

# Amalek and the Persistence of Evil

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*It is going to be bad.  
Looks like it will not leave us,  
That hostility of evil ...*

Chaim Gouri,

Five Chapters of Poems, 2002<sup>1</sup>

It is a widely held Jewish belief that evil will soon vanish, due to the victory of God over evil.

This is an optimistic belief, as it assumes the temporary character of evil and stresses the power of God leading us to future redemption. Sometimes, however, “wishful thinking” in this direction can go too far<sup>2</sup>, to

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew original of Chaim Gouri's poem: **רע**

יהיה רע.  
נראה שהוא לא יפרד מאיתנו  
הרע הרע.  
כאילו לכך נוצרנו.  
ונעמוד לגורלנו גאים ומצולקים  
ויעטרנו בעיטור הרע.  
והולם התופים יעור בדם  
וגם תשמע תרועת החצוצרה.  
שם נהיה האנשים שהרעות אהבו אותם,  
שהקוצים כרתו איתם ברית דם,  
שהעיפות אדומה בעיניהם.  
והרעה תשוב להתגורר בינינו, כמנהגה.  
ונצטופף, נפנה לה מקום מרצוננו,  
כילדים טובים ומורגלים מקטנותם.  
ויהיה לנו יופי ולא תיהיה לנו ברירה  
כי הרעה תשוב, כדרכה בקודש,  
תבוא בנו כנשמה היתרה.  
והרשעה לא כעשן תכלה לה.  
מטר פחות, יקירי.  
והיא תמלוך עלינו עוד ועוד, כהנה וכהנה,  
עד שיבואו, אם יבואו, הימים האחרים.  
חיים גורי/ מאוחרים  
חמשה סדרי שירה  
הוצאת הקיבוץ המאוחד

the point of assuming that evil is *already* destroyed; this can lead to a severe underestimation of the evil forces actually present in the world.

This "rose garden" vision of the world is not only erroneous, but even dangerous, since a wave of evil is likely to break out in the near future, for example, a war in the Middle East.

Let us adopt the time-honored Jewish approach to dealing with such questions, and turn to the Bible as the starting point for our examination of evil's nature and persistence.

## Persistent Evil in the Pentateuch

The Torah does not say anything about a persistent source of evil, and it would be reasonable to conclude, on the basis of the simple meaning of the text, that no such entity exists in the world. There is, however, one noteworthy exception. Unexpectedly, in Exod. 17, appears Amalek, whose enmity to God and to God's people is described in the most dramatic terms. Amalek is presented not as a circumstantial enemy, but rather as a theological and eternal<sup>3</sup> enemy (Exod. 17:13-16):

וַיִּחַלֵּשׁ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת עֲמֹלֵק וְאֵת עַמּוֹ לְפִי חֶרֶב  
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה כֹּת בַּזָּבִיב וְזָכְרוֹן בְּסִפְרֵי וְשִׂים בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כִּי מַח־הָ אֲמַלֵּךְ אֶת זְכָר  
עֲמֹלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם  
וַיִּבֶן מֹשֶׁה מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יְהוָה נַסִּי  
וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי יָד עַל כַּס יְהוָה מִלְחָמָה לִיְהוָה בְּעֲמֹלֵק מִדֹּר דָּר

So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-LORD-Is-My-Banner; for he said, "Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

From the text, it remains unclear from where Amalek appeared and why God did not destroy him as He destroyed Pharaoh of Egypt and other enemies of Israel. Why will the war against Amalek persist over the future generations? What is the importance of this enemy, and how is he related to the Heavenly Throne? Clearly the Torah in relating this episode wants to convey something more than an historical description of a single encounter with an enemy of Israel. Perhaps the Torah wants to tell us about the nature of evil and our relationship with evil.

In this article, we argue for an affirmative answer to this last question.

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There is no other place in the Pentateuch where God's throne (Kes) is mentioned in relation to a war with any enemy. The usual explanation of this expression is that it is an oath, given by God. The "simple" meaning of "from generation to generation" is "forever". See also Tanhuma Ki Tetze 11, which tried to solve this problem of "eternal war" by interpreting it as follows: "from generation of Moses to generation of Samuel".

## An Attempt to Understand the Story of Amalek in the Wider Context

Both the ancient and medieval commentators of the Bible were perplexed by the question of why God sees Amalek as his primary enemy, and searched<sup>4</sup> for an answer.

A reasonable way to seek an explanation for the unusual lofty and dramatic style of Exod. 17:13-16 would be to carefully examine the Amalek story in other places in the Bible.

Deut. 25:17-19 gives a far more prosaic reason for the war with Amalek, which differs from the highly theological motive given in Exod. 17.

זְכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְךָ עֲמֹלֵק בְּדַרְכְּךָ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם  
אֲשֶׁר קָרַךְ בְּדַרְכְּךָ וַיִּזְנֹב בְּךָ כֹּל הַנֶּחֱשָׁלִים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַתָּה עָנִיף וְיָגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֶל הַיָּם  
וְהָיָה בְּהַנִּיחַ יְהוָה אֶל הַיָּד לְךָ מִכָּל אֲיָדֶיךָ מִסָּבִיב בְּאַרְצוֹ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחֲלָה  
לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחָה אֶת זֵכְרָ עֲמֹלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח

Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God. Therefore it shall be, when the LORD your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.

Here Amalek is depicted as an enemy because of immoral behavior: attacking the weakest “stragglers at your rear”- tired slaves that just escaped Egypt.

The commentators in fact use the more prosaic details brought in Deut. 25 to explain the theologically charged narration of Exod. 17: Amalek became God’s enemy by wickedly attacking God’s people on their way from slavery to freedom. Thus Ramban<sup>5</sup> described Amalek’s behavior as “taking part in a quarrel that was not his own”<sup>6</sup>.

Indeed, the slaves, who escaped the greatest empire in the world (Egypt), were unjustly attacked by Amalek,

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The Midrash and commentators were consistent in trying to fill certain gaps of meaning in the Torah using the principle “The Torah’s words [sometimes] are poor in [one] place, but are rich [and explain better the problem] in the other place”

דברי תורה עניים במקומן ועשירים במקום אחר [Talmud Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashana, 17a].

With respect to our question, too, they applied this approach.

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See Ramban’s commentary to Exod. 17:16

וטעם העונש שנענש עמלק יותר מכל העמים, בעבור כי כל העמים שמעו וירגזו (לעיל טו יד), ופלשת אדום ומואב ויושבי כנען נמוגו (שם) מפני פחד ה' ומהדר גאונו, ועמלק בא ממרחק כמתגבר על השם, ולכך אמר בו ולא ירא אלהים (דברים כה יח), ועוד כי הוא נין עשו וקרוב לנו, עובר מתעבר על ריב לא

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<sup>6</sup> Proverbs 26:17 נתעבר על ריב לא לו

who came from far away and did not have any political or economic *casus belli*. In addition, Amalek was the first<sup>7</sup> who dared to attack Israel upon Israel's redemption from Egypt.

But even this attempt to harmonize the Amalek stories of Exodus and Deuteronomy does not explain why Amalek became God's primary enemy when there were many other candidates for this distinction, such as Egyptians, Canaanites and other idol worshippers.

In a later historical period, God commands Saul to completely exterminate the Amalek tribe:

I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys. (1 Sam. 15:2-3)

For sparing Agag, the King of Amalek, and allowing Israel's soldiers to plunder some of the Amalekite cattle, God rejects Saul as king. Samuel himself finishes the slaughter of the Amalekites by "hewing Agag in pieces before the Lord." (1 Sam. 15:33)

The sages<sup>8</sup> explain to us that Saul's "mercy" had severe consequences: Haman, the murderous villain of the Book of Esther, is called the "Agagite," which is interpreted to mean a descendant of the Amalekite King Agag.

The moral basis for Amalek's extremely severe punishment, as well as the various reasons for it listed by the commentators, is discussed in the articles of Sagi<sup>9</sup>. Sagi grouped the exegeses of the Amalek story into two broad categories: *realistic* and *symbolic*. In dealing with the question of why Amalek's deed deserves such

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Tanhuma Ki Tetze, 9interprets the word *korcha* in "how he met you on the way" as related to "made cold" from the word *kor* "cold." In the example that this midrash brings, Amalek is compared to a man who was the *first* to jump into the boiling water, and cooled it, thus showing the way for other enemies to attack Israel.

אמר רבי חונאי למה"ד לאמבטי רותחת שלא היתה בריה יכולה לירד בתוכה בא בן בליעל אחד וקפץ לתוכה אע"פ שנוהה הקירה לפני אחרים אף כאן כיון שיצאו ישראל ממצרים הקב"ה קרע הים לפניהם ונשתקעו המצרים לתוכו נפל פחדן על כל האומות שנא' (שמות טז) אז נבהלו אלופי אדום וגו' כיון שבא עמלק ונודווג להם אע"פ שנטל את שלו מתחת ידן הקירו לפני או"ה

<sup>8</sup> The following references are cited in the article by D. Kopeliovich (see Footnote 14):  
קדמוניות היהודים, ספר יא, ו, ה (תרגום במהדורת שליט, ג, ירושלים תשכ"ז, עמ' 20); מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל, מסכתא דעמלק בשלח ב, ד"ה "כי-מחה אמחה" (מהדורת הורוביץ-רבינ, עמ' 185); אסתר רבה, פתיחתא, ז (מדרש רבה המבואר, עמ' ט); תרגום ראשון לאס' ג א (מקראות גדולות, נ"ד, אסתר, ירושלים תשנ"ט, עמ' לד) ועוד.

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Sagi A., *The punishment of Amalek in Jewish tradition: coping with the moral problem*. Harvard Theological Review, 87:3, p. 323-346, 1994.

<http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-16999708/punishment-amalek-jewish-tradition.html>

An alternative to Sagi's point of view on the moral problems related to Amalek's punishment can be found in Rabbi Yaacov Meidan's article

פרשת עמלק: מצוות ה' ומוסר - הילכו יחדיו?  
המאמר מובא מתוך הקובץ: "האחר - בין אדם לזולתו"  
בעריכת חיים דויטש

ומנחם בן ששון, עמודים 367-401 הוצאת ידיעות אחרונות וספרי חמד, תל אביב 2001

severe punishment, the realistic approach remains within factual, concrete bounds. Following the realistic approach, Sagi discussed two main ideas: first, that Amalek transgressed the norms of just war (Abrabanel); and, second, that Amalek rebelled against God (Ramban).

The symbolic approach, according to Sagi, comprises three different trends: the *metaphysical*, the *conceptual* and the *psychological*. All of these trends<sup>10</sup> agree on a perception of the symbolic meaning of Amalek's deed and the subsequent punishment as representing a struggle between good (Israel) and evil (Amalek); that is, all view the text through an archetypal moral perspective. For the purposes of our present inquiry, we will focus on the metaphysical aspect.

The metaphysical trend argues that Israel's war against Amalek is the embodiment of a metaphysical struggle that takes place in the divine world. Sagi points out that Rabbinic literature already hints at this approach<sup>11</sup>, but it is in the mystical text, the *Zohar*<sup>12</sup>, that these notions are taken to radical extremes.

According to Sagi, "as Kabbalah spread, this approach became an integral aspect of exegetical literature"<sup>13</sup>.

Kopeliovich<sup>14</sup> has also tried to reconstruct the historical developments that turned Amalek into an archetypal enemy of God. In this reconstruction, the Book of Esther represents a turning point. According to Kopeliovich, the author of the Book of Esther is the one responsible for the transformation of Amalek's role from just another fierce local tribe into an archetypal enemy. Kopeliovich suggests viewing the Book of Esther as a kind of proto-midrash that both relates an historical narrative and also conveys an apologetic, which explains both the high dramatic charge of Exod. 17 and the very severe punishment accorded to Amalek. The punishment is the consequence of Amalek's *eternal* goal to completely destroy Israel (in the Book of Esther, Haman represents Amalek).

As we see, Kopeliovich's reconstruction is more radical<sup>15</sup> than Sagi's suggestion: according to Kopeliovich,

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<sup>10</sup> Sagi, pp 330-331

<sup>11</sup> *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* (trans. W.G. Braude and I. J. Kapstein; Philadelphia: Jewish Publ. Society, 1975) 56. See also Menachem. M. Kasher, *Torah Shelema* (37 vol.; NY: Schlezinger, n. d.) 14.272.127.

<sup>12</sup> According to the *Zohar* (5 vols.; trans. H. Sperling and M. Simon; London: Soncino, 1949) p. 206, in the statement found in Exod. 17:11, "and it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed", "Israel alludes to "the Supernal Israel". See also p. 207 "Said R. Isaac: ... The Holy One, blessed be He, said in effect: "Ye shall blot out his remembrance on earth, and I will blot out his remembrance on high."

<sup>13</sup> For instance, Yesha'ayahu Horowitz (1560-1630) categorically states (*Shenei Luhot Haberit*) [5 vols.: Jerusalem: Sha'arei Ziv, 1963] 2.89) that "Amalek is the impure body *per se* [the *sefirot* of impurity] and Samael is his minister".

<sup>14</sup> Kopeliovich D. 2009  
(מזעד י"ט, תשס"ט, עמ' 54-80).

<sup>15</sup> In fact, this article makes an even more radical suggestion than that of Kopeliovich: Amalek became an archetypal enemy *already* by Exod. 17: 13-16. However, I agree with Sagi's (p.330) statement:

Although the notion of a metaphysical war is not explicit here, God's involvement in this relentless struggle and God's oath to blot out Amalek enable the exegete to displace the struggle from the concrete to the metaphysical realm.

Amalek becomes an archetypal enemy much earlier in history (in the time of the book of Esther).

This historical analysis of the developing Jewish attitude towards Amalek, as signified by the book of Esther, makes for an interesting theory. However, it still does not explain the dramatic charge of the Amalek story in Exodus.

## From Esau to Amalek

According to The New World Encyclopedia<sup>16</sup>, the Amalekites are unknown historically and archaeologically outside of the Bible, except for traditions that apparently rely on biblical accounts themselves.

Gen. 36:12 traces Amalek's ancestry to Esau through Timnah, the concubine of Esau's son Elifaz:

וַתִּמְנַע הַיְתֵהּ פִּילְגֶשׁ לְאֵלִיפַז בֶּן עֵשָׂו וַתֵּלֶד לְאֵלִיפַז אֶת עַמְלֵק

Esau's son Eliphaz also had a concubine named Timnah, who bore him Amalek.

According to the Babylonian Talmud,<sup>17</sup> Timnah wanted to become a proselyte and requested Abraham to accept her into his family. Rejected by Abraham, she went to Elifaz's family. The conclusion of this story seems to be that if only Timnah had been accepted by Abraham, Israel would have been spared of such a fierce enemy in future generations. Needless to say, this commentary contains a certain moral lesson: we must be careful in how we treat potential proselytes<sup>18</sup>; we can inadvertently turn them into future enemies.

It is possible that this midrashic legend arose out of an attempt to answer the same fundamental question that we asked regarding the passage in Exodus: Why and how did Amalek become God's main enemy?!

Although Esau (Edom) and his children are certainly far from being traditional favorites in the list of biblical personalities (at least in comparison to Jacob's family), they still are not depicted as ultimately evil, at least from the perspective of the simple meaning of the text. Some of the commentators (for example, Ramban) also adopted this view, and even demonstrated a degree of understanding of Esau.

The Kabbalistic tradition, however, has a sharply different opinion on this subject. The Edomite kings (Gen. 36: 31-43) are viewed by this tradition as an embodiment of evil<sup>19</sup>. The genesis of evil from Abraham's own root of lineage, the same root from which virtuous Jacob's branch also originates, began already before Jacob, with Esau and his children. In kabbalistic language, this is called "*klipe kodemet lepri*"<sup>20</sup>: Cain was born before Abel, Esau

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<sup>16</sup> New World Encyclopedia <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Amalekite>

<sup>17</sup> Sanhedrin 99b

<sup>18</sup>

See the paper on Giur in Hidushei Torah NDS ,v 2009 ,158-180 ,10.at [http://www.nds.com/chidusheitorah/toc\\_10\\_hebrew.htm](http://www.nds.com/chidusheitorah/toc_10_hebrew.htm)

<sup>19</sup>

See ,for example ,Zohar ,Mishpatim108 ,b ;Emek HaMelech5:47

<sup>20</sup>

This means literally "the shell precedes the fruit". In addition to precedence in time, this saying has also another meaning: in fact, there is a kind of purification mechanism here, as evil goes away first, and then good remains rectified

preceded Jacob, and Edomite kings preceded Israelite kings.

## Amalek and God's Throne

Even after taking into account all the preceding explanations, it still seems that the theological and eternal hostility of Amalek to God remains incompletely explained. It appears that the Talmudic sages were similarly dissatisfied, and that they looked for further answers.

Indeed, one Amoraic Midrash (Tanhuma, Ki Tetze 11) sees in the survival of the Amalekites a blemish upon the very nature and sovereignty of God:

רבי לוי בשם רבי אחא בר חיננא אומר כל זמן שזרעו של עמלק בעולם לא השם שלם ולא הכסא שלם אבד זרעו של עמלק השם שלם והכסא שלם מה טעם האויב תמו חרבות לנצח וגו' (תהלים ט) מה כתיב אחריו (שם) וה' לעולם ישב כונן למשפט כסאו הרי השם שלם והכסא שלם אמן וכן יהי רצון:

Rabbi Levi said in the name of Rabbi Aha bar Hanina: As long as the descendants of Amalek are in the world, neither the name [i.e., YHWH] nor the throne is complete. When the descendants of Amalek will have perished, both the name and the throne will be complete. What is the reason? "The enemy is no more - ruins everlasting," etc [Psalm, 9:7]. What is written thereafter? "But the Lord abides forever; He has set up his throne for judgment."

Levenson<sup>21</sup> gives the following interpretation to Rav Aha's words, which relate to the Amalek account in Exodus:

If *Kes* means "throne", then it lacks the final letter of the ordinary word for "throne" (*kissei*). Similarly, the name of YHWH here lacks the last two consonants [*sic*] that it usually (but not always) shows. Rabbi Aha interprets these apocopated terms as an indication of the unfinished quality of God's nature and His mastery over the world. So long as Israel's ancient and by now archetypical enemy endures, YHWH is not altogether YHWH, and His real regal power is not yet fully actualized. Rather He is the omnipotent cosmocrator only *in potentia*. His power and His majesty, not yet fully manifest, will become so when, acting in accordance with Psalm 9, He blasts His enemy from the world.

A most extensive and detailed research of the relation of Amalek to God's throne in Kabbala was carried out by Haviva Pedaya in her article "Flaw" and "Correction" in the concept of the Godhead in

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(מבורר)

In this context, see Zohar Shemot 2: 108b

Here is a mystery. In all actions performed by the blessed Holy One, he begins with the external, and then the kernel within... Come and see. In all those actions performed by the blessed Holy One, though he begins with the external, He begins with the kernel in thought, and in action with the external. For every shell derives from the Other Side, and kernel from kernel. The Other Side always precedes: growing, developing, protecting the fruit. Once it has grown, it is cast aside. *What the wicked will prepare, the righteous will wear* (Job 27:17) - that shell is thrown away and Righteous One of the world is blessed...

<sup>21</sup>

Levenson, Jon .D .*Creation and the Persistence of Evil :The Jewish Drama of the Divine Omnipotence* .Harper & Row Publ .,San Francisco,1988 , p37

the Teachings of Rabbi Isaac the Blind” (published in the Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism, Ed. J. Dan, Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, 1987, v. VI (3-4) pp.157-285). According to Rabbi Issac, Amalek was produced by Sefirat Gevurah and eventually rebelled against it and damaged it.

## Amalek Today - Psychological Aspect

Hasidic teachers<sup>22</sup> have tried to solve the same problem of the theological and eternal hostility of Amalek to God by ascribing Amalek-like qualities to human nature itself. When a person gets out of his own “Egypt-*Meitzarim*”<sup>23</sup>, and is on his way to freedom within the constraints of Torah and its commandments, Amalek comes and attacks him at the delicate nexus where intellect and emotions are connected<sup>24</sup>. Thus Amalek effectively “cools”<sup>25</sup> the emotional arousal of a person on his way to repentance.

There are even those<sup>26</sup> who have employed the popular homiletical method of *gematria* to support this idea as well. Using the numerical value (*gematria*) of the letters of the name (Amalek=240=*safek*), the concept of Amalek takes on a kind of psychological meaning, being compared to a “doubt” or “non-determination” (*safek*).

## Amalek Today as a Quasi-Historical People

We have already noted, and it was also observed by Levenson<sup>27</sup>, that Amalek ceased to be merely a marauding tribe on the southern fringe of Canaan and came to represent any anti-Semite of murderous intent, even the prime minister of Persia in the days of Esther and Mordecai [Esther 3:1. Cf. 1 Sam. 15].

Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik<sup>28</sup> discusses the idea, which he attributes to his father Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik,

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For example, the Baal Shem Tov’s Hasidic tradition, see in

ספר המאמרים עטרות ס”ע רצב ואילך. תרפ”ה ע’ רה ואילך. תש”ט ע’ 62 (השני) ואילך.  
ד”ה ויבוא משה תר”ץ פ”ו. תש”ט (ספר המאמרים תש”ט ע’ 40 (השני)). אגרות-קודש אדמו”ר מהור”י צ”ח ג’ ע’ רעט (בשם הבעש”ט). פלה הרמון שמות ע’  
שנה (בשם הרה”ק רלו”צ מבארדיטשוב). ועוד.

23

Egypt, *Mitzraim* is closely related to *Meitzarim* - distresses as in Psalms 118:5

24

Amalek is called, in one of the Kabbalah descriptions<sup>24</sup>, “Klipa of Sefirat Daat.”

25

*Korcha baderech* - As we mentioned in Footnote 7 above, the midrash interpreted the word “korcha” in Deut – 25:17, whose plain contextual meaning is “encountered –” as derived from “ice” or “made cold.”

26

As far as I have found, the first source mentioning the equivalence Amalek= *safek*, based on the *gematria* of the letters of the two words, is in the Hassidic teachings (see reference brought in footnote 22). For a later source, see also:

דרשה ידועה היא הקשר בין עמלק = ספק = אל אחר = רם (240) שמופיעה בספר “מבוא להכמת הקבלה”  
חלק א’, שער ד פרק ד; חלק ב’, מאמר א על דבר חנוכה

27 Levenson, p. 38

28

Soloveitchik J.B., *Be-Sod ha-Yahid ve-ha-Yahad In Aloneness, In Togetherness, (a Selection of Hebrew Writings)*. Edited by Pinchas H.Peli, “Jerusalem”, Orot, 1978, pp.391-393

that every nation that strives to destroy “Knesset Yisrael” is Amalek in certain respects<sup>29</sup>. This understanding is based on Maimonides’s description of the laws regarding how Israel is to relate to the seven nations (i.e., those who inhabited the land of Israel before Israel arrived from Egypt) and how Israel is to relate to Amalek. There is a distinct difference between these descriptions. Concerning the seven nations, Maimonides wrote (Hilhot Melachim, 5:4) “[today] no trace of them exists”. Nothing like this is written about Amalek (see Hilhot Melachim, 2:5). Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik concludes from this textual difference that according to Maimonides, Amalek exists even in our day, despite the fact that all the ancient nations mentioned in the Torah (like the Ammonites, Moavites etc.) have lost their identity through intermingling with other nations<sup>30</sup>, and one can no longer trace them.

Rabbi Soloveitchik states that during the 1930s and 1940s the role of Amalek was played by Nazi Germany led by Hitler, and later the same role was played by Nasser and the Mufti.<sup>31</sup>

Rabbi Ben Zion Fuerer<sup>32</sup> sees the commandment “Remembering” as a central observance that distinguishes Israel from other nations. While enmity and friendship between other nations alternate constantly following day-to-day political interests, Israel is distinguished by eternal remembrance. Denial of the Holocaust in the modern world is a clear example of the loss of divinely-commanded remembrance. In contrast to this, Amalek will never be forgotten by Israel.

Rabbi Fuerer extends the remembrance of Amalek<sup>33</sup> to a prohibition against buying German products, listening to German music, watching German films, etc.<sup>34</sup>.

Mendel Piekarz has also pointed to a tendency to view anti-Semitism and the Holocaust as a struggle between Israel and Amalek<sup>35</sup>. Many other thinkers, including several halakhists, have extended this

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29

According to Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik this does not refer to any particular individual of the hostile nation, since there exists no commandment to destroy any particular individual. This nation has Amalek’s status in a sense that every Jew has to participate in a “Milhemet Mizva” with this nation.

30 See Mishna Yadaim 4:4, The Assyrian King, Sanheriv, came and mixed all the nations.

31

I can only add to this that this place did not become empty in our generation. Leaders like Hassan Nasrallah and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad are in competition to force their people to play this role also today.

32 Fuerer, Ben Zion

אלה הם מועדי חלק ג'.

<http://library.osu.edu/sites/users/galron.1/01762.php>

It is noteworthy that Rabbi Fuerer himself was a survivor of the Holocaust.

33

Contrary to Rabbi Fuerer’s own statement saying that the mitzvah of remembrance is a commandment like any other, in his article the commandment of remembering Amalek grows into a meta-commandment, which encompasses all areas of our life.

34

Although the general approach of Rabbi Fuerer seems to be too farfetched and extreme today, it is interesting to note that several NDS employees refused to attend this past Devcon conference in Berlin (April 2010) because they decided to never set foot on German soil of their own will.

35

perception to the modern struggle against enemies of Jewish independence in the form of the state of Israel.<sup>36</sup>

## The Combat Myth in the Midrash about Creation and in Eschatology

According to the Canaanite and Mesopotamian literature, creation was characterized by a primordial battle between various monsters and forces of nature.

Levenson<sup>37</sup> notes that “the typological identity of this Amalek-centered eschatology with the ancient combat myth as it appears in Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic literature is striking. To be sure, the enemy is not the sea beast [Isaiah 27:1, Ezekiel 29: 1-7, 32:1-16], but a quasi-historical people...”

In Levenson’s opinion, the ancient Canaanite and Mesopotamian combat myth of creation has been projected onto the onset of a future era. On the basis of the fact that the apocalyptic vision described in Isaiah<sup>38</sup> displays numerous close parallels with Ugaritic mythology, Levenson tries to reconstruct an eschatological combat myth in the Tanach.

Levenson traces this eschatological combat myth from the Tanach to early apocalyptic literature and to the aggadah of the Talmudic rabbis. In opposition to Yehezkel Kaufmann<sup>39</sup>, who called God’s mastery the “basic idea of Israelite religion”, Levenson argued that this mastery is often fragile and needs continuous reactivation and reassertion, being sometimes painfully distant from our ordinary experience<sup>40</sup>.

In Levenson’s opinion, the Bible story in Genesis represents a “post-victory” view of the primordial drama of Creation. The participants in this drama are sometimes mentioned only briefly in the Bible, but this brief reference is itself an answer to well-known Akkadian, Babylonian and Assyrian mythological constructions<sup>41</sup>.

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Cited in the article of Sagi, p 331: Mendel Piekartz, *Hasidut Polin bein Shtei Milhamot ha-Olam*, (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1990) 327, 278, 326.

<sup>36</sup>  
Cited in the article of Sagi, p 332: See Yitzhak Arieli’s claim (*Midrash Ariel al ha-Torah* [Jerusalem: Mosad Einaim la-Mishpat, 1992] 2. 322-323) that Amalek is “essential evil... a defiled and corrupt race without even a glimmer of good”, whereas Israel is a “pure race”. Membership in the defiled race, however, is not determined by ethnic criteria: “Anyone who hates the people of Israel as such, belongs to the race of Amalek.” See also Yehuda Gershoni, “Berurei Halakhah be-Inyanei ha-Sho’ah” in *Emunah ba-Sho’ah* (Jerusalem, Ministry of Education, 1980) 23;

<sup>37</sup> Levenson, p.38

<sup>38</sup> Isaiah 24-27

<sup>39</sup> Kaufmann Y. *The Religion of Israel*. New York: Schocken, 1972. p. 60.

<sup>40</sup>

I agree with Levenson’s statement ,that God’s mastery today is more memory ,hope and faith than the conclusion of our every day experience.

<sup>41</sup>

On the etymological connection between the term Deep (Tehom) in Genesis, 1:2, - and the Akkadian term Tiamat, known in Ugaritic and other semitic languages as a designation of the sea, see in the Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD) in the Internet. On the possible connection between the same Tehom to the goddess Tiamat, the Babylonian female monster of the primordial

Monsters of the past—Tehom<sup>42</sup> (Deep), Nahash and Taninim<sup>43</sup>—are conquered and subdued in the Chaoskampf, and God sits on His throne after His victory over them. So the forces of evil are subdued, but not destroyed totally. About the future we read:

In that day the Lord will punish  
With His great, cruel, mighty sword  
Leviathan the Elusive Serpent-  
Leviathan the Twisting Serpent;  
He will slay the Dragon [Tannin] in the sea. (Isaiah 27:1)

Levinson writes<sup>44</sup>:

...Leviathan, Amalek, Gog and the like are symbols from different traditional complexes for the same theological concept: the ancient and enduring opposition to the full realization of God's mastery, the opposition destined to be eliminated at the turn of the aeon. We must not forget that the optimistic element in this theology, which is the faith in God's ultimate triumph, is dialectically qualified by the pessimistic element, which is the tacit acknowledgement that God is not yet God. Our cup of salvation will indeed run over, but it is now only half full – and half empty.

## Is Amalek Related to Other Enemies of God and Israel?

In the Bible, we find additional references to enemies of Israel and God. Can these be related to Amalek?

First, let us examine enemies described as belonging to a future era.

The war of Gog (Ezekiel 38-39) seems to be a special case<sup>45</sup>, representing a unique confrontation. The description of the nations gathering together for a war against Judah and Jerusalem in Zechariah 12-14 probably relates to the same confrontation<sup>46</sup>.

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salt-water ocean in Enuma elish, see

[http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted\\_Hildebrandt/OTeSources/01-Genesis/Text/Articles-Books/Hasel\\_Cosmology\\_AUSS.pdf](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted_Hildebrandt/OTeSources/01-Genesis/Text/Articles-Books/Hasel_Cosmology_AUSS.pdf); and see also parallels to the Babylonian Tiawath (chaos) or the Assyrian Tamtu (deep sea).

<sup>42</sup>

See the previous footnote

<sup>43</sup>

*Hatanninim hagedolim* (הַתַּנִּינִים הַגְּדוֹלִים) is the class of creatures to which the chaos-monsters Leviathan and Rahab belong. The great *tanninim* are associated with mythological sea creatures such as Lotan, the Ugaritic counterpart of the biblical Leviathan, (which were considered deities by other ancient near eastern cultures; see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis\\_creation\\_narrative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative))

<sup>44</sup> Levenson, p. 38

<sup>45</sup>

Usually the war of Gog is projected to the future, and not to the past.

<sup>46</sup>

Gog's name is not mentioned in Zechariah, 12-14. However (applying the principle cited in Footnote 4), it is reasonable to suggest that the war described in these chapters of Zechariah is related to Gog.

As there is no explicit mention of Amalek in these chapters, I conducted a search in rabbinical sources to see if they mention any connection between Gog and Amalek. The result of this search in the ancient midrash and aggadic literature was negative.

Now let us look at the list brought in Psalms 82 (83) 2-8 of the enemies of God and Israel:

For behold, Your enemies make a tumult;  
And those who hate You have lifted up their head.  
They have taken crafty counsel against Your people,  
And consulted together against Your sheltered ones.  
They have said, "Come, and let us cut them off from *being* a nation,  
That the name of Israel may be remembered no more."  
For they have consulted together with one consent;  
They form a confederacy against You:  
The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites;  
Moab and the Hagrites;  
Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek;  
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre;  
Assyria also has joined with them;  
They have helped the children of Lot.

Amalek's name appears in this list, but he does not appear to get any greater emphasis than any other nation listed in this passage<sup>47</sup>.

In Isaiah 34, it is the nation of Edom that is singled out as the main representative of God's enmity.

For My sword shall be bathed in heaven;  
Indeed it shall come down on Edom,  
And on the people of My curse, for judgment.  
The sword of the LORD is filled with blood,  
It is made overflowing with fatness,  
With the blood of lambs and goats,  
With the fat of the kidneys of rams.  
For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah,  
And a great slaughter in the land of Edom.

Isaiah 34: 5-6

The same is true in Isaiah 63. Amalek is not mentioned in either of these passages in the book of Isaiah.

A search of the literature of the Second Temple period reveals that Amalek is scarcely mentioned<sup>48</sup> in

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<sup>47</sup> This is mentioned in the article of Kopeliovich, p. 66

Josephus, Philo, Pseudo-Philo, in the Qumran Library and in the Sefarim Hitzoniyim (the apocryphal literature). Certainly no archetypal symbolic image of Amalek can be found in these books.

The Talmudic sages characterized the archetypal historical relationship between Esau (Edom) and Israel in explaining the attitude of the Roman Empire<sup>49</sup> towards Jews in terms of the hatred of Esau to Jacob: "It is a known fact that Esau hates Jacob<sup>50</sup>". However, the sages did not seem to use the name of Amalek in such a formulation.

According to Prof. Josef Stern<sup>51</sup>, the situation in the Middle Ages is different<sup>52</sup>:

It is well known that in medieval rabbinic literature Esau, and his land Edom, are typologically identified with Rome and, in turn, with Christianity. It is less widely known that Amalek, because he was the best known and most distinguished descendant of Esau, also came to be conflated with his ancestor and identified with Rome and Christianity. This general identification was also given a more specific address... the important point, as Elliott Horowitz has argued, is that such references testify to the existence of a compelling and vital intuition at the time that Amalek was still alive somewhere in Europe.

The natural question could be asked at this point: Why did the talmudic sages not want to push too far the idea of a continuity of evil spanning world history from the time of Amalek's attack on Israel (when they left Egypt) to their own days? And why did this idea become popular after the spread of Kabbalah?

Prof. David Kazhdan suggested the following answer to this question. Archetypal symbolism *per se* was rarely used by Talmudic sages. Archetypal thinking became much more popular after the spread of the Zohar during the Middle Ages. For example, according to Sefer Ha-Bahir and the Zohar, Avraham is an archetypal symbolic representation of Sefirat Hesed.

It may be<sup>53</sup> that Christianity, which itself employed an archetype (i.e., that of God's embodiment in a man),

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See also Feldman, L. H., *Remember Amalek! Vengeance, Zealotry and Group Destruction in the Bible According to Philo, Pseudo-Philo, and Josephus*. Hebrew Union College Press, 2004

[http://www.google.com/books?hl=iw&lr=&id=-MSI0S4G03YC&oi=fnd&pg=PP15&ots=KI5hmkW00&sig=0Nr8QP\\_7NOrTEdWOrttisiBSp\\_k#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://www.google.com/books?hl=iw&lr=&id=-MSI0S4G03YC&oi=fnd&pg=PP15&ots=KI5hmkW00&sig=0Nr8QP_7NOrTEdWOrttisiBSp_k#v=onepage&q&f=false)  
49

Prof. Yehuda Libis suggested that King Herod is the first responsible for Edom-Rome identification, as King Herod belonged to the Edom tribe and proclaimed full loyalty to the Roman Empire

<sup>50</sup> הלכה בידוע שעשו שונא ליעקב. ספרי טט

<sup>51</sup> J. Stern, "Maimonides on Amalek, Self-Corrective Mechanisms, and the War against Idolatry." In *Judaism and Modernity: The Religious Philosophy of David Hartman*. Malino, Jonathan, ed. Burlington, VT, Ashgate, pp 359-392, 2004.

<sup>52</sup> Stern, p 361; Note that both Stern and Horowitz claim that Maimonides himself thought that Amalek existed in his own (Maimonides') day!

<sup>53</sup> I learned from Prof. David Flusser z"l that modern Judaism and Christianity, in some cultural and psychological aspects, can be seen as two sister-religions, rather than the customary view of them as mother and daughter religions.

influenced Jewish civilization in the direction of archetypical thinking.

## Continuity of Evil

If, as we suggest, the Talmudic sages were reluctant to adopt the idea of the continuity of evil in history, it would seem that among recent generations of Jewish thinkers, this idea has become increasingly popular.

For example, Rabbi Zadok HaKohen of Lublin<sup>54</sup> explicitly mentions the connection between Amalek and Gog, saying that Gog is Amalek's descendant<sup>55</sup>. In the commentary *Shem Mishmuel*<sup>56</sup>, Gog and Amalek are also mentioned together in the context of the wars of the Messiah that comes from the children of Joseph.

Rabbis Soloveitchik, Feurer and many others, whose ideas were discussed above, are also not strangers to this idea of evil's historical continuity. Indeed, the tragedy of the Holocaust cannot really be understood within any reasonable and logical framework, and thus seems to require an explanation on the metaphysical level.

In some Jewish academic circles<sup>57</sup>, the idea of the historical continuity of evil has been taken much farther. Parts of Levenson's [Levenson, 1988] and Knohl's books [Knohl, 2007] are devoted to this

subject. In fact, Levenson and Knohl extend the concept of evil's continuity<sup>58</sup> considerably beyond what we have already mentioned. According to these two scholars, the presence of evil starts much earlier—even to the point that they submit that evil preceded the creation of the world. The evil forces that had been defeated in the *Chaoskampf* (the primordial struggle with Tehom, Tanninim etc.) appeared again when Amalek attacked Israel on their way from Egypt, and will appear once more in the war with Gog in the future.

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<sup>54</sup> 1823-1900

<sup>55</sup> *Pri Zadik*, Prashat Naso, 15

ואחר כל זה יהיה עוד מלחמת גוג ומגוג על משיח בן יוסף כי גוג ומגוג הוא מזרע עמלק ועמלק הוא מנגד תמיד על קדושת ישראל בעומק גם על חסרון כ"ש

<sup>56</sup>

*Shem Mishmuel* Va'Yeshev: תרע"ו,

נראה דמשיח בן יוסף תעודתו לכלות זרעו של עמלק ומלחמת גוג ומגוג וכל המלחמות תהינה נגמרות על ידו

<sup>57</sup>

It may be that Levenson and Knohl, both observant Jews, are representing a modern kind of a gnostic-academic approach. Michael Schneider (personal communication) argues to the contrary: that positing the continuity of evil in history, and concluding that our world is full of evil forces, does not yet make one a gnostic. To be defined a gnostic, one must also believe in a remote good God, who does not intervene in the affairs of our world.

<sup>58</sup>

Prof. Yehuda Libis told me that from the Zohar's perspective the continuity of evil has very clear meaning. The name of this continuity is "The Other Side", *sitra ahra*. In a personal discussion of this issue with Prof. David Kazhdan, he suggested the need to differentiate carefully between the continuity of evil (like *sitra ahra*) and the Amalek archetype, which is a human embodiment of the idea of evil. In the context of this discourse it is interesting to note the following citation from Zohar Hadash, 111 (Ed. R. Margoliet, Jerusalem, Tav-Shin-Lamed-Het): " He is an Evil Inclination, he is Nachash, he is Samael, he is Amalek, he is Plishti (Goliat)"

## The Palace Built on Garbage

Knohl [in *Emunot HaMikra*, Page 18-19] took Levenson's ideas (mentioned above) even further. To illustrate his thesis Knohl brought a Midrash about a King who built his palace on a heap of garbage<sup>59</sup>.

בנוהג העולם מלך בשר ודם בונה פלטין במקום הביבין והאשפה והסיריות, כל מי שיבוא לומר פלטין זו בנויה במקום הביבין והאשפה והסיריות אינו פוגם אתמהא, כך כל מי שהוא בא לומר העולם הזה נברא מתוך תהו ובהו וחושך אינו פוגם אתמהא, ר' הונא בשם בר קפרא אילולי הדבר כת' אי אפשר לאומרו ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ מן הן, מן והארץ היתה תהו.

It sometimes happens that a King of flesh and blood builds [his] palace on a place where there were sewers and a dungheap and foul garbage... and [if] someone comes and says that this palace is built on a place of sewers and a dungheap and foul garbage, would not [this person] be offending the King?! [Similarly, if] someone comes and says that this world is created from "unformedness and voidness and darkness", would not [this person] be offending the King [of Kings]?! Rav Huna [said] in the name of Bar Kapara: If it had not been written [in the Torah], we would never let ourselves say such a thing: God created heaven and earth... What are they? From "And the earth was unformedness [and voidness]"...

According to Rav Huna in this midrash, the garbage etc. represents the ancient blocks of evil. God did not destroy entirely the Tehom, but rather transformed it. According to Knohl, it is not surprising that after a time, when the flowers and precious carpets are removed, the terrible smell of evil, rats and voles appear in the Palace. God's use of the blocks of evil in the process of the building of his Palace solves an important theological problem. As the existence of the evil in the world is an empirical fact, there are seemingly two distinct theological options from which to choose<sup>60</sup>: the source of evil is either inside God, or outside of Him. According to Knohl, the Torah has chosen the second option, which resolves the problem by asserting that God is purely good, and the source of evil is not in Him. This theory also has a significant weakness, as it assumes a source of evil that is eternal (or, at least, preceded Creation) and independent of God. In Knohl's opinion, the Torah sacrificed, as it were, a degree of God's omnipotence and His being the Creator of all, in the interest of insisting on His pure goodness.

According to Knohl's concept<sup>61</sup>, the case of Amalek is not a single and unusual exception to the general picture of God's good world; rather, it is a manifestation of the primordial evil.

While I find the Levenson-Knohl interpretation quite compelling, including Knohl's use of the striking metaphoric description of the King's Palace built on garbage, I am well aware of the dangers inherent in this

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<sup>59</sup> Gen. Raba, Chapter I

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Michael Schneider (in "The Myth of the Satan in the Book Bahir". .287-344In *Kabbalah: Journal for the study of Jewish Mystical texts*, vol 20, Ed. D. Abrams, A Cherub Press Publication, LA, 2009) points out an interesting formulation in the Book of Bahir. Bahir describes evil as sometimes inside, and sometimes outside God. Thus a kind of dynamical solution is given.

<sup>61</sup>

Michael Schneider raised an interesting objection to this application of Knohl's theory: it remains unclear how the archetypal and personalized Amalek could have been produced from the non-personalized Tehom (Deep).

kind of explanation. Asserting that God used primordial blocks of evil in his creation carries some Gnostic connotations<sup>62</sup>, which makes for a tidy explanation, but I cannot accept it.

It also seems unnecessary to explain the midrash of the palace built on garbage by positing the existence of continuous evil that predates creation and constitutes an existence independent of God. Located well within the bounds of monotheistic Jewish thought is Lurianic Kabbalah, which offers an explanation of the origin of evil as a kind of artifact of the initial stages of creation, *tzimtzum* and *shvirat ha-keilim*.<sup>63</sup> These processes represent the inherent problematic in a finite creation by an infinite Creator. In Lurianic Kabbalah, then, evil can be said to originate in a very early stage of creation and afterwards can be understood to have continuity, expressed in historical developments, as we have described above.

## The Practical Advantage of Kabbalah over the Classic Philosophical Approach to Understanding Evil

According to the neoplatonist philosophical approach<sup>64</sup>, evil is merely the absence of good.

In Kabbalah, on the other hand, the concept of evil gets much more substantiation and personification. Satan, Lilit and other various evil forces each has its own character and unique behavior.

The philosophical approach does not assume any independent source of evil. This approach is consistent with the claim that God is the only and single Origin and Creator of this world (Isaiah. 45: 5-7):

אָנִי יְהוָה נֹאֲמֵן עוֹד וְזִלְתִּי אֵין אֵל הֵים אֲאַנְרֶךְ וְלֹא יִדְעֻמֵּנִי  
לְמַעַן יִדְעוּ מִמְּזִרְחַ שְׁמֶשׁ וּמִמְּעַרְבָּהּ כִּי אֶפֶס בְּלִעְדֵי אָנִי יְהוָה נֹאֲמֵן עוֹד  
יּוֹצֵר אוֹר וּבוֹרֵא ח' שֶׁךְ ע' שָׁה וְשָׁלוֹם וּבוֹרֵא רַע אָנִי יְהוָה ע' שָׁה כָּל אֵלֵה

I am the LORD, and *there is* no other;  
*There is* no God besides Me.  
I will gird you, though you have not known Me,  
That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting  
That *there is* none besides Me.  
I am the LORD, and *there is* no other;  
I form the light and create darkness,  
I make peace and create calamity [literally "evil"—MK];  
I, the LORD, do all these *things*.'

62

For a very general review of Gnosticism see Hans Jonas *The Gnostic Religion*, p. 42, Beacon Press, 1963, 1st ed. 1958, and also <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnosticism>

63

On this subject see:

אידל, המחשבה הרעה של האל, תרביץ מ"ט, 357-364  
אסי פרבר גנת, קליפה קודמת לפרי, המיתוס ביהדות, 118-142

64

For an introductory overview, see, for example, Rosenberg, S. *Good and Evil in Jewish Thought*, Israel Ministry of Defense, 1995

Empirically observed evil shall be also essentially attributed to God's creation. We then will need to reconcile God's goodness with the fact that His Creation includes evil, by defining evil as the lack of God's intervention, as we mentioned earlier.

The disadvantage of the philosophical approach is that it may be more difficult to combat evil if one assumes that evil does not have a distinct independent existence, but is merely the absence of good.

On the other hand, the kabbalistic view, according to which the evil forces are personalized by Satan, Samael, Lilit etc., seems to more successfully account for evil, by characterizing it as a continuous entity in history, according to the explanations we have given above.

A personal note: I think that I can trace my own interest in this subject to two factors<sup>65</sup>. First, as a youth I became well acquainted with Russian Romantic Literature, which contains considerable gnostic elements<sup>66</sup>. The second factor would be my years as a "refusnik" in the Soviet Union (1979-1987), during which I was seriously preparing to "sanctify God's name" in a conflict with the "Empire of Evil".

So let us suppose that evil does indeed exist as a continuity, as we have described in this article. Does this mean that nothing can be done about it, and that despite all our efforts evil cannot be defeated? In fact, my motivation in writing this article was to claim just the opposite. I believe that evil must be properly recognized, assessed and understood—all this in order to combat it. Of course, one needs to be well aware of the dangers inherent in this struggle.

The main problem is that to combat evil, one needs somehow to come closer to evil, and use its own methods. This idea is clearly expressed by a Talmudic statement in Gittin 57b:

הקול קול יעקב אין לך תפלה שמועלת שאין בה מזרעו של יעקב והידיים ידי עשו אין לך מלחמה  
שנוצחת שאין בה מזרעו של עשו

"The voice is the voice of Jacob" – no prayer is effective unless among those who are praying are descendents of Jacob—"and the hands are the hands of Esau"—no war is won unless among the fighters are descendents of Esau.

Armed with awareness of the dangers, we must decisively commit ourselves to eradicating evil.

One of the most informative and interesting articles of Amalek reincarnations through the centuries of the world history belongs to Prof. Eliot Horowitz<sup>67</sup>, whose work offers valuable references as well as historical concepts related to the evolution of Jewish relation to this topic in the Middle Ages. However, Horowitz's own point of view is just the opposite to mine. Horowitz's position is well expressed by the citation from Asa Kasher<sup>68</sup>, which Horowitz brings at the beginning of his article: "I am

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Both factors are described in my article in *Chidushei Torah @ NDS*.2008 ,v.9. pp7-29 [http://www.nds.com/chidusheitorah/toc\\_9.htm](http://www.nds.com/chidusheitorah/toc_9.htm)

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See footnote62

67. Horowitz E. מדורו של משה עד דורו של משיח: א.הורוביץ.

"MeDoro shel Mosheh Ad Doro shel Mashiah: ha-Yehudim Mul Amalek ve -Gilgulav" in *Zion* 64 (5759/1999): 425-454 (Hebrew)

68. אני לא מוכן לחשוב על ימינו בתור עוד שלב בתולדות המאבקים של עמלק נגד העם היהודי.

not ready to perceive our days as one more step in the history of Amalek's struggle against Jewish people".

With all due respect to honorable professors Kasher and Horowitz, the development of anti-Semitism and hatred towards the Jews in the modern world teaches us that Amalek exists and is active today. Thus also the commandments in Deut. 25:17-19 are not "dead" commandments<sup>69</sup>.

## Conclusion

There is a pessimistic, yet also optimistic, message, which we can convey to our children, based on our admittedly incomplete survey of the concept of evil in Judaism.

The message is contained in what the Rebbe of Piasechna<sup>70</sup> told his Hasidim after the death of his only and beloved son in German-occupied Warsaw in 1940:

- איך האב שוין די מלחמה פערשפילט! השי"ת זאל העלפן אז דער כלל ישראל זאל די מלחמה געווינען! (אני נוצחתי כבר במלחמה, ה' יעזור שעם ישראל ינצח במלחמה זו!)..

"I myself have already been defeated [in war]... God will help the People of Israel win this war!"

I understand in a very similar vein the poem by Haim Gouri, which I brought as the epigraph to this article.

I see this poem as optimistic, despite all its difficult passages regarding the evil that is going to reach us, since in the final analysis it envisions the continued existence of the Jewish people, who will survive all the periods of suffering and continue towards the goal formulated in Exod. 19:6:

וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמֻלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ

And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation

The realistic, even bitter, view of both the Rebbe of Piasechna and Haim Gouri seems to me to be considerably more helpful and useful for Jews today than what I consider the false prophecies of our time (cf. footnote 2 above). This is especially relevant as we anticipate the great battle for Jerusalem, about which we know from the Prophets (e.g. Zeharia 12-14) and the first rumblings of which we already feel from the radio and newspapers.

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כך התבטא לאחרונה הפילוסוף הישראלי אסא כשר, י' הדרי (עם י' אבישר וי' סתר) עושים חושבים: עימותים במחשבה הציבורית בישראל, רמת אפעל תשנ"ה, עמ' 331.

69. See p. 361 in Ref. 51 about the considerations on the "dead" commandments.

<sup>70</sup> קלונמוס קלמיש שפירא מפיאסעצנא, ירושלים, שנת תש"ך, יוצא לאור ע"י ועד חסידי פיסענא, מתולדות האדמור. עמ"ל 24

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