



RABBI YEHUDAH BIENSTOCK

## Haman and the Primordial Sin

Where is Haman's name found in the Torah? (Talmud, Chullin 139b)

THAT QUESTION IS PUZZLING. HAMAN LIVED almost a thousand years after the Torah was given at Sinai. Why should his name appear in the Torah at all?

At Creation, G-d looked into the Torah and created the world. The Torah is the blueprint for creation, and every detail of creation exists only because the Torah says so. Just as a builder follows the plans drawn up by an architect, G-d first brought the Torah into being and then created the world. Since the Torah is the genetic material of the world, all aspects of existence, from the beginning of time until the end, are contained therein. The challenge, however, is uncovering that information.

The Talmud is not merely searching the Torah for a hint or a reference to the name of Haman. Rather, the Talmud seeks to define his essence. If we can find where "Haman" is located in the Torah, we can understand his very being, how he came into being, and why he continues to exist until this very day. Haman, a descendant of Amalek, the nation whose only goal is to destroy the Jewish people, must be located in the Torah!

The Talmud finds Haman's name at the beginning of the Torah—surprisingly, in the middle of the narrative of Adam's sin. After Adam eats from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, G-d appears and asks him, "*Hamin ha'etz... achalta*—did you eat from the tree?" The Hebrew word *hamin* and *Haman* are spelled alike: *Heh, mem, nun*. Without vowels, they are the

same word.

This is the beginning of sin: Adam brought sin into the world. And the root of Haman in the Torah is somehow connected to the root of sin itself.

*Nefesh HaChaim* explains that, prior to his sin, Adam possessed free will, but the temptation to sin was external. The Evil Inclination, as we call it, was not part of him. It was embodied in the Serpent. Although the ability to sin existed, the reality of G-d's existence was so obvious that sin had almost no appeal. When we see a policeman in our rear-view mirror, the desire to run a red light dissipates quite fast; likewise, Adam perceived G-d so clearly that he had no desire to sin as we do. If we saw G-d with complete clarity, we too would feel compelled to do His will.

Adam ate from the tree because he wanted to increase his role in the world. Adam felt he was capable of much more than simply avoiding one tree; he needed a greater challenge. If he could internalize the Evil Inclination, then he could perfect himself and the world through his own efforts to overcome it. When Adam ate from the tree, he created *hester panim*—the Divine Presence of G-d became hidden. The lines between good and evil became blurred. What had been so clear suddenly became opaque. Mystical writers refer to the Tree of Knowledge as *ilana d'sfeika*, the Tree of Doubt. The tree combined good and evil so thoroughly that when Adam ingested the fruit, he became entangled in the two. G-d was distant; things were no longer clear.

The Talmud finds the name of Haman—of Amalek, the archenemy of the Jewish people—in the sin of Adam *because the sin created Amalek*. Amalek represents uncertainty.

When the Children of Israel left Egypt, Amalek was the first people to attack them. It entered a suicidal battle against a nation that had miraculously exited Egypt. Amalek was compelled to wage this war, because their very essence was threatened—when the nations of the world realized that the Torah was about to be given, they entertained thoughts of joining the Jewish people at Sinai.

Although Amalek lost that battle, they won the war. They were virtually decimated, but they achieved their aim: They created doubt. The Jewish people were shown to be vulnerable, and the Torah itself no longer seemed invincible. The nations of the world now doubted whether the Torah was for them or not. Rashi offers an analogy to a tub of boiling water—the first to jump in is badly burnt, but he cools the water off. The Jewish people could have inspired the entire world to accept the Torah, but Amalek created doubt.

That is the nature of Amalek. Does G-d exist? Is there a Divine will? Do we have to observe the Torah? This is analogous to sin, which creates a gap between reality and our perception of it.

In the physical world and throughout history, Amalek has attempted to destroy us. But by connecting Haman to the primordial sin, the Talmud is warning us of an even greater threat. In the spiritual world, Amalek represents uncertainty. Perhaps G-d doesn't see.

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This essay was originally published in *Unmasking Purim, Volume 1*—which, like all of the Kollel's Holiday Readers, can be found online at <http://cincynollel.org/links/holiday-readers/>.

# At the Kollel

**KEY:** 🖐️ Beginners 🖐️🖐️ Intermediate 🖐️🖐️🖐️ Advanced 🚺🚻 for men and women

**Looking for a chavrusa?** See Coordinator Rabbi Chaim Heinemann!  
Chavrusos are available noon–1 PM on weekdays, and 8–9:45 PM Sun.–Thurs.

## Sunday *Free brunch!*

🖐️🖐️ **America Runs on Torah**  
(Jewish Law & Parasha)  
Rabbis Dani Schon  
and Yisroel Kaufman.....10 AM  
*Grand Deluxe breakfast served*

## Tuesday

🚺🚻 🖐️ **Partners in Torah  
at the Mayerson JCC**  
Rabbi Binyamin Teitelbaum.....8 PM

## Wednesday

🚺🚻 🖐️ **Torah Treasures for  
Seniors at the Mayerson JCC**  
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 10:30–11:15 AM

🚺🚻 🖐️ **Downtown Lunch-n-Learn  
at Strauss & Troy**  
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 12–1 PM

## Thursday

🖐️🖐️ **Halacha** (based on the parasha)  
Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....9:10–10 PM  
*Homemade refreshments served.*

## Minyanim for Standard Time

**Shacharis**  
Sunday .....8:15 AM  
Monday–Friday .....7:20 AM

**Mincha**  
Sunday .....1:15 PM  
Mon.–Thurs. thru January .....2:35 PM  
Sun.–Thurs., Feb.–Mar. ....5:45 PM  
Shabbos .....2:40 PM

**Ma'ariv**  
In the Beis Midrash:  
Sunday–Wednesday .....9:45 PM  
Thursday .....10 PM

## Every Day

🖐️ **“Dirshu” Gemara Shiur**  
(Maseches B'choros)  
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....  
Sunday 7:15–8:15 AM  
Monday–Friday 5:50–6:45 AM

🖐️🖐️ **Kollel Yisgaber K'ari**  
(amud-a-day of Mishnah B'rurah)  
Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....  
Monday–Friday 6:55–7:20 AM

🖐️🖐️ **Kitzur Shuchan Aruch**  
Live video conference!  
Rabbi Dani Schon.....  
Monday–Friday 12:05–12:20 PM

🖐️ **Daf Yomi**  
Rabbi Meir Minster.....  
Sunday–Thursday 8–8:45 PM  
Shabbos (at CZE) 1:00 pre-mincha

🖐️🖐️ **Nightly Halacha Chabura**  
Rabbis Dani Schon  
& Binyamin Teitelbaum .....  
Monday–Thursday 9–9:45 PM

**Chavrusa Learning**  
(private & small groups).....times vary

## A Little Give and Take CONT'D

Perhaps he doesn't know. Amalek is the force that blinds us from the truth.

To return to Adam's story: After Adam sinned, he realized he was naked, and he hid when G-d appeared. G-d asked Adam, "Where are you?" Did Adam actually think he could hide from G-d? How is that possible? Only moments before, G-d had been completely revealed to him! Through his sin, Adam became blind, confused, unable to see things clearly, to the extent that he hid from the One Who sees all.

Another aspect of *hester panim*, of G-d's Presence being hidden, is that the Divine plan is beyond our grasp, beyond the scope of our vision. We can no longer see the hand of G-d in the world. Difficult events in our personal lives and in world history leave us wondering, "Where is G-d?" or "How could such tragedies take place?"

One who reads [the verses of] the Megillah (the story of Purim) out of sequence does not fulfill his obligation. (Mishnah, Megillah 2:1)

Starting from the beginning of the Megillah, the events it recounts seem quite random. Achashveirosh makes a party. He executes his wife. Esther becomes queen. Mordechai saves the king's life. These events, through a narrow scope, seem random, not Divinely orchestrated. Only when we reach the end of the Megillah do we realize that the events leading up to that point were all part of a Divine plan. Everything had a purpose and a reason. They were not simply coincidences.

The Talmud is teaching us that our duty is not to look to the end of the story to see the hand of G-d; rather, we must read the Megillah and see the Divine hand in every event, good and bad.

People often write their memoirs at the ends of their lives. Only in retrospect can they see how everything worked out and how all the pieces of the puzzle fit. The Megillah challenges us to see G-d throughout our lives as a reality, as a guide. In good and bad times, He is guiding us to our individual and collective destinies.

Amalek represents doubt. The message of Purim is to rise above that doubt, to make G-d a reality. Adam brought Amalek into existence, but we sustain Amalek. Amalek's ideology exists in our culture today—nothing is absolute; everything is mere chance. Our goal, however, is to find G-d, to uncover His presence, and to make Him a part of our lives. 🕊️