



Balancing Remembering with Forgetting Torah Reflections on *Parashat Ki Tetze*

Deuteronomy 21:10 – 25:19

As the summer ends, and the High Holy Days beckon, we begin the annual process of trying to prepare ourselves spiritually for those approaching awesome days. We are helped along in that process as we read the closing two paragraphs of this *sedra*. The next-to-the last section explains that we are to have honest weights and measures. “You shall not have in your pouch alternate weights, larger and smaller. You shall not have in your house alternate measures, a larger and a smaller . . . but rather honest weights and measures” (Deut. 25:13-15). The Torah is speaking of a literal balance, yet the image brings to our mind that in this period we are particularly mindful of our own deeds weighed up in the balance of life. Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we seek to add to the store of our good deeds, that we will be accounted for goodness in the year ahead.

Then, the final paragraph of the *sedra* (Deut. 25:17-19) begins with the word “remember” (*zakhor!*) and closes with the admonition, “do not forget” (*lo tishkah!*). In its specific context it refers to the evil acts of the tribe of Amalek, but well we know that there are many matters to remember, and not to forget.

Yet there is the conundrum: are we always to remember; are we never to forget? Where is the balance in that? To be sure, there are some memories that we need to make part of our lives. The Spanish political philosopher George Santayana’s dictum: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it . . .” is a powerful reminder that there are things we need *not* to forget, much less to forgive.

Still, memory and remembering is not always the best route. Occasionally there are some matters, past hurts or past angers, which we would be wise to relinquish. All of us carry burdens of emotional baggage from the past. A family member’s rudeness or selfish deeds continues to serve as a wedge between us. A former co-worker or business partner’s self-serving acts hurt us deeply. Often, we find ourselves bearing these long-remembered burdens, and weighted down, we suffer, with no resolution possible. The other persons either have moved on in their lives, or have long forgotten what they did.

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As we learn in the Bible, “A season is set for everything . . . A time for keeping and a time for discarding . . . a time for silence and a time for speaking.” Further we read, “Don't pay attention to everything that is said” (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 6-7; 7:21).

There may be times when our remembering/not-forgetting has scant value, and actually serves to drag us down emotionally. On occasion, even without forgiving, we need to move on to forgetting.

Holy one who knows our hidden thoughts, help us to discern and achieve that careful balance: to know when it is time to really remember, and when it is time to let go, and to forget. Guide and sustain us as we move to and through the High Holy Days so that we may achieve better inner balances and live healthier lives. Amen.

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