Remember what Amalek did to you… He did not fear G-d. When G-d gives you rest from all your surrounding enemies… you shall blot out the name of Amalek… Do not forget! (25:17-19)

We read in the Hagada Shel Pesach that "in every generation they rise against us to destroy us, but the Holy One… saves us from their hands." So, out of all our enemies, why is the nation of Amalek, who himself was the grandson of Eisav, singled out as the worst of all our attackers? Indeed, as the Midrash Tanchuma derives (Ki Teitzei 11, in reference to Sh'mot 17:16), the Throne of G-d is not complete until Amalek is destroyed. In addition, "You shall blot out the memory of Amalek" is seen as a mitzva, yet in the same verse it says: "You must not forget!"

The Meshech Chochma suggests a possible translation of V'LO YAREI ELOKIM - "did not fear G-d" - as referring to the People of Israel, and in the present tense. The Meshech Chochma joins it with words that follow: "You do not fear G-d. When G-d gives you rest from all your surrounding enemies." It is then that G-d will stir the Amelekites to attack you, as He did when they were travelling in the wilderness. "Do not forget" can mean: "You must not forget G-d", and what He requires from you. But continue to live according to His teachings; do not be of those who turn to G-d only in times of trouble, and forget Him when things are going well. If you always bear this in mind, the name of Amalek will no longer be of importance; they will sink into oblivion from the beneath the heavens as G-d will have no reason to promote them to attack Israel.

Why particularly Amalek; what makes him different from other possible attackers? The Ramchal (Otzrot Ramchal 128) offers a kabbalistic dimension. Of all the negative forces on Earth, he explains, there are none so threatening to Am Yisrael as Amalek. The Amalekites' dark forces, in his words, "paralyze the fundamental forces of K'dusha and prevent connection between Israel and G-d." As long as the channel between G-d and Israel does not function, there can be no rest for Israel. In several places elsewhere in his commentary on the Torah, the Ramchal explains that the eternity of Am Yisrael is due to the fact we are independent of the forces that see great nations rise and fall. It is our having that channel of connection with G-d that overrides those forces. Spiritually, it helps to
explain why our people, Baruch Hashem, continue to flourish after 4000 years.

Amalek's particular power to block those forces may be seen by combining his spiritual root with his behavior.

His spiritual root belonged to Avraham Avinu and Yitzchak Avinu, although modified by Eisav and his son, Elifaz (B'reishit 36:12). Thus Amalek shared much of the same spiritual root as Am Yisrael. This put him on a similar wavelength: it was the closeness of their roots that gave him the spiritual commonality to threaten the very spiritual fundamentals of the eternity of Am Yisrael. Amalek knew his "relatives", their strengths and their limitations, and which particular values and vices G-d hates most.

These were exemplified in his behavior. His behavior, it may be suggested, was Sin'at Chinam, hatred without cause: exemplified by previously attacking Am Yisrael for no reason, when they were physically weak and tired (25:18). Indeed, G-d's utter rejection of Sin'at Chinam is reflected in being a cause of the Churban Bayit Sheni. Sin'at Chinam is behaving to other people in that way that perpetuates Amalek. And those who practice Sin'at Chinam may be seen as the disciples of Amalek.

For it is that Sin'at Chinam which is implied in the way the Torah elsewhere introduces Amalek: VAYAVO AMALEK: Amalek came (Sh'mot 17:8). He fought with Israel in Refidim. Unlike virtually all the other oppressors of the Israelites, the attack had no reason, neither stated nor implied. Amalek just came. He attacked and he fought. In contrast to Par'oh and later the Canaanites, the people of Amalek had nothing to lose through the Israelites leaving Egypt, travelling through the desert and entering the Promised Land. It seems that there was only one reason that the Amalekites went out their way: hatred for the Am Yisrael. Nothing else.

There are two types of hatred. The first type is for a particular reason: real or imagined. The Egyptians could hardly have been pleased in losing their slaves. It would have been bad for their ego, and bad for their economy. The Canaanites could have hardly have been pleased in being occupied by what in their eyes was a foreign power, however justified in the eyes of G-d. And later on in our history it would be fair to say that in most cases when there were anti-Jewish decrees, the Gentiles themselves genuinely, if erroneously,
believed that the Jews conducted themselves in such a way as to be a threat to interests of other peoples and/or classes. That does not justify hatred, but at least it does not compare with the second type, Sin'at Chinam, the groundless hatred from Amalek.

The first type of hatred is therefore regrettable, but understandable. The second type, Sin'at Chinam, is of such a nature that there is no room for it in the Creation. Therefore the Torah, in the broader sense declares that such behavior must be wiped out, and that one must not forget the absolute evil of the doctrine of Amalek: Sin'at Chinam.

Ed. note: Congratulations and Mazal Tov to Dr Jacob Solomon on his receiving his hard-earned doctorate. HATZLACHA RABA.