

Parsha Plug: Parshat Vayikra/Zachor

Vayikra 5:20-26	ויקרא ה:כ-כו
<p>20 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 21 If a person sins, betraying the Lord by falsely denying to his fellow concerning a deposit, or money given in hand, or an object taken by robbery, or he withheld funds from his fellow, 22 or he found a lost article and he denied it and swore falsely regarding any one of all these cases whereby a man may sin, 23 and it shall be, when he has sinned and is guilty, that he shall return the article which he had robbed, or the funds which he had withheld, or the item which had been deposited with him, or the article which he had found; 24 or anything else, regarding which he had sworn falsely, he shall pay it with its principal, adding its fifths to it. He shall give it to its rightful owner on the day [he repents for] his guilt. 25 He shall then bring his guilt offering to the Lord: an unblemished ram from the flock with the [same] value, for a guilt offering, to the kohen. 26 And the kohen shall make atonement for him before the Lord, and he shall be forgiven for any one of all [cases] whereby one may commit [a sin], incurring guilt through it.</p>	<p>כ וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: כֹּא נִפְשׁ כִּי תַחֲטֵא וּמַעֲלָה מֵעַל בְּה' וְכַחֵשׁ בְּעַמְלֵתוֹ בְּפִקְדוֹן אוֹ בְּתַשׁוּמַת יָד אוֹ בְּגִזֹּל אוֹ עִשְׂק אֶת־עַמִּיתוֹ: כב אוֹ־מִצָּא אֲבֵדָה וְכַחֵשׁ בָּהּ וּנְשַׁבַּע עַל־שֹׁקֵר עַל־אֲחַת מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה הָאָדָם לְחֹטֵא בְהֵנָּה: כג וְהָיָה כִּי־יִחַטֵּא וְאִשָּׁם וְהָשִׁיב אֶת־הַגִּזְלָה אֲשֶׁר גָּזַל אוֹ אֶת־הָעֵשֶׂק אֲשֶׁר עִשְׂק אוֹ אֶת־הַפְּקֻדוֹן אֲשֶׁר הִפְקִיד אֹתוֹ אוֹ אֶת־הָאֲבֵדָה אֲשֶׁר מָצָא: כד אוֹ מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁבַּע עָלָיו לְשׁוֹקֵר וְשָׁלַם אֹתוֹ בְּרֵאשׁוֹ וְחִמְשָׁתָיו יִסֹּף עָלָיו לְאִשֶׁר הוּא לוֹ יִתְּנֶנּוּ בַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁמְתוֹ: כה וְאֶת־אֲשָׁמוֹ יָבִיא לֵה' אֵיל תָּמִים מִזֶּדֶה־צֹאן בְּעֶרְפָךָ לְאִשָּׁם אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן: כו וְכִפֹּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן לִפְנֵי ה' וְנִסְלַח לוֹ עַל־אֲחַת מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה לְאִשְׁמָה בָּהּ:</p>

Rashi on Vayikra 5:21	רש"י ויקרא ה:כא
<p>Rabbi Akiva said: What is Scripture teaching us, when it says, “betraying the Lord”? Since every lender and borrower, buyer and seller, perform their transactions with witnesses and by documentation, therefore, if one denies a monetary claim, he would find himself contradicting witnesses and a document. However, when someone deposits an article with his fellow, he does not want anyone to know about it, except the Third Party between them [God]. Therefore, when he denies, he is denying against the Third Party between them.</p>	<p>אמר ר' עקיבא מה תלמוד לומר ומעלה מעל בה', לפי שכל המלוה והלוה והנושא והנותן אינו עושה אלא בעדים ובשטר, לפיכך בזמן שהוא מכחש מכחש בעדים ובשטר, אבל המפקיד אצל חבירו אינו רוצה שתדע בו נשמה אלא שלישי שביניהם, לפיכך כשהוא מכחש, מכחש בשלישי שביניהם:</p>

Devarim 25:15-19	דברים כה:טו-יט
<p>15 You must have completely honest weights and completely honest measures, if you are to endure long on the soil that the Lord your God is giving you. 16 For everyone who does those things, everyone who deals dishonestly, is abhorrent to the Lord your God. 17 You shall remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you went out of Egypt, 18 how he</p>	<p>טו אָבֹן שְׁלֵמָה וְצִדְקָה יִהְיֶה־לְךָ אִיפֹה שְׁלֵמָה וְצִדְקָה יִהְיֶה־לְךָ לְמַעַן יֵאָרִיכוּ יְמֵיךָ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ: טז כִּי תוֹעֵבֶת ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ כָּל־עֲשֵׂה אֵלֶּה כָּל עֲשֵׂה עוֹל: יז זְכוֹר אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בְּדַרְךָ בְּצֹאתְכֶם</p>

<p>happened upon you on the way and cut off all the stragglers at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and he did not fear God. 19 [Thus,] it will be, when the Lord your God grants you respite from all your enemies around [you] in the land which the Lord, your God, gives to you as an inheritance to possess, that you shall obliterate the remembrance of Amalek from beneath the heavens. You shall not forget!</p>	<p>מִמְצָרִים: יֵחַ אֲשֶׁר קָרַךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיִּזְנַב בְּךָ כְּלֵי־הַנְּחִשָׁלִים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַתָּה עֲנִי וַיִּגַע וְלֹא לָרָא אֱלֹקִים: יֵט וְהָיָה בְּהִנִּיחַ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ לִיךְ מִפְּלֵאֲיֶיךָ מִסָּבִיב בְּאַרְצֵךְ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחֲלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחָה אֶת־זֵכֶר * (זְכָר) עֲמִלֶּךָ מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח:</p>
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<p>Rabbeinu Bachya on Devarim 25:17</p>	<p>רבינו בחיי דברים כה:יז</p>
<p>The reason the paragraph dealing with Amalek was written at this point is to teach that if your business practices are corrupt you will have reason to worry about provocation by enemies...Thus the Torah wanted to conclude “everyone who deals dishonestly” in connection with Amalek. We learn from this connection that God imposes the enemy upon all who deal dishonestly in measurements/values. And also to teach that Amalek dealt unjustly with us and attacked us from a faraway land and did not respect the covenant with God.</p>	<p>נסמכה פרשת עמלק ללמדך שאם שקרתם במדות הוי דואג מגרוי האויב...ולכך רצתה התורה לסיים כל עושה עול כדי להסמיכו אל עמלק, שנדרוש ממנו סמוכין שהקב"ה משליט האויב על כל מי שעושה עול במדות. ועוד ללמדך כי עמלק עשה עמנו עול ובה כנגדנו מארץ מרחקים ולא זכר ברית אלקים.</p>

<p>Rambam Melachim uMilchamot 6:1, 3-4</p>	<p>רמב"ם מלכים ומלחמות ו:א, ג-ד</p>
<p>1 War, milchemet hareshut or a milchemet mitzvah, should not be waged against anyone until they are offered peace, as Devarim 20:10 states: “When you approach a city to wage war against it, you should propose a peaceful settlement.” If the enemy accepts peace and commits itself to the Noahide laws, none of them should be killed...3 It is forbidden to lie when making such a covenant or to be untruthful to them after they have made peace and accepted the Noahide laws. 4 If they do not agree to peace, or if they agree to a peaceful settlement, but refuse to accept the Noahide laws, war should be waged. All males past majority should be killed. Their money and children should be taken as spoil, but neither women or children should be killed, as in Devarim 20:14: “But the women and the children...take as spoil.” ‘The children’ refers to males below the age of majority. The above applies to a milchemet hareshut fought with other nations. However, if either the seven nations or Amalek refuse to accept a peaceful settlement, not one soul of them may be left alive as in Devarim 20:15-16: “Do this to all the cities that...are not the cities of these nations. However, from the cities of these nations...do not leave a soul alive.” Similarly, in regard to</p>	<p>א אין עושין מלחמה עם אדם בעולם עד שקוראין לו שלום אחד מלחמת הרשות ואחד מלחמת מצוה שנאמר כי תקרב אל עיר להלחם עליה וקראת אליה לשלום אם השלימו וקבלו שבע מצות שנצטוו בני נח עליהן אין הורגין מהן נשמה...ג ואסור לשקר בבריתם ולכזב להם אחר שהשלימו וקבלו שבע מצות: ד ואם לא השלימו או שהשלימו ולא קבלו שבע מצות עושין עמהם מלחמה והורגין כל הזכרים הגדולים ובוזזין כל ממונם וטפם ואין הורגין אשה ולא קטן שנאמר והנשים והטף זה טף של זכרים במה דברים אמורים במלחמת הרשות שהוא עם שאר האומות אבל שבעה עממין ועמלק שלא השלימו אין מניחין מהם נשמה שנאמר כן תעשה לכל וגו' רק מערי העמים לא תחיה כל נשמה וכן הוא אומר בעמלק תמחה</p>

Amalek, Devarim 25:19: "Obliterate the memory of Amalek."	את זכר עמלק.
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Rav Elchanan Samet, The Mitzva to Destroy Amalek and Our Moral Qualms

The mitzva is not applicable today, since the nation of Amalek no longer exists. Yet this does not exempt us from the obligation to study and understand it. Prima facie, this seems to be a commandment of genocide, which understandably arouses in us a great deal of discomfort. In general, we give no expression to our inner sense of moral unease. But to ignore a psychological fact, to deny what we are feeling, is unhealthy. It is better to formulate the question directly and to attempt openly and honestly to deal with it. "Then I shall not be ashamed, when I look at all Your commandments." (Tehillim 119:6). The prevalent solution to this problem is treat the mitzva as a war of ideas, rather than the extermination of a specific nation. According to this approach, Amalek is no more than a symbol, such that the war with Amalek is merely a metaphor for the eternal battle to defeat evil or heresy. However, while there is indeed great symbolic meaning to the war with Amalek, we cannot ignore its literal and concrete meaning. Amalek was a real nation that we were (and are) commanded to destroy...The intention behind the mitzva of wiping out Amalek is not to persecute a nation to the point of total extermination, in such a way that the nation is left with no escape from its fate. On the contrary, this nation is exhorted to make peace with Israel. It is only when the offer of peace is rejected, and a war rages between this nation and Israel, that the laws of total cherem apply to them. Indeed, the thought that the Torah desires the extermination of a nation under all circumstances is an anachronistic idea influenced by modern racism that developed in Europe during the last two centuries. The Giver of the Torah is the Creator of man, and He is the father of all nations. Why would He desire the extinction of a nation that He Himself created? The background to the mitzva of the war against Amalek is completely ethical-religious in nature, and very far from any racist intent. Amalek committed a most heinous sin in waging war against Israel as they came out of Egypt. When a nation sins, the responsibility for the sin is borne not only by the generation that committed the sin, but also by the generations that follow. The same applies to Israel: "Our forefathers sinned, and they are no more; and we suffer for their sins" (Eikha 4:7). Because of Amalek's terrible sin against God and against Israel, God's nation was commanded to exact revenge from Amalek and to punish them for their sin, not allowing the passage of time to dull their memory of the deed and of the need to repay it. But the ethical system we are discussing, in which there is sin and punishment, contains – by its very definition and by its very nature – the means for a sinner to part with his sin. The assumption underlying this mitzva is that Amalek is a bitter enemy of Israel, and that he will continue to be such, and therefore the war against Amalek is a war of cherem. But if the nation of Amalek wishes to end their hostility towards Israel and agree to coexist peacefully, then they are abandoning the sin of their forefathers, and their punishment is likewise then cancelled; "they are like any upright gentiles" (Kessef Mishneh).

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The Face of Evil (Beshalach 5775)

Today, the great danger is terror. Here the words of Princeton political philosopher Michael

Walzer are particularly apt: Wherever we see terrorism, we should look for tyranny and oppression...The terrorists aim to rule, and murder is their method. They have their own internal police, death squads, disappearances. They begin by killing or intimidating those comrades who stand in their way, and they proceed to do the same, if they can, among the people they claim to represent. If terrorists are successful, they rule tyrannically, and their people bear, without consent, the costs of the terrorists' rule. Evil never dies, and like liberty it demands constant vigilance. We are commanded to remember, not for the sake of the past but for the sake of the future, and not for revenge but the opposite: a world free of revenge and other forms of violence. Lee Harris began *Civilization and its Enemies* with the words, "The subject of this book is forgetfulness," and ends with a question: "Can the West overcome the forgetfulness that is the nemesis of every successful civilization?" That is why we are commanded to remember and never forget Amalek, not because the historic people still exists, but because a society of rational actors can sometimes believe that the world is full of rational actors with whom one can negotiate peace. It is not always so. Rarely was a biblical message so relevant to the future of the West and of freedom itself. Peace is possible, implies Moses, even with an Egypt that enslaved and tried to destroy us. But peace is not possible with those who attack people they see as weak and who deny their own people the freedom for which they claim to be fighting. Freedom depends on our ability to remember and whenever necessary confront "the eternal gang of ruthless men," the face of Amalek throughout history.