**Remembering Amalek – Inside & Out**

**Source sheet prepared by Rabbi Toba Spitzer**

*“Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt; how he surprised you on the march, when you were weak and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear,* *undeterred by fear of God.*” (Deut. 25:17-18)

**What is “Amalek”?**

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) Evidently the criterion of God-fearingness (*yirat Elohim*, awe of God)…may be measured by the attitude...to the weak and the stranger. Where the fear/awe of God is lacking, the stranger who is homeless in a foreign land is liable to be murdered…In this context, Amalek is condemned for killing the weak and smiting the feeble because “*he feared not God*.” This is evidently the reason why we were commanded to blot out the memory of Amalek, since they came and fell upon the defenseless and weary without any pretext whatsoever… “Amalek” against whom the Almighty declared eternal war is not any more an ethnic or racial concept, but is the archetype of the wanton aggressor who smites the weak and defenseless in every generation. (Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Deuteronomy*)

3) God, blessed be, does not like wars in the world; on the contrary, “Shalom” is the name of the Blessed Holy One. One obligatory war did God decree and that is the war against Amalek, the war against wars in general. (R. Moshe Avigdor Amiel, born in Lithuania, Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, d. 1946)

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 do wrong/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, late 18th c.)

**These texts imagine Amalek in very different ways: as a force that keeps God Godself from being whole; as injustice and war; as internal tendencies towards doing wrong.**

* **If you had to choose one (or two!) that most resonate with you, what would you choose?**
* **How do you imagine evil in the world—as residing in particular people or groups of people? As universal human tendencies? Something else?**

**How should we deal with “Amalek”?**