

This past week we celebrated International Women's Day. I know that it is not a major holiday in many countries and in others it is a day of protest. But for me it has been a day of learning and remembering. One of the programs I ran while working at a nursing home in Israel was a weekly conversation group. Every week was based on a different topic.

It was during the week of International Women's Day I would talk about the history of women's day and women's achievements in the world. I would try to encourage the women to speak about their own experiences in the world. I heard stories of women who were sent on the kindertransport and built up a new life in a new country; of women who built bombs for lechi or fought for the Palmach; of the woman decided never to marry and worked farmer, a banker, and a meditation master; of the woman who moved to Chicago from Germany and how in one of her jobs there was no woman's bathroom in the building, as she was the only woman. I met women who were teachers, professors, doctors, farmers, caterers, seamstresses and homemakers.

Hearing their stories was not for my benefit only, the women were able to look back at the strength that they once had, and remember that it was still buried deep inside.

In some opinions we fast on Ta'anit Esther to commemorate the fast that Esther called before she went to Achashverosh. Though, this is not the only reason brought by the Rishonim and Achronim.

Rav Soloveitchik in his work "Harrei Kedem" quotes the Ran on Mesechet Ta'anit:

י"ג אינו דומה לשאר תעניות, דזכרון הוא לנס שנעשה בו, ועוד שיש לנו סמך הכתוב שאמר וכאשר קימו על נפשם דברי הצומות לומר שכשם שקבלנו עלים לעשות יו"ט, כך קבלנו עלינו דברי הצומות וזעקתם, כלומר לעשות תענית בכל שנה ושנה.

The 13th is not similar to any other fast day, as this fast is a remembrance for the miracle that took place then. In addition, there is textual basis for the fast, and just like the Jewish people took upon themselves the aspects of celebration of the holiday, they also took upon themselves the aspects of crying out, meaning that they would fast each year.

The Ran says that the reason for the fast is to remember what occurred during the time of the Shushan story.

Rav Menashe Klein, in his work, *Mishne Halachot* gives a similar reason for the fast. He says it is in remembrance of the fast that the Jewish people held before going out to war on the 14th of Adar. When we fast today, we are reliving this story of triumph, including the preparations that one took before it was known that we would win the war.

According to both the Ran and Rav Menashe Klein, our fasting, and I would include our celebrating, is done so we are able to see ourselves as if we are present in the time of Shushan. We are able to relive their experience, as if we were there.

This idea can be seen even more clearly in Purim Shpilim. Traditionally a Purim Shpiel was a retelling of the Purim story, but set in the time that it was written. In many cases it was Jewish political satire. The actors would read the megilla into their lives, or read their lives into the megilla. In this form of theatre, always with the same story line and stock characters, allowed the community to see themselves physically in the story of Purim.

This morning we read from Parshat Zachor:

זָכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלִיק בְּדַרְךָ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם: אֲשֶׁר קָרַךְ בְּדַרְךָ וַיִּזְנֵב בְּךָ כָּל הַנְּחַשְׁלִים  
אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאֶתָּה עֵיפָ וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹהִים: וְהָיָה בְּהֵנִיחַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ | לְךָ מִכָּל אִיבֵיךָ מִסָּבִיב בְּאַרְץ  
אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחְלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחָה אֶת זֵכֶר \* (זָכַר) עַמְלִיק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח:

You shall remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you went out of Egypt, how he happened upon you on the way and cut off all the stragglers at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and he did not fear God. [Therefore,] it will be, when the Lord your God grants you respite from all your enemies around [you] in the land which the Lord, your God, gives to you as an inheritance to possess, that you shall obliterate the remembrance of Amalek from beneath the heavens. You shall not forget!

In only three verses are told not only to remember but also not to forget, two words that at times are used interchangeably.

The Sifra on Bechukotai asks both if and what is the fundamental difference between remembering and forgetting.

וכן הוא אומר "זכור את יום השבת לקדשו" -- יכול בלבך? כשהוא אומר "שמור", הרי שמירת הלב אמורה. הא מה אני מקיים "זכור"? שתהא שונה בפיך. וכן הוא אומר (דברים כה, יז) "זכור את אשר עשה לך עמלק" -- יכול בלבך? כשהוא אומר (דברים כה, יט) "לא תשכח", הרי שכחת הלב אמורה. הא מה אני מקיים "זכור"? שתהא שונה בפיך. (פרשה א:ג)

It is written (Ex. 20:8) "Remember (Zachor) the day of Sabbath to sanctify it." We might think, remember in your heart. But later the Torah writes, "Observe (Shamor) the Sabbath day to keep it holy" - observance in the heart is already stated. How, then, are we to understand Remember? That you repeat it with your mouth. Similarly, we read "Remember (Zachor) what Amalek did to you." I might think, remember in your heart. But verse 19 writes, "Do not forget," heart-forgetfulness is already stated. How, then, are we to understand Remember? That you repeat it with your mouth.

The difference between not forgetting and remembering is the addition of a physical action. To not forget, we must keep an idea in our mind. But to remember we must do something - in this case we must say the words out loud. When we speak out loud we are connecting more of our senses, as well as connection with other people around us.

So it is this Shabbat that we take the moment to retell the story of Amalek. We are not meant to relive the story of what happened to us, but we are supposed to talk about that story, to make sure that story stays within our history.

In most years, it would be this Shabbat that would start preparing us for delving into our history. We slowly ease into going back in time in order to remember and learn from our past. We start with Parshat Zachor, we listen to a retelling of a time that there was a nation out to get us, but we were able to triumph and continue. This communal memory is necessary to have, if we will even have a chance to fight and win the war at Purim.

With that memory, we are able to enter fully into the Fast of Esther and Purim. Knowing that we have the ability to win, we are able to go into the middle space of joining our modern reality with our community history.

By remembering and even play acting our past, we are able to grow into our future. It is through our memory of being able to stand up and come out strong, that we are able to try again.

May we remember what happened in the desert when Amalek came up upon us, not only remembering the attack but remembering that we were able to continue. May we be able to see ourselves as the characters of Shushan, remembering that both as individuals and as a community we have the strength and ability to triumph over those things or people which we feel are out to defeat us.

Shabbat Shalom,  
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