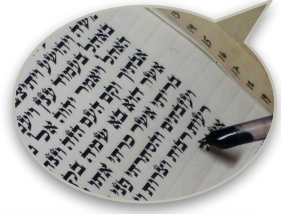




The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Vayikra

Parshat Vayikra • Shabbat Zachor

Adar 2 5784 / March 2024

Am Yisrael Chai

By Jeff Kapelus

Today's parsha is *Vayikra*. Given its “unscintillating” subject matter — korbanot (sacrifices) and Kohanic rituals — I was initially not too excited about crafting this dvar Torah. As luck would have it, the calendar rescued us, and the 2nd Adar pushed *Shabbat Zachor* to this week, providing me with a more stimulating and meatier topic to analyze. *Parshat Zachor* recalls the Amalekites' attack on Bnei Yisrael soon after Bnei Yisrael left Egypt. The attack targeted the community's most vulnerable, those straggling at the rear. The Torah exhorts us never to forget this and to *תִּמְחֶה אֶת-זֵכֶר עַמְלֵק*, blot out the memory of Amalek.

In any other year, I would be thrilled to have my dvar torah rescued by *Shabbat Zachor*. But not this year. Why? Because it immediately brings to mind and parallels the evil perpetrated on October 7th by the current iteration of Amalek. It's a timely topic that resonates with us and is worthy of further examination.

The *Zachor* maftir states:

זָכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְךָ מִמִּצְרָיִם:
אֲשֶׁר קָרָךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיַּגִּבְךָ בְּכָל-הַנִּחְשָׁלִים אֲחֵרֶיךָ וְאֶתָּה עֵיפָה
וַיַּגֵּעַ וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹהִים: וְהָיָה בְּהַגִּיחַ יְהוָה אֶלְהֵיךָ אֶל לִבְךָ
מִכָּל-אֲיֵכֶיךָ מִסָּבִיב בָּאֲרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחֲלָה
לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחֶה אֶת-זֵכֶר עַמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח:

Remember what Amalek did to you after you left Egypt — how, he happened upon you on the march, when you were feeble and weary, and struck down all the stragglers in your rear and did not fear God ...You shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!

(Devarim 25:17-19)

This verse describes how the Amalekites attacked from the rear, targeting the weak and vulnerable. Sound familiar? Amalek has been reincarnated in the form of Hamas.

On October 7th, just as the Amalekites perpetrated against Bnai Yisrael, Hamas attacked weak and unsuspecting noncombatants. It was like something from the dark ages of antiquity. Hamas cowards targeted innocent civilians- unarmed men, women, children, babies and the elderly. In their homes, at a concert, in the street, on their bikes. They slaughtered innocent civilians and took and abused hostages. These savages have repeatedly stated that their mission is to eradicate Jews and Israel; the ultimate Amaleki.

The Amalekites, aka Hamas, are said to be the embodiment of pure evil. They specialize in attacking the weak. Amalek is the anti-Israel, a people whose way of life, values, and military tactics are set in direct opposition to ours.

Shabbat Zachor similarly resonated with me in 2018 when I was invited to Copenhagen for the three-year anniversary of the murder of Dan Uzan, ז"ל. In 2015, shortly after Dan was murdered by an Islamic terrorist while safeguarding children at a bat mitzvah party and

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heroically saving their lives. I visited the Copenhagen Jewish community and forged a lasting friendship with the Uzan family. In 2018, the Uzans invited me back to Copenhagen to emcee a Dan Uzan memorial basketball tournament (which included teams from Israel and Switzerland) and to present a dvar Torah at the Great Synagogue on Shabbat. Coincidentally, that Shabbat was, like today, *Shabbat Zachor* — then as now it was a stark personal reminder of the evil of Amalek.

The Hebrew Gematria, or numerology, for the word “Amalek” is the same as the word “Safek,” doubt, each having the numerical value of 240.

Referring to the Hebrew word for doubt, many Jews throughout history have struggled with the balance among morality, absolute obedience to Hashem, temptation, and choosing good over evil. At times, we each have doubts. We are tempted to deviate from our moral compass and ask ourselves “Why even bother?”

Parshat Zachor reminds us not to doubt our own values, maintain our moral clarity, and always remember that the “bad guys” are indeed bad. It serves as a reminder that we should cling to our values, follow the right path, and remember that evil-doers, such as the murderous and cowardly Amalek, have no redeeming qualities and are destined to be eradicated.

Let there be no doubt: Despite all the challenges and noise, the IDF adheres to a strong moral code and the highest of standards. It values civilian life and does everything in its power to avoid civilian casualties. This is a war of good vs. evil. Good defeats evil. There is no doubt about it.

How do we “Remember Amalek,” especially in its current incarnation? We make sure these attacks never happen again. We defend ourselves and eradicate them. We support and rely on our IDF heroes. We volunteer in Israel and in our communities. We spread the truth and do not remain silent. We challenge the antisemitic, uninformed, ignorant, and inaccurate claims of the pro-Amalekis in the media, on college campuses and local streets. We safeguard our Jewish institutions, our local Jewish communities, and our way of life.

On this *Shabbat Zachor*, I have a renewed sense of purpose to protect the Westchester Jewish community. In my role as security chair of the Westchester Jewish Council, I work closely and regularly interact with law enforcement, Jewish institutions, and security professionals to keep our community safe.

In every generation, Amalek has re-emerged. On each occurrence, our existence was threatened and we absorbed body blows, yet we overcame and survived. Attacks on Israel and Jews unify us, mobilize us and inspire us. May Hashem protect the IDF and all who support and defend Israel.

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