

Assemble the Jews: Assimilation is not an Option

Haman was a master orator. The Talmud (*Megilah* 13b) states:

אמר רבא ליכא דידע לישנא בישא כהמן.
Rava says that there was no one who knew how to speak as devilishly as Haman.

When we read the simple interpretation of these words, we see that Haman used his skills to speak against the Jewish people and manipulate King Achashveirosh to accomplish his plan of annihilating the Jews. However, the Gemara can be understood on a deeper level.

The commentators explain that the words Haman used to speak to Achashveirosh were also the prosecutorial words that he directed at the King of all Kings to be used against the Jewish nation.

Haman's intention was to claim both to the human king Achashveirosh why it was time to wipe out the Jewish nation, as well as to Hakadosh Baruch Hu why He too should allow the Jewish nation to be destroyed.

When Esther was informed of what was occurring, she orchestrated a plan to counteract both of Haman's claims — the one toward Achashveirosh and the one directed at Hashem. The *Manos Halevi* 4:16, points out the contrast between the words that Haman used and those that Esther used. Haman said “ישנו עם אחד מפזר ומפרד בין העמים — there is a certain



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people scattered and separate among the peoples throughout all the provinces of your kingdom” (Esther 3:8). When Esther began her counter-attack, she instructed Mordechai “לך כנוס את כל היהודים — Go, assemble all the Jews” (Esther 4:16).

The *Manos Halevi* explains that when Haman stated that the Jews are spread out, he was accusing them of having no unity among themselves. He was claiming to Hashem that the lack of unity is the reason they should now be destroyed. In response, Esther said, “Go assemble the people together,” meaning, create unity and that will be the defense necessary to stop Haman's evil decree.



With this understanding, several other commentators explain why the Megilah states numerous times that the Jews “*assembled*” together. “That the king had given to the Jews who are in every city, [the right] to *assemble* and to protect themselves”

(8:11), “Now the Jews who were in Shushan *assembled* on the fourteenth day of Adar as well” (9:15), “And the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces *assembled* and protected themselves” (9:16), “And the Jews who were in Shushan *assembled* on the thirteenth” (9:18).

Why does the Megilah emphasize the assembly so many times? It seems extraneous. Based on the above understanding, we could explain that this is the very reason the Jews were victorious. The fact that they *assembled* negated Haman's claim.

Perhaps there is an even deeper message we can learn from Esther's response to Haman. Every word that Haman said was countered with a direct word from Esther. Haman said, “ישנו עם אחד מפזר ומפרד בין העמים — there is a certain people scattered and separate among the peoples throughout all the provinces of your kingdom” (Esther 3:8). And Esther instructed Mordechai “לך כנוס את כל היהודים — Go, assemble all the Jews.” Haman did not name the “Jews”; he only said, “a certain people,” without identifying them directly. This can be interpreted to mean that he was

telling Hakadosh Baruch Hu that His nation had lost their identity; they were simply a nameless, stateless people with no real anchor. Esther, realizing how negative this was, said that they should “go assemble the Jews,” with the emphasis on the word Jews. She was saying that in order to be victorious, the Jews had to begin identifying themselves as a Jewish nation. Assimilating is not an option. That is exactly how Haman is going to try to destroy us. Indeed, when we look at the verses that emphasize assembly, the word Jew also appears. Thus, one of the goals of unifying was to unify as Jews and restore Jewish identity.

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Esther, during much of the story, could not publicly identify as a Jew. Who did Esther have with her in her fight against Haman? Mordechai. How are we introduced to Mordechai?

אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה בְּשׁוּשַׁן וּשְׁמוֹ מֹרְדֵכַי בֶּן יָאִיר בֶּן שִׁמְעִי בֶּן קִישׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי.

There was a Judite man in Shushan the capital, whose name was Mordechai, the son of Yair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite.

Esther 2:5

The Gemara, *Megilah* 13a, wonders how one person can be a Judite (meaning from the tribe of Yehudah) and a Benjamite (from the tribe of Binyamin)? The answer is that really, he was from the tribe of Binyamin. However, he was being introduced as a “Jewish man” — meaning someone fiercely proud of his Jewish identity (see *Yeshua Gedolah* by Rav Yonasan Eibeshitz). Zeresh, the wife of Haman, told her husband, “If Mordechai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish birthright, you will not prevail against him, but you will surely fall before him” (6:13).

We live in a world that is conducive to assimilation. It is much easier to blend in than to stand out. Esther realized that one of the greatest ways



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of preventing assimilation is through unity or “assembly.” When people are alone, the temptation toward assimilation is much stronger. When we have a sense of camaraderie with other Jews, we take pride in being Jewish and the desire to assimilate is diminished. Purim is a day where we stress that camaraderie through the mitzvah of *mishloach manos* (see *Manos HaLevi* 9:19), and this ultimately leads to greater Jewish identity.

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