

## Parashat Ki Teitzei, Temple Micah, August 25, 2018

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### Biblical Amalek

[1] Amalek is great-great grandson of Abraham and Sarah:

And these are the generations of Esau the father of a the Edomites in the mountain-land of Seir....And Timna was concubine to Eliphaz Esau's son; and she bore to Eliphaz Amalek.... --Gen 36:9-12

[2] In the wilderness, Amalek attacks Israel, who prevails; God declares war against Amalek, “from generation to generation”:

Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim....And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. And the LORD said unto Moses: 'Write this for a memorial in the book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.'

כִּי-מָחָה אֶמְחָה אֶת-זֵכֶר עַמְלֵק, מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם.

And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Adonai-nissi. And he said: 'The hand upon the throne of the LORD: the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.'

וַיֹּאמֶר, כִּי-יָד

עַל-כִּסֵּי הָיָה, [throne of the LORD]

מִלְחָמָה לַיהוָה, בְּעַמְלֵק--מִדּוֹר, דּוֹר --Exodus 17:8, 13-16

[3] Two details about the Exodus story appear in this week's portion:

...how he met you by the way, and smote the hindmost of you, all that were enfeebled in your rear, when you were faint and weary; and he feared not God...--Deut 25:18

[4] Enmity between Amalek and Israel persists:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts: I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he set himself against him in the way, when he came up out of Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not...

And Saul smote the Amalekites.... And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. --1 Sam 2-3, 7-8

[5] Agag's survival, contrary to instruction, led to the Purim story:

After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him. --Esther 3:1

### Language Notes

[6] נִמְחָה – to be obliterated, forgotten, destroyed, or eliminated  
מָחָה – to erase [or wipe, as dishes], to obliterate, to blot out the memory of ; (literary) to wipe away, to dry (tears, sweat)

[7] OED: “Erase” is a newer (17<sup>th</sup> Century) than “blot” (15<sup>th</sup> Century). “Erase” may have come from older word “arace,” to uproot. A “blot” in backgammon is a lone, vulnerable piece.

[8] “Why is the word for ‘throne’ shortened, and even **God’s Name** is abbreviated? God swore that His Name and His Throne are not complete until Amalek’s name will be totally obliterated.”  
– from *Tanchuma*, Ki Teitzei 11; Rashi

[9] The degree of love in the soul of the righteous embraces all creatures, it excludes nothing, and no people or tongue. Even the wicked Amalek's name is to be erased by biblical injunction only “**from under the heavens**” (Ex 17:14). But through “cleansing” he may be raised to the source of the good,\* which is above the heavens, and is then included in the higher love. But one needs great strength and a lofty state of purity for this exalted kind of unification.

– Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), *The Moral Principles*.  
Ben Zion Bokser, trans. Paulist Press, 1978, p.137

\*Kook believed that an evil deed is an impulse that at its highest source of origin was good but became distorted and went astray. The first Ashkenazi chief rabbi in pre-state Israel, he published on ethics and mystical teachings.

[10] Deut 25:17-19 includes **three directives**. Based on Maimonides' (d. 1204), many teachers recognize *three commandments* here:

**remember זָכֹר**

*Remember what Amalek did to the Jewish people*

**blot out the remembrance תִּמְחָה אֶת-זִכְרֹוֹ**

*Wipe out the descendants of Amalek*

**not forget לֹא, תִשְׁכַּח**

*Not to forget Amalek's atrocities/ambush on our journey from Egypt in the desert*

Many teachers, including Maimonides, also say that “wipe out” means to wipe out Amalek-like behavior through influence and education.

[11] Over the centuries, Jews have argued about whether, and how, those commandments still apply. Many interpreters have identified Amalek with one real life enemy or another, historical or contemporary, from ancient Rome to the Soviets or Nazis; Jews have called other Jews “Amalek,” and some Christians have seen themselves as “Israel” and their enemies, including Jews, as “Amalek.” Others have said that Amalek no longer exists or taken a metaphorical view. – Summarized from Golinkin (full citation below)

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century teacher Nechama Leibowitz explores Deut 25:18 in the context of Torah passages mentioning fear of God, or lack thereof. She notes that each passage focuses on caring for the most vulnerable among us, or failing to do that. Therefore, she writes:

“Amalek” against whom the Almighty declared eternal war is not any more an ethnic or racial concept but is the archetype of the wanton aggressor who smites the weak and defenseless in every generation.

Golinkin quotes Leibowitz (above) and concludes:

In our day, this is perhaps the most important message of the Amalek story — not hatred of Amalek but aversion to their actions. In the State of Israel, there are many strangers and stragglers — new immigrants, foreign workers, as well as innocent Arabs and Palestinians. Some Jews learn from the story of Amalek that we should hate certain groups. We must emphasize the opposite message. We must protect “the stragglers” so that we may say of the State of Israel: “surely there is fear of God in this place”.

– “Are Jews Still Commanded to Blot Out the Memory of Amalek?” Prof. David Golinkin is president of the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem; highly recommend this thorough, readable article – <https://www.schechter.edu/are-jews-still-commanded-to-blot-out-the-memory-of-amalek/>

[12] “My Brother Esau,” Words by John Perry Barlow; music by Bob Weir. First performed by Grateful Dead in 1983

Esau holds a blessing;  
Brother Esau bears a curse.  
I would say that the blame is mine  
But I suspect it's something worse.  
The more my brother looks like me,  
The less I understand  
The silent war that bloodied both our hands.  
Sometimes at night, I think I understand.

...It's brother to brother and it's man to man  
And it's face to face and it's hand to hand...  
We shadowdance the silent war within.  
— —  
words left and above are as copyright by Ice Nine  
Publishing 1982 and often performed. Words at right  
are alternative wording, maybe Bob Weir forgetting  
lyrics as written or creating new ones, March 1983

Esau tried to move away  
A marvelous disguise  
Where every street is easy  
and, there's nothing to deny  
Though he gave me all his cards  
I could not play his hand  
Made a choice  
Soon became a stand

[13] Work/Service/Worship = *Avodah*. (Creative) Work = *Melachah*:  
וַיִּכַּל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, מַלְאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה; וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי,  
מִכָּל-מַלְאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

And on the seventh day God finished His work [*melachto*] which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. – Gen 2:2

וַשְׁמֹרְתֶם, אֶת-הַשַּׁבָּת, כִּי קֹדֶשׁ הוּא, לָכֵם; מִחֻלְלֶיהָ, מוֹת יוּמָת--כִּי  
כָּל-הָעֹשֶׂה בְּהַמְלָאכָה, וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מִקֶּרֶב עַמִּיהָ  
You shall keep the sabbath, for it is holy unto you; every one that profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whosoever does any work [*melachah*] therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים, יַעֲשֶׂה הַמְלָאכָה, וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת שְׁבִתוֹן קֹדֶשׁ, לַיהוָה;  
כָּל-הָעֹשֶׂה מַלְאכָה בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, מוֹת יוּמָת  
Six days shall work [*melachah*] be done; but on the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD; whosoever does any work [*melachah*] in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.

וַשְׁמְרוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֶת-הַשַּׁבָּת, לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם, בְּרִית עוֹלָם  
Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant.

בֵּינִי, וּבֵין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל--אוֹת הוּא, לְעֹלָם: כִּי-שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים, עָשָׂה יְהוָה  
אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ, וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, שָׁבַת וַיִּנָּפֹשׁ  
It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel for ever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and rested.' – Ex 31:14-17

Later Jewish tradition, beginning with the Talmud, lists “forty minus one” categories of *melachah* – like tying knots, bleaching, spinning, and carrying things – related to building the Tabernacle, as prohibited on Shabbat. (There's a 40<sup>th</sup> category, which is Creation with a capital “C,” but people cannot imitate God in that way, so that's not included among the prohibitions.)

Very nice resource on this can be found at Ask Moses:  
<http://www.askmoses.com/en/article/208,2210298/What-type-of-work-is-forbidden-on-Shabbat-and-Holidays.html>

[14] Reform Movement and Commandments

<https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/>

### 1885 Pittsburgh Platform

...We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and today we accept as binding only the moral laws, and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization....

### 1999 Platform

...We are committed to the ongoing study of the whole array of *mitzvot* and to the fulfillment of those that address us as individuals and as a community. Some of these *mitzvot*, sacred obligations, have long been observed by Reform Jews; others, both ancient and modern, demand renewed attention as the result of the unique context of our own times....

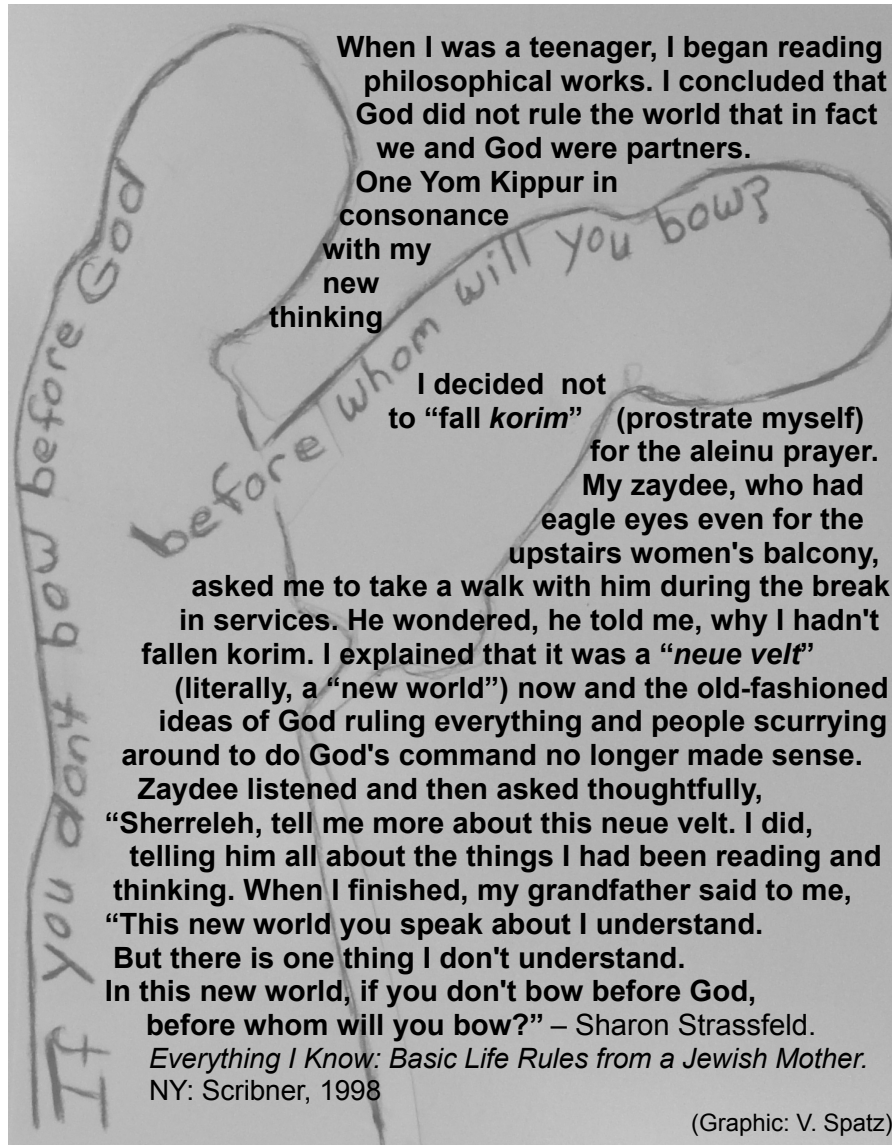
...We bring Torah into the world when we seek to sanctify the times and places of our lives through regular home and congregational observance. Shabbat calls us to bring the highest moral values to our daily labor and to culminate the workweek with *kedushah*, holiness, *menuchah*, rest and *oneg*, joy....

[15] “True Erasing” from [http://www.ravkooktorah.org/KI\\_TEZE57.htm](http://www.ravkooktorah.org/KI_TEZE57.htm)

...Erasing merely to blot out what is written is a destructive act, and destructive acts are not forbidden on Shabbat by Torah law. *Melachah* is constructive activity, similar to God’s creative acts when forming the universe.

So what form of erasing is prohibited on the Sabbath? “*Mocheik al m'nat lichtov*” — erasing with the intention of writing again. One’s intention must be to clean the surface in order to write over the original letters. This type of erasing is a positive, constructive activity, and therefore is incompatible with the special rest of the Sabbath day.

[16]



When I was a teenager, I began reading philosophical works. I concluded that God did not rule the world that in fact we and God were partners.

One Yom Kippur in consonance with my new thinking

I decided not to “fall korim” (prostrate myself) for the aleinu prayer.

My zaydee, who had eagle eyes even for the upstairs women's balcony, asked me to take a walk with him during the break in services. He wondered, he told me, why I hadn't fallen korim. I explained that it was a “*neue welt*” (literally, a “new world”) now and the old-fashioned ideas of God ruling everything and people scurrying around to do God's command no longer made sense.

Zaydee listened and then asked thoughtfully, “Sherreleh, tell me more about this neue welt. I did, telling him all about the things I had been reading and thinking. When I finished, my grandfather said to me, “This new world you speak about I understand. But there is one thing I don't understand. In this new world, if you don't bow before God, before whom will you bow?” – Sharon Strassfeld.

*Everything I Know: Basic Life Rules from a Jewish Mother.*  
NY: Scribner, 1998

(Graphic: V. Spatz)

[17] “*Mocheik al m'nat lichtov*”

מַחֵק – to erase, to delete ; to blot out

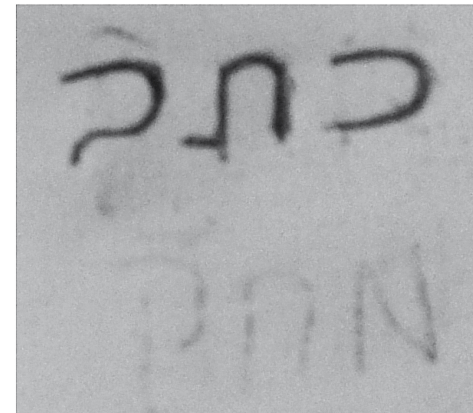
מַחֵק – eraser, rubber

[18]

לִישָׁע בֶּן אֲבוּיָה אָמַר, הַלּוֹמֵד יֵלֵד לְמָה הוּא דּוֹמֶה, לְדִיּוֹ  
כְּתוּבָה עַל גִּיר חֲדָשׁ. וְהַלּוֹמֵד יִזְקֶן לְמָה הוּא דּוֹמֶה, לְדִיּוֹ  
כְּתוּבָה עַל גִּיר מְחֻק

Elisha ben Abuya said: When you learn as a child, what is it like? Like ink written on clean paper. When you learn in old age, what is it like? Like ink written on **blotted** paper [a sheet from which the original writing has been erased]

– Avot 4:25 (or 4:20)



erasing, writing, erasing to write