

Shabbat Zachor: Remembering & “Blotting Out” Amalek

Amalek as “Other”

1) R. Levi said in the name of R. Hama bar Hanina: The Name of God will not be complete and the throne of Adonai will not be whole as long as Amalek's seed remains in the world. Only after the seed of Amalek is blotted out from the world will the throne of Adonai be whole and the Name of God complete. (*Tanhuma B, Ki Tetze* 18)

2) *These are the clans of the children of Esau...The sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam, and Lotan's sister was Timna* (Gen. 36): What is the purpose of writing, “*And Lotan's sister was Timna*”? Timna was a royal princess...Desiring to convert (to Judaism), 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 descended, who afflicted Israel. Why so? Because they should not have repulsed her. (Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 99b)

3) Shabbat Zachor falls most years on *parshat Tetzaveh*. And we can explain it thus, that the matter of Amalek had to do with “cooling” (*l'karer*)—it says, “who *korcha* on the way,” “cooled you on the way” (Deut. 25:18)—to raise doubt and to instill despair and uncertainty in the Israelites. The beginning of *Tetzaveh* has to do with the oil for lighting the menorah, and the end has to do with incense and the lamps. Oil and incense gladden and make joyful the heart, and joy awakens and makes life seem new—and this is the opposite of Amalek. (*Shem Mishmu'el, Rabbi Shmuel Bornstein, in Itturei Torah*)

Amalek as Us

4) Not only are Jews commanded to wipe out Amalek, who is the descendant of Esau, but each Jew has to wipe out that negative part that is called Amalek hidden in his or her heart. So long as the descendants of Amalek are in the world – and each of us is also a small world, so when the power of evil in each of us arises (that which leads us to sin) Amalek is still in the world – the reminder (to wipe out Amalek) calls out from the Torah. (*Kedushat Levi*, R. Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev)

5) We have already written about the warning regarding memory, as it is written (Deut. 25, 19): “you shall surely erase *the memory of Amalek* from beneath the heaven, do not forget.” This means that a person must erase and uproot and nullify from within all memory of the *yetzer ra*, the evil impulse in him, that which arouses him and reminds him of appetites and the needs of this world in vain and insipid things, and also during prayer and Torah study when a person sets his heart to be correct and stand before the blessed Name, it confuses him with its trickery and reminds him of worries about this world and the needs of his household and livelihood. Therefore even what he learns at that time is a kind of forgetting, because he cannot serve in joy. Therefore the Bible warns, “you shall surely wipe out *the memory of Amalek*,” which is the *yetzer ra*—because it reminds you and confuses you, wipe it from the tablet of your heart. By so doing you will not forget all the words of Torah that you learn. Rather, this will rise up in one's memory, that one is about to serve God. (*Tiferet Shlomo, Rabbi Shlomo Hacohen of Radomsk*).

(over)

6) The *Ma'or va'Shemesh* (Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Halevi Epstein) re-reads the phrase *zakhor et asher asah lekha Amalek* (“remember that which Amalek did to you”) to mean “recall that you made yourself Amalek.” Internalizing the polarity of good and evil in the world, we must soberly assess the extent to which we are so often our own worst enemies. By grappling with that challenge, let us emerge as heroes, not villains. (Rabbi Andy Sugarman)

7) '***Do not forget***' - Do not forget this thing, if the day comes and you will want to become like Amalek, and, like Amalek, you fail to recognize your obligation and do not know God. Rather, you only seek opportunities, in matters small or great, to exploit your advantage in order to harm your fellows. Do not forget this if the day comes and you ask to relieve your heart of its role and its mission as Israel that you have taken upon yourself amongst humanity. Do not envy the laurels which a foolish world throws to those happy with having destroyed the happiness of others. Remember the tear-soaked soil which nurtures the laurels of those wreathes. Do not forget this thing when the day comes and you yourself suffer Amalek's violence and coarseness. Keep standing straight! Preserve the humanity and values of justice that you learned from your God. The future belongs to them, and in the end humanity and justice will overcome coarseness and violence. You yourself were sent in order to announce and to bring near – with your very example – that overcoming and that future. *Do not forget* – and in order that you not forget, remember from time to time, renew in your heart the memory of Amalek and what you have been told of its future. (Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Germany, c. 1860)