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**Daniel Greenberg**

**Script for BBC Thought for the Day**

**16 January 2019**

**The Dangers of Victory**

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Good morning.

In these unprecedentedly politically and constitutionally turbulent times, we are all looking for signs of cheer and hope wherever we can.

One thing that I noticed about the closing days of the Withdrawal Deal debate in the House of Commons was the number of speakers who, whether scenting likely victory or fearing probable defeat, went out of their way, more than might normally have been expected, to express to their opponents, including the Prime Minister and others, admiration for the dignity and decency that they have brought to pursuit of their views, along with a recognition that politicians and others on all sides of the debate share equal commitment and dedication to the public good.

The fact that even before it was possible for anybody to talk in terms of victory or defeat, people were going out of their way to reach out to their political opponents struck me as an important green shoot of hope in these troubled times.

The importance of avoiding triumphalism in victory or malice in defeat is a recurring theme in Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism. At this time of the year Jewish communities throughout the world are reading weekly Torah portions dealing with the escape of the Jewish people from slavery amidst unprecedented constitutional change within the previously invulnerable Ancient Egyptian empire.

In this week’s Torah reading we will observe a slight lapse on the Jewish side, into a triumphalist dance at the downfall and death of large parts of the Egyptian army. The Bible text and Rabbinic commentators are at pains to point out that this gloating does considerable spiritual harm to the Jewish people. Later in this week’s narrative they appear to have learned the lesson: when confronting the Amalekites, a nation traditionally portrayed as the paradigm of selfishness, greed and violence, the Biblical account has the Jewish people prevailing only at times when they look towards Moses’ hands raised to the heavens, symbolically reminding us that when we engage in conflict of any kind we must conduct it in accordance with core Jewish values of decency, dignity, humility and sensitivity.

We all share those core values, although we derive them from different religious, humanist or ideological sources; and so we can perhaps agree that the more challenging the times ahead for our constitution and our country, the more opportunity there is for us individually and collectively to avoid triumphalism and malice, and to engage and develop our decency and humanity.