

AMALEK STRIKES AGAIN

Remember!
(Sermon for Shabbat Zahor, March 19, 2011)
By Rabbi Haskel Lookstein

זכור את אשר עשה לך עמלק...לא תשכח!

“Remember what Amalek did to you... do not forget.”

The actual Hebrew word that begins Parshat Zachor is not Zechor – remember – but rather, Zachor, which means be involved constantly in the memory. It is the same word that is used in the Fourth Commandment of the Ten Commandments

זכור את יום השבת לקדשו

“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it Holy.” Here too the word is Zachor, not Zechor. Rashi comments on that word by saying that we should spend the entire week being involved in thinking about the Shabbat that will come at the end of the week. He even quotes the opinion of Beit Shammai in the Talmud which says that if one finds a choice delicacy on Sunday or Monday it should be put aside for the following Shabbat. If one then finds a better morsel on Tuesday then the first one can be eaten and the second one is kept for Shabbat. In other words, the whole week is devoted to being involved in the Shabbat experience.

By the same token, we are not just supposed to remember Amalek; our minds should be pre-occupied by thinking about Amalek and his deeds, his threats to our existence and his venal plans.

It is in that frame of mind that I would like to say a few words today about the cruel and inhuman, Amalek-like attack upon the Fogel family in particular and the citizens of Israel and the Jewish people in general, last Friday night. Udi Fogel, age 37 and baby Hadas, 3 months, had their throats slashed while they slept. Wife and mother, Ruth Fogel, age 36 was stabbed on the threshold of the bathroom after what appears to have been a struggle with the terrorists. The terrorists then slashed the throat of 11 year old Yoav and brutally murdered 3 year old, Elad, with two stabs to his heart. The horrible scene was discovered by Tamar Fogel, age 12 when she returned home from spending Shabbat dinner with friends.

These are the simple, horrible facts. A dastardly crime of brutal murder was perpetrated by Palestinian terrorists whose organization, the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades took responsibility, describing the slaughter of the Fogel family as a “natural response” to “Israeli crimes.” The Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades are the military arm of Fatah which is run by the Palestinian Authority and its President, Mahmoud Abbas. The next night residents of Gaza handed out candy to children and participated in a celebration,

rejoicing over the murder of five Israelis. That celebration was repeated in other places. Two days later a public square in Ramallah was dedicated in honor of two terrorist murderers from the 70's. That was the Palestinian response to the beastly brutality of their own people.

How about the world response? Here is the way CNN reported this heinous crime, "Five members of an Israeli family were killed in the West Bank early Saturday morning in what the Israeli military is calling a "terror attack." The report went on to say "according to a military spokesman *an intruder* entered the Israeli settlement of Itamar... around 1:00AM, made his way into a family home and killed two parents and their three children.

So it was just an intrusion and two parents and their three children were killed. The fact that these were inhuman terrorists – beasts or animals would be a better description – who slashed the throat of a three month old baby and murdered five people, was not stated by CNN. The New York Times, of course, wasn't any better. Its headline on Saturday morning, read as follows, "Suspecting Palestinians, Israeli military hunts for killers of five West Bank settlers." I remember speaking in 2002 with Joe Lelyveld, then Executive Editor of the New York Times, when I accused the Times of terrible bias and urged people to suspend their subscriptions for a period of time, I told him that the word killer is not the same as the word murderer and militants is not the same as terrorists. What happened last Friday night was a murder of five people, not the killing of five people. Later on in the article, the Times wrote as follows, "Palestinians have often justified the killing of Israeli civilians, especially settlers, as a legitimate response to the Israeli occupation of territory conquered in the 1967 war (a war that was started by five Arab armies)... as part of a broader struggle against Israel's existence." This is what Malcolm Hoenlein called, "denigrating the murdered to justify the murderers." How can anyone justify what happened last Friday night? How can anyone ascribe that horrific act to a protest over an Israeli occupation?

One of the responses of Prime Minister Netanyahu to the brutal murders was to say that the Israeli government would allow the building of 500 more houses in existing settlements in the West Bank. Commenting on that response, Simon Plosker (sounds like a Jew) writing in the Los Angeles Times, wrote as follows, "which is worse – stabbing children to death or building new houses in West Bank settlements? The answer is obvious. But that's not the point. The point is that no matter how abhorrent the murderers are, it serves no purpose to aggravate the provocation that led to them in the first place." What possible provocation could there be in building homes that would in any way excuse the slashing of the throat of a three month old baby? No human being is capable of such an act. The actions last Friday night have nothing to do with Israeli provocations. They have everything to do with a culture of incitement and indoctrination that has been developed in the Arab world since the establishment of the State of Israel and probably long before it. It is the same kind of culture that led 200 Egyptian men in Tahrir Square, Cairo, a few weeks ago to assault Lara Logan, Chief Foreign Affairs correspondent for CBS News, to strip her naked, molest her and beat her and keep shouting, "Jew, Jew!" In much of the Arab, Muslim world today, "Jew" is

not a person, Dennis Prager suggested in a blog last Tuesday. “Jew” is not even merely the enemy. In fact, there is no parallel on earth to what “Jew” means to a hundred million, perhaps hundreds of millions of Muslims.

A couple of years ago we had a program at our Seudah Shlishit in which a teenage Israeli boy, a son of Dr. Daniel Gordis, spoke on a panel with a teenage Arab boy from the West Bank. They were part of a program sponsored by the Presbyterians to develop dialogue between young Palestinians and Israelis. The Palestinian boy described how when the group traveled on a bus that passed through an Israeli check-point, an IDF soldier got on the bus and proceeded to examine the knapsacks of all the Palestinian boys and girls who were seated on one side of the bus and never examined the knapsacks of the Israeli boys and girls seated on the other side. He gave this as an example of the unfair treatment accorded by Israel to the Arabs in the West Bank and indicated that this was the source of animosity on the part of the Arabs. I didn’t want to challenge him publicly, but after the program was over I approached the two boys and I asked the Arab boy why he considered this to be a provocation. Why shouldn’t the IDF soldier make a distinction between the knapsacks of the Arab teenagers and the Israeli teenagers? Would he expect that Israeli teenagers might be hiding an explosive device in their knapsacks? The young Palestinian gave me an elusive answer and I started to go inside for Ma’ariv. The Gordis child called me aside and said to me in these words: “Rabbi Lookstein, you don’t understand; the provocation is not the inspection of knapsacks. The provocation is 1948 when Israel was established. That is the source of the hatred. Israel, according to these young people has no place in the Middle East.”

The young Gordis was right. Palestinian and other Muslim spokesmen and their supporters on the left argue that their unique hatred of Israelis is the fruit of Israeli policies. In fact, it has nothing to do with Israeli policies; it has to do with Israel’s existence in the Middle East as a State. That is the offense. That is the provocation. And that is the result of the education and indoctrination that is taking place in the Arab world and especially in the West Bank and Gaza. It is that kind of incitement and indoctrination that leads Palestinian terrorists to be able to slash the throat of a three month old baby. Such an act should have outraged the world; but it didn’t. It should have thrown the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times into fits of fury; but it didn’t. It should have brought the greatest condemnation on Abbas and his whole crew in the Palestinian Authority; but it didn’t. It didn’t, because Israelis and Jews are considered sub-human by the Palestinians in the West Bank and in Gaza, and much of the world is indifferent to that judgment.

This analysis and the horrible murders in Itamar help to explain what Yossi Klein Halevi told us from this pulpit when he was a scholar here in November. The broad majority of Israelis recognize that there must be a two-state solution. But they also recognize that it is impossible to bring about that solution at the present time. It may take a generation of changing the whole culture of the Palestinian world before Israel can safely withdraw from territories in the West Bank. We learned that when we withdrew from Lebanon. We learned that when the Fogel family withdrew from Gaza

and settled finally in Itamar where five of them were butchered last Friday night. You can't make peace with butchers.

So what are we to do – you and I? First we must mourn and grieve and pray as we did this week. I was very proud that Malcolm Hoenlein asked us to host the Memorial Service on Thursday. I was very proud of the Ramaz Upper School students who wrote hundreds of letters that were sent to Israel to the Fogel family. We mourned; we grieved; and we tried to comfort the bereaved.

But that is only the first response. The second response in the face of such brutality and such clear evidence that there is nobody with whom to talk peace, is that we have to strive to unify the Jewish people. We are facing right now, with the upheaval in the Arab world and with the unceasing enmity toward Israel of even the moderate Palestinians, the kind of crisis that we faced in May of 1967; but with two important differences. The crisis of 1967 was short-lived. It ended with the Six-Day War. The crisis of 2011 will probably have a very long life because the upheavals in the Arab world will take a long time to settle and we have no way of knowing how they will settle. So longevity is the first difference between 1967 and 2011.

The second difference is that in 1967 the Jewish people were united behind Israel. Today, unfortunately, we are divided. Our divisions are going to hurt us if we cannot overcome them. For example: "What would you call a group that opposes sanctions on Iran, questions Israel's right to defend itself from terrorist groups firing rockets from Gaza, seeks to pressure Israel into making major concessions without regard to the views of the elected government in Jerusalem, and supports a UN Commission Report accusing Israel of committing war crimes in the course of self-defense? That group is J Street, the new advocacy organization that calls itself, 'pro-Israel, pro-peace'."

These words from an article by Michael Goldfarb, the on-line editor of the Weekly Standard, describe an organization that is determined to fight the monopoly that AIPAC has had on lobbying for Israel in Congress. They want to counter AIPAC at every turn. Some members of J Street are about as pro-Israel as Mahmoud Abbas is. Some even want to drop "pro-Israel" from its mission statement. Others, including some Orthodox Jews whom you and I know, are very well meaning. We have to try to convince our fellow religionists to stand behind Israel now and to present a united front to Congress and the Administration. We cannot afford to have to have two strong antithetical positions advocated. We have enough foes throughout the world without complicating our message to Congress. If you didn't plan on going to the AIPAC Conference this May, you might consider changing your plans and come with us. But whatever you do, try to work for the unity of the Jewish people as we confront a terribly complex world and as we meet the challenge of beastly opponents who murder babies on Shabbat. They are not responding to provocations; they are responding to 63 years of unceasing hate and demonization. We have to confront them with all the strength that Jewish unity can muster.

Finally, I think Prime Minister Netanyahu's response was particularly appropriate. Let the punishment fit the crime. The Arabs want to drive us out of the West Bank; let them know that every time there is an atrocity of this kind, we will dig in deeper and build more homes and solidify ourselves in the West Bank. As the Prime Minister announced the morning after the funeral "They kill; we build."

To quote Brett Stephens in Tuesday's Wall Street Journal, who expressed the same view that I am advocating, "I write these words as one who has long entertained doubts about the wisdom and viability of much of the settlement enterprise, though I have never considered it the core issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – a point well borne out by the example of Gaza following Israel's withdrawal. Now I find myself cheering Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for announcing, in the wake of the Fogel family massacre, the construction of hundreds of additional homes in the settlements. Israel's consistent mistake since the peace process began nearly 18 years ago was to suppose that conspicuous displays of reasonableness and moderation would beget likewise on the other side. The reality has been closer to the opposite."

We should send his article to Theodore Bikel who will not perform in the West Bank.

Fifty-four years ago, on the eve of Yom Ha'Atzmaut, five children and one teacher were murdered by Arab terrorists in the Beit Midrash of K'far Chabad. The Chasidim of K'far Chabad were desolate. They sent a telegram to the Rebbe, asking what they should do. For four days they waited for an answer and it finally came. The Rebbe answered in three words *Behemshech habinyan tinacheimu* – "by your continued building you will be comforted". The Rebbe's answer in 1956 is as relevant today as it was then. The ultimate comfort and consolation will come from continued building.

We have to remember the Amalek of today and we must never forget who and what they are. But our ultimate salvation will come *Behemshech habinyan*, by continuing to build and support the Land and the State of Israel. That is our sacred responsibility. Let us prove worthy of it.