

Shabbat Zachor falling on Parashat Tetzaveh, immediately followed by Purim is a three-act drama about remembering and forgetting, concealment and revelation, presence and absence, played out against the backdrop of a fragile people struggling to survive. On Shabbat Zachor we remember Amalek and his descendants and remind ourselves to continue to oppose the evil that he represents. The reading from Deuteronomy recalls Amalek's first attack: "... how he attacked you by chance, and injured all the weak ones at your rear. You were faint and weary, and he did not fear *elohim*." The word *elohim* refers to the universal Judge, indicating that Amalek recognizes no higher power, and has no conscience, no boundaries, and no sense of accountability. Midrash portrays Amalek as the quintessential bully who targets the weak because he cannot understand, and therefore, resents any form of dignity that is not won through domination. Bullying is an ongoing, recurring theme in human history, from schoolyard and workplace to highest governmental office. Shabbat Zachor names this toxic pattern, Parashat Tetzaveh presents a countermodel, and Purim brings it to life. Focusing on the priestly garments and the investiture and duties of the priests, Parashat Tetzaveh models a form of dignity rooted in service, memory, and identity. Aaron is designated Kohen Gadol (High Priest), his family inherits the priesthood, and there are elaborate descriptions and meticulous instructions for the Kohanim's attire, investiture, and duties. But Moses, the person who is responsible for making it all happen, is conspicuously absent. He withdraws so that others can step into the roles for which they are most suited, letting HaShem address him three times simply as you in a flurry of commands to make, clothe, anoint, invest, and sanctify. The Kohen Gadol's garments reflect both his status and his responsibility. His breeches, tunic, and belt are similar to those worn by all the Kohanim, but set apart by an ornate robe, vest, breastplate, and turban. He wears the names of the tribes both on his shoulders symbolizing the burden of responsibility he bears for the people, and on his heart indicating the empathy he must have for them. With collective responsibility on his shoulders and individuals in his heart, the Kohen Gadol exemplifies balance and harmony between collective and individual, and between authority and compassion. It is noteworthy that *sha'atnetz* – combining wool and linen, which is normally forbidden, is required for the Kohanim. Keeping wool (animal) and linen (plant) separate helps the people understand that boundaries are necessary for a society to thrive, whereas the Kohanim wear *sha'atnetz* to signify their role as mediators between individuals and between the people and HaShem. The colors of their vestments also reflect this principle, with crimson (blood) standing for the earthly realm, blue for the heavenly realm, and purple, a mixture of red and blue, for the meeting point between them. The Kohen Gadol, the Torah's counter-vision of Amalek, stands at the liminal space between heaven and earth serving HaShem, not for his own glory, but on behalf of the people. Like Esther's royal garments, his vestments transform him and function as a threshold between the private person and the public role that makes approach to power possible. But underneath those splendid protective layers both the Kohen Gadol and Esther remain vulnerably human, modeling authority grounded in carrying others with humility and courage. Moses' hiddenness in Parashat Tetzaveh (and in the Pesach Haggadah), HaShem's in Megillat Esther, and Esther's behind her royal façade are the polar opposite of Amalek's boisterous swagger. Haman is Purim's incarnation of Amalek. His inner emptiness causes him to inflate a personal affront into genocidal rage. Unable to tolerate the dignity of a man who refuses to worship a fellow human being, he plots to annihilate an entire people to soothe his bruised ego. His grandiose description of what should be done for "the one whom the king wishes to honor" exposes his pathological neediness, a desperate attempt to clothe his hollow core in borrowed splendor. His delusions of grandeur collapse under the weight of his overreach. Where sacred hiddenness empowers others, Amalek's noise seeks to overpower them. Where the Kohen Gadol and Esther clothe themselves in responsibility, Amalek clothes himself in spectacle. Where their authority is rooted in service, his is rooted in domination. Their quiet strength reveals a world upheld by covenantal dignity, while Amalek's bluster reveals a worldview terrified by it. Sadly, our world continues to produce new Amaleks, who bolster their fragile egos with gaudy displays of power and lash out at anyone who dares oppose them. And when they succeed, they leave untold destruction in their wake. This week's remarkable confluence of Parashat Tetzaveh, Shabbat Zachor, and Purim teaches us that we can confront tyranny from the moral high ground. Tetzaveh shows us a vision of leadership rooted in service, hidden strength, and shared dignity. Purim reveals how courage, humility, and the quiet work of human beings can overturn even the most entrenched cruelty. Together, they remind us that the antidote to Amalek is not brute force, but the courageous work of integrity grounded in covenantal responsibility. Finally, Shabbat Zachor reminds us in a delightful paradox that remembering to forget Amalek denies him the victory he seeks. Amalek thrives on noise, spectacle, and the erosion of memory. We counter him not with hatred, but with vigilance, by cultivating the quiet strengths he cannot comprehend. Remembering Amalek creates the possibility of a time when what he stands for will be entirely forgotten. Memory is the resistance that fuels our resolve. Never again is now!

Shabbat shalom & chag Purim sameach!