

Zachor

- Rabbi Maurice Unterman.

Rabbi Unterman preached this sermon in 1972 when the new wave of anti-Semitism was beginning to be felt in Europe and England. He was the Rabbi of Marble Arch Synagogue. The lesson he preached then is applicable today, and so I have changed nothing in this sermon.

Zachor: BY Rabbi Maurice Unterman ZT"L

(This sermon was preached in 1972. I have not adapted it to the present, relying on my colleagues to do so, each in his own way. The material is, unfortunately, still timely. [NES])

This morning's special portion, known as Zachor, is the most important of the whole Jewish calendar. So says the Shulchan Aruch. I want to explain two things.

First, why a Talmudic scholar makes the extraordinary statement that he who leaves the synagogue in the middle of the Torah reading is "cursed", a word that is so repugnant to Jewish ears. Also, why the Rambam, our great sage and codifier, says in connection with the Purim Megilla *Liyemot Hamashiach kol haneviim vehaketuvim atidin libatel – hutz mimegilat Esther*. The Books of the Prophets are only a preparation for the time of the Messiah, but even when he comes, there will still be need to read the Megilla. How can the Purim Megilla take precedence over the Prophets?

I offer you one answer to both questions; to explain why the Rambam placed such importance on the reading of the Megilla, and why the Talmud used the word "curse" for leaving the synagogue in the middle of the Torah reading.

Throughout our history, whenever the Jew came face-to-face with danger, he drew on a hidden reservoir of strength that has baffled historians and resulted in his survival. Russian Jews were never so strong as they are today, now that each one is aware of the danger which faces him as a Jew. The stories are mounting day by day. Katya Palatnik, by her own admission, a weak, frightened school-girl, who was terrified to admit even to herself that she was Jewish, and certainly feared to divulge this to her school friends, lest she lose them as friends. Now that the danger is identified and visible, nothing in the world would tempt her, or her imprisoned sister, and thousands like them, from declaring from the house tops how proud they are to be Jews.

FACTS ARE FACTS. The only fatal danger for Jews is when they cannot identify the danger, when they are coaxed to turn their backs upon reality, with a shrug, with escapism, with a posture of "Oh, its not really that bad" . . . or "It can't happen here". You know all the phrases. You've heard them yourselves.

Now what would you say if I told you that the charge that Jews are inhumane in the slaughter of animals, in shehita, which was leveled in France this week, is the beginning of a dangerous campaign that can run like wild fire throughout the common market countries and can strike at us here? Would you see in this recent attack in France the hand of Amalek of this morning's

reading, or would you shake it off?

Do you think it is sheer coincidence that this week in Italy, a new issue of the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” have been published, this libel which contains the NAZI FOOD OF “SMEAR AND FEAR”? What I am saying is: The words of today’s reading, ZACHOR, “Remember”, are alerting us to the ugly facts of life and asking you not to walk out in the middle of the reading, not to dismiss the warning, for if you do, it will diminish the blessings of life by a situation which brings the perennial curse of anti-Semitism in its train.

For a long time it has been known that a reputable British firm was going to reprint Hitler’s Mein Kampf. The effect of this is to resuscitate Hitler’s satanic ghost and his anti-Jewish poison, which will soon find hospitality in the homes of Britishers who may have been too young to know about the Nazi horrors. This book, which in our generation gave the green light to erect gas chambers, enslave Jews, and non-Jews, which turned Europe into a Graveyard, is going to be found in British drawing rooms and libraries. And all that our Organizations have been able to do is to see that it costs twice as much as intended. What a Purim folly! All that will happen is that prospective purchasers will think.... “What costs more is worth more”.... That is why the Talmud says it is a curse if we don’t hear the alarm of ZACHOR, “Remember”, we are surely cursed if we fail to learn from history. Far better to lawfully but effectively picket every major shop which offers for sale Mein Kampf, with the same success as our British coal miners have had with their picketing. No wonder the Rambam saw as imperative, the constant reminder of the Megilla, that Jewish survival must have in it the ingredient of Jewish participation in their own survival efforts... When Jews take their own future into their hands, identify the danger, then it becomes ARUR HAMAN, as we say after the Megilla, “Cursed be Haman and blessed be Mordechai”, symbolical of the Jewish people.

Remember, an attack against Shechita is another way of saying Jews are not humane. You know what follows that allegation. A reprint of the notorious “Protocols of Zion”, is an incitement to violence, to vandalism against Jewish property, and you know that once this begins, it is almost impossible to stop, for it gathers momentum until it is a frenzy. Remember a reprint of Mein Kampf is a defamation of millions of martyrs and since no group has mobilized real opposition then we have only ourselves to blame if life here becomes difficult.

So let us not leave the synagogue when the words of ZACHOR, “Remember the past” are proclaimed, and listen to the Megilla which exhorts you to do something about your own future, and then, LaYehudim hayta ora vesimcha vesason, we will be worthy of hearing the words of the Megilla.

When Jews see the light and identify the dangers, then there will be joy and rejoicing in our midst. AMEN.

(Written by Rabbi Maurice Unterman, zt"l, submitted by Nisson Shulman