



Sermon Tidbits

FEBRUARY 23, 2015

Parashat Tetzaveh-Zachor-Purim

Speaking Out – Parashat Zachor

Remember... (Deuteronomy 25:17)

זכור... (דברים כה:יז)

When Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel [announced his intention](#) to attend Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's upcoming address to a joint session of Congress, he explained that, "As one who has seen the enemies of the Jewish people make good on threats to exterminate us, how can I remain silent?" Explaining his decision to speak out in support of Netanyahu's upcoming address, Wiesel [told Israel Hayom](#), "I think that Netanyahu raises public awareness, and that is very important at this time. I am not the only one who thinks that the Iranians must not be allowed to develop nuclear weapons, but some people need to hear more and get a better understanding of the situation. Netanyahu is the Prime Minister of Israel, and as such there is no one more suited to go to Congress and speak about this issue." difg

We find the obligation and necessity of speaking out in the face of dangerous threats to the Jewish people embedded in the language of Parashat Zachor, the additional portion of the Torah read on the Shabbat before Purim. The section begins by exhorting us to, "Remember what Amalek did to you by the way as you came forth out of Egypt," (Deuteronomy 25:17) and ends with the command that, "you shall not forget." (verse 19) If we are commanded to remember, why forbid us to forget? To answer this question, the Midrash suggests that the two phrases refer to two different types of memory. "I might have thought that ['Remember' refers to remembering] in your heart. When it says, 'you shall not forget' – forgetfulness of the heart is already mentioned! How do I interpret 'Remember'? [This teaches us that this lesson] must be recited in your mouth." (Sifra Bechukotai 1:3) Sefer Hachinuch (#557) writes that the commandment to remember Amalek includes both "memory of the heart and the mouth." It's not enough to remember. We must also speak out, and verbally remember the dangerous threat that Amalek posed – and poses – to the people of Israel.

While Prime Minister Netanyahu appreciates the need to speak out about the dangers of a nuclear Iran, we must also recognize that the universal commandment to speak out against Amalek applies not just to Prime Ministers or members of Congress, but to each of us. We must speak out and consistently remind the world that Iran is the leading state sponsor of terrorism around the globe, providing funding, weapons, and tactical support to radical Islamic terrorist groups like Hezbollah, which recently launched a missile attack that killed two Israeli soldiers, and the brutal Syrian Assad regime, which has killed hundreds of thousands of Syrians over the last four years. We must speak out about Iran's radical leadership, and its stated intention of annihilating the state of Israel. And we must speak out and remind the world, time and time again, what happened when the world ignored the threat of a nation bent on annihilating the Jewish people.

In the advertisement which announced his intention to attend Netanyahu's address to Congress, Wiesel noted that the Prime Minister is scheduled to speak on the day before Purim and quoted from Esther, who, despite grave personal danger, chose to speak out on behalf of the Jewish nation. Before accusing Haman of attempted genocide, Esther tells King Ahasuerus that had her people "only" been sold into slavery, "I would have held my peace" (Esther 7:5) and remained silent. But, as they face annihilation, "How can I behold the destruction of my people?" Elie Wiesel spoke out. Prime Minister Netanyahu will speak out. We must speak out as well, and fulfill the commandment to remember, and remind the world, of the danger that threatens the safety and well-being of the Jewish people today. ■

A Tale of Two Pageants - Purim

Esther did not tell (Esther 2:10)

לא הגידה אסתר (אסתר ב:י)

Esther's "audition" for the King was essentially a beauty pageant. She spent twelve months—"six months with oil of myrrh, and six month with sweet odors" (Esther 2:12)—in preparation for her meeting with the King. Yet, during all this time, she never revealed her identity, "for Mordecai had charged her that she should not tell it." (2:9) Why did he forbid her to reveal her Jewish identity? The Midrash (Panim Acheirim 2:2) explains that, "Mordechai thought in his heart: From the day that Israel was exiled from Jerusalem, they are not honored among the nations. Lest I do something and they stand against the nation of the Holy One—and knowing that Esther is my relative they will go and tell the king that his wife is a Jew, and they will destroy her household and nation. For this reason, he commanded her not to reveal [her heritage]." He recognized that revealing her identity as a Jew could unleash anti-Semitism and hatred upon her and her country.

Fast-forward to 2015—thousands of years later—to another beauty pageant: the Miss Universe contest in Miami. When Miss Israel Doron Matalon posted a selfie on Instagram of her smiling with Miss Lebanon Saly Greige, [a swift outpouring of hatred ensued](#), including [calls that Greige be stripped of her title](#) for having illegal contact with an Israeli. The outrage ultimately forced the Lebanese representative to insist that the picture with the Israeli was taken without her permission. She wrote, "I was having a photo with Miss Japan, Miss Slovenia and myself, suddenly Miss Israel jumped in, took a selfie, and put it on her social media." Miss Matalon reacted not with anger, but sadness. "Too bad you cannot put the hostility out of the game, only for three weeks of an experience of a lifetime that we can meet girls from around the world and also from the neighboring country." Clearly, Mordechai's ancient concerns about baseless hatred still apply today. ■

Do it in Person - Tetzaveh

And you shall command (Exodus 27:20)

ואתה תצוה (שמות כז:כ)

We live in an increasingly impersonal society. We communicate via text, email, or voicemail—if we're lucky. If not, all we get is a Tweet or a Facebook post. Our meetings are "virtual," taking place online if they take place at all. Yet, the more distant and impersonal our society grows, the more important interpersonal relationships and interactions become. Every businessman knows this instinctively: for all the emails and texts and phone calls, if the meeting is really important, meet in person.

This is precisely the message inherent in the first words of Parashat Tetzaveh. In the commandment to anoint Aaron and his sons as the priests, appointed with the holy service in the Tabernacle, Moses is addressed in a highly unusual manner: "And you shall command the Children of Israel." (27:20) Ramban (on verse 20) notes that this emphasis on "you" communicated to Moses that, "you yourself must command them" personally. While most other tasks could be delegated to others, this task was so significant that Moses must fulfill it himself. Mordechai gives the very same instruction to Esther after learning of Haman's evil decree to annihilate the Jews. He sends her a message, "to charge her that she should go in to the king, to make supplication to him and to make request before him, for her people." (Esther 4:8) When the issue is critical, we must do it ourselves, in person.

Beginning on Sunday, tens of thousands of passionate supporters of Israel will gather from across the country to learn, interact, and voice their support for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship at [AIPAC's annual Policy Conference](#) in Washington, DC. If you've been at a Policy Conference, you've experienced the energy of meeting and interacting with thousands of other Americans who share the passion for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship. Even more importantly, you've also joined those thousands of advocates visiting each and every member of Congress, lobbying them about the importance of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, in person. While emails, articles, letters and phone calls are important, there's no stronger statement that we can make than expressing our support for Israel in person. ■

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