

## Shabbat Zachor: We Are on the Amalekite Continuum

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Hello friends,

The Shabbat before Purim is called "Shabbat Zachor" - Shabbat of remembering. In preparation for the annual encounter with Haman which will take place next Wednesday at Veahavta and throughout the Jewish world, we are called upon to **remember** what Amalek did to us, and we are required to **remember** and to commemorate it "under the skies."

Who is Amalek?

Although a tribe named Amalek is mentioned in the period of Abraham, it is more familiar to us as the grandson of Esau, Jacob's twin brother. So no, Amalek is not the ultimate "other," as many modernists may choose to define him today. Rather, he is our cousin, of our own flesh.

Here is the Amalekite sin:

(Deuteronomy 25, 17-19) **Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt. How, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. Therefore, when the LORD your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!**

Amalek took advantage of the weakness and confusion of the Israelites as they emerged from Egypt. They took advantage of their exhaustion and thirst. Worse still, they went after the weak and old who trailed behind.

Many nations have fought the Israelites, but no other nation has earned the "honor" of being forever doomed to be remembered in such a way.

Why? What distinguishes "Amalek"? And since Shabbat Zachor is upon us, what exactly are we supposed to remember?

Throughout the generations, Jews have identified Amalek with every enemy that sought to destroy us - the Crusaders in Europe, the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal, the Cossacks in Eastern Europe, the Nazis in Germany, and so on.

And not only are those who hate Israel called Amalek, Jews also labeled one another with this denigrating title.

The Hassidic movement was among the first to see the term "Amalek" as an internal quality and not as an external enemy, such as a hostile nation or a rivaling religious stream.

In the spiritual world, everything that unites symbolizes the good, and everything that splits and places a wedge between all parts of creation symbolizes evil. Amalek did not come and fight against the people of Israel as other nations did. It struck a wedge between the people and then devoured the weak.

This sounds like a trivial matter, but it is not.

It sounds like a trivial matter, because it happens all the time, it happens to all of us. We all sometimes take advantage of someone's weakness - a person, an organization, or a company - to make gains at their expense.

Amalek is the quality of weakening another. Every separation we make always weakens. The expression "divide and conquer", for example, comes from the aggressive world of "Amalek". Every time we weaken someone by splitting up his inner or outer forces - undermining his confidence, casting doubt on him - we are a little Amalekite.

Amalekite strength uses fear. It knows no courage, heroism or greatness.

The story of Purim, which is celebrated next week, is in fact a third round in the ongoing campaign between Amalek and Israel. The first was in the Exodus (mentioned above), the second was the war between Agag, King of Amalek, and Saul, King of Israel. The third takes place in Persia, between Haman the Agagite - that is, the direct descendant of Agag - and Mordecai, the direct descendant of King Saul. This is why this Shabbat is "Shabbat Zachor".

The description of Haman in the Book of Esther is a classic Amalekite description:

(Esther Chapter 3, 1-9) **Some time afterward, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite; he raised him and seated him higher than any of his fellow officials. All the king's courtiers in the palace gate knelt and bowed low to Haman, for such was the king's order concerning him; but Mordecai would not kneel or bow low... Haman then said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any**

**other people and who do not obey the king's laws; and it is not in Your Majesty's interest to tolerate them. If it please Your Majesty, let an edict be drawn for their destruction, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the stewards for deposit in the royal treasury."**

Haman is a small man (internally, not physically). His ego is distorted. People with damaged egos are very dangerous. As a small man, he had an obsession with size. He was obsessed, for example, with the exact height of the tree on which he would hang Mordecai. He felt so small that Achashverosh had to raise him, to carry him above all the other ministers. But that was not enough for him, because little people never feel good enough about themselves. He therefore demanded that everyone bow down to him - an honor reserved only for the king. By doing so, he demands that everyone reduce themselves before him. A small person hates people who are perceived as bigger than him. He can't tolerate people whose ways are different from his own. They threaten him, and he will do everything to destroy them.

With his Amalekite quality, Haman sensed the weakness of the Jewish people as a result of the Babylonian exile. He saw that they were scattered. And worst of all, that their customs and religion were different! Because they were weak and defenseless, it would be easy to destroy them and steal their property and money!

### **The Service of the Heart**

We all live in an Amalekite world - a world that is competitive, weakening and demeaning. You can say that this quality - Amalek - is in all of us, and we can all be found on the Amalekite continuum. Every time we weaken another person (even if that's not our intention), or put someone down, or disparage him, we bring a little of Amalek into the world. It is so natural that we never think of it as having a little Amalek within us.

When Esther was persuaded to risk her life and come to the rescue of her people, she asked only one thing of Mordechai: (Esther chapter 4, 16) **"Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast in my behalf; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!"** If Haman senses our weakness, and enjoys seeing the Jewish people so dispersed and fragmented, giving him the power to split and weaken us further, Esther (by her nature, apparently) goes for the exact opposite: She knows that the only strength she can recruit is standing against the forces of separation and fragmentation with unity.

This, then is the work in our hearts:

1. **To unite our forces** - mainly our inner forces, but also the external ones. This is perhaps the most important spiritual work of all - to know that we ARE essentially one continuous entity, not a fragmented conglomerate of human particles. To do so, it is necessary to accept, embrace and if necessary also strengthen all the parts that make up who we are - those we love and those we don't; To see how every part within us - without exception - has a role and requires space. It is likewise crucial to recognize that everyone in our surroundings has a role and a place that is reserved only for him / her.
2. **To always seek to empower** - ourselves and others - and not to weaken. Empower ourselves not by weakening the other. Not to take advantage of another person's weakness.

Amalek appears when a person is not "God-fearing." We are God-fearing when we are confident, aware of our powers, recognize our intrinsic right to be. A person with self-worth recognizes his genuine weight - in Hebrew, it is called Kavod.

If we recognize our inner weight and value - inner and not outer - then everything will fall into its rightful place: we will not need to weaken others and we will not seek to split their inner unity. We will then be immune to others attempting to weaken us and seeking to place a wedge between us and ourselves.

We will pay attention to our inner feelings of meekness and grandeur, we will heal ourselves, and we will be surprised to discover how everyone around us seems to grow and evolve with us.

Shabbat Shalom,  
A Shabbat of empowering memories, followed by a redemptive Purim!

Elisha