ZAKHOR. Antisemitism does not stop: it must be stopped

The Shabbat that precedes Purim is called Shabbat *zakhor* (= Remember!). This Shabbat we take out two Sefarim, one for the weekly Parasha, this year 2022: Vayqra, and the other Sefer for a special Maftir in Debarim 25:17, *zakhor. "Remember… what Amaleq did to you when you left Egypt … Amaleq attacked the defenseless … and did not fear God … do not forget !!!".*

THE STORY OF AMALEQ
When we left Egypt, escaping a 140 years period of slavery, Amaleq attacked us. It was an unprovoked attack, without reason or motive. Israel was not a threat to Amaleq's possessions or territory. The reasons for Amaleq to attack the Jews were not "logical" but rather, using a modern term "ideological". Moreover, we were superior in number to Amaleq. But Amaleq still –irrationally– attacked us. To be more effective and cause maximum damage, Amaleq attacked the weak, the infirm, the old.

There was nothing specific about the Jews that triggered Amaleq's hatred. It was not the power of the Jews, or the money of the Jews. The Jews had just escaped from a lengthy captivity. What power or money would slaves have? It was not a territorial issue either: we were in the desert, not even in the Promised Land. Amaleq territory was not in our plans!
What characterizes Amaleq is a radical irrational hatred for Jews.

I think the best way to identify Amaleq (and anti-Semitism in general) is that Amaleq hates Jews "unconditionally". Is not because of what we Jews "have" or what we Jews "do" but because of what we Jews "are": the people of God. It is an existential hatred. What the Jew has or does is something Amaleq might use as an excuse to justify his hatred. To disguise hatred as a politically correct fight against this who wish to dominate the world, etc.

Amaleq and his “ideological” descendants (known as ”zekher Amaleq”) can be clearly identified by the following characteristics:

1. **UNCONDITIONAL HATRED**
Amaleq’s hatred towards Jews is not motivated by territorial disputes, revenge or by feeling threatened. It is an obsessive hatred toward the Jewish people . Look for example at Iran. Iran threatens to wipe Israel off the map although it has no common borders with Israel. There are not disputed territories between the two countries.

2. **CIVILIANS**
Amaleq would attack and would try to kill Jews, whether they are civilians, women, elder or children. Remember Ma’alot in 1974? 22 little children were massacred by Arafat and the PLO. The murder of the Fogel family in Itamar, including a woman, her children and a baby. The synagogue of Har Nof in Jerusalem. And many more. In the last years, representatives of Amaleq have killed Jews in Israel and have stabbed to death Jews also outside Israel. In Paris, Milan, London, Brussels, Miami, California, Buenos Aires, New York, Pittsburg, and unfortunately there are no signs that this will stop.

3. **SUICIDAL**
Amaleq’s hatred for Israel is suicidal. Amaleq is willing to practice martyrdom (self-immolation, suicide attacks, etc.) if as a consequence he would kill a Jew. Amaleq’s hatred towards Jews is greater than Amaleq’s love for their own lives or even the lives of their own children.

4. **SINGLE OBSESION**
Amaleq may hate other people temporarily, but his endless obsession is against Israel. Amaleq does not hate the Jews for what happens in Israel. On the contrary, Amaleq hates Israel because is a Jewish state. Anti-Zionism is Amaleq’s way to disguise its anti-Semitism.

5. **EXISTENTIAL HATRED**
The most important and practical point to consider in our confrontation with Amaleq is that it is not possible to

negotiate with Amaleq. Because Amaleq will never be satisfied with land, money, or even with us changing our religion. Think of the Shoa. The Nazis killed also those Jews who were willing to renounced their religion. **Amaleq wants the Jewish People to disappear, period.** Israeli politicians and Jews around the world are divided precisely on this point: Everyone Jew wishes to live in peace. But some believe that peace with our enemies can be achieved through negotiations. Others believe that, like Amaleq, our enemies (Iran, Palestinians, Hizbollah, BDS, etc.) will NEVER stop attacking us, even if Jews or Israel concede their demands. The greatest internal conflict of the modern Israeli politics has to do with identifying or not identifying our modern enemies with the Amaleq the Tora warned us about.

6. **SELF HATRED**

For many Jews, especially for those who are unfamiliar with or unwilling to accept the Biblical concept of Amaleq, it is extremely difficult to recognize and acknowledge the true nature of Amaleq. And since the behavior of Amaleq is beyond rationality, intelligent and educated but extremely naive Jews, believe that something "rational" must be triggering Amaleq's hatred toward us. And instead of accepting the irrational nature of Amaleq's hatred, they blame it on ourselves!. They assume, for example, that terrorist attacks or Amaleq killing of Jewish civilians, or the BDS movement that aims to delegitimize Israel is the consequences of a new settlement. Or that hatred to Jews has to do with some Jews being wealthy or powerful. When a Jews accepts Amaleq's narrative he or she might end up hating their own people instead of holding Amaleq accountable.

7. **DENIAL**

Foreseeing the danger of the well-meaning but naive Jew, the Tora warned us not only to "zakhor" (remember) Amaleq. In the same text, with an exceptional tautology, the Tora exhorts us to not forget Amaleq's suicidal obsession and irrationality ("Lo Tishkakh").

Our Hakhamim prescribed to publicly read the text where the Tora mentions Amaleq the Shabbat before Purim. Why? Because

Haman was the first descendant of Amaleq who was about to succeed in erasing the entire people of Israel off the map.

The Tora assures us that HaShem will not let Amaleq destroy us. But it exhorts us not to be naive about the true nature and intentions of Amaleq. Forgetting, can be tremendously costly for us.

Parashat Zakhor has the special status of being a biblical text whose reading is a direct commandment of the Tora. Women are also expected to fulfill this obligation and attend Synagogue to hear Parashat Zakhor.

UMJCA Community Notice on COVID-19

בס"ד

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March 5, 2020

Dear Community Members,

Although for many of us, the coronavirus, COVID-19, has caused much anxiety and concern, the CDC has no specific recommendations that affect attending services in the synagogues.

The following are guidelines that we have adopted, based on consultation with Rabbi Eliyahu Ben-Haim and our Religious Council.

1. As has been widely reported, we ask everyone to wash their hands regularly with soap and water and/or with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Handwashing with soap and water or the use of hand sanitizers (liquid, gel or foam) is permitted on Shabbat.

2. Good personal hygiene practices are also important, such as covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing. Other appropriate actions include disinfecting objects and surfaces that one frequently touches, and avoiding touching one's eyes, nose and mouth. We recommend refraining from kissing Mezuzot, Sifre Torah or religious books such as Siddurim and Chumashim, especially in the synagogue. It is also advisable to refrain from shaking hands. No one should feel any social pressure at all to extend or reciprocate a handshake, and no one should feel offended by someone who does not agree to shake hands.

3. All healthy individuals should continue attending synagogue for prayer, learning or any social and religious activities as always, without other limitations. However, if one has a fever or flu-like symptoms, or if one is sick with a potentially contagious respiratory illness, he or she should not attend synagogue or other social events. If one is sick, he or she should follow these guidelines regarding the following religious obligations, until further notice:

For Shabbat Parashat Zakhor: One who is sick can hear Parashat Zakhor later in the year such as on Shabbat Parashat Ki Tetze.

For the reading of Megilat Esther: One who is sick should listen to a live-stream reading of Megilat Esther instead of coming to synagogue for the reading. They should keep a Megila in front of them and read word for word with the Chazzan to themselves.

If one has Kaddish: One who is sick and needs to recite Kaddish should ask someone else, such as one of our rabbis, to recite Kaddish on his behalf until he recovers and is healthy.

The preservation of life is of utmost value in our tradition. Everyone should follow these guidelines until further notice, in order to prevent the risk of spreading the disease. **A person with a fever, flu or any other symptom of respiratory illness MUST NOT attend synagogue or other social events and thus risk exposing other people to infection**.

May Hashem keep us all healthy so that we may continue to attend synagogue, serve Him and thank Him for all the blessings that He grants us.

UMJCA Rabbis and Medical Advisory Committee