

# PURIM

## DISUNITY OF THE HOLIDAY

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### Two Days of Purim

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The holiday of Purim is the most joyous day of the year. It is the holiday of the Jewish people in *galus*. It is the only holiday that celebrates Jewish survival in exile. This is perhaps part of the reason why it is the most joyous. We are still in exile, and therefore for us this celebration is very important. The exile is the most overwhelming fact of Jewish history. As a people, we were in Israel for about 1200 years, and then in our various exiles for over 2000 years. Thus the holiday of Purim is a very important holiday.

Strangely, Purim is celebrated on two different days. The Megilla explains that this is because for two days the Jews fought against the followers of Haman who wanted to kill the Jews. One battle took place throughout the world, and the second day the battles continued in the city of Shushan. Shushan had a wall, and the rabbis together with Mordechai and Esther instituted a special second day of Purim just for walled cities. Jerusalem famously had a wall, just like Shushan. This second day of Purim applies to all cities that had walls from the time of Yehoshua bin Nun. This includes other cities such as Chevron and Shilo.

Why did our Sages create two days of the holiday?

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## Aspirations of Annihilation

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When the Jewish people came into Eretz Yisrael with Yehoshua, they had three *mitzvos* to fulfill. One was to appoint a king. The second was to fight Amalek, the archenemy of the Jews. The third *mitzva* was to build a holy temple for Hashem in Yerushalayim. The war against Amalek is a war against absolute evil. For us, these are the Haman-like agendas that aim for the total destruction of the Jewish people. The nations that make Jewish annihilation their agenda are Amalek. Absolute evil is Amalek. Not so long ago the world saw Hitler and Nazi Germany, which was absolute evil.

It is intriguing and remarkable that the nations that are evil *vis-a-vis* the rest of the world also have a special agenda of hatred. They wish to totally annihilate the Jewish people. This is the central motif of their evil.

One book about Hitler, called *The War Against the Jews*, says that Hitler focused more on the war against the Jews than he did on conquering more territory. This is typical of Amalek. He is absolutely evil in relation to everyone in the world, but he has a special focus reserved for the Jewish people. He wants to destroy them.

This was true in the original fight against Amalek and it continues today. The Muslim terrorist fanatic groups are absolutely evil, they are evil for the whole world. They also have a special agenda to attack and annihilate the state of Israel and the Jewish people who live there. This is a strange phenomenon of absolute and total evil, which focuses on annihilating the Jewish people.

In a Chassidic sense, this focus is because Amalek represents the satanic force in the world. Satan is an evil angel who God created. God put him in the world of angels and gave him some power in this world. But Hashem wants us to fight evil. He wants us to earn reward. Hashem wants people to fight against the evil of Satan. This evil can even take on a mixture of good and evil

together. This is most difficult. The Torah though empowers us to fight the Satan and his evil in the world. We need deep knowledge of the Torah to discern good from evil when they are intertwined. The Amalek manifestation of the Satan, however, is not a mixture. It is absolute and total evil.

Amazingly, this evil can grow so powerful that many millions and even billions of people can be attracted to the Amalek agenda. Hitler attracted millions. The Islamic terrorists have millions of people today who believe in their ideology. It is a powerful force and a difficult one to overcome.

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### Hosting Holiness

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Shem Mishmuel believes that the *mitzvos* of destroying Amalek and building the Beis Hamikdash are intrinsically related. In order to get to the *mitzva* of creating a place in this world for Hashem's presence in a holy city, you must first eradicate absolute evil from the world. If the world has a place that belongs to Satan, that is home for absolute evil, then Hashem says, "I can't put My holy presence into this world." If humanity can tolerate genocidal evil any place in this world, then how can God reside among man? If man and woman are not sensitive to this kind of evil force and are ready to tolerate it, how can they build the place for the almighty holy God to live among them? God does not tolerate those who tolerate absolute evil. If the people of the world do not fight Hitler, Stalin and the other archenemies of goodness, then Hashem cannot be part of that society. Therefore Hashem will not allow us to build the Mikdash in Yerushalayim until we stand up against Amalek, against that horrible evil of the world.

We must be ready to fight this evil, no matter how powerful it is, because it is totally wrong. When we assume this responsibility then Hashem says, "I will enable you to build a Beis Hamikdash, a

holy place for My presence in this world.” Man and women must be ready to fight absolute evil. Hashem will then enable us to build a Beis Hamikdash for Him. We may not be perfect. There still may exist mixtures of good and evil, and people may tolerate them. Hashem can be in the world with evil mixtures, like the Eitz Hada’as Tov Vara together. However, Hashem does not tolerate pure evil, genocidal lusting in the worst form. So He tells us first to destroy Amalek and only afterwards can we build the Beis Hamikdash

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### **Fight against Cruelty**

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This is a Godly phenomenon. Sometimes the Jewish people feels ready to build a Beis Hamikdash. We have gone through enough sufferings and improvements. We feel ready to build the Beis Hamikdash. Hashem then looks to see if we are ready to fight Amalek. So He creates an Amalek that threatens Jewish survival to see if the Jews are committed to fighting against it. If the Jewish people do fight against this evil, Hashem will say that we have passed the test, that we have shown our resolve and sensitivity, not to tolerate this butchering and homicide. If we are ready to fight then He will help us defeat them.

Amalek is God’s creation. This is a difficult concept. Even Satan is God’s creation. Hashem created this absolute evil for one purpose—so we will fight it and destroy it. Then Hashem will join us and become part of our community. Hashem creates the evil Amalek for us to fight.

This is why there was an Amalek in the desert when the Jews left Egypt right before they received the Ten Commandments. Moshe and the Jews had to fight Amalek. Amalek attacked unprovoked in the desert. Their goal was to annihilate the former Jewish slaves. Moshe had to fight them. That’s when Hashem said I will

give you the Ten Commandments, I will become a part of the community of Am Yisrael. Before the Beis Hamikdash was built by Dovid and Shlomo, they fought against Amalek. Dovid fought a huge battle against Amalek. This is why he merited to write up the plans for the Beis Hamikdash, and his son actually built it.

We move ahead in Jewish history to the Jewish people in the kingdom of Persia. The seventy years of exile had fundamentally ended. Yirmiya had predicted that the Jewish people would return to Israel. The Jewish people had to be confronted with an Amalek again. They faced a cruel enemy with lust for power, an enemy who knew no bounds in his hatred for the Jew. Haman and his followers had an incredible hatred for the Jewish people for no apparent reason. They wanted to kill everyone of us. Haman even gave Achashveirosh a fortune of money to accept this proposal.

The Jews had to confront Haman and literally fight. The story of Megillas Esther focuses therefore on how Mordechai and Esther were able to eventually defeat Haman's Amalekite followers on the two days of battle. After that, some of the Jewish people, including Mordechai, returned to Israel and built the *bayis sheni* and Hashem put His presence back among the Jewish people and into the world. Hashem returned His presence because the Jews confronted the absolute evil of Amalek.

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### Unity Without a Leader?

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Shem Mishmuel asks an interesting question. When the Jewish people first came into Israel they had to appoint a king to fight Amalek and then build a Beis Hamikdash. They appointed Dovid as king, and he fought Amalek. Then his son Shlomo built the Beis Hamikdash. At the time of the building of the Second Temple, Bnei Yisrael fought the great war against Amalek and Haman. But there was no Jewish king at that time. This occurred in Persia.

Yet the Jewish nation was able to defeat Amalek and merit to return to Israel and build a Beis Hamikdash. Without a Jewish king, how could the Jewish people fight Amalek? The king comes first before fighting Amalek! How did Mordechai and Esther succeed in fighting against Amalek and defeating Haman?

The point that Shem Mishmuel makes is very important for us today. The role of a Jewish king is to create Jewish unity, to make us into one people, not fractured, split, or dismembered. We are supposed to be one unit, one nation, *k'ish echad b'lev echad*. At the time of Moshe, the Jews united after the fight with Amalek. Moshe was a Jewish king. He united the Jews with a common purpose, and they defeated the Amalek enemy. Then they went to Sinai to receive the Torah as Hashem sent His holy presence into Am Yisrael. Dovid Hamelech also united the people. When we are united in Torah and *mitzvos*, Am Yisrael has the *koach* that gives us the power to defeat even Amalek, the fiercest of Jewish enemies.

However, there was no Jewish king at the time of Mordechai and Esther. They were in exile, but the Amalek of Haman found strength in the claim, “*Yeshno am echad mefuzar u'meforad bein ha'amim*. This nation is scattered among the nations.” They have no internal unity. They don't have one leader. Some Jews came to the royal ball, and some didn't. Some keep Shabbos while others don't keep Shabbos. Some want to go back to Eretz Yisrael, but most don't. This is a splintered nation. The *koach* of the Satan is very strong when he sees a divided people. Shem Mishmuel says *mefuzar* means split from one another. *Meforad* means split from our Father in heaven. Haman convinced Achashveirosh to destroy every single Jewish person, young and old, man, woman, and child on the thirteenth day of Adar. Amalek was able to raise its head and enunciate its plan of Jewish annihilation. Mordechai, the great Torah scholar, and Esther, queen of Persia, saw that there was only one way for the Jewish people to muster the spiritual strength to defeat Amalek. This would only happen if the people

would connect themselves to their one and only King, the King of all kings, God Almighty Himself.

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### Rallying Around the Leader

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When the Jewish people saw the decree of Haman, they still had no idea that Esther was Jewish. They saw that Mordechai was banished from the palace by Haman. They saw they had no one on the inside to help them. They realized there was no way they could overpower this decree without Hashem's mercy. The people gave up their agendas for one simple agenda. They would throw themselves on Hashem's mercy.

This is the concept of *bitul hayesh*, giving up your individuality and self and losing it in God's presence. When a decree like that comes out and there is no reasonable political, economic, military or social strategy, there are two possible reactions. One is to feel overwhelmed by a sense of hopelessness. This hopelessness could lead to total *yiush*, a sense of impending death, a feeling that we are lost forever, that God has abandoned us. There is another reaction though. We can focus on the truth that God Almighty runs the world. I can lose myself in Him. I have no plans or strategies. I only have one plan, I will cling to Him. I give up everything because I am lost in His infinite being.

When the Jewish people under the leadership of Mordechai and Esther were confronted by this horrible decree by the all-powerful emperor of Persia and his prime minister, they felt hopeless. But Mordechai said, "We must pray, we must learn Torah, we must throw ourselves upon Hashem's mercy." The Jews united under one purpose—to be God's people. Hashem then became the King of Israel.

Shem Mishmuel quotes Reb Simcha Bunim of Peshischa. Haman's plot was his own downfall. The strength of Amalek comes

from the fact that the Jews are disunited. But the decree to kill them revived the feeling of Jewish unity with Hashem at their head, because we knew that we had nothing without Him. This unity saved us from Haman.

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### A United People

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Shem Mishmuel says that this is going to be the script for the coming of the Mashiach. Who knows if this is the time today? There is no Jewish king, and the Jewish people are so disunited. There are so many different agendas and ideas, and unfortunate inter-Jewish hatred. Amalek raised its head in our times in the form of Nazi Germany. Maybe Hashem wanted Jewish unity to fight that Amalek. There was a certain amount of Jewish unity after that. People wanted a state of Israel and many Jews rallied around that. But sixty years later there is again so much disunity. The unity that existed then may have produced a State of Israel, but not a Beis Hamikdash. In the last twenty years, the Jewish state has not won a war, and we may even lose, God forbid, the city of Yerushalayim. Amid our disunity, a new Amalek has raised its head. Today a new movement of Islamic jihad wants to *chalila*, heaven forbid, wipe out the State of Israel and all the Jews who live there.

We Jews can't agree on issues of government, military strategy, or economic strategy. But we share the *mitzva* of Purim. We can share what Mordechai and Esther did in their days. We can throw ourselves on Hashem and become united only with His purpose. I hope and pray that the dangers that face us today do not become worse. They should never reach the severity of the decrees of Haman or Hitler. At this stage, where we see elements of Amalek, we should learn to unite and create a united nation under Hashem with His Torah. This is the only real solution and strategy.



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# Two Days

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This is the reason that the day of Purim has been split into two separate days. Until the decree of Haman the Jewish people were splintered. After the war of Purim when the people had been united with Hashem, Jewish disunity resurfaced. Very few Jews left Persia for Israel. Many chose to stay in Persia. The Second Temple that was built was weak and never achieved the heights that the first one did.

This is why the Rabbis established two days of Purim. The decree of Haman was an unfortunate situation that only temporarily produced unity in Am Yisrael. But unfortunately, as great as it was, that unity did not last a long time.

We celebrate the Jewish survival and return to the Land of Israel and the rebuilding of the second Beis Hamikdash. We also split the celebration of Purim, to remind ourselves that this was not the final redemption. It was only a partial redemption. Once the danger passed, Jews still had different agendas and again fought with each other.

We pray to Hashem to give us the ability to reunite, as we were united under King Dovid and Moshe Rabbeinu, and at the time of Purim, when we fought Amalek in the old days.

May we see in our days the Jewish people reunite in purpose and commitment to Hashem and to the holy life of Torah. With His help we will have a king Mashiach, a special king who can unite us and fight the war against Amalek and then build the third Beis Hamikdash. May we see it in our days.

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## QUESTIONS:

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1. Why does Hashem allow Amalek to exist?
2. Why do we need a king to fight Amalek?
3. How did the Jews defeat Amalek during Purim without a king?
4. Why is Purim two days long?

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## EXERCISES:

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1. Using a chart, keep track of times when you used the four levels of your soul: *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshama*, and *chaya*.
2. Keep a list of things you do to promote Jewish unity.



*Answers and Exercises*

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