

Parsha Ponders

Purim | Mar 13, 2025 | 13 Adar 5785

*Past mistakes, future salvation*¹

כי פור המן נהפך לפורנו, צדיק נחלץ מיד רשע, אויב נתן תחת נפשו

For Haman's lot was flipped to our Purim, a righteous one was saved from the hand of the wicked, and an enemy was substituted for him²

It's clear from the book of Shmuel that the primary sin of king Shaul was that he didn't listen to the *mitzvos* of Hashem with *temimus*, innocent and pure loyalty. Rather, he made all kinds of calculations. He was commanded to annihilate every member of the wicked nation of Amalek, including their animals. Instead, he kept the fatty animals for offerings to Hashem, and he spared the king of Amalek, Agag, to execute him later³. The intent seemingly was to publicly disgrace him, to create a great *Kiddush Hashem*. It would demonstrate the tremendous victory of the Jews over their arch enemy.

When the prophet Shmuel discovered what king Shaul had done, what did he tell him? He said that listening is greater than a good offering, and paying attention is greater than the fats of doe⁴. The intent is that the main desire of Hashem is that we follow His commands, with *temimus*. Our service of Hashem should be devoid of all calculations.

We are taught⁵ that Esther and Mordechai, as descendants of king Shaul, had the mission to rectify their ancestor's sin. This was appropriate, for Haman was a descendant of Agag, the Amalekite King that Shaul failed to promptly execute. How did their rectification of Shaul's sin, which was not performing Hashem's will with *temimus*, manifest itself?

When Esther was taken to the palace to see if she qualified to be the new queen, Mordechai instructed her not to reveal her family, or that she was Jewish⁶. The Vilna Gaon explains⁷ that initially, Esther tried to avoid going to the palace. First, she hid. When she was eventually discovered, she wouldn't go, until she was taken against her will. She made it clear she wasn't interested in marrying the king. If she would reveal her family and that she was Jewish, perhaps they would all be killed in retribution for her misconduct. She therefore hid her identity.

Once Esther became queen, she saw that the king's men were all honoring her, and no one brought up again her initial misconduct. It would make sense then for her to finally reveal her Jewish heritage. Nevertheless, since Mordechai instructed her not to reveal her identity, she kept it a secret, even though she knew that the reason no longer applied⁸.

¹ Based on Iyunim L'Peirush HaGra U'Miluim L'Mekoros U'Biurim to Esther 3:1, citing a contemporary anonymous *Talmid Chacham*

² *Asher Heini* poem recited after the night time *megillah*

³ See Malbim to I Samuel 15:20

⁴ I Samuel 15:22

⁵ Alshich to Esther 4:14

⁶ Esther 2:10

⁷ *Ad. loc.*

⁸ This is very reminiscent of the Vilna Gaon's approach to the decrees of the Sages, where he says in Ma'aseh Rav § 97 that even if the reason for the decrees doesn't apply, the decree still applies

We see from here her tremendous righteousness. Yet is this really vital information for the story? According to the above, indeed it is. We see that Esther acted with *temimus*, simply following the command of Mordechai without a second thought.

We find another example of this with Esther going unannounced to Achashverosh to get him to spare the Jewish people. Initially, she thought it would be counterproductive⁹. Everyone knows it's a capital crime to appear to the king unannounced. Defying a well-known law could have grave ramifications. Furthermore, she said that the king hadn't summoned her in thirty days. She felt that he would likely summon her in the coming days, so why take a risk and be impatient? However, once Mordechai impressed upon her the urgency of the matter, and that she must go herself to stop Haman's decree, she went without question¹⁰.

In fact, not only did Esther's *temimus* rectify king Shaul's sin, but it also brought about the Jew's salvation. If Haman had known that Esther was herself Jewish, he would have simply stipulated that his decree did not include her. Then, Esther would not have been able to claim that Haman was trying to kill her and her people. It's clear that Achashverosh wasn't concerned about the fate of the Jews, only that his own wife was in danger. Since she hid her identity until the end, she had a winning claim against Haman¹¹.

This is in contrast to Haman. He inherited his ancestor Amalek's trait of making calculations and continued on this destructive path. He had this whole plan to annihilate the Jewish people, and didn't for one instant think about their Father in Heaven¹². We find many examples of Haman's overthinking things. He saw the destruction of the Temple and the Jewish people being in exile as a guarantee that the constellations were against them¹³. Nevertheless, he was terrified that if he struck them at the wrong moment, the constellations might backfire against him. He therefore drew lots to find the exact right time to commit his genocide.

Furthermore, when Haman presented his plan to Achashverosh, he was careful not to mention the Jews by name. This was because he was afraid that Achashverosh wouldn't agree to the plan. Perhaps he was a big fan of Mordechai, and would nix the whole thing¹⁴. He also simply mentioned "make them lost" [לאבדם], out of fear that Achashverosh wouldn't let him kill them¹⁵. He was also careful not to mention the Jews by name in his letters that he sent to the nation, out of fear that the Jews would go running to the ministers for asylum¹⁶. Haman's wife also advised him to ask Achashverosh early in the morning to hang Mordechai¹⁷. This was abnormal for the viceroy of the empire, as he would usually come to the

⁹ [Vilna Gaon to Esther 4:11](#)

¹⁰ See [Yosef Lekach](#) to v. 8

¹¹ See [Alshich](#), as well as [Yosef Lekach](#) to [Esther 7:6](#)

¹² This point is a little confusing, because earlier the author said that king Shaul's sin was making calculations, and now he suddenly asserts that this is the trait of Amalek. However, the [Brisker Rav](#) in [Chiddushei HaGriz Ki Seitzei](#) § 152 says exactly this point about Amalek

¹³ [Yosef Lekach](#) to [Esther 4:7](#)

¹⁴ [Vilna Gaon](#) to [Esther 3:8](#)

¹⁵ [Yosef Lekach](#) to v. 9

¹⁶ [Vilna Gaon](#) to v. 14

¹⁷ [Esther 5:12](#)

king later in the day. This advice was because Haman was afraid that an advisor to Achashverosh who likes Mordechai might be there and veto the whole thing¹⁸.

Every single one of Haman's concerns and worries ended up coming back to haunt him. Esther's claim against Haman was that he only decreed to "make them lost", not to kill them. The king never agreed to such a thing¹⁹. Since Haman was the first to come to the palace in the morning, Achashverosh asked him what to do with the one who the king wants to honor. Haman thought the question was about himself, and he ended up granting Mordechai all the honor. This caused his downfall, for after Mordechai received all this honor, Haman was caught wanting to hang Mordechai. Haman couldn't then claim that he didn't know that Mordechai was so prominent. Finally, since Haman didn't mention which nation was to be killed, Mordechai and Esther could amend the letter to say that it was the Jews who would kill their enemies, and not the opposite²⁰.

We see just how deep Hashem's master plan is, that Mordechai seemingly was the instigator of Haman's decree, but in the end, he was the one who engineered its annulment. Not only that, but together with Esther, they were able to rectify the sin of their ancestor king Shaul of not following Hashem's *mitzvos* with *temimus*. It's amazing the acts of Hashem, that they were able to overcome every single one of Haman's plans with precision. Everything he feared ended up turning on him, ultimately saving the Jewish people.

A freilichin Purim and Good Shabbos!

¹⁸ Vilna Gaon *ad. loc.*

¹⁹ Yosef Lekach to Esther 7:2

²⁰ Vilna Gaon to Esther 8:8