

Weekly Teaching

February 10, 2017

According to the book of Exodus, Amalek is the nation that attacked the weakest among the Israelites as they fled from Egypt.

Moses tells the Jewish people that for all of eternity we should remember, and never to forget, how Amalek attacked the most vulnerable among us.

Moses then seemingly contradicts himself, and commands us that for all of eternity we should erase Amalek's name from our memory.

This apparent paradox is solved by Rabbinic tradition. Within Jewish law there are two categories by which we understand "erase:"

- Destructive Erasure
- Constructive Erasure

The eternal commandment to "erase" Amalek from our memories is not so we will forget. (Destructive Erasure)

Rather, we are to "erase" the evil done by Amalek, and assure that it isn't ever allowed to happen again. (Constructive Erasure)

We are charged, for all generations, to erase the possibility that more evil should arise and target the most vulnerable among us.

This commandment, as pertaining to "Amalek," came to mind with the recent news story about riders on a New York City subway train that observed anti-Semitic graffiti, and fulfilled the mitzvah of "Constructive Erasure."

One rider, Gregory Locke, wrote:

"I got on the subway in Manhattan tonight and found a Swastika on every advertisement and every window...The train was silent as everyone stared at each other, uncomfortable and unsure what to do...One guy got up and said, 'Hand sanitizer gets rid of Sharpie. We need alcohol.' He found some tissues and got to work...I've never seen so many people simultaneously reach into their bags and pockets looking for tissues and Purell. Within about two minutes, all the Nazi symbolism was gone."

The passengers who fulfilled the mitzvah of "Constructive Erasure" can serve as a role model to us all.

Amalek "lives" still today; evil confronts us constantly in speech and actions.

No individual can solve the entire problem, but we are commanded to keep trying to do so.

We begin with careful examination of what needs to be "constructively erased," and then we set ourselves to taking concrete actions.

Let's go about erasing Amalek's power in our world with the weapons of our own sacred love and compassionate actions.

Shabbat Shalom,

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