

Preparing for Purim

Haftorat Parashat Zachor, (Parashat Tzav)

I Shemuel 15:2-34

This week's Haftorah teaches us about the importance of eradicating the Amalekian people who attack the weak and feeble among us. Likewise, the story of Purim teaches us that sometimes it is necessary to kill in order to defend our lives against our enemies who threaten to annihilate us.

When will our government learn to protect and defend its citizens adequately? When will they learn that every building freeze only empowers the enemy to terrorize us? The proper response is to continue to build in Yehuda, Shomron and all the disputed areas. Supporting the building of a home for women's Torah learning on the Land of the Judean Hills is an important way to strengthen our Jewish presence in the Land and prevent further terrorism.

The Haftorah's Connection to the Parashah

This week's special *haftorah* is connected with *Parashat Zachor* which we read the Shabbat before Purim to remember that Hashem commands us to annihilate the entire people of Amalek, because their *raison d'être* is to destroy the Jewish people spiritually by separating them from Hashem and physically through brutal murder. In *Parashat Zachor*, we read about Amalek's unprovoked attack of innocent Israelites, which warrants Hashem's command to utterly destroy this evil people.

The *haftorah* is about Hashem's mitzvah to King Shaul to completely destroy the people of Amalek: "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (1 *Shemuel* 15:3). Although King Shaul heeds Hashem's command partially and wages war against Amalek, he spares King Agag and the best of the cattle and sheep. Shaul's negligence to utterly destroy the Amalekian people with all their belongings, costs him his crown. Hashem regrets having made Shaul king, "For he has turned back from following Me, and he has not fulfilled My words" (Ibid 11).

Being Compassionate to the Cruel

King Shaul found it difficult to accept Hashem's command to eradicate an entire nation. He compassionately questioned, "If Amalekite men are sinful why must the children perish and their cattle die?" (*Mesichta Yoma* 22b) We can recognize King Shaul's voice today. Even if it seems like a noble sentiment to spare the enemy and give them a chance to shape up, Shaul's mercy reflected his lack of *emunah* in Hashem's decision. His desire to be "kinder than Hashem" together with the Jewish people's weakness, allowed for the survival of our arch enemy, Amalek, and a near holocaust by his descendant, Haman. Rabbi Elazar said, "He who becomes compassionate to the cruel will ultimately become cruel to the compassionate". As it states, "But Shaul and the people had mercy on Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, even the young of the second birth, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them..." (1 *Shemuel* 15:9). Later it mentions that Shaul mercilessly killed eighty-five innocent Kohanim in Nov (Ibid. 22:18), (*Midrash Tanchuma, Metzora*, Chapter 1). Today, our leaders try to speak kind words of peace to our enemy, while cruelly disenfranchise our own people and ostracizing those Jews who protect the entire Nation of Israel by living on the front line, endangering their own lives.

Defending the Lives of Our People

I'm not involved in politics, but when it comes to defending the lives of our people this is Torah rather than politics. Waging war in order to save Jewish lives from terrorism is a *milchemet mitzvah* (A mitzvah war, commanded by Hashem), just as is waging war against Amalek (Rambam, Laws of Kings, Chapter 5:1). In the *Megillah*, Esther received permission from the king for the Jews to defend themselves against their anti-Semitic enemies. Today, unfortunately, in our own Jewish country, we don't have permission to properly defend our lives, against the terrorists. Israel has released terrorist murderers, giving them another chance to cruelly murder our people, including innocent women and children. Among them was the release of Sami Kuntar, the baby-killer of Hezbollah who said "I can't wait to kill again!" In contrast, our own prisons include convicts who have no other guilt than defending themselves against terrorist invaders. If an Arab is found sneaking into a Yishuv with a knife, clearly it is a mitzvah to kill him before he gets a chance to use it, as it states: "If someone comes to kill you, rise up early to kill him first" (Babylonian Talmud, *Berachot* 58:1).

Why does the Megillah Mention the Number of People the Jews Killed?

There is a lot of emphasis on the killing of the enemy in *Megillat Esther*. It is hard for our "make love not war" generation to read about all the thousands of people that the Jews killed. Altogether they killed 75,810 people as written in Chapter Nine, Verse 12-16. I believe that the reason for this emphasis in the *Megillah* is to set a precedent to teach us pacifistic Jews that there is a time to defend ourselves even if this means we will have to kill to save lives. We have to learn that there exist people so evil in this world that the only way to ensure world peace is to wage war against them. The perpetual anti-Semites are the embodiment of evil which must be eradicated in order to restore everlasting peace and harmony to the world. Perhaps the emphasis on killing our enemies was supposed to give us strength to fight back against the Nazis. Had we learned the lesson of the *Megillah* and defended ourselves as encouraged by the *Megillah*, the Holocaust could have been prevented. Moreover, if in our post holocaust generation we learn this lesson today, with Hashem's help, not one more cruel terrorist attack will assault our holy people!

Who is Amalek Today?

"Hashem will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (*Shemot* 17:16). The fact that we have a mitzvah to destroy Amalek, and that this mitzvah is one of Mashiach's responsibilities to carry out, proves that Amalek still exists today. But – where is he today? "I once heard the answer from my father and master, of blessed memory, namely that any nation that conspires to destroy Knesset Israel becomes, according to the *halacha*, Amalek" (Rav Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, *Kol Dodi Dofek*", in: *Divrei Hagut Ve'Ha'aracha*, Jerusalem 1983, pp.49-50).

Throughout history, the Amalekites have been hunting for our weak points and attacking Israel from behind. Today, our weak points are our lack of self-respect as a nation, and the Jewish guilt which makes us feel unworthy to deserve living uprightly and safely in our land. Concessions to international pressure and "peace processes" bring no peace. They only make us weaker and more vulnerable.

We need to learn from King Shaul's mistake who allowed his heart to turn him away from the law, and adapt an uncompromising struggle against terrorism – a law which for us, as a Jewish state, is an existential necessity. Eliav Shochetman writes, "The beginnings of the sin are in the manifestations of tolerance towards rioters and stone throwers, and its conclusion in the stationing of "peace" as a supreme value which supersedes the obligation to battle terrorism until its demise" (<http://www.acpr.org.il/ENGLISH-NATIV/06-issue/shochetman-6.htm>).

Parashat Zachor that we read this Shabbat commands us to eradicate Amalek as soon as we enter the Land of Israel (*Devarim* 25:19). The reason is that it is impossible to set up a proper society when terrorism reigns rampant (has free range). May Hashem avenge the innocent blood of the Fogel family, and may we be able to eradicate all brutal terrorists in our Land! May there be no more innocent Jewish sacrifices for the sake of an imaginary peace. True peace is only when Amalek has been completely eradicated from humanity.