

Parshat Zachor
We Are Our Own Worst Enemy
Rabba Sara Hurwitz - President and Co-Founder

This Shabbat is parshat zachor, when we read those poignant and somewhat troubling verses:

זָכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לָךְ עַמְלֵק בַּדֶּרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם:

Remember what Amalek did to you on the way when you came out of Egypt

אֲשֶׁר קָרַךְ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וַיִּזְנַב בְּךָ כָּל-הַנְּחָשָׁלִים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַתָּה עֵיפָ וְיָגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹהִים:

how he came upon you on the way and attacked your rear, all that were following feebly behind you, when you were weary and faint, and he did not fear God.

And it ends:

תִּמְחָה אֶת-זְכוֹר עַמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח: (פ)

you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!

There is much to say about the ethical and historical meaning of these verses. But today, I want to offer and expand on the metaphorical interpretation of the Alshich Hakodesh, a Biblical commentator living in the 16th century.

According to the Alshich, Amalek can be read as a metaphor, not as an actual physical enemy, but as our internal yetzer har'ah, or evil inclination. The first person named Amalek in the Torah was Esav's grandson, born to Esav's son Eliphaz. Says the Alshich, Esav is the spiritual representative of our inner evil inclinations. With this in mind then, it is Amalek - our internal turmoil, that attacks us b'derech when we are on the way, unsettled and unmoored. Amalek disrupts our journey towards God, Torah, and mitzvot. The next pasuk repeats that we are attacked on the way. Amalek attacks בַּדֶּרֶךְ - from the root mikreh- meaning randomly, with no clear purpose. It is chaos, lack of clarity that leaves us feeling embattled.

And Amalek attacks the Jewish people who are עֵיפָ וְיָגַע - when we are "tired and worn out", When we are at our spiritual low point. When we feel far from what is supposed to be home, and our strength is most depleted, we lose the resolve to be the person we know we can be.

And so, it is no surprise, that from this state of despair, we inevitably invite "amalek" we invite chaos and discord into our lives. And, it is not until we can rid ourselves of this internal angst, of the ugliness within that we can eradicate amalek, And so, says the Torah-

וְהָיָה בְּרַחֲמֵי יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְךָ מִכָּל-אֲיֵכָיִךְ מִסָּבִיב

When you will have rest from your enemy- from your inner turmoil, from your evil inclination, then, you will be able to blot out amalek, and it will become a mere memory.

Friends, I am tired and weary and depleted. We all thought 2021 would be better- but it feels like we are being tested over and over again. Vaccine shortages. Snowstorms. Cold weather. Power outages. And, although I am physically home, I feel far from what I thought home could be. In this way, I am ba'derch, journeying haphazardly towards an unknown. I am filled with anxiety, and it is in this state that I am most likely to be my worst self. To invite in thoughts and ideas that are not clear and pure and productive. More than ever, I need the ethic of Purim. Where marbim b'simcha, joy can be increased, and the turmoil within can be eradicated, and replaced with the certainty that God is guiding me. That humanity is good and kind. And that I can find my way back home.

Although many of us are not physically traveling, perhaps we should recite "Tefilat Haderach- the prayer to God for strength and protection from when we are on the way- al haderech, where we encounter our enemies.

יהי רצון מלפניך " אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו
May it be Your will, Lord, our God and the God of our ancestors, that You lead us toward peace, guide our footsteps toward peace, and make us reach our desired destination for life, gladness, and peace.
ותצילנו מכף כל אויב ואורב ולקטים וחיית רעות בדרך,

May You rescue us from the hand of every foe, ambush along the way, (internal and external) and from all manner of punishments that assemble to come to earth. May You send blessing in our handiwork, and grant us grace, kindness, and mercy in Your eyes and in the eyes of all who see us. May You hear the sound of our humble request because You are God Who hears prayer requests. Blessed are You, Lord, Who hears prayer.

יהי רצון מלפניך " אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו
שתוליכנו לשלום ותצעידנו לשלום ותדריכנו לשלום, ותסמכנו לשלום,
ותגיענו למחוז הפצנו לחיים ולשמחה ולשלום.
ותצילנו מכף כל אויב ואורב ולקטים וחיית רעות בדרך,
ומכל מיני פרעניות המתרגשות לבוא לעולם,
ותתננו לחן ולחסד ולרחמים בעיניך ובעיני כל ראינו,
כי אל שומע תפלה ותחנון את



Rabba Sara Hurwitz, Co-Founder and President of Maharat, the first institution to ordain Orthodox women as clergy, also serves on the Rabbinic staff at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

Rabba Hurwitz completed Drisha's three-year Scholars Circle Program, an advanced intensive program of study for Jewish women training to become scholars, educators and community leaders. After another five years of study under the auspices of Rabbi Avi Weiss, she was ordained by Rabbi Weiss and Rabbi Daniel Sperber in 2009.

In 2013 Rabba Hurwitz was awarded the Hadassah Foundation Bernice S. Tannenbaum prize, and the Myrtle Wreath Award from the Southern New Jersey Region of Hadassah in 2014. In 2016 she was the Trailblazer Award Recipient at UJA Federation of New York. She was named as one of Jewish Week's 36 Under 36, the Forward50 most influential Jewish leaders, and Newsweek's 50 most influential rabbis. In

2017 Rabba Hurwitz was chosen to be a member of the inaugural class of Wexner Foundation Field Fellows.

She and husband, Josh Abraham, are parents to Yonah, Zacharya, Davidi and Natan.