

Parashat Tezaveh-Zachor

Identifying Amalek

Remember what the Amalekites did to you (Deuteronomy 25:17)

זכור את אשר עשה לך עמלק (דברים כה:יז)

Israelis in the country's northern region awoke two weeks ago to the familiar [sound of air raid sirens](#), warning them to take shelter in their protected rooms from the firing of anti-aircraft missiles from Syria. The Shabbat-morning altercation, which included a major confrontation with Syrian air defense forces and ultimately resulted in the downing of an Israeli F-16, began with the [infiltration of Israeli airspace from Syria by an Iranian-built drone](#), an act the Israeli military called a, "severe and irregular violation of Israeli sovereignty." In response to the unprovoked violation of its territory, Israel Air Force (IAF) F-16 fighter jets destroyed the mobile Iranian command and control center used to operate the UAV. Ultimately, while the loss of the fighter jet was distressing (thankfully, both pilots managed to eject over Israeli territory and survived), the incident served as a jarring reminder of the danger lurking at Israel's border, and the very tense calm that could come undone at any moment. This is precisely what happened to the Israelites as they embarked on their journey in the desert.

Each year, in anticipation of the holiday of Purim the Jewish community places special emphasis on the episode in the Torah that we read regarding the Amalekite attack on the Israelites. This Shabbat is given a special title: *Shabbat Zachor*. The Amalekites attacked us when we were at our weakest and demonstrated malice toward a downtrodden people. We read about how Amalek, *karcha baderech*, "met you by the way, and smote the hindmost of you." (25:18) Rashbam (on verse 18) derives an additional meaning from the word *karcha* (literally "met you"), explaining that this word is "a language of happenstance." In other words, Amalek attacked simply because it chanced upon the Israelites, and seized what it considered a golden opportunity to take advantage of what it perceived to be a weaker adversary.

Sages over the generations have argued that the identity of the Amalekites is not to be attributed to any one particular nation, but rather, to *any* nation that demonstrates overwhelming animosity towards the Jewish people. The Amalekites singled themselves out as a terrorist group who went to war without sending warnings or ultimatums to their adversaries and attacked without setting conditions or terms. The Torah says, *zachor*, "remember." We are not to forget. We must stand guard and be vigilant when there is the threat from those that seek the destruction of the Jewish people. Our great Sages warn us to be cognizant and aware of the aggression and danger that the Amalekites pose to our safety and security. "Amalek-like" aggression rears its ugly head in the form of a violent and deadly confrontation. The Torah reading of *Zachor* resonates with us strongly today as we watch the state of Israel defend itself time and again from nefarious scheming on the part of adversaries looking to take advantage of any opportunity to attack.

Thankfully, numerous voices from inside the U.S. government strongly supported Israel's right to vigorous self-defense. Both the [Pentagon](#) and [State Department](#) issued statements of support. The Pentagon noted that, "Israel is our closest security partner in the region and we fully support Israel's inherent right to defend itself against threats to its territory and its people." The State Department noted Iran's continued effort to entrench itself inside war-torn Syria, giving it yet another foothold from which to attack Israel, calling Iran's presence in Syria, "unacceptable." Iran in Syria on Israel's border is not only unacceptable; it is also dangerous—a development that the [New York Times described](#) as what could be, "a dangerous new phase in Syria's long civil war...which threaten to draw Israel more directly into the conflict."

As we saw this month, even a seemingly happenstance episode has the potential to snowball into a major conflagration. While we are grateful for America's strong support of Israel throughout this troubling event, we must continue our efforts to ensure that the United States stands by Israel and supports its right to defend against Iranian threats on its border, and continues to ensure that Israel has the resources required to defend itself, by itself, against this—or any combination of threats in the future. ■

He's Not Heavy, He's My Brother

And Aaron will carry (Exodus 28:30)

ונשא אהרן (כח:ל)

The Torah portion of *Tezaveh* continues the divine instructions to the Israelites regarding the laws of the Tabernacle. The vestments that Aaron wore in the capacity of High Priest are delineated in great detail. Among the unique clothing that the High Priest wears are two shoulder pieces in which two stones are secured. On these two stones are etched the names of the tribes of Israel: “Attach the stones to the shoulder pieces of the *ephod*, as stones for remembrance of the Israelite people, whose names Aaron shall carry...” (Exodus 28: 6-12). Interestingly, the term “carry” is used by the Torah in the context of two other pieces of clothing worn by the high priest. Namely, on the breastplate (*hoshen mishpat*) we find the term “carry:” “Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel on the breastplate of decision over his heart” (Exodus 28:15). Finally when we look at the “frontlet” (*tzitz*) that Aaron wears as a headdress it says: “It shall be on Aaron’s forehead, that Aaron may carry any sin...” (Exodus 28:28). In each of these cases, the Torah describes Aaron’s function as carrying the item, using the Hebrew verb “*nassa*.” Conveyed in these few verses is a fundamental idea. Leadership of the Jewish nation requires “carrying” the nation. To put it simply, a leader must care and protect those that are in need. Like a little child who cannot walk on her own and must be lifted up and carried in the arms of her guardian, so too, the leaders of the nation must serve as guardians and lift up those who are in need of assistance and guidance. The loving and selfless conduct and behavior of Aaron the High Priest is to serve as a paradigm for all those who aspire to be a great Jewish leader.

When Hurricane Harvey ripped through Houston this past August many of us watched the devastation, pain and heartache that affected tens of thousands of our fellow Americans. Although the story no longer receives much coverage in the media the suffering and trauma continues to linger for many of the residents of Houston. It is stunning to see that the state of Israel has not forgotten about the plight and the challenges of a community six thousand miles away from their home. Israeli trauma experts have just been deployed to Houston to help teach resilience. Mental-health professionals from the Israel Trauma Coalition have kicked off a series of [train-the-trainer sessions](#) for 65 professionals. This sacred work echoes the sacred work of the *kohen gadol* who carried the burden of those who suffer—on his shoulders, on his heart and on his mind.

This is just one example of [the work that Israel does](#) in bringing its wisdom and knowhow to countries worldwide. Israel has shared its expertise to improve the lives of millions of people. From the natural disasters that struck Japan and Haiti, to drought stricken nations in Africa, Israel has sent experts abroad to help countries in need. Equipped with firsthand knowledge of the challenges that resource-poor countries face, Israel strives to provide other countries with the assistance they need to develop and grow. Before it had established embassies in many world capitals, Israel sent experts abroad to teach developing nations such skills as how to upgrade medical facilities, improve schools, and coax crops from arid land. Today, Israel has one of the most extensive foreign assistance programs in the world for a nation of its size. When Israel received a request from Mexico following a devastating 7.1 magnitude earthquake in 2017, it responded [by sending](#) a 50-member team of the IDF Search and Rescue Unit with a planeload of equipment to help.

At last year’s AIPAC’s annual policy conference, Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz [demonstrated](#) an amazing new technology developed in Israel in which drinking water can be extracted from thin air. On stage, he touted the device, which he said can produce 15-20 liters of drinkable water a day, as a weapon against worldwide water scarcity. Innovations such as this combined with Israel’s commitment to being a provider that aids the worldwide community gives us a true sense of the impact that Israel is making to better the lives of people across the globe.

Learning more about Israel’s accomplishments particularly in these areas is a source of immense pride for Jews everywhere. The state of Israel provides not only for the needs of its own people, but continuously reaches out with kindness and compassion to the global community—to offer light where there is darkness and alleviate the pain and suffering of people wherever they may be. In this way, just as Aaron “carried” the needs of his people with him at all times, the state of Israel “carries” the responsibility of improving the lives of people wherever it can around the world. ■

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