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THE JEWISH CENTER

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“A HALE AND HEARTY HATE”

An eminent professor of the Hebrew University, who is an observant Jew, has developed a very quaint custom. It is based on the *halakhah* that Purim is observed throughout the world on the 14th day of Adar, but in those towns or cities which were walled since the days of Joshua’s conquest of Canaan, Purim is observed on the 15th day of Adar. Hence, in Israel, while most of the country observes Purim tonight, 14 Adar, Jerusalem will begin its observance Sunday night, a day later, 15 Adar.

Now, our professor manages every year to spend the 14th of Adar in Jerusalem, and then towards evening he takes the trip to Tel Aviv to spend the 15th there. In that manner, he manages to avoid the observance of Purim without violating the Halakhah!

Why does he do this? Not because he is a fun-hating man of dour and cantankerous mien. Rather, on principle he objects to the hatred – against Haman and all anti-Semites – which we express on this festival.

The wielding of the “groggers” and the stamping, underneath all the obvious fun, are expressions of vindictiveness. Thus, this morning we read the *פרשת עמלק*, in which we proclaim anew the commandment to obliterate and erase the memory of Amalek from the world.

If this is so, is the professor right? Does Purim evoke hatred and aggressiveness against our enemies? And if so, doesn’t this open the floodgates to hatred against real people, here and now? And is not hatred unreservedly evil and morally corrupting? And if so, should we not cancel our festivities scheduled for this evening?

No, I have no intention of calling off the reading of the Megillah tonight! On the contrary, our tradition teaches us that even if all the holidays will some day be nullified, Purim will always remain. The Megillah teaches:

וימי הפורים האלה לא יעברו מתוך היהודים וזכרם לא יסוף מזרעם

“These days of Purim will never depart from amongst the Jews and their memory will never cease from their descendants.”

It is not at all true that it is absolutely wrong to hate. I am sorry that I have to disturb the prejudices that we have inherited in our liberal culture, reinforced by the Christian environment. There is a “kosher” kind of hatred, a hale and hearty hatred. Indeed, I am wary of people who cannot or never do not hate at all. I fear that they tend to fall into a far worse trap, into something far more debilitating than hatred, and that is – indifference. It was primarily indifference and not hatred that was the major and most corrupting vice of the Holocaust and from which we suffered.

There are three main points that should be made about our annual and lovely feast of hatred called Purim.

The first is a moral point. There are some ideas, certain movements and individuals, who simply deserve to be hated. Are we morally justified in hating Hitler and Himmler, Bormann¹ and Eichmann, Stalin and Beria,² Ahasuerus and Haman? No, we are not “justified.” We are *compelled!* A truly moral position does not allow us to react in any other way except hatred to such monsters. I am infinitely annoyed by the holier-than-thou attitude of those who act as if merely

¹ Martin Ludwig Bormann (17 June 1900 – 2 May 1945) was a German Nazi Party official and head of the Nazi Party Chancellery, private secretary to Adolf Hitler and a war criminal. After the war, he was convicted and sentenced to death-in-absentia for crimes against humanity. Bormann gained immense power by using his position as Hitler's private secretary to control the flow of information and access to Hitler. He used his position to create an extensive bureaucracy and involve himself as much as possible in the decision making. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Bormann

² Lavrentiy Pavlovich Beria (March 29, 1899 – December 23, 1953) was a Georgian Bolshevik and Soviet politician, Marshal of the Soviet Union and state security administrator, chief of the Soviet security, and chief of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) under Joseph Stalin during the Second World War, and promoted to deputy premier under Stalin in 1941. He officially joined the Politburo in 1946. Beria was the longest-serving and most influential and brutal of Stalin's secret police chiefs, wielding his most substantial influence during and after the war. Following the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939, he was responsible for organizing purges such as the Katyn massacre of 22,000 Polish officers and officials. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lavrentiy_Beria

understanding the sociological and psychological circumstances of the perpetrator of a crime must automatically lead us to desist from judging or criticizing or hating him for his monstrous outrage. I do not care if Hitler was paranoid, or Stalin schizoid, or Ahasuerus retarded, or Haman genetically aggressive. They are all genocides, and they have forfeited their right to our compassion as well as their moral right to continued existence.

The second is a psychological point. Legitimate hatred has a cathartic value. It allows you to express your aggression and your enmity and hostility towards defined objects that are worthy of it, and then to relate to all others in a constructive manner. אֹהֲבֵי ה' שְׂנֵאוּ רָע, “those who love God, hate, hate ye evil,” taught King David. Only if you hate evil can you love God and the good.

It is told of the great scholar of some 300 years ago, Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschutz, the rabbi of Prague; one day he was accosted by the Bishop of Prague who challenged him with the usual Christian canard – is it not true that we Christians believe in the God of Love while you Jews worship the God of Vengeance? Yes, answered Rabbi Eibeschutz, it is quite true. You Christians worship love, so you feel free to hate. Whereas we Jews ascribe all vengeance to the Lord, so our lives can therefore be filled with love and understanding. Psychologically, therefore, it is dangerous to make a fetish of love and a taboo out of hatred, lest in effect we live the reverse kind of life.

Finally, there is a halakhic dimension which is quite remarkable. There is a halakhic *requirement* – to hate! Just as there is a *mitzvah* to love – whether God or neighbor or stranger – so there is a *mitzvah* to hate. For instance, we must hate Amalek. (Certainly, if we are to obliterate their memory, that would include hatred).

Moreover, just as there is a commandment *not* to hate, לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ, “thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart,” so there is a commandment לְשׂוֹא אֶת הַרְשָׁעִים, to hate the evil doers: אֶת מְשַׁנְאֶךָ ה' אֲשַׁנֵּא, “those who hate Thee, O Lord, I shall hate.” The Halakhah requires us to orient ourselves with hatred towards אַפִּיקוֹרְסִים מוֹמְרִים וּמְשׁוּמְדִים, towards heretics, apostates, and those who convert out of Judaism.

Now, that is harsh indeed, And yet, the Halakhah provides immediate correctives and restraints so that the practice is far different from the theory.

Thus, some authorities maintain that the commandment to destroy Amalek is operative only when the Amalekites refuse first to accept the seven commandments of the sons of Noah, the basic foundations of civilized life. Hence, it is not a genocidal commandment, but it means that

we must do battle to those who are so uncivilized as to corrupt and destroy others. That is not, strictly speaking, a commandment to hate. Furthermore, the Talmud tells us that since the days of Sennacherib, we no longer know how to identify many ancient peoples, and hence the commandment to obliterate Amalek is performed by reading that chapter of the Torah, but can never be put into practice!

So, the Halakhah tells us that the commandment to hate the evil-doer is operative only after the sinner has rejected our rebuke. First we must perform the commandment of *הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך*, of reproving him or correcting him or informing him of his errors. Only after we have effectively done so, and the sinner remains a sinner, are we required to hate him. However, the Tanaim have taught that already in their days *תוכחה* or moral preachment had become a lost art. There is no one left who knows how to do it. Hence, while we must always continue to strive to correct others, we must always assume that the failure is not in the sinner but in the preacher.

Thus, the late sage and saint, one of the greatest scholars of our own times, known by the title of his great work, the *חזון איש*, decides that in our times not only is it not required to hate the *רשע*, the evil-doer – but we are halakhically required to *love* him!

והיות ואין אנו יודעים להוכיח הרי זה אצלנו כקודם התוכחה ולכן מצוה לאהוב את הרשעים... ועלינו להחזירם בעבותות האהבה ולהעמידם בעבותות האהבה ולהעמידם בקרן אורה במה שידינו מגעת.

Since we no longer know how to reprove the sinner properly, therefore every sinner must be regarded by us as one who has not yet been reproved. Hence, it is a *mitzvah* to love the evil-doers... we must strive to bring them back to Judaism with the bonds of love, to allow the rays of light to illuminate them to the extent that we are able.

But if, in effect, the Halakhah concludes with a ban on hating – not in principle, but in practice – what of the many positive aspects of hatred which we have discussed?

The answer is that the Jewish tradition has directed our venom and hostility to *sin* rather than the *sinner*. The great Beruriah, the wife of R. Meir, pointed out that David said specifically *יתמו חטאים מן הארץ*, may the *חטאים* (sins) – and not *חוטאים* (sinners) – be wiped off the earth. It is the sin and not the sinner who is the object of our derision and contempt.

Also, we do reserve our actual, living hatred for the unusually hateful individuals who commit historic crimes and whose malice is monstrous and premeditated. Anti-Semites who wish

to destroy all the Jewish people; monsters who seek sadistically to wipe out whole populations – such people remain deserving, on purely moral grounds, of actual contempt and hatred.

And, of course, we are always bidden to release our hatred against the *symbols* of evil. And this is the basic motif of the commandment to read the portion of Amalek, and to observe the festival of Purim.

So, I want to teach my children to hate. I want them to know that there is a moral law which required that those who have placed themselves outside morality deserve not our love but our contempt. I want my children to have available for themselves the psychological relief in hating those who deserve it, so that they can relate to all others constructively and lovingly. I want them to be halakhic Jews, and thus to handle hatred with extreme circumspection and caution and great care, and so in effect they will hate without hurt, and express their innate hostility towards evil by stamping and stomping and greggering Haman.

In conclusion, contrary to our friend the professor of whom we spoke, were I in Israel today, I would spend tonight in Tel Aviv and the day after in Jerusalem – observing Purim twice! If there were no Purim, we would have to invent it.

We must live our lives so that the commandment of hatred, מצות שנאה, becomes the most difficult of all to observe. And by restricting our שנאה to evil and those who personify it and symbolize it by chanting the commandment to obliterate Amalek and by hissing and booing at the mention of Haman's name, we shall learn to act lovingly to all God's creatures. For this is the meaning of the Purim commandment משלוח מנות איש לרעהו ומתנות לאביונים – to express our friendship for all people, and especially gifts and love for the poor and the underprivileged.