

SHABBOS ZOCHOR 1989
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

*before
Purim*

Today is Shabbos Zochor. On this day we remember what Amalek did to the Jewish people when they left Egypt, how they attacked the weak and the helpless and the stragglers. This Shabbos is meant to teach Jews throughout the generations that there is evil in the world. We Jews many times adopt a Polyannish attitude and feel there is not evil in the world. We want things to be good so much that we discount many times warning signs. We fail to believe that people really mean what they say when they say that they want to kill us, when they say they want to harm us and hurt us and exploit us and do away with us. In the 30's there were Jews who said Hitler does not really mean what he says in Mein Kamp. He is just pandering to the masses, but really he would never carry out such a program. They, of course, were wrong. Today we have people who say the same thing about Arafat. They say Arafat does not mean what he says in the Palestinian covenant. He really does not mean to wipe out Israel and cast all the Jews into the sea or, even worse, kill them all. They cite as proof the few words he mumbled at Geneva, but we know that he means what he says. How do we know he means what he says? Because of what he tells his own people. He still tells his own people that he is going to, together with the PLO, destroy Israel and supplant it with a totally Arab state. Why is it that today we believe Gorbachev and the Russians when they say that they want peace, while under Breznev and other leaders we did not believe them? After all, the Russians used to hold periodic peace conferences and spout off their peaceful intentions at the UN and through all the propaganda media and in the west, but we never believed them until now. Why is it that we believe Gorbachev now? The reason we believe Gorbachev now is that now he is telling his people exactly the same thing he is telling us. Under Breznev and Kruschev they would say one thing at the UN but to their own people they would say something else. The reason we believe Gorbachev

now is because he is saying the same thing to his people. He is demonstrating by his words and his actions towards his own people that he really believes that it is time to have peace in the world. Arafat up to now has not done so. He speaks one way to the west and another way to his people. Until he is willing to speak to his own people and tell them that Israel is here to stay, that we have to live with Israel, that if we do get a state on the west bank that is all we are going to get, that we do not want any more, that we are giving up the right of return because one of the primary platforms of the PLO is that all those Arabs who live in Tel Aviv and Haifa and Beer Sheba and all the other Jewish settlements can return to those places even after they receive a state which, of course, means the demise of Israel. Until they renounce the right to return, until they change their covenant, I do not believe we can trust them. This, of course, may be an unpopular stand. Everybody is running and rushing to Arafat's side including many Jews, who say he really does not mean what he says to his own people. He is only mollifying them. You will see when he gets into power he will adapt and follow a moderate course. This, of course, is the same thing they said about Hitler and they were wrong about Hitler, and they are wrong about Arafat today.

In the Haftorah that we read today we learn about the terrible cost that comes to people who just want to court popularity. We learn about Shaul, who was chosen to be king of Israel, but who had a fatal flaw. The fatal flaw was he could not stand up to people. He could not stand to be unpopular. There are two instances recorded in the Bible which caused Saul to lose his kingdom. One of them concerned the time when Samuel had him gather all the tribes and told Saul to wait for him before he was officially crowned, etc. but the people pressed Saul and said why wait for Samuel, and Saul gave in to the people. In this particular Torah portion we learn how Saul gives

in to the people. He does not give in to the people because the people are morally right or morally justified. He gives in to them just so he can retain his popularity. He was commanded by G-d to wipe out the Amalekites. There is a moral problem involved here, but that was not Saul's problem. Saul went and he did wipe out the Amalekites, though the rabbis say not the children. He wiped out the Amalekites except he saved the ring leader, the one who was really responsible for everything, and he also saved the best cattle. Why did he do this? Because he was afraid of the people. The people wanted it and clamored for it, and, therefore, he did it. When Samuel came and saw this he was furious, and G-d appeared before Samuel and said He was taking away Saul's kingdom because of this, because a leader must be able to do unpopular things and stand up against the people. In Jewish tradition we know that a leader also has to stand up against G-d. If the conditions are too harsh, even if the Jewish law is too harsh, a leader should stand up for his people against G-d, but that is not just because the people want something. It is because the people need something. Abraham stood up against G-d to defend the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Moshe stood up against G-d to defend the Jewish people from punishment. If Saul would have stood up to G-d and said it was not right what He was doing to the Amalekites, or maybe You are asking the Jewish people to do too much. That would be within Jewish tradition, but he did not do that. He did not stand up against G-d. He was just afraid to stand against the people. The people did not need the cattle. The people did not need a G-d to stand as a symbol of their superiority, but he did not carry out His commands because it would make him unpopular, and, therefore, his kingdom was wrested from him. When Samuel sees him he says to him, "Are you so small in your own eyes, the head of the tribes of Israel, that you do not follow G-d's commands? Why didn't you listen to the voice of G-d, and you flew at the spoil and did evil in the eyes of G-d." Saul answered him, "The people took the booty, the sheep

and the cattle." When Samuel told him that G-d has rejected him as being king for this, what does Saul say? He still does not get the point. He says, "I have sinned because I have violated the word of G-d and your word because I was afraid of the people and I listened to their voice." He was afraid to be unpopular. Then when Samuel told him that he will not even go out with him to greet the people because he despised the word of G-d, and Samuel turned to leave Saul grabbed ahold of his garment and even tore it. And Samuel said to him, "Just as you have torn my garment you have torn your kingdom from you." He also did not understand this. Saul said then, "I have sinned. Now honor me before the elders of my people, before Israel. Return with me in front of them." In other words, he was still only concerned with his popularity among the people. He did not get the point that his kingdom was lost because he was only concerned with popularity.

Unfortunately, today there are many leaders who act the same way. In the United States today people are afraid to raise taxes. Why? We are 75% richer than we were in 1968. We have a 5 trillion dollar economy. We cannot have national health insurance but all the other countries of the world can have it. We cannot take care of the homeless or the poor and make sure we lower infant mortality. Of course we can. The leaders are afraid to stand up to the people. The occurs throughout the world. In the United States today instead of taxing we borrow the money, which means that we have to pay it back, which means that the interest is a percentage of our national budget which is already 25%. We are following the same mistakes Israel made. It looks like the United States is following exactly the same mistakes. First in Israel they had a situation where young people could not buy homes, and now except for Houston young people cannot afford homes in the United States. Then they had a banking crisis in Israel. Now we have a banking crisis here. Now in Israel 40% of their budget is paying back loans that they borrowed

before. Only 22% is defense which leaves only 38% to run the country. The United States is following the same pattern. Pretty soon we will have 40% of our budget to pay back loans, too. It is a terrible situation, but people are afraid to do anything because they will not be popular.

The same thing is true in many other areas of life. Even in our shul there are things that we should be doing that we are not doing because people want to be popular. It is okay to stand up against G-d for the people if the people not only want something but they need it. People many times want things they should not have, and a leader should be able to stand up against the people and tell them the things that they have to do even if they do not want to do it. Unless you have good leadership your kingdom will be rent away from you. This applies throughout all the spectrum of issues. Jews who want to pander to the good will and public opinion of others are harming Israel. They want to be popular. They do not want to do the right thing. We know Israel cannot now surrender to the PLO what it wants. It would be the death knell of Israel. Israel cannot be stampeded into doing these things. When Jews have pandered trying to seek the popularity of others, we have always been hurt.

That is, too, the story of Purim. The Jewish people were willing to go attend banquets where Achaverish displayed the utensils of the Temple and mocked them and degraded them, and we laughed, too, just like many times Jews today laugh at degrading comments of Jewish comedians, etc. in order to be popular. It is not the right thing to do. If we want Israel to survive, if we want the Jewish people to survive, many times we have to do things that are not popular otherwise our fate will be the same as Saul's.

I am reminded of the story of the woman who went into a butcher and said, "I would like 12 lamb chops. Please make them lean." The butcher said,

"Of course, which way do you want them to lean? Right or left?" It is not our business to try to please the right or the left. It is not our business to be popular with certain groups or even with the total group. It is our business to do what is right and display leadership. Yes, we can stand against G-d, even stand against G-d on certain laws and certain principles, etc. as long as it is the things people need and not just what the people want. To give into people just because they want certain things is destructive. I just returned from a CLAL conference in which they discussed the sensitive issue of who is a Jew, and, of course, this is a problem which is not going to be solved because the people want to have converts without any standards whatsoever. They want their children or grandchildren or sons or daughters to be Jews without setting any kind of standards. It is a difficult situation and it is one which will be with us for a long time. You just cannot have things you want. If you just pander to the people you will end up by destroying them and by destroying yourself. Let us all hope that we will all realize this so that the Jewish people will endure and the State of Israel will endure and so that the Mashiach will come. Amen.