

# HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

## SERIES 2: 82 - AM YISRAEL AT WAR: PART 4 - DESTROYING AMALEK OU ISRAEL CENTER - WINTER 2024

- The mitzva to wipe out the nation of Amalek is one which many people would prefer not to analyze too closely! It grates on our 21st Century ears and sounds uncomfortably like a command to kill innocents!
- Furthermore, the mitzva not only sits unhappily with our modern ethical sensibilities but also appears to go against standards of morality which the Torah itself requires - both in times of war and peace.
- Perhaps a feeling of discomfort should spur us on to discover a deeper understanding and appreciation of the mitzva!
- Indeed, we are not meant to be embarrassed by the existence of any mitzva - (תהלים קיט:ו) **אָז לֹא אֲבוֹשׁ בְּהֵיטִי אֶל כָּל מִצְוֹתֶיךָ**

### A] THE TORAH ETHICS OF WAR

- The Torah includes a number of mitzvot designed to maintain our ethical and moral standards<sup>2</sup> during war, such as:
  - The insistence that the Jewish people should know that their success in war, or rights to the Land, are not due to their superiority but to the wickedness of the 7 Nations (Devarim 9:5).
  - The mitzva to offer peace before any<sup>3</sup> battle (Devarim 20:10).
  - The mitzva not to destroy more than necessary in a battle (Devarim 20:19).
  - The mitzva to maintain kedusha in the battle camp - both sexually and in use of the latrine (Devarim 23:10-15).
  - The mitzva of proper treatment of civilian women in war situations - eshet yefat toar (Devarim 21:10-14).
- Why do these NOT apply to the battle against Amalek?

1. But regarding certain particular tzivuyim (divine commands), surely we find instances in which obedient response to God's normative demands stands in apparent opposition to what we conceive to be good and, if you will, to what we understand that God conceives to be good. Here, a problem arises: How do we relate to this?  
What makes this problem more acute is the fact that it arises particularly in individuals who are morally and spiritually sensitive. Those who are relatively coarse are not concerned with these issues. Who is troubled by the command to wipe out Amalek? Those people who have succeeded in developing the kind of moral sensitivity that is important to us.

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein - Being Frum and Being Good: On the Relationship Between Religion and Morality<sup>4</sup>

### B] AMALEK IN TANACH

#### B1] ORIGINS

2. (ט) וְאַלְהַ תְּלַדּוֹת עֲשׂוֹ אֲבִי אָדָם בְּהָר שְׁעִיר: (י) אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי עֲשׂוֹ אֵלִיפַז בֶּן עֲדָה אִשְׁתּוֹ עֲשׂוֹ רְעוּאֵל בֶּן בְּשֵׁמֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ עֲשׂוֹ: ... (יב) וְתִמְנַע הַיְתֵה פִּילְגֶשׁ לְאֵלִיפַז בֶּן עֲשׂוֹ וְתִלְדַּ לְאֵלִיפַז אֶת עַמְלֵק אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי עֲדָה אִשְׁתּוֹ עֲשׂוֹ:

בראשית לו

*Amalek<sup>5</sup> is the grandson of Esav and the son of Elifaz from his concubine, Timna.*

1. This issue has blown up recently in Israel following the massacre committed by Hamas on October 7 2023. On October 28, as the IDF moved into battle against Hamas, Binyamin Netanyahu made a public statement in which he said: "[Our soldiers] are committed to eradicating this evil from the world, for our existence, and I add, for the good of all humanity. The entire people, and the leadership of the people, embrace them and believe in them. 'Remember what Amalek did to you' (Deuteronomy 25:17). We remember and we fight." This reference by Netanyahu to Amalek was later used in the accusation of genocide against Israel in the ICC in January 2024. This is clearly a sham and a false cynical attempt to undermine Israel in every forum possible. Netanyahu's comments cannot be linked to genocide for many reasons: (i) The halachic obligation to fighting Amalek in the biblical sense is inapplicable today; (ii) Instead, fighting 'Amalek' has been broadly invoked for centuries as the imperative to oppose those who advocate for the extermination of the Jewish people and who kill and abuse the weakest among us; (iii) Netanyahu is not a Torah scholar and does not rule religious or halachic decisions; (iv) His reference was to remembering Amalek and not to eradicating it (this was misquoted by the prosecution in the ICC); (v) IDF combat policy is not based on this speech. The libelous and cynical accusation against Israel in the ICC must be seen in the context of constant explicit calls by Iran, Hamas and others for the total eradication of Israel, not to mention the ubiquitous chanting by millions to 'free' Eretz Yisrael of the Jewish people.
2. See an excellent shiur on this by R. Mordechai Torczyner, with accompanying source sheet - available at <https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/915720/rabbi-mordechai-torczyner/eternal-war-with-amalek/>
3. There is a machloket Rishonim whether this applies only in a milchemet reshut or also in a milchemet mitzva.
4. Available at <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/philosophy/great-thinkers/harav-aharon-lichtenstein/being-frum-and-being-good-relationship-between>
5. Note Bereishit 14:7 which is the first reference in the Torah to Amalek. In this verse the 4 Kings rampaged across the Land of Israel, including the Negev region in the South and  
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3. **אחות לוטן תמנע** - מאי היא? תמנע בת מלכים הוא, דכתיב אלוף לוטן אלוף תמנע. וכל אלוף - מלכותא בלא תאגא היא. בעיא לאיגיורי, באתה אצל אברהם יצחק ויעקב ולא קבלוה, הלכה והיתה פילגש לאליפז בן עשו. אמרה: מוטב תהא שפחה לאומה זו, ולא תהא גבירה לאומה אחרת. נפק מינה עמלק, דצערניהו לישראל. מאי טעמא - דלא איבעי להו לרחקה.

שנהדרין צט:

Chazal understood that Timna wished to convert, but was pushed away by the family of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. Because of this she connected indirectly through Elifaz, producing Amalek<sup>6</sup>. As such, Amalek feels deep resentment and antagonism to the Jewish people on BOTH his father's side (Elifaz) and his mother's (Timna).

B2] FIRST CONTACT - THE BATTLE WITH YEHOSHUA

4. (ז) ויקרא שם המקום מסה ומריבה על ריב בני ישראל ועל נסתם את ה' לאמר ה' בְּקַרְבְּנוּ אִם אֵין: פ (ח) וַיָּבֵא עֲמֶלֶק וַיִּלָּחֶם עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרַפְדִּים: (ט) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּחַר לָנוּ אֲנָשִׁים וְצֵא לְחַלֵּם בְּעֲמֶלֶק מִחַר אֲנֹכִי נֹצֵב עַל רֹאשׁ הַגְּבֻעָה וּמִטָּה הָאֱלֹהִים בְּיָדִי: (י) וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כְּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר לוֹ מֹשֶׁה לְהִלָּחֵם בְּעֲמֶלֶק וּמֹשֶׁה אָהָרֹן וְחֹוּר עָלוּ רֹאשׁ הַגְּבֻעָה: (יא) וְהָיָה כְּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וְגַבַּר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכַאֲשֶׁר יִנִּיחַ יָדוֹ וְגַבַּר עֲמֶלֶק: (יב) וַיְדִי מֹשֶׁה כְּבָדִים וַיִּקְחוּ אֶבֶן וַיִּשְׁלִימוּ תְּחִילָתוֹ וַיָּשֻׁב עֲלֶיהָ וְאָהָרֹן וְחֹוּר תָּמְכוּ בְּיָדָיו מִזָּה אֶחָד וּמִזָּה אֶחָד וַיְהִי יָדָיו אֶמּוּנָה עַד בֹּא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ: (יג) וַיַּחְלֵשׁ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת עֲמֶלֶק וְאֶת עַמּוֹ לְפִי חֶרֶב: פ (יד) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה כְּתֹב זֹאת זָכְרוֹן בְּסֵפֶר וְשִׁים בְּאָזְנוֹי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כִּי מָחָה אֶמְחָה אֶת זָכְרֵךְ עֲמֶלֶק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם: (טו) וַיִּבֶן מֹשֶׁה מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ ה' נָסִי: (טז) וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי יָד עַל כָּס יְהִי מִלְחָמָה לְה' בְּעֲמֶלֶק מִדֹּר דָּר:

שמות יז

After the first battle with Amalek, God tells Moshe to write down<sup>7</sup> and pass down orally that (i) God will erase the memory of Amalek; (ii) there will be a war against Amalek for all generations; (iii) this war is between Amalek and God! Note also the name of the mizbeach built there, emphasizing that God must be the banner of the Jewish people in war.

5.

<p>אבל עמלק לא היה לו טבה מזה במלחמתו. כי חנה ישראל לא היו עוברים בארצו ובאים להלחם בו לשיצא להלחם בם. וגם לא היה להם ארצות שילך עמלק לכבשם</p>	<p>ולחמדתו אותם ילחם בם. אבל היתה לבד מלחמתו בדרך בצאחם ממצרים. ר"ל שתוא יצא לשטן להם בדרך. עובר ומתעבר על ריב לא לו:</p>
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אברבנל שם

The Abarbanel emphasizes that Amalek attacked without any political or military justification and for no apparent benefit to themselves. This is the essence of Amalek - doctrinal and obsessive even to the point of self destruction.

B3] BILAAM'S PROPHECY

6. וַיִּרְא אֶת עֲמֶלֶק וַיִּשְׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר רְאשִׁית גּוֹיִם עֲמֶלֶק וְאַחֲרֵיתוֹ עַדֵי אָבֶד:

במדבר כ"ד:

Bilaam prophecies the primacy of Amalek as a nation and its ultimate total destruction.

B4] PARASHAT ZACHOR

7. (יז) זָכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לָךְ עֲמֶלֶק בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם: (יח) אֲשֶׁר קָרָךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיִּזְנֶב בְּךָ כָּל הַנְּחֻשָׁלִים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאֶתְּךָ עֲנִי וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹהִים: (יט) וְהָיָה בְּהֵנִיחַ ה' אֶלְהֶיךָ לָךְ מִכָּל אִיבֶיךָ מִסָּבִיב בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ נַחֲלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחָה אֶת זָכְרֵךְ עֲמֶלֶק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח: פ

דברים כה

The Torah commands each of us to remember what Amalek did when we came out of Egypt. The mitzva requires that, when we have conquered Eretz Yisrael and rest there from our other enemies, we are to wipe out the memory of Amalek. Here, interestingly, the war has become OUR war against Amalek.

8. (יח) אשר קרד בדרך - ... לשון קרי וטומאה, שהיה מטמאן במשכב זכור ... ויזנב בך - מכת זנב, חותך מילות וזורקי כלפי מעלה.

רש"י דברים כה:יח

Rashi quotes Chazal emphasizing the element of sexual abuse which accompanied Amalek's attack - that they even<sup>8</sup> raped the men and mutilated their sexual organs.

<sup>6</sup> "smote all the country of the Amalekite". This is a reference to what would be the land of the Amalekites when the Torah was given - see Rashi ibid and Bamidbar 13:29.  
<sup>7</sup> Showing how the Jewish people often create their own enemies!!  
<sup>8</sup> This is the first mention in Tanach of something having been written down.  
 Rashi is focusing on textual cues indicating male rape - 'zecher', 'vayezanev'. Rape and sexual abuse of woman is not, however, excluded by implication and may have been assumed in the context Amalek's attack. See Gittin 57b in connection with rape of women specifically by Amalek.  
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9. Philistia feared, Edom remained stunned, Moav trembled, Canaan was quite dumbfounded. It was only Amalek, completely unprovoked, who hurried out of his way to gain renown and take up arms against the Force which had laid even a Pharaoh low. He alone did not fear God. He alone was the heir of that spirit which chose the sword as his lot, who sought to realise the seeking [of] renown in laurels of blood ....
- But in Israel he sees an object of mortal hate and complete disdain, where one dares to think the sword is dispensable, where one dares to trust in spiritual-moral powers, powers of which the sword has no idea and which are beyond its reach. In the representative of the idea of the greatness which Man can attain by Peace, Amalek sees the utter scorn of all his principles, sees in it his one real enemy, and senses somehow his own ultimate collapse.

R. Hirsch Shemot 17:8-16

*In the mid 19th century Rav Hirsch encapsulates the maniacal obsession of Amalek in destroying the moral and spiritual forces of Judaism. Its presaging of Nazi philosophy 75 years later is powerful!*

## B5] THE BATTLE OF SHAUL AGAINST AMALEK

10. (א) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂמוּאֵל אֶל שָׁאוּל אֲנִי שָׁלַח ה' לְמִשְׁחָךְ לְמַלְכָּךְ עַל עַמּוֹ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַתָּה שְׁמַע לְקוֹל דְּבָרֵי ה': ס (ב) כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת פְּקֹדֵי אֱשֶׁר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה עִמָּךְ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר שָׂם לְךָ בְּדָרְךָ בְּעֵלְתוֹ מִמִּצְרַיִם: (ג) עַתָּה לָךְ וְהִכִּיתָ אֶת עַמְּלֶךְ וְהִחַרְמְתָם אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ וְלֹא תַחַמַּל עֲלָיו וְהִמַּתָּה מֵאִישׁ עַד אִשָּׁה מֵעַלְלָל וְעַד יוֹנֵק מִשׁוּר וְעַד שֶׁה מִגִּמְלָל וְעַד חֲמוּר: ס (ד) וַיִּשְׁמַע שָׁאוּל אֶת הָעָם וַיִּפְקְדֵם בְּטַלְאִים מְאֹתִים אֶלְפֵי רִגְלֵי וַעֲשֶׂרֶת אֲלָפִים אֶת אִישׁ יְהוּדָה: (ה) וַיָּבֵא שָׁאוּל עַד עִיר עַמְלֶךְ וַיִּרְבַּ בְּנַחֲלֵ: (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל הַקִּינִי לְכוּ סְרוּ רְדוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמְלֶקִי פֶן אֲסַפֶּה עִמּוֹ וְאַתָּה עֲשִׂיתָה חֶסֶד עִם כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵלְוֹתָם מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיִּסֶר קִינִי מִתּוֹךְ עַמְלֶק: (ז) וַיִּן שָׁאוּל אֶת עַמְלֶק מִחוּלָה בּוֹאֶף שׁוּר אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי מִצְרַיִם: (ח) וַיִּתְּפֹשׂ אֶת אַגַּג מֶלֶךְ עַמְלֶק חַי וְאֵת כָּל הָעָם הַחֲרִימָם לְפִי חָרֵב: (ט) וַיַּחַמֵּל שָׁאוּל וְהָעָם עַל אַגַּג וְעַל מֵיטֵב הַצֹּאן וְהִבְקֵר וְהַמְשִׁנִּים וְעַל הַכְּרִים וְעַל כָּל הַטּוֹב וְלֹא אָבוּ הַחֲרִימָם וְכָל הַמְּלֶאכֶה נִמְבָּזָה וְנִמְסָה אֶתָּה הַחֲרִימוּ: פ (י) וַיְהִי דְבַר ה' אֶל שְׂמוּאֵל לֵאמֹר: (יא) נַחֲמֵתִי כִּי הַמְּלֶכֶתִי אֶת שָׁאוּל לְמַלְכָּךְ כִּי שָׁב מֵאַחֲרַי וְאֵת דְּבָרֵי לֹא הָקִים וַיַּחַר לְשְׂמוּאֵל וַיִּזְעַק אֶל ה' כָּל הַלַּיְלָה:

שמואל א' טו

*In the battle against Amalek by Shaul HaMelech, God commanded him (through Shmuel) to destroy everything from Amalek, including every person. Shaul did not do this but saved Agag and many of the animals. As a result, the crown was taken away from him.*

## B6] OTHER BATTLES IN TANACH AGAINST AMALEK

- The war against Amalek was not an isolated incident. Rather, there was an ongoing struggle across the pages of Tanach, with many encounters in battle, including:
  - Bamidbar 14 Second attack by Amalek, with Canaan
  - Shoftim 3 Attack by Amalek, with Moav
  - Shoftim 6 Attack by Amalek, with Midian
  - Shmuel I 15 King Shaul's attack, and mercy for Agag
  - Shmuel I 27 David's attack on behalf of the Pelishtim
  - Shmuel I 30 Amalek burns down Tziklag, and takes the women and children hostage
  - Shmuel II 1 King Shaul is killed by an Amaleki
  - Divrei haYamim I 4:43 The tribe of Shimon goes to war against Amalek, successfully
  - Esther 3, 8, 9 Haman is the last person in the Tanach to be connected to Amalek - through Agag.

## C] DESTROYING AMALEK - DEFINING THE MITZVA

### C1] MALBIM

11. שחוף ממה שנצטוו ללחום עמו על משטמת עולם שי"ל על ישראל, יבא עת שהשי"ת בעצמו ימחה את שמו, נגד מה שהיה מגמתו לנאץ שם ה'. ונגד מה שנלחם עם ה' מחה אמחה את זכר עמלק יבא עת לעת"ל שאני בעצמי אמחה את זכר עמלק. וזה יהיה לעת"ל. ורמז ג"כ שבכל דור ודור יעמדו צוררי ישראל להשמידם וצוררי ה' ומכחישי שמו, שכלם שורש פורה ראש ולענה מעמלק, ובאחרית הימים ישמידם מתחת שמי ה'.

מלבי"ם שמות יז:יד

*The Malbim understands that the ultimate eradication of Amalek will be done by God. In the interim Amalek, and the nations fill Amalek's shoes, will never cease.*

## C2] SEFER MITZVOT GADOL - SMA'G

12. כשם שנמחה שבעת עממים כך נצטוו ישראל למחות את זכר עמלק ... ובשתי מצות אלו גם יש מצות עשה .... מצוה זו אינה נוהגת אלא לימות מלך המשיח לאחר כיבוש הארץ שנאמר והיה בהניח ה' אלהיך לך מכל אויבך וגו' תמחה את זכר עמלק מתחת השמים.

ספר מצוות גדול לאוין סימן רכו

*The Smag<sup>9</sup> learns that the mitzva of wiping out Amalek applies only in the times of Mashiach.<sup>10</sup>*

## C3] SEFER YEREIM

13. תניא בסנהדרין בפ' כהן גדול (פ:) ר"י אומר ג' מצוות שנצטוו בכניסתן לארץ ישראל - להעמיד להם מלך, ולהכרית זרעו של עמלק, ולבנות להם בית הבחירה. איני יודע איזו תחילה! כשהוא אומר כי יד על כס יהוה הוא אומר להעמיד להם מלך תחילה. שאין כסא אלא מלך.... למדנו מכאן שמצוה למחות זכר עמלק על המלך מוטלת ולא על שאר ישראל. וכה פירוש המקרא כייד על כס יהוה דהיינו מלכות אז תתקיים מלחמה לה' בעמלק:

ספר יראים סימן תלה [דפוס ישן - רצט]

*The Yereim (R. Eliezer of Metz, 12th century France) rules that the mitzva of wiping out Amalek falls solely on the king.*

## C4] SEFER HACHINUCH

14. שנצטוינו למחות זרעו של עמלק ולאבד זכרו מן העולם זכר ונקבה גדול וקטן. ועל זה נאמר (דברים כה:ט) תמחה את זכר עמלק. שבכלל 'זכר' הוא הכל. .... וזאת מן המצוות המוטלות על הצבור כולן. וכענין שאמרו זכרונם לברכה (סנהדרין פ:) שלש מצוות נצטוו ישראל בשעת כניסתן לארץ - למנות להם מלך, ולבנות להם בית הבחירה, ולהכרית זרע עמלק. ובאמת כי גם על כל יחיד מ ישראל הזכרים מוטל החיוב להרגם ולאבדם מן העולם אם יש כח בידם - בכל מקום ובכל זמן אם אולי ימצא אחד מכל זרעם. ועובר על זה ובא לידו אחד מזרע עמלק ויש סיפק בידו להורגו ולא הרגו ביטל עשה זה

ספר החינוך מצוה תרד

*The Sefer Hachinuch rules that the mitzva applies: (i) both to the community as a whole and also to individuals; (ii) in all generations; (iii) only to the genealogical descendents of Amalek.*

15. והנראה צזה, דמלחמת עמלק כיון שהכריז הקצ"ה עליו מלחמה 'מדר דר'. איכ לא פסקה המלחמה לעולם גם כשאין הליצור מתאסף להלחם. ולכן כל אחד ואחד שצא לידו עמלקי, הרי הוא משתתף במלחמה הכללית הזו ע"י מחייתו.

מנחת אהרון שם

*The Minchat Aharon explains that we are in an ongoing war against Amalek, which does not end. When we have a Jewish army, that leads the war effort. When we do not have an army, the battle falls to individuals!*

16.

WHEN R' GUSTMAN REACHED THE FOREST, HIS PLAN WAS TO become a partisan to fight against the Nazis and defend himself and his family. However, to be accepted as a partisan, there was a single condition: One had to bring a weapon.

R' Gustman's opportunity came when he saw a lone Nazi soldier passing through a quiet place in the forest. R' Gustman jumped the

soldier, threw his rifle as far as away as he could, and killed the soldier with his bare hands. In Yerushalayim, R' Gustman would look down at his hands and say, "I was *mekayem* the mitzvah of being *moche zecher Amalek* [I fulfilled the mitzvah of wiping out Amalek] with my bare hands."

Biography of Rav Yisrael Zev Gustman, Artscroll, 2017

*In what way could this be a fulfillment of the mitzva according to the Chinuch? How does Rav Gustman know that this is indeed a descendent of Amalek!? In fact, we will see that he may have been following the line of thought of the Rambam!*

9. This is also the position of Hagaot Maymoniot on Hilchot Melachim 5:5.

10. This of course enables us to avoid the difficult questions involved in this mitzva at this point and push them off to Yemot Hamashiach. But does this really help? Will the fulfillment of the mitzva be so much easier for us then? Maybe the total shift in mind-set following the arrival of Mashiach will mean that we relate to the issue in a wholly different way that we cannot anticipate at this stage.

## C5] RAMBAM

17. ד מצות עשה להחרים שבעה עממין שנאמר החרם תחרימם, וכל שבא לידו אחד מהן ולא הרגו עובר בלא תעשה שנאמר לא תחיה כל נשמה, וכבר אבד זכרם ה וכן מצות עשה לאבד זכר עמלק, שנאמר תמחה את זכר עמלק. ומצות עשה לזכור תמיד מעשיו הרעים ואריבתו, כדן לעורר איבתו שנאמר זכור את אשר עשה לך עמלק. מפי השמועה למדו זכור בפה לא תשכח בלב, שאסור לשכוח איבתו ושנאתו.

רמב"ם הלכות מלכים פרק ה

*The Rambam rules the halacha to destroy the 7 Nations and then the mitzva to destroy Amalek.*

18. [ד] מ"ע להחרים וכו'. .... ומה שכתב 'וכבר אבד זכרם' - לפי שזכרם סנחריב וכלכל את העולם:

רדב"ז הלכות מלכים פרק ה הלכה ד

*The Radvaz explains that the Rambam's comment that the 7 Nations are 'no longer known' is due to the actions of Sanheriv who mixed up all the nations.*

19. בו ביום בא יהודה גר עמוני ועמד לפניו בבית המדרש. אמר להם מה אני לבא בקהל? אמר לו ר"ג אסור אתה. אמר לו ר' יהושע מותר אתה. א"ל ר"ג הכתוב אומר (דברים כג) לא יבא עמוני ומואבי בקהל ה' גם דור עשירי וגו'. אמר לו רבי יהושע - וכי עמונים ומואבים במקומן הן?! כבר עלה סנחריב מלך אשור ובלבל את כל האומות. שנאמר (ישעיהו י"ג) וְאֶסִיר גְבוּלַת עַמִּים וְעֲתוּדוֹתֵיהֶם שׁוֹשְׁתֵי וְאוֹרֵיד כְּאֶבֶר יוֹשְׁבֵים.

משנה מסכת ידים פרק ד משנה ד

*Chazal understood that the classic definitions of Amon and Moav could not longer be applied in halacha due to the dispersal policies of Sanheriv during his wars of conquest in the 7th century BCE.*

• Does this also apply to the halachot relating to Amalek? On the one hand, the Rambam does not include the words זכרם אבד זכרם in the halacha relating to Amalek, indicating that we may still know how to identify them. On the other hand, he starts that halacha with וכן, perhaps importing the relevant conditions of the previous halacha.

20. א אין עושין מלחמה עם אדם בעולם עד שקוראין לו שלום אחד מלחמת הרשות ואחד מלחמת מצוה ד ואם לא השלימו או שהשלימו ולא קבלו שבע מצות, עושין עמהם מלחמה והורגין כל הזכרים הגדולים, ובוזזין כל ממונם וטפם. ואין הורגין אשה ולא קטן .... במה דברים אמורים במלחמת הרשות שהוא עם שאר האומות. אבל שבעה עממין ועמלק שלא השלימו אין מניחין מהם נשמה שנאמר ... לא תחיה כל נשמה. וכן הוא אומר בעמלק תמחה את זכר עמלק. ...

רמב"ם הלכות מלכים פרק ו הלכה ד

*The Rambam rules that Amalek too must first be offered peace terms and, only if they refuse, is war the answer! Clearly, the mitzva to 'wipe them out' is not genocidal! Peace with Amalek is a legitimate option, but on what terms?*

21. חלף שאפשר לטעון צעד רבינו ולומר שכלל 'השלימו' הוא קבלת שבע מצות. שאם קבלו עליהם שבע מצות הרי ילאו מכלל שבעה עממין ומכלל עמלק והרי הם כבני נח הכשרים:

כסף משנה הלכות מלכים פרק ו

*The Rambam's position is that, if Amalek accept the 7 Mitzvot and live as Noachides, they are fully accepted!*

22. .... חבל אם עשו תשובה וקבלו שבע מצות, הרי אין אוחזין מעשה מצותיהם צדיקה, ושוב אין נענשים צעון מצותם

אבני נור תקח

*This is also how the Avnei Nezer understands the Rambam. Teshuva is an option for any Amaleki!*

• This clearly underlines, at least according to the Rambam<sup>11</sup>, the non-racial nature of the mitzva of wiping out Amalek.

23. אבל שבעה עממין ועמלק וכו'. ח"א - זה שבוש! חלף שיכול לומר השלימו לקבל המצות

השנת הראב"ד שם

*The Ravad disagrees with this and rules that the only basis on which Amalek can make peace with us is if they convert to Judaism, which he agrees is fully legitimate.*

11. Although in Moreh Nevuchim 3:50 the Rambam appears to take a more genealogical approach to Amalek when explaining that the descendents of Seir are listed in the Torah so that we do not mistake them for those of Amalek, which must be wiped out.

24. מבני בניו של המן למדו תורה בבני ברק

גיטין נ:

*Indeed, it seems that Amalek DOES have descendants<sup>12</sup> in the Jewish people!*

25.

Divine providence is testing us once again via the crisis that has overtaken the land of Israel. Let it be clearly stated: the matter does not just affect the political future of the land of Israel. The designs of

the Arabs are directed not just against the political sovereignty of the State of Israel but against the very existence of the *Yishuv* in the land of Israel. They wish to destroy, heaven forbid, the entire community, "both men and women, infant and suckling, ox and sheep" (1 Samuel 15:3). At a Mirachi convention I cited the view expressed by my father and master (R. Moses Soloveitchik) of blessed memory, that the proclamation, "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16) does not only translate into the communal exercise of waging obligatory war against a specific race, but includes as well the obligation to rise up as a community against any people or group that, filled with maniacal hatred, directs its enmity against *Keneset* Israel. When a people

emblazons on its banner, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance" (Psalms 89:5) it becomes, thereby, Amalek.<sup>12</sup> In the 1930s and 1940s the Nazis, with Hitler at their head, filled this role. They were the Amalekites, the standard-bearers of insane hatred and enmity during the era just past. Today their place has been taken over by the mobs of Nasser and the Mufti. If we are silent now as well, I know not the verdict that will be issued against us by the God of justice. Do not rely on the "liberal" world's sense of equity. Those same righteous liberals were around fifteen years ago, and they looked with indifference upon the extermination of millions of people; they did not even lift a finger. If, heaven forbid, yet a second spectacle of blood were to take place before their very eyes, it is likely that they would not even lose a night's sleep over it.

Kol Dodi Dofek, Rav Yosef B Soloveitchik<sup>13</sup>

26. From Maimonides' words it appears that Amalek still exists in the world, whereas the seven nations of Canaan have descended to the depths of oblivion. One wonders why Maimonides did not employ the rule of R. Joshua that "Sennacherib came and intermingled all the nations" with relation to Amalek. The answer to this question is very simple. The Bible testifies that Amalek still exists in this world. Go and see what the Torah says: "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16). Accordingly, it is impossible for Amalek to be blotted out of the world until the coming of the Messiah.

.... But where is Amalek? I heard the answer from my father of blessed memory. Every nation that conspires to destroy the Jewish people is considered by the halakhah to be Amalek. My father added that as concerns Amalek itself we were commanded to perform two mitzvot: (a) [for the individual] to blot out the memory of Amalek, which is incumbent on everyone [to slay] any individual member of Amalek [that he encounters], as expounded in the Torah portion of Ki Tetzeh, "You shall blot out the memory of Amalek" (Deuteronomy 25:19), and (b) [for the community] to engage in communal military preparedness for war against Amalek, as it is explained in the Torah portion of B'shalach, "The Lord will wage war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16). With relation to any other nation that stands ready to destroy us, we are [now after the time of Sennacherib] commanded to wage war against it [even] while it prepares for war against us, and our war against it is a "War of Mitzvah", in accordance with the command of the Torah that "The Lord will wage war with Amalek from generation to generation." However, the destruction of individuals, which is derived from the Torah portion of Ki Tetzeh, refers only to the biological descendants of Amalek. The words of Maimonides include the obligation to wipe out individuals, which does not apply to any other nation that plots destruction against the People of Israel. However, since the obligation of warring Amalek pertains to such a nation (as well), he did not employ the phrase "And its memory has already been lost." The status of Amalek exists even now after the nations were intermingled [by Sennacherib]. ....

Kol Dodi Dofek footnote 25

12. Unless of course Haman is not genetically descended from Amalek but connected spiritually to Amalek. Note also the Mechilta in Parashat Beshalach which brings the opinion of R. Eliezer that converts may NOT be accepted from Amalek. There is also a different girsa of the Gemara here which reads Na'aman and not Haman!

13. Delivered in a lecture in New York on Yom Haatzmaut 1956, as the Suez Crises was building.

**D] MORAL AND ETHICAL APPROACHES****D1] MORAL GOOD IS DEFINED BY, AND ONLY BY, MITZVOT**

27.

There are, basically, two elements of moral concern. One is the Amalek commandment, whereby the descendants of Amalek are forever condemned to death, apparently without regard to their own conduct. The Torah's explanation implies a genetic defect in the Amalekites. The other is the Seven Nations commandment, whereby the seven indigenous Canaanite tribes are to be wiped out—"you shall not let a soul remain alive"—and the reason is their abominable culture and religion which threaten to corrupt the incoming Israelites.

Neither of these stands up well under mortal scrutiny. Here is a blatant case of Law versus Morality. How should a Jew loyal to Halakha respond?

A first response is to deny any separate and independent value to morality. What the Law says, that is what is good. Hence, by definition, the Torah's commandments concerning Amalek and the Seven Nations are good and not open to moral objection. This essentially Platonic idea (as developed in his *Republic* and *The Laws*) is translated into Jewish terms by one of the most outstanding rabbinic authorities of the twentieth century, R. Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, known by the title of his major work, the *Hazon Ish*.

For the *Hazon Ish*, it is inconceivable that humans can devise a moral code that, in any way, is more noble or demanding than the laws of the Torah. Nothing that came after the Sinaitic revelation can lay claim to improving on the Torah's legislation. Morality is whatever the Halakha says. Law trumps conscience; conscience, morality, ethics can never be the source or have the power of *mitzvah*. The sole function of ethics and conscience is to inspire one to observe the Halakha as the Word of the Almighty.<sup>6</sup>

**Rabbi Norman Lamm - Faith and Doubt Chapter XIII p 326**

28.

In Judaism, the Euthyphro dilemma does not exist.<sup>5</sup> God commands the good because it is good. Without this assumption, Abraham's challenge over the fate of Sodom – 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justice?' – would be incomprehensible. God and humans are equally answerable to the claims of justice. But the good is what God commands because God-the-lawgiver is also God-the-creator-and-redeemer. Morality mirrors the deep structure of the universe that God made and called good. Plato's challenge arises because the Greek gods were not creators. Matter was eternal. The gods had no special authority except for the fact that they were held to be powerful. Plato was therefore correct to challenge the popular cults of his day by, in effect, drawing a principled

distinction between might and right. The gods may be strong, but that is no reason to invest them with moral authority. For the Bible, however, God who teaches us how to act in the world is also the maker of the world in which we act. This means that in monotheism, morality means going with, not against, the grain of the cosmos and history. God himself empowers his prophets to challenge kings – even himself – in the name of justice or mercy. To be sure, there are occasions – most famously, the binding of Isaac – in which God seems to demand pure obedience; but this itself suggests that the story may be more subtle than it seems.<sup>6</sup> Taken as a whole, Judaism embodies divine faith in the moral capacity and literacy of humankind.

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks - To Heal a Fractured World, p164**

*Rabbi Sacks suggests that the classic Euthyphro dilemma does not apply in Judaism since the command of God is also one and the same with the very fabric of the created cosmos. This avoids any challenge of an 'external' conception of morality.*

**D2] 'EXTERNAL' MORAL SENSITIVITIES ARE LEGITIMATE BUT YIRAT SHAMAYIM OVERRIDES THEM**

29.

After the massacre at Sabra and Shatila, I published an open letter to the Prime Minister. Among other things, this letter dealt with the use of force and the motivation behind it. I asked: Why was it that King Shaul was punished for not killing Agag, King of Amalek? Was it simply for not having killed the last remaining Amalekite? I suggested that he was punished not just for sparing Agag, but because the fact that he refused to kill Agag placed in a totally different light his killing of all the other Amalekites beforehand. Shaul had been commanded to take a whole people and kill them—and this is, morally, a frightful thing. The only justification lies in it being a response to an unequivocal divine command. Therefore, if Shaul had been motivated in his actions purely by fear of God, by obedience to the *tzav*, then he should have followed the command to the letter. God didn't say, "Kill Amalek but spare Agag." Now, if he didn't kill Agag but killed everybody else, what does that indicate? It indicates that what motivated him in killing the others was not the *tzav* of God, but rather some baser impulse, some instinctive violence. And the proof is that he killed everyone, but spared his peer, his royal comrade. If that is the case, then Shaul was not punished for sparing Agag; rather, he had to be punished because of the Amalekites he did kill! Why? Because he killed them not purely due to a divine command (which is the only thing that can overcome the moral consideration), but rather out of military, diplomatic or political considerations.

Subsequently, I heard that a leading Religious Zionist rabbi in a prominent yeshiva had taken thirty minutes out of his Gemara shiur in order to attack what I had said. I called and asked him, "What did I say that merits this great wrath?" He replied, "I think it is a terrible thing to speak in this way, describing the divine command to destroy Amalek as asking a person to do something which ordinarily is not moral. This poses an ethical problem."

I said to him, “Wiping out Amalek does not conform to what we would normally expect a person to do. Normally, you should not be killing ‘from child to suckling babe.’ But I’m not saying, God forbid, that it is immoral in our case, where God has specifically commanded the destruction of Amalek—‘A faithful God, without iniquity, righteous and upright is He’ (Devarim 32:4). Although generally such an act would be considered immoral, it assumes a different character when God, from His perception and perspective, commands it. The same holds true of the akeida—it demanded that Avraham do something which normally is immoral. But in the context of the divine command, surely it partakes of the goodness and morality of God. We must admit, though, that there is a conflict in this case between the usual moral norm and the immediate tzav given here.”

He said, “Yes, but you shouldn’t describe it as being something which is not moral in a sense.” So I asked him, “Do you agree that the tzav given here is something which we would not normally encourage people to do, something that we would normally consider to be immoral?” He said, “Yes, but it should not be described that way.” And he added, “Yesh kan hevdel chinukhi—there is an educational difference.”

I admit, there is something to this. The moment one speaks of a kind of clash between the demands of yirat Shamayim and the demands of morality—even given the qualifications which I mentioned—there is some kind of problem. There are risks in this approach.

Nevertheless, I believe there is little choice. I think that the importance of moral sensibility as the grounds for moral action in our lives is of such scope, depth and magnitude that we need willingly to accept certain risks. To be sure, we should try to minimize them, but I don’t think we can avoid them. We avoid them only by, in effect, almost totally neutralizing the moral element in our educational endeavors. What we need to do is not to instill morality less, but yirat Shamayim more.

I recall in my late adolescence there were certain problems which perturbed me, the way they perturb many others. At the time, I resolved them all in one fell swoop. I had just read Rav Zevin’s book, *Ishim Ve-shitot*. In his essay on Rav Chayim Soloveitchik, he deals not only with his methodological development, but also with his personality and gemilut chasadim (acts of kindness). He recounted that Reb Chayim used to check every morning if some unfortunate woman had placed an infant waif on his doorstep during the course of the night. (In Brisk, it used to happen at times that a woman would give birth illegitimately and leave her infant in the hands of Reb Chayim.) As I read the stories about Reb Chayim’s extraordinary kindness, I said to myself: Do I approach this level of gemilut chasadim? I don’t even dream of it! In terms of moral sensibility, concern for human beings and sensitivity to human suffering, I am nothing compared to Reb Chayim. Yet despite his moral sensitivity, he managed to live, and live deeply, with the totality of Halakha—including the commands to destroy the Seven Nations, Amalek and all the other things which bother me. How? The answer, I thought, was obvious. It is not that his moral sensitivity was less, but his yirat Shamayim, his emuna, was so much more. The thing to do, then, is not to try to neutralize or de-emphasize the moral element, but rather to deepen and increase the element of yirat Shamayim, of emuna, deveikut and bittachon.

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein - Being Frum and Being Good: On the Relationship Between Religion and Morality

### D3] DEVELOPING MORALITY

- Rabbi Norman Lamm suggests that a developing morality (which could effectively ‘legislate away’ the issue of Amalek) is legitimate provided it is based upon the value systems of the Torah itself and not on some external moral code.<sup>14</sup>

### D4] DESTROYING THE AMALEK WITHIN US

30. זכור את אשר כו' ואתה עיף ויגע ולא ירא אלהים (דברים כה, יז-יח). נראה, דהנה לא זו בלבד דזרע ישראל הם מצויים על מחיית עמלק דהוא זרע עשו אלא דכל איש מישראל צריך למחות חלק רע המכונה בשם עמלק אשר תמון בלבנו. דכל זמן דזרע עמלק נמצא בעולם אז כיון דאדם גם כן הוא עולם קטן אז יש מציאות לעמלק לכה הרע בכל אדם אשר מתעורר בכל פעם להחטיא את האדם ועל זה בא הזכירות בתורה. והנה כח של זרע ישראל אינו אלא צפה – 'הקול קול יעקב' – בתורה ותפלה. כשאדם יש לו כח זה ובוטח תמיד לבו להשם יתברך אז אין שום רע יוכל לשלוט בו. אך כשאדם יניח כח זה אז מיד ויסעו מרפידים, שרפו ידיהם, מיד ויבא עמלק, מיד שורה הרע עמו. אך כשאדם תופס על כל פנים מדת היראה להיות ירא מפניו יתברך מלעבור על מצותיו על כל פנים אינו בא לידי חטא. .... וזהו שכתוב מוחה תמחה מלצבן שורש הרע ולכפות אותו תחת העוץ. וזהו שכתוב (שמות י"א) ויהי כאשר ירים משה את ידו – ראה לומר כוחו המכונה בשם 'יד' כשאדם מרים זה הכח אז וגבר ישראל. אבל כאשר יניח מזה הכח אז חס ושלים וגבר כו'.

קדושת לוי, שמות, דרוש לפורים א'

14. See Faith and Doubt p343 ff



R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev reads Amalek as the inner destructive force within each of us which weakens our hand and causes us to stumble in sin. When we raise our voice in prayer and Torah, this strengthens our hands to succeed in our battle against the yetzer hara.

#### D5] RECOGNIZING THE SANCTITY INHERENT IN ALL NATIONS AND HUMAN BEINGS - EXCEPT AMALEK

31. תמחה את זכר עמלק. ... פי' כי עמלק מסר נפשו לרעה. אף כי ידע שסופו לאיבוד אבל רצה לערצב את בני ישראל. ולכן זה שכרו שלא יהי' לו חלק בקדושה. דהנה כל האומות יש להם קצת שורש בקדושה. וכי' (נפיוה ג:ט) **כִּי-אֵז אֶהְפֹּךְ אֶל-עַמִּים שְׂפֵה צְרוּרָה כּוֹי**. דלעתיד יתגדל שמו ית' וידעו כל העמים כי לבי המלוכה כמ"ש (תהלים ס:ה) **יִשְׁמְחוּ וְיִרְנְנוּ לְאַמִּים כּוֹי**. אבל עמלק ימ"ש לא יהי' לו חלק בזה. כמ"ש (צמדבר כד:ב) **רַחֲשִׁית גּוֹיִם עַמְלֵק וְאַחֲרֵיהֶוּ עַדִּי אֲצַד**. לכן נשבע הקב"ה שלא יהי' תיקון השלם שיכירו כל האומות את כבודו ושמו הגדול ז"ה עד שימחה זכר עמלק. כדי שלא יהי' עמלק בכלל ולא יזכה לראות האמת. ולכן כפי מה שמתקצת הגאולה ומתברר כבודו ית' בעולם, כפי זה השיעור נמחה שמו של עמלק. וז"ש (דברים כה:יט) **וְהָיָה צְהַרְיָם ה' קָלָהּ לְךָ מִכָּל-אֲוִיבֵיךָ מִסְבִּיב**, אז תמחה בוודאי זכר עמלק. ולכן מי שמאפה לפרסום שמו הגדול ז"ה הוא מאפה למחיית עמלק. כי הא צהא תליא

שפת אמת, שמות, פרשת זכור ה'ג'

R. Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter of Gur explains that every nation, other than Amalek, has an element of kedusha which will eventually be realized. Amalek represents an irredeemable evil which must be removed as the geula approaches and we are able publicize the name of God.