

Parashat Zakhor

דברים פרשת כי תצא פרק כה

(יז) זְכוֹר אֵת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בְּדַרְדֵּר בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם: (יח) אֲשֶׁר קָרַד בְּדַרְדֵּר וַיִּזְנֹב בְּךָ כָּל הַנְּחָשִׁים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַתָּה עָיַף וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹהִים: (יט) וְהָיָה בְּהֵנִיחַ יִקְנֹךְ אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְךָ מִכָּל אִיבֶיךָ מִסָּבִיב בְּאַרְצְךָ אֲשֶׁר יִקְנֹךְ אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחְלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחָה אֵת זְכֹר עַמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח: פ

Remember what Amalek did to you by the way as you came forth out of Egypt; (18) how he met you by the way, and struck the hindmost of you, all who were feeble behind you, when you were faint and weary; and he didn't fear God. (19) Therefore it shall be, when Hashem your God has given you rest from all your enemies all around, in the land which Hashem your God gives you for an inheritance to possess it, that you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under the sky; you shall not forget.

✕

שמואל א ט"ו

(1) And Samuel said unto Saul: 'The Lord sent me to anoint thee to be king over His people, over Israel; now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the Lord. (2) Thus saith the Lord of hosts: I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he set himself against him in the way, when he came up out of Egypt. (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.' (4) And Saul summoned the people, and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah. (5) And Saul came to the city of Amalek, and lay in wait in the valley. (6) And Saul said unto the

(א) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל שָׁאוּל אֲתִי שָׁלַח יְיָ לְמִשְׁחָךְ לְמֶלֶךְ עַל עַמּוֹ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַתָּה שְׁמַע לְקוֹל דְּבָרַי יְיָ. (ב) כֹּה אָמַר יְיָ צְבָאוֹת פְּקֹדֵתִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה עַמְלֵק לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר שָׂם לוֹ בְּדַרְדֵּר בְּעֵלְתוֹ מִמִּצְרַיִם. (ג) עַתָּה לֵךְ וְהִפִּיתָ אֵת עַמְלֵק וְהִחַרְמְתָם אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ וְלֹא תִחַמְל עֲלוֹ וְהִמַּתָּה מֵאִישׁ עַד אִשָּׁה מֵעִלָּל וְעַד יוֹנֵק מִשׁוֹר וְעַד שֶׂה מִגְּמֹל וְעַד חֲמוֹר. (ד) וַיִּשְׁמַע שָׁאוּל אֵת הָעָם וַיִּפְקְדֵם בְּטַלָּאִים מֵאֲתִים אֶלְפֵי רִגְלֵי וַעֲשֶׂרֶת אֲלָפִים אֵת אִישׁ יְהוּדָה. (ה) וַיָּבֵא שָׁאוּל עַד עִיר עַמְלֵק וַיִּרֵב בְּנַחֲל. (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל הַקִּינִי לְכוּ סְרוּ רִדּוֹ מִתּוֹךְ עַמְלֵקוֹן פֶּן אֲסַפְּךָ עַמּוֹ וְאַתָּה עֹשִׂיתָה חֶסֶד

"וירב בנחל": אמר ר' מני על עסקי נחל. בשעה שאמר לו הקב"ה 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 (קוהלת ז) "אל תהי צדיק הרבה." ובשעה שאמר לו שאול לדואג (שמואל א כב) "סוב אתה ופגע בכהנים," יצאה בת קול ואמרה לו (קוהלת ז) "אל תרשע הרבה." (יומא כב ע"ב)

"He [Saul] fought in the stream." R. Mani said: [He fought] over the matter of a stream. When God told Saul: "Go and smite Amalek," he said: "If with regard to but a single life, the Torah requires an *'eglah arufah*, then how much more so on account of all of these lives? And if the people sinned, did the animals sin? And if the grownups sinned, did the children sin? A heavenly voice proclaimed: "Do not be so righteous." And when [Saul] told Doeg "Turn about and slay the *kohanim*," a heavenly voice proclaimed: "Do not be so wicked."

"אל תהי צדיק הרבה ואל תתחכם יותר:" אל תהי צדיק הרבה יותר מבוראך. מדבר בשאול דכתיב (שמואל א' ט"ו) "ויבא שאול עד עיר עמלק" וגו'. ר' הונא ור' בנייה אומר: התחיל מדיין הוא כנגד בוראו, ואמר: כך אמר הקב"ה, "לך והכית את עמלק;" אם אנשים חטאו, הנשים מה חטאו? והטף מה חטאו? והבקר ושור וחמור מה חטאו? יצאת בת קול ואמרה: "אל תהי צדיק הרבה" יותר מבוראך. קהלת רבה (וילנא) פרשה ז

"Don't overdo goodness and don't act the wise man to excess" (Eccl. 7:16). This applies to Shaul when he "advanced as far as the city of Amalek" (1 Sam. 15:5). Rav Huna and Rav Benaya said that (Shaul) began to debate with his Creator, saying: God said, "Now go and attack Amalek" (op. cit., v.3). [Shaul countered:] Even if the men (of Amalek) sinned, did the women sin? Did the children? Did the cattle, oxen, and donkeys sin? A heavenly voice came out and said: "Don't overdo goodness" beyond your Creator.

רשב"ל אומר: כל מי שנעשה רחמן במקום אכזרי סוף שנעשה אכזרי במקום רחמן, ומניין שנעשה אכזרי במקום רחמן? שנאמר (שמואל א' כ"ב) "ואת נוב עיר הכהנים הכה לפי חרב." ולא תהא נוב כזרעו של עמלק.

Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish says: Whoever acts compassionately where cruelty is called for will eventually act cruelly when compassion is required. And where did (Shaul) act cruelly instead of compassionately? To wit: "And he [Shaul] put Nob, city of priests, to the sword" (1 Sam. 22:19), and Nob should not have been treated like the seed of Amalek.

<p>(ג) עָתָה לָךְ וְהִפִּיתָ אֶת עֲמֶלְק וְהִחַרְמָתָם אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ וְלֹא תִחַמַּל עָלָיו וְהִמַּתָּ מֵאִישׁ עַד אִשָּׁה מֵעַלְלָל וְעַד יוֹנֵק מִשׁוֹר וְעַד שֶׁחַ מִמְּמַל וְעַד חֲמוֹר:</p>	<p>(ט) וְאֵת נֹב עִיר הַכֹּהֲנִים הִכָּה לְפִי חֶרֶב מֵאִישׁ וְעַד אִשָּׁה מֵעוֹלָל וְעַד יוֹנֵק וְשׁוֹר וְחֲמוֹר וְשֶׁחַ לְפִי חֶרֶב:</p>
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(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. (10) Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying: (11) 'It repenteth Me that I have set up Saul to be king; for he is turned back from following Me, and hath not performed My commandments.'

down to Gilgal.' (13) And Samuel came to Saul; and Saul said unto him: 'Blessed be thou of the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord.' (14) And Samuel said: 'What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?'

Samuel said: 'Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, As in hearkening to the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to hearken than the fat of rams. (23) For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as idolatry and teraphim. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king.' (24) And Saul said unto

לְפִי חָרַב. (ט) וַיַּחַמְלֵם שְׂאוּל וְהָעָם עַל אֲגָג וְעַל מֵיטֵב הַצֹּאן וְהַבְּקָר וְהַמְּשָׁנִים וְעַל הַכְּרִים וְעַל כָּל הַטּוֹב וְלֹא אָבוּ הַחֲרִימָם וְכָל הַמְּלֹאכָה נִמְבְּזָה וְנָמַס אֶתָּה הַחֲרִימוּ. (י) וַיְהִי דָבָר יְיָ אֶל שְׂמוּאֵל לֵאמֹר. (יא) נִחַמְתִּי כִּי הִמְלַכְתִּי אֶת שְׂאוּל לְמֶלֶךְ כִּי שָׁב מֵאַחֲרַי וְאֶת דְּבָרִי לֹא הָקִים וַיֵּחָר לְשְׂמוּאֵל וַיִּזְעַק אֶל יְיָ כָּל הַלַּיְלָה. (יב) וַיִּשְׁכַּם שְׂמוּאֵל לְקִרְאֵת שְׂאוּל בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּגַּד לְשְׂמוּאֵל לֵאמֹר

יָד וַיֵּסֶב וַיַּעֲבֹר וַיֵּרֵד הַגִּלְגָּל. (יג) וַיָּבֵא שְׂמוּאֵל אֶל שְׂאוּל וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ שְׂאוּל בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה לַיהוָה הִקִּימְתִּי אֶת דְּבָר יְיָ. (יד) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂמוּאֵל וּמָה קוֹל הַצֹּאן הַזֶּה בְּאָזְנִי וְקוֹל הַבְּקָר אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי שֹׁמֵעַ. (טו) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂאוּל

בַּגִּלְגָּל. (כב) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂמוּאֵל הַחֲפִץ לַיהוָה בְּעֹלֹת וּזְבָחִים כְּשֹׁמֵעַ בְּקוֹל יְיָ הִנֵּה שֹׁמֵעַ מִזְבַּח טוֹב לְהַקְשִׁיב מִחֶלֶב אֵילִים. (כג) כִּי חָטְאת קָסָם מְרִי וְאֹנָן וְתִרְפִּים הַפָּצַר יַעַן מֵאַסְתָּ אֶת דְּבָר יְיָ וַיִּמְאַסְדָּ מִמְּלֶךְ. (כד) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂאוּל אֶל שְׂמוּאֵל חָטְאתִי כִּי עֲבַרְתִּי אֶת פִּי יְיָ וְאֶת דְּבָרֶיךָ כִּי יָרֵאתִי אֶת הָעָם וְאַשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלָם. (כה) וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא אֶת חָטְאתִי וְשׁוּב

to their voice. (25) Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord.' (26) And Samuel said unto Saul: 'I will not return with thee; for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel.' (27) And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his robe, and it rent. (28) And

(כה) וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא אֶת חַטָּאתִי וְשׁוּב עִמִּי וְאַשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַיהוָה. (כו) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל שָׁאוּל לֹא אָשׁוּב עִמָּךְ כִּי מְאַסְתָּה אֶת דְּבַר יְהוָה וַיִּמְאַסֶּךָ יְהוָה מֵהִיּוֹת מֶלֶךְ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל. (כז) וַיֹּסֵב שְׁמוּאֵל לְלֶכֶת וַיַּחֲזֵק בְּכַנְף מְעִילוֹ וַיִּקְרַע. (כח) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו שְׁמוּאֵל קִרַע יְהוָה אֶת מַמְלַכּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעַלְיָד הַיּוֹם וּנְתַנָּה לְרַעְדָּה הַטּוֹב מִמָּךְ. (כט)

The question: Who caused whose coat to tear?

THE POSSIBILITIES

Four logical possibilities present themselves for consideration:

- (1) Saul tore Samuel's coat
- (2) Samuel tore his own coat
- (3) Saul tore his own coat
- (4) Samuel tore Saul's coat

Let us consider and evaluate each of these possibilities.

(1) Saul tore Samuel's coat: Conventional wisdom posits that Saul tore Samuel's coat. After all, he has just pleaded with Samuel to remain by his side, and when the prophet gave the final indication of his refusal—by turning his back on Saul—the king made a desperate grab for him, tearing the prophet's coat in the process.

A logical scenario, indeed, but is it borne out by the text? If Samuel, who is the subject of the first clause ("he turned") is not the subject of the second clause ("he took hold"), shouldn't a new subject be named? What should win out here, logic or syntax?

(2) Samuel tore his own coat: How do we treat the ambiguous pronoun reference of *his* coat? If the syntax of the verse (as explained in #1) requires Samuel to remain the subject throughout the verse, then he must be the antecedent of the pronoun "his" as well. That is to say: After turning his back on Saul, Samuel proceeded to tear *his* own coat.

But why should he do a thing like that? Was he in mourning, or something? Precisely! Samuel, who had staked his own considerable reputation on Saul and who now saw the fledgling Israelite monarchy being dispossessed from his protégé, had every reason to adopt a posture of mourning by tearing his own coat.

- (3) Saul tore his own coat: If the syntax can be overcome by logic and the subject of “he took hold” is Saul—as conventional wisdom argued (in #1)—then it could well have been his *own* coat which he tore rather than Samuel’s. After all, if a prophet has cause to mourn the collapse of the monarchy he supported (as argued in #2), surely the monarch himself has an even greater cause?

Neither of these last two scenarios is unfeasible, but they, too, run afoul of the text. *Va-yikara*, in biblical Hebrew grammar, is the reflexive form of the verb *k-r-*‘ thereby signifying an accident (“it was torn”), while mourning would call for the active voice: *va-yikra`renu*, “and he tore it” (which, by the way, is precisely how the word is rendered by the Greek Septuagint!).

Are we back at square one? Not yet. We have one more possibility to pursue.

- (4) Samuel tore Saul’s coat: If the syntax commands that Samuel, the subject of “he turned,” remains the subject of “he took hold,” then that would confirm that he did the tearing. The third person masculine singular pronominal suffix attached to the coat, however, is sufficiently ambiguous to allow for one final permutation: Samuel turned—and tore Saul’s coat!

But wait! Forget the grammatical point about “it was torn” (#3), logic alone seems to prove this one improbable. While Saul’s grabbing Samuel’s coat—because the latter was about to abandon him—is plausible, as are the even less likely possibilities of self-tearing in mourning, is it behavior becoming of a prophet to tear the coat of a king?

Perhaps a peek at 1 Kings 11:29 ff. is in order:

During that time, Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem and the prophet, Ahijah of Shiloh, met him on the way. He had put on a new robe, and when the two were alone in the open country Ahijah took hold of the new robe he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. “Take ten pieces,” he said to Jeroboam, “for thus said the Lord, God of Israel: I am about to tear the kingdom out of Solomon’s hands and I will give you ten tribes.”

Since Ahijah’s tearing of Jeroboam’s coat symbolizes God tearing away his kingdom, can’t Samuel tear Saul’s coat to make the same point? Indeed, the same verb, *k-r-*‘, punctuates Samuel’s next words (15:28): “The Lord this day has torn (*kara*) the kingship over Israel away from you and has given it to another who is worthier than you.”

Indeed, if we bear in mind—having already read the next chapter—that the “worthier other” is David, then the symbolism of the torn coat is uncanny. It is precisely when Saul’s coat is torn again—by David, in a cave near Ein Gedi (1 Samuel 24:5)—that Saul is persuaded to acknowledge his claim to the throne: “I know now that you will become king” (v. 21).

Indeed, a convincing scenario; however—as we have already pointed out—the passive, accidental, *va-yikkara*, rules this out as well.

THE RESOLUTION

Now we are really back at square one. Four logical possibilities presented themselves for our consideration and all four have been challenged on grounds of either grammar or syntax. It almost seems as though no matter how hard either Samuel or Saul try to tear one another’s coat, Scripture just won’t let them get away with it.

We can decide, however, that as important as grammar and syntax are, they are only tools and should remain subordinate to the dictates of logic and common sense. In which case, let us return to the conventional wisdom with which we began and see if we can hurdle the syntactical obstacles we placed before it.

- Ignoring Saul’s plea for unity, Samuel turns to go on his way.
- Saul, in desperation, seizes the prophet’s coat by its corner.
- By the force of Samuel turning one way and Saul pulling in the other—the coat is torn.

While only this explanation, of the four, conveys the accidental value of “it was torn,” the problem, as explained above (#1), is that without the interpolation of a new subject (Saul), the verb “he seized” is still governed by Samuel. Our solution: Saul had already seized hold of Samuel’s coat, and is therefore already recognized as the implicit subject of all subsequent actions performed upon it. We have two proofs to submit in evidence.

First of all, the verse employs neither the verb *a-h-z* nor *t-f-s*—either of which would simply mean “to take hold, or grasp” (as in 1 Kings 11:30)—rather it uses *h-z-k*, which, strictly speaking, means to strengthen an existing grip. This implies that Saul had already taken hold of Samuel’s coat and, now that Samuel was threatening to abandon him, he tightened his hold.

The second proof comes from earlier in this same chapter. Saul greeted Samuel with the claim of: “I have upheld the word of God” (v. 13), which Samuel countered with: “what is this bleating of sheep in my ears?” (v. 14), which Saul tries to excuse as: “intended for sacrifice” (v. 15). Samuel then says to Saul: “Let go of me (*heref*) and I shall tell you (what God said to me last night (vs. 16; not to be translated “stop,” as in the JPS translation). “Let go of me” (or, “stay your hand,” as JPS itself translates *heref* in 2 Samuel 24:16), implies that Saul had previously taken hold of Samuel’s coat.

IN CONCLUSION

The conventional wisdom prevails. Saul tore Samuel’s coat accidentally, and the prophet capitalized on the incident to turn the torn coat into a symbol of the imminent tearing away of Saul’s kingdom. Sometime later (see 1 Samuel 24), Saul came to appreciate the significance of this symbolic act as a sign that David—who also tore his coat—was to be his successor.

שמואל א כ"ד (יא) וְאָבִי רָאָה גַם רָאָה אֶת כַּנֹּף מְעִילָהּ בְּיָדִי כִּי בְּכַרְתִּי אֶת כַּנֹּף מְעִילָהּ וְלֹא הִרְגָתִּי דַע
וְרָאָה כִּי אֵין בְּיָדִי רֶעֶה וְפָשַׁע וְלֹא חָטָאתִי לָהּ וְאִתָּה צִדָּה אֶת נַפְשִׁי לְקַחְתָּהּ... (כ) וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי
מֶלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ וְקָמָה בְּיָדְךָ מַמְלַכֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל.