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**Shaul 2: When Mercy is Cruel**

*Dedicated by Rabbi Avraham Witty in memory of his father, HaRav Yitzchak Gamliel Witty z”l*

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**The Mission: Listen to the Lord’s command**

1. **Shemuel I 15:1-3 (tr. adaptation of JPS 1985, from sefaria.org)**

(א) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל שָׁאוּל אֹתִי שָׁלַח ה לִמְשָׁחֳךָ לְמֶלֶךְ עַל עַמּוֹ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַתָּה **שְׁמַע לְקוֹל דִּבְרֵי ה**: ס (ב) כֹּה אָמַר ה צְבָאוֹת פָּקַדְתִּי אֵת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה עֲמָלֵק לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר שָׂם לוֹ בַּדֶּרֶךְ בַּעֲלֹתוֹ מִמִּצְרָיִם:(ג) עַתָּה לֵךְ וְהִכִּיתָה אֶת עֲמָלֵק וְהַחֲרַמְתֶּם אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ **וְלֹא תַחְמֹל עָלָיו** וְהֵמַתָּה מֵאִישׁ עַד אִשָּׁה מֵעֹלֵל וְעַד יוֹנֵק מִשּׁוֹר וְעַד שֶׂה מִגָּמָל וְעַד חֲמוֹר: ס

Samuel said to Saul, “I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over His people Israel. **Therefore, listen to the LORD’s command**! Thus said the LORD of Hosts: I am exacting the penalty for what Amalek did to Israel, for the assault he made upon them on the road, on their way up from Egypt. Now go, attack Amalek, and destroy all that belongs to him. **Have no mercy on him**, but kill alike men and women, infants and sucklings, oxen and sheep, camels and donkeys!”

1. **Rashi Shemuel I 15:1**

(א) ועתה שמע לקול דברי ה' - פעם אחת נסכלת עתה הזהר בעצמך

“Now listen to the Lord’s command”- you were foolish once-now be careful!

1. **Malbim Shemuel I 15:1**

דע כי מצוה זו היא משתלשלת ממה שנמשחת למלך, וכמו שנשלחתי למשחך כן נשלחתי אליך בשליחות הזאת, שזה יהיה בחינה אל קיום המלכות בידך, ולכן עתה שמע לקול דברי ה'

Know that this commandment emanates from you having been anointed as king. Just as I was sent to anoint you, so I was sent with this mission, such that this is a test regarding the maintenance of the kingship in your hand. Therefore: “Now, listen to the command of the LORD”.

1. **Devarim 25:17-19 (tr. Alhatorah.org)**

זָכוֹר אֵת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְךָ עֲמָלֵק בַּדֶּרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם: אֲשֶׁר קָרְךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וַיְזַנֵּב בְּךָ כָּל הַנֶּחֱשָׁלִים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַתָּה עָיֵף וְיָגֵעַ וְלֹא יָרֵא אֱלֹקִים: וְהָיָה בְּהָנִיחַ ה’ אֱלֹקֶיךָ לְךָ מִכָּל אֹיְבֶיךָ מִסָּבִיב בָּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה’ אֱלֹקֶיךָ נֹתֵן לְךָ נַחֲלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחֶה אֶת זֵכֶר עֲמָלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם לֹא תִּשְׁכָּח:

Remember what Amalek did to you by the way as you came forth out of Egypt; 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 G-d. Therefore it shall be, when Hashem your G-d has given you rest from all your enemies all around, in the land which Hashem your G-d 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.

**Shaul’s Implementation:**

1. **Shemuel I 15:4-9 (tr. adaptation of JPS 1985, from sefaria.org)**

(ד) וַיְשַׁמַּע שָׁאוּל אֶת הָעָם וַיִּפְקְדֵם בַּטְּלָאִים מָאתַיִם אֶלֶף רַגְלִי וַעֲשֶׂרֶת אֲלָפִים אֶת אִישׁ יְהוּדָה: (ה) וַיָּבֹא שָׁאוּל עַד עִיר עֲמָלֵק וַיָּרֶב בַּנָּחַל:

(ו) וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל הַקֵּינִי לְכוּ סֻּרוּ רְדוּ מִתּוֹךְ עֲמָלֵקִי פֶּן אֹסִפְךָ עִמּוֹ וְאַתָּה עָשִׂיתָה חֶסֶד עִם כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּעֲלוֹתָם מִמִּצְרָיִם וַיָּסַר קֵינִי מִתּוֹךְ עֲמָלֵק: (ז) וַיַּךְ שָׁאוּל אֶת עֲמָלֵק מֵחֲוִילָה בּוֹאֲךָ שׁוּר אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי מִצְרָיִם: (ח) וַיִּתְפֹּשׂ אֶת אֲגַג מֶלֶךְ עֲמָלֵק חָי וְאֶת כָּל הָעָם הֶחֱרִים לְפִי חָרֶב:

(ט) **וַיַּחְמֹל שָׁאוּל וְהָעָם** עַל אֲגָג וְעַל מֵיטַב הַצֹּאן וְהַבָּקָר וְהַמִּשְׁנִים וְעַל הַכָּרִים וְעַל כָּל הַטּוֹב וְלֹא אָבוּ הַחֲרִימָם וְכָל הַמְּלָאכָה נְמִבְזָה וְנָמֵס אֹתָהּ הֶחֱרִימוּ: פ

Saul mustered the troops and enrolled them at Telaim: 200,000 men on foot, and 10,000 men of Judah. Then Saul advanced as far as the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the wadi. Saul said to the Kenites, “Come, withdraw at once from among the Amalekites, that I may not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they left Egypt.” So the Kenites withdrew from among the Amalekites. Saul destroyed Amalek from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is close to Egypt, and he captured King Agag of Amalek alive. He destroyed all the people, putting them to the sword; but Saul **and the troops had pity** on Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the second-born, the lambs, and all else that was of value. They would not destroy them; they destroyed only what was cheap and worthless.

**Shaul’s Denial**

1. **Shemuel I 15:10-23 (tr. adaptation of JPS 1985, from sefaria.org)**

(י) וַיְהִי דְּבַר ה אֶל שְׁמוּאֵל לֵאמֹר: (יא) נִחַמְתִּי כִּי הִמְלַכְתִּי אֶת שָׁאוּל לְמֶלֶךְ כִּי שָׁב מֵאַחֲרַי וְאֶת דְּבָרַי לֹא הֵקִים וַיִּחַר לִשְׁמוּאֵל וַיִּזְעַק אֶל ה כָּל הַלָּיְלָה: (יב) וַיַּשְׁכֵּם שְׁמוּאֵל לִקְרַאת שָׁאוּל בַּבֹּקֶר וַיֻּגַּד לִשְׁמוּאֵל לֵאמֹר בָּא שָׁאוּל הַכַּרְמֶלָה וְהִנֵּה מַצִּיב לוֹ יָד וַיִּסֹּב וַיַּעֲבֹר וַיֵּרֶד הַגִּלְגָּל: (יג) וַיָּבֹא שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל שָׁאוּל וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ שָׁאוּל בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה לַה' הֲקִימֹתִי אֶת דְּבַר ה': (יד) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל וּמֶה קוֹל הַצֹּאן הַזֶּה בְּאָזְנָי וְקוֹל הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי שֹׁמֵעַ: (טו) וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל מֵעֲמָלֵקִי הֱבִיאוּם אֲשֶׁר **חָמַל הָעָם** עַל מֵיטַב הַצֹּאן וְהַבָּקָר לְמַעַן זְבֹחַ לַה' אֱלֹקיךָ וְאֶת הַיּוֹתֵר הֶחֱרַמְנוּ: ס (טז) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל שָׁאוּל הֶרֶף וְאַגִּידָה לְּךָ אֵת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה אֵלַי הַלָּיְלָה ויאמרו וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ דַּבֵּר: ס (יז) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל הֲלוֹא אִם קָטֹן אַתָּה בְּעֵינֶיךָ רֹאשׁ שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָתָּה וַיִּמְשָׁחֲךָ ה לְמֶלֶךְ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל: (יח) וַיִּשְׁלָחֲךָ ה' בְּדָרֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר לֵךְ וְהַחֲרַמְתָּה אֶת הַחַטָּאִים אֶת עֲמָלֵק וְנִלְחַמְתָּ בוֹ עַד כַּלּוֹתָם אֹתָם: (יט) וְלָמָּה לֹא שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹל ה' וַתַּעַט אֶל הַשָּׁלָל וַתַּעַשׂ הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי ה': ס (כ) וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל שְׁמוּאֵל **אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתִּי בְּקוֹל ה וָאֵלֵךְ בַּדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר שְׁלָחַנִי ה וָאָבִיא אֶת אֲגַג מֶלֶךְ עֲמָלֵק וְאֶת עֲמָלֵק הֶחֱרַמְתִּי**: (כא) וַיִּקַּח הָעָם מֵהַשָּׁלָל צֹאן וּבָקָר רֵאשִׁית הַחֵרֶם לִזְבֹּחַ לַיקֹוָק אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּגִּלְגָּל: (כב) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל הַחֵפֶץ לַיקֹוָק בְּעֹלוֹת וּזְבָחִים כִּשְׁמֹעַ בְּקוֹל ה הִנֵּה שְׁמֹעַ מִזֶּבַח טוֹב לְהַקְשִׁיב מֵחֵלֶב אֵילִים: (כג) כִּי חַטַּאת קֶסֶם מֶרִי וְאָוֶן וּתְרָפִים הַפְצַר יַעַן מָאַסְתָּ אֶת דְּבַר ה וַיִּמְאָסְךָ מִמֶּלֶךְ: ס

The word of the LORD then came to Samuel: “I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned away from Me and has not carried out My commands.” Samuel was distressed and he entreated the LORD all night long. Early in the morning Samuel went to meet Saul. Samuel was told, “Saul went to Carmel, where he erected a monument for himself; then he left and went on down to Gilgal.” When Samuel came to Saul, Saul said to him, “Blessed are you of the LORD! I have fulfilled the LORD’s command.” “Then what,” demanded Samuel, “is this bleating of sheep in my ears, and the lowing of oxen that I hear?” Saul answered, “They were brought from the Amalekites, for the troops spared the choicest of the sheep and oxen for sacrificing to the LORD your G-d. And we destroyed the rest.” Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night!” “Speak,” he replied. And Samuel said, “You may look small to yourself, but you are the head of the tribes of Israel. The LORD anointed you king over Israel, and the LORD sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and destroy the sinful Amalekites; make war on them until you have exterminated them.’ Why did you disobey the LORD and swoop down on the spoil in defiance of the LORD’s will?” Saul said to Samuel, **“But I did obey the LORD! I performed the mission on which the LORD sent me: I captured King Agag of Amalek, and I destroyed Amalek, and the troops took from the spoil some sheep and oxen—the best of what had been destroyed—to sacrifice to the LORD your G-d at Gilgal.”** But Samuel said: “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obedience to the LORD’s command? Surely, obedience is better than sacrifice, Compliance than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, Defiance, like the iniquity of teraphim. Because you rejected the LORD’s command, He has rejected you as king.”

**Shaul’s Repentance and Rejection**

1. **Shemuel I 15:24-31 (tr. adaptation of JPS 1985, from sefaria.org)**

(כד) וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל שְׁמוּאֵל חָטָאתִי כִּי עָבַרְתִּי אֶת פִּי ה וְאֶת דְּבָרֶיךָ כִּי יָרֵאתִי אֶת הָעָם וָאֶשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלָם:(כה) וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא אֶת חַטָּאתִי וְשׁוּב עִמִּי וְאֶשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַה. (כו) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל שָׁאוּל לֹא אָשׁוּב עִמָּךְ כִּי מָאַסְתָּה אֶת דְּבַר ה וַיִּמְאָסְךָ ה מִהְיוֹת מֶלֶךְ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל: ס (כז) וַיִּסֹּב שְׁמוּאֵל לָלֶכֶת וַיַּחֲזֵק בִּכְנַף מְעִילוֹ וַיִּקָּרַע:(כח) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו שְׁמוּאֵל קָרַע ה אֶת מַמְלְכוּת יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעָלֶיךָ הַיּוֹם וּנְתָנָהּ לְרֵעֲךָ הַטּוֹב מִמֶּךָּ:(כט) וְגַם נֵצַח יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יְשַׁקֵּר וְלֹא יִנָּחֵם כִּי לֹא אָדָם הוּא לְהִנָּחֵם:(ל) וַיֹּאמֶר חָטָאתִי עַתָּה כַּבְּדֵנִי נָא נֶגֶד זִקְנֵי עַמִּי וְנֶגֶד יִשְׂרָאֵל וְשׁוּב עִמִּי וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֵיתִי לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ:(לא) וַיָּשָׁב שְׁמוּאֵל אַחֲרֵי שָׁאוּל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ שָׁאוּל לַה': ס

Saul said to Samuel, “I did wrong to transgress the LORD’s command and your instructions; but I was afraid of the troops and I yielded to them. Please, forgive my offense and come back with me, and I will bow low to the LORD.” But Samuel said to Saul, “I will not go back with you; for you have rejected the LORD’s command, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel.” As Samuel turned to leave, Saul seized the corner of his robe, and it tore. And Samuel said to him, “The LORD has this day torn the kingship over Israel away from you and has given it to another who is worthier than you. Moreover, the Glory of Israel does not deceive or change His mind, for He is not human that He should change His mind.”

But [Saul] pleaded, “I did wrong. Please, honor me in the presence of the elders of my people and in the presence of Israel, and come back with me until I have bowed low to the LORD your G-d.” So Samuel followed Saul back, and Saul bowed low to the LORD.

**Shaul’s Failure: The Limits of Questioning Divine Obligation**

1. **Talmud, Yoma 22b (tr. adapted from sefaria.org)**

בשעה שאמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לשאול ולך 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 זאל תהי צדיק הרבה.

At the time when the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Saul: “Now go and attack Amalek” (I Samuel 15:3), Saul countered and said: Now, if on account of one life that is taken the Torah said to bring a heifer whose neck is broken to a barren valley, all the more so must I have pity and not take all these Amalekite lives. And he further reasoned: If the men have sinned, in what way have the animals sinned? And if the adults have sinned, in what way have the children sinned? A Divine Voice then came forth and said to him: “Do not be overly righteous” (Ecclesiastes 7:16).

1. **Audio Recording on war with Amalek**

https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/915720/rabbi-mordechai-torczyner/eternal-war-with-amalek/

1. **Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, *Developing a Torah Personality*,**

**https://etzion.org.il/en/being-frum-and-being-good-relationship-between-religion-and-morality**

This is not to say that in such a context there is no room for moral sensibility. Surely, in relating to Halakha, including those areas which one may find morally difficult, there is some role for conscience, some role for the goodness in us, particularly in an interpretive capacity. Conscience does and legitimately can have a role in helping us to understand the content and substance of the *tzav*. In the Midrash, Chazal depict Avraham’s thoughts during his three-day journey to the akeida. He tried to understand God's command: perhaps God meant something else. Surely, one can, and presumably should, walk the last mile in order to try in every way to avoid a conflict. But even when one has walked the last mile, at times the conflict may remain, and—as in the akeida—the decisive element is clear. It was only a tzav of God, or of the angel sent by God, which was able to countermand the command to sacrifice Yitzchak…

But, of course, the resolution must be clear, and the grappling must all be done within the parameters of the understanding that, however much I wrestle, I do not for a moment question the authenticity or the authority of the tzav. I do not judge God. I assume, a priori, that “His deeds are perfect, for all His ways are just; a faithful God, without iniquity, righteous and upright is He” (Devarim 32:4). If He commands, “Take your son and offer him as a sacrifice,” then it must be good (in a sense which perhaps, at the moment, I do not understand). But within the context of my a priori obedient submission, I may try to understand. I may grope, I may ask, and I may ultimately seek resolution.

1. **Malbim Shemuel I 15:9**

(ט) ויחמל שאול. …והנה לא הזהירו ה' בל יחוס או בל ירחם על עמלק, כי אלה מתכונות נפשיות, שהגם שיקיים מצות ה' בכ"ז יצוייר שיעורר רחמיו ויכאיב לבו במיתת ילדים רכים, או יחוס וידאב לבו בהשחיתו השלל שהיה יכול להנות ממנו. אבל החמלה הוא ענין מחשביי, שחושב שאין מן הראוי והיושר להשחיתם ושלא בצדק צוהו הנביא דבר זה, זה עון פלילי, כי רוצה להתחכם נגד ה'… ובאמת בזה נכשל שאול שחמל על אגג ועל מיטב הצאן, ובזה הראה כי האמונה מתרופפת בידו, שאל"כ לא היה חושב שראוי לחמול על אויבי ה', וע"י מחשבתו זאת חטאו גם בפועל ולא אבו החרימם:

Behold, G-d didn’t warn against having pity or mercy on Amalex. For these are natural characteristics, that even if one fulfills the commands of G-d, nevertheless it’s possible that his mercy will be awakened and his heart will be pained by the death of small children, or he will have pity and be saddened when the spoils he could have benefited from are destroyed. But, *chemlah*, is a cognitive concept, that he thinks that it’s not right to destroy them, and that the prophet was unrighteous to command such an act. This is a horrific sin, for he wants to be wise against G-d…In this way Shaul stumbled in his *chemlah* on Agag and the best sheep, and he showed that his belief was weak, for otherwise he wouldn’t have thought that its fitting to have *chemlah* for the enemies of G-d. Because of this through, he also sinned with his actions and didn’t destroy them.