

Torah Musings
זְכוֹר-דֵּבַר יִם-Deuteronomy 25:17-19

זכור לשכוח
Remember to Forget

The Amalekites were a nomadic group that staged an unprovoked, rear flank¹ attack on Israel. In Deuteronomy 25 there is an enigma or oxymoron concerning the historical memory of the Amalekites. In verse 17 we are instructed to **remember** what Amalek did to the Israelites.

זְכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בַּדֶּרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם:
Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt

Two verses later we are enjoined to **obliterate** any remembrance of Amalek and commanded- do not **forget**!

תִּמְחָה אֶת-זֵכֶר עַמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח
you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!

What is the command, to **remember** Amalek's deeds or to **forget** them?

Baba Metzia 84a² may offer the answer. Through a chance encounter Shim'on ben Lakish and Yohanan bar Nappaha³ meet. Reish Lakish is an outlaw⁴ and gladiator⁵ but deserts this lifestyle when Rabbi Yohanan recognizes his inner talents and takes him under his tutelage. They become friends, study partners and brothers in law. During a בית מדרש (house of study) discussion on the ritual impurity of objects, a debate arises concerning when the manufacturing of an object is complete.

They disagree, as they sometimes have, but this time the disagreement has a calamitous outcome. R. Yochanan, speaking of Reish Lakish, makes the comment *לסטאה בלסטיותיה ידע* - "a bandit knows his banditry," thus reminding everyone in attendance of Lakish's previous occupation. The discussion between the two deteriorates into a banter of oblique insults that permanently fractures the relationship. Lakish is so troubled by the outcome that he falls ill and dies and later R. Yochanan dies a dejected, despondent man. Why did R. Yochanan remind Lakish of his past illustrious life? Nothing good was or could be gained from it.

I wonder what would have occurred if R. Yochanan had followed the advice of Deut. 25 and **remembered to forget**? Reminders of the past are thrown into our face and relationships fracture because one is constantly reminded of past indiscretions. Disagreements are fertile ground for this type of behavior- "you did this," "you used to be," "you said that," "you lied then," "you kept this secret," and on it goes. For the health of relationships some things should be cast into the abyss of oblivion, forgotten and relegated to ancient history. Every time we are tempted to remind someone of their past deeds, we must **"remember to forget."** When we *remember* the Amalekites and the injury they inflicted, *forget* about it because the memories of the wounds serve no useful or healthy purpose. The ability to *forget* is so significant that Deut 25:19 teaches us to obliterate bad memories and then immediately

reminds us - *do not forget* to do it! The lives of Rabbi Yohanan and Reish Lakish would have been enriched had they followed this principle and so will ours. May we always...

זכור לשכוח

Remember to Forget

שבת שלום מביתנו לביתך
Shabbat Shalom From Our House to Your House

Rabbi Malchah

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Endnotes

¹ The area where the women, sick, elderly and children are located

² The second tractate in Order Netzikin (damages) of the Babylonian Talmud. It discusses interpersonal civil law

³ Shim'on ben Lakish (better known as Reish Lakish) and Yohanan bar Nappaha (Rabbi Yochanan) are second generation Amoraim (Talmudic scholars of the period 200-500 CE).

⁴ Rashi *on Bava Metzia* 84a.

⁵ Gittin 47a --Babylonian Talmud. Part of the Order of Nashim (women). It discusses issues related to halakhic divorce.