influx will continue. The new wave of Jews will take possession of the entire land of Israel and settle therein but even these broadened quarters will not suffice. The return will be so encompassing that Zion

will truly wonder in bewilderment from whence did all of her people emerge.

Yet the kindness of Hashem won't end here and the prophet continues to describe the setting of the future. Yeshaya tells the Jewish people, "Do not be afraid or embarrassed because your shameful past will never be remembered." (54:4) He adds in the name of Hashem, "I forsook you for a brief moment and I will gather you in with great compassion. With mild anger I concealed My countenance from you and with everlasting kindness I will have mercy upon you." (54:7,8) These passages reflect the concern of the Jewish people over their dark and rebellious past. They hesitate to return to Hashem because their previous wrong doings remain fresh in their minds. They cannot imagine bonding perfectly with Hashem given how unfair they acted towards Him in the past. Hashem responds that they should not hesitate to return because no trace will remain of their earlier ways.Hashem's blessing will be so encompassing that it will be virtually impossible for the Jewish people to relate to their earlier experiences.They will develop such close relationships with Hashem that they will be incapable of imagining what it was like without Him. How could they have ever appreciated life without their close and perfect relationship with Hashem?!

The prophet continues and reveals to us the merit through which this unbelievable experience will transpire. Yeshaya says in the name of Hashem, "For the mountains may move and the hills may sway but My kindness will never leave you and My covenant of peace will never be swayed."(54:10) In explanation of these words, our Chazal in Yalkut Shimoni (477)share with us a beautiful insight. They explain that the mountains mentioned here refer to the firm and sound merits of the Patriarchs and the hills refer to those of the Matriarchs. Although the Jewish nation continuously draws upon these merits for its basic existence there are times when even these merits do not suffice. The Jews stray so far from the proper path that they cease to identify with the virtues of the Patriarchs. During such times, Hashem doesn't identify with the Jewish people as children of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs and the mountains and hills-merits of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs- begin to sway and can not be of any assistance. Yeshaya advises the Jews that in those difficult moments they should cleave to acts of loving kindness. In return for their loving kindness Hashem promises to show them His loving kindness resulting in the indescribable proportions mentioned earlier.

With the above insight we begin to comprehend the unbelievable Messianic era awaiting the Jewish nation. The Malbim (ad loc.) explains this merit of loving kindness and notes that, by nature, kindness is boundless.Unlike compassion and mercy which depend upon the recipient's worthiness,kindness is shown without calculation or consideration. The recipient of pure kindness is never deserving of it and such acts are therefore not subject to limitations. In essence whenever Hashem showers His kindness upon someone it is, by definition, unlimited and everlasting. This,incidentally is the deeper meaning of Dovid Hamelech's words in Tehillim,"For His kindness is everlasting." (107:1) Accordingly, when the Jewish people will be the beneficiaries of Hashem's kindness they will experience it in boundless proportions. They will be privileged to establish such closeness to Hashem that they will never be capable of understanding life without Him.

However, in order to elicit true kindness from Hashem the Jewish people must conduct themselves in a very special manner. To this end Yeshaya offers them an inside tip and advises them to cleave to acts of loving kindness amongst each other. When, in the end of time, we will be totally committed to benefiting others Hashem will reciprocate in that same manner. If we will provide for others above and beyond our obligation Hashem will do the same. We now understand that those acts of loving kindness-by definition beyond the call of duty-will truly serve as the keys to our glorious future. Such acts of pure kindness are not subject to calculations and computations and are the true expression of boundless concern for others. Hashem therefore responds with His acts of loving kindness and showers us with His boundless love in the most indescribable proportions. Eretz Yisroel will be continuously expanding to allow for the influx and our association with Hashem will be so perfect that our entire life will revolve totally around Him.

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

At the very end of Parshat Ki Tetzei we encounter one of the more famous commandments, instructing us to remember what Amalek did to us as we left Egypt. While the whole world saw the Jews as untouchables, Amalek decided to kill us by attacking the weak people lagging behind, thus proclaiming to the world that they weren't afraid of G-d by attacking His nation. However, they WERE scared of the Jews themselves, which is why they attacked the weak ones. Strangely, though, the next few Pesukim (verses) tell us to wipe out the memory of Amalek from this world. So which is it? Should we remember what they did to us, or should we wipe out their memory and forget? To top it all, the Torah then tells us AGAIN to not forget!?

To help us understand the issues involved here, Chazal (our Rabbis) have explained, using an analogy, that it's as if Amalek jumped into scolding hot water, and although they were burned, they cooled the water, and everyone around them was a little bit more comfortable with the hot water. As the book "Majesty of Man" elaborates, human nature dictates that the more

we see of something, the less sensitive we are to it. So what's the solution?

Well, the Torah tells us to remember, erase, and yet remember: Remember the elements in this world that would pick on the weak and defy G-d and authority, but only so that you could erase them, thereby erasing their influence. The final step is to never forget what happens when we surround ourselves with negative influences. As human nature dictates, and as the history books (following this battle) record, we are influenced by our society, neighborhood, and by our friends. Just as we must be careful not to let ourselves be affected by anything negative, we must also remember that we can have a positive or negative effect on those around us. May we have the strength to control ourselves and inspire others!

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg,
Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

"If a man has a rebellious son who does not listen to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother..." [Devarim 21:18]. What does the unique term "sorer u'moreh" mean. Exactly what does the phrase "the voice of his father and the voice of his mother" mean?

In the Talmud we are told about the process of the creation of a new child: "There are three partners in the creation of a new person: The Holy One, Blessed be He, the father, and the mother. The father provides the white material from which the bones and the brain in the head are formed. The mother provides the red material from which skin and flesh are made, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, supplies the spirit and the soul." [Nida 31a]. This can be taken in a straightforward way to imply that the Almighty provides the soul, while the parents build up the "garment" for the soul: The mother is the source of the material element, the body, while the father is the source of the spiritual side, related to the Torah.

However, the task of the parents is not really limited only to the physical body. "Listen, my son, to the morals of your father, and do not abandon the Torah of your mother" [Mishlei 1:8]. It is the responsibility of the father to teach the child Torah, here described as "the morals of your father." The mother teaches proper behavior, which is called "the Torah of the mother." Thus, the "sorer" is a person who rebels against the morals of the father (similar to the word "mussar"). And "moreh" is a person who does not listen to the "Torah" of the mother-that is, to her teachings. In summary, a Ben Sorer U'Moreh follows neither the formal Torah nor proper codes of human behavior.

The above model is based on a division of labor between the father and the mother. The father teaches the Torah and the mitzvot. The mother, on the other hand, teaches proper behavior, and all of this is included in the physical elements provided by the mother. This then implies that the role of the mother was relevant before the onset of time, since as we know "derech Eretz"-proper natural behavior-preceded the Torah. Rabbi Chaim Vital wrote that the Torah did not give direct commands about behavioral traits since they are the human basis for the Torah, and it is impossible to build up the level of the Torah without first having a basis of natural morality. The sages see a hint of this in the Torah in the verse, "This is what you should say to the House of Yaacov"-referring to the women-"and tell the children of Yisrael"-referring to the men [Shemot 19:3]. "Thus, the women who are righteous are the first ones to provide material merits, so that the child will then be ready to achieve the intellect of the Torah" [Maharal].

With respect to the rebellious son, we have been taught, "If his mother and father are not equal in their voices, in their appearance, and in their height, the child is not declared a 'sorer u'moreh.'" [Sanhedrin 71a]. When the parents are not coordinated in matters of education and each one speaks in a different voice, it is no surprise that their son is a rebel. When the parents do not live in peace and if they do not show respect for each other, the children will feel a negative influence. Such a son is therefore not punished.

In addition, when the mother and father are impatient with their own parents, we should not be surprised to see that the children treat their mother and father the same way. A story is told about a father who had no patience to sit with his own father to eat. He gave his father a wooden bowl so that it would never be able to break, and he made him sit in the corner of the room. One day the father saw his young son carving something out of a piece of wood, and he asked the boy what he was doing. The answer was, "I am making a bowl for when you grow old..."