

5781 - Genesis 32-36 – Vayishlach (And he sent)

*A Lesson from Timna the Concubine*¹

If you were to stare evil in the eye, what would you see? What would be its character traits?

Of the many malevolent characters recorded in the Torah, Amalek, the grandson of Esau, stands out as the greatest villain. He is the archetypal enemy of our people. He is the father of the nation that first waged war against the Jewish people upon their miraculous emergence from their Egyptian bondage.

Throughout our long history, Amalek's murderous intentions have had many anti-Semitic heirs. One of these was Haman, in the Purim miracle, who sought to annihilate every Jew from the face of civilized society. Traditionally, any mortal threat to the Jewish people is referred to as an Amalekite design.

What are the origins of such a character, who has proven to be the nemesis of the Jewish people and their G-dly quest throughout all time?

In the portion of *Vayishlach*, we are introduced to Amalek's parents.

Timna was a concubine to Elifaz, **son of Esau**, and she bore Amalek to Elifaz.—GENESIS 36:12

Some verses later, we are told more about Timna's background.

And the children of Lotan were Hori and Hemam and Lotan's sister was Timna.—GENESIS 36:22

We are also given information about the status of Lotan, Timna's brother.

These are the chiefs who came of the Horites: **the chief Lotan**, the chief Shobal, the child Ziboen, etc.—GENESIS 36:29

Elifaz's concubine, Timna, was no common woman, but was the product of a royal family, her brother claiming the position of one of the Horite chiefs.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 99b) fills in some missing details by explaining that Timna sought to convert to Judaism and came to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but they refused to accept her. The Talmud asks why Timna gave birth to Amalek and concludes that it was because they rejected her.

1. Sanhedrin 99b

A propos, what is the purpose of [writing], And Lotan's sister was Timna?—Timna was a royal princess, as it is written, *alluf* [duke] Lo-

tan,⁽¹⁷⁾ *alluf* [duke] Timna;⁽¹⁸⁾ and by 'alluf' an uncrowned ruler is meant. Desiring to become a proselyte, she went to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but they did not accept her. So she went and became a concubine to Eliphaz the son of Esau, saying, 'I had rather be a servant to this people than a mistress of another nation.' From her Amalek was descended who afflicted Israel. Why so?—**Because they should not have repulsed her.**

(17) אֵלּוּף Gen. XXXVI, 28.

(18) Ibid. 40.

Timna became a concubine to Elifaz instead, insisting, "It is better to be a maidservant to this nation than to be a princess in any other nation."

Being from the seed of Abraham and Sarah was considered extremely prestigious. Timna perceived the great respect and honor given to this clan, and she was willing to sacrifice her personal dignity in order to be attached to such a prominent and respected people, even if her connection would be a servile one.

I've always been puzzled by this story.

Timna's actions seem so righteous, so altruistic and pure. Why then would they result in a child who represents the antithesis of goodness and who is the very paradigm of evil?

Our patriarchs and matriarchs selflessly gave of themselves to reach out to humanity and teach the beauty of monotheism and G-d's path of truth. They eagerly taught and accepted converts into their midst. Abraham was the ultimate seeker of converts; in fact, that was his stated goal. **If our patriarchs rejected Timna, there must have been a strong reason for them to do so, perceiving that her motives were insincere.**

Timna was not searching for G-d, but rather for her personal aggrandizement. Her motives were not selfless, but rather all about herself.

Had Timna truly wanted to join a nation serving G-d and following His ways, she would not have "settled" for joining the family of Esau, whose path was the antithesis of the Abrahamic teachings. **Timna desired, rather, to be part of a powerful but not necessarily G-dly or spiritual people.**

She was willing to temporarily sacrifice her personal status, but only for what she perceived as a greater, more fulfilling gratification. Her actions were not about G-d, but entirely about herself. Our perceptive patriarchs realized this and therefore rejected her from joining the nation of G-d.

In the era of Redemption, evil will be eradicated and all mankind will be perfected. Only one nation—Amalek—will not be a part of this vision.

Their hand is on G-d's throne, G-d shall be at war with Amalek for all generations.—EXODUS 17:16

¹ Chana Weisberg, *Shabbat deLights*, Vol 1, (Chabad.org), pp. 103-106.

Amalek represent an attitude that is beyond repair because it is the opposite of G-dliness. It is entirely egocentric, **even while dressed up as an act of devotion to G-d**. These are the seeds that can grow into the most extreme acts of evil fathomable.

Because **the greatest distortion of godliness is an act of malevolence adorned in the religious garb of purity, and act of selfishness acted out in the noble name of G-d**.

2. *If our patriarchs rejected Timna, there must have been a strong reason for them to do so, **perceiving that her motives were insincere**.*

a. Acts 8:9-24

⁹Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. **He boasted that he was someone great**,¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is rightly called the Great Power of God." ¹¹They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. ¹²But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name (better; *work*) of Yeshua the Messiah, they were (immersed), both men and women. ¹³Simon himself believed and was (immersed). And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

¹⁴When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria ...

¹⁷Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money

¹⁹and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹You have no part or share in this ministry, **because your heart is not right before God**. ²²Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." ²⁴Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

3. **16. the hand upon the throne of the LORD**. I.e. the hand of Amalek was against Israel, the host of God. The text is difficult, and can also be translated, 'The Lord has sworn, the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation' (Onkelos, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Luzzatto, RV Text).²

war with Amalek. See 1Sam xv, 2f; Deut xxv 17-19. 'As Amalek was the first to attack Israel with the sword, Israel was commanded to blot out his name by means of the sword' (Maimonides). Amalek has disappeared from under heaven, but his spirit still walks the earth. In the battle of the Lord against the Amalekites in the realm of the Spirit, the only successful weapons are courage and conviction, truth and righteousness.

a. Exodus 17:8-16

⁸The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.

⁹Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." ¹⁰So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. ¹¹As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. ¹²When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained **steady** till sunset. ¹³So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

¹⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven." ¹⁵Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner.

¹⁶He said, "**Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the LORD, the LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.**"

b. According to the more detailed account given in Deut. 25:17-19, the Amalekites made a surprise attack on the famished and exhausted Israelites not long after the escape from Egypt. They cut down the stragglers—the elderly, the weak, and the infirm. **Israel was forced to fight its first war of survival**. The Amalekites were a tribe of Edomite nomads whose home was the Negev and the Sinai Peninsula. Interpreting the appearance of the Israelites in this region as a menacing encroachment on their territory and as a threat to their control of the oases and trading routes, the Amalekites savagely attacked them.³

Amalek is the Torah's symbol of pure malice, attacking without cause. Some people commit crimes for profit or revenge, but Amalek acts that way for the sheer joy of hurting people. God's "war from generation to generation" is not only with the tribe of Amalek

(which disappears early in the biblical period) but with those people in every generation who revel in cruelty and hatred.

- c. **8-15 The eternal struggle against Amalek.** Amalek's enmity against Israel stems not only from its legacy as the grandson of Esau, but from what his nation represents. The evil prophet Bilaam referred to Amalek as the first among nations (Numbers 24:20), which means that **Amalek is the leading force of evil**, just as Israel is the leading force of good. Consequently, **the struggle of Israel and Amalek is the eternal struggle of good versus evil**. The current exile is referred to by the Sage as the Exile of Edom, another name for Esau's progeny, and the coming of the Messiah is described by the prophet as *The saviors will ascend Mount Zion to judge Esau's mountain, and the kingdom will be HASHEM'S* (Ovadia 1:21). Thus, when this passage concludes with the Divine assurance that God will erase the memory of Amalek from the face of the earth, the import is that the time will come when evil will ultimately be defeated and disappear (*Exo 17:14, Deu 25:19*).

This passage outlines the first confrontation between Israel and Amalek, and it shows Amalek's treachery in launching an unprovoked sneak attack. **As descendants of Esau, the Amalekites knew the boundaries of the land that had been promised to the offspring of Jacob. They know that they had no rational cause to attack, for their land was not endangered, either then or later.** Nor had there been any prior battle between the two nations. There were only two reasons for the sneak attack: **Amalek wished to show it's brazen denial of God and His power**, and it was carrying on the ancient legacy of Esau's hatred for Jacob (Malbim).⁴

1) Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Repentance 3

One who sins with a high hand in public like Jehoiakim, whether he did minor or serious sins, has no portion in the World to Come; and **such a person is called "Brazen in the Face of the Torah,"** since he bared his forehead and raised his face [in arrogance], and had no shame before the words of Torah (cf., Num 15:30-31).

d. 1 Samuel 15:1-9

¹Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. **²This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them**

as they came up from Egypt. ³Now 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."**

⁴So Saul summoned the men and mustered them at Telaim ... (and) ⁵went to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the ravine ... ⁷Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt. **⁸He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive**, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. ⁹But **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, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.

1) Esther 3:5-6

⁵When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. ⁶Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

a) Mordecai was a descendant of King Saul (Est 2:2; Targum Sheni⁵)

b) Haman was a descendant of King Agag (Est 3:1)

4. *Had Timna truly wanted to join a nation serving G-d and following His ways, she would not have "settled" for joining the family of Esau, whose path was the antithesis of the Abrahamic teachings. **Timna desired, rather, to be part of a powerful but not necessarily G-dly or spiritual people.***

a. Genesis 25:29-34

²⁹Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. ³⁰He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.) ³¹Jacob replied, "First **sell me your birthright.**"

³²"Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" ³³But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, **selling his birthright to Jacob.** ³⁴Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. **So Esau despised his birthright.**

5 The *Targum Sheni* ("Second Targum") is an Aramaic translation (*targum*) and elaboration of the Book of Esther, that embellishes the Biblical account with considerable new apocryphal material, not on the face of it directly related to the Esther story.

4 Rabbi Noson Scherman, Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, Gen. Eds., *The Chumash*, (Mesorah Publications, Ltd.), p. 391.

1) Genesis 27:36-41

³⁶Esau said ... "This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: **He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!**" ... ⁴¹Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; **then I will kill my brother Jacob.**"

2) Genesis 33:4-5

⁴But **Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept.** ⁵Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. "Who are these with you?" he asked. Jacob answered, "They are the children God has graciously given your servant."

3) Genesis 35:27-29

²⁷Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed.

²⁸Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. ²⁹Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And **his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.**

4) Seder Eliyyahu Zuta⁶ 19 (JPS, p. 494)

When Jacob and Esau were in their mother's womb, Jacob said to Esau, "Esau, my brother, our father has two of us, even as there are two worlds before us—this world and the world-to-come. In this world there is eating, drinking, and the give-and-take of business. But with regard to all such activities, the world-to-come is quite different. If it be your wish, you take this world, and I will take the world-to-come." Thus it came about that **Esau took this world as his portion, and Jacob took the world-to-come as his.**

Now, when Jacob came back from Laban's house and Esau saw that Jacob had wives, children, menservants and maidservants, livestock, and silver and gold, he said to him, "Jacob, my brother, did you not say to me that you would take the world-to-come as your portion and that I would take this world as mine? How, then, did you come to all this wealth—wives, children, money, men servants, and maid-servants? Why do you, like me, make use of this world?" Jacob replied, "What few possessions I have are what the Holy One has given me for my use in this world as the need arises." In that instant, weighing the matter in his mind, Esau said

to himself: If the Holy One has given him so much of this world, even though it is not his portion, how much more and more will He give him of the world-to-come, which is his portion!

5) Tanhuma, Toledot, 11

[Why] "Isaac was seized with great terror" (Gen. 27:33) [when Esau returned with the game will be explained in what follows. But to begin with], note that earlier in the passage it is said, "Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father" (Gen. 27:30). How can one go out and the other come in at the same moment [without their seeing each other]? He who is in bright light cannot see one who is in the dark; but he who is in the dark will readily see the one who is in the bright light. Since Esau came in from the outdoors, he could not see Jacob, who was inside the house. Jacob, however, saw Esau from inside the house and hid himself behind the door, and the moment Esau came in, Jacob stepped out. Did Jacob calculate the hours so as to make certain that Esau would not arrive [first] and receive Isaac's blessings? [It was not Jacob but God who did the reckoning.] Because, as soon as Esau went out to hunt, the Holy One dispatched Satan, who prevented Esau from succeeding in his hunt until Jacob had come and received the blessings ...

When Esau finally entered the house, **he called to his father in a rude tone**, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's venison" (Gen. 27:31)—"let my father arise," he ordered. Jacob, however, had not spoken in the same tone, but said, "Arise, I pray thee, sit and eat" (Gen. 27:19)—both "I pray thee" and the three verbs implying respectful entreaty, humility, and submissiveness. **That wicked Esau, however, said, "Let my father arise and eat," all but saying, "He'd better" [in a curt and peremptory tone].**

6) Hebrews 12:14-17

¹⁴Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. ¹⁶See that no one is sexually immoral, **or is godless like Esau**, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. ¹⁷Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

7) Malachi 1:1-5

¹A prophecy: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.

⁶ *Tanna Devei Eliyahu* is the composite name of a midrash, consisting of two parts, whose final redaction took place at the end of the 10th century CE. The first part is called "*Seder Eliyahu Rabbah*" (31 chapters); the second, "*Seder Eliyahu Zuta*" (15 chapters).

²"I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?'" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob, ³but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals." ⁴**Edom** may say, "Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins." But this is what the LORD Almighty says: "They may build, but I will demolish. **They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD.**" ⁵You will see it with your own eyes and say, 'Great is the LORD—even beyond the borders of Israel!'

5. *Because the greatest distortion of godliness is an act of malevolence adorned in the religious garb of purity, and act of selfishness acted out in the noble name of G-d.*

a. This is the truest definition of taking God's "name in vain."

b. Exodus 20:7

⁷"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

—Taking God's name in vain is to *misuse the name*. The "name" is much more than a title by which God is addressed.

1) **It may refer to His nature and being.**

a) Psalm 20:1

¹May the LORD answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.

b) John 1:12

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God ...

2) **Or, to His teaching or doctrine.**

a) Psalm 22:22

²²I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you.

3) **Or, to His moral and ethical teaching.**

a) Micah 4:5

⁵All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.

4) It is forbidden to show contempt for God by making an idol. It is forbidden to disgrace His Name by using it for no valid purpose. And, it is forbidden to appeal to God's name in taking a false oath or in making a false testimony.