

# Could Hitler Have Repented? Rabbinic Perspectives

Rabbi Tovia Singer:

At a certain point when people are so wicked, you have to remember that repentance is a gift. You know people ask, could Hitler have repented in the bunker in Berlin? Where he and his wife Eva Braun (yimach shemam) [may their name be obliterated], committed suicide at the end of World War 2. Could Hitler repent? So the answer is, it's not that I had a conversation with God or I hear voices or anything, but repentance is a gift and someone so evil of course God takes away such a gift. Because you know, at that point... But the key is up to a certain point God hopes, hopes, hopes, hopes, hopes, that the person repents.<sup>1</sup>

Until a certain point, there are some people who are so wicked [inaudible] that God could harden their heart. Hitler was not going to repent in the bunker in Berlin. But free will is a gift from Hashem, but it's real, it's genuine, we have free will, and God's foreknowledge does not determine...<sup>2</sup>

Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz: (2023)

Pharaoh did not die by the splitting of the Red Sea, it's interesting that Pharaoh did survive and Pharaoh indeed had a second career as the king of Ninveh in the story of Yonah where he brought a whole city to teshuvah [repentance]. Although it may have been a short-lived teshuvah but he brought a whole city to teshuvah. Pharaoh had a second act of being a mekarev [bring closer]. It was almost like Ohr Somayach gave Pharaoh a job to teach, of course he was teaching Goyim, our non-Jewish division, maybe we ought to start a Noachide division?

So Pharaoh did have a chance to do teshuvah and Pharaoh took advantage of it. When we look at somebody like Adolf Hitler (yimach shemo), Hitler just died and there was no possibility of teshuvah. So I'll give you two short answers. Answer number one is you know you just assumed in your equation Pharaoh and Hitler are the same, well maybe there's a difference. Remember the Torah says a strange thing, the Torah says, you shall not despise an Egyptian for you were strangers in their land. They took care of you. Now that's very, very odd. What do you mean they took care of us?? They enslaved us! But

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<sup>1</sup> Tenak Talk (TaNaCh), '219) 73 - Let's Get Biblical Q&A with Rabbi Tovia Singer', (YouTube, 26/9/2016, 18:14)

<[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLHyvPxY\\_6o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLHyvPxY_6o)>.

<sup>2</sup> Tenak Talk (TaNaCh), '284) 88 - Let's Get's Biblical Q&A with Rabbi Tovia Singer', (YouTube, 3/4/2017, 1:36:28)

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMv2UYCnYHs&t=4883s>>.

apparently the concept was, they still, you know, gave us reasonable food and shelter, etc. You know, there was something which, in other words, I don't know, but it seems from that description that living in Egypt was not a concentration camp, the way that Nazi Germany the way that, not Nazi Germany, the way Nazi Europe was. So that's one answer, the second answer is Hitler committed suicide, meaning to say, you know, Hitler himself made a decision that would make it impossible for him to do teshuvah. Now God is not going to interfere with your decisions...everything is in the hands of Heaven except for yiras shamayim [fear of Heaven].

Hitler made a decision to preclude the possibility of any type of teshuvah that he would ever do. A third reason, let me give you a third reason is, there was a special reason to keep Pharaoh alive that would not apply to Hitler. Pharaoh was an eyewitness to supernatural miracles that happened over a year and as a result, keeping him alive, he would be able to tell the Umot HaOlam [Nations of the world]. Now the Jewish people knew it but Jewish people, people will say, 'Oh that's what the Jews say.' It was important to have a non-Jew, a hostile non-Jew who saw those miracles and knew that they happened, he would be the witness to the nations of the world. Hitler was the opposite, I mean unfortunately during the Holocaust we were not zocheh [meritorious] to those types of miracles. So there was no particular edus [witness/testimony] that God needed Hitler to give because Hitler did not see any unique miracles that help the Jewish people, so that I think would be the difference.<sup>3</sup>

Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz: (2022)

So the first question is easier than the second question. That is, it says the descendants of Haman became teachers, they converted and they became teachers of Torah in Bnei Brak. Well first of all the question becomes Haman is Amalek, if Haman is Amalek, supposed to kill Amalek so how can a descendant of Amalek become Jewish?

So the truth is that according to many Rishonim even an Amalekite can convert if they're sincere, and you won't kill them. That's actually an answer. So in terms of the ability of the descendants of Hitler, I understand that, well it's not a descendant of Hitler but Hitler has a nephew who converted to Judaism who teaches in an Israeli university. He lives here, Hitler has a nephew who lives here and he converted. I'm not sure if he converted orthodox or not but he's here and I think he changed his name but in recent years he's

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<sup>3</sup> Ohr Somayach, Q&A- Genetic Modification, Smartphones & AI Halachic Decisions (HaRav Yitzchak Breitowitz)', (YouTube, 7/5/2023, 58:40) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSr2J1vtLbg&list=PLPuQm7551c3Bm8vOrgZGasup74VsSYFyz&index=43>>.

gone public and he talks about this and the like. And it is entirely possible for a descendant of a rasha [evil person] to become a righteous person, that's really not philosophically problematical.

What is a little bit more problematical is the rasha himself. Nevuzaradan who was Nebuchadnezzar's general and he murdered hundreds of thousands of Jews and finally he himself realized that if God is punishing the Jewish people because they murdered some one person, what's going to be with me when I murder hundreds of thousands of people? So he left Nebuchadnezzar's army, he ran away, he converted, he became a Jew, he became accepted in Klal Yisrael [all of Israel].

I mean, let's imagine, it's a thought experiment that's very uncomfortable. Let's imagine that Hitler decided to convert and become Jewish, he decided to do teshuvah. Would we accept, yimach shemo, would we accept Adolf Hitler as a Jew? I have to admit it's mighty hard to imagine but, but if I ask myself halachically is it impossible, I don't think it's halachically impossible.

Now granted you have an issue of Amalek or whether Hitler is Amalek, that's a whole other question. Because Rav Chaim Soloveitchik said anyone who wants to destroy the Jewish people is Amalek. On the other end halachically that's not the definition. Halachically, Amalek is the descending from a specific nation and there's no real evidence that Germany is the nation of Amalek. I mean some say yes but, no, that's not a done, that's not an automatically accepted view.

So what would stop a rasha, now again if he's not sincere, if he's doing it to escape something of course we wouldn't accept it as a fake conversion; but is there the possibility of genuine contrition? Genuine teshuvah? Now I want to differentiate. Teshuvah is not it's not cost free. I mean if Hitler were to do teshuvah that doesn't mean he's not going to burn in Gehinnom, that doesn't mean he's not going to suffer, that doesn't mean there's not going to be awesome punishments. Teshuvah is not going to erase all the evil that was done. But it does give a path to ultimate, to eventual redemption and the Rambam does write, the Rambam writes about murder, the Rambam writes a murderer, even a single murderer, even a murder of a single person does not have a share in the World to Come. But the Rambam says he can do teshuvah. So the Rambam does say there can be teshuvah for murder. It doesn't mean there is no punishment, there's teshuvah. Well, if there is teshuvah for murder, can there be teshuvah for mass murder? I don't know, I mean I admit to you feel very strange saying it. But just within the overall philosophy of Judaism, the

Rambam writes teshuvah is for everything. Teshuvah is for everything if, if, of course, it is sincere.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ohr Somayach, 'Q&A- Mazal, Korbanos & Cherem (Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz)'; (YouTube, 12/2/2022, 1:09:44)  
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYv7skunGes&list=PLPuQm7551c3Bm8vOrgZGasup74VsSYFyz&index=6>>.