

# THE LEGACY OF AMALEK

## Genocide, Vikings, and the Climate

YCT Yemei Iyun: 5781

Rabbi Haggai Alexander Resnikoff

### The Mitzvah

1. Devarim 25	דברים פרק כה
<p>17 Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way as ye came forth out of Egypt; 18 how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, all that were enfeebled in thy rear, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God. 19 Therefore it shall be, when the LORD thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget.</p>	<p>(יז) זָכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בַּדֶּרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם: (יח) אֲשֶׁר קָרָךְ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וַיִּזְנֹב בְּךָ פֶלֶאֱחֵזְחֵשְׁלִים אֲחֵרֶיךָ וְאֵתָה עֵינֶךָ וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֶל-לֵקִים: (יט) וְהָיָה בְּהִנָּיִחַ יְקִוֶּךָ אֶל-לֵקִיךָ וְלֹךְ מִכָּל-אֲיִרֶיךָ מִסָּבִיב בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יִקְוֶךָ אֶל-לֵקִיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחֲלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחָה אֶת-יִזְכֹּר עַמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח:</p>

### The Problem

- Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, "Being Frum and Being Good", Based on addresses, adapted by Rav Reuven Ziegler.

<http://etzion.org.il/en/being-frum-and-being-good-relationship-between-religion-and-morality>

... I mentioned before that the quest for goodness is an integral component of *frumkeit*. Generally speaking, this is true. But regarding certain particular *tziuvyyim* (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...

But, of course, the resolution must be clear, and the grappling must all be done within the parameters of the understanding that, however much I wrestle, I do not for a moment question the authenticity or the authority of the *tzav*. I do not judge God. I assume, a priori, that "His deeds are perfect, for all His ways are just; a faithful God, without iniquity, righteous and upright is He" (*Devarim* 32:4)...

## Who is Amalek?

3. Judges 3	שופטים פרק ג
<p>12 And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done that which was evil in the sight of the LORD. 13 And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and smote Israel, and they possessed the city of palm-trees.</p>	<p>(יב) ויספוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְקֹנָק וַיַּחֲזִק יְקֹנָק אֶת-עֲגִלוֹן מֶלֶךְ-מוֹאָב עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל כִּי-עָשׂוּ אֶת-הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְקֹנָק: (יג) וַיֵּאַסֶּף אֵלָיו אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וְעַמְלֶק וַיִּלָּחֶם וַיִּדְּ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּירָשׁוּ אֶת-עִיר הַתְּמָרִים:</p>

4. Shoftim 6	שופטים פרק ו
<p>1 And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years... 3 And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east; they came up against them; 4 and they encamped against them, and destroyed the produce of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no</p>	<p>(א) וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְקֹנָק וַיִּתְּנֵם יְקֹנָק בְּיַד-מִדְיָן שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים... (ג) וַהֲיָה אִם-זָרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעָלָה מִדְיָן וְעַמְלֶק וּבְנֵי-קְהָדָם וְעָלוּ עֲלֵיו: (ד) וַיַּחֲנוּ עֲלֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁחִיתוּ אֶת-יִבּוֹל הָאָרֶץ עַד-בּוֹאֵף עֲגָה וְלֹא-יִשְׁאִירוּ מִחֵיָהּ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וְשָׂה וְשׂוֹר וְחִמּוֹר...</p>

sustenance in Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.	
---	--

5. 1 Samuel 30	שמואל א פרק ל
<p>1 And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had made a raid upon the South, and upon Ziklag, and had smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire... 3 And when David and his men came to the city, behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives... 16 And when he had brought him down, behold, they were spread abroad over all the ground, eating and drinking, and feasting, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah.</p>	<p>(א) ויהי כבא דוד ואנשיו צקלג ביום השלישי ועמלקי פשוטו אל-נגב ואל-צקלג ויכרו את-צקלג וישרפו אתה באש... (ג) ויבא דוד ואנשיו אל-העיר והנה שרופה באש ונשיהם ובניהם ובנותיהם נשבו... (טז) וירדהו והנה נטשים על-פני כל-הארץ אכלים ושתיים וחגגים בכל השלל הגדול אשר לקחו מארץ פלשתים ומארץ יהודה:</p>

## Raider Civilizations

### 6. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book 1, ch. 1

For in early times the Hellenes and the barbarians of the coast and islands, as communication by sea became more common, were tempted to turn pirates, under the conduct of their most powerful men; the motives being to serve their own cupidity and to support the needy. **They would fall upon a town unprotected by walls, and consisting of a mere collection of villages, and would plunder it; indeed, this came to be the main source of their livelihood, no disgrace being yet attached to such an achievement, but even some glory.** An illustration of this is furnished by the honour with which some of the inhabitants of the continent still regard a successful marauder, and by the question we find the old poets everywhere representing the people as asking of voyagers—"Are they pirates?"—as if those who are asked the question would have no idea of disclaiming the imputation, or their interrogators of reproaching them for it. The same rapine prevailed also by land.

### 7. *Egil's Saga*, 1893, English, transl. W. C. Green, from the original 'Egils saga Skallagrímssonar', Ch. 46. [http://sagadb.org/egils\\_saga.en#41](http://sagadb.org/egils_saga.en#41).

Now Egil and his twelve had gone through a wood and then saw wide plains and tillage. Hard by them stood a house. For this they made, and when they came there they ran into the house, but could see no one there. They took all the loose chattels that they came upon. There were many rooms, so this took them a long time. But when they came out and away from the house, an armed force was there between them and the wood, and this attacked them...Egil's party were wounded, and after that taken, and all bound, and so brought home to the farmhouse.

The owner of that farm was a powerful and wealthy man; he had a son grown up. Now they debated what they should do with their prisoners. The goodman said that he thought this were best counsel, to kill them one on the heels of another. His son said that the darkness of night was now closing in, and no sport was thus gotten by their torture; he bade them be let bide till the morning. So they were thrust into a room and strongly bound. Egil was bound hand and foot to a post...

Egil strained and worked at the post till he loosed it up from the floor... And then he freed his comrades; but when they were all loosed they searched round for the likeliest place to get out...

But when they came to the wood, then Egil stopped, and he said:

'This our going is all wrong, and not warlike. We have stolen the goodman's property without his knowing thereof. Never ought that shame to be ours. Go we back to the house, and let him know what hath befallen.'

All spoke against that, saying they would make for the ship.

Egil set down the mead-cask, then ran off, and sped him to the house...

Egil seized a beam, carried it to the dining-hall, and thrust the burning end under the eaves, and so into the birch bark of the roof, which soon caught fire... But those who sate drinking within did not find it out till the flame burst in round the roof. Then they rushed to the door; but there was no easy way out, both by reason of the fagot-wood, and because Egil kept the door, and slew most who strove to pass out either in the doorway or outside....

## The Legacy of Amalek

8. Mishna, Tractate Kidushin, ch. 4	משנה מסכת קידושין פרק ד
<p>Mishna 14 ... Rabbi Yehudah said in his name, 'Muleteers are mostly wicked. Camel drivers are mostly kosher. Sailors are mostly righteous. The best doctors go to Hell and the most kosher of butchers are partners with Amalek.'</p>	<p>משנה י"ד ... רבי יהודה אומר משמו החמרין רובן רשעים והגמלין רובן כשרים הספנין רובן חסידים טוב שברופאים לגיהנם והכשר שבטבחים שותפו של עמלק</p>

<p><b>9. Tosafot Yom Tov ad loc.</b></p>	<p>תוספות יום טוב מסכת קידושין פרק ד</p>
<p>The language of Rashi...“The best of the butchers,” possible treif meet comes to them and they are concerned with their money and feed it to others. This is the opinion of Rashi. And [according to this] “partners with Amalek” doesn’t make sense. For what is the connection between Amalek and one who feeds others treif? And therefore it appears [better] to interpret: the best of butchers are cruel and shed blood. And they are the partners of Amalek the cruel, who attacked the stragglers.</p>	<p>לשון רש"י...טוב שבטבחים. ספיקי טרפות באות לידו וחס על ממונו ומאכילן. ע"כ לשון רש"י. ושותפו של עמלק לא ניחא. דמה ענין עמלק למאכיל טרפות. ולכן נראה לפרש טוב שבטבחים הוא אכזרי ומזגו רע. והוא שותפו של עמלק האכזרי שזינב כל הנחשלים.</p>

<p><b>10. Esther 3</b></p>	<p>אסתר פרק ג</p>
<p>9 If it please the king, let it be written that they be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those that have the charge of the king's business, to bring it into the king's treasuries.'... 13 And letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey.</p>	<p>(ט) אִם-עַל-הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יִפְתָּח לְאַבְדֵם וְעִשְׂרֵת אֲלָפִים כֶּסֶף אֲשָׁקוּל עַל-יְדֵי עֹשֵׂי הַמְּלָאכָה לְהָבִיא אֶל-גִּנְזֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ... (יג) וְנִשְׁלַח סִפְרִים בְּיַד הַרְצִיִּם אֶל-כָּל-מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהַרְגוֹ וּלְאַבֵּד אֶת-כָּל-הַיְהוּדִים מִנְּעַר וְעַד-זָקֵן טָף וְנָשִׁים בָּיּוֹם אֶחָד בְּשִׁלּוּשָׁה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנַיִם-עָשָׂר הוּא-חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר וְשָׁלְלֵם לְבוֹז:</p>

<p><b>11. Esther 9</b></p>	<p>אסתר פרק ט</p>
<p>5 And the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and with slaughter and destruction, and did what they would unto them that hated them. 6 And in Shushan the castle the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men... 10 the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Jews' enemy, slew they; but on the spoil they laid not their hand... 15 And the Jews that were in Shushan</p>	<p>(ה) וַיַּכּוּ הַיְהוּדִים בְּכָל-אֹיְבֵיהֶם מִכַּת-חֶרֶב וְהָרַג וְאַבְדּוּ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כְשֵׁנְאֵיהֶם כְּרָצוֹנָם: (ו) וּבְשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה הָרְגוּ הַיְהוּדִים וְאַבְדּוּ חֲמִשָּׁה מֵאוֹת אִישׁ... (י) עִשְׂרֵת בְּנֵי הָמָן בֶּן-הַמְּדַתָּא צָרַר הַיְהוּדִים הָרְגוּ וּבְבִזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת-יָדָם...</p>

gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men in Shushan; but on the spoil they laid not their hand. 16 And the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of them that hated them seventy and five thousand--but on the spoil they laid not their hand

(טו) וַיִּקְהָלוּ הַיְהוּדִים הַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר-בְּשׁוּשַׁן גַּם  
בַּיּוֹם אַרְבַּעַה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר וַיַּהַרְגוּ בְּשׁוּשַׁן  
שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וַבַּבֹּיָה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת-יָדָם:  
(טז) וְשָׂאֵר הַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּמִדְיָנוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ נִקְהָלוּ  
וַעֲמָד עַל-נַפְשָׁם וְנוֹחַ מֵאֲיֻבֵיהֶם וְהָרַג בְּשָׂנְאֵיהֶם  
חֲמֵשֶׁה וְשִׁבְעִים אָלֶף וַבַּבֹּיָה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת-יָדָם: