



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM
KI SEITZE / כי תצה
WE DON'T GIVE IN TO SOCIAL PRESSURE

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SERMON TITLE:

We Don't Give in to Social Pressure



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"Remember what Amalek did to you on your way out of Egypt." This is one of the six things a Jew is obligated to remember every day. They include remembering the going out of Egypt, the giving of the Torah, the story of Miriam, and so on, including remembering what Amalek did. All of them have basic reasons why we need to remember them. We need to remember Shabbos in order to keep it; we need to remember going out of Egypt in order to remember the miracles and wonders the G-d performed for us; the story of Miriam reminds us not to speak Lashon Hara, etc.

What, however, is the reason we need to remember every day what Amalek did to us? The Torah tells us to erase Amalek from the earth, but nowadays we don't know who is descended from Amalek, something that has not been known for 2,500 years, already. If so, what exactly is this mitzvah? What are we supposed to do?

When we read in this week's Torah portion about Amalek, we see something very interesting that the Torah points out. The Torah says of Amalek that they "did not fear G-d". What does this mean? How are they different from any other nation?



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The story with Amalek happened immediately after the Jews left Egypt, after the 10 plagues, the splitting of the sea, etc. The entire world trembled from these awesome and obvious miracles. Everyone saw the great and long hand of G-d punishing the Egyptians for what they did to the Jews. Therefore everyone was afraid to touch the Jews for starting up with them was sure to get them punished by G-d. This was the kind of fear like people fear hurricanes or tsunamis. This was literally a fear of God's punishment.

The only ones who were not afraid was Amalek, who came and fought the Jews. They did not even have the basic fear of punishment.

In the Torah there is an even higher level than fear, what is called in Chassidus "awe of G-d." A Jew aspires to something higher. He does the right thing not out of fear of punishment, rather, from something higher, an awe of the supremacy. This is learned from Yosef.

It is told about Yosef, before he revealed himself to his brothers, when they still thought he was an Egyptian ruler out to get them, he said "I fear G-d." He was reassuring them that they had nothing to fear from him. What kind of fear of G-d was he talking about there?

Yosef ruled over all of Egypt and could have done whatever he desired. Yosef held back from harassing his brothers not because he feared punishment. His intentions in saying that he feared G-d was that despite his power he would do what



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was right because he knew there was a G-d who watches and sees into our hearts. There is a G-d and that is why we need to do what is right.

Where do we see that Yosef feared G-d? Everyone is familiar with the story of Potiphar's wife who tried to tempt and seduce Yosef, and at the last second Yosef saw before him his father's image and prevailed. He didn't refuse because he feared punishment; the embarrassment stopped him. He saw his father, who represented G-d in his eyes, and this caused him great shame and gave him the strength and willpower to pass this test.

This is the difference between the fear of a hurricane and the fear of the Day of Judgment. A hurricane brings on a physical fear. People are afraid of physical damage. The fear Jews feel on Judgment Day is a higher fear, it is the shame that fills the heart of every Jew when he thinks of standing before G-d. This is a higher fear, a spiritual fear, an awe of the Supremacy.

The Torah's intentions in commanding us to remember Amalek is that we should do the exact opposite of that. Amalek did not fear G-d and so it is incumbent upon us to improve our Fear of Heaven, doing things not out fear of punishment but out of acknowledgment of G-d's greatness.

In general, fear of heaven is not common. When you ask someone if he fears heaven the answer will no doubt be "Of course! Why else do I not steal? Why else do I not kill? It is because G-d commanded it so." The truth is that the reason people behave properly is because of social pressure. The history of humans has proven



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that when people are in the company of wild, animal-like people, they begin to act like them.

A few years ago, a "Brinks" truck overturned, spilling large amounts of money and people ran to gather some of it. These were people who had never contemplated stealing a day in their lives but when people around them ran to collect money, they forgot everything and joined in. This shows to what extent the company and environment influence people.

The same is true regarding Judaism. When a religious Jew goes to synagogue every day, this doesn't necessarily show their fear of heaven. The main reason they go is social pressure; if he doesn't go, everyone will be asking why.

Here, in our shul, we don't have to worry about that. No one is pressuring you to go to synagogue; nobody will ask why you didn't show up. In fact, we have the opposite. People ask why you do go.

The one who has the pressure is the Rabbi, he has no choice; it's his job. The rest of the people attending are people with true fear of heaven. It is therefore a great honor for me to pray with people who have such true awe of heaven.