

Sermon by Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch Ki Teitzei 20 “Remember”

Gut Shabbos. Shabbat shalom. First, I have a few announcements. I'd like to emphasize that one of our safety guidelines is that socializing in the shul is permissible only if maintaining a **6'** distance from one another, and **that also applies to socializing in our entrance area.** Our first priority in shul is to protect the health of our community, so please help us by cooperating with and encouraging others to keep the safety guidelines.

Also, beginning today, I will be making kiddush for the whole shul to hear, and over on the table [point] we will have prepackaged cookies that you can eat after leaving the shul.

The High Holidays are quickly approaching, and as mentioned in the recent email, we are now accepting reservations for services. Please see the shul website or email about membership information, our High Holiday schedule, and other important info.

It should be obvious that the most important aspect of our preparation for the High Holidays is spiritual. That's why we have the shiva dinechemta, the current 7 weeks of consolation, to prepare for Rosh Hashana and the 10 days of teshuva. A vital element in our preparation is to heed the guidance we receive from the Torah, one step at a time, in each of the parshiot which lead up to the holidays.

One of the distinctive characteristics of this week's parsha is the maftir, the last Aliyah, which is the source of Parshat Zachor that we read in shul on the shabbat before Purim. It is bracketed off this week, so to speak, since it's a stand-alone portion, the maftir. It is one of the most prominent sections in the Chumash because of the mitzvah midiorayta, the Biblical command to remember Amalek's brutal attack against us immediately after we left Egypt. Every other reading in shul is either rabbinical, midirabanan or minhag, custom.

This year, Parshat Zachor had been on the minds of many, because Purim fell at the outset of the pandemic, so many people missed the mitzvah to hear it read in public on the Shabbos preceding Purim, when we read Parshat Zachor as the maftir from a 2nd Sefer Torah.

I gave advice then that was based on the Chasam Sofer's reassurance - if you miss that reading, you can make it up with this week's maftir. Unfortunately, we haven't returned to normal yet, so for most people, that will not be an option, at least in our community.

But I think there is something even more notable about the timing of this week's parsha during our preparation for the High Holidays. It can be no coincidence that the maftir is the source of Parshat Zachor, and Rosh Hashana is known as Yom Hazikaron, Memorial Day.

One of the most famous questions asked about Parshat Zachor is that the Torah commands us to remember Amalek and their vicious attack on the Jewish people, but the last verse of the parsha tells us to blot out their memory. So how is it that we can fulfill the mitzvah to remember Amalek but simultaneously erase their memory? Isn't that an inherent contradiction?

We can resolve this apparent contradiction by considering what Amalek stood for – they were cynics who derided the very concept of memory, because memory implies that our lives have meaning.

It would seem that the deepest way to blot out their memory is to **persist** in our remembering, whatever that might entail.

And that is the critical message we can take into the High Holidays: Life has meaning. It may be a simple idea, but it's profound, and we need time each year to contemplate it, to recognize that if there is a God who judges the world and cares about every individual, then everything must have meaning. The inherent meaning of our lives is what makes each moment memorable, and that is what Yom Hazikaron represents.

This year our entire Jewish community has faced pervasive uncertainty about how to keep our rituals. But if we remember there is rhyme and reason for everything which befalls us, and if we carry that conviction into the High Holidays, the message of Parshat Zachor, even in the summer, will have a significant impact on our New Year ahead. Shabbat Shalom.