



JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES

PURIM UNMASKED: UNDERSTANDING THE ETERNAL FESTIVAL

SOURCE AND DISCUSSION SHEET



In Jewish thought names capture the essence of that which they name. There are a lot of interesting names found in the Megillas Esther – the Scroll of Esther. Let's consider a few of them, and their meanings.

SOURCE 1: *The Name Esther. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Chulin 139b*

Where is **Esther** alluded to in the Torah? As it is written, "I will surely **hide** [my countenance on that day]" (Devarim/Deuteronomy 31:18).

אסתר מן התורה מנין ואנכי הסתר אסתיר
פני ביום ההוא

The Gemara points out as well that her real name was Hadassah, yet she is known as Esther throughout the story. On some level, Esther, which means "hidden" captures her essence.

Q: What about "hiddenness" aptly describes Esther, or the story which is named after her?

Q: The Scroll of Esther is the last book of the Bible. There is one name strangely omitted from the book. What name is that?

Consider the following source:

SOURCE 2: *The Name of G-d. Midrash on Scroll of Esther 1:2*

"In those days, as **King Achashveirosh** sat on his royal throne which was in Shushan the Capitol." **Megillas Esther** (1:2) **Midrash. " King Achashveirosh"**. Rav Yochanan said: Whenever it says 'King Achashveirosh' in this Megillah it refers to the King Achashveirosh, and every place it says just 'the king' it means both the Holy King (**G-d**) and the secular King (**Achashveirosh**).

Question: G-d seems to be hiding in the Purim story. Based upon the source above is He really hiding and what does that imply about His relationship with us?

SOURCE 3: *The Name Haman. Talmud Bavli Chagiga 139:b*

They also asked Rav Mattana: From where in the Torah can one find an allusion to **Haman**? He replied: The verse states after Adam ate from the tree of knowledge: "**Have you eaten of [hamin]** the tree, about which I commanded you not to eat?" (Genesis 3:11). **Hamin** is spelled in the same manner as Haman: Heh, mem, nun.

המן מן התורה מנין . המן העץ

Q: Haman's name is found directly in the aftermath of the "original sin" by Adam and Eve, when they are "hiding" from G-d in the Garden. What do you think the link is between Haman and this catastrophic episode?

Consider the following source:

SOURCE 4a: *The Name Haman. Rabbi Akiva Tatz, Worldmask, Targum Press, pp.94-97, based on Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin,*

The Gemara asks **"Haman min haTorah minayin** – Where is Haman's name found in the Torah?" **"Hamin ha'etz ... – Did you eat from the tree ...?"** Now the word **"hamin" is Haman, without vowels**, which is the way the Torah is written... This question which God asks man, "Did you eat ..." is an expression of the distance which has come between man and his Creator as a result of man's transgression. Adam has become so blind to reality, so confused that he tells himself that he can hide from the One Who sees all.

Doubt has entered the world. Perhaps it is possible to hide. Perhaps He does not see, perhaps He does not know that man has transgressed. A gap has opened between God and His creation; the gap, the chasm of doubt. And the name of that gap, **the name of that doubt that keeps God in hiding is Amalek.** The source of Amalek has entered the world; Haman has been born. (Note: The Megilla itself refers to Haman as from the Nation of Amalek)

Haman is that force in the world that **sows doubt and causes hiddenness.** Let's take a closer look at the Torah to see how he achieves this.

Amalek: The Tools of His Trade:

SOURCE 5: *Devarim 25:17-18 – Following the Exodus Amalek attacks the Jewish People*

Remember what Amalek did to you by the way, when you came forth out of Egypt; how he **happened upon you by the way**, and struck at your rear, all who were feeble behind you, when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God.

Rashi: **"Happened upon you"**. "Karchika" is a language of **chance (Mikra)**, impurity and an expression of **cold (kar)**; they tried to **cool us down** from our heat (**inspiration from Sinai**) It's analogous to a boiling vat of water that no one could enter, and one crazy person jumps in and scalds himself to cool the water down so that others would follow. (that's the self-destructive hatred of Amalek)

זכור את אשר
עשה לך עמלק
בדרך בצאתכם
ממצרים: אשר קרך
בדרך ויזנב בך כל
הנחשלים אחריו
ואתה עיף ויגע ולא
ירא א-להים

Question: What two strategies does Amalek (Haman) use to fight the Jewish People and how does that relate to the essence of his name as explained above?

By espousing a world view of chance and being derisive (mockingly throwing cold water upon) of inspiration and truth, Amalek sows doubt and obscures G-d in the world. He is the philosophical heir to atheism, existentialism, humanism and all other philosophies that chalk the world up to blind chance.

SOURCE 6: *Parshas Beshalach 17:7-8*

V7. They called the place Masa and Meriva (contention and strife) because of the strife caused by the Children of Israel and that they provoked G-d by saying **"Is G-d in our midst or Not?"**

V8. Amalek came to fight the Jewish People in Refidim.

Q: What do you suppose is the connection between verses 7 and 8? Is there a causal link?

When the Jews doubt that G-d is with them, "He Hides His Face" in return, and a vacuum is created from which Amalek Will attack.

SOURCE 7: *Shemos (Exodus) 18:14-16 Our Eternal War with Amalek*

Then the Lord said to Moses... I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven!"

And He said, **The Hand (of Amalek) is upon the throne of the Lord!' The Lord will be at war with Amalek throughout the ages."**

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כְּתֹב זֶאת זִכְרוֹן
בְּסֵפֶר וְשִׁים בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כִּי־מָחָה
אֶמְחָה אֶת־זִכְרֵ עַמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:
וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־יָד עַל־כֹּס יְהוָה מִלְחָמָה לַיהוָה
בְּעַמְלֵק מְדַר דָּר

Q: Jews are not vengeful people. Why do you suppose G-d commands us to be engaged in an eternal war with Amalek?

Perhaps because this struggle between hiding G-d and revealing Him is an ongoing battle that we must continually wage.

One Last Perplexing Issue:

SOURCE 8: *Megillas Esther 9:24-26. Purim is a Most Unusual Name for the Holiday*

"For Haman ...the enemy of the Jews , had plotted to destroy the Jews and had cast a **"Pur"** – **lot** to terrify and destroy them...That is why they called these days "Purim" form the word **Pur**.

Q: How could Mordechai and Esther call the holiday the equivalent of "Dice"—indicating blind chance in its outcome? As Einstein once famously quipped do you think G-d plays Dice with the Universe?

Perhaps we are being told that even when "chance" seems to rule the day, and G-d seems to be in Hiding those dice which our enemies roll to obscure G-d in the world are actually "loaded" and come up 7's every time for G-d's Chosen People. Despite the smokescreen we see His guiding hand unmistakably throughout the story.

The Scroll of Esther - Megillas Esther:

In fact, the story itself is written in " the Scroll of Esther" or Megillas Esther. Megilla comes from the world to reveal, because as you open up a scroll it reveals the story within. Esther as we said before comes from the world hidden. Literally the Megillas Esther translates as revealing that which is hidden. This prophetic scroll reveals to us that although G-d seems to be hiding in the story, His fingerprints are everywhere we look.

Q: How does this relate to our own lives, when it's not so easy to see G-d's hand in our own circumstances?