



Ki Tetze 5769

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Accepting Converts from Amalek

[Iturei Cohanim #155]

Question: In the Mechilta (on Shemot 17:16), our Rabbis prohibit accepting converts from Amalek, but the Gemara (Gittin 57a) mentions that the descendants of Haman learned Torah in Bnei Brak. Don't these two sources contradict one another?

Answer: Quite simply, it is a dispute. According to the Mechilta, we do not accept converts from Amalek, while the Babylonian Talmud does not forbid it. The Rambam ruled like the Gemara, since he did not mention in the "Laws of Converts" that it is forbidden to accept converts from Amalek. He must therefore explain the problem of how King David killed the Amalekite convert who claimed he killed King Shaul, even though there were no witnesses (Shmuel 2 1). According to the Mechilta, we do not accept converts from Amalek and a non-Jew can receive capital punishment based on self-incrimination, but the Rambam followed the Gemara that we can accept converts from Amalek and it is forbidden to kill a Jew based on his own testimony. The Rambam thus explained that King David's action was a temporary ruling or part of the unique powers given to a king (Rambam, Hilchot Sanhedrim 18:6). According to this explanation, there is a dispute between the two sources. It is possible, however, to resolve this contradiction in various ways:

1. There is a different version of the Gemara which reads: "The descendants of Na'aman" instead of "The descendants of Haman" (see, for example, Ba'al Ha-Turim on Shemot 28:2).
2. It is forbidden to convert them but if they converted of their own, they are considered converts (Megillat Sefer, Lo Ta'aseh 115). This resolution is difficult since the Mechilta seems to hold that we do not accept converts from Amalek at all.
3. It is permissible for them to convert and to be Jewish for all purposes but we do not marry them (Megillat Sefer ibid.). This is also difficult since the Mechilta is discussing conversion and not marriage.
4. We do not convert them from the outset, but if they convert they are considered converts after the fact (Shut Beit Yehudah. Resisei Lailah of Rabbi Tzadok Ha-Cohain Mi-Lublin #32 and 58). This is also difficult since the Mechilta implies that they are not considered converts even after the fact.

5. While Haman was from Amalek, he was a slave to Mordechai and slaves do not have "yichus" (are not related to anyone), i.e. his descendants are not related to him and are not considered Amalek (Kli Chemdah on the Torah).
6. If a woman marries a non-Amalekite, the offspring are not considered Amalek, since the genealogy of non-Jews is patrilineal (Yevamot 78b). According to this explanation, the "descendants of Haman" is not to be taken literally but that they were descendants of women in the Amalekite line (Gilyon Ha-Shas, Gittin 57a and Chazon Ish, Yoreh Deah Gerim 157). This explanation follows the opinion of the Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim (3, 50) that the obligation to destroy Amalek does not apply to women. This is still difficult, however, since the Mechilta there writes that Hashem swore not to leave a grandchild or a great-grandchild of Amalek and this potential convert is a great-grandchild of Amalek! Some explain that even though this potential convert is not an Amalekite, since he is from the offspring of "Amalekite women," we should still reject him since he is connected to Amalek in some manner.
7. According to the Rambam, if Amalek makes peace, there is no longer a mitzvah to eradicate them (Hilchot Melachim, chap. 6); i.e., he is no longer an Amalekite and it is then permissible to convert him (Mishpat Ha-Meluchah of Rav Gershuni, Hilchot Melachim, chap. 5). While it is forbidden to convert directly from Amalek, it is possible for one to convert in another manner.

Additional sources: Shut Maharsham 3:272, "Sefer Michlol Ha-Ma'amarim" erech mi-bnei, Shut Mishneh Halachit 6:220, Sefer Hasidim 1019, Kedushat Levi – Kedushat Revi'it p. 124b (Sefer Haichei David 560), Seridei Esih 2:104 (ibid. 564).



Text Message Responsa

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah," "Olam Ha-Katan" and "Be-Ahavah U-Be-Eumnah." Here's a sample:

Q: Is it permissible to do an art project with food?

A: Yes, it is not "Bal Tashchit" (wanton destruction).

Q: Is it permissible on Shabbat and holidays for the person leading the davening to do so from the Bima (the Torah-reading table) and not from the shtender in order for everyone to hear?

A: Yes, the essence is that there is a Bima in the middle and a shtender up front.

Q: How should I answer a secular Jew who asks me where Hashem was during the Holocaust?

A: For a question of such depth, you can only answer what you know and not what you learn from a text message. I also do not know how to answer such a deep matter in a text message. If you are interested, see my book on the subject "Orot Me-Ofel."

Q: Is it permissible for me to occasionally make a phone call from work?

A: They will allow it if it is rarely done and essential.

Q: Is the famous picture of the Rambam really him?

A: No. In the picture, he does not have pe'ot and is dressed like a Turk.

Q: When one leaves the Kotel should he walk backwards?

A: Yes, like in every shul.

Q: After a parachute jump should one recite "Bircat Ha-Gomel"?

A: Yes, both Ashkenazim and Sefardim.

Q: Is it permissible to see the museum exhibition "Body Works" which presents corpses in different positions?

A: No, it is shaming the deceased.

Q: A lawyer is willing to give me a big discount if I pay with cash without a receipt. Is it permissible?

A: It is forbidden, it is illegal. He is not suitable to be a lawyer.

Q: If I am not a mourner, is it permissible to learn the laws of mourning or will it injure me?

A: It is certainly permissible, it is Torah and will not injure. Sefer Chasidim #261.

Stories of Rabbenu — Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

Guarding one's tongue

On one occasion, when our Rabbi returned home from prayer, his taxi driver accidentally drove past his house. "Oops," said the driver, "I'll have to back up." Our Rabbi immediately corrected him, saying: "You have to proceed backwards."

On another occasion, our Rabbi was asked to "descend" a stairway. He immediately replied: "I do not 'descend'!" (implying that 'descent' has a negative connotation and that such expressions should be avoided).

Following the words of our Sages

Our Rabbi once joined a wedding for a short time, arriving while the bride and groom were in the "cheder yichud" (room of privacy where they go immediately after the ceremony). He refrained from partaking of the meal, quoting the Gemara (Berachot 6b): "Whosoever partakes of the wedding meal of a bridegroom and does not bring him joy him violates 'the five voices' mentioned in the verse: 'The voice of joy,' etc. (Yirmiyahu 33:2)."

Whenever our Rabbi reached home, before entering, he would knock, even though he knew that nobody was inside. This practice was in keeping with the words of our Sages in Derech Eretz Rabbah: "A person must not enter his home suddenly."

When they called him up to the Torah, he reacted with alacrity, without delay, in keeping with what is written by Pri Megadim regarding the reason for taking the shortest route possible when going up to the Torah: "To demonstrate one's love for [the Torah] and one's desire to read from it."

*From Rav Aviner's Commentary on Birkat Ha-Mazon,
entitled Shir Ha-Ma'a lot*

"Blessed in everything, from everything, with everything"

"The Holy One Blessed Be He gave three people the ability to taste from the World to Come, our forefather Avraham as it is written regarding him: '[He was blessed] in everything' (Bereshit 24:1), Yitzchak as it is written with regard to him: '[He was blessed] from everything' (ibid. 27:33) and Yaakov as it is written with regard to him: '[He was blessed] with everything' (ibid. 33:11). The evil inclination had no control over three people, and they are: Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov as it is written with regard to them: 'in everything, from everything, with everything'" (Baba Batra 16-17). We pray that we will merit to taste the sweetness of the World to Come in this world, which is the sweetness of closeness to Hashem and the good feeling after doing good, and that the evil inclination will have no control over us, rather we will know how to be purified and liberated from it. These things are connected. By liberating oneself from the evil inclination, a person tastes a taste of the Garden of Eden. And out of the fact that he carries the supreme taste with him, the evil inclination is no longer interested in him.

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