

# Violence, Morality and the Book of Esther

## Megillat Esther as a Corrective (Tikkun) to Saul's War of Annihilation Against Amalek

### I. Parallels Between Saul's War with Amalek and the Violence in Esther

#### a. I Samuel 15:3, Esther 8:11

##### I Samuel 15:3

ג עתה לך והכיתה את-עמלק, והחרמתם את-כל-אשר-לו, ולא תחמל, עליו; והמתה מאיש עד-אשה, מעלל ועד-יונק, משור ועד-שה, מגמל ועד-חמור. {ס}

3 Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.' {S}

#### d. Esther 8:11

יא אשר נתן המלך ליהודים אשר בכל-עיר-ועיר, להקהל ולעמד על-נפשם--להשמיד ולהרג ולאבד את-כל-חיל עם ומדינה הצרים אתם, טף ונשים; ושללם, לבוז.

11 that the king had granted the Jews that were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, and to slay, and to cause to perish, all the forces of the people and province that would assault them, their little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey,

#### b. I Samuel 15:9, Esther 9:16

##### I Samuel 15:9

ט ויחמל שאול והעם על-אגג, ועל-מיטב הצאן והבקר והמשנים ועל-הפרים ועל-כל-הטוב, ולא אבו, החרים; וכל-המלאכה נמזה ונמס, אתה החרים. {פ}

9 But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, even the young of the second birth, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them; but every thing that was of no account and feeble, that they destroyed utterly. {P}

##### Esther 9:16

טז ושאר היהודים אשר במדינות המלך נקהלו ועמד על-נפשם, ונוח מאיביהם, והרוג בשנאייהם, חמשה ושבעים אלף; ובבזה--לא שלחו, את-ידם.

16 And the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of them that hated them seventy and five thousand--but on the spoil they laid not their hand--

a. I Samuel 15:8, Esther 9:15

I Samuel 15:8

ח וַיִּתְּפֵשׂ אֶת-אַגַּג מֶלֶךְ-עַמְלֵק, 8 And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and  
וְיָאֵת-כָּל-הָעָם, הַחֲרִים לְפִי- חֲרֵב. utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the  
sword.

Esther 9:15

טו וַיִּקְהָלוּ הַיְהוּדִים (הַיְהוּדִים) אֲשֶׁר- 15 And the Jews that were in Shushan gathered  
בְּשׁוּשָׁן, גַּם בְּיוֹם אַרְבַּעַה עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ themselves together on the fourteenth day also of  
אָדָר, וַיַּהַרְגוּ בְּשׁוּשָׁן, שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ, the month Adar, and slew three hundred men in  
וּבְבִזְיָה--לֹא שָׁלְחוּ, אֶת-יָדָם. Shushan; but on the spoil they laid not their hand.

I Samuel 15:21

כא וַיִּקַּח הָעָם מֵהַשָּׁלָל צֹאן וּבָקָר, 21 But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen,  
רֵאשִׁית הַחֲרָם, לְזִבְחַ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ, the chief of the devoted things, to sacrifice unto the  
בְּגִלְגָל. {ס} LORD thy God in Gilgal.' {S}

י עֲשֶׂרֶת {ר} בְּנֵי הָמָן בֶּן-הַמְּדֵתָא, 10 the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha,  
צַרְרֵי הַיְהוּדִים--הָרְגוּ; וּבְבִזְיָה--לֹא the Jews' enemy, slew they; but on the spoil they laid  
שָׁלְחוּ, אֶת-יָדָם. not their hand.

יא בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, בָּא מִסַּפֵּר הַהַרְוֵגִים 11 On that day the number of those that were slain in  
בְּשׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה--לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ. Shushan the castle was brought before the king.

יב וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֵסְתֵר הַמַּלְכָּה, 12 And the king said unto Esther the queen: 'The Jews  
בְּשׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה הָרְגוּ הַיְהוּדִים וְאֶבְדּוּ have slain and destroyed five hundred men in  
חֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וְאֵת עֲשָׂרֶת בְּנֵי- Shushan the castle, and the ten sons of Haman; what  
הָמָן--בְּשָׂאָר מְדִינֹת הַמְּלָכָה, מִה then have they done in the rest of the king's  
עָשׂוּ; וּמַה-שֶּׁאֲלַתֶּךָ וַיִּנְתֶּנּוּ לְךָ, וּמַה- provinces! Now whatever thy petition, it shall be  
בְּקִשְׁתֶּךָ עוֹד וַיַּעַשׂ. granted thee; and whatever thy request further, it  
shall be done.'

יג וַתֹּאמֶר אֵסְתֵר, אִם-עַל-הַמֶּלֶךְ 13 Then said Esther: 'If it please the king, let it be  
טוֹב--וַיִּנְתֶּנּוּ גַם-מָחָר לַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר granted to the Jews that are in Shushan to do  
בְּשׁוּשָׁן, לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּדַת הַיּוֹם; וְאֵת tomorrow also according unto this day's decree, and  
עֲשֶׂרֶת בְּנֵי-הָמָן, יִתְּלוּ עַל-הָעֵצָא. let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows.'

יד וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לַהַעֲשׂוֹת כּוֹ, וַתִּנְתֶּנּוּ 14 And the king commanded it so to be done; and a  
דָת בְּשׁוּשָׁן; וְאֵת עֲשֶׂרֶת בְּנֵי-הָמָן, decree was given out in Shushan; and they hanged  
תָּלוּ. Haman's ten sons.

טו וַיִּקְהָלוּ הַיְהוּדִים (הַיְהוּדִים) 15 And the Jews that were in Shushan gathered  
אֲשֶׁר-בְּשׁוּשָׁן, גַּם בְּיוֹם אַרְבַּעַה עָשָׂר themselves together on the fourteenth day also of  
לְחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר, וַיַּהַרְגוּ בְּשׁוּשָׁן, שְׁלֹשׁ the month Adar, and slew three hundred men in  
מֵאוֹת אִישׁ; וּבְבִזְיָה--לֹא שָׁלְחוּ, אֶת- Shushan; but on the spoil they laid not their hand.  
יָדָם.

טז וְשָׂאֵר הַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּמְדִינֹת 16 And the other Jews that were in the king's  
הַמְּלָכָה נִקְהָלוּ וַעֲמָדוּ עַל-נַפְשָׁם, וְנוֹחַ provinces gathered themselves together, and stood  
מֵאֲוִיבֵיהֶם, וְהָרוּגוּ בְּשִׁנְאֵיהֶם, חֲמִשָּׁה for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and  
וְשִׁבְעִים אֶלֶף; וּבְבִזְיָה--לֹא שָׁלְחוּ, slew of them that hated them seventy and five  
אֶת-יָדָם. thousand--but on the spoil they laid not their hand--

יז בְּיוֹם-שְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר, לְחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר; 17 on the thirteenth day of the month Adar, and on  
וְנוֹחַ, בְּאַרְבַּעַה עָשָׂר בּוֹ, וַעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ, the fourteenth day of the same they rested, and  
יוֹם מְשֻׁתָּה וְשִׂמְחָה. made it a day of feasting and gladness.

יח וַהיְהוּדִים (וְהַיְהוּדִים) אֲשֶׁר- 18 But the Jews that were in Shushan assembled  
בְּשׁוּשָׁן, נִקְהָלוּ בְּשְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ, together on the thirteenth day thereof, and on the  
וּבְאַרְבַּעַה עָשָׂר, בּוֹ; וְנוֹחַ, בְּחִמְשָׁה the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day of the  
עָשָׂר בּוֹ, וַעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ, יוֹם מְשֻׁתָּה same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and  
וְשִׂמְחָה. gladness.

## IV. Tikkun

### a. Genesis Rabbah 67:4

ד כשמוע עשו את דברי אביו, א"ר חנינא כל מי שהוא אומר שהקב"ה וותרן הוא יתוותרון בני מעוהי, אלא מאריך אפיה וגבי דיליה, זעקה אחת הזעיק יעקב לעשו דכתיב כשמוע עשו את דברי אביו ויזעק זעקה והיכן נפרע לו בשושן הבירה שנאמר (אסתר ד) ויזעק זעקה גדולה ומרה עד מאד

4. WHEN ESAU HEARD THE WORDS OF HIS FATHER, HE CRIED WITH AN EXCEEDING GREAT AND BITTER CRY. etc. (XXVII, 34). R. Hanina said: Whoever maintains that the Holy One, blessed be He, is lax [in dispensing justice], may his bowels become lax! He is merely longsuffering, but [ultimately] collects His due. Jacob made Esau break out into a cry but once, and where was he punished for it? In Shushan, the castle, as it says, And he cried with a loud and bitter cry, etc. (Est. IV, 1).

### b. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Yoma 22b

+שמואל א' טו+ וירב בנחל, אמר רבי מני: על עסקי נחל. בשעה שאמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לשאול +שמואל א' טו+ לך והכית את עמלק, אמר: ומה נפש אחת אמרה תורה הבא עגלה ערופה, כל הנפשות הללו על אחת כמה וכמה! ואם אדם חטא - בהמה מה חטאה? ואם גדולים חטאו - קטנים מה חטאו? יצאה בת קול ואמרה לו +קהלת ז+ אל תהי צדיק הרבה. ובשעה שאמר לו שאול לדואג +שמואל א' כב+ סב אתה ופגע בכהנים, יצאה בת קול ואמרה לו +קהלת ז+ אל תרשע הרבה.

(I Samuel 15:5) And he strove in the valley. R. Mani said: Because of what happens in the valley: When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Saul: (I Samuel 15:3) Now go and smite Amalek, he said: If on account of one person the Torah said: Perform the ceremony of the heifer whose neck is to be broken, how much more [ought consideration to be given] to all these persons! And if human beings sinned, what has the cattle committed; and if the adults have sinned, what have the little ones done? A divine voice came forth and said: (Ecclesiastes 7:16) Be not righteous overmuch. And when Saul said to Doeg: (I Samuel 22:18) Turn thou and fall upon the priests, a heavenly voice came forth to say: (Ecclesiastes 7:17) Be not overmuch wicked.

c. Engraving – Megillat Esther, Joseph Kaplan 1932

THE TRANSGRESSIONS OF SAUL  
AND DAVID

[The Gemara continues by expounding the next verse, which deals with the war King Saul fought against Amalek. It says:] "[Saul] battled in the valley" (1 Samuel 13:3). R. Meir said: [He argued with God] about the ceremony that happens "in the valley." When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Saul: Go and attack Amalek, [kill alike men and women, infants and sucklings, men and sheep, camels and donkeys] (ibid. 3). Saul said: If because of one person (who was killed) the Torah says: Bring a calf to a valley where its neck is to be broken (as atonement for the murder), then surely the lives of all these Amalekites should be spared! And if you will say that people have sinned, what is the sin of the cattle [of the Amalekites, that they too should be destroyed]? And if the adults have sinned, what have the little ones done? Thereupon, a Heavenly Voice came forth and said to Saul, "Don't override goodness" (Ecclesiastes 7:16). And when Saul said to Doeg, "You, Doeg, go and strike down the priests of the city of Nob" (1 Samuel 22:18), [because they had given supplies to David and his men], a Heavenly Voice came forth and said to him, "Don't override wickedness" (Ecclesiastes 7:17).



d. The ultimate Tikkun-Yearot Devash, 2, derush 9, R. Yehonatan Eyebeschutz

ולכן אחי למדו הטוב מבלי לנטור איבה ואדרבה להיטב לשונאו וכך יפה לפי מידת אנושי ולפי גדר התורה וזהו תפארת ישראל מבלי לנטור איבה וכך יהיה מדותיו מיושרים שבטבע לא ינטור ולא ינקום. ולכן אמרו חייב אדם לבסומי בפוריא עד דלא ידע וכו' והיינו דישכח לרוב שתייתו מה שצוה התורה ויהיה כפי מדת הטבע ואז לא ידע מה בין ארור המן וכו' כי כפי הטבע אין לנקום ולקלל מבקש רעתו בשום אופן כלל.

Therefore my brothers, learn the good (or "learn well") not to hold on to hatred, rather do the opposite - learn to do good to your enemy. So it is befitting according to human morality and the fence (ethics) of the Torah, and this is the glory of Israel, not to hold on to hatred. This way your traits will be in line with nature (or "natural morality"), not to bear a grudge and not to take vengeance. And thus they said, "A person is obligated to get drunk on Purim until the point that he does not know etc." That is, that a person should forget, due to the excessiveness of his drinking, what the Torah has commanded [regarding destroying Amalek], and he will then be according to the natural morality, and thus will not know between the cursedness of Haman, etc. Because according to nature (natural morality), one should never seek vengeance or curse even those who seek to do them evil, under any circumstance.