



MACHSHAVOT

Parashat Terumah

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What are we 'remembering' on Shabbat Zachor?

Rabbi Andrew Shaw
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This Shabbat is a big deal.

It's *Parshat Zachor* and according to many opinions, this is the one time of the year for a piece of *laining* when everyone has to be in shul.

Obviously, at the moment it's difficult with Covid but even so, extra readings of *zachor* are being put on in a safe and legal way in many shuls. The reason is because both men and women have to hear *Parshat Zachor* - it's a *chiyuv d'orayta* – to remember Amalek.

You would think therefore, that if it is something so important that everyone has to hear, then it is going to be so inspiring and so uplifting and contain the core of what is to be a Jew.

However, when you read it you think to yourself, really?

סִי,רְצִימָם מִסִּכְתָּא צִיבִי,רְרָד־בְּקִלְמֵעַ,רְלֵה שְׁעֵרֵי שְׂאֵתֵי אֶרֶץ
פְּלִיעַ הַיָּתֵא וְרִיחָא מִלֵּי שְׁחִינָה לִכְרִיב בְּנִזְיוֹ,רְרָד־בְּרִיחֵי קֶרֶן שָׂא

Remember what Amalek did to you when you came out of Egypt. and they happened upon you on the way and they attacked all the weaklings at the rear when you were faint and exhausted
(Devarim 25:17)

It was a horrific attack by Amalek - that's the essence of the reading. It finishes by telling us that once we possess the land of Israel we have to wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens.

That's it?

That's what we've got to bring everyone to Shul for? This is one of the most important *leinings* of the year, remembering a horrible event?

Of course it is true that we were saved but it doesn't say in the *leining* 'remember you were saved, remember that Hashem looked after you.' It says remember what Amalek did to you. That's the *ikkar*, the point of the remembrance.

We are not remembering that Moshe held up his hands as we all focused on *Shamayim* when we were saved. *Parshat Zachor* doesn't talk about that, it just says remember what Amalek did to you on the way, specifically how they came, attacked you on the way out of Egypt, attacked the women and the children. It's very strange. It doesn't seem to be something that should be the focus of the most important *leining* of the year.

Of course, one opinion is that the idea is to actually remember the evil, and we have to hate it, we have to inspire in ourselves hatred for the evil. In today's pc world that's not a lovely idea, but it is actually a very powerful idea. That as Jews we are expected to hate evil, to love good but also to hate evil and to recognize Amalek as the epitome of evil.

However, I want to explore another idea on this *zachor* from Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin. I think it's a beautiful idea which can help us understand why actually this is really one of the most fundamental things to remember in Judaism.

First, we have to understand why did Amalek attack? Now you could say, why does anyone want to attack the Jewish people? However, this was a specific attack.

We have just come out of Egypt, we've just defeated the major global power of the day, we've just been taken across the Red sea, everyone was speaking about us. This incredible Jewish nation protected by Hashem, they are invincible.

Amalek says, not so fast and they come in a despicable way, attacking the women and children. Their job was, says Rashi, to be like the person that knows they are going to lose but has to put the first blow in. Like the person getting into a very hot bath, they may scold themselves but they make the temperature cooler for everybody else. Amalek had to cast doubt on our invincibility.

Amalek had an agenda. What was their agenda? It was an agenda to say we disagree fundamentally with your ideology.

Let's understand this. In the ancient world there used to be just one ideology - many gods, idols, demons, whatever it was. *Avraham Avinu* and the Jewish people then had the second ideology - one God, monotheism. Amalek created a third one, there are no gods, there's no meaning, what you see is what you get, everything in life is just a coincidence, there's no higher power, no higher meaning and they felt there was a real need to strike a blow against our ideology as soon as we were forming as a nation.

Think about it, three thousand years later who's won? What ideology is really the superior ideology today? You may say monotheism look at it, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, it's phenomenal. However, in the western world I would say that the ideas of Amalek are really in the ascendancy.

What are people's ideologies in the world? What are many Jewish people's ideologies in this world? They're not God-fearing, there is no ultimate meaning, things happen by coincidence. What matters in life is the here and now. Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. That's the ideology, that's generally the way of the Western world. It's very sad but it's true.

We come to Purim this week and the Purim story comes at a time when the Jewish people are living in Shushan, and depending which opinion you understand, either it was just before they go back to rebuild the second temple or it's just after that, but it's around the time when the exile from Bavel is ending and the return under Persia is beginning. We returned after 70 years to rebuild the second temple.

Today, 2500 years later, we have returned to Israel after two thousand years, not under Persian rule but under our rule, a sovereign Jewish state - miracle.

Our survival through Haman's and his descendants for generations to come, we've survived, we've thrived – miracle.

The Jewish people, the State of Israel, miracle after miracle after miracle and yet for many people, Jewish or non-jewish, they are just blind. They don't see it, they don't understand it. Don't connect the dots, don't see the *yad Hashem*.

So, what is so crucial about *Parshat Zachor*? Rav Tzadok says an amazing thing, look at the context, don't just look at *parshat Amalek*, understand what led to *Amalek* coming. That's not in *Parshat Ki Teitzei*, that's in *Parshat Beshalach*, where the story happens, Ki Teitzei just reports that story, Beshalach is when it says:

וַיִּכָּרְדּוּ בְּיַד אֲרָר, שִׁימָעוּ עֲסָחִיל יִינוּקָלְמָע אֲבִינוּ

And Amalek came and they fought the Jewish people in Refidim. (Shemot 17:8)

However just before that, the paragraph leading into that, what had happened to the Jewish people? It was the story of the complaining for water at *Massah* and *Merivah*.

בִּירְלָע הַבִּירָמִוּהָ סִמָּה מִן שֶׁאֲרָק יִינוּ
וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה שֶׁיְהִי רָמָל לְהִתְאַמֵּס נִלְעָל אֲרָק שֶׁיִּינָב

He named the place Massah [testing] and Merivah [quarreling] because of the quarrel of the children of Israel and because of their testing the Lord, saying, Is the Lord in our midst or not? (Shemot 17:7)

There was doubt - doubting themselves, doubting Hashem, that gave Amalek a door opening.

Amalek has the same *gematria* as *safek* – doubt. Amalek is that ideology that says to you, are you sure, do you really think there's a God who cares about your life, cares about the world, do you really think that all these things happen for a reason? No, there's no reason everything just happens, just go with it, go with the flow.

That's Amalek.

Says Rav Tzadok, remember what Amalek did, because that ideology is there to destroy who we truly need to be. We need to be people who are *maaminim*, believing in Hashem, understanding that everything happens for a reason, understanding there is a purpose to every single person on this planet, understanding that everything is happening in a way to bring Hashem's presence fully into the world. That is what we believe.

Therefore, we have to remember what brought Amalek to us was our lack of *emunah*, our lack of understanding of what is our ideology and therefore *shabbat Zachor* and *Purim* remind us to *lo tishcach*, don't forget who you are, don't forget the ideology you espouse, don't forget what Torah is, what Hashem is.

That is why every single person has to hear *Zachor*, because in today's day and age, with a western world that is focused to a large extent on hedonism and nihilism, we have to remind ourselves who we are, what *Am Yisrael* is and what *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* expects us to be.

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Rav Andrew Shaw, CEO of Mizrachi UK

Rabbi Shaw served as Rabbi at Stanmore and Canons Park United Synagogue for over 15 years. He has also been a leading figure in the United Synagogue's central organisation for more than a decade and was the founder of Tribe as well as Director of the Living & Learning department. Rabbi Shaw lives in Edgware, London with his wife and two sons.

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Terumah: If you turn away from the needs of another person, you're turning away from the will of Hashem

Chief Rabbi Mirvis

President of Mizrachi UK

If you turn away from the needs of another person, you're turning away from the will of God. This is an important message emerging from Parshat Terumah. The Torah introduces us to the concept of the keruvim, the cherubs, angelic-styled three-dimensional figures emerging from the lid of the aron, the Holy Ark in the Sanctuary in the Wilderness. And the Torah tells us,

“Ufeneihem ish el achiv,” – “Each one was facing the other,”

It was face to face contact. However, in the temple of Solomon as is described in the second book of Chronicles, Chapter 3, the Bible tells us,

“Ufeneihem labayit,” – the cherubs, the keruvim were both facing towards the inside of the Temple. They weren't facing each other. Why this difference?

The Gemara in Masechet Bava Batra 99a explains that within the Sanctuary in the Wilderness, it was a time when the people of Israel were mostly keeping to the will of God, and this is represented by the keruvim facing each other. However during the days of the reign of King Solomon in general the people were rebelling against the word of God, and this is represented by the keruvim not facing each other.

So what emerges for us is that it is the will of Hashem that we should turn our faces towards others: we should be filled with compassion, live altruistic existences, ask what we can do for those who are in need. In the event however that we don't face each other, that we turn our backs to each other, that is a time when we're rebelling against the word of Hashem.

In the yevarechecha prayer, the Priestly Blessing, our Cohanim say,

“Yisa Hashem panav eilecha,” – “May the Lord turn His face towards you. If you turn your face toward somebody, if you look that person in the eye, it means that you are relaxed in their presence, you've got nothing to hide, you feel comfortable with them and you are there for them in the way that you would expect them to be for you.

That is the blessing that the Cohanim give to us: that Hashem should look us in the eye, be comfortable with us, be proud of us and shower us with His blessings. Therefore, the keruvim in the wilderness represent a time when we face others, when we build our relationships with others, when we're concerned for them and always try to do whatever we can to assist. That is a time when we are performing the will of Hashem. In the event however that we turn our backs on other people, that is a sure sign that we are going against the will of our Creator.

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