

פרשת "זכור"
PORROSHAS "ZOCHOIR"

Our Chachommim, of blessed memory, instituted that we commemorate certain events or Mitzvos by means of special readings from the Sefer Torah and special Haftorahs (readings from the נביאים, the Books of the Prophets). This week's Shabbos is called Shabbos Porroshas "Zochoir." It takes its name from the first word of the special Maftir read on Shabbos morning. This special Torah-reading is taken from Sefer Devorrim, Chapter 25, Pessukim 17 — 19 inclusive (at the end of Sidra כי תעזר). The Haftorah is from the first Sefer of Shmuel, Chapter 16, Pessukim 1 — 34 (Ashkenazzim start at Possuk 2 of that Chapter) inclusive.

1. We are commanded in the Torah to always remember what Ammolayk did to us shortly after HaShem took us out from Egypt.
2. As the People that HaShem took to be His Own Nation in such spectacular fashion, we have as our mission and duty to teach the whole of Mankind about HaShem and thus to elevate the whole of humankind to the spiritual and moral level that HaShem in His goodness intends for all. Indeed, the very way in which we exploded, as it were, on to the stage of world history teaches that our Nation is like no other. For the usual stages of development of other nations — from a family to become a tribe, to become a people in its own country, to then expand into an empire — did not happen with us. Instead, we went down to Egypt as a family few in number, and, away from our own Land, we were soon overwhelmed and enslaved and afflicted under the burdens of the Egyptian slavery.
3. But then, when the time appointed by HaShem had come for us to be released so that we could apply ourselves to our G-d-given task, the Egyptians and their king refused to acknowledge HaShem our G-d as the Almighty G-d of the whole of Creation. They defied His command to let us go — and they paid for their defiance in full measure. The land of Egypt and its people became the object-lesson to the world: through them the Almightyness of HaShem became known to all Mankind. The lessons taught by our Deliverance from Egypt by HaShem were taken to heart by all the peoples of the world who heard of those miraculous events. The whole of Mankind thus came to know and recognize the Almightyness of HaShem and was ready to come under the benign influence of His moral code, paying special respect to — and in some fear of — that Nation which was special to HaShem by virtue of their taking upon themselves His Torah in its entirety.
4. The old order of "might is right" and the cruel, flagrant power of the sword which until then had been the dominant force in the world of Man and had virtually enslaved his spirit was now challenged: a new age was about to take its place, the age of "right is might." This new age was to bring to Mankind an awareness of HaShem as the All-Merciful and All-Powerful G-d of heaven and earth, the Father and King of all humanity, Who orders the destiny of Nations and Who intends that Mankind should elevate itself through moral and correct behaviour and thus find happiness and fulfilment in living a life governed not by might, but by right — by what is right in the Eyes of G-d.

5. It was then that Ammolayk, in a wilful demonstration of defiance and revolt against HaShem, attacked His People. Completely unprovoked and not at all threatened, the warlike Ammolaykites came up behind the Jewish People with sword and battle-axe: they alone of all the Nations were utterly without fear of G-d and they alone set themselves up as the enemies of HaShem by attacking His People. Taking up arms against us when we were weakened and tired-out from our travellings, our greater number were defenceless women and children and our men were totally untrained in warfare. We were a People making our peaceful way to our rightful Homeland when Ammolayk sought to destroy us and through our destruction re-establish the rule of might. For Ammolayk sees in this People which is governed by the moral code of HaShem — a code whose aims are the real happiness and spiritual fulfilment of all Mankind and the peace and brotherhood of Man under the Kingship of G-d — in this People Ammolayk sees his greatest enemy. For this People of HaShem teaches of the greatness that Man can attain not by the sword but by peace. This People teaches of things spiritual and scorns the principles of the might of the sword. This People teaches of Man’s noble spirit in the service of his Creator — and thus spells the end of the rule of the sword and brute force and cruelty and intimidation.
6. Attacked by Ammolayk, we were forced to wage war. But the battle was won not by the sword but by the G-dly staff in the hand of Mosheh our Teacher. On the day of that battle — which was an indication of all such future confrontations that the Jewish People would encounter — Mosheh our Teacher, together with Aharon the future Kohen Ga’dol and Chur (ever-zealous for the Glory of HaShem) went up to the top of the hill and demonstrated their confidence in HaShem our Protector. With the hands of Mosheh our Teacher visibly raised in prayer signalling to them to trust in HaShem, those of us who were chosen to fight with Ammolayk in the battlefield below took courage and placed their trust, not in their prowess or bravery, but in HaShem. Thus was this first battle with Ammolayk fought and won, and taught again that the power of the sword of the ungodly brute falls before the omnipotent power of HaShem, the All-Merciful G-d of Mankind.
7. HaShem then commanded Mosheh to commemorate this battle for all time, for this encounter signalled only the beginning of the struggle between these two opposites: on the one hand, the moral force of HaShem’s Rule, which elevates Man’s spirit to higher things and inspires him to spiritual greatness, and on the other hand, the cruel despotism of the pitiless and inhuman tyrant who would enslave and subjugate any who would stand in his way and who would throttle the happiness of the free, not satisfied until everyone trembles before his might.
8. HaShem tells Mosheh to proclaim that it is this malevolence of Ammolayk that He wants blotted out from under the heavens. But He wants it to be overcome by the free spirit of Man himself. It must be the triumph of Man’s noble spirit and G-dliness that overcomes the tyranny of the brute. It must be Man’s goodness that overcomes the evil of the tyrant. Even if this be at great cost, the triumph of good over evil must be as the result of Man’s own efforts. Furthermore, evil must be overcome only with goodness, not with matching evil. Therefore however tempting it might be to become like the tyrant so as to overcome him, nevertheless great care must be taken that in this struggle against evil the nobility of Man’s spirit of goodness is not corrupted. But so long as there are those who look up to the violence and force of the tyrant as epitomized in Ammolayk and would try to emulate him, so long will the happiness of Mankind be threatened. Only when all the sons of Man cease to glorify the memory of

the Ammolaykite and instead recognize the just and moral Law of HaShem and His value-system, only then will Mankind be able to achieve true happiness and spiritual fulfilment under the banner-standard of HaShem.

9. This part of our mission as the People of HaShem, namely, to ensure that no more shall Mankind glorify the power of the conqueror's sword for its own sake, and in its place to teach of the morality and justice of the Law of HaShem, is fundamental to our calling. Indeed, we are commanded that on our taking possession of Eretz Yisroel we are to undertake three tasks: Firstly, we are to set a king over ourselves, who will put in hand, secondly, the building of the Beis HaMikdash (HaShem's House of Peace) and, thirdly, the eradication of the effects of Ammolayk and his influence. (Noteworthy is that the Torah does not command so much the destruction of the physical Ammolayk but the memory, that is, the influence, of self-glorifying Ammolaykite power.) It is not surprising, therefore, that shortly before we came into Eretz Yisroel, Mosheh our Teacher commanded us to remember to blot out the memory of the people called Ammolayk who, without any provocation or threat, would attack and enslave others out of sheer joy of massacre and cruelty. For this is one of our tasks as the People of HaShem — to utterly erase the glory of Ammolayk and destroy the influence of those who would follow him in his crusade against HaShem. It is a task that will be completed only when all Mankind ceases to honour those wreckers of human happiness as epitomized by the brutal Ammolayk and his heirs and followers. Even when the physical Ammolaykites are laid low we may never forget that their ungodly brute force would enslave Mankind. Ever-mindful of our calling, we must remember to keep our humaneness, our morality and our justice as taught by HaShem's Torah and spread its message over the world.
10. It is not enough that we should not forget this: the Torah commands us to positively remember it. From time to time (but at least once a year) we are to refresh our remembrance of the effect of Ammolayk and what he stands for. To this end, our Chachommim, of blessed memory, ordered that the account of that encounter with Ammolayk should be read and studied, but especially at the time of year when once again the dire threat of Ammolayk arose. The plot of Hommon, a descendant of Ammolayk, to wipe out the entire Jewish Nation showed that the evil of Ammolayk was not yet obliterated, and our Chachommim, of blessed memory, ordered that this commandment of the Torah “to remember Ammolayk” should be fulfilled on the Shabbos before Purim (the festival which marks our deliverance by HaShem from Hommon's malevolent plan). Thus, our remembrance of the fall of Ammolayk in absolute terms precedes our commemoration of his fall as we experienced it in our own national story at this particular time of the year. In this way, we express the hope that our remembrance of the fall of Ammolayk long ago should again precede the fall — final and complete, in our own days — of Ammolayk and all that he represents, to the benefit of all Mankind.

The Haftorah of Porroshas “Zochair” is in preparation.