



Bet Horaah בית הוראה Shaa'are Ezra שערי עזרא

Parshat Bo

Zmanim for New York:

Candle Lighting: 4:39pm

Shabbat ends: 5:43pm

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REMEMBER WHAT AMALEK HAS DONE TO YOU- IS GAZA AMALEK?

WRITTEN BY RABBI SHAY TAHAN

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On Thursday last week, South Africa presented its case at the World Court in The Hague, asserting that Israel is engaged in genocide in Gaza. The legal representatives urged the court to issue an interim order, calling for an immediate cessation of Israel's military actions.

South African lawyers asserted that Israeli soldiers interpreted Benjamin Netanyahu's November speech, where he invoked a biblical reference to Amalek, as a justification for killing Palestinians. This claim, highlighting Netanyahu's use of Amalek and IDF soldiers chanting "wipe off the seed of Amalek," was presented during the first day of public hearings at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. Netanyahu's use of Amalek during the Gaza invasion had sparked international outrage, with many interpreting it as an explicit call for Israeli soldiers to kill Palestinians in response to Hamas' attack on October 7. Netanyahu stated during the broadcast, "You must remember what Amalek has done to you, says the Torah, and we do remember."

In this article, we aim to analyze whether the seeds of Amalek, referring to the descendants of Amalek, are truly represented by the Hamas faction or if they belong to another nation.

Who is Amalek?

Amalek identified as the son of Eliphaz who was the son of Esav and ancestor of the Edomites, was born to Eliphaz and his pilegish- Timna.

Amalek are later referenced in the Torah after the Israelites departed from Egypt, accompanied by numerous miracles that gained recognition globally. Despite the widespread awareness of these miracles, Amalek chose to defy the prevailing fear and engage in battle against us. Despite the awareness that they would not survive, they deemed it worthwhile to confront and diminish the fear instilled in the nations, accepting their own demise as a means to "cool down," so to speak, the apprehension among other nations.

Because Amalek was the first to confront our nation in battle, Bilaam, in his prophecy, refers to Amalek

as "the first of nations."

In the biblical narrative, King Shaul and the conflict with the Amalekites are described in the First Book of Shmuel, (chapter 15). Hashem commanded Shaul to completely destroy the Amalekite people, including men, women, children, and livestock, as a divine punishment for their earlier hostility towards the Israelites during their Exodus from Egypt.

However, Shaul did not fully carry out this command. Despite destroying many of the Amalekites, he spared their king, Agag, and some of the best livestock.

As a result of Shaul's disobedience, Shmuel declared that Hashem had rejected him as king over Israel.

The Amalekites continued to be a recurring enemy of the Israelites throughout biblical history.

Amalek in later Generations.

In subsequent generations, we encounter Haman, who was a descendant of Amalek, once again in Persia during the reign of King Ahasverosh. The discovery of Haman is mentioned in Megilat Esther as "Haman the Agagi," meaning from the Agagite family. Agag is openly mentioned in the Book of Shmuel as a king of the Amalekites. Therefore, Haman is a descendant of Agag, the king of Amalek. We encounter the Amalekite once again in recent times, specifically in Germany. The Vilna Gaon, who lived over 200 years ago, asserted that Germany are the descendents of Amalek. In the book "Yerushatenu," (חלק ח' עמוד קצו והלאה) Rabbi Binyamin Hamburger cites various rabbis who affirmed this perspective. Among them, Rabbi Eliezer from Lezinsk and Rabbi Zusha from Manipoli, eminent Chasidic figures, were the first to express the idea that the Germans embody Amalek. This viewpoint is also echoed in the writings of the Sfat Emet and Avnei Nezer.

Accordingly, we understand that without knowledge of Amalek's lineage, we should refrain from assuming that other nations are Amalek. Therefore, when discussing Gazans, we can reasonably conclude that they are not Amalek, especially considering they are not even Caucasians like the Germans.



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Thus, using the term Amalek in relation to them appears to be inaccurate.

Amalek as a Concept Rather than a Nation.

A novel interpretation of understanding Amalek is that it may not exclusively refer to the descendants but rather to the ideology and cruelty that Amalek represents. Rabbi Chaim Zonenfeld elucidated that the pasuk does not specifically command the obliteration of Amalek but rather its memory. This suggests that anyone embracing the principles and actions akin to Amalek would fall into that category (a testimony from Rabbi Noah Wientrob).

Looking back in time, we find similar explanations in the Rishonim. Sefer Hachinuch (מצוה תרג) elucidates that the essence of the commandment to remember what Amalek did to the Israelites upon leaving Egypt is to engrain in our hearts the understanding that any nation causing pain to Am Israel is despised by Hashem, just as He detests Amalek for the suffering they inflicted upon us. Furthermore, the more a nation inflicts pain upon Am Israel, the more it will lead to their own downfall, as evidenced by the complete destruction of the Amalekite nation, which inflicted significant suffering upon us. This perspective suggests that Amalek is more of an idea than a specific nation—a representation of those who stand as enemies to the Jewish nation and, consequently, enemies to Hashem.

If one seeks a clear example of what appears to be Hashem's intended retribution for historical persecution against the Jewish nation, particularly in Germany, it can be observed in the influx of seemingly "peaceful" immigrants to European countries, where Hashem establishes the groundwork for the upcoming. Douglas Murray, a renowned author, extensively elaborated on this in his best-selling book titled 'The Strange Death of Europe.' Europe is grappling with a severe threat of terrorism in various forms. Additionally, examining recent events in Ukraine, a country with a history of being sworn prosecutors of Jews for generations, reveals a cruelty even surpassing that of the Germans in certain aspects.

But the truth is that this is only the beginning, as Hashem has a

more fitting retribution for all those Nazis. Based on these explanations, it becomes evident that the Gazans who have killed, tortured, and kidnapped our brothers and sisters, children, and babies are indeed following the footsteps and idealism of Amalek. Therefore, labeling them with that name is appropriate.

The Jewish Amalek

An interesting question that may be asked is whether Jewish people could be Amalek. At first glance, it seems unlikely, as Jews are not descendants of Amalek and are, in fact, the victims of Amalek. However, upon further examination, a different perspective emerges.

Rav Elchanan Vaserman (אגדות ע"ד הפשט סימן י') writes that the holy Chafetz Chayim told him that Jews who oppose the Jewish people and heritage are actually descendants of Amalek.

The Vilna Gaon (אבן שלמה, פרק חבלי משיח) also goes to the extent of saying that even Jewish individuals displaying evil and cruel traits similar to Amalek are considered Amalek. This includes many Jewish leaders who oppose the Jewish heritage.

Final words

Finally, let's delve into some hashkafa on this topic. The Holy Chafetz Chayim provided insight into the Mishna (end of Sotah) that prophesied a generation before the arrival of Mashiach, likening it to a dog. He explained that this comparison reflects the behavior of a dog, which, when a stick is thrown at it, instinctively bites the stick rather than the person who threw it. Similarly, in times of sorrow for Am Israel, such as enemy attacks, we often find ourselves fighting against the visible adversaries without recognizing the underlying cause – our sins, which give rise to these troubles. The Chafetz Chayim suggests that as long as we continue to focus on biting the "stick" – the apparent enemies – the sorrows will persist. Instead, he urges us to address the core issue, our wrongful ways, in order to bring about true rectification.

Between the Lines: The Art of Reading Emotions in Text Messages

When we get a text from a friend or family, often we can sense the emotions revealed in the texts—interpreting the sentiments behind the words. Paying attention to subtle cues allows us to understand not only how the person on the other side of the line feels about us but also how they feel about themselves.

Observing the choice of words, tone, and even the use of emojis can provide valuable insights into the sender's emotional state. This nuanced understanding enhances our ability to connect and empathize in the digital realm.

We can extract this notion from our Torah portions dealing with Pharaoh, observing how his feelings evolve based on the contextual shifts in the words he uses.

Since Pharaoh claimed to be a god, one of Hashem's agendas in afflicting him was to expose that he is a regular human being. Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu (Shemot 7, 1), "I am appointing you as a god to Pharaoh." What does that mean? Since Pharaoh was portraying himself as a god in control of everyone in the world, Hashem wanted to show that Moshe is in control of Pharaoh, indicating that he isn't a god. Thus Hashem sends Moshe to the river early in the morning when Pharaoh is going to the bathroom in

hiding, not to expose himself as a human.

One of the differences between a god and humans is that a god doesn't have any feelings, while humans do. (Do not be misled by verses in Scripture that suggest Hashem has feelings. As the Rambam explains, Hashem does not have emotions, but the verses are intended for us to comprehend how a human would feel in a similar situation.)

Therefore, Hashem manipulated Pharaoh to expose his emotions. We see this repeatedly while reading the interactions between Moshe and Pharaoh. Although the Torah doesn't explicitly tell us how Pharaoh felt, careful observation of Pharaoh's words reveals

his feelings quite clearly.

Let's consider a few examples.

When Moshe first approaches Pharaoh to request the release of the nation, Pharaoh answers (Shemot 5' 2), "Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know Hashem, nor will I send out Israel." By reading these words, one clearly gets the understanding that Pharaoh here feels very proud and elevated above all. He is acting as someone who doesn't take commands from anybody and shows contempt for anyone who tries to



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order him.

When Moshe insists, Pharaoh responds (Shemot 5, 4), "Why do you disturb the people from their work? Go to your own burden." Immediately, Pharaoh commands his servants to increase the work of the slaves. From Pharaoh's response, we can infer that he is angry. The Torah doesn't explicitly mention it, as it is understood from the context.

After the plague of locusts, Pharaoh says (Shemot 10, 17), "I have sinned to Hashem, your God, and to you. And now, please forgive my sin just this time and entreat Hashem that He removes from me only this death." Reading these words immediately gives the impression that Pharaoh is finally breaking down, as he uses words of remorse. Although it is understood that he may not genuinely mean them, the fact that he speaks in this manner speaks volumes.

Finally, during the last plague—the death of every firstborn—Pharaoh loses his own firstborn child and fears for his life. We read that Pharaoh goes out at midnight to look for Moshe and Aaron and the Jewish courtiers. He screams (Rashi 12, 31), "Where is Moshe? Where is Aaron? Please leave without any conditions. I will abide by every one of your demands." This is a clear demonstration of fear and panic, and we can understand this without the Torah explicitly telling us how he felt.

Understanding people's emotions from their text messages involves analyzing various textual cues, including language choice, tone, punctuation, and context. Here are some key aspects to consider:

1. Word Choice and Tone: Positive Emotions can be expressed through positive and enthusiastic language, the use of exclamation points, emojis, and positive adjectives. Negative Emotions may be

conveyed through negative words, complaints, sarcasm, and a generally pessimistic tone.

2. Punctuation: Exclamation Points can indicate heightened excitement, while excessive use of ellipses (...) might suggest hesitation, uncertainty, or trailing off in thought. All Caps writing can imply shouting or strong emphasis.

3. Sentence Structure: Long and detailed sentences may indicate enthusiasm or a desire to share more information. Short and abrupt sentences might suggest frustration, impatience, or a desire to keep communication brief.

4. Emojis and Emoticons: Smileys :) and other emojis can convey a person's emotional state, adding nuance to the text. The absence of emojis in a typically expressive person might be noteworthy.

5. Context: Consider the context of the conversation, including recent events or known circumstances that may influence emotions.

6. Repetition: Repeating certain words or phrases may indicate emphasis or strong feelings.

7. Timing: Responding quickly may suggest excitement or eagerness, while delayed responses might imply contemplation or busyness.

Paying attention to all those signs provides us with a strong sense of how the person on the other side feels, guiding us on how we should proceed in our response.

It's important to note that interpreting emotions through text has limitations, as nuances can be lost, and interpretations may vary. Cultural differences, personal writing styles, and the relationship between communicators also play crucial roles in understanding emotions accurately.

BALANCING JUSTICE AND ANGER: TORAH INSIGHTS ON REVENGE

Our parasha (Bo) begins with Hashem telling Moses that He has made Pharaoh's heart stubborn so that Moses can convey to his children how Hashem abused the Egyptians. Rashi explains that in this context, "abuse" refers to making a mockery of Egypt.

Those words suggest that Hashem is not merely punishing the Egyptians for their misdeeds but is also exacting revenge for the years-long oppression of the Jewish people. This is evident in the manner of punishment, which involves mockery rather than a straightforward form of retribution. Upon reading these words, one might be puzzled as Hashem has commanded in the Torah that we

should not take revenge on those who have wronged us (ויקרא יח, ט). If that's the case, wouldn't it be appropriate for Hashem to set an example so that we can emulate His ways? While we can understand that Hashem should punish for the sins of the sinners, the punishment should be administered without the feelings of revenge, mockery, or abuse.

There are a few answers to this question:

a. The revenge that the Torah prohibits is limited to actions against fellow Jews, as the pasuk states (ויקרא יח, ט): "You should not take revenge...against the members of your people." Chazal also illustrate this with a demonstration: In Midrash Raba, there is a question from Klal Israel asking Hashem why He is avenging against the nations when revenge is forbidden according to the Torah. Hashem replied that revenge is only restricted towards the Jewish nation.

This command should not be interpreted in a racist way.

Instead, it signifies that since a Jew is considered our brother, Hashem expects us to treat him in a special manner, akin to how one would treat their biological brother and refrain from seeking revenge against him.



The Gmara says that laws of revenge were mentioned only in relation to material things, hence, the Torah does not prohibit any other form of revenge. (ראה מחלוקת ראשונים בזה בחפץ חיים, לאוין ה, ט בבאר.) (מים חיים)

Chazal explained (יומא כג, א רש"י על הפסוק) that the paradigm for revenge is illustrated when someone

asks a friend to borrow a tool, gets refused, and later, when the friend requests to borrow a different tool, they are declined with the justification that the first tool wasn't lent yesterday. The Gemara provides examples of material items to teach that only in this way it is forbidden.

Although one does not violate the prohibition of revenge, it is still considered a highly elevated virtue to forgive a person and refrain from seeking revenge. Chazal state (Shabbat 88b): "Those who are insulted but do not insult back, hear themselves insulted but do not answer back... of them scripture says: 'But they who love Him shall be as the sun when it goes forth in its might' (Shoftim 5:31)."

Both of these answers leave a troubling question. Usually, when one attempts revenge, it is motivated by anger. Since anger is viewed extremely negatively in the Torah, with Chazal even comparing a person who gets angry to an idol worshiper, how can we permit revenge against the nations, and how can we permit it

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when it's not for material reasons?

Here we come to a third approach. When a person harms another, whether physically or verbally, the Torah does not forbid the victim from taking revenge. The Torah understands human nature and acknowledges that it's not always possible for someone to remain silent without responding. We clearly learn this idea from cases in the Torah where a person commits murder, and the relatives—referred to as Goel Hadam, might be hot-blooded enough to consider revenge. The Torah does not punish the relatives because it recognizes that it's almost beyond human capacity to refrain from responding to someone who has killed a family member. However, one needs to exercise caution not to seek revenge after the anger has subsided. We learn from this that while anger is a very negative character trait, there are instances when it is understood, and

individuals are not judged for their actions during those moments. As a demonstration of this, we learn from halacha in Shulchan Aruch (ח"מ סימן תכא ס"ג ובסמ"ע) that if someone hits another, and the person who got hit hits back, they are exempt from punishment. The Prisha adds that this exemption applies even if the person doesn't retaliate immediately, rather later as long as he remains angry and hot-blooded.

The Chafetz Chayim explains (לאוין ח, ט בבאר מים חיים) that the reason a person is exempt from punishment for hitting back is because human nature doesn't allow someone who has been assaulted to remain still like a stone. However, once the person calms down, retaliation is prohibited. It's important to note that the exact time for calming down varies for each individual, given the differences in their nature.

IN THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR: HOSTILITY BEYOND THE DUNGEON WALLS

Many times, when we read the parasha, (the Torah portion of the week), we get the sense that some things just never change. For example, when examining the wars of Israel in the Tanach, we find that kings and army generals actively participated in battles. Numerous chapters depict how King David personally engaged in wars, rather than staying behind and letting others go into battle. This stands in contrast to other nations where leaders often remain behind to monitor and ensure their safety.

Another observation we make is that, unlike the Jewish people who deeply care for one another, whenever one is suffering, everyone strives to do everything in their abilities to help out the leaders of nations often seem indifferent to the well-being of their people. They are willing to sacrifice everyone in a blink of an eye without hesitation for their agenda. However, this changes when they realize that the danger is imminent and close to them; suddenly, their stance shifts, and they become willing to make concessions.

Look at how Pharaoh is steadfast, not yielding to Moshe's demand to let the people leave Egypt. For the course of nine plagues, he doesn't give in. However, everything changes with the tenth plague—the death of the firstborns. Why is that? It's because it touched him personally. It came close to home when his own firstborn child died in this plague. Suddenly, he rushes in the middle of the night to Moshe Rabbeinu and tells him that everyone can leave at once without any conditions.

Applying this concept to our time, we can clearly see how the leaders in Gaza are willing to sacrifice the people. They use them as human shields and don't hesitate to shoot at them if necessary. For instance, if the leaders observe that the people they use as human shields want to leave the area for a safer location or if they wish to benefit from the delivery of food that comes over the border, the



militants may interfere and claim the resources for themselves.

Another example is when Hashem punished even the Egyptian's firstborn of those who were imprisoned or held hostage in dungeons, (The Torah mentions the pit) during the last plague. One might question why Hashem punished them if they didn't personally enslave the Jews. Rashi provides an answer (Shemot 12, 29), stating that although they didn't physically harm the Jews, they rejoiced and took pleasure in witnessing the suffering of the Jewish people.

Consider this: individuals held as hostages in dungeons under likely harsh conditions by the Egyptians should have felt compassion for other victims, especially since the perpetrator is the same – the Egyptians. However, we observe that despite their own difficult circumstances, they still harbored hatred based on the longstanding history against the common adversary, the Jews.

The relevance to our time is striking. Despite the suffering of Gazans under Hamas, there still cheer when Hamas fires rockets and celebrate with sweets when Hamas commits acts of violence against Jews.

While the nature of the enemy may remain constant throughout ancient times, it appears evident that the approach of the Jews has changed, and not necessarily for the better. When the Jews entered the Land of Israel after forty years in the desert, they understood the necessity of eliminating the enemy to conquer and settle the land without interference. However, in modern times, there is an increased emphasis on protecting the human rights of the enemy, even at the expense of putting our soldiers and citizens in harm's way.

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