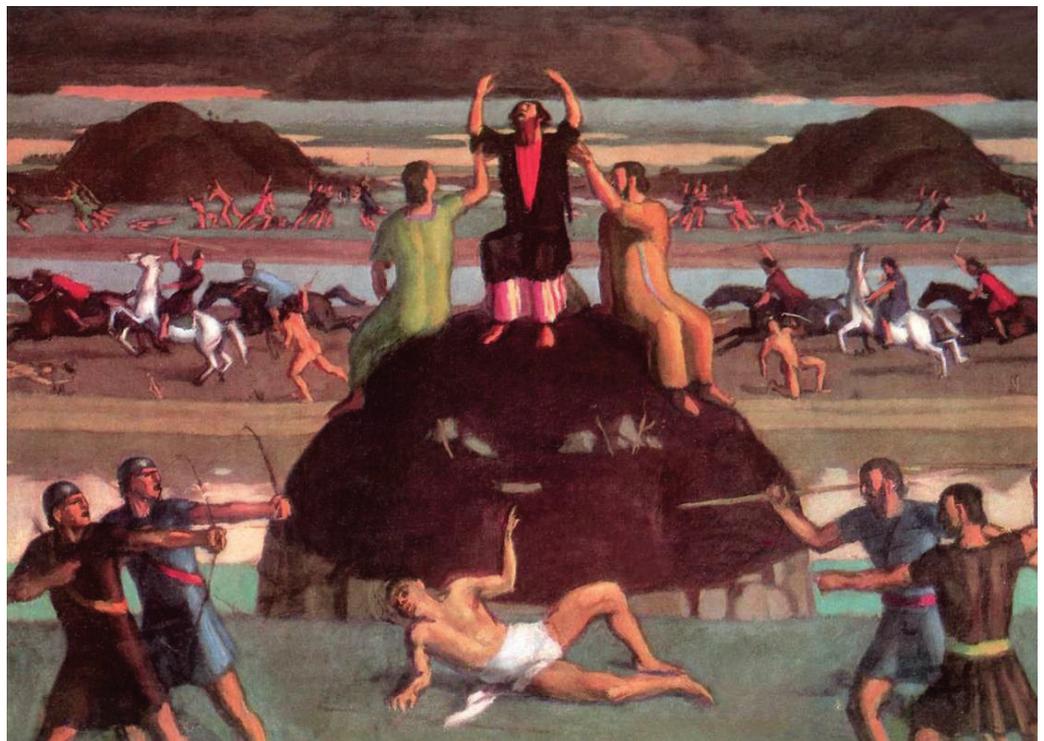


AMALEK:

REMEMBERING THE ARCH-ENEMY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE



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FACULTY GUIDE

LESSON DEVELOPED AND PROVIDED BY

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Cover image: Adolf Fenyés, "The Jews Defeating Amalek's Army" (1915)

Amalek: Remembering the Arch-Enemy of the Jewish People

INTRODUCTION

The expectation that one remember an occurrence that one has never personally experienced would seem to be quite a tall order. And yet, on six separate occasions, the Torah makes this demand of the Jewish People:

- 1) To remember the Exodus from Egypt
- 2) To remember the sin of the Golden Calf
- 3) To remember the giving of the Torah
- 4) To remember the Shabbat
- 5) To remember the attack of Amalek
- 6) To remember the sin of Miriam

- How are individuals or a nation to go about preserving a memory of something that none of them have actually witnessed?
- What are the fundamental requirements of remembering, and what steps must be taken to preserve memory?
- How is memory different from history? While historiography is the actual recording of history, Jewish collective memory is not the same thing. Like other nations, what is remembered is not always what is recorded.

The instruction to remember, and, in the case of this lesson specifically, the commandment to remember what the nation of Amalek did to the Jewish People, does not demand of the Jewish nation to merely preserve information about a bitter historical moment. Preserving that memory places it as the beginning of a time trajectory that offers hope for a better tomorrow in light of our recollection of battle

with an arch-enemy. As Rabbi Irving Greenberg writes, in reference to the commandment to remember the Exodus from Egypt,

...history is not an eternal recurrence – ever repeating but never progressing – but a time stream, with direction. History is not a meaningless cycle but the path along which the Divine-human partnership is operating to perfect the world. Time is linear, not merely circular; all humans are walking toward the end of time when the final peace and dignity for humankind will be accomplished.¹

This lesson, the opening lesson of a specially designed four-part Florence Melton course, focuses on the linear dimensions of the Jewish responsibility to remember the attack of Amalek against the Jewish nation just a short time after leaving Egypt, considering the short term and long term relevance of this instruction in all generations.

¹ Greenberg, I. (1988). *The Jewish Way*. New York: Simon and Schuster, pp. 38-39.

LESSON OUTLINE

The texts in this lesson explore the importance of remembering and how to remember.

[1] Professor Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, Biblical and Rabbinical Foundations

Memory is a crucial element of faith in Judaism.

[2] Exodus (*Shemot*) 17: 8-16

Amalek's attack against the Israelites shortly after the exodus from Egypt is followed by God's promise to utterly blot out any memory of them.

[3] Deuteronomy (*Devarim*) 25: 17-19

God's commandment to Israel to remember what Amalek did to them in the wilderness, and that they are to utterly blot out all memory of them.

[4] Ramban (Nachmanides), Deut. 25:17

Implicit in the commandment to remember Amalek is the responsibility to retell their evil ways to our children, generation after generation.

[5] Rabbi Irving Greenberg, Commemorating Jewish Destiny: Purim

Remembering and confronting the evils of the past is the most powerful generator of moral cleansing and fundamental reconciliation.

[6] Rabbi Dov Linzer, *Zakhor*

The mitzvah to destroy Amalek has been transformed into a mitzvah of memory, a mandate to restore moral order and to repudiate violence.

[7] Rabbi Kalonymos Kalmish Shapira, Parashat Zakhor, 1942

The war with Amalek teaches that even in the midst of great suffering, we must continue to look heavenwards, persisting in our belief in the supernatural ability of God to save us.

[8] Professor Shmuel Glick, Ruminations on Memory and its Transmission to the Next Generation

The ritual components of the commandments lead to memory, preserve the active component of the commandment, and keep the commandment relevant to a changing reality.

Text 1

Professor Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, Biblical and Rabbinical Foundations

[(1932–2009) Prof. of Jewish History, Culture and Society at Columbia University, 1980 to 2008]

... No more dramatic evidence is needed for the dominant place of history in ancient Israel than the overriding fact that even God is known only insofar as he reveals himself "historically." Sent to bring the tidings of deliverance to the Hebrew slaves, Moses does not come in the name of the Creator of Heaven and Earth, but of the "God of the fathers," that is to say, of the God of history: "Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them: The Lord the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has appeared to me and said: I have surely remembered you ... " (Exod. 3:16). When God introduces himself directly to the entire people at Sinai, nothing is heard of his essence or attributes, but only: "I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the Land of Egypt, the house of bondage" (Exod. 20:2). That is sufficient. For here as elsewhere, ancient Israel knows what God is from what he has done in history." And if that is so, then memory has become crucial to its faith and, ultimately, to its very existence.

Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people. Its reverberations are everywhere, but they reach a crescendo in the Deuteronomic history and in the prophets. "Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past" (Deut, 32:7). "Remember these things, O Jacob, for you, O

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Israel, are My servant; I have fashioned you, you are My servant; O Israel, never forget Me" (Is. 44:21). "Remember what Amalek did to you" (Deut, 25:17). "My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab plotted against you" (Micah 6: 5). And, with a hammering insistence: "Remember that you were a slave in Egypt"

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If the command to remember is absolute, there is, nonetheless, an almost desperate pathos about the biblical concern with memory, and a shrewd wisdom that knows how short and fickle human memory can be. Not history, as is commonly supposed, but only mythic time repeats itself. If history is real, then the Red Sea can be crossed only once, and Israel cannot stand twice at Sinai, a Hebrew counterpart, if you wish, to the wisdom of Heraclitus. Yet the covenant is to endure forever. "I make this covenant, with its sanctions, not with you alone, but both with those who are standing here with us this day before the lord our God, and also with those who are not with us here this day" (Deut, 29: 13-14). It is an outrageous claim. Surely there comes a day "when your children will ask you in time to come, saying: What mean you by these stones? Then you shall say to them: Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord when it passed through the Jordan" (Josh. 4:6-7). Not the stone, but the memory transmitted by the fathers, is decisive if the memory embedded in the stone is to be conjured out of it to live again for subsequent generations. If there can be no return to Sinai, then what took place at Sinai must be borne along the conduits of memory to those who were not there that day.....

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[Yerushalmi, Y. H. (1982). *ZAKHOR: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, pp. 9-10]

Analysis Text 1

The opening text of this lesson challenges us to consider the significance of memory, and its relationship to history. The interplay between history and memory in terms of Jewish living is quite central to understanding the ongoing relevance of Judaism throughout the generations.

So much of Jewish practice and the values associated with Jewish living emanate from moments, events, and experiences that biblical tradition has preserved, and, as Yerushalmi points out, the obligation to remember these accounts has in a number of cases been turned into a religious imperative. This unique aspect of Judaism brings with it many challenges. How is one to actually go about remembering an event that one did not experience? What happens when a Jew is called upon to remember such an event? To what extent does the “memory” of the event become influenced by the context in which the remembering is being actualized? For instance, most would agree that though although now for hundreds of years the steps taken at a Passover seder are more or less the same for Jews worldwide, the discussion that surrounds the actual fulfilment of the precept to remember slavery and remember gaining our freedom has taken on many different forms depending on the needs of the hour, the geographic location of those doing the remembering, and the particular blessings or challenges facing the community doing the remembering.

Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 535 – c. 475 BCE) was a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher. Heraclitus is famous for his insistence on ever-present change in the universe, as stated in the famous saying attributed to him by Socrates, “No man ever steps in the same river twice.” Jews do not relive history, claims Yerushalmi, just as Jews did not cross the Red Sea nor stand at Sinai more than one time. Ceremonial re-enactments of these events or retelling of these narratives is not an actual reliving of the event, but it is an effort to perpetuate a memory.

- ▶ What happens to a memory as it is passed down throughout the generations? As it gets passed along, it takes on new dimensions of significance. This lesson will focus on just one of the six specific biblical

imperatives to “remember” – the instruction to “remember what Amalek did to you as you left Egypt.”

- ▶ What about it are we instructed to remember, how are we to go about accomplishing this, and for what purpose(s)?

Text 2

Exodus (*Shemot*) 17: 8-16

Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. 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 the hill, with the rod of God 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.

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Inscribe this in a document as a reminder, and read it aloud to Joshua: I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven!” And Moses built an altar and named it Adonai-nissi [My Lord is my Miracle]. He said, “With the hand upon the throne of the Lord, the Lord will be at war with Amalek throughout the ages.”

שמות פרשת בשלח פרק יז

(ח) וַיָּבֹא עֲמֹלֵק וַיִּלָּחֶם עִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרַפִּידִם:

(ט) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה שֶׁעָרְרִלְנוּ אֲנָשִׁים וַצָּא הַלָּחֶם בְּעֲמֹלֵק מִחֵר אֲנֹכִי נֹצֵב עַל־רֹאשׁ הַגִּבְעָה וַיִּמָּטֵה הָאֱלֹהִים בְּיָדֵי:

(י) וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה כְּאֲשֶׁר אָמַרְלוּ מֹשֶׁה לְהִלָּחֵם בְּעֲמֹלֵק וַיִּמָּטֵה אֶהְרֹן וְחֹר וְעָלוּ רֹאשׁ הַגִּבְעָה:

(יא) וְהָיָה כְּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יְדוֹ וְגִבְרַת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָאֲשֶׁר יִנִּיחַ יְדוֹ וְגִבְרַת עֲמֹלֵק:

(יב) וַיְדִי מֹשֶׁה כְּבָדִים וַיִּקְחוּ־אֲבָן וַיִּשְׂמֹוּ תַחְתֵּיָהּ וַיֵּשֶׁב עָלֶיהָ וְאֶהְרֹן וְחֹר תָּמְכוּ בְיָדָיו מִזֶּה אֶחָד וּמִזֶּה אֶחָד וַיְהִי יָדָיו אֶמּוּנָה עַד־בֹּא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ:

(יג) וַיַּחֲלֵשׂ יְהוָה אֶת־עֲמֹלֵק וְאֶת־עַמּוֹ לְפִי־חָרֵב: פ

(יד) וַיֹּאמֶר יִקְנָן אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כְּתָב זֶאת זָכְרוֹן בְּסֵפֶר וְשִׂים בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוָה שֶׁיְהוָה פִּי־מַחֵה אֶת־זִכְרָ עֲמֹלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:

(טו) וַיִּבֶן מֹשֶׁה מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יִקְנָן נְסִי:

(טז) וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־יָד עַל־כַּס יְהִי מִלְחָמָה לִיקְנָן בְּעֲמֹלֵק מִדֵּר דֵּר:

Analysis Text 2

Only a very short time after the Jewish nation had left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea, before they stood at Mt Sinai to receive the Torah, they were ambushed by the nation of Amalek. Appearing to come out of nowhere, without any indication of provocation, the vicious Amalakites are said to have suddenly attacked the nation of Israel, forcing Moses to appoint Joshua to gather up an army and go to battle. One assumes that under the circumstances, the Israelites were at a great disadvantage. They had no standing army, no doubt had limited weaponry, and very little experience at war, if any. And yet, miraculously they were victorious, and the location of their victory was marked with an altar that would serve as a reminder of this great miracle. However, this physical reminder was not to suffice: Moses was instructed by God to record a written account of the events, and to stipulate therein the divine promise that Amalek would be completely obliterated from upon the face of the earth.

According to this text, the written account itself is to serve as reminder of the events and the ultimate commitment to bring about Amalek's complete destruction. Would it be God's role to bring this about? If so, then what is the role of the

Israelites in this endeavour? Are they actually fighting a war, or are they only to be pawns in this timeless endeavor?

- ▶ Perhaps the most interesting question here, as it relates to the topic of this lesson, is what it means to write a reminder for something that God has promised to bring about?
- ▶ Does God require to be reminded?
- ▶ And will it suffice to simply record this in a book in order for it to serve as a reminder of any sort?
- ▶ How does simply recording the events actually serve as a reminder?

The next text, from *Devarim*, seems to either elaborate and clarify the ambiguity of this text in *Shemot*, or comes to completely change the premise.

Text 3

Deuteronomy (*Devarim*) 25: 17-19

Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt— how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. Therefore, when the Lord your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!

דברים פרשת כי תצא פרק כה

(יז) זְכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בְּדַרְךָ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם:

(יח) אֲשֶׁר קָרַךְ בְּדַרְךָ וַיִּזְנֹב בְּךָ כָּל-הַנֶּחֱשָׁשִׁים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאִתָּה עָנָף וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹהִים:

(יט) וְהָיָה בְּהִנָּיִם יִקְנוּ אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְךָ מִכָּל-אֹיְבֶיךָ מִסָּבִיב בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יִקְנוּ-אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחֲלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ

תִּמְחָה אֶת-זֵכֶר עַמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח:

Analysis Text 3

This text in *Devarim* describes in much greater detail the heinous, shameful, cowardly and unforgivable behavior of Amalek when it attacked the nation of Israel. It was not so much that they attacked, but the way in which they went about it that seems to have been the driving force behind their total condemnation and sentencing to utter and eternal obliteration.

Important for the topic at hand, however, is what seems to either be a clarification here in *Devarim* of the instructions recorded in *Shemot*, or perhaps a redirecting of those instructions. While in *Shemot*, the text speaks of a written reminder that seems to be directed toward God, here the text could not be more clear: the responsibility to obliterate the nation of Amalek – every memory of that nation in fact – lies squarely on the shoulders of the Israelites, realizable only upon their settlement of the land in a period when they are no longer facing the threat of annihilation at the hands of other neighbouring countries.

- ▶ What does it mean to “blot out” a memory?
- ▶ Why does this responsibility only become operative at a time of peace with Israel’s surrounding neighbours?
- ▶ And what does the Torah mean to add by telling us on the one hand, to remember to blot out their name, and at the same time, not to forget? Isn’t that somewhat redundant?

The remaining texts in the lesson will address these questions from a variety of different angles.

Text 4

Ramban: Deuteronomy (*Devarim*) 25: 17

[Acronym for Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (English: Moses Nachmanides); 13th century Bible commentator and legal scholar in Spain]

REMEMBER WHAT AMALEK DID TO YOU... The correct interpretation appears to me to be that the verse states that you are not to forget what Amalek did to us until we blot out his remembrance from under the heavens, and that we are to relate it to our children and to our generations, saying to them, “Thus did the wicked one do to us and therefore we have been commanded to blot out his name.”

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רמב"ן, דברים, פרשת כי תצא, פרק כה

והנכון בעיני שהוא לומר שלא תשכח מה שעשה לנו עמלק עד שנמחה את שמו מתחת השמים, ונספר זה לבנינו ולדורותינו לומר להם כך עשה לנו הרשע, ולכך נצטוינו למחות את שמו.

Analysis Text 4

Much ink has been spilled throughout the ages to address the double commandment to both blot out the name of Amalek and also to never forget. Is it not a contradiction? For if the name is truly blotted out, will it not be the case that Amalek is then de facto forgotten?

Ramban addresses this textual oddity, explaining that the commandment to never forget what Amalek did to Israel remains in force until Israel has succeeded in blotting out “his remembrance,” meaning, any trace of Amalek, in the world. Clearly this will be a task that will take many many generations to complete, and thus, Ramban describes the implicit mechanism that will be utilized to keep the memory alive – passing the memory on, generation after generation.

It is no wonder that as the memory of Amalek has been recalled throughout the generations, different characters and different nations have “worn his clothes,” becoming the contemporary Amalek incarnate – Haman in his time, Hitler in his time. One wonders if the “remembrance” can ever truly be blotted out, for as

long as there is severe evil in the world, there will always be one nation or another who will be associated with Amalek-like behavior. One might almost suggest that the Torah's coupling of the responsibility to blot out all remembrance of Amalek with the need to never forget Amalek is a bow to reality. Perhaps the Torah is just saying quite plainly: albeit you are to be held responsible for obliterating Amalek from the world, you will never completely achieve this and so, although the road will be infinitely long, the Torah instructs us never to forget that it is nonetheless our obligation to try.

What then is the meaning of remembering this episode? There is not a lot about it recorded in the Torah. No one today actually possesses a true memory of what that was like for our ancestors in the wilderness, and yet, the commandment to pass on the memory is there. Functionally, the rabbis established that on the Shabbat prior to Purim, the section from *Devarim* — *Parshat* (Torah reading) *Zachor* — should be read publicly, and people should consider themselves obligated to hear that reading. This technically is considered to be fulfillment of the Torah injunction, for in doing so all those present heed the instruction to remember something that not a single one has experienced.

- ▶ Is this really an act of remembering?
- ▶ What does it take to fulfill the responsibility of remembering an evil nation, or an evil act carried out by that nation?

Text 5

Rabbi Irving Greenberg, Commemorating Jewish Destiny: Purim

[Contemporary theologian and writer in America; presently serving as Director of the U.S. Holocaust Museum]

Zachor is a mitzvah that has made modern Jews uncomfortable.

The natural desire to forget and be happy collides with the ongoing pain of memory and analysis. When asked why President Ronald

Reagan in 1985 initially declined to visit the Dachau concentration camp, a presidential aide explained that the President was an "up" type of person and did not like to "grovel in a grisly thing."

Modern people who are future-oriented stress the need to forgive. They argue that there will be no reconciliation as long as the memories of the cruelties and atrocities of the past are preserved and thrown in the face of those involved. "Forget and forgive" becomes the slogan. This argument can even take the form of an attack on the victims for keeping the memory alive. In May 1985, a storm of opposition arose against President Reagan's visit to the Bitburg, Germany military cemetery because the ceremony involved paying homage and laying a wreath in a cemetery with graves of S.S. soldiers. During the uproar, one German parliamentarian attacked the Jews for their unchristian-like refusal to forget the past!

The primary lesson of *Parshat* (Torah reading) *Zachor* is that true reconciliation comes through repentance and remembrance. Confronting the evils of the past is the most powerful generator of moral cleansing and fundamental reconciliation. Repentance is the key to overcoming the evils of the past. When people recognize injustice, they can correct the wrongdoing and the conditions that lead to it. In the twentieth century, repentance has liberated many Christians from past stereotyping and hatred of Jews, thus beginning to transform Christianity into a gospel of love-which it seeks to be.

Remembrance is the key to preventing recurrence. Goaded by the memory of the failures of the 1930s, the indifference toward Jewish refugees, the American government in 1979 organized a

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worldwide absorption program for two million boat people. Goaded by memory America's Jews and Israel responded to the crisis of Soviet Jewry and, belatedly, of Ethiopian Jewry.

Naiveté and amnesia always favor the aggressors, the Amalekites in particular. The Amalekites wanted to wipe out an entire people, memory and all; amnesia completes that undone job.

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Ingenuousness leads to lowering the guard, which encourages attempts at repetition. One of the classic evasions undergirding naiveté is the claim that Amalek is long since gone. Only

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"primitive" people are so cruel; only madmen or people controlled by a Svengali/Hitler type would do such terrible things. The mitzvah of Zachor is a stern reminder that Amalek lives and must be fought.

[Greenberg, I. (1988). *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*. New York: A Touchstone book Published by Simon and Schuster, pp. 243-244]

Analysis Text 5

Greenberg offers a significant, important angle on the requirement to remember, to preserve memory into the future. One would be critically mistaken if they felt that the Torah's instruction to "remember" could be simply fulfilled through an annual public reading of the Torah. According to Greenberg, the Torah instruction here comes to insist that evil will return time and time again to the world, and it is up to us to be prepared for that.

We are required to remember and preserve memory in a way that "goads" us into taking action, that "goads" us into responding powerfully when faced with any modern-day Amalek, bent on our destruction. For Greenberg, the

obligation to remember, and to never forget, is one whose underlying goal is to leverage us to take action whenever we may find ourselves confronting the evil of our world, in any generation, with the knowledge that we must never be naive enough to think that Amalek has been entirely vanquished.

Remembering, and understanding what that implies, serves as the focus of this discussion. However, we cannot escape the fact that in addition to remembering, the Torah in Devarim instructs us, quite literally, to obliterate every trace of Amalek in our world. In fact, when Saul, king of Israel, resisted completely destroying every trace of Amalek in his war against that nation, he was duly punished for his disobedience (I Samuel, Chapter 15).

For most people today, the notion that we as a people may be instructed to remember Amalek in all generations in order to ultimately bring about their complete demise, i.e. to kill every man, woman and child, and destroy all of their possessions, does not sit all that well.

- ▶ How might we otherwise understand the nature of this difficult injunction today?

Text 6

Rabbi Dov Linzer, *Zakhor*

[Rosh HaYeshiva and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School in New York]

Three mitzvot: One, remember. Two, do not forget. And three, sandwiched in between – you shall blot out their memory. Kill them, wipe them out. What possible message can we learn from this mitzvah?

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God is a vengeful God. Violence must be met with violence. Even innocents – the infants and the future descendants of the original nation - can be slaughtered by the hand of Israel when Israel is following God's command and is the agent of God's justice. Is this the message of Amalek? Is this the story that we tell?

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We know that it is not. It is not the story that we as a people have told. Having as a people been persecuted and slaughtered in the name of religion, and as witness today to the evils that can be perpetrated by a murderous, fundamentalist religious belief – this also is not the story that we can ever tell. [...]

It is a story, first and foremost, of moral grappling, of a people who treasure the sanctity of human life, and who believe in a God who commands them to preserve human life. It is the story of a people who can only be confounded by such a command. [...]

Where is the justice in God's decree? Such a command violates God's own treasuring of human lives, and the most fundamental sense of justice....

This grappling echoes throughout the generations. It can be heard in the words of the great Chasidic rabbi and *posek*, Rav Avraham Bornstein of Sochachov (1839-1910), who states that the punishment cannot be just because the Torah teaches that children do not suffer for the sins of their father (Avnei Nezer, Orah Hayyim, 508). [...]

It is a story of a grappling, yes, but not one that leads to resignation or rejection, but to transformation. It is a story about how Amalek stops being a people whom we must physically destroy, and instead becomes a symbol, an idea, that we must fight against, peacefully and without violence. [...]

It is a story of moving from the passage in *Devarim*, from the charge of *timche* – that you shall blot out – to the passage in *Shemot*, and the declaration of macho *emche*, that I, God, will blot out. It is the

transferring of the war, from *B'nei Yisrael* to God. *Milchama laHashem bi'Amalek*, a war of God against Amalek. *Midor dor*. The story that we have chosen to tell, from generation to generation, is the story of Shemot, the story of God's war, not of ours. The story of a war not against a people, but against violence, against evil.

We are truly an amazing people. We have taken the mitzvah to destroy Amalek, a mitzvah that disrupts our moral and religious order, a mitzvah that embraces violence and, through interpretation, through choosing how we will tell the story, we have transformed it into a mitzvah of memory, a mandate to restore moral order and to repudiate violence. [...]

Remember. Do not forget. We have a responsibility of memory and a responsibility of speech and of story. We, each one of us, will choose the story that we will tell.

[Linzer, D. (2013). *A Message from the Rosh Yeshiva, Parashat Tetzaveh/Zachor*. http://rabbidovlinzer.blogspot.co.il/2013_02_17_archive.html Viewed Aug. 17, 2014]

Analysis Text 6

In this text, Linzer contends that although on the written level, the Torah does imply in Devarim that we are to take sword in hand and destroy all remnants of Amalek in the world, without regard for their age, gender or personal responsibility, the Jewish people have resisted embracing this literal reading and have instead chosen to tell the story as one of adopting a moral stance that condemns Amalek-like behavior in the world, and works to free the world of its grip. Suggesting that this implies a shift from the Devarim command for bnei Yisrael to actively destroy Amalek, back to the Shemot promise that God will be the one who will fight this battle in generation after generation, Linzer takes a bold stab at the traditional understandings of the nature of the laws as delineated in Devarim. However, that aside, it is clear to Linzer that the Jewish People have very cleverly taken a law and reinterpreted it to read not as a mandate to kill, but rather as essentially a

mitzvah of memory, a mandate to restore moral order and to repudiate violence. Israel has moved the focus away from a commandment to bring about destruction, and defined it instead as an obligation to remember.

In other words, according to Linzer, the simple understanding of the Torah texts did not match up against our actual physical power to implement, nor our moral/ethical desire to obliterate any nation, especially where there are innocents involved. Therefore, it is we who have chosen exactly how we are going to tell our story. More extremist voices will no doubt chose to tell the story quite differently.

Perhaps, however, the requirement to remember is not so much for the purpose of assuring our ultimate vanquish of the evil nation of Amalek, as much as it is meant to serve as a banner reminder to Bnei Yirael when the nation is suffering – whether acutely or nationally – that even in the midst of the very worst to times, there is still hope. There is no need for despair. This reading of the commandment is reflected in the following text.

Text 7

Rabbi Kalonymos Kalmish Shapira, *Parashat Zakhor*, 1942

[(1889–1943), Chief Rabbi of Piaseczno, Poland; authored a number of works and was murdered by the Nazis during the Holocaust]

... In the past, when facing the challenge to conquer ourselves, we had to overcome our desires and evil inclination, as it says in the Mishnah (Avoth 4:1): "Who is a strong? He who conquers his desires." Now, however, we have another, additional challenge: to conquer our despair and bolster our broken spirit, to take strength in God. Doing so is very, very difficult, because the agony is unbearable, God will have mercy. But while so many Jews are being burned alive for God's name, when they are murdered and slaughtered only because they are Jews, then we must at least be able to withstand this test. With the very same

selflessness that they display, we too must conquer ourselves and find strength in God.

This is hinted at in the verses ... "Remember what Amalek did to you on the road, on your way out of Egypt. They met you on the road, cutting off those stragglers at the rear. . . ." The Hebrew word *karcha*, "met you," also translates as "chilled you," meaning, "they were trying to degrade you." The Hebrew words *hanecheshalim acharecha*, "those stragglers at the rear" can also be translated as "those who had fallen into despair," or as one might say in Yiddish, *Di vas fallen unter sich*, because it was their inner spirit that had collapsed. It was these stragglers whom Amalek was able to attack and damage. Moses taught us that even in the midst of war, even when Amalek is dominant - when, according to all the evidence of our eyes, there is no hope of salvation - we must continue to look heavenwards, persisting in our belief in the supernatural ability of God to save us. Moses lowered his hands and allowed Amalek momentary victory in order to teach the Jewish people that even when Moses' hands are lowered and Amalek is winning, they must still turn their faces heavenwards and hope. Not just this, but even when salvation is not forthcoming we must enslave our hearts to our Father in heaven, accepting everything with love. Then, our acceptance arouses the transformation of *Din* [judgment] into *Rachamim* [compassion], as we said above, fulfilling the promise to "obliterate the memory of Amalek from beneath the skies." (*Devarim* 25:19.).

[Shapira, K. K. (2002). *Sacred Fire: Torah From the Years of Fury 1939-1942*. Trans. J. Hershey Worch. Ed. Deborah Miller. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., pp. 299-301]

Analysis Text 7

Rabbi Shapira was murdered along with the others millions of victims of the Holocaust. In 1942, amidst the death and despair, he penned these words of hope and inspiration.

For Shapira, the biblical obligation to preserve the memory of Amalek comes not so much as a reminder of mission and task, but more a source of great hope. Even in the darkest times, like the Israelites battling Amalek, we too must turn our eyes heaven-ward accompanied by feelings of hope and great anticipation. The reminder to never forget Amalek serves to remind us of the great victory yet in store for us in the future.

According to Shapira, remembering the Israelite victory in the face of the arch-enemy Amalek is perhaps meant more than anything else, to remind us that there is always hope. Instructing Jews throughout the generations to keep this in mind at all times is perhaps a mechanism for preserving hope in the face of great despair. The nation of Israel has certainly experienced its share of despair-filled historical periods, and remembering the victory over the arch-enemy Amalek does offer hope in the face of such desperate periods.

Text 8**Prof. Shmuel Glick, Ruminations on Memory and its
Transmission to the Next Generation**

[Professor of Jewish Law and Talmud at the Schechter Institute and Director of the Schocken Institute in Jerusalem]

Our generation is unique in the annals of Jewish history. It is a generation in which the famous line from Psalms has come to pass: "He raised us from the dust, he will raise up the destitute from the refuse heap". From the darkest valley of the shadow of death, from the crematoriums of Auschwitz, our parents dusted themselves off, rose from their mourning, and with great courage made their way to the

land of their dreams, to a country with a glorious past, but with a present and future shrouded in uncertainty.

Historical Memory in Judaism

Historical memory is a central motif of Judaism. Deuteronomy 32:7 instructs us to "Remember the days of yore, learn of ancient times, ask your father and he shall tell you, your elders and they shall recount for you". The Jewish circle of life revolves around memory. In our daily prayers, morning and evening, the memory of the exodus from Egypt has the pride of place. This is not, however, the only memory mentioned in the Torah. Other positive commandments to remember remain as scriptural edicts have had less of an influence on history, such as: "Remember and do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness;" (Deuteronomy 9:7) or "Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on your journey out of Egypt;" (Deuteronomy 24:9), and finally "Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey out of Egypt," (Deuteronomy 25:17).

Why did the commandments "Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8) and "Remember the day you left Egypt, the house of bondage" (Exodus 13:3) have such an active resonance in the collective Jewish memory, and other commands to remember were left at the wayside?

[...]

The Sabbath and Passover are so entrenched in the Jewish consciousness because the command to keep and observe was part of the command to remember. Keeping or observing is the ritual

35 component of the commandment (the celebratory meal and its
symbols, the traditions and the laws, the communal prayer, etc.) which
leads to memory, preserves the active component of the
commandment, and keeps the commandment relevant to a changing
reality. Without the command to keep the Sabbath and Passover, it is
40 doubtful that these holidays would have been any different than any of
the other scriptural commands to remember, which remain in scripture
but have no resonance in the present.

Ever since the Jews returned to their land, more memorial days and
45 more holidays have been added to the calendar, most importantly
Holocaust Memorial Day, and the Memorial Day for IDF soldiers. I
wonder what the fate of these memorial days will be in subsequent
generations. Will they be like the passive commands of the Torah, or
like the many memorial days for past massacres and martyrdom (such
50 as the massacres of 1096, the massacres of 1648 and so many others)
which are part of the general passive memory of hardship, or perhaps
these days will be actively remembered and commemorated in
subsequent generations?

55 How can we ensure that seminal events such as the Holocaust and the
resettlement of Israel be preserved in the collective memory for many
generations to come?

[...]

The answer to this question depends on what we pass on to the next
60 generations. The March of the Living, libraries, museums, and school
ceremonies are all important components of learning about the
Holocaust and the Return, but they are not enough to entrench this

memory as "an active memory", as an influential memory. Only if we can transmit the narrative to the next generation, the grand saga of the Holocaust and the rising from the ashes, in such a way that each man, woman, and child can recount it in simple language through a ritual framework, will it find a secure place in people's hearts and minds.

[Schechter on Judaism, Volume 12, Issue No. 9, May 2014,
<http://www.schechter.edu/facultyForum.aspx?ID=130> Viewed Aug. 17, 2014]

Analysis Text 8

While Greenberg and Shapira (Texts 5, and 7) considered the role of memory to be a source of warning or inspiration moving forward, to be a wellspring of faith in the future based on former salvations, or to serve as a reminder to avoid reliving the same mistakes of the past, this text comes to address not the purpose of the commandment "to remember," but rather the implicit mechanism that needs to be in place in order to perpetuate even the most significant of memories.

Glick suggests that the operative aspect of preserving memory is not through simply emphasizing the importance of remembering, but rather, by associating the commandment to remember with the practice of ritual. He contends that one cannot hope to perpetuate the biblical obligations to remember events or actions without associating them with ritual practice. It is for this the reason, he contends, that both Shabbat and the Exodus from Egypt continue to be "remembered," for both of them are associated with ongoing ritual observances. With the passing of time, even the most significant of events will be forgotten if no accepted celebrations or observances associated with these events are maintained.

One significant comment made here by Glick is that "...the ritual component of the commandment ... leads to memory....and keeps the commandment relevant to a changing reality." He seems to suggest something very interesting here: the ceremony does not *preserve* memory but actually *leads* to memory...and then the memory combines with the ritual to "keep the commandment relevant." In other words, ongoing ritual observance creates memory for the observer, and that acquired memory, in the way it is generated, overlays the commandment to

remember with a vital layer of contemporary relevance. What Glick suggests here is that the commandment to remember triggers the need to create a memory, and that memory, as it is formulated in any given generation will in turn preserve the contemporary relevance of the purpose of remembering.

Two illustrations of this:

- 1) The contemporary call for [a day of unplugging](#) calls upon people to stop using their internet devices on one Shabbat to embrace the spirit of Shabbat as a day of rest. The call to do this creates a memory of Shabbat as a day of disconnecting from the day-to-day hectic nature of our lives, and colors our understanding of the commandment to remember the Shabbat as a call to mankind to make Shabbat different from the rest of the week.
- 2) The practice of noise-making on Purim each time the name of Haman is mentioned during the reading of Megillat Esther, creates a strong association between Haman and the nation of Amalek. Though attempts have been made to connect Haman to Amalek, none have been that convincing; however, the blotting out of Haman has created a memory for the Jewish people that equates Haman with Amalek, and thus colors our understanding of the commandment to remember what Amalek did to our ancestors in the desert as a somewhat more universal commandment aimed at actively blotting out all nations who have historically positioned themselves as seeking the genocide of the Jewish people.

Thus, memory is not as much preserved as it is created and recreated with time, as ancient events are combined with current concerns to create frameworks through which Jews are accustomed to viewing the past and present, and the future as well.

