



# GEULAS YISRAEL

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RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION  
MAGGID SHIUR ALL PARSHA AND ALL DAF, OU.ORG

## Amalek 2.0

Morality is complex and deeply contextual. For that reason, the Torah does not attempt to spell out every detail of human moral interaction. Such an effort would be endless, because moral situations shift with time, place, and circumstance. As the Ramban explains, the Torah sets out core moral responsibilities that are universal and binding. Beyond those obligations, it calls upon us to preserve the moral spirit of the law even when no specific halachic requirement applies. This is the mitzvah of *lifnim mishurat hadin*, acting beyond the letter of the law. Moral life is often too complicated to be fully captured by formal rules alone.

There are exceptions. The mitzvah to battle Amalek reminds us that some moral situations are not gray, but starkly black and white. When we encounter pure evil in its most horrific form, evil that threatens humanity and challenges the presence of Hashem in the world, we are commanded to eradicate it entirely. In such moments, false compassion and

moral hesitation come up short, and there is no room for moral balancing or contextual excuses.

### TWO EVILS

Evil exists in two different forms, one theological and one historical. The seven nations that once inhabited the Land of Israel had become fully submerged in a pagan culture marked by savagery, black magic, sorcery, and even cannibalism. They posed a direct threat to the presence of Hashem and to the survival of belief in monotheism. For that reason, they had to be removed from the land so that the kingdom of Hashem could be established in Yerushalayim. Though the mitzvah to eliminate the seven nations can sound extreme when read in isolation, within its broader theological context it was necessary for the spread of monotheism. Monotheism itself serves the broader welfare of the human condition. This commandment was given only once in history and applied solely under those original conditions.

The second form of evil is embodied by Amalek. Amalek does not deny Hashem, nor does it confront His presence through overt religious challenge. Instead, it sets itself against Jewish destiny. Descended from Esav, Amalek defined its role as resisting the rise of Yaakov. As Jewish history unfolds and that destiny presses forward, Amalek repeatedly emerges, intent on disruption and obstruction.

### BA-DERECH

When we first left Mitzrayim, we were meant to enter Eretz Yisrael within a short span of time. Though our failures in the desert

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delayed that journey, the original trajectory was swift and direct. It was at that moment that Amalek attacked, confronting us *ba-derech*, on the way, seeking to block our path and sap our momentum as we moved toward historical and spiritual purpose.

Our entry into Eretz Yisrael was delayed for forty years because of our repeated desert failures. Finally, after four decades, we stood at the threshold of the land, poised to enter from the southeast. At that moment, descendants of Amalek attacked us, disguising themselves as local Canaanite warriors in order to confuse and mislead. Once again, Amalek appeared *ba-derech*, on the road of Jewish history, seeking to slow the march forward and obstruct the unfolding of Jewish destiny.

Hundreds of years later, we were driven from Yerushalayim by the Babylonians and found ourselves exiled in Persia. Slowly, we began the difficult process of return, laying the groundwork for the era of the Second Mikdash. Once again, a descendant of Amalek emerged, this time Haman the Agagite, seeking to undo Yaakov's ascendancy over Esav and to destroy us before we could make our way back to Eretz Yisrael.

### AMALEK WITHOUT AMALEKITES

Haman, however, was the last time a genealogical descendant of Amalek rose up against Jewish history. A few centuries earlier, the Assyrians had conquered much of the Mediterranean Levant and forcibly displaced populations, creating lasting demographic confusion. With the identity of the Amalekite nation lost, the specific mitzvah to eradicate Amalek no longer applies. The command of Parashat Ki Teitzei has been frozen in history. Yet the struggle with the idea of Amalek continues. While the command in Ki Teitzei has faded, the verse in Beshalach remains fully alive. It points to an

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ongoing battle with Amalek as a concept, one with broad historical and theological meaning.

כִּי יָד עֲלֵיכֶם יְ-הוָה מִלְחָמָה לְה' בַּעֲמֻלַּק מִדֹּר

“For a hand is raised against the throne of God; the Lord is at war with Amalek from generation to generation.”

In every generation, there are those who become obsessed with the Jewish people and fixated on their destruction. They may not descend from Amalek genealogically, and the mitzvah of Amalek does not translate in our time into a command to kill, but they are part of the same enduring struggle described in Beshalach, a historical battle that resurfaces again and again in different forms.

This Amalek impulse is highly contagious. It surfaces across very different cultures and ideologies, infecting fascists in Germany and communists in Moscow, fundamentalist Islamists and, at times, even Western liberals. Its danger lies partly in how easily it spreads,



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often to people unaware they have absorbed it. From desert encampments outside Egypt to imperial palaces in Shushan, from Europe's killing fields during the Holocaust to battlefields in the Middle East, this impulse has repeatedly driven humanity toward obsessive hatred of the Jewish people and a determination to block Jewish destiny.

Purim offers a microcosm of this continuing struggle. Both then and now, the battle is no longer waged against a clearly defined, genealogical Amalek, but against those who have internalized its poison. The threat has changed form, but the animating hostility remains the same, reappearing whenever Jewish existence and purpose move visibly forward.

### SWITCHING SIDES

By introducing a new form of Amalek, Purim also introduced something new into the struggle. We were no longer alone. Allies emerged, people who had once aligned themselves with those who sought our destruction, but who now switched sides.

After Haman's fall, Mordechai rose to prominence and was celebrated in Shushan as a heroic figure. As the new decree empowered us to defend ourselves, a gradual but striking reversal took place. Many who had planned our downfall now stood with us in our defense.

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Twice, the Megillah records this shift.

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 עֲלֵיהֶם

“Many among the peoples of the land aligned themselves with the Jews, for the fear of Mordechai had fallen upon them.”

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According to many opinions, these Persian citizens did not formally convert to Judaism; they merely aligned themselves with our cause. Both the awe inspired by the Jewish people and the respect commanded by Mordechai caused former enemies to reverse course and stand alongside us in battle. It was the ultimate *v'nahafoch hu*: those who once threatened us now helped defend us.

Purim created an important historical template that would resurface as we approached the final redemption of history. For nearly two thousand years, we suffered in silence and isolation. Part of what made the Holocaust so horrific, and so emblematic of exile, was that no one rose specifically to our defense. Though we ultimately benefited from the Allied defeat of Hitler, it was not undertaken as a focused effort to protect the Jewish people. If anything, Roosevelt felt compelled to downplay his concern for European Jewry so that the war would not be portrayed as driven by Jewish interests. We were murdered in silence, and we were alone.

Yet history seems to be shifting once again, echoing the pattern first set in Purim. In 1965, the Christian Church formally moved toward rapprochement with the Jewish people, acknowledging and apologizing for nearly two millennia of hatred and discrimination. Since then, Israel has benefited greatly from the

support of Christians who see the Jewish return to history and to the Land as an advance of the divine presence in the world.

As I write these lines, our country and the United States are engaged in a battle against a fundamentalist regime of violence in Tehran. We hope that this ממשלת דודן will soon be swept into the dustbin of history, like all those who have opposed the presence of Hashem or who have spoken in the name of false gods. Perhaps that day will also allow its people to renew a healthier relationship with the Jewish people and with the Jewish state.

Our vision of *acharit hayamim* includes the defeat of the forces of Amalek, those who choose to oppose Hashem and the destiny of His people in their land. We do not believe in predetermined or fated forces of evil. People exercise free choice when they adopt the Amalek impulse and turn their hatred against our people, and they will ultimately be defeated. At the same time, we look toward a future in which many of today's adversaries will once again switch sides, as they did in Persia twenty-five hundred years ago and as we have witnessed, in part, over the past fifty years. ■



OU Press is honored to partner with Rabbi Moshe Taragin on his new volume in Hebrew regarding the recent war ('Emunah B'toch Hahastara). This remarkable book is also available in English, "Dark Clouds Above, Faith Below"



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