

HAMAN'S OFFER OF SILVER SHEKELS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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The Symbolism of Haman's Offer of Silver Shekels

The Megillah [Esther 3:9] states that Haman offered to increase the King's coffers by 10,000 kikar silver in exchange for the right to get rid of the Jews. (Tosfos in Tractate Megillah [16a] indicates that this was a half Shekel for every Jewish person.) The simple analysis of Haman's offer is that Haman was afraid that Achashverosh would object to the loss of Jewish tax revenue if he killed them all. To pre-empt that financial objection, Haman was ready to sweeten the deal for the King by making an offer of ten thousand kikar silver.

On the metaphysical level, however, the Rabbis tell us that Haman was trying to negate the merit of the Jews' annual half Shekel contribution to the Temple's upkeep. The Gemara [Megilla 13b] says that since HaShem [G-d] knew that Haman would offer Shekels to Achashverosh to 'purchase' the right to destroy the Jews, HaShem pre-empted Haman's contribution through the half-shekel. The merit of the Jews contributing the annual half-shekel protected them (in the future) against Haman's evil designs.

I once heard an interpretation of this Gemarah in the name of the Yismach Yisrael. Haman's potential for destroying the Jewish people was hinted at in his own description of the nation: "There is a people that is dispersed and divided..." [Esther 3:8]. It is only because there is division and unjustified hatred within the Jewish nation that their enemies have the ability to harm them.

When the Jews are divided, they represent only individuals -- not a Klal [a communal entity]. When that happens we have lost our strength.

Haman's whole plot was based on the division of the nation. That is why G-d insisted that each Jew should give exactly one half shekel. The symbolism of the half shekel is that each Jew is only a fraction of the entity. He needs to combine with his fellow Jew to make a significant contribution. If we think we can be 'an entire shekel unto ourselves', that is not going to work. Our strength is

through the recognition that we need each other, and the realization that we need to set aside our petty differences to come together to provide a complete shekel.

This is the strength that ultimately saved the Jewish people. Because of the terrible calamity that was hanging over them as a result of Haman's decree, they decided to put away those 'dispersions and divisions in the nation' and came together as a unit and as a whole.

Sources and Personalities

Yismach Yisrael (1863-1910) Rav Yerachmiel Yisroel Yitzchok Danziger, the second Alexander Rebbe. He was Niftar in 1909.

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