

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

As I write these lines on October 12th, I am still shocked by the events that took place in Israel on the morning of Shemini Atzeret. The viciousness, cruelty, and senseless bloodshed our brothers and sisters experienced is beyond words.

By the time you read these lines, I am sure new developments in the war against Hamas should have taken place. Hopefully we will be heading in the right direction, although it looks as if we will have a long and difficult way ahead.

I don't wish to repeat what by now you have listened to countless times, including the sheer ruthlessness of the attackers, the bravery of the defenders, and the tragedy of the bereft families and those waiting to hear news from their loved ones.

I am not going to offer a novel political analysis, or ponder why we didn't see this coming, or simple recipes about what the IDF should do.

I like to say, what I shared in shul, and that is that we got to experience for 10 hours what it feels like to be powerless, not to have a sovereign State, not to be in charge.

Our Torah commands us to remember what Amalek did to us.

“Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God. When the Lord your God gives you rest from the enemies around you in the land that He is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you are to blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” (Deuteronomy 25:17-19).

I like to share an insight from Rabanit Sally Mayer, Rosh Midrasha at Midreshet Lindenbaum's Overseas Program in Jerusalem (Abby studied there for one year).

Rabanit Sally Mayer reminds us that the first plain meaning of the above verses is to destroy Amalek, to make sure that the barbaric attackers who killed 1300 people in Israel, and those who sent them, are eliminated to the extent that “never again” will be, this time, “never again.”

However, there is a second, deeper meaning, in obliterating Amalek, and that is to obliterate what Amalek stands for: cruelty, mercilessness, disregard for the weak and defenseless.

We should pray for the IDF soldiers to do their job, and to do it well. At the same time, we must strive to live lives of kindness and compassion, caring for the weak and the defenseless, so we not only can defeat Amalek physically, but also what Amalek represents.

May we hear good news soon. May brighter days lay ahead for all of us. May Hashem give strength to His people and protect His people with peace.

Rabbi Manes Kogan