

Parshas Vayikra

Rabbi Aaron Berger

“ותלו אותנו ואת בנינו על העץ”
(אסתר ט' כ"ה)

Let's take a moment to examine the chronology of the hanging of Haman and his ten sons. Haman was hanged on the 16th of Nissan 3668. Later that year, his sons were killed on the 13th of Adar. Although they were already dead, Esther specifically requested of Achashverosh that they too be hung. Achashverosh agreed, and their bodies were hung the next day. Why was it necessary to hang their bodies? On a basic level, we can understand Esther's motivation to remind the world of the ultimate downfall of the Jews' enemies, but let's look a bit deeper.

Rav Shimon Schwab zt"l writes that this tree has substantial significance in the story of Purim. The Gemara in Chulin 139b asks “המון מן התורה מנין?”. Where in the Torah is the reference to Haman? The Gemara points us to the story of how the Evil Serpent cleverly got Adam and Chava to eat from the Eitz Hadaas, the Tree of Knowledge. When Hashem confronted Adam, He asked him **המון העץ** “המון העץ” אשר צייתך לבלתי אכול ממנו אכלת? The Gemara cites this as the source for Haman in the Torah because the word “Haman” and “Hamin” are spelled the same. Rav Schwab explains this connection as follows; Haman set out to accomplish the single most heinous crime, to annihilate Hashem's chosen people. In contrast, Adam ate from the Eitz Hadaas because he was told that it would raise his level of spirituality and make him more “like G-d”. Yet the Gemara is telling us that Haman's plot was rooted in the Aveira of the Eitz Hadaas, because any violation of Hashem's word brings evil

to this world. This then is the connection between Haman and eating from the Eitz Hadaas. Yet we may still wonder, is there any similarity in these two instances of disregarding Hashem's command?

The Maharsha on this Gemara comments that Haman traces his ancestry to the wicked Amalek, who was in turn the spiritual heir of the Evil Serpent. Amalek and Haman both derived the force of their evil agenda of destroying Klal Yisrael from this source. This can be found, says the Maharsha, in the Gemara Sota 9b. There the Gemara tells us that the ultimate downfall of numerous wicked people was because “they set their eye's on something not appropriate for them”. Not only did they not achieve their

pating in the crime, it was the Snake who was the source of this evil. This evil, the Gemara tells us, stems from the “setting of one's eye's on something not appropriate for him”. We find the Torah warns us of this in Krias Shma, **“ולא תתורו אחריו, עיניכם ללבבכם ואחריו עיניכם”**. We are commanded not to follow our natural desires for things that are forbidden to us. Now we can readily understand what the Gemara means when it informs us that the source of “Haman” is “Hamin Ha'etz”. The same root evil is at play.

Perhaps this idea can help us understand the severity of attending Seudas Achashverosh. According to one opinion in the Gemara, the reason that Hashem

“Promising only the never-satisfying success of endless yearning for more and better emptiness”

desire, but that which they had already was also taken away from them.

The Gemara explains that the snake was slated to cleverly rule the animal kingdom. However, he set his eyes on getting Adam killed so he could marry Chava. Not only did he not achieve that, but all that he had was taken from him, until he was reduced to a despised creature slithering in the dust. Haman too, was guilty of this and he too was reduced from his greatness to a hanging corpse. How fascinating! Haman possessed the same devious nature as his spiritual ancestor, the Serpent. Both felt that they could somehow reach beyond what was given them and fulfill their evil desires. And both were completely cut down (or, in the case of Haman- hung up!). Although Adam and Chava were guilty of partici-

allowed the Jews to suffer the decree of Haman, was because of their attendance of Achashverosh's party. His party was a fantastic display of royal materialism, a gathering of minds and hearts focused on the lowly goal of complete subversion to the passions of the human animal. Perhaps this expressed a desire to assimilate into the great melting pot of Persia, to join the celebration of the arts and culture of a strange nation. They were considering replacing the sacred traditions of their own faith, for the glamor of a modern and very different society. The idea of abandoning what Hashem designated as their true portion, the mission to strive to emulate Hashem in the fashion of a true dignified prince, and instead setting their eyes on what was not befitting them at all, is truly a serious

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matter. For this grave aveira, Haman was given permission to decree their destruction. And like the Snake the Jewish People almost lost it all.

On Purim we celebrate the recognition of our forefathers of ancient Persia who, through tears and tes-huva turned away from what was inappropriate for them, the lures of modern Persia, and refocused on their

true destination, the holy and lofty mission to reach the greatest of spiritual heights.

Let us take this special time of celebration to inspire our minds and hearts away from the lures of a society sorely lacking any spiritual depth, promising only the never-satisfying success of endless yearning for more and better emptiness. Let's refocus on

the deep, simple, and rich joy of studying and fulfilling the Torah, a guide to life authored by the Master Designer Himself. Let us reconnect to our creator with sincere communication. May we merit to tap into this divine day and celebrate the ultimate redemption in our times. Wishing one and all a Purim filled with light and joy!

Good Shabbos! ♦



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