

Amalek from Generation to Generation

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Mitzvos upon Entering the Land

Rambam begins *Hilchos Melachim* by listing three mitzvos that Israel was commanded to fulfill upon entering their land.

א שלוש מצוות נצטוו ישראל בשעת כניסתן לארץ: למנות להם מלך שנאמר "שום תשים עליך מלך" (דברים יז, טו), ולהכרית זרעו של עמלק שנאמר "תמחה את זכר עמלק" (דברים כה, יט), ולבנות להם בית הבחירה שנאמר "לשכנו תדרשו, ובאת שמה" (דברים יב, ה). מינוי מלך קודם למלחמת עמלק, שנאמר "אותי שלח ה' למשווהך למלך... ועתה לך והכית את עמלק" (שמואל א טו, א-ג). והכרתת זרע עמלק קודמת לבניין הבית, שנאמר "ויהי, כי ישב המלך בביתו; וה' הניח לו מסביב, מכל אויביו. ויאמר המלך, אל נתן הנביא, ראה... אנוכי יושב בבית ארזים..." (שמואל ב ז, א-ב).

Israel was commanded to fulfill three mitzvos upon entering the Promised Land: To choose a king, as Deuteronomy (17:15) states: "Appoint a king over yourselves"; To wipe out the descendants of Amalek, as Deuteronomy (25:19) states: "Erase the memory of Amalek"; To build G-d's chosen house, as Deuteronomy (12:5) states: "Seek out His Presence and go there." The appointment of a king should precede the war against Amalek. This is evident from Samuel's charge to King Saul (I Samuel 15: 1-3): "G-d sent me to anoint you as king ... Now, go and smite Amalek." Amalek's seed should be annihilated before the construction of the Temple, as II Samuel (7:1-2) states: "And it came to pass, when the king dwelled in his palace, and G-d gave him peace from all his enemies who surrounded him, the king said to Nathan, the prophet: 'Look! I am dwelling in a house of cedar...but the ark of G-d dwells within curtains.'"¹

These were all commands to the people, and although the appointment of a government would be the first step in organizing the nation to

¹ Even though the mitzvah of building the *Mikdash* based on the verse of *ועשו לי מקדש* is brought in *Hilchos Bais HaBechirah*, it is here based on *לשכנו תדרשו*, referring to the permanent sanctuary that was to be the central feature of the Jewish Nation.

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fulfill the other two mitzvos, Rambam is nevertheless explicit that all three mitzvos are incumbent on the community as a whole,² not solely on the king. The individual must contribute what he is able towards a goal that can only be accomplished by the nation as a whole. We have discussed all three mitzvos and how they comprise three steps in fulfilling Israel's purpose as a nation elsewhere.³ Here, however, we will concentrate on better understanding the command to "annihilate Amalek."

Amalek is the nation which attacked Israel immediately after they left Egypt, and thus it follows that they represent those who threaten Israel's security. Aside from the fact that this is what is implied by the Torah narrative, this also emerges from Rambam's explanation for the reason this mitzvah precedes building the Beis HaMikdash:

והכרתת זרע עמלק קודמת לבניין הבית, שנאמר "ויהי, כי ישב המלך בביתו; וה' הניח לו מסביב, מכל אויביו. ויאמר המלך, אל נתן הנביא, ראה... אנוכי יושב בבית ארזים..."

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Although this verse in Shmuel does not speak of Amalek, *Chazal* understood it to be referring to Amalek since the Torah itself links the war against Amalek with battles for security.

והיה בקהלים ה' אלהיך לה מכל-אויבך מסביב, בארץ אשר ה- אלהיך נתן לה נחלה לרשתה--תמקה את-זכר עמלק, מתסת השמים; לא תשקה.

² See *Sefer HaMitzvos*, at the end of the *Mitzvos Aseh*. Ramban (*Ramban al HaTorah, BeMidbar* 16:21-22) says the sin of Israel which was the reason for the plague in the days of David was that Israel did not build the *Mikdash* independently all the years after the first conquest. The people need not have waited for a king. It would seem that Rambam would disagree, and that the means for fulfilling the latter two mitzvos was first appointing a king. Nevertheless, Rambam would agree with Ramban's premise that these *mitzvos* are obligations on the nation, with each individual expected to do his part. The Gemara (*Sanbedrin* 20b) brings the verse *יד על כס קה* as a proof that there must be a king for the mitzvah of destroying Amalek to apply. Rambam implies that this is not a requirement for the obligation in the mitzvah to begin but merely an explanation of what order the mitzvos are to proceed in initially.

³ See *Hakirah* 25 pp 55ff, "Rambam's Missing Mitzvah."

When G-d will give you ease from all your surrounding enemies, in the Land which G-d Your G-d has given to you as an inheritance, erase the memory of Amalek from beneath the Heavens. Do not forget.

The *Smag* (163), based on this verse,⁴ says it follows that all other enemies are to be destroyed, then Amalek, then the Beis HaMikdash can be rebuilt. Although it is not considered a “surrounding enemy,” even at a distance it remains a threat to Israel’s security.

מלחמה לה' בעמלק מדור דור, Identifying Amalek,

The *Aruch HaShulchan*⁵ states that from the fact that the defeat of Amalek must precede the building of the Beis HaMikdash, and that Amalek strikes Israel for no apparent reason, it appears that Amalek is an ideological foe who opposes Judaism. He then stops himself, fearing that he is veering away from Halachah and lapsing into homiletics.⁶ Yet this cannot be avoided, and it is the Briskers⁷ especially who felt compelled to develop this idea. Rav Soloveitchik, זצ”ל,⁸ quotes in the name of his father an understanding of Amalek as those who seek the destruction of the Jewish people even if they are not biological descendants of Amalek. He suggests this as Rambam’s source for counting שבא עליהם מצר ישראל מצר, “saving Israel from an enemy who rises against them,” (*Hilchos Melachim* 5:1) as a category of *milchemes mitzvah*, an obligatory war.

Rambam writes⁹ that while the war against the seven Canaanite na-

⁴ Which is brought in TB *Sanbedrin* 20b.

⁵ *Aruch HaShulchan HaAsid, Hilchos Melachim, siman* 71.

⁶ דרוש.

⁷ The ultimate halachists.

⁸ In a footnote in the 10th section of *Kol Dodi Dofek*.

⁹ *Mitzvas Aseh* 187. Despite his absolute clarity on this point, I have seen him misquoted by those who equate this battle against *avodah zarah* with the war against Amalek. The fact that in the *Moreh*, Rambam explains that the Torah details the lineage of Amalek to make clear that only a part of Esau is to be destroyed, is no evidence for the exclusively biological definition of Amalek. On the contrary, Rambam’s point is that the war against Amalek is not a war against Esau. Esau symbolically represents secular civilization. They are not our arch-enemy.

tions was completed by King David, it nevertheless is considered an eternal mitzvah and is to be counted amongst the *Taryag*¹⁰ because the command is eternal, and the inability to perform it does not detract from its permanent nature.¹¹ He compares this with the mitzvah of warring against Amalek, which remains applicable until *Melech HaMashiach* completes it. And though he will, it is of course an eternal mitzvah. Clearly he believes זרע עמלק, “the seed of Amalek,” still exists and the assumption of בא סנחריב ובלבל האומות, “Sancherib intermixed all the nations” or that there is some kind of בטול “annulment” on the remnant of a destroyed nation, that Rambam applies to the Canaanite nations, was not applied to Amalek. Indeed, the Torah is explicit מדור דור “from generation to generation,” that this would be a never-ending challenge to the Jewish people. The conclusion is inescapable—Amalek transcends biology and refers to ideology.

Rambam¹² refers to the seven Canaanite nations that must be destroyed as עיקר ע"ז “the essence of *avodah zarah*” and this helps explain why he says David destroyed them even though some of their genetic descendants survived and were mixed among the nations.¹³ The mitzvah only applies with regard to those who still maintain the identity of the original people and what they stood for. Perhaps this identity is rooted in all the תועבות “abominations” that the Torah associates with their idol worship, so in the modern world, enlightened by science and the influence of monotheism, this quality has been sufficiently diluted so that the identity of Canaan is lost. Likewise, with Amalek, we are not concerned with genetics but with the nation and what it stood for. Just as Rambam codifies that a convert from Amalek becomes a Jew¹⁴ and sheds his Amalekite identity, those who adopt Amalek’s ideology become Amalek. Apparently this ideology and its proponents are alive and well.

The Rogatchover Gaon¹⁵ also takes this approach, describing Amalek as those who deny G-d’s *hashgachah* (Divine Providence). He apparently says this based on the words of the Torah in describing their motivation

¹⁰ 613 mitzvos. In *Shoresh* 3 of *Sefer HaMitzvos* he explains that mitzvos that were not לדורות (eternal) are not to be counted.

¹¹ He also explains that the war against the Canaanites was a battle against עיקר ע"ז, “the essence of idol worship,” and this fight has been won, as the seven nations and what they stood for were destroyed. We will return to this idea, later.

¹² *Sefer HaMitzvos*, *ibid*.

¹³ Thus we can contend that the Canaanites also represent an ideology.

¹⁴ See *Hilchos Issurei Biah* 12:17; *Hilchos Sanhedrin* 18:6. Some argue on this point.

¹⁵ In his commentary on the *Chumash* on *Parashas Beshalach* and *Balak*.

for attacking, לא ירא אלקים, “They did not fear G-d.” He contrasts Bilaam’s description ראשית גוים עמלק, “Amalek is the first of nations,” with Israel’s גוי אחד בארץ¹⁶, “the unique nation on the earth” (Shmuel II 7:23), saying there are only two nation-ideologies, neither of which is subject to being annulled (בטול), and he refers to Amalek as a species (מין). Having set up Israel and Amalek as opposing nations and ideologies, this subset of Esau is the ideological opponent of Israel and so the two are constantly competing for dominance of the world. In the *Moreh Nevuchim* (III, 50) Rambam explains that the Torah details the lineage of Esau to make clear that only a part of Esau is to be destroyed. In the *Sefer HaMitzvos* this is also explicit.

הציווי שנצטוונו להכרית זרע עמלק בלבד מכל שאר זרע עשו (מ"ע קפח)

There is a commandment to destroy the seed of Amalek alone of the seed of Esau

What follows directly from this point is that the war against Amalek is not a war against Esau. Esau symbolically represents secular civilization, most specifically Western civilization.¹⁷ But though we are in constant competition with them, as Yitzchak states in his blessing to Yaakov (*Bereishis* 27), they are not our archenemy. One opinion amongst *Chazal* is that at their fateful meeting, Esau embraced Yaakov with all his heart¹⁸ and, undoubtedly, there are many in Christian America who embrace the Jewish people today.¹⁹ But, Amalek, a subset of Esau, seeks Israel’s destruction, and we are commanded to oppose them.

The Mitzvah of Fighting Amalek Today

In *Iggeres Teiman*,²⁰ Rambam describes the eternal battle of attempted annihilation waged against Israel, first by Amalek and others who attempted physical annihilation, and then by the Greeks and Romans who attempted spiritual annihilation. In later generations, different approaches were taken by Christians and Muslims. While Rambam does not explicitly call these later enemies of the Jewish people Amalek, he clearly describes them

¹⁶ And the *midrash* on the first verse in *Bereishis* ישראל... בשביל ראשית – See Rashi.

¹⁷ See Abarbanel to *Yeshayah* chap. 34 and Malbim *Oradiah* 1:1.

¹⁸ See Rashi *Bereishis* 33:4.

¹⁹ Still, there is a relationship between Amalek and Rome (the Western world) and we will return to this later.

²⁰ See Rambam & Redemption, pp. 74-80.

as their heirs, and hence we can look at our defensive wars against them as an extension of *milchemes Amalek*.

To avoid the *Aruch HaShulchan's* fear of lapsing into homiletics, we must formulate the parameters of this mitzvah in pure halachic terms. The strict, explicit mitzvah stated in the Torah is the destruction of the genetic descendants of Amalek. However, Rambam's category of²¹ *divrei sofrim* defines non-explicit elements in a mitzvah, largely conceptual derivations from the *mikra*, that are also to be viewed as binding Torah law. Here, it extends the mitzvah to opposition to those who seek our annihilation. As only an extension of the explicit Torah law, it is not subject to all the details of the essential mitzvah, such as that of actually physically killing people. Perhaps, since the mitzvah is extended to those who try to destroy our spiritual values, the reciprocal mitzvah of their annihilation is to defeat their ideals.

A good example of a comparable mitzvah using the principle of *divrei sofrim* is *lav 57*, *לא תשחית*, the prohibition against "wanton destruction." Rambam explains in the *Sefer HaMitzvos* that the explicit prohibition in the Torah of cutting down trees during war includes all forms of destruction, and there is the Torah punishment of lashes in all cases. But in *Mishneh Torah* he qualifies that, except for fruit trees, the lashes are only *מכות מרדות* *דרבנן*, of Rabbinic origin. This causes many commentaries to question whether this extension is Rabbinic or Torah law. In fact, it is of Torah origin but subject to a lower level of punishment because the Torah does not mention it explicitly, and so it is of an auxiliary nature. Rambam applies this principle in many cases, and this is the case with regard to Amalek. The prohibition of *לא תשחית* and mitzvos regarding Amalek are both in *Hilchos Melachim*, leading some to believe that they are only applicable when the monarchy is functioning in Israel, but in fact the conceptual *divrei sofrim* elements of these mitzvos are of eternal relevance.

The *drush* with which *Aruch HaShulchan* does not want to taint pure halachic methodology should not be avoided. The essence of *lomdus* is conceptualization, and this conceptualization should ideally grow from the simple rendering of the text, *פשוטו של מקרא*. The Torah presents Amalek as the enemy who attacks Israel for no reason. He is defined as one "who does not fear G-d." The Torah singles him out as the eternal enemy of G-d: *מלחמה לה' בעמלק מדר דור*, "A war for G-d is to be waged with Amalek from generation to generation." The *halachah* pertaining to Amalek should follow his conceptualization in the Torah. *Midrash Tanchuma*

²¹ Literally the "words of the scribes." See *Shoresh 2* in *Sefer HaMitzvos*.

(*Parashas Ki Seitzei*) describes Amalek's hatred for Israel and says the etymology of his name is עם שבא ללוק דמן של ישראל, "Amalek, the nation that comes to suck the blood of Israel."

Mitzvah of *Zechirah*—Never Forget

While this mitzvah in its literal sense—destroying another nation—is certainly out of favor in the modern civilized world, the Torah doubles down on it. There are two supporting mitzvos to ensure that Israel will fulfill it. There is the mitzvah to remember what Amalek did to us and yet another mitzvah that prohibits us from forgetting it. In *Mishneh Torah* Rambam formulates all three mitzvos very succinctly:

וכן מצות עשה לאבד זרע עמלק, שנאמר "תמחה את זכר עמלק" (דברים כה, יט) ומצות עשה לזכור תמיד מעשיו הרעים ואריבתו, כדי לעורר איבתו--שנאמר "זכור את אשר עשה לך עמלק" (דברים כה, יז) מפי השמועה למדו, "זכור" בפה; "לא תשכח" (דברים כה, יט) בלב, שאסור לשכוח איבתו ושנאתו. (הל' מלכים ה:ה)

Similarly, it is a positive commandment to destroy the memory of Amalek, as Deuteronomy (25:19) states: "Obliterate the memory of Amalek." It is also a positive commandment to constantly remember their evil deeds and their ambush of Israel to arouse our hatred of them, as it states (ibid:17): "Remember what Amalek did to you." The Oral Tradition teaches: "... Remember," with your mouths; "... Do not forget," in your hearts. For it is forbidden to forget our hatred and enmity for them.

While there is the mitzvah of remembering *yetzi'as Mitzrayim* and, in fact, many mitzvos exist to help us remember it as it is the source of our nationhood and our special relationship with G-d, there is no mitzvah in the *Taryag*²² requiring us to not forget. The Briskers²³ and others note, as Rambam's language clearly suggests, these mitzvos of remembering are to ensure that we will fulfill our obligation of warring against Amalek. Again, in *Sefer HaMitzvos*, Rambam is most clear on this point:

המצווה הקפ"ט: הציווי שנצטוונו לזכור את אשר עשה לנו עמלק, שקדם אותנו ברע, שנאמר את זה בכל זמן וזמן ונעורר את הנפשות בדברים להלחם בו, שנקרא את בני האדם לשנאו, כדי שלא ישכח הדבר ולא תחלש שנאתו ולא תמעט בנפשות במשך הזמן, וזה אמרו יתעלה: "זכור את אשר עשה לך עמלק" (דברים כה, יז). ולשון ספרי "זכור את אשר עשה לך עמלק – בפה, ולא תשכח – בלב." כלומר: אמור דברים בפיך שיביאו בני אדם לכך, שלא תסור שנאתו מן

²² According to Rambam. Ramban in fact counts as a mitzvah that we not forget *Har Sinai*.

²³ See for example at the end of *Chidushei Griz al HaTorah*.

לב. ולשון ספרא "זכור את אשר עשה לך עמלק, יכול בלבבך, כשהוא אומר 'לא תשכח', הרי שכחת הלב אמורה, הא מה אני מקים 'זכור' - שתהא שונה בפיד." הלא תראה, איך עשה שמואל הנביא, כשבא לקיים מצווה זו: שהוא זכר תחילה, ואחר כך ציווה להרגם, והוא אמרו "פקדתי את אשר עשה עמלק לישראל" (שמואל-א טו, ב).²⁴

The 189th *mitzvah* is that we are commanded to constantly remember what Amalek did to us, i.e., being the first to attack us [after we were redeemed from Egypt]; and to speak of it constantly; to arouse people to wage war against them and hate them, **in order that it not be forgotten or the hatred towards them lessened with the passage of time. The source of this commandment is G-d's statement (exalted be He), "Remember what Amalek did to you. [Do not forget.]"** The *Sifri* says, "The phrase 'Remember what Amalek did to you' refers to doing so verbally. The phrase 'Do not forget' means in one's heart." This means that one should say verbally words that cause people to keep this hatred in their hearts. The *Sifra*⁴ says, "From the verse, 'Remember what Amalek did to you,' you might think it means in your heart. But when it says, 'Do not forget,' that means in your heart! How do we explain the commandment to 'remember'? It means to speak about it verbally." **You can see how the Prophet Shmuel went about fulfilling this commandment: first he remembered them [verbally] and then commanded that they be killed. This was done when he said, "I remember what Amalek did to the Jewish people when they came up from Egypt."**

If we reflect for a moment, we of course make the connection to the slogans that have arisen in response to the Holocaust and that have become associated with Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaShoah; "Never Forget" is meant to ensure "Never Again." As Primo Levi said, "It happened, so it can happen again. That is the essence of what we have to say." It is up to Israel to prevent a recurrence. This war against Amalek and his ideology is the war against antisemitism.

Before we explore this equation, it is important to realize, as the Torah says explicitly, it is actually G-d's war with Amalek in which we are to act as His agents.²⁵ This *mitzvah* is a central tenet of our religion—and is the *mitzvah* that precedes and is necessary for the building of the Beis HaMikdash.

²⁴ See also *Law* 59.

²⁵ Even should one argue that the *mitzvah* of *Mechiyas Amalek* only applies when there is a Jewish king, certainly these two auxiliary *mitzvos* apply even today.

Rambam's Account of *Antisemitism*

Let us turn to Rambam's words in *Iggeres Teiman* where he defines the battle against Israel of Amalek and his successors, antisemitism. It sounds as if he is expounding upon the message of the famous words of the Haggadah:

והיא שעמדה לאבותינו ולנו שלא אחד בלבד עמד עלינו לכלותינו אלא שבכל דור
דור עומדים עלינו לכלותינו והקב"ה מצילנו מידם.

This [the Torah] stood up for our fathers and for us. For not just one arose against us, but in every generation they arise against us to annihilate us, and the Holy One Blessed is He saves us from their hands.

First he explains what the **והיא** is that makes us special and worthy of salvation—the Torah.

Know that this Torah is the true teaching of G-d that was given to us by the master of all prophets... And with this Torah He distinguished us from the rest of the world as it says "Only your fathers did G-d desire to love and he chose their descendants after them, from all the nations of the world just as this day" (*Devarim* 10:15). It is not because we were worthy of it that we were chosen, but in the Creator's mercy and goodness, He acted kindly with us because of the conduct of the *Avos* who did special actions in *Avodas Hashem* and in acquiring knowledge of G-d, as it says "Because of G-d's love for you and in keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers."

Then Rambam (*Iggeres Teiman* part 2) explains the reason for the hatred against Israel.

G-d distinguished us with his laws and statutes, and thus the superiority of our system of conduct over that of all others became evident, as it says, "What nation is so great that it has such righteous rule and laws, like this entire Torah which I am presenting before you today."

Thus all the nations became extremely jealous of our religion. Their kings then stirred their peoples to hatred towards us. **Their true will is to war against G-d and to quarrel with Him, but who can fight with G-d.**

The nations of the world are like rejected children who see that their father prefers a younger brother. The love for this brother is a result of his superior conduct and adherence to the principles that the father has taught. They could gain that same love by emulating their conduct, but this they refuse to do, for the standards of the father are too demanding. Their true resentment and anger are for the father, but the only way they

can hope to take revenge for the feelings of shame and inferiority that envelop them is to strike out at the chosen son.

In every era, since the Torah was given to us, every idolatrous king or powerful leader has always made as his first priority the overturn of our faith via force, by violence and the sword. This was Amalek, Sisera, Sancheriv, Nebuchadnezzar, Titus and Hadrian and many others like them. These comprise the first of the groups whose aim it is to defeat the Divine will. But the second group is more intelligent and is found in nations such as the Romans, Persians and Greeks. Their intent is also to destroy our religion and our Torah but their vehicle for so doing is the arguments and the questions that they compose. The goal of their writing is the dissolution of the Torah and the removal of all traces of it, similar to what the violent kings wished to accomplish by war. Neither approach will succeed, for the Holy One Blessed Be He announced to us through the prophet Yeshayahu that any oppressor that attempts to destroy our Torah or abolish our religion with military might will find his weapons destroyed by the Creator—which is a metaphor for saying that he will be unsuccessful. Likewise, any who tries to use intellectual arguments and debate to undermine the received wisdom of our religion shall find his arguments undermined and shall lose the debate. This is found in the verse “Any tool created against you shall fail and any tongue that stands against you in law will be invalidated. Such is the inheritance of the servants of G-d, for their righteousness is from Me, says the L-rd.”

The attempts “to annihilate us” that the Haggadah speaks of take different forms. ראשית גוים עמלק, Amalek is the first to pour out his hatred to Israel. He and those who succeed him attempt to destroy us physically. Other groups that follow attempt to destroy us spiritually by destroying our beliefs. In these latter cases, the enemy is satisfied merely if the bond between us and G-d be broken. It is this special relationship of chosen son that they are jealous of and wish to destroy. Rambam here defines the eternal phenomenon of antisemitism, the heritage of Amalek. The hatred is to G-d and His servants. The target is really Judaism, G-d’s revelation, the Torah.²⁶ Sometimes it seems desirable to shoot the messenger, but killing the message is the ultimate goal.

Despite the difficulty these two groups found in their attempt to overthrow our structure they continued in their attempts **and joined in partnership in their effort.**

²⁶ סיני, משם יצא שנאה לעולם.

So important is this goal to the nations of the world that at times the two groups of destroyers, the brutes and the intellectuals, who are natural enemies with different world views, ally together to accomplish this goal. Their only common denominator is their jealousy. Thus the thieves and murderers of the 70 nations sit together with the more civilized and sophisticated Western nations and unanimously²⁷ condemn Israel for defending itself. And thus the base of the Democratic Party in the United States is made up of the envious lower classes, the Muslims, and the G-dless “intellectuals” who dominate and indoctrinate on our college campuses and in the media. All are driven by jealousy. Feminists and homosexuals coexist in blissful harmony with Muslims, who are for the oppression of women and the murder of homosexuals. Jealousy and its precipitous hatred for the Jews and Judeo-Christian America unite them. Many prosperous people will join in, for as Rambam makes clear to us, the greatest jealousy is of virtue, and even the rich and famous are infested with it.

Nevertheless, they only found themselves increasing their own toil and pains while the structure remains firm. But the Truth, i.e., the Holy One Blessed Be He, mocks them for their feeble attempts to accomplish the impossible. This is the meaning of King David’s statement said with *Ruach HaKodesh* (the holy spirit), “**Let us break off their shackles, and discard their bonds.** He who sits in Heaven mocks and derides them.” We have been troubled and tested with these two groups through all the days of our monarchy and part of the days of our *galus*. (*Iggeres Teiman*, *ibid.*)

“Let us break off their shackles,” is their common cry. The values professed by Israel are a burden that hampers their freedom. But what they attempt to do is impossible. Those who impose their rule by the brute force of weapons eventually find themselves deposed by those with greater weapons. And as for dominion gained by ideas, here Rambam explains, G-d’s name is truth, and thus the lies they employ in their arguments will fail. The rules of the Torah are the rules which man must follow in order to thrive. The Creator mocks those who try to destroy the Jewish religion in this way. As they are in fact trying to defy the laws of nature, the laws of nature will prove their folly.

Later, a new group that combined the abilities of the two earlier groups arose, to embitter our lives. It attempted to destroy our nation with a new approach. It conspired to claim a new prophecy,

²⁷ With the exception of the United States in most cases.

revealing a new religion. It claimed both the Torah and this new revelation were from G-d, therefore hoping to sow confusion in our hearts. This plan was initiated by Yeshu the Nazarene. He caused others to believe that he was sent from heaven to explain the unclear parts of the Torah, and that he was the Mashiach promised by the prophet. He explained the Torah in such a way as to nullify it and its mitzvos and to permit what it had prohibited. Sometime later a religion arose, formed by the descendants of Esav, that associated itself with him but which did not reflect his views. Still later, there arose Mohammed who followed in his footsteps, attempting to change our religion. In addition, he sought political power and tried to subjugate us, creating the well-known religion [of Islam]. All these men had but one desire, to equate their religions with the religion of G-d. But the work of man bears no resemblance to that of G-d, except to an infant that does not comprehend either of them. These religions that copy ours are as comparable to ours, as is a mannequin to a human being... in that a fool will look at each and say they look alike but a wise man understands what is inside of each, realizing that the innards of a man has wondrous organs that reflect the wisdom of our blessed Creator. So too the fool, who does not understand the secrets of Holy Writ and internals of the mitzvos will compare our religion to the forgeries. He notes that both have the permitted and the prohibited, and forms of worship, and many commands and warnings bearing reward and punishment. But if he understood what is in the inside, he would see that the true G-dly faith has inner brilliance, and has no command or prohibition that does not bring with it perfection of man both in his character and in his intellect. (*Iggeres Teiman* *ibid.*)

The nations of the world realized with time that the laws of the Torah bound Israel with G-d, and thus made Israel indestructible. Their only hope to gain advantage over the Jewish people and to tear them away from the Torah was to imitate their practices. They took from the Torah as much as their character would allow and then claimed that their version of the Torah was the actual will of G-d. But in so doing they took only that which appealed to their superficial understanding. In the details of the Torah lies a system that perfects man and makes him a true servant of G-d, and it is this system alone that makes Israel the *am segulah*, the chosen people. They hoped to convince the Jews to join them with argumentation and, when that failed, with the violence of slaughter and forced conversions.

Often our Rabbis speak of periods of persecutions and *shemad* (forced apostasy) ... and then of how G-d nullified the decrees and those that had made them. Thus *Chazal* say *shemad* does not last. And

The Holy One, Blessed Be He, promised Yaakov Avinu that even though the nations will persecute his descendants, they will survive and triumph over them, and the oppressors will be destroyed – “And your seed will be like the dust of the earth [and you will break forth to the west, east, north, and south]” (*Bereishis* 28:14) meaning that though they will be trampled like dust that is stepped on by all, at the end they will be victorious. And so too in a metaphoric fashion, the dust is eternal and eventually settles on all the people who had trampled it while the trampers perish... The Creator has informed us through our prophets that we will never be destroyed nor cease to be an important nation. As it is impossible for the Holy One Blessed Be He to cease to exist, so too it is impossible for us to cease from creation for it says “For I am the L-rd, I have not changed, and you are the children of Yaakov, you have not ceased to be” (*Malachi* 3:6). (*Iggeres Teiman*)

As we have seen, Rambam sees the source of Amalek’s enmity as jealousy. The rejected son of Yitzchak is not willing to pay the price to acquire Eretz Yisrael. He hates the Jews because he hates Judaism. In their comprehensively researched work on the history of and reasons for antisemitism, *Why the Jews?*, Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin come to the same conclusion as Rambam. Antisemitism is not a function of racism, and the claim that this is the case is itself generated by antisemitism. Rambam goes one step deeper in explaining that the real hatred is towards G-d for His creation of a world that requires adherence to the principles of the Torah in order for man to reach meaningful fulfillment and inner happiness.

This same hatred has now been extended to the Judeo-Christian state of America²⁸ by those, both within and without the country, who wish to undermine the principles upon which it was founded.

Megillas Esther

R. *Eliezer HaModai* (TB *Megillah* 7a) says that in the Torah’s command to Moshe and Yehoshua:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כְּתֹב זֶאת זְכוֹרֹן בְּסֵפֶר וְשִׂים בְּאָזְנִי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כִּי־מָחָה אֶמְחָה אֹת־
זְכוֹר עַמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:

G-d said to Moshe, ‘Write this as remembrance in a book and tell it to Yehoshua, that I will erase the memory of Amalek from beneath the Heavens.

²⁸ See especially their chapter on “non-Jewish Jews” such as Chomsky and Jerry Rubin.

The book (*sefer*) refers to *Megillas Esther*. *Chazal* tell us that **המן האגגי** is the descendant of Amalek, king **אגג**.²⁹ The story of the *Megillah* is that of classical antisemitism. Achashverosh rules an empire of diverse nations; he emphasizes at a gathering of leaders **והשתיה כדת אין אונס**, “the drinking is according to everyone’s personal taste,”³⁰ and there is a spirit of freedom and respect for individual rights in his reign. Later he makes the democratic proclamation **להיות כל איש שורר בביתו ומדבר כלשון עמו**, “every man should be lord of his own house and speak the language of his own nation,”³¹ i.e., the Empire grants freedom to the nations under its rule as well as to individual households. And still later, the king makes a commoner queen, chosen from all his servants and all his nations. Yet he is quick to proclaim annihilation for **עם אחד מפזר ומפרד... ודתייהם שנות מכל עם**, “One nation spread out everywhere... with laws different from every nation, who do not conform to the laws of the king.”³² Even in the spirit of freedom with which Achashverosh rules his domain, Israel’s commitment to the Torah cannot be tolerated. Mordechai “will not bend nor bow,” **לא יכרע ולא ישתחוה**, as his allegiance and subservience both privately and publicly is only to the G-d of Israel.

The Inner Amalek—לא ירא אלקים

Rama, in his commentary on the *Megillah*, **מחיר יין**, explains that the lessons of the *Megillah* are meant to be understood not only on a literal level, but also metaphorically. He quotes *Moreh Nevuchim* (2:30) to relate **המן** to the **יצר הרע** “the evil inclination,” and more specifically to **סמאל** who is the rider (guiding force) of the snake in *Gan Eden*. This force is rooted in man’s **כח המדמה**, his imaginative/emotional nature.

It is obvious to anyone of understanding that the evil Haman represents **סמאל**... he is the descendant of Amalek, all of whose actions are twisted. All who follow the forces of **דמיונות** (imagination) and lusts will eventually be lost, as they were. This is what *Chazal* meant in saying **המן העץ** **המן** in the Torah? **המן מן התורה מנין**, “Where do we find **המן** in the Torah? In the phrase “Did you (**המן**) take from the tree,” meaning that Haman was at the “tree” and was the one who seduced you. The king elevates Haman’s chair above all others as the snake who is **ערום מכל חית השדה** “more cunning than all the animals of the field,”

²⁹ *Bilaam*, in his blessing, sees how Israel will conquer **אגג**. See *Targum on Megillas Esther* 3:1.

³⁰ *Megillas Esther* 1:5.

³¹ *Megillas Esther* 1:22.

³² *Megillas Esther* 3:8.

meaning that all the forces of one's soul obey him and bow to him except Mordechai [HaYehudi].

Amalek is not merely an entity outside of Israel seeking his destruction, but it is an entity within human nature, and every Jew must wage the battle against his internal Amalek. *Why the Jews?* has a chapter on “Non-Jewish” Jews, from Marx to Chomsky, as we must acknowledge the phenomenon of biological Jews who are converts from Judaism to the nation of Amalek. But more importantly, we must realize that even as observant and loyal Jews, it is possible and even probable that some elements of Amalek exist within ourselves.

The Rama's analysis of the defining quality of Amalek is that of Rambam's *כח המדמה* which is imagination, anti-rationalism, and he further identifies this with the *יצר הרע*. Anti-rationalism, a denial of the laws of nature that the Torah is in harmony with, conforms with the identity that we have been forging for Amalek. But as we have noted, the *mikra* specifically identifies Amalek's motivation as *לא ירא אלקים*—lacking fear of G-d. In *Parashas Ki Seitzei* we find:

אֲשֶׁר קָרָף בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיִּזְגַּב בָּהֶם כָּל־הַנְּחָשָׁלִים אֲחֵרֵיךָ וְאֶתְהָ עֵינֶיךָ וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יִרָא אֱלֹקִים.

They encountered you on the road and ambushed all those who were weakened and trailing, as you were tired and weary, and did not fear G-d (*Devarim 25:18*).

*Chazak*³³ present two interpretations of the final words of the *pasuk*; it is either Amalek or Israel who lacks the fear of G-d. But both the external Amalek, and the internal Amalek that allows the external one to conquer Israel, are identified by this quality, lacking the fear of G-d. Israel is also described as “tired and weary” when Amalek is successful; Israel must be strong and alert in order to prevail. Moshe sends Yehoshua and a select group of soldiers to battle while his hands, uplifted to Heaven, decide the outcome.

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּחַר־לָנוּ אַנְשִׁים וְצֵא הִלָּחֵם בְּעַמְלֵק מִחֹר אֲנָכִי נִצֵּב עִלַּי־רֹאשׁ הַגְּבֻעָה וּמִטָּה הָאֱלֹקִים בְּיָדֵינוּ: יְהוֹשֻׁעַ פָּאָשֶׁר אָמַר־לוֹ מִלְּשָׁה לְהִלָּחֵם בְּעַמְלֵק וּמִלְּשָׁה אֶתְרֹן וְחֹר עָלָיו רֹאשׁ הַגְּבֻעָה: יֵא וְהָיָה פֶּאָשֶׁר יָרִים מִלְּשָׁה יָדוֹ וַיִּגְבֵּר יִשְׂרָאֵל וּכְאֲשֶׁר יָגִישׁ יָדוֹ וַיִּגְבֵּר עַמְלֵק: יב וַיִּדִּי מִלְּשָׁה כְּבָדִים וַיִּקְחוּ־אֶבֶן וַיִּשְׂימוּ תַחְתֵּי וַיִּשָּׁב עָלֶיהָ וְאֶתְרֹן וְחֹר תִּמְכּוּ בְיָדֵי מֹזֶה אֶתְד וּמֹזֶה אֶתְד וַיְהִי יָדָיו אָמוּגָה עַד־כָּא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ: יג וַיִּחַלֵּשׁ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת־עַמְלֵק וְאֶת־עַמּוֹ לְפִי־חֶרֶב.

Moses said to Joshua, “Pick some men for us, and go out and do battle with Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of

³³ See commentaries on this verse.

the hill, with the rod of G-d in my hand.” Joshua did as Moses told him and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Then, whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; but whenever he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses’ hands grew heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur, one on each side, supported his hands; thus his hands remained steady until the sun set. And Joshua overwhelmed the people of Amalek with the sword.

In an unusual Aggadic excursion in the Mishnah of *Masechet Rosh HaShanah* (3:8), *Chazal* express the message behind Israel’s original battle against Amalek.

והיה כאשר ירים משה ידו וגבר ישראל (שמות יז יא) וכי ידיו של משה עושות מלחמה או שוברות מלחמה אלא לומר לך כל זמן שהיו ישראל מסתכלים כלפי מעלה ומשעבדין את לבם לאביהם שבשמים היו מתגברים ואם לאו היו נופלין.

“And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand Israel prevailed,” etc. (*Shemos* 17:1). Did the hands of Moses wage war or break [Israel’s ability] to wage war? Rather, this teaches that as long as Israel would look upwards and subject their hearts to their Father in Heaven they prevailed, and if not they fell. (*Shemos* 17:9-13)

Amalek is antithetical to the fear of G-d. As noted earlier, his anger is towards G-d and, were it possible, he would war against G-d Himself, Whom he resents. Israel’s task is to make man feel His presence in this world. Amalek’s is to keep Him away from human consciousness. Rambam explains the essence of the mitzvah of the fear of G-d in *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* after explaining love of G-d:

והיאך היא הדרך לאהבתו, ויראתו: בשעה שיתבונן האדם במעשיו וברואי הנפלאים הגדולים, ויראה מהם חכמתו שאין לה ערך ולא קץ--מיד הוא אוהב ומשבח ומפארו ומתאוה תאוה גדולה לידע השם הגדול, כמו שאמר דוד "צמאה נפשי, לאלוקים--לקל חי" (תהילים מב,ג) וכשמחשב בדברים האלו עצמן, מיד הוא נרתע לאחוריו, ויירא ויפחד ויידע שהוא בריה קטנה שפלה אפלה, עומד בדעת קלה מעוטה לפני תמים דעות, כמו שאמר דוד "כי אראה שמיך... מה אנוש, כי תזכרנו" (תהילים ח,ד-ה). (הל' יסדה"ת ב:א)

What is the path [to attain] love and fear of Him? When a person contemplates His wondrous and great deeds and creations and appreciates His infinite wisdom that surpasses all comparison, he will immediately love, praise, and glorify [Him], yearning with tremendous desire to know [G-d’s] great name, as David stated: “My soul thirsts for the Lord, for the living G-d” [Psalms 42:3]. When he [continues] to reflect on these same matters, he will immediately recoil in awe and fear, appreciating how he is a tiny, lowly, and dark creature,

standing with his flimsy, limited wisdom before Him Who is of perfect knowledge, as David stated: “When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers... [I wonder] what is man that You should recall Him” [Psalms 8:4-5].

Moshe, upon whom victory depends, is defined with only one superlative quality, והאיש משה ענו מאד מכל האדם “The man Moshe is much more modest than all men.” Amalek’s quest to elevate man above G-d is steeped in arrogance. When we hear someone say, “We are the ones we have been waiting for,” we can hear Amalek speak.

Identifying Amalek Today

There are two primary nations, two ideologies—Israel and Amalek. Israel’s ideology is a search for G-d within nature, and subservience to Him via adherence to the rules He revealed to man which were the rules by which the world was created וברא עלמא,³⁴ “G-d looked into the Torah and created the world.” Amalek celebrates man and demands freedom; the freedom he demands is a freedom from G-d.

In their chapter on Nazi antisemitism, Prager and Telushkin discuss the 1899 influential and well-received (by many intellectuals of the day) *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*. They write, “According to *Foundations*, the future of humanity will be determined by the outcome of the epochal struggle between two races: the Teutonic (“Aryan”) and Jewish (“Semitic”).” *Why the Jews?* explains that the “real opposition was to the Jews’ values and theology, not to their race and biology.” The author of *Foundations*, H.W. Chamberlain, writes, “I cannot help shuddering...at the portentous, irremediable mistake the world made in accepting the traditions of this wretched little nation as the basis of its belief.” *Why the Jews?* quotes him and explains, “He hated the Jews for their monotheism and moral values which **prevented the natural human being from possessing unrestricted freedom. “The Jew came into our world and spoiled everything with his concept of sin, his law, and his cross.”**”³⁵

Hillary Clinton, the “moderate” Democratic presidential candidate of 2016, addressed the evil she saw in America’s Judeo-Christian³⁶ culture and, had she been elected president, she would have accelerated the march of the Democratic Party to emulate the governments of Europe to uproot

³⁴ See *Bereishis Rabab* 1:1; *Zohar* 3:178:1.

³⁵ He saw Christianity and its values as an extension of Judaism.

³⁶ See *Torah and Western Thought: Intellectual Portraits of Orthodoxy and Modernity* by Meir Y. Soloveichik (2016).

that culture. The *Washington Post* records her words.³⁷ “In a speech not long before she launched her 2016 presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton made a stunning declaration of war on religious Americans. Speaking to the 2015 Women in the World Summit, Clinton declared that ‘deep-seated cultural codes, religious beliefs and structural biases have to be changed.’ Religious beliefs have to be changed? This is perhaps the most radical statement against religious liberty ever uttered by someone seeking the presidency. It is also deeply revealing. Clinton believes that, as president, it is her job not to respect the views of religious conservatives but to force them to change their beliefs and bend to her radical agenda favoring taxpayer-funded abortion on demand.”

Amalek believes that freedom demands that an inconvenient infant can be killed if it escapes the attempt to kill him in the womb. It believes that freedom demands that one should be able to declare one’s gender based on preference rather than biology. It believes that men in a relationship may be declared “married.” Indeed, *Chazal* interpret “אשר קרך בדרך, אשר קרך בדרך” as “who encountered you on the road,” as subjecting the Jews to *משכב זכר* (homosexual relations). Amalek opposes the limits of the Torah because it opposes the limits that G-d put into nature.

As Rambam explains, this hatred towards G-d and His servants does not allow Amalek to be satisfied to live its deviant life unobstructed. Seeing others committed to the Torah life and even to its offshoot, the Judeo-Christian culture, and thriving because of it, stirs up the jealousy of the rejected son. Amalek cannot bear the happiness in others that comes from a connection with G-d. *Chazal* say of *ויזנב בך* that he “cut off the *מלות*”, i.e., destroyed the *ברית* (covenant) between Israel and G-d. The Torah refers to rejection of the *mitzvos* as *בחקתי תמאסו* and *Chazal* explain *מואסים* “באחרים עושים מצוות,” “They are disgusted by others who do the mitzvos.”³⁸

Pirkei D’Reb Eliezer notes that Amalek strikes after Israel doubts G-d’s presence: *היש ה’ בקרבנו* — “Is G-d in our midst?” The Midrash comments that those who are attacked are those who have been rejected by the *ענן* (“cloud”) of G-d’s protection.³⁹ *Chazal* discover Amalek in the Torah in a place where he is not named.

א וישמע הקנעני מלך-עַרֶד, יֵשֶׁב הַנֶּגֶב, כִּי בָא יִשְׂרָאֵל, דָּרָךְ הָאֲמֹרִים; וַיִּלְחָם
בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיִּשָּׁב מִמֶּנּוּ שָׁבִי. (במדבר כא:א)

³⁷ See Marc Thiessen writing in the *Washington Post* of Oct 13, 2016.

³⁸ See *Rashi* to *Vayikra* 26:15.

³⁹ See *Rashi, Shemos*.

When the Canaanite, king of Arad, who dwelt in the Negev, learned that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, he engaged Israel in battle and took some of them captive.

Though the Torah says it was the Canaanim who struck, *Chazal*⁴⁰ note that both Amalek and Canaan inhabited the south, and it is the way of Amalek to make unprovoked sneak attacks. It was, in fact, Amalek disguised as Canaan who attacked Israel. They disguised themselves so that Israel would not know who they were so that when Israel prayed, as Moshe had demonstrated to them, they would pray to defeat Canaan and not Amalek and thus Israel would remain vulnerable.

Undoubtedly the Rabbis are teaching us a crucial message that we must apply today. We believe the reason for the hatred of the left for Israel is that Israel thwarts their will to fulfill their desires. This is not the case. In fact, as Rambam tells us, *ikkar avodah zarah* has been fundamentally defeated, and even though the remnant is still disbursed amongst the nations as they call out to do every *תועבה* (abomination) that the Canaanim popularized, mankind has learned and essentially knows in its heart that these things are self-destructive. The intense hatred comes from jealousy towards the chosen people. This cannot be appeased. The Midrash continues that Israel was victorious by being *מתפלל סתם*, “praying without identifying any enemy,” i.e., strengthening our relationship with G-d. This is the preparation needed for the battle, the battle against internal Amalek that prepares us for the battle against the external Amalek.

The mitzvah of *Binyan Beis HaMikdash* awaits the fulfillment of the mitzvah of the destruction of Amalek. It is incumbent on our community to fight this battle. We cannot expect others to do it for us. Achashverosh gave the Jews the right to fight and encouragement, but as is the case in Israel today so too in America, the battle is upon us. We must rely on the hands of Moshe, the Torah he gave us. But Moshe did not participate in the actual battle; he left that up to *Klal Yisrael*. An ideological battle must be waged. Our duty lies before us. ❧

⁴⁰ Quoted by *Rashi*.