

Shabbat Shalom. Today we are celebrating my Bar Mitzvah as well as recalling my Saba David's who never had a chance to fully celebrate his Bar Mitzvah because of the Holocaust. Today while I am celebrating being thirteen, I was joined by my grandfather on the Bima who has passed his 83rd year. In Jewish law 83 is the age where one can celebrate a Bar Mitzvah for the second time. I know that today is special and I will always remember it.

Today's Shabbat is known as Shabbat Zachor. Zachor means remembering. Remembering the past is very important, so we can make a better future. This has been relevant to many people including my family. All four of my grandparents were Holocaust survivors. They all suffered terrible losses in their families. The fact that each of them survived is a miracle. From my father's parents and my mother's mother who passed away four years ago I have learned many important lessons from their experiences. Even though I never met my mother's father I learned incredible things from him through my mom, such as the importance of perseverance and faith. The lessons from my past will serve me well in my future.

Remembering our past and events in our life guides and directs our future and the choices that we make. Shabbat Zachor is unique because it is the only Torah portion which Jews are commanded to hear read out loud every year. Zachor in English means remembrance. But what exactly are we supposed to remember? Well, this question can be answered by translating the beginning of the Maftir, the concluding section of the Parasha, which starts by saying,

*“Zachor, Remember what Amalek did to you as you were leaving Egypt. They happened upon you, and struck the weakest people trailing behind, when you were exhausted. And they did not fear God.”*

We are commanded to remember the evil that Amalek did to Bnei Israel. They attacked from the rear and ambushed the Israelites who were physically and spiritually weak and weary from their long journey in the desert and from hundreds of years of slavery. We as a nation did not pose any threat to them. Nevertheless, their irrational hatred against G-D and the Israelites compelled them to travel hundreds of miles out of their way to attack us. In the aftermath of their attack we were commanded to remember this event forever and we do this by reading this Maftir. In the same portion we also read about being commanded to destroy the memory of Amalek. This seems contradictory; however, we can remember what Amalek did to us while still destroying the memory of evil. Our great Torah Scholars teach that Amalek is “Spiritual Wickedness” in the world around us and within ourselves, and that we should strive to destroy it. Amalek was a nation with no faith and a lack of belief, a nation that went against conscience and morality, just trusting in the here and now and in the superiority of their own physical strength. Our belief that every human is created in the image of G-D leads to equality and mutual respect, whereas Amalek’s irrational hatred is the basis of Anti-Semitism, racism and apartheid.

The evil of Amalek has unfortunately not left this world, as we know there are too many recent examples of this. Hitler and the Nazi’s believed in the superiority of the Aryan race and sought to destroy others starting with the handicapped and mentally ill and moving onto Jews, Gypsies, Homosexuals and others who they believed were

inferior. Our faith teaches us to care for the vulnerable and weak, and all people, whereas Amalek and the Nazi's represent the opposite.

The Kabbalists also teach us that in each and every person, there is a tiny bit of Amalek and the potential for hatred and evil, and thus we must be persistent in the goal of becoming more spiritually aware, which will lead to fairness, kindness and belief in equality. Remembrance is a key to eradicate the potential for evil inside ourselves and in the world around us. We all have the option to do good or bad in this world. Being aware of the past and believing in G-D creating us all equally will lead us all to a better future in a world of greater unity and kindness to all others. Shabbat Shalom