



## SINAH AND AHAVA LISHMA

The Jewish people served as slaves in Egypt for at least two hundred years. The Torah tells us that the labor was backbreaking and intense:

ויעבדו מצרים את בני ישראל בפרך. וימררו את חייהם בעבדה קשה בחמר ובלבנים ובכל עבדה בשדה את כל עבדתם אשר עבדו בהם בפרך.

*The Egyptians ruthlessly made the Children of Israel labor. They made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and in brick and in all kinds of labor in the field, all their labor in which they ruthlessly made them serve.*

**Shemot 1:13–14**

Pharaoh even ratcheted up the slavery by murdering Jewish babies. Yet, while the Torah enjoins us to eternally remember that we were slaves in Egypt, and many of the mitzvot



that we perform are based on that memory, we have no obligation vis-a-vis the Egyptians themselves. There is no requirement to despise all those descendants of Pharaoh and his ilk, nor to hate the Egyptian people. The only possible gesture toward hatred is the prohibition to live in Egypt (Devarim 17:16).

Not so with Amalek. Though the Amalekites never enslaved us and their attempts to seriously injure the Jewish people were repelled (Shemot 17:13), their ignominious attack must never be forgotten:

ויאמר ה' אל משה כתב זאת זכרון בספר ושים באזני יהושע כי מחה אמהה את זכר עמלק מתחת השמים. ויבן משה מזבח ויקרא שמו ה' נסי. ויאמר פי יד על פס ג-ה מלחמה לה' בעמלק מדר דר.

*Hashem said to Moshe, "Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Yehoshua: that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under the sky." Moshe built an altar, and called its name Hashem our Banner. He said, "Yah has sworn: 'Hashem will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.'" Shemot 17:14–16*

Despite their only marginal success, the Torah nonetheless marks Amalek as the eternal enemy of the Jewish people with a clear demand and requirement that they and their memory be wiped from the map. It is an intensity reserved for this nation to the exclusion of the enslaving Egyptian and other destructive enemies of the Jewish people.

What makes this enemy unique?

Commenting on Amalek's first appearance, the Ramban says:

וטעם העונש שנענש עמלק יותר מכל העמים, בעבור כי כל העמים שמעו וירגזו (שמות טו יד), ופלשת אדום ומואב ויושבי כנען נמוגו (שם) מפני פחד ה' ומהדר גאונו, ועמלק בא ממרחק כמתגבר על השם, ולכך אמר בו ולא ירא אלקים (דברים כה יח), ועוד כי הוא נין עשו וקרוב לנו, עובר מתעבר על ריב לא לו:

*The reason Amalek was punished more than other nations was because all the other nations heard [of God's wonders] and shook (Shmot 15:14). The Philistines, Edom, Moab and the dwellers of Canaan were terrified with the fear of God and His greatness. And Amalek came from afar as if more powerful than God. Therefore, it says about them, "they don't fear God" (Devarim 25:18). Further he is the grandson of Esau and close to him and enters into a fight that is not his own.*

Reading Ramban carefully, we can see that he points to three factors that mark Amalek as unique among the enemies of God. (1) While the other nations shook with fear, Amalek was emboldened to defeat God. (2) Amalek traveled from a far-off land to enter a battle that was not their own. (3) Amalek is a descendant of Esau.

Egypt matches Amalek in its refusal to fear God. Pharaoh, in his first meeting with Moshe declares (Shemot 5:2):

לא ידעתי את ה' וגם את ישראל לא אשלח "I don't know God nor will I release the Israelites." However, this was Pharaoh's perspective prior to the plagues. After experiencing five plagues, it is only with God's intervention hardening Pharaoh's heart that the king does not back down.

Further, the Jews lived among the Egyptians and Egypt enslaved them out of a (misplaced) fear that these strangers would rise up against them. Amalek, as Ramban notes, had no business with the Jews. They were not local, nor threatening to Amalek lands. Even the argument that they were acting on behalf of Esau is specious since Edom themselves, while they refuse to allow the Israelites through their land, do not attack their distant cousins. It is only Amalek.

Amalek's unfounded, unnecessary, and unprovoked attack marked them as the unique enemy of God. While God rejects the hatred of the Egyptians, Amalek's hatred, which acts without even a modicum of support, evokes a fit of very particular anger from God. Amalek's lack of fear of God led them to attack out of hatred that had no source or inspiration.

The shadow of *sinah lishmah*, hatred for its own sake, undergirds Haman's plan to exterminate the Jews. Mordechai's refusal to bow ignites Haman's anger and a vendetta against Mordechai alone might have been explicable though unfortunate. However, punishing Mordechai alone is insufficient:

וַיֹּאמֶר הֲמֵן לְמַלְכָּךְ אַחְשׁוּרוּשׁ יִשְׁנוּ עִם אֶחָד מִפְּזָר וּמִפָּרָד בֵּין הָעַמִּים בְּכָל מְדִינֹת מְלֻכּוֹתָךְ וְדַתֵּיהֶם שְׁנוֹת מִכָּל עַם וְאֵת דַּתֵּי הַמְּלָךְ אֵינָם עֹשִׂים וְלְמַלְכָּךְ אֵין שׁוּהָ לְהַנִּיחָם.

*Haman said to King Ahasuerus: "There is a certain people scattered abroad and*

*dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom, and their laws are diverse from those of every people and they do not keep the king's laws; therefore it does not profit the king to leave them."*

**Esther 3:8**

Adopting the craft of his Amalekian ancestors, he chooses unadulterated hatred and seeks to destroy the entirety of the Jewish people.

Megilat Esther celebrates the downfall of Haman and his children. However, it asks us to respond to his unadulterated hate with unadulterated love:

לְקַיֵּם עֲלֵיהֶם לְהַיּוֹת עֲשִׂים אֵת יוֹם אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ אֲדָר וְאֵת יוֹם חֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ בְּכָל שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה. כְּיָמִים אֲשֶׁר נָחוּ בָהֶם הַיְּהוּדִים מֵאִיְבֵיהֶם וְהַחֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר נִהְפָּךְ לָהֶם מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׂמְחָה וּמֵאֲבֵל לְיוֹם טוֹב לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם יְמֵי מִשְׁתֶּה וְשִׂמְחָה וּמְשֻׁלַּח מְנוֹת אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ וּמְתֻנּוֹת לְאֶבְיָנִים.

*To enjoin them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day, yearly. The days in which the Jews had rest from their enemies, and the month that was turned for them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a holiday, that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.*

**Esther 9:21–22**

Feasting and gladness are sensible responses to salvation. What prompts the requirement to send gifts neighbors and the poor? These are acts of pure love and brotherhood to counteract the pure hatred of Amalek. This victory over pure hatred occurs when we act out of unconditional love, sending *mishloach manot* and *matanot la-eyyonim*.