

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted March 1, 2007, by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

BH

DO WE MAKE OUR OWN ENEMIES?

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On Purim, we celebrate the final victory over Amalek, whose memory we are commanded to remember:

Then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Refidim. And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand." So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy, and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side, and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua harried Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heaven. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Adonai Nissi (the Lord is my Banner) for he said, "Because the Lord has sworn by his throne that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation. (Exodus 17:8-16)

Remember what Amalek did to you by the way, when you came out of Egypt. How he met you by the way and smote the hindmost of you, all that were feeble in your rear, when you were faint and weary. And he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies round about, in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess it, that you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heaven. You shall not forget. (Deuteronomy 25:17-19)

But why did Amalek hate us? The sages offer this possibility:

Desiring to become a convert to Judaism, Timna, (see Genesis 36:22) went to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but they did not accept her. So she went and became a concubine to Eliphaz the son of Esau, saying, "I had rather be a servant to this people than a mistress of another nation." From her Amalek was descended who afflicted Israel. Why so? Because they should not have rejected her. (B. Sanhedrin 99b)

Discussion Questions:

1. Are the sages "blaming the victim" here?
2. Is our policy of rebuffing prospective converts on their first try productive or counterproductive? Why do you think so?
3. What victory will you remember this Purim? For which will you pray?