

We got out. After plagues, trauma and pursuit by Pharaoh's armies, with the help of a few miracles, we make it safely to the other side of the Red Sea. It is presumed by those who like to make maps of the Israelite wanderings that we crossed at a point where the Sea narrows, behaving more like a river, just north of where the Suez Canal is presently.

Once we crossed, according to descriptions in Torah as well as reconstructed, we actually wandered south, keeping close to the Red Sea on our right, so to speak, before cutting across the wilderness to Mt. Sinai, and then beginning a northward journey, this time hugging the coast of what is now the Gulf of Aqaba to the east, before making our way up the Sinai Peninsula towards Israel.

We were not necessarily welcome. This week's same parashah closes with the description of a battle between the Israelites and Amalek, who becomes synonymous with evil through centuries of Jewish tradition. Chapter 17:8, states, "Amalek came a fought with Israel at Rephidim," the subsequent 8 verses are devoted to describing how Israelite defeats Amalek, with the help of a miracle.

Why did Amalek attack? Rashi comments that it was a consequence of the people's lack of faith, and complaining, so soon after witnessing miracles. But this does not account for the Divine rage that Torah ascribes to Amalek. The passage ends with a promise that Hashem will blot out the name of Amalek, and be at war with Amalek throughout the ages. This punishment makes no sense unless Amalek has free will, and is using it in ways that are entirely morally abhorrent.

Sforno notes that Amalek came because they heard the Israelites' cries of thirst, and took advantage of them when they were weakest. And medieval commentator Ibn Ezra writes, "Behold, he came from a distant place to wage war against Israel." Between these two commentators, we get a sense of the taboo Amalek violated: In the culture imagined by Torah, migration was a right.

One might fight wars against invaders, but not attack weary, thirsty travelers who posed no threat. All the more so, one should not travel a great distance to attack

a group of people who aren't posing a threat to one's own territory. Torah takes for granted that such a group of people should have the right to travel and seek safety unmolested – hence the utter divine outrage at Amalek, and the later association between Amalek and every kind of evil.

I tell the story in this light, of course, because this weekend has been designated as HIAS refugees Shabbat. Because there are still people – 32.5 million of them in 2022 officially classified as refugees – who must cross seas and deserts to try to find safety and freedom. Generally, the seas are not miraculously parting for the nowadays, and their journeys are difficult enough even when they are not attacked by Amalek on the way.

When the Israelites left Egypt, we didn't encounter a wall on the other side. We weren't told that we needed to use an app to make an appointment before we could present an application for asylum at the Sinai desert.

And yet, those are some of the techniques that our own country is using to keep people out, at this very moment. As outraged at many in this congregation were by the immigrations bans during the Trump presidency, we have largely fallen into complacency and willful ignorance as the Biden administration continues and expands many of the same policies.

And Torah reminds us: who attacks and waylays hungry, weary people who are just seeking a better life? That is Amalek behavior. That is behavior we should not call normal, whether it exists on a vigilante level or as Federal policy.

Given how difficult our government makes it for people to get here, it is amazing that there are refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants who make it here to our community. But there are, and our q and a as we finish our service will give us some time to learn and explore how we might support those in our community who are living the Exodus story now.

For now, we'll continue with our reminder to ourselves that it is Aleinu to be the change we wish to see. Page 121.