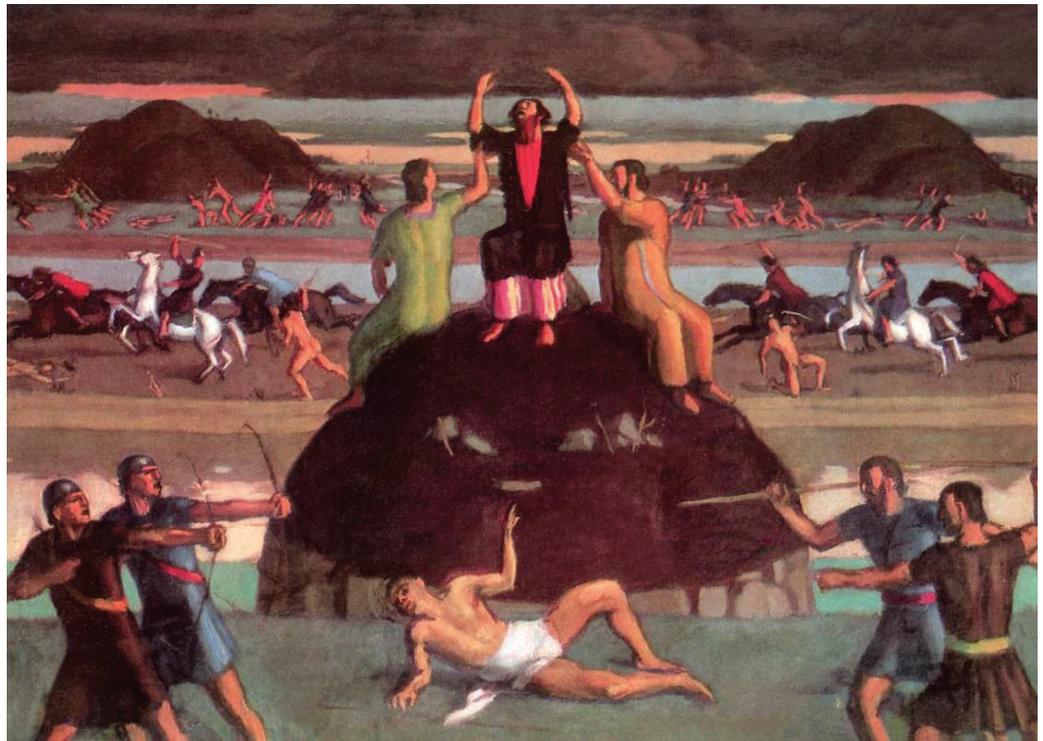


# AMALEK:

## REMEMBERING THE ARCH-ENEMY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE



SUNDAY  
NOVEMBER 16, 2014  
23 CHESHVAN 5775



STUDENT READER

LESSON DEVELOPED AND PROVIDED BY

 **the florence melton school  
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Cover image: Adolf Fenyés, "The Jews Defeating Amalek's Army" (1915)

# ***Amalek: Remembering the Arch-Enemy of the Jewish People***

GLOBAL DAY  
OF LEARNING

**Amalek:  
Remembering  
the Arch-  
Enemy of the  
Jewish People**

## **TEXTS AND ANALYSES**

### ***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.

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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 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

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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.....

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

## 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  
5 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,  
10 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  
15 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 בְּחַרְלָנוּ אֲנִישִׁים וַיָּצֵא הַלָּחֶם בְּעֲמֹלֵק מִחֵר אֲנֹכִי נִצַּב עַל־רֹאשׁ הַגִּבְעָה וַיִּמָּטֵה הָאֱלֹהִים בְּיָדִי:

(י) וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה כְּאֲשֶׁר אָמַרְלוּ מֹשֶׁה לְהִלָּחֵם בְּעֲמֹלֵק וַיִּמָּשֶׁה אֶהָרֶן וַחֹר עָלוּ רֹאשׁ הַגִּבְעָה:

(יא) וַהֲיָה כְּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וְגִבֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכְאֲשֶׁר יָנִיחַ יָדוֹ וְגִבֹר עֲמֹלֵק:

(יב) וַיְדִי מֹשֶׁה כְּבָדִים וַיִּקְחֵרְאָבֶן וַיִּשְׁיִמוּ תַחְתָּיו וַיֵּשֶׁב עָלֶיהָ וְאֶהָרֶן וַחֹר תָּמְכוּ בְיָדָיו מִזֶּה וּמִזֶּה אֶחָד וַיְהִי יָדָיו אָמוּנָה עַד־בֹּא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ:

(יג) וַיִּחַלֵּשׁ יְהוָה אֶת־עֲמֹלֵק וְאֶת־עַמּוֹ לְפִי־חֶרֶב: פ

(יד) וַיֹּאמֶר יְקֹנֵק אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כָּתַב זֹאת זְכָרוֹן בְּסֵפֶר וְשִׁים בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוָה יְהוָה כִּי־מָחָה אֶמְחָה אֶת־זְכוֹר עֲמֹלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:

(טו) וַיִּבֶן מֹשֶׁה מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יְקֹנֵק נָסִי:

(טז) וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־יָד עַל־כַּס יְהִי מִלְחָמָה לִיקְנֹק בְּעֲמֹלֵק מִדֶּר דֶּר:

### 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!

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## דברים פרשת כי תצא פרק כה

(יז) זָכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לְךָ עֲמֹלֵק בְּדַרְךָ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם:

(יח) אֲשֶׁר קָרַךְ בְּדַרְךָ וַיִּזְנֹב בְּךָ כְּלִי־הַנְּחֹשׁ לִים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַתָּה עֵינֶיךָ וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹהִים:

(יט) וַהֲיָה בְהֵנִיחַ יְקֹנֵק אֶל־הַיָּד לְךָ מִכָּל־אֲיִבֶיךָ מִסָּבִיב בְּאַרְצְךָ אֲשֶׁר יְקֹנֵק־אֶל־הַיָּד נָתַן לְךָ נִחְלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחָה אֶת־זְכוֹר עֲמֹלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח:

**Text 4****Ramban: Deuteronomy (*Devarim*) 25: 17**

[Acronym for Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (English: Moses Nachmanides); 13<sup>th</sup> 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."

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.

**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]

Zakhor 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 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.

40 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.

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  
45 "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]

### Text 6

#### Rabbi Dov Linzer, *Zachor*

[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  
10 the message of Amalek? Is this the story that we tell?

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

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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. [...]

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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....

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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). [...]

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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. [...]

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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

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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  
 45 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. [...]

50 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](http://rabbidovlinzer.blogspot.co.il/2013_02_17_archive.html) Viewed Aug. 17, 2014]

## Text 7

### **Rabbi Kalonymos Kalmish Shapira, *Parashat Zachor*, 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  
 5 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]

**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 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 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 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 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?

[...]

60 The answer to this question depends on what we pass on to the next 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  
65 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]

