**Amalek and the Roots of Haman**

**1) Deuteronomy 25: 17-17**

Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. When the Lord your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!

**2) 1 Samuel, Chapter 15**

This is what Hashem [said to Saul]: ‘Go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.’”. Then Saul attacked the Amalekites… and all the people he totally destroyed with the sword. But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely. Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: “I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.” Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul...Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears?...The Lord anointed you king over Israel.And he sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.’ Why did you not obey the Lord?"

**Mordechai and Esther**

**3) Esther – Chapter 2: 5-11**

Mordechai the son of Ya’ir, the son of Shim‘i, the son of Kish, a Binyamini…He had raised Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle’s daughter; because she had neither father nor mother. The girl was shapely and good-looking; after her father’s and mother’s death, Mordechai had adopted her as his own daughter. When the king’s order and decree were proclaimed, and many girls assembled in Shushan the capital, Esther too was taken [ **וַתִּלָּקַח אֶסְתֵּר**] into the king’s house and put under the care of Hegai, who was in charge of the women...Esther did not disclose her people or family ties, because Mordechai had instructed her not to tell anyone. Every day Mordechai would walk around in front of the courtyard of the harem’s house in order to know how Esther was doing and what was happening to her.

**4) Farouk Chothia, BBC Africa, May 12, 2014**

In Uganda, the Lord's Resistance Army rebel group specializes in kidnapping children, using them as soldiers and sex-slaves. Some manage to escape, while many others remain in captivity all their lives. "Will Nigeria's abducted schoolgirls ever be found?"

5) **Bob Woodruff** - " Albanian Girls Trafficked For Sex," abcnews.com, May 21, 2008

In the tiny and very poor village of Fushara in northern Albania, the girls are disappearing…The girls wind up as teenage prostitutes on the streets of Italy, smuggled there by the Albanian mafia. It happens almost every day, in just about every village and town in Albania. "They are kidnapped mostly," says Lydia Bici of the International Catholic Migration Commission. "The minors are mostly kidnapped from discos or bars or the streets [and] even from the schools." In some villages, families have stopped sending their teenage girls to school, fearing they could be kidnapped. "A majority, it seems like, of the women who are trafficked are under 18 years old," says Sophie Mosko of Save the Children. "They're demanded younger and younger in the sex trade." There are now about 30,000 Albanian prostitutes walking the streets of Europe. In a country of only about 3 million people, that is almost 1 percent of the Albanian population.

**6) Esther – Chapter 2: 12-14, 17, 20**

Each girl had her turn to appear before King Achashverosh after she had undergone the full twelve-month preparation period prescribed for the women...She would go in the evening, and on the following day she would return to another part of the harem’s house... She would not go to the king again unless he was especially pleased with her and had her summoned by name. The king liked Esther more than any of his wives; none of the other virgins obtained such favor. Esther had not yet revealed her family ties or her people, as Mordekhai had ordered her; for Esther continued obeying what Mordekhai told her to do, as she had when he was raising her.

**The Plot Against the King and Its Aftermath**

**7) Ibid 21-23**

During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king’s officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Ahashverosh. But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were impaled on poles. All this was recorded in the book of chronicles before the king.

**8) Ibid – Chapter 3:1**

**אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, גִּדַּל הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ אֶת הָמָן בֶּן-הַמְּדָתָא הָאֲגָגִי**

After all of these things (events, King Aashverosh elevated.... Haman the son of Hamdata, the *Agagaite*, *Esther* 3:1

**Why Does Mordechai Refuse to Bow?**

**9)** **Ibid – 2:5**

All the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed down, and prostrated themselves before Haman; for the king had so commanded. But Mordechai did not bow down. Then the king's servants said to Mordechai: 'Why do you transgress the king's commandment?' Now it came to pass, when they spoke daily with him, and he did not listen to [heed] them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; he had told them that he was a Jew. And when Haman saw that Mordechai did not bow down, nor prostrate himself before him, he was full of wrath.

**10) Genesis - Chapter 33: 1, 3**

And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And Jacob himself passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

**Ibid – Chapter 42: 5-6**

And the sons of Israel came to buy [grain] among those that came; for the famine was in the land of Canaan... And Joseph was the governor over the land…And Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down to him with their faces to the earth.

**11) Yoram Hazony, The Dawn, 1994**

Nothing in Jewish law or custom forbids a Jew to bow down to a ruler… Indeed, Esther herself goes so far as to fall to the floor before the king in supplication later on in the story [*Esther* 8:3]. What is the difference between bowing to Ahashverosh, which is done without hesitation, and bowing to the vizier, for which it is worth endangering everything of value? The meaning of the Book of Esther turns on there being a compelling answer to this question. For without a reason, it can be sensibly claimed that the treatment of Mordechai as a hero for the later salvation of the Jews is exaggerated and even absurd--since it his own stubbornness which draws Haman's ire in the first place.

**12) Rabbi Joseph Kara, [France, 1065 – c. 1135, contemporary of Rashi]**

[Even after the Jews were rescued from potential genocide, they could not forget that Mordechai had originally set in motion the chain of events that endangered them]. “They murmured against him saying: Look what Mordecai has done to us! He was the one who provoked Haman, and on his account we were sold to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish.”

**13) R. Abraham Ibn Ezra [Spain; 1089-1167], Commentary on Esther.**

Why did not Mordechai try to absent himself from the palace gates [or turn aside] when Haman was passing by? In not doing so, he was recklessly endangering himself and the lives of the entire nation. [Ibn Ezra answers that the king had explicitly commanded Mordecai to be stationed at the palace gate, leaving him with no alternative but to obey the royal decree]. 14) Rabbi David ibn Abi Zimra, known as the “Radbaz,” [Spain, Palestine, 1479-1573] found Ibn Ezra’s solution unconvincing. It would certainly have been possible for Mordecai to apply to the king for permission to go somewhere else (analogous to taking a “personal day”). Radbaz therefore suggested a different rationale for Mordecai’s imprudent conduct: it simply never occurred to him that Haman would react so furiously to such a trivial provocation by targeting the entire Jewish nation in response to a perceived slight by one individual. Professor Eliezer Segal [U. of Calgary] "Mad about Mordechai".

**15) Esther Rabba 7:6**

Haman wove an image of an idol on his clothes so that anyone who bowed to him was bowing to an idol.

**16) Yoram Hazony – Ibid**

Mordechai's public resistance to Haman's authority... contradicts everything that he has come to stand for throughout the first seven years of Ahashverosh's reign ...Suddenly, we are told, that he disdains to offer respect to the new vizier, and refuses to assist in the consolidation of his rule by contributing to the public's acceptance of him. On the surface it is as though Mordechai has recanted everything he ever believed about his relationship with the Persian state. But Mordechai has not changed: It is Persia that has changed. To make sense of the revolution in Mordechai's behavior we must first understand the revolution that has taken place in the king's government.

**17) Esther - Chapter 1: 13-14**

Then the king said to the wise men, who knew the times. and the next unto him was Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memuchan, the seven princes of Persia and Media.

**Chapter 3:1**

Ahashverosh set [Haman's] seat above all of the princes that were with him.

**18) Ibid - Chapter 4**

When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly...Then Mordecai sent word to Esther: “Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

**19) "American Jewry and the Holocaust" - *Yad Vashem* Resource Center**

When the Nazis rose to power, the Jews living in the US were not prepared to confront the threat to the Jews of Europe. Most Jews in America at that time were either new immigrants themselves or first generation Americans, reluctant to stand up with confidence as citizens with a say in government policies.

Partly as a result of the fact that American Jews were not unified into one cohesive group with one voice, they were ineffective at rescuing their Jewish brethren in Europe during the Holocaust. The first evidence of disunity within American Jewry with regard to the Nazi threat was in its failure to agree on how to evaluate that threat when it first [appeared] in early 1933...The American Jewish Committee, which represented the wealthier, more Americanized German Jews, believed that the best way to deal with Hitler was diplomatically and quietly, with behind-the-scenes negotiations. On the other hand, the American Jewish Congress, which represented the less Americanized Eastern European Jewish immigrants, felt that holding protest rallies, demonstrations, and boycotts was a better way to affect the Nazis. With such disparate ways of dealing with the issue, there was no single American Jewish voice to appeal to the American gov’t for help...

**20) Yoram Hazony - Ibid**

In making public his opposition to the decree, the only thing that Mordechai can know with certainty is that he courts immediate punishment. Nevertheless he chooses to take his anger and grief to the broad places of the capital to the king's gate...for a *political* reason. And that is the claim lodged in silence, an appeal made in silence, an interest defended in silence, is one that is not lodged, not made and not defended.



Rabbi Avi Weiss, at Soviet Jewry rally on December 6, 1987, just before being arrested.

**Book of Esther - The Conclusion**

**21) Esther – Chapter 8**

The king’s edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves [**וְלַעֲמֹד עַל-נַפְשָׁם** - lit. "to stand for their lives"] to destroy, kill and annihilate [**לְהַשְׁמִיד וְלַהֲרֹג וּלְאַבֵּד**] the armed men of any nationality or province who might attack them and their women/children, and to plunder the property of their enemies. A copy of the text was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

**22) Ibid – Chapter 9**

On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them. The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Ahashverosh to attack those determined to destroy them...The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them. In the citadel of Shushan, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men...But they did not lay their hands on the plunder ....Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the king’s provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of them but did not lay their hands on the plunder. This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.

**23) Yoram Hazony - Ibid**

While seeking to stress the fact that the Jews are being given permission to "organize and defend themselves", the wording of the missive which Mordechai dispatches is hardly defensive. Being copied straight out of the first letter composed by Haman, it grants the Jews permission (i) "to annihilate, to kill, and to destroy" their enemies, (ii) to slaughter their children and women, and (iii) to seize their property. Neither the assault on the families of would-be assailants nor the clause concerning property has anything to do with defense in any obvious sense, nor does the brutal hyperbole of annihilation, killing and destroying immediately seem to have much in common with this purpose.

**Politics and Power**

**24) Gandhi, M.K. “The Jews” *Harijan* 26 November 1938 (*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* vol. 74, p. 240**

If there ever could be a justifiable war in the name of and for humanity, a war against Germany, to prevent the wanton persecution of a whole race, would be completely justified. But I do not believe in any war. A discussion of the pros and cons of such a war is therefore outside my horizon or province... The calculated violence of Hitler may even result in a general massacre of the Jews by way of his first answer to the declaration of such hostilities. But if the Jewish mind could be prepared for a voluntary suffering, even the massacre I have imagined could be turned into a day of thanksgiving and joy that Jehovah had wrought deliverance of the race even at the hands of the tyrant. For to the God-fearing, death has no terror.

**25) Niccolo Machiavelli [Italy, 1469-1527], The Prince. Chapter 15**

Many have imagined republics and principalities which have never been seen or known to exist in reality; for how we live is so far removed from how we ought to live, that he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done, will rather learn to bring about his own destruction rather than his preservation, for a man who wishes to profess goodness at all times must fall to ruin among so many who are not good. Whereby it is necessary for a prince who wishes to maintain his position to learn how not to be good.

**26) Ibid – Chapter 8**

Men must either be caressed or annihilated; they will revenge themselves for small injuries, but cannot do so for great ones; the injuries therefore that we do to a man must be such that we do not fear his vengeance. Those cruelties can be considered well used (if it is permissible to say the good about the bad) that are performed all at once and are not continued. Badly used are those cruelties that, although at first they are few, increase with time rather than disappear... Injuries, then, should be inflicted all at once, for the less they are tasted the less they offend.

**27) Yoram Hazony – Ibid**

In politics, a minimalist response to a real threat all but ensures two undesired consequences, both of them deadly: i) the defeated enemy nurtures the hope of revenge, and continues to be an active threat as he seeks an opportunity to reassert his challenge: and ii) the mildness of the response encourages others to take advantage of what can be perceived to be hesitancy or weakness on the part of the ruler. The only hope to avoid future outrages is thus the assertion of overwhelming power in the first instance.

**28) President Barack Obama, Speech upon Acceptance of the Nobel Peace prize, Oslo City Hall, Norway. December 10, 2009**

We must begin by acknowledging the hard truth:  We will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes.  There will be times when nations -- acting individually or in concert -- will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified. I make this statement mindful of what Martin Luther King Jr. said in this same ceremony years ago:  "Violence never brings permanent peace.  It solves no social problem:  it merely creates new and more complicated ones." ...I know there's nothing weak -- nothing passive -- nothing naïve -- in the creed and lives of Gandhi and King. But as a head of state sworn to protect and defend my nation, I cannot be guided by their examples alone.  I face the world as it is, and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people.  For make no mistake:  Evil does exist in the world.  A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies.  Negotiations cannot convince al Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms.  To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism -- it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.

**Rabbinic Discomfort with Jewish Violence**

**29) Babylonian Talmud - *Yoma* 22b**

R. Mani said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Saul: Now go and smite Amalek, [Saul] 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: Be not righteous overmuch.

**30) *Esh Kodesh* (R. Kalonymus Kalman Shapiro, 1889-1943)**

The violence at the end of the text [of Esther] is specific to the story and should not be expected or desired at any other point in history.

**31) R. Irving Greenberg. *The Ethics of Jewish Power* (National Jewish Resource Center, 1984) 1–3.**

Given the corrupting effects of power, Jews cannot be given a blank check in that exercise any more than any other group. It is racism to believe that Jews are congenitally incapable of doing evil to others…. If memories of the Holocaust are only used to justify Jewish behavior and never to challenge and judge it, then it will be dismissed as propaganda. The memory of our past torment must lead us to greater efforts to treat others with consideration and ethical sensitivity.

**Purim, Violence and Contemporary Israel**

**32) Ian Lustick - For the Land and the Lord, 1994**

On February 28, 1994 [Purim day] Dr. Baruch Goldstein woke up early in Kiryat Arba. The previous day he had meticulously updated his patients' files and composed a farewell note to his coworkers thanking them for the opportunity to work with them toward the fulfillment of the "complete redemption." He donned his army uniform, picked up his assault rifle and several clips of ammunition, and went to the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the center of Hebron... The room was packed with Muslims reciting their prayers...Goldstein pointed his gun and began killing the kneeling men and boys. When his gun jammed he was beaten to death by desperate survivors, but not before he had shot twenty-nine people to death, wounded dozens more, and unleashed a torrent of violence. Preceded by a rash of killings of Jewish settlers by Muslim fundamentalists … it is not in the least a coincidence that the massacre took place on the Jewish holiday of Purim... As Goldstein sat reading [the Megillah] on Purim in 1994, it is almost certain he identified Yasir Arafat with Haman, and the killing of Jewish settlers over the previous months with Haman's murderous designs. By mowing down Arabs he believed wanted to kill Jews, Goldstein was re-enacting part of the Purim story. Upon [his] tomb, the following words are inscribed: “He gave his life for the people of Israel, its Torah and land.”

**33) The Times of Israel, February 24, 2016**

On Tuesday morning IDF engineers [destroyed the homes](http://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-demolishes-west-bank-homes-of-two-palestinian-terrorists/) of Raed Masalmeh, 36, and Mohammed al-Kharoub, 24…The two were responsible for the deaths of five people in two attacks carried out within hours of each other on November 19…Al-Kharoub shot dead three people and wounded four others near the West Bank settlement of Alon Shvut. Ruling recently on an appeal against the demolition, the [Supreme Court](http://www.timesofisrael.com/supreme-court-upholds-demolition-of-terrorists-homes/) said that “the ability to prevent future bloodshed requires us to harden our hearts and spare potential victims, more so than pitying the house occupants.” While the petitioners opposed the house demolitions on the grounds that it unfairly punishes the families living there, the court stated that the price was justified if even one life could be saved.

**34) R. Irving Greenberg – Ibid**

The bitter Jewish experience (of the Diaspora, in general, and the Holocaust, in particular) taught that while it is true that “power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” absolute powerlessness corrupts even more… On the other hand, given the corrupting effects of power, Jews cannot be given a blank check in that exercise any more than any other group. It is racism to believe that Jews are congenitally incapable of doing evil to others…. If memories of the Holocaust are only used to justify Jewish behavior and never to challenge and judge it, then it will be dismissed as propaganda.

**35) Yoram Hazony - Ibid**

One cannot be a good person or a good Jew in our own age--or in the period of the rabbis, either, for that matter--and "understand" genocide. Being good is today very closely allied with the revulsion we have learned towards the killing of children, the aged, and other non-combatants in war, and it is very clear that our own moral sensibilities are in this sense "higher" than those which drove the wars of liquidation in *Joshua* and *Samuel*, and even the Jews' war in *Esther*...Purity requires that man renounce power; but morality requires that man have power in order to pursue right. This is true on the individual level, in which one can only give to others if one has what to give. But it is even more true when one considers moralities of scale, which require vast amounts of political power, economic power, military power. Without power, there is no police force capable of defending the innocent, no court capable of doing justice, no army capable of wresting peace from the aggressor ... Mordechai's war is a war of morality...because any other choice in his time and place would have been folly. Thus if one were to ask why so many men had to die on the day of the fighting, if the results were by then practically assured, the answer is that this is the way of politics. Without decisive action against his enemy, Mordechai would have guaranteed himself a reputation of mildness - a reputation which would have breathed new life into the anti-Semitism of the empire.