

INYANEI PURIM

תשפ"ד

This week we will talk about Amoleik and next week we will discuss Purim.

There is a mitzvah in the Torah to always remember what Amoleik did to us and wipe them off the face of the Earth. When Shmuel Hanovi instructed Shaul what the will of Hashem was, he was exceedingly clear: He is to slaughter men, women and children.

Of course, all this is illegal according to international law. But, on the other hand, no war has even been won by adhering to international law. The only army that is routinely criticized for failing to keep international law is the Israeli Army. All other armies in modern times like Russia and Ukraine get a passing rebuke and then it's quickly forgotten. We will discuss WWII shortly.

Chazal tell us that the night before Shaul went to battle with Amoleik, he challenged Hashem's morality for commanding him to kill the women and children. The next day Shaul does manage to kill everyone, but leaves the king, Agog, and the sheep and cattle alive. He had sympathy for a king who lost everything he had. People are naïve when they are confronting evil. They feel the evil can be redeemed somehow. The United States however didn't have any ambivalence towards Nazi Germany or Imperial Japan. They recognized very well that there is no way to make peace with these evil regimes and they had to be utterly destroyed. The same is true with the Israeli government. There is the clear recognition that Hamas must be completely destroyed if there is to be any security for Israeli citizens.

But Amoleik's evil goes much deeper than any of these modern examples of evil. There are two dinim when it comes to Amoleik. Rav Chaim asked the question: After Sancherev came and mixed up all the ancient peoples, the halacha recognizes that we cannot identify who is an Ammoni or Moavi or Edomi or Mitzri today, even though there are many halachos that depend on these national identities. But the mitzvah to wipe out Amoleik has never been rendered inoperative. The Torah testifies that there will be a battle with Amoleik in every generation. Why? How can we identify an Amoleiki after Sancherev mixed up all the ancient nations?

The answer is that the posuk in Tehillim says Amoleik can be identified as the nation who makes it their national philosophy to eliminate Klal Yisroel from history. So Rav Chaim said there are two definitions of Amoleik: The ancient people which we can no longer identify, and any nation who makes the destruction of Klal Yisroel part of their national philosophy.

The reason why Amoleik must be destroyed is because they are a nation that feels threatened by Klal Yisroel's very existence and they cannot tolerate what Klal Yisroel represents. Klal Yisroel went through the ten makkos and kriyas Yam Suf. Through Klal Yisroel, Hashem showed the entire world that there is hashgocho protis, and there is reward and punishment for good and evil. It was a radically different approach to the world and Amoleik could not tolerate it. Jews represent the idea of a conscience and Amoleik has to eliminate that idea completely by killing every Jew. In every generation there are people who adopt this philosophy of Amoleik. Any nation that is built on evil, cannot tolerate the existence of any Jew. Hamas and their followers support this ideology. The Torah tells us that this evil will emerge in every generation, and our job is to eliminate it entirely.

King Shaul didn't understand this. He thought it would be sufficient to just kill off the men.

We read a very interesting thing in the piyyut recited after the Megillah reading:

הָמֹן הוֹדִיעַ אֵיבַת אֲבוֹתָיו וְעוֹרָר שָׁנְאָת אַחִים לְבָנִים: וְלֹא זָכַר רַחֲמֵי נְשָׂאוֹ, כִּי כְחֻמְלָתוֹ עַל אֶגֶג נוֹלַד אוֹיֵב:

Homon didn't remember the mercy of Shaul who allowed Agog to live an extra day and sired a child. Chazal explain that the night of his captivity, Agog impregnated a woman and his descendant was Homon.

Somehow, after almost every member of Amoleik was killed by Shaul, their philosophy survived and Homon eventually acted upon it. Evil becomes a part of a culture and people are fascinated by it and adopt it.

Homon noticed that Mordechai refused to bow down to him. He wasn't satisfied with just killing Mordechai. Why? Because he realized that Mordechai is the model of what every Jew is supposed to be. He represents a people who have a conscience and a strong sense of right and wrong, and Homon's whole approach to the world is being contradicted. So all the Jews have to be destroyed.

It is interesting that we find three groups of people that are subject to a mitzvah of complete annihilation: Amoleik, the seven Canaanite nations, and the Ir HaNidachas must also be destroyed. Why? What is the common denominator? Each one is a group of people that have dedicated themselves to a philosophy of evil. The members of an Ir HaNidachas have declared that as a society, they are going to ignore a core element of the Torah. They decide to worship avodo zoro as an official part of their society. Once evil becomes embedded in the culture, the society must be eliminated.

It may sound cruel, but in reality, it isn't. When Shaul was arguing with Hashem about wiping out all Amoleikim, a bas kol came out and said "don't be so overly righteous." Later on in his life when he wiped out the kohanim of the city of Nov, the bas kol came out and said: "don't be overly wicked." Chazal learn from Shaul that whoever has mercy on cruel people will eventually become cruel to merciful people.

Shaul went into battle against Amoleik with tremendous misgivings. Shmuel tells Shaul that nothing can remain from this nation – not even the animals. This is similar to how Hashem wiped out the world of the dor haMabbul. Chazal tell us that even a plow that was used in their time was disintegrated by the intense waters of the Mabbul. Nothing from their civilization survived the Mabbul. Why? Because we don't want artifacts being preserved to remind people about this evil civilization – it will continue to fascinate people and capture their imagination. The dor haMabbul will live on – just like Hitler and the Nazis live on through routine auctions selling Nazi memorabilia. Hitler still lives on in people's minds till this day because we have so many tangible reminders of his life to grab on to.

Shaul lets Agog live one extra night and he manages to let Amoleik survive to threaten Klal Yisroel again through Homon.

Shaul also spared much of the sheep and cattle of Amoleik. Shmuel confronts Shaul the next day about not obeying his command, and Shaul tries to justify it by saying he wants to use them for korbanos. Shmuel responds with the following sharp rebuke:

(טז) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל שָׂאוּל הֲרָף וַאֲגִידָה לְךָ אֶת אֲשֶׁר דָּבָר ד' אֱלִי הִלִּילָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ דָּבָר: (יז) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל הֲלוֹא אִם קָטַן אֶתָּה בְּעֵינַיךָ רֹאשׁ שְׂבָטִי

ישראל אתה וימשחקך ד' לְחַלֵּךְ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל: (יח) וַיִּשְׁלַחךָ ד' בְּדָרֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר לְךָ וְהִתְרַמְּתָה אֶת הַחֲטָאִים אֶת עֲמֻלְךָ וְנִלְחַמְתָּ בּוֹ עַד כְּלוּתָם אֹתָם: (יט) וְלָמָּה לֹא שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹל ד' וַתַּעַט אֶל הַשָּׁלָל וַתַּעַשׂ הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי ד':

Shaul was very humble. He became intimidated by Agog and by his own people who wanted to keep the spoils of war. But Shmuel says, even though you are small in your own eyes, you cannot maintain any sense of inferiority when you are the leader of the Jewish people! When you confront powerful people and nations, remember who you are. This applies to every Jew at every time in history. How can you feel inferior to anyone if you are representing Hashem, the King of the Universe?

I remember reading about Golda Meir – the Prime Minister of Israel 50 years ago, who felt small when meeting the Pope in Rome. She had no right to feel inferior representing the Jewish People and confronting the head of an evil avodo zoro religion.

Shmuel reminded Shaul that Amoleik is evil and this is why they have to be eliminated.

(כב) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל הִנֵּה הָיָה שְׁמֵעַ בְּקוֹל ד' הִנֵּה שָׁמַע מְזַבַּח טוֹב לְהִקְשִׁיב מִחֻלָּב אֵילִים: (כג) כִּי חֲטֵאתָ קֶסֶם קָרִי וְאִנִּי וַתִּרְפִּים הַפָּצֵר יַעַן מֵאַסַּת אֶת דְּבַר ד' וַיִּמְאַסְךָ מִסָּלְךָ:

Hashem doesn't need your korbonos. Hashem wants your obedience more than any amount of korbonos you can offer to Him. The purpose of all mitzvos is to listen to Hashem. Don't do anything extra for Hashem which is against the will of Hashem.

Shmuel says Shaul's rebellion against the dvar Hashem is something similar to avodo zoro. Avodo zoro is a problem of recognizing and dealing with powers other than Hashem. When you sit in judgment of Hashem's commands it means you have some other value system by which you judge Hashem, and this is a form of avodo zoro. Hashem defines what is just and what is moral. We have no external way of evaluating the will of Hashem in moral terms.

Then Shmuel goes to Agog and tells him he is evil and this is why he will be killed.

People are naïve about evil. The enemies of Klal Yisroel are the enemies of Hashem. Our enemies cannot tolerate the existence of a nation that represents the ideals of the one true G-d. They can be very powerful nations, but they must be confronted as evil without feeling intimidated. They have to be eliminated.

Why does evil arise in every generation? Because we represent an idea that evil cannot tolerate. All talmidei chachomim understood anti-Semitism in one consistent manner. When we try to assimilate and find favor with the nations, they push back and reject us. The more we maintain our identity and remain separate from them, the more we command their respect and admiration.

We are living through a very dangerous period of history right now. We have been living on borrowed time. We have enjoyed a very successful, fantastic existence post WWII in the Western world. We have risen to the highest levels of power and prestige in all areas of Western society. We have been welcomed and we assimilated for a long time. But now there is a reckoning that has been decades in the making. Now there are open calls to kill the Jews. This cycle repeats itself in every generation.

This cycle will end when the war against Amoleik is finally won with the coming of Moshiach and the elimination of all evil in the world. When does that happen? When people reach an understanding that Hashem runs the world and the Torah is emes.

One extra clarification: My recent comments about the necessity for us to increase our learning during an active war have been misunderstood. Every army has different divisions. Certain units are focused on intelligence – safely in a Tel-Aviv bunker somewhere. Others are involved in other areas of conducting a war behind the frontlines, who are in much less danger than those fighting on the front lines. In our understanding of war, there are those battling on the front lines, those flying the planes dropping bombs in relative safety, those in the interior doing various logistic responsibilities, and then there are those learning Torah. They are all involved in fundamental parts of the war effort and all are equally valuable and vital.

And there are two types of wars. One is to gain territory or dominance over surrounding nations – it is for power or control. Others are ideological – to wipe out a people that pose an existential threat. These are two very different types of wars.

We are facing an enemy that cannot tolerate there being a world with Jews in it. The cause of these wars only comes from the desire for Klal Yisroel to assimilate into the rest of the world. The best remedy for the underlying cause of war is to turn to the Torah and strengthen our separate identity as the nation of Hashem.