

Sermon by Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch Parshat Tzav 22 “Faith & Persistence”

Gut Shabbos. Shabbat Shalom. First, I'd like to acknowledge that this week's Kiddush is sponsored by Basya, Rosie, and Yossel Schley in honor of the Mekor children, and in celebration of the 10th anniversary of their parents, Courtney & Harry Schley. Mazal tov!

This week's Kiddush is also sponsored by Esther and Alex Schwartz, who are visiting this Shabbat from Lower Merion. Thank you!

I'd also like to thank everyone who participated in our Purim services and festivities. Last year, we had to curtail our events due to the pandemic, so it was particularly gratifying to see our community gather here again to resume our beautiful Purim celebration.

Purim is like an island in time, full of light-hearted fun, but we wake up the next day and realize we're still living in sad world with so many problems – war, post pandemic woes, inflation, and a challenging economy - - just to name a few. But just when it seems as though there is no escape from these hardships, I think there is a takeaway from Purim to help us face them with

courage. A couple of years ago, I wrote an article about Parshat Tzav, which usually falls on Shabbat Hagadol. I explained the contrast between last week's Parsha, Vayikra, and this week's Parsha, Tzav. Although both Parshiot are focused on korbanot, the sacrifices brought in the desert mishkan/tabernacle, they express dramatically different perspectives on life. Last week's parsha tried to romanticize the korbanot by emphasizing the love and connection between God and the Jewish people. But this week's Parsha, Tzav, reveals the cold, harsh world we live in, through its depiction of the blood and death which characterize the korbanot.

We have explained in the past that the nation of Amalek takes advantage of this inescapable aspect of our world. But what makes them distinctive is their ***persistence*** in spreading the gospel that there is no meaning to life.

I think this aspect of their collective personality stems from their family origin. The sages teach us that Amalek's mother, Timna, was relentless in her desire to connect with the Jewish people. She was a princess, yet wanted so badly to join us, that she offered to be a maidservant to Abraham. However,

Abraham for various reasons rejected her, so she decided to try Esav's side of the family.

She ended up courting Esav's son Elifaz and became *his* maidservant. Amalek was a product of that union, forming a character that combined his mother's absolute determination with his grandfather Esav's apathy about evil and disbelief in the world to come. The result was Amalek's passion for propagating the idea that the world has no meaning.

I think we can learn from our enemies' evil perspective and their behavior. Haman was insistent about killing Jews just like Hitler was. However, they both make us face the fact that we who **do** believe in a life of meaning must never become complacent. We must be actively committed to spreading our positive outlook on life.

That is the lesson that Tzav represents. *Tzav* means *command*. The hallmark of the Kohanim, who were commanded to perform the korbanot rituals of our parsha, was their passion, alacrity, and consistency in serving God. They are therefore aptly described by our sages as *Zerizim* – extremely enthusiastic individuals.

This message is exemplified in a touching story I read recently about the current war in Ukraine. During the

holocaust in Ukraine, the non-Jewish family of Mariya Blyshchik risked their lives to save Jews in their town. One of those Jews was Fanya Bass, who often reminded her granddaughter Sharon about Mariya's righteous deeds.

Over the years, Sharon has made a point of keeping in touch with Mariya's family. Because of her experiences in Israel, Sharon could relate to the stories about the current hardships in Ukraine – no electricity; food rationing, constant bombing etc. Sharon contacted authorities in Israel and saved Mariya's granddaughters by facilitating their rescue to Israel. In the midst of all the darkness of the Holocaust, Sharon's grandmother chose to focus on the positive; she reminded her children and grandchildren about the people who helped her, despite grave risks, and Sharon remembered that goodness and persisted in her gratitude. After all these years, because of this enduring memory of righteousness, she was able to return the good deeds done for her grandmother. Despite our current circumstances, we must follow this example and be tenacious about recognizing goodness in the world. We can learn from the persistence of Amalek and all our enemies, and use that quality of persistence to focus on the positive elements of this world. If we can accomplish this kind of focus, it will enable us to maintain the happiness we achieved

during Purim throughout the year and change our collective future for the better. Shabbat Shalom.