

Haman and the Holocaust

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This *Motzei Shabbat* Jews throughout the world will begin the observance of Purim with the reading of the *Megilla*. This book tells the entire story of the miracle which we celebrate on this holiday. While there is great similarity between the miracle of Chanuka and that of Purim, there is some difference. In both cases, the Jewish people came up against cruel tyrants who sought and almost attained their destruction (Heaven Forbid!).

However, in the case of Chanuka the evil decrees of the brutal Hellenistic Empire were not aimed at the physical existence of the Jews, per se. Their goal was the eradication of Torah and Judaism, which was at odds with their own, idolatrous and hedonistic philosophy. The Greeks fought an ideological war whose aim was to obliterate the performance of the commandments and convert the Jews to Hellenism.

The case of Purim was different. The antagonist, in this instance was not a nation but one particular individual. It is hard to believe that a single person can be the cause of so much harm, but history confirms this to be true. The annihilation of the Jews of Europe was the handiwork of Adolf Hitler, Y" S. Of course, as Daniel Goldhagen says, he had many "willing executioners" who were only too happy to join his evil project.

However, he was the founder and force behind the genocidal movement. He made anti-Semitism and the "war against the Jews" the central goal and purpose of the Third Reich. With his great oratorical skills, he mesmerized the People and seduced them into blind and absolute obedience to his will. He sold them his psychotic view of history and paranoid assessment of the Jews and what "needed to be done to them." The details of the extermination policy were worked out in "secret" by his underlings and henchmen.

However, in my opinion, the entire German nation bears the guilt for the Holocaust and other atrocities which were the outcome of Hitler's misbegotten "ideologies." The Holocaust was Hitler's brainchild, but he made no secret of what he intended to do to the Jews. He was explicit about his extreme Jew hatred in his writings and speeches. He came to power in 1933 and immediately implemented the systematic delegitimizing, persecution and violence against the Jews which culminated in the crematoria. The Germans were fully aware of his anti-Semitic aspirations and wholeheartedly supported him.

In my opinion, the designation of Amalek should apply not only to Hitler and the Nazis but to the entire German nation of that time. I do not apply the guilt to subsequent generations of Germans if they sincerely repudiate the evil of the Holocaust and the sins of their forebears and dedicate themselves to the support of Israel and Jews everywhere. If they fail to do this, then the iniquity of the fathers clings to the children, and they bear the stigma of Amalek.

Haman and Hitler have a lot in common. Both suffered from a moral psychosis that predisposed them toward extreme hatred of the Jews. Haman had a depleted ego which could not be assuaged unless he was elevated to the level of a deity and all people would acknowledge his greatness by bowing to

him. The two tyrants were extremely dangerous because of their ability to manipulate the state to carry out their will.

Hitler sold his insane racial theories and his primitive caricatures of the Jews to the German people. The Germans were an advanced society in terms of scientific and cultural development. They readily agreed to be seduced by this “evil genius” who promised to restore their greatness and blamed all of their troubles on the Jews.

Haman had a much easier task. All he had to do was convince the person who had absolute authority to issue an order of extermination, King Achashverosh. Appealing to his lust for extravagance and great wealth, he assured him that the Jews were disloyal and an economic drain on the treasury whom the King would be better off getting rid of. The decree of Achashverosh was even worse than Hitler’s for it aimed to destroy the entire Jewish people “children and women” in one day – just one day.

The difference between the plot of Haman and that of Hitler is that Haman’s was thwarted. The merit of Mordechai who would not “kneel and not bow” prevailed. He was able to convince Esther to risk her life and use her position to influence Achashverosh to rescind the decree. The fearless idealism of Mordechai and the ingenious maneuvers of Esther brought Haman and his ten sons to utter destruction. All this could not have happened without the help of Hashem, who responded to the people’s fasting and repentance.

There are important lessons for us in the *Megilla*. We should not underestimate the potential danger of any anti-Semite, no matter how much of a sick madman he appears to be. Nor should we overestimate the intellectual and moral level of seemingly advanced nations. The “Unthinkable” has happened before and can happen again. Even the “civilized” Western countries are becoming increasingly hostile to Jews and Israel.

We must do everything we can to support and strengthen Israel. We should be grateful to America for the tremendous assistance it renders to the Jewish State. Most important is that we affirm our special relationship with Hashem who hearkens unto us “whenever we cry out to him.” May we return to Hashem with perfect *Teshuva* and be worthy of His blessings and Salvation.

Shabbat Shalom veChag Purim Sameach.