

# א ב י ס ל ת ו ר ה !

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י"א אדר תשפ"ו · תצוה

## Blotting Out the Memory of עמלק

By Joshua Jaffe '29

The last פסוק of זכור describes how the Jews must wipe out עמלק מתחת השמים לא תשכח: "And when Hashem your G-d gives you rest from all of your enemies all around, in the land that Hashem your G-d is giving to you as inheritance you should erase the memory of עמלק from under the heavens, do not forget" (דברים כה:ט). This פסוק, with pretty strong language, sets the מצוה that only a few people in Jewish history attempted to fulfill, and will be fulfilled in the future. This is a very important מצוה, as, in a later generation, after שאול has been anointed as the first king of ישראל, שמואל commands (שמואל א' ט"ז:ג) שאול to attack עמלק, kill every soul and destroy their possessions. שמואל implies that the main reason שאול was anointed was to fulfill this מצוה. In עמלק kills every soul in besides the king, אגג. The end of הפטרה talks about how שאול gets mad at שאול for leaving אגג alive, and אגג, the next day, is put to death. According to the מדרש, as a punishment for leaving אגג alive, a woman visited אגג in jail and continued the dynasty of עמלק.

In דוד attacks the עמלקים, for they had been the inhabitants of that land forever. דוד kills whole villages at a time without letting a soul live. And yet after these attacks, the number of עמלקים seems to remain in the hundreds of thousands, as evident in ל:א. שמואל א' ל:א. In פרק ל, some people from עמלק burn the city of צקלג. It takes דוד and his men, who were known for being expert warriors and very strong, two nights and one day of war, until the people of עמלק were destroyed, and no one escaped (except for 400 camel riders). From the language of the text one can see that 400 was a very small, insignificant percentage of the עמלקים, even after דוד had previously diminished the

עמלקי numbers. And these, the people who escaped, were not just regular soldiers but top ranking warriors. And yet, they were insignificant to the original number of עמלקים. The number of עמלקים at this point in history was huge, yet less than two years before, שאול wiped out every soul of עמלק, save אגג, who gave birth to just one child before being killed. How did the עמלקי population go from 1 to tens of thousands in the span of two years?

There are a few answers that modern bible scholars give, saying that we misunderstood the story. One such answer is that when it says that שאול killed everyone in עמלק that is only referring to the capital of עמלק. This answer does not completely work as it says שאול destroyed עמלק "from חוילה until שור", not just the capital. An extension of this answer is that שאול did not actually kill everyone, and many people were able to escape. Again, this answer is a stretch. שאול tells שמואל confidently that he killed every soul. Is it possible that a few slipped away? Maybe. But thousands? That does not seem so. Additionally, this answer is not really compatible with the מדרשים that imply that שאול did kill everyone, and if it were not for אגג, there would be no more עמלק. Another similar answer is that עמלק refers to a few different things. One is an ethnic group, descended from the person עמלק. This is the nation that שאול wiped out. The עמלקים that דוד fought are a group that may have similar values to the ethnic group descended from עמלק, but were not wiped out by שאול. This answer is not a satisfying answer, because one can always just say there are two distinct עמלק's. Additionally, the מדרשים clearly identify the people דוד was fighting as the descendants of עשו. To answer the question of how the עמלקים respawnd so quickly, there are a few more complex answers.

שאול was commanded to annihilate the sinners, (שמואל א' ט"ז:י"ח) עמלק. The רמב"ם goes so far as to say that the מצוה of wiping out עמלק only applies to עמלקים that are

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evil. However, if an עמלקי excepts Hashem as G-d and Israel as their government, like a גר תושב, then they are to live happily ever after. שמעון נחלת suggests that many עמלקים pretended to sincerely accept Israel sovereignty, perhaps they even converted to Judaism. Later, they left Israel and returned to their evil ways, and fought דוד. However, if עמלקים were converting just so they don't die, someone would have realized that and put a stop to it. This answer only works according to the רמב"ם's view.

One of the most widely accepted answers is that שאול was commanded to kill every soul - even the animals. One opinion in the מדרש says that this was because the עמלקים could use magic to turn themselves into animals. If שאול left any animals alive, then he might be leaving עמלקי people alive. In the end of the day, the Jews did take some of the best animals from עמלק as spoils, and only killed the mediocre animals. Apparently, all these animals were not normal animals, but עמלקים that turned themselves into animals. These animals turned back into people, ran away, and joined together to form עמלק again and fight דוד. First of all, it does not sound like the Jews took thousands of animals from the spoils. Also, many of the animals were real animals - the chances that they were mostly people do not seem so high. Third of all, nobody said the עמלקים were able to turn themselves back from animals. This is all under one opinion in the מדרש, which is just one מדרש among a number of מדרשים that disagree with it.

All these answers are technical answers that don't really work well with the simple reading. It seems like we are misunderstanding something greater about the story, but no answer has been given to fully explain it.

## Lessons From תצוה

By Amiel Jotkowitz '28

תצוה begins with the מצוה of lighting the מנורה: "וְאָתָּה... לְהַעֲלֶת נֵר תָּמִיד" "and you are commanded... to kindle a

continual flame" (שמות כז:ב). רש"י explains that "תמיד" means consistent and regular, every single day without fail. The רמב"ן adds that the מנורה represents the שכינה dwelling among בני ישראל. The message is that Judaism is built on consistency. Greatness does not come from one big spiritual moment, but from steady commitment in learning, tefillah, and daily actions.

The פרשה then describes the בגדי כהונה, the special garments of the גדול, which were made "לְכָבוֹד וּלְתִפְאָרֶת" "for honor and glory" (שמות כח:ב). רש"י explains that the garments gave dignity to the position, while the ספורנו says their beauty elevated the thoughts of the people who saw them. The clothing was not about fashion; it was about reflecting the greatness of serving Hashem. The נצי"ב adds that the honor was for the role, not for the individual. This teaches that when we represent תורה, how we act and present ourselves matters.

One of the most meaningful garments was the משפט, which held the names of the twelve tribes over אהרן's heart. The רמב"ן explains that this symbolized אהרן constantly remembering and praying for בני ישראל. The נצי"ב says a true leader must feel the people's struggles internally. Leadership in Torah is about responsibility and empathy carrying others in your heart.

Finally, תצוה's name does not appear anywhere in תצוה. The בעל הטורים connects this to משה's words after the sin of the Golden Calf, when he offered to be erased from the תורה if בני ישראל were not forgiven. Even though Hashem forgave them, משה's words had an impact. This highlights both the power of speech and משה's humility as he was willing to give up his own honor for the sake of the nation.

תצוה teaches that a Jew must live with consistency like the נר תמיד, dignity like the כהונה, responsibility like the משה, and humility like חושן. When we combine steady effort, תורה, and care for others, we become a source of light ourselves.

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