

# SEARCHING FOR HAMAN

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

The Gemara (Chullin 139b) asks, "Where is there an allusion to Haman in the Torah? As it is written (Bereishis 3:11), 'Have you perhaps eaten from the Tree (Ha-min ha-eitz) from which I told you not to eat?... ' The word Ha-min ("perhaps from") is spelled (in Hebrew) with the same letters as Haman. At first inspection, this appears to be a simple play on words. Upon reflection, however, we will find that there is more to this "simple allusion" than meets the eye.

I have perhaps done a misdeed in my translation of the above Gemara. More accurately, the Gemara's question was: Where do we find Haman in the Torah? If, in its answer, the Gemara points us towards this verse, we may assume that it embodies the very essence of the mysterious Jew-hater called Haman.

Haman, we know, was a descendent of Amalek. This is the same Amalek about whom the Torah instructs us (Devarim 25:19), "You must obliterate any recollection of Amalek from beneath the Heavens - do not forget!" Amalek is the nation who, upon seeing a nation finally freed from the bonds of slavery, takes the initiative of attacking them while they were still weak and feeble, in order to usurp from them the dream of being taken to their homeland. Amalek represents dissention, conflict, strife, and war. Amalek - sefarim write, is symbolic of everything bad, evil, wicked, and corrupt. And as long as Amalek survives, we continue to suffer the consequences. Because there is a little Amalek in each of us.

It is no coincidence that Haman, one of Amalek's most fervent emissaries, finds his place in the Torah together with the primordial Snake. According to the Kabbalists, man was originally created perfect. He had no innate will to do wrong. If man were to sin, it would not be due to any fault from within, but rather to enticement and seduction from without. This was the role of the Snake. Once man sinned, however, evil was drawn inside man. Our task was no longer to resist temptation from outside sources; the enemy had breached the walls - the battlezone was now from within.

So when we speak of the zeideh Amalek, and his einikel (grandson) Haman, and we stamp our feet and clap our hands, we are reminded of the Haman who threatens us to this very day. Our own personal Haman.

Let us then take a moment to examine this Haman character. Material bliss, it seems, was among Haman's blessings. In exchange for permission to kill the Jews, Haman offered King Achashveirosh a cool ten thousand kikar of silver. Just to put that in perspective: The Jews in the desert were

commanded to give a half-silver shekel each. The proceeds of these half-shekels would be used to purchase communal sacrifices for the entire year, after which a new collection was taken. In parshas Pekudei, the Torah gives a total of the silver collected as a result of the half-shekel census: One hundred kikar. One kikar of gold was enough to fashion the menorah, which stood so tall that Aaron needed to stand upon a ladder just to clean out its lamps. Haman offered ten thousand kikar. Haman was no pauper.

Nor was he lacking in power. He had ascended to the highest echelons of the Persian Empire, then the most powerful monarchy in the world. Haman himself gives expression to his tremendous power and wealth (Esther 5:11-12): "Haman told (his wife and friends) of his glorious wealth, his many sons, and all the power that the King had granted him; that he had elevated him above all the officials and royal servants. 'Moreover, Queen Esther invited only me to the banquet that she prepared, and I am invited again tomorrow together with the King.'" There was but one singular item which obstructed Haman's bliss, preventing him from reaching the pinnacle of accomplishment and success; a lone Mordechai refused to bow down to him.

So, what do you call a man who has everything - wealth, power, recognition - with but one tiny kink in his armour? Let's get it from the horses mouth. The above verse continues (5:13), "Yet all this means nothing to me as long as I see that Jew Mordechai sitting at the King's gate (and refusing to bow down to me)!" I have nothing! My wealth, my power, my reputation, my family - it's all worthless, because it's flawed. My bliss is incomplete; therefore I have nothing.

Come on Haman! - It's all worth nothing to you? The riches, the power, your position? All because one man refuses to recognize you? Perhaps life's not perfect; maybe something's missing. But nothing! Aren't you exaggerating your situation? No - says Haman - I have nothing, nothing at all. Nothing I have has any meaning; because of this one imperfection.

There's a name I have for such spoiled, self-centered cry babies. For people who have everything, yet whine and fuss over the smallest and most insignificant imperfections and flaws in their o-so-fragile lives. For individuals who, no matter how well things may go, and no matter how numerous their gifts, always find something to kvetch about. I usually call them - well, me.

Why is it that our focus is constantly fixed on the small imperfections in our lives? If we were to make a list of all the gifts Hashem gives us on a daily basis, the small and the big and everything in between, and then think of everything missing in our lives, things we really need, yet don't have, we would be overcome with gratitude and joy. How many times do we allow our concentration during tefilla (prayer) to be diverted by the most trivial and insignificant matters? I wanted this and didn't get it... Something broke or was lost... So-and-so said such-and such... We stand before the Almighty, our lips should ostensibly be overflowing with praise and thanksgiving for all we have; and yet we have nothing. We are unable to feel joy and gratitude, because something just happened, or is about to happen, or might happen...

This is the voice of Haman from within. This is (at least one aspect of) the Amalek whose recollection we are required to obliterate. It is the voice of ingratitude and of self-centeredness. It is the voice which says, "All this is nothing!" Adam too was given the world on a silver- platter. There was only one thing he couldn't have; the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. And yet this was too much to bear. "Perhaps from the one tree (Ha-min=Haman) which I have commanded you not to eat - you have eaten?!" So as we ponder the many messages of Purim this Shabbos, perhaps take a moment to think of all the things we do have to be thankful for. Focus on the good, and the bad will wither in comparison.

Have a good Shabbos, and a joyous Purim!

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