



THE REASONS FOR ANTISEMITISM

From Laban the Aramean to Haman and Ahasuerus, from ancient times through the present day, we have always suffered from antisemites who try to harm us. Why do they hate us? And how should we respond?

TEACHER'S MANUAL



JEWISH INSIGHTS

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Teacher's Introduction

In this lesson we will address a topic that is of much interest these days - antisemitism. We must remember that it is obviously impossible to cover the entire subject in such a short amount of time. Thus, in this lesson we will only give a glimpse of the Rebbe's teachings on the subject.

In this talk, the Rebbe presents the Torah view in a clear, and somewhat sharp, way. Since we are teaching a range of students, some of whom have no background in the subject, it is recommended to continuously emphasize that we are talking about the "antisemitic gentile," and of course there are many gentiles who are part of the "righteous among the nations."

JEM has a 30-minute video titled "the Rebbe and antisemitism." It is highly recommended that everyone watch the video in its entirety, before teaching the lesson.

The first ten minutes of the video are from the Rebbe's talk quoted in this class. You can either show the class the entire video, or only the first part, depending on the amount of time you have.

Hebrew: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPXzifD2wuk>

English: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcWwkkQ7Dro>

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Jacob works hard for Laban for 21 years and agrees with Laban on a salary he deserves. When Jacob gets rich as a result, his brothers-in-law - Laban's sons - accuse him of getting rich at their expense (Sources 1-3).

B. The Reason for Antisemitism.....12

Regarding the story of Haman and Ahasuerus, the Talmud teaches a parable about the owner of a field that had a mound of dirt in it, and the owner of a second field that had a ditch in it. When the owner of the ditch wanted to pay the owner of the mound for the dirt, he responded, “so long as I’m getting rid of it, take it for free” (Source 7).

This parable alludes to the real root causes of antisemitism. The first form of antisemitism is casual hatred, without any reason. Like a person who has a “mound” in his field, which simply bothers him, even though it is not harmful. Why? Just because it is there. The second form of antisemitism: The Jew illustrates to the antisemite the emptiness in which he - the antisemite - lives. As a result of the fact that the nations of the world refused to accept the Torah, they have a feeling of an “empty pit,” a void. The antisemite tries to destroy the Jew in order to remove the trigger that awakens this empty feeling.

The reason for the decree was not the stupidity of Ahasuerus, nor was it the bravery of Mordechai in standing up to Haman, or any other aspect of the story. All these were the only natural “dressing.” The real reason for the decree was that Ahasuerus saw the Jewish people as an unnecessary mound in his field, and Haman felt inferior to the Jewish people and was intensely jealous of them.

C. Fighting Antisemitism.....19

The proper way to deal with the decree is the way Esther did. She asked Mordechai to announce three days of fasting and prayer to G-d. Only after making sure that the people of Israel were aware that G-d is the true guardian, did she turn to the natural path, the end of which we know very well from the Purim story.

D. The Jews and the Nations.....8

On the one hand, the prophets instructed the Jewish people not to rely on the nations of the world (Source 4). On the other hand, they supported the creation of alliances, and peaceful relationships with the nations (Source 5). Sometimes they even ordered the Jewish people to bow their heads and pay taxes to the local and regional powers (Source 6). How are these two contrasting approaches reconciled?

The prophets on the one hand told the Jewish people not to trust the nations and only trust G-d Almighty; and at the same time instructed them to act in natural and diplomatic way with the powers and empires of the region.

Introduction

In this week's Torah portion we read the story of Laban the Aramean, who can be identified as the first antisemite in history. Jacob immigrated to Haran, where he faithfully worked for Laban for 21 years. Fatigue at night did not deter him, and the cold in the winter did not weaken his hands. But when Jacob finally amassed a fortune, his brothers-in-law accused him of stealing the family wealth.

In this lesson we will learn about the Rebbe's view on antisemitism: What causes it, and how we should respond to it.

השיעור לפרשת ויצא

משיחת חג הפורים, ה'תשכ"ה
הנחה בלתי מוגה
תורת מנחם חלק מ"ג עמ' 35

[לשמיעת השיחה:](#)



A. Laban - The First Antisemite

Jacob takes his walking stick, leaves his father's house in Be'er Sheva, and arrives in Haran (modern-day Iraq), the city from which his mother Rebecca came. There he meets his relatives, Laban and his daughters, and stays at their house. He asks Laban permission to marry his daughter Rachel, and Laban agrees, but conditions it on seven years of work with his sheep.

At the end of the long years of work, Jacob comes and asks to marry Rachel. Laban organizes a wedding in the presence of his friends and relatives, and during the wedding he tricks Jacob, and sends in her older sister, Leah, instead. Jacob only discovers the scam in the morning, and when he comes to Laban to complain, Laban answers him: "In our country it is not customary to marry off the younger woman before the older one." But if you are really interested in Rachel, you are welcome to work an additional seven years. Jacob agrees, he marries Rachel, and works seven more years.

During these seven years, Jacob's family grew, with eleven sons and one daughter born to him. Then, one day, he arrives at his father-in-law's son, and informs him that he wants to return home - to Be'er Sheva.

Source 1 Genesis 30:25-28

Student's
pg. 3

Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, and I will go to my place and to my land. Give me my wives and my children for whom I worked for you, and I will go. For you know my work, which I have worked for you." Laban said to him, "If only I have now found favor in your eyes! I have divined, and the L-rd has blessed me for your sake." Then he said, "Specify your wages for me, and I will give them."

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל לָבָן שְׁלַחֲנִי
וְאֵלֶיךָ אֶל מְקוֹמִי וְלְאֶרְצִי. תְּנֵה
אֶת נְשֵׁי וְאֶת יְלָדֵי אֲשֶׁר עֲבַדְתִּי
אִתְּךָ בָּהֶן וְאֵלֶיךָ כִּי אֶתָּה יָדַעְתָּ
אֶת עֲבַדְתִּי אֲשֶׁר עֲבַדְתִּיךָ.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי לָבָן אִם נָא מְצָאתִי
חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ נַחֲשֵׁתִי וַיְבָרְכֵנִי ה'
בְּגִלְגָּלָה. וַיֹּאמֶר נִקְבֵה שְׂכָרְךָ עָלַי
וְאֶתְנֶה.

Laban says to him, I believe that G-d has blessed me because of you. During the past fourteen years, my flock has grown under your management and supervision, and I have become extremely rich. I want to reward you for your faithful work.

Laban and Jacob agree that Jacob will continue to shepherd the white sheep, and the new sheep that will be born with brown dots or patches will belong to Jacob. And indeed, so it was. Over time, more and more sheep were born with brown spots or patches, and Jacob's sheep and wealth just kept getting bigger.

Source 2 Genesis 30:43

Student's The man became exceedingly wealthy, and he
pg. 3 had many animals, maidservants, manservants,
camels, and donkeys.

וַיִּפְרֹץ הָאִישׁ מְאֹד מְאֹד וַיְהִי
לוֹ צֹאן רְבוֹת וּשְׁפָחוֹת וְעֹבְדִים
וּגְמָלִים וְחֹמְרִים.

Seemingly, all is well. Everyone should be happy. Laban is wealthy, and so are his daughters and faithful son-in-law. But there were those who were troubled by Jacob's success. His brothers-in-law - Laban's sons.

Source 3 Genesis 31:1-2

Student's He heard the words of Laban's sons, saying,
pg. 3 "Jacob has taken all that belonged to our father,
and he has amassed this entire fortune from what
belonged to our father." Jacob saw that Laban's
countenance had changed, and he was not
disposed toward him as he had been yesterday
and the day before.

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶת דְּבַרֵי בְנֵי לָבָן לְאָמֹר
לָקַח יַעֲקֹב אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִינוּ
וַיִּמְאַשֶׁר לְאָבִינוּ עֲשָׂה אֶת כָּל
הַכָּבֵד הַזֶּה. וַיֵּרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶת פְּנֵי
לָבָן וְהִנֵּה אֵינָנו עִמּוֹ כְּתָמוּל
שְׁלֹשׁוֹם.

The sons of Laban couldn't stand the sight of Jacob's success, and they accuse him of stealing everything from their father. Laban, who himself had signed the salary agreement with Jacob, is also affected by the incitement and hatred, and suddenly he too shows a displeased face to Yaakov.

Jacob understands the situation, and decides that this place is no longer for him. After a short consultation with his wives, Rachel and Leah, he decides to take advantage of an opportunity when Laban and his sons are away. Jacob hurries to pack his family's belongings, and the escape begins. When Laban returns home, he discovers that Jacob and his family are gone, but G-d reveals himself to him in a dream and warns him not to harm Jacob. They make a non-aggression pact between them, and part in peace.

*

It can be said that this is one of the first antisemitic events in history, an event copied and repeated so many times over the generations. The Jews immigrate to a new place, work hard, accumulate a fortune with honesty and faith, and then the familiar tune is heard: the Jews are stealing the public money, etc. Then the Jews have to flee, with or without their money. Just like Jacob, who immigrated to Haran and worked faithfully for 21 years, undeterred by fatigue and the winter cold. When he finally amassed wealth, his brothers-in-law accused him of stealing the family fortune.

In this lesson we will learn about the Rebbe's view on antisemitism: What are the reasons that cause it, and how should we respond to it.

B. The Reason for Antisemitism

Let us first understand what causes the hatred of our many enemies to persecute and fight us. Or in other words: what is the reason for hatred and antisemitism? When we understand the root of antisemitism, we can learn how to deal with this phenomenon.

We are all familiar to some degree with the story of the Book of Esther. Haman—one of the worst antisemites in history—comes to Ahasuerus and presents him with a deal: I will give you ten thousand pieces of silver, and in return you will allow me to kill all the Jews. Ahasuerus tells him in response: Keep the money, and you can do with them whatever you like - with pleasure

The Talmud relates an interesting parable about this:

Source 4 Tractate Megillah 14a

Student's To what can Ahasuerus and Haman be compared?
pg. 4 They are like two individuals, one who had a mound in the middle of his field and the other who had a ditch in his field. The owner of the ditch said: Who will give me this mound? I would even be willing to pay for it. The owner of the mound said: Who will sell me this ditch for money? At a later point, they happened to have met one another. The owner of the ditch said to the owner of the mound: Sell me your mound so I can fill in my ditch. The mound's owner, anxious to rid himself of the excess dirt on his property, said to him: Take it for free; if only you had done so sooner.

מִשְׁלַּל דְּאֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ וְהָמָן לְמָה
הַדְּבָר דּוּמָה? לְשָׁנֵי בְּנֵי אָדָם,
לְאֶחָד הָיָה לוֹ תֵּל בְּתוֹךְ שָׂדֵהוּ,
וְלְאֶחָד הָיָה לוֹ חֲרִיץ בְּתוֹךְ שָׂדֵהוּ.
בְּעַל חֲרִיץ אָמַר: מִי יִתֵּן לִי תֵּל זֶה
בְּדָמִים? בְּעַל הַתֵּל אָמַר מִי יִתֵּן לִי
חֲרִיץ זֶה בְּדָמִים? לְיָמִים נִזְדָּוְגוּ
זֶה אֶצֶל זֶה, אָמַר לוֹ בְּעַל חֲרִיץ
לְבַעַל הַתֵּל: מְכַר לִי תֵּלְךָ. אָמַר לוֹ
טוֹל אוֹתָהּ בְּחִנָּם וְהִלְוֵאִי.

Simply put: two farmers faced problems on their land. One was stuck with a mound of dirt and the other with a hole. When they met, it became clear to them that one man's problem is the other one's solution.

The moral is as follows: when Haman offered Ahasuerus ten thousand pieces of silver to kill the Jewish people, it is like the owner of the ditch who wants to pay for the mound. Ahasuerus told him, "The silver is yours, and the people are yours to do to them as you please." This, in the example, is the owner of the mound who gives up the money, as long as he rids himself of the mound.

In his talk, the Rebbe quotes this parable, and establishes that it not only explains the dynamic between Ahasuerus and Haman, but also goes to the root of the historical enmity of all antisemites.

>> The Rebbe

The Existence Of The Jews Disturbs Him

“One had a mound in his field:”

Student's

pg. 4

The very fact that Jews exist in this world is like a “mound in the field” for the antisemite. He doesn't care what the mound is composed of, if it has special qualities, contains gold or silver, or is simply a mound of dirt. He is bothered by the very existence of the “mound” taking up place in his “field” - what is the Jew doing there?! In the words of the Midrash about Jacob and Esau, Esau said to Jacob “what are you doing in this world?!” Esau didn't care about Isaac's blessing and the like, the very existence of a Jew is like a mound in his field. His hatred for the mound isn't because it inconveniences him, but simply because it is his field and the mound is a foreign object within it.

For such people, nothing can be done. Even if the Jew surrenders everything, gives him all of his money, and becomes his slave, so long as he still exists this antisemite will want to destroy him. The very existence of a Jew drives him mad.

A Jew may think that if he takes off his tefillin, G-d forbid, opens his store on Shabbat and closes it on Sunday, speaks in the local non-Jewish language, dresses like the non-Jew, acts like him, and attends his parties - then the antisemite will be his friend. This is wrong. So long as a Jew exists, this antisemite cannot be calm.

“לאחד היה לו תל בתוך שדהו:”

עצם העובדה שישנה מציאות של יהודי בעולם היא אצלו כמו “תל בתוך שדהו”. לא מעניין אותו מהי מציאותו של ה“תל”, אם יש לו תכונה מיוחדת, זהב או כסף, או שאינו אלא עפר, כי אם, שישנה מציאות דבר שתופס מקום, והיכן - בעולם שחושב שהוא שלו - “שדהו”, וכיון שזוהי “שדהו” - מה עושה שם מציאותו של יהודי?!... ובלשון המדרש⁹ בנוגע ליעקב ועשו, שעשו טוען ליעקב: מה אתה עושה בעולם הזה?!... - לא אכפת לו מברכות יצחק וכיוצא בזה; עצם מציאותו של היהודי נחשבת אצלו כמו “תל” בשדהו, ולא בגלל שה“תל” מפריע לנוחיות שלו, אלא אך ורק בגלל שזוהי “שדהו”, ובה נמצא “תל” שהוא דבר זר.

ועל זה אין שום עצה: גם אם היהודי יוותר על כל עניניו ויתן לו את כל רכושו, וייהפך להיות לו “עבד כנעני” - הנה כל זמן שלא יתבטל ממציותו, “ביהודים לאבדם”, הנה עצם מציאותו של היהודי מנקרת את עיניו!...

גם אם יהודי חושב שאם יסיר את התפילין רחמנא לצלן, יפתח את חנותו בשבת ויסגרנה ביום ראשון, ידבר בלשונו של הגוי, יתלבש ויתנהג כמותו, וייהנה מסעודתו של אותו רשע, אזי יהיה הגוי ידיד שלו - אין האמת כן; כל זמן שקיימת מציאותו של היהודי, לא יכול הגוי להיות רגוע!

(9) ראה יל"ש (רמז קיא) ופרש"י תולדות כה, כב. סדר אליהו זוטא פ"ט. תנחומא תרומה ט (ותנחומא באבער שם ז).

The first reason for antisemitism is casual hatred, without any reason. Like a person who has a "mound" in his field, it just bothers him, even though it is not actually harming him. Why you may ask? Just because.

So too the antisemite - he simply does not tolerate the presence of the Jew in his space.

We also see this in the words of the Midrash about Esau's argument to Jacob: We have already agreed that you are the spiritual person and I am the material one. What then are you doing here in this world, in my territory? You belong in the World-to-Come!

Therefore, even if the Jew starts to behave like a gentile - it won't remedy anything. Because the hatred does not stem from cultural differences or differences in mentality, language and behavior. The proof is that sometimes the Jews are accused of being rich, and sometimes they are hated because they are poor; Sometimes they are targeted for being different, and sometimes for trying to assimilate with the Gentiles. No matter what we do, the antisemites will hate us.

Empty Feelings

"One had a ditch in his field:"

Another type of antisemite feels like he has a "ditch," an empty void. The Sages teach us that at Mt. Sinai when we received the Torah "hatred—sinah—descended into the world." Since the Jewish people received the Torah, the non-Jew who didn't receive the Torah feels like he has a "ditch," an empty void in his life.

The non-Jews were given the opportunity to receive the Torah but they didn't want to. The Sages taught that "G-d went around offering the Torah to every nation and they didn't want it." But the element they didn't want was the Torah's restrictions - the goodness of Torah is something they want now.

ולאחד היה לו חריץ בתוך שדהו":

הגוי מרגיש שיש אצלו "חריץ" - חלל ריק. ובלשון חז"ל¹⁰ בנוגע ל"הר סיני", "שירדה שנאה לאומות העולם עליו", "שלא קבלו בו תורה"; מאז שבני ישראל קיבלו את התורה, "תורת חיים", מרגיש הגוי שאצלו יש "חריץ" - חלל ריק.

אמנם הייתה להם אפשרות לקבל את התורה, אלא שלא רצו בכך, כמאמר רבותינו זכרונם לברכה¹¹ "החזירה הקב"ה על כל אומה ולשון ולא קבלוה", אבל אף-על-פי-כן, מה שאינם רוצים - הרי זה בנוגע להגבלות שבזה, ואילו את הטוב שבזה - היו רוצים עכשיו.

Student's
pg. 5

This antisemite has a path to overcoming his feeling of emptiness - by raising himself to a higher level. But he rejects this option out of hand, because he doesn't want to observe commandments like "do not murder." This occurred already at the time of the giving of the Torah, when G-d offered the Torah to the children of Esau and Ishmael they asked what it says. When they heard that the Torah commands "do not murder," "do not commit adultery," "do not steal," all the nations rejected it one by one.

So this antisemite has another way to address his feeling of emptiness: neither of us will have anything! The feeling of emptiness only arises in reaction to someone else that has something positive that he doesn't have. But if the Jewish people are destroyed and Torah is lost from the world as a result, then he will lack nothing, because no one else will have anything special that he doesn't have.

The second reason for antisemitism is a feeling of emptiness. Since the Torah was given to the Jewish people on Mt. Sinai, the other nations feel a spiritual void. They could have accepted the Torah themselves, but they chose not to because they didn't want to be restricted by the precepts of the Ten Commandments. But this doesn't prevent them from being jealous of the nation that did accept the Torah.

The two antisemitic personalities of the "mound" and the "ditch" are related, because the reason why the Jew's existence is like a "mound" in the non-Jew's field is because he feels an empty void, a "ditch in his field."

יש לו אמנם דרך למנוע את רגש הריקנות - על ידי זה שיתעלה למעמד ומצב נעלה יותר מכמו שהוא עתה, אבל, הוא שולל מלכתחילה דרך זו, כיון שאין רצונו בכך; אין רצונו לקיים את הציווי "לא תרצח". וכבר היה לעולמים בשעת מתן תורה, כמסופר במדרשי חז"ל¹² שכאשר פנו לבני עשו ובני ישמעאל ונתנו להם אפשרות לקבל את התורה, שאלו, מה כתוב בה, הנה "לא תרצח" - לא רוצה זה לקבל, "לא תנאף" - לא רוצה השני לקבל, ו"לא תגנוב" - לא רוצה השלישי לקבל.

ובכן, יש לו דרך אחרת למנוע את רגש הריקנות: "גם¹³ לי גם לך לא יהיה!" כל המושג של "חריץ", חלל ריק, שייך רק כאשר ישנו מישהו שיש לו דבר חיובי, ואילו אצלו חסר הדבר; אבל כאשר יאבדו היהודים, "ביהודים לאבדם", ובמילא תתבטל המציאות של ענין התורה בעולם, כיון שהתורה תחזור למקומה, והעולם יישאר ללא תורה רחמנא לצלן - אזי לא יחסר לו מאומה, כיון שאף אחד אין לו דבר מיוחד!

ושני הענינים-הסוגים הללו ("לאחד היה לו תל בתוך שדהו ולאחד היה לו חריץ בתוך שדהו") שייכים זה לזה - כי, הסיבה לכך שמציאותו של יהודי נחשבת בעיני הגוי כ"תל בתוך שדהו", היא, בגלל שמרגיש שאצלו יש חלל ריק - "חריץ בתוך שדהו".

Ultimately these are two sides of the same coin. From the physical perspective the antisemite proclaims that he can't stand the physical existence of the Jew, it is a "mound in his field." And from the spiritual perspective of the soul, the "veritable part of G-dliness" that is the reason G-d descended on Mt. Sinai and gave the Jewish people the Torah, the antisemite feels an empty void, a "ditch."

ובאמת הרי זה ענין אחד: מצד הגוף - צועק הגוי שאינו יכול לסבול מציאות הגוף של היהודי, כיון שזהו "תל בתוך שדהו"; ומצד הנשמה, שהיא "חלק אלקה ממעל ממש", ולכן, "וירד ה' על הר סיני... וידבר אלקים את כל הדברים האלה לאמר"¹⁴, עד סוף כל הדורות - נעשה אצלו חלל ריק, "חריץ".

The Rebbe explains that, in fact, the two aforementioned reasons are two sides of the same coin. From the perspective of the body - the antisemite says that he cannot tolerate Jews near him. Just because. For no reason. But in reality this all stems from the soul - the antisemite feels an emptiness near the Jew, and instead of filling his life with meaning and elevating himself, he prefers to destroy the Jew, and make the problem go away

>> A Story

Shalom Dovber (later the Rabbe Rashab of Lubavitch), and his older brother, Zalman Aharon, played together outside. Zalman Aharon dug a hole and pushed his younger brother into it. Shalom Dovber burst into tears, which reached the ears of their father, Rabbi Shmuel, the Rebbe Maharash.

"I'm the older brother," justified Zalman Aharon, "he's taller than me. It's not fair!"

His father said to him:

"If you want to be taller than your brother, take a chair and stand on it. If you elevate yourself, you won't have to lower i.e. humiliate, the other person to be taller than them".

There's No Reason

Student's
pg.7

This is the meaning of the Talmud's parable: "Ahasuerus and Haman can be compared to two individuals, one who had a mound in the middle of his field and the other who had a ditch in the middle of his field."

וזהו תוכן דברי הגמרא - "משל דאחשוורוש והמן למה הדבר דומה, לשני בני אדם לאחד היה לו תל בתוך שדהו ולאחד היה לו חריץ בתוך שדהו וכו'":

When contemplating and trying to make sense of the entire episode of Haman and Ahasuerus, one may think that it all happened because Haman was jealous of Mordechai, he bribed Ahasuerus with “ten thousand pieces of silver,” and because Ahasuerus was a stupid king he agreed, not understanding what Esther would later explain to him that “the adversary has no consideration for the king’s loss.”

But had Ahasuerus been intelligent, or if someone else would have offered him 11,000 pieces of silver, more than Haman’s 10,000, the entire decree would never have been made. Similarly, if Haman hadn’t been so wicked, or if someone had convinced him not to be so offended by Mordechai’s failure to bow down to him, or if Mordechai hadn’t angered Haman with his conduct - any of these courses of action would have prevented the entire decree from being made.

The Real Reason - Hatred And Jealousy

The Talmud negates this, stating that it is a misconception. The aforementioned events were the natural trappings of the matters, but the ultimate truth of it all was “Ahasuerus and Haman can be compared to two individuals, one of whom had a mound in the middle of his field and the other of whom had a ditch in the middle of his field.”

כאשר רוצים להתבונן ולהבין את פרשת הדברים של אחשוורוש והמן, יכולים לחשוב, שכל זה אירע בגלל שהמן הרשע קינא במרדכי, ולכן רצה לשחד את אחשוורוש ב"עשרת אלפים ככר כסף", וכיון ש"אחשוורוש מלך טיפש היה"¹⁵, הסכים לכך, מפני שלא הבין מעצמו (מה שאסתר הסבירה לו אחר כך), ש"אין הצר שוה בנוק המלך".

אבל אילו אחשוורוש היה חכם, או אם מישהו אחר היה מציע לאחשוורוש סכום גדול יותר, לא עשרת אלפים אלא אחד עשר אלף, וכן בנוגע להמן אילו לא היה רשע כל כך, או אם מישהו היה משקה אותו לשוכרה יום אחד לפני זה כדי שלא יקח ללב ש"מרדכי לא יכרע ולא ישתחוה", וכן בנוגע למרדכי, אילו לא היה מרגיז את המן, אזי לא הייתה באה כל הגזירה.

ובכן, הגמרא שוללת סברה זו, ואומרת שזו טעות. המאורעות הנ"ל הם הלבושים בטבע, אבל כשרוצים לדעת את אמיתית הענין - הנה "משל דאחשוורוש והמן למה הדבר דומה, לשני בני אדם, לאחד היה לו תל בתוך שדהו, ולאחד היה לו חריץ בתוך שדהו".

C. Fighting Antisemitism

After we properly understand what the root causes of antisemitism are, the real reasons that led Haman and Ahasuerus to pass such a harsh decree on the Jewish people, we can now analyze the reaction of Esther and Mordechai, and learn from it what is the proper way to deal with antisemitism.

>> The Rebbe

What Should We Do?

Student's Considering that Ahasuerus and Haman are
pg. 9 like an “owner of a mound” and an “owner of a ditch,” what should we do about it?

Should we go to a person like Ahasuerus and attempt to influence him to revoke his decree? We just explained that he is like the “owner of a mound” who wishes to rid himself of the Jewish people. If so, what would any efforts to influence him help?

Prayer, And Natural Efforts

The revocation of the decree was achieved by Mordechai establishing a fast day, gathering 22,000 children to study Torah and pray “until their cries reached the heavens and G-d heard their cries...like kids and sheep...at that moment G-d took the sealed proclamations and ripped them up,” as the Midrash relates.

In addition, since G-d blessings are given in “whatever you do,” natural efforts were also needed. Esther therefore wore royal clothes and came to speak to Ahasuerus and hold a party that incited jealousy towards Haman, and ultimately she was able to revoke the decree in a natural way as well.

אמנם, כיון שאחשוורוש והמן הם כמו “בעל התל” ו”בעל החריץ” - מה היא אפוא העצה לזה?

ללכת אל אחשוורוש ולהשתדל לפעול עליו שיבטל את הגזירה - הרי זה עתה נתבאר המשל של “בעל התל” בנוגע לאחשוורוש, שהוא בעצמו רוצה להיפטר מבני ישראל, ואם כן, מה תועיל ההשתדלות אצל אחשוורוש!?

ובכן: ביטול הגזירה היה על ידי זה שמרדכי גזר תענית, וקיבץ עשרים ושניים אלף תינוקות של בית רבן שלמדו תורה והתפללו, “עד שעלתה שוועתם למרום ושמע הקב”ה קול בכייתם. . קול גדול. . כגדיים וטלאים. . באותה שעה נטל הקב”ה אותן אגרות שגזר עליהם שהיו חתומות בחותם של טיט וקרעם כו” (כמסופר במדרש¹⁷);

ונוסף לזה, כיון שיש צורך בפעולה בדרך הטבע, “בכל אשר תעשה”-הוצרכה אסתר ללבוש מלכות ולילך לדבר עם אחשוורוש (“בעל התל”), ולערוך משתה, שעל ידי זה “קנאתו במלך קנאתו בשרים”¹⁸, ועד שבטלה את הגזירה גם בדרך הטבע.

(17) אסתר ספ”ט.
(18) מגילה טו, ב.

A Beauty Parlor Won't Get The Job Done

Student's This is expressed in Esther's conduct.
pg. 10 When Esther needed to find favor in Ahasuerus's eyes, even though she hadn't been called to him for thirty days, seemingly the first thing she should have done is go to a beauty parlor, dress up and beautify herself. She needed to do everything possible to find favor in his eyes, because "we don't rely on miracles."

What did Esther actually do? She called for an old rabbi... She said to the rabbi that since it is necessary to act naturally he should "gather all the Jews and fast for me for three days." Not only should Mordechai fast—that wouldn't be a big deal—but all of the Jews, young and old, and "even me." Esther needed to look good to find favor with Ahasuerus, but she said that she would worry about that immediately before entering the king's chamber. First she would fast, together with her maidservants.

"I will go to the king contrary to the law:" I will go with self-sacrifice, and this is what guarantees my success. And even if not, that wouldn't change anything, because a Jew needs to fulfill his obligations and success is in G-d's hands.

This point is the test for Esther's approach to the king - is she doing this relying on "my power and the strength of my hand," or is she doing it because "Esther obeys

ענין זה מודגש באופן ההנהגה של אסתר¹⁹:

לכאורה: כאשר אסתר צריכה לשאת חן וחסד בעיני אחשוורוש, כך שלמרות ש"אני לא נקראתי לבוא אל המלך זה שלושים יום"²⁰, יושיט לה המלך את שרביט הזהב - הנה לכל לראש הייתה צריכה ללכת ל"מכון יופי", להתלבש ולהתייפות, ולעשות כל מה שצריך כדי לשאת חן וחסד, שהרי "אין סומכין על הנס".

ומה עשתה אסתר? - שלחה לקרוא לרב זקן... ואמרה לו: כיון שצריך לעשות פעולה "בדרך הטבע" - הנה "לך כנוס את כל היהודים וצומו עלי. . שלשת ימים"²¹; לא די שאתה תצום לבדך - זה לא "קונץ"... אלא כל היהודים, מראשם ועד סופם, גם הילדים, ו"גם אני" - שצריכה אני לשאת חן וחסד לפני אחשוורוש - הנה לזה אדאג סמוך לכניסתי אל המלך, אבל התחלת הפעולה בזה היא - "גם אני ונערותי אצום כן"²¹.

"ובכן אבוא אל המלך אשר לא כדת"²¹ - כך הולכת אני מתוך מסירות נפש, ולכן יודעת אני שאצליח; וגם אם לאו - אין זה נוגע, שכן, יהודי צריך לעשות מה שמוטל עליו על פי תורה, וההצלחה תלויה בברכת ה'.

וזוהי ה"בחינה" בנוגע להליכת אסתר אל המלך - אם היא עושה זאת בגלל שסומכת על "כחי ועוצם ידי", או בגלל ש"את מאמר מרדכי אסתר עושה"²²: כאשר ההכנה

Mordechai's instructions." When Esther chose to approach the king after fasting for three days, we know that "Esther obeys Mordechai's instructions." She is then successful in forming a receptacle in which G-d's blessings will be able to be manifested.

להליכה אל המלך היא באופן ש"גם אני ונערוטי אצום כן" - אזי יודעים ש"את מאמר מרדכי אסתר עושה", ואז מצליחה לעשות את הכלי - "בכל אשר תעשה" - שבו תשרה ברכת ה', "וברכך ה' אלקיך".

משיחת חג הפורים, ה'תשכ"ה, הנחה בלתי מוגה
תורת מנחם חלק מ"ג עמ' 35

The first thing Esther did was to ask Mordechai to decree a three-day fast for all the Jewish people. She wanted to make sure that the people of Israel would pray to G-d that he protect them and annul the decree. She herself also fasted for three days because she knew that this was the main thing.

It is actually worth dwelling on this point. Because Esther's fast—which is a spiritual action—essentially clashed with her next step—a physical one.

Esther wanted to gain favor in the eyes of Ahasuerus, and invited Haman to a private feast with her and Ahasuerus so that Ahasuerus and the other ministers would be jealous of Haman.

But going to the king when she was weak and pale from prolonged fasting could have ended in disaster... The capricious king could have executed her for the mere fact that she appeared before him without an invitation (as stipulated by Persian law).

Still, Esther prioritized fasting and prayer to G-d, because, ultimately, it is he - G-d - who is the "guardian", while diplomatic action is only the "tool".

B. The Jews and the Nations

The Prophets - Don't Rely On The Nations Of The World

In the days of the prophet Hosea, who was active during the First Temple period, two powers were fighting each other for control of the Middle East region. Egypt, the old and famous kingdom, and Assyria, the new and powerful kingdom. The people of Israel were torn between the two powers, sometimes supporting one and sometimes the other. The prophet Hosea called on the people of Israel to stop placing their trust in the nations: "Assyria will not save us; we will not ride on horses, (a reference to Egypt, the main breeder of horses) nor will we call the work of our hands our gods any longer" (meaning, we will not trust in our military power, but trust in G-d alone).

Source 5 Hosea 14:4

Student's Assyria will not save us; we will not ride on
pg. 12 horses, we will no longer call the work of our hands 'our gods.'

אֲשׁוּר לֹא יוֹשִׁיעֵנו, עַל סוֹס לֹא
נִרְכָּב, וְלֹא נֹאמַר עוֹד אֱלֹהֵינוּ
לְמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵינוּ.

>> The Rebbe

Student's The Torah says "Assyria will not save us,"
pg. 12 meaning that we will cease to request human assistance from Assyria and Egypt. And "we will not ride on horses," referring to the assistance Egypt would provide. Not only will they not be the source of salvation, on the contrary: the verse terms Egypt a "splintered reed of a staff" that is incapable of supporting the person relying on it and it "pierces the hand of anyone who leans on it."

התורה אומרת ש"אשור לא יושיענו (לא נבקש עוד עזרת אדם, לא מאשור ולא ממצרים) על סוס לא נרכב"¹ (זו היא עזרת מצרים שהיו שולחים להם סוסים, כמו שאמרו לישעיהו² - לא כי על סוס ננוס גו'), ולא זו בלבד שלא תבוא מהם ישועה, אלא אדרבה - כמו שכתוב בנוגע למצרים, שלהיותם "מְשַׁעֲנֵת קֶנֶה"³ "קנה רצוץ"⁴, כקנה זה שהוא רך ואינו סומך את הנשען עליו⁵, אזי "בהשענם⁶ עליך תִּשְׁבֵּר והעמד להם כל מְתַנְּיִים" (מאחר שתשבר, יצטרכו לחזק את מתניהם ולעמוד עליהם).

(4) ישע"י מ"ב, ג.
(5) פרש"י יחזקאל שם.
(6) יחזקאל שם, ז (ובפרש"י).

(1) הושע י"ד, ד (ובפרש"י).
(2) ישע"י ל, טז.
(3) יחזקאל כ"ט, ו.

The Prophets - Peaceful alliances with the nations

Source 6 Jeremiah 29:4-7

Several years later, when the Israelites are exiled to Babylon, broken and humiliated, Jeremiah tells them to raise their heads, establish a life there, get married, build houses and plant gardens. Then he adds and says: "Seek the peace of the city." They then established peaceful and fraternal relations with the authorities and people of Babylon.

Student's So said the L-rd of Hosts, the G-d of Israel, to the
pg. 13 entire exile which I have exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and dwell therein, plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and bear children, take wives for your sons and give your daughters to men, and they shall bear children. Multiply there and do not diminish. Seek the peace of the city where I have exiled you and pray for it to the L-rd, for in its peace you shall have peace.

כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
לְכָל הַגּוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר הִגַּלְתִּי
מִירוּשָׁלַיִם בְּבָבֶלָה. בְּנוּ בָתִּים וְשִׁבוּ
וְנִטְעוּ גִּנּוֹת וְאָכְלוּ אֶת פְּרִיָּו. קַחוּ
נָשִׁים וְהוֹלִידוּ בָנִים וּבָנוֹת וְקַחוּ
לְבָנֵיכֶם נָשִׁים וְאֵת בְּנוֹתֵיכֶם תְּנוּ
לְאֲנָשִׁים וְתִלְדְּנָה בָנִים וּבָנוֹת
וְרַבוּ שָׂם וְאַל תִּמְעָטוּ. וְדַרְשׁוּ אֶת
שְׁלוֹם הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר הִגַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם
שָׁמָּה וְהִתְפַּלְלוּ בְעֵדָה אֵל ה' כִּי
בְשָׁלוֹמָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שְׁלוֹם.

Jeremiah said this to the Israelites not only after their exile in Babylon, but even before, when they were still in Jerusalem. At that time, Babylon was the rising power (after Assyria), and King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon demanded that the countries of the region submit to him and pay taxes. Talks were held amongst the kings of the region to decide whether to submit to him or to stand together against him and fight for independence.

The prophet Jeremiah sent a message to King Zedekiah of Israel, instructing him to make peace with Nebuchadnezzar and pay him taxes. Jeremiah continued that if Zedekiah does so, the Temple will continue to exist and he will continue to reign in Jerusalem.

Source 7 Jeremiah 27:12-13

Student's To Zedekiah the king of Judah I have spoken all
pg. 13 these words, saying: "Bring your necks into the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him and his people, and live. Why should you die, you and your people, by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, as the L-rd has spoken concerning the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon?

וְאֵל צִדְקִיָּה מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה דִּבַּרְתִּי
כְּכָל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאָמֹר
הֲבִיאוּ אֶת צִוְאַרְיֶכֶם בְּעַל מְלֶכֶךְ
בָּבֶל וְעִבְדוּ אֹתוֹ וְעִמּוּ וְחִיו. לָמָּה
תָּמוּתוּ אֶתְּהָ וְעִמְךָ בְּחָרֵב בְּרָעֵב
וּבְדָבָר כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' אֵל הַגּוֹי
אֲשֶׁר לֹא יַעֲבֹד אֶת מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל.

>> The Rebbe

Student's On the other hand, the prophet Jeremiah
pg. 13 instructed us “seek the peace of the city to which I have carried you into exile and pray to G-d for it, because if it has peace, you too will be at peace.” He also instructed to send messengers to make peace with the non-Jewish King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and pay the taxes he demanded. Although Nebuchadnezzar was no less wicked than the Assyrian king, Pharaoh the king of Egypt is termed a “splintered reed” while with Nebuchadnezzar they were commanded to make peace in order to guarantee the future of the Holy Temple and the reign of King Zedekiah.

Just as was the case in the time of the First Temple, so too was it during the time of the Second Temple, and throughout all the generations this has been the approach of true Torah leaders who cared for the Jewish people, both as a community and on the personal level.

On the one hand they cautioned us not to rely on favors from the non-Jewish nations because this would be a false hope that would not help, and perhaps even cause harm. At the same time, we see that they invested effort into attempting to influence non-Jews. Despite considering the non-Jews “a splintered reed,” they even used money to try to influence them, for which purpose they taxed not only the wealthy, but even the poor and Torah scholars.

ולאידך מצינו - שירמיה אמר “ודרשו את שלום העיר גו' והתפללו בעדה כי בשלומה יהיה לכם שלום”⁷ וכן צוה⁸ לשלוח שלוחים לעשות שלום עם גוי - נבוכדנצר מלך בבל, וליתן לו המסים שדורש, וכו' וכו', והיינו, שאף על פי שרשעותו לא היתה פחותה ממלך אשור, הנה פרעה מלך מצרים יהיה “משענת קנה” (רצוץ), ואילו נבוכדנצר מלך בבל, צריכים לעשות עמו שלום, שלום שיבטיח את קיומו של בית המקדש ומלכותו של צדקיהו וכו' וכו'.

ועל דרך שמצינו בזמן בית המקדש הראשון, כן היה גם בזמן בית המקדש השני, וכן היה גם במשך כל הדורות, באופן היחס של גדולי ישראל האמיתיים, שהקיום היהודי, הן של היחיד והן של הרבים, היה יקר להם -

שמחד גיסא מצינו שהזהירו שלא לסמוך על חסד לאומים, כיון שזוהי תקות כזב שלא תצמח ממנה תועלת, והלוואי שלא תזיק; וביחד עם זה מצינו שעסקו בהשתדלות לפעול על אינם-יהודים גם על ידי תשלום ממון, ועד שבשביל זה הטילו מסים על בני ישראל, לא רק על עשירים, אלא גם על עניים ותלמידי חכמים, כדי שיהיה כסף לפעול על אינו-יהודי שיעזור לבני ישראל, למרות שאינם אלא “משענת קנה רצוץ”.

(7) ירמ' כט, ז.
(8) ראה שם כו, יב ואילך.

Even during a later period, at the end of the time of the Second Temple, when Rome besieged the city of Jerusalem, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai thought it was a mistake to fight them. Instead, they should have made peace with the Romans and paid taxes. The militia who ruled Jerusalem at the time did not allow this - and we all know how it ended. Rome conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, hundreds of thousands were killed, and many more taken into captivity.

How are these two opposites reconciled? How is it that on one hand we are told not to trust the Gentiles, and that they are only a broken reed, and on the other hand we are told to strive to make alliances of cooperation, and sometimes to bribe them, so that they will help us, the Jewish people

According to what we learned in this lesson, it's all understood. The prophets' intention was that we should "trust" and "lean" only on G-d Almighty. We must always pray to G-d and trust only in His salvation. Along with this, we are supposed to find diplomatic and natural ways to survive in this world. Therefore, sometimes we are required to bow our heads and pay taxes to this or that power, or to make an alliance with the peoples of the region. But all of this is founded on the basis of faith and prayer for the power and protection of G-d Almighty.