

**PARSHAT TETZAVEH
SHABBAT ZACHOR
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Purim occurs this week. Most people see it as a children's holiday, an opportunity to dress up in masquerade, make a lot of noise, and have a carnival. Yet, the holiday itself, and the Scroll of Esther upon which it is based, has some very adult themes attached to it. Some of those themes are rather complex. Perhaps the most challenging one was read as our Maftir this morning. Parshat Zachor reminds us of the story of the Amalekites, a tribe of nomads who preyed on the stragglers of Israel who left Egypt as they were on their way to the Promised Land. The story is told in the book of Exodus and we are reminded of it in the book of Deuteronomy. G-d is so infuriated that He instructs the Israelites to annihilate the Amalek tribe. In our Maftir reading this morning we are instructed: "Remember what Amalek did to you," and then we are told once more at the ending of the reading: "You shall not forget."

Why these two phrases? If we are to remember, surely we will not forget. It is recorded as a positive commandment to erase the name of Amalek and it is also incumbent upon us to remember their evil deeds, in order to inspire hatred of them. We are to remember our history and act in the present.

Amalek came to be seen as an arch enemy of the Jewish people who wished to annihilate them. He is Haman, he is Hitler, he is every enemy of the Jewish people, who wishes to destroy us simply because we are Jews. Unfortunately, those enemies continue to exist in our day as well.

I returned only a few days ago from a Conference of Presidents of Major American Organization's Mission to Vienna, Bratislava and Israel. We traveled to Vienna to give strength to that community of 8,000 Jews and to be in central Europe as anti-Semitism has reared its ugly head throughout the countries of the European Union. We also went to Vienna for meetings concerning Iran's nuclear threat and to convey our support of the position of the State of Israel in a volatile Middle East.

We spent time with major leaders of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA. Our concern with the nuclear capacity of Iran is not simply because of its proximity to the State of Israel but Iran is a threat not only to the Middle East, but to the entire Western world. We have watched Iranian hegemony

spread throughout the countries of the Middle East. It is supplying Syria with arms and military might. Over 200,000 people have been killed in the civil war in that country. It continues to supply weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon, an enemy of the Jewish state, which continues to spew forth hatred against Israel. It is attempting to rearm Hamas in Gaza and its reach has extended to Yemen and to parts of Africa. It has attempted to export its brand of terrorism, including all the way to Argentina, and one can only be concerned should it attain a nuclear bomb in the future. There are serious concerns about the viability of Iraq and Jordan that stand between Iran and Israel. Thus, Iran gaining nuclear capacity is a supreme danger to Israel, to the Arab countries of the Middle East, and to the entire Western world.

We are but a few days from March 24, the deadline for the Iran P5+1 talks. In the next week, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu will speak to a joint meeting of the Congress concerning the threat of Iran. There has been much discussion concerning this speech and the invitation behind it. The Prime Minister told our group in Jerusalem that he would go anywhere and everywhere to try to protect the Jewish state and acting upon an invitation from the Congress at this time was an essential part of his duty as the leader of the State of Israel. Over and over again we were told that no deal is better than a bad deal. You may have your own opinion concerning the appropriateness of Netanyahu's speech this week, even in Israel there is great division, but there is no doubt that everyone in the State of Israel sees Iran as the major villain in the Middle East scenario equivalent to Amalek of our generation.

We also had meetings with leaders of the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Our major concern was anti-Semitism and its effect on the Jewish communities of Europe. We were joined at our Friday night dinner by Roger Cukierman, the President of the CRIF, the Central institution of the Jews of France. He told of his continuing concerns for the safety and security of French Jews. Many of them are sitting on their suitcases ready to leave the country should something else occur after the horrible events in Toulouse and recently in Paris. He asked for our help and support.

Many of you may have seen the video of a Jewish reporter who walked down the streets of Paris with a kippah on his head and his tzitzit hanging out. He was cursed, spat on, and called many names. We were told it was simply not safe in many areas of Paris to walk the streets wearing an identifiable Jewish symbol. Scandinavia is seen as a dangerous place to be a Jew. As we were leaving we heard of the horrible event in Denmark. It seems that the two major enemies of

radical Islamic terrorism in Europe are freedom of the press and Jews. Both in Paris and in Copenhagen, those were the targets.

The leaders of Europe are very concerned about those individuals who are brainwashed into assuming a radical form of Islam and then return to their countries of origin in order to perpetrate deeds of terror. They can blend in with the local population and it is very difficult to follow the movements of all of them. And this week we learned that the threat also exists in our own country, as well.

To protect Jewish institutions adequately requires governments to acknowledge the special dangers that Jews face. Some of those governments have been slow to react. In fact, in one of my meetings in Israel I found out that over \$5 million dollars has been allocated by the Jewish Agency for Israel to Jewish communities around the world, except for North America, for security apparatuses to protect Jewish institutions. The money is used for cameras and surveillance equipment, for those things which will protect each Jewish institution from the horrible tragedies that have occurred as of late. The Jewish Agency can supplement these efforts, but it is the responsibility of the host countries to guarantee the security and welfare of its own citizens.

Seventy years after the Holocaust we are reminded: “Do not forget.” Once again, European anti-Semitism is resurgent and the countries that housed Jews before the war are again becoming inhospitable to our brothers and sisters.

Melanie Phillips in the *Jerusalem Post* last Friday wrote: “Jews are the conscience of the world. Those who want to destroy the Jews want to tear up their own heart. And Judaism’s moral codes lie at the very core of Western civilization.” It is not simply the Jews they are after. We are simply the proverbial canary in the coal mine. They are after Western values and all those who profess them, Western governments and populations who are not willing to embrace their form of radical religious zealotry. They are prepared to kill anyone who stands in the way of their ideology. We came away from Vienna with mixed emotions. On the one hand, we saw a community returning to some of its pre-war glory days with synagogues and day schools, a united Jewish community and four kosher restaurants. On the other hand, though Vienna itself has been quiet, there are concerns everywhere for the Jewish communities that inhabit European soils.

When Theodore Herzl began his movement of political Zionism, he wrote that he felt that a Jewish enclave would solve the Jewish question. The nations of Europe would be pleased to get rid of their Jews and the world would leave the

Jewish people alone in that enclave, whether it became a state or not. That enclave became, of course, the State of Israel. However, Herzl's vision of the Jewish people finding itself safe and sound in its own land has not occurred.

As we came to Israel, we brought with us the messages from Europe concerning anti-Semitism and the specter of Iran's nuclear tendencies. In Israel we met with Prime Minister Netanyahu, opposition leader Isaac Herzog, Tzipi Livni, the new president of the State of Israel, Reuven Rivlin, and many other Israeli political leaders and military and security analysts. They told us over and over again that Israel lives in a dangerous neighborhood. Iran's reach is getting longer and the upheaval that was termed at one point as the "Arab Spring," has not brought tranquility to the Middle East, only more turmoil. In addition to the Syrian civil war, a new group, a radical blood thirsty Islamic caliphate, known as ISIS or ISIL, has ravaged populations in Iraq, Syria, and beyond. They have made alliances with radical groups in Libya and in other places in Africa. In addition to them, other groups such as Al Nusra front and others are all fighting one with the other and also against the Syrian regime. Over a million refugees have made their way to Jordan which has the possibility of becoming unstable. Lebanon, itself, is not an island of stability, as well. Except for Egypt which is now under the control of President Sisi, Israel is concerned with its neighbors. We were warned about the far reaching hand of Iran, the dangerous winds which are blowing in the Middle East, and the real concerns about terrorist groups that do not value human life.

And yet, no matter to whom we spoke, as dire as the picture may be, they ended up with feeling of optimism. There is, at least today, a State of Israel. Europe's Jews have a place to go as a safe haven. A Jewish state knows how to take care of itself and though they are convinced that there will be other episodes with Hamas and perhaps others, the leaders of the IDF and the military analysts all told us that Israel would be victorious.

We are asked to remember the past so that we are not doomed to repeat it. Not so long ago we were helpless and became hopeless. Today we are not helpless whatsoever and definitely not without hope. The motto of the Conference of Presidents' "strength through unity" should be the motto of the Jewish people. No matter where we live, no matter what our religious inclination, or our political orientation, we must come together for the benefit of the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

When Haman complained to Ahasuerus about the Jewish people he said: “There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the King’s laws.” The Jewish response to that statement by Haman was uttered by Esther after she agreed to aid her people. She said: “Go, assemble all the Jews that live in Shushan and fast on my behalf.” Haman believed that we were scattered and not concerned about one another, that we were a people who were not united. Esther said in times of difficulty: “come together, unite and we will all be strengthened in the process.”

As we look towards Purim this week let us remember the message of the hatred of Amalek, Haman’s words, and respond with those of Esther. We will not be vanquished, we will not lose hope. We will be victorious, and the Jewish people, both in the State of Israel and in the Diaspora, will thrive in the future.