Chapter Nine

Haman

Preventative Medicine

[13b] “After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him” (Esther 3:1).

“After” what?

It is a common midrashic premise that phrases like “after these things” come to indicate a causal connection between the events described, not merely a chronological one. Therefore Rava tries to dis-

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1 See Rashi: “(This is the correct reading:) [The words in parentheses are missing in MS New York JTS Rab. 382 of Rashi’s commentary] ‘After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman, etc.’ This verse comes after the episode of Bigthan and Teresh. [Addition in MS New York: “And the Talmud is asking: After what? Scripture has informed us that he was not promoted until after that incident.”] Apparently there were texts known to Rashi which mistakenly read Esther 2:1 here instead of 3:1. No such reading is attested in any of the extant witnesses.


3 See Genesis rabbah, 44:5 (428): “R. Judan and R. Huna, both in the name of R. Yosé: R. Judan says: Everywhere where it says דְּרֵאָשׁ is connected; דְּרֵאָשׁ is separated. R. Huna says: Everywhere where it says דְּרֵאָשׁ is connected; דְּרֵאָשׁ is separated.” See also Esther rabbah, 5:2. Maharsha discusses whether our pericope can be harmonized even with R. Judan’s view that דְּרֵאָשׁ disconnects the current verse from the previous one (see below).

In many midrashic passages the word דְּרֵאָשׁ is also expounded in its basic sense of “words,” assuming that prior to the current verse there took place a conversation which the Bible did not report but which the midrash reconstructs. [This exegesis is founded on a word-play between aḥar haddevarim and hirhurei devarim; as explained by Maharzu in his comments to the instances from Midrash rabbah enumerated below.] See e.g., Genesis rabbah, ibid. (to Genesis 15:1; [=Song of Songs rabbah, 1:61; cf. Aggadat bereshit, 13:1 (ed. Buber, 28)]); 55:4 (578; to Genesis 22:1

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cern such a relationship between the introduction of Haman now and the developments in the previous chapter.⁴

[13b] — Says Rava:⁵ After the Holy One had created a remedy for the wound.⁹

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[=Tanhumavayyera, (18)]; 87:4 (1063-4; to Genesis 39:7). See also Seder eliahu rab-bah, 8 [L. M. Friedmann, ed., Seder Eliahu rabba und Seder Eliahu zuta (Tanna d’be Eliahu) (Vienna: Achiasaf, 1902), 45]; 23 (ed. Friedmann, 128). Esther rabbah, 7:4, to our current verse, applies the rule in the following manner:

“After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman etc.” There were ponderings of words (דְּרָאֵי דָּבָר) there. And who was it who pondered? — R. Judah says: Haman pondered. He said: If Esther is Jewish, then she is my relation through my ancestor Esau... And if she is a gentile, then all the nations are related to each other.

The assumption seems to be that Haman used this argument to justify his request for promotion (see commentators: Ginzberg, Legends, 4:394; 6:463, n. 99). A similar exegetical assumption seems to underlie the Targum to our verse, which supplies a conversation between the “Standard of Judgment” and God that serves as a prelude to Haman’s magnification. Cf. Paton, 194; Moore’s commentary, 35.

⁴ See I. Heinemann, Darkhei ha-aggadah, 141-3. Identically formulated questions (“‘After’ what?”) are cited in several other places in the Babylonian Talmud. See e.g., Sanhedrin 89b (expounding Genesis 22:1; the answer is supplied by R. Johanan in the name of R. Yosé ben Zimra); 94b (expounding 2 Chronicles 32:1; answer supplied by Ravina); 102b (expounding 1 Kings 13:33; answer supplied by R. Abba). Sanhedrin 89b is cited by Maharsha (see his more extensive comments on that passage) who refers us to the interesting observation in R. Elijah Mizrahi’s commentary to Genesis that the Talmud there does not simply connect the verse to the immediately preceding section. A full discussion of Rashi’s approach to these passages in his Bible commentaries is found in Sarah Kamin, Rashi’s Exegetical Categorization In Respect to the Distinction Between Peshat and Derash, Publications of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), 231-47.


⁶ “After”—MS O: “‘After’—This teaches that.”

⁷ “created”—MSS L, M, AgE: “prepared.”

⁸ MS P and EY add: “and prepared.”

⁹ “the wound”—MS B: “the righteous, and for the wound of Israel.”
Says Resh Laqish: The Holy One never inflicts a wound upon Israel unless he has created for them a remedy beforehand; as it says: "When I healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered and the wickedness of Samaria" (Hosea 7:1).

But for the nations of the world it is not so. Rather, he inflicts the wound and afterwards he creates for them the remedy; as it says: "And the Lord shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it" (Isaiah 19:22).

Resh Laqish’s dictum is based on a meticulous comparison of the respective word orders of the passages in Hosea and Isaiah. When speaking of the chastisement and subsequent healing of Israel, it is the

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12 “has created” — MSS B, Ashkenazic family, YS, AgE: “creates”; MS O: “has prepared”; MS P: “prepares and creates” [or: “previously creates”]; EY, Genizah fragment: “prepares”; HgT: “prepared and created” [or: “previously created”]; Printings: “the Holy One creates.”

13 “for them” — ~ in HgT2, Genizah fragment (before emendation).

14 HgT1, Genizah fragment add: “for the wound.”

15 “beforehand” — ~ in HgT1, Pesaro Printing, AgE, Genizah fragment.

16 MSS G, W add: “for the wound.”

17 Spanish family adds: “And afterwards.”

18 MS G adds: “And afterwards: ‘then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered.’”

19 “for” — supplied for purposes of translation, but actually found only in MSS W and R.

20 “for the nations...is” — HgT2: “the nations of the world are.”

21 “Rather” — MS M: “He creates (for them the remedy first)”; ~ in MSS G, B (but filled in in B*), W, Ashkenazic family, Printings, AgE.

22 MS Mf adds: “first.”

23 “creates for them the remedy” — Spanish family, Genizah fragment: “heals them [‘them’ — ~ in MS O].”

24 Spanish family, Genizah fragment add: “At first: ‘he shall smite’ and afterwards: ‘heal it’.”
healing that is mentioned first—even though this constitutes a reversal of the order of events. In Isaiah's oracle about Egypt the order is the opposite. This is taken by Resh Laqish as an indication of God's special concern for his people; he will not begin to inflict a punishment on them until after he has made preparations for their healing. In the case of the heathen peoples—even though the eventual cure might also be as-

More precisely: His careful attention to the order of the words causes him to utterly invert the contextual meaning of the verse, which says—according to all the traditional and critical commentators—that because of the iniquity of Ephraim God was unable to heal Israel (e.g., Targum, Lamentations rabbah, 2:3, Rashi, Qimhi, Mesuddat David; William Rainey Harper, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea, The International Critical Commentary, ed. S. R. Driver et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905), 292; Peter C. Craigie, Twelve Prophets, Vol. 1, The Daily Study Bible, ed. John C. L. Gibson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 53. Note in particular Ibn Ezra's observation that Hosea 7:1 serves as a refutation of the people's claim in 6:1 that "he hath torn, and he will heal us [Observe the order!—E. S.]; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." [See Abe Lipshitz, , The Commentary of Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra on Hosea (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1988), 72, 75 (English); 21 (Hebrew)]. But cf. Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, Hosea, The Anchor Bible, ed. W. F. Albright and D. N. Freedman (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 444: "...the repentance of the people seems to be the result—not the precondition—of divine restoration. ...The question of sequence remains, since the order of the clauses is not necessarily chronological." For a similar midrashic reversal of a disheartening scriptural passage see James Kugel, “Two Introductions to Midrash,” in Midrash and Literature, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick, 77-103 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 77-80.
sured—no such affection is expressed and the healing is left, as it were, in temporary suspense.

Rava’s use of the term “remedy” makes it likely that he was actually alluding to Resh Laqish’s dictum. The reassuring idea expressed

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26 See Anaf yosef (citing Or kesalmah). This point was particularly bothersome to the traditional commentators who were not satisfied that Resh Laqish’s delineation of the difference between Israel and the nations is substantial enough to be meaningful. Thus, Maharsha explains that the tribulations of Israel are designed to atone for their sins and hence the eventual cure is unconditional, whereas those of the gentiles are perceived as punitive so that the restoration is made conditional upon their repentance (which is mentioned in the continuation of the verse). See also ‘Iyyun ya’aqov and commentaries quoted in Ge’on ya’aqov to EY. It would appear at any rate that all these commentators (except for the Anaf yosef) are being overly literal and missing the touching and reassuring psychological point of the midrash, for whom it is the attitude, and not the execution, that is of the essence. [See also Yad yosef: “If the blow had preceded the creation of the remedy, then it would have been too heavy for them to suffer.”]

27 Rava’s interpretation is cited in substantially the same form in Panim aherim A, 45, alongside the dictum of R. Simeon ben Laqish. Rava’s comment is cited there anonymously (as it is in several witnesses to our pericope). Resh Laqish’s dictum is ascribed there simply to “R. Simeon.” Buber (n. 10) is certain that it should be emended according to TB. The Panim aherim version makes the connection more explicit by adding a concluding sentence: “Which remedy did he create for them? — ‘In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king’s gate’ (Esther 2:21).” Otherwise the connection might have been construed as being to Esther’s accession to the throne, which is in fact more essential to the happy conclusion of the plot than Mordecai’s uncovering of the plot against the king, without which the Jews would still have been saved. The Leqaḥ tov, 97, nevertheless interprets the “remedy” as a reference to the fact “that Haman’s nemesis [Esther] had been taken into Ahasuerus’ household.” See also Lamentations rabbah, 1:22-23 in which an elaborate literary homily is fashioned around the premise that “for all the difficult prophesies which were uttered by Jeremiah about Israel, Isaiah had already anticipated their remedies.” The passage goes on to enumerate an instance for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet in which the subject-matter of a verse from Lamentation is paralleled by a consolation from the book of Isaiah.

28 See Zwi Moshe Dor, The Teachings of Eretz Israel in Babylon (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1971).
therein might also have been put to a variety of homiletical uses, not necessarily with respect to Purim.

**Mordecai and the People of Mordecai**

[13b] “And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai” (Esther 3:6).

Says Rava, First to “Mordecai,” and in the end to “the people of Mordecai.” And who are they? —The rabbis. And in the end all the Jews (see Esther 3:13).

The verse mentions three different objects of Haman’s outrage: (1) Mordecai; (2) “the people of Mordecai”; and (3) “all the Jews that were throughout the kingdom.” Although, understood simply, (3) is merely intended as an identification of (2), the midrash here follows

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29 E.g., it would fit nicely into a homily for “Shabbat Sheqalim,” on the theme of how the precept of sheqalim counteracted Haman’s plot (as found below on the current page of the Talmud).

30 E.g., in the context of a sermon on the Exodus or Passover, the preacher might have developed the theme of how the Israelites’ redemption had been promised to Abraham; and cited the present instance as one of a series of corroborating examples. The corollary of such a derashah would of course be that the current state of exile should be viewed from the same perspective, and that God has long ago prepared the redemption.

31 “Says”—Genizah fragment: “רָאָה (?)”

32 “Rava” (in MS Y: רָבָא) —MS G: “Rabbah”; AgE: “R. Abba.”

33 “Says Rava”— in MS P.

34 MSS B, W, L, R, P, Mf, HgT, Genizah fragment add: “‘alone.’”

35 “in the end”—MSS O, EY, Genizah fragment: “afterwards.”

36 Spanish family and Genizah fragment add: “‘to destroy, to kill, to cause to perish, all Jews’ (Esther 3:13).

37 We should note that additional justification for Rava’s exegesis is furnished by the unnecessary repetition of the phrase “the people of Mordecai” within the verse. Cf. Haupt’s “Critical Notes,” 125/29 [where he observes that the Septuagint omits all the references to “the people of Mordecai”]. Cf. Josephus, Antiquities 10:6:5 (211) [pp. 416-7] which seems to be expounding the duplication as a hint that Haman’s hostility to Mordecai hearkens back to the archetypal hatred of the Amalekites to the Israelites.

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its normal methods of reading scripture, according to which such apparent redundancy must be exploited in order to discover additional religious insights. In this vein Rava deduces that Haman is directing his wrath against a separate class of victims which was in more immediate proximity to Mordecai, namely his fellow rabbinic scholars. Our midrash thereby joins the company of several others whose purpose is to cast Mordecai in the role of a typical talmudic sage and demonstrate thereby that the rabbis and their institutions were alive and active throughout the story.

Choosing a Date

[13b] “They cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar” (Esther 3:7).

an approach which is also found in the Targum (where the emphasis is placed on Esau, not Amalek, as the pertinent ancestors; see Grossfeld, The Two Targums, 52). See Ginzberg, Legends, 4:397; 6: 464, n. 104.

38 See Maharsha. He suggests that Rava is also alluding to a play on the word שִׁשֵּׁה (companion; alluding to TB Shevu'ot 30a where the occurrence of שִׁשֵּׁה in Leviticus 19:15 is expounded midrashically as “with him who is with you in the Torah and commandments”), but this strikes me as farfetched. More likely is an allusion to the etymologically related “שימ,” “[those who are] with”; an emendation which is preferred by several recent commentators (see Moore’s commentary, 37, citing Gunkel).

39 The “rabbanan” have already been mentioned by that name in the Esther-Midrash on 12b (to Esther 1:13); and will be referred to later on the current folio (“There are among them the rabbis”); and below 16a (where Mordecai teaches them the laws of “qemisah”).
It was taught\(^40\) [in a *baraita*]:\(^41\) When the lot fell for him upon\(^42\) Adar, he rejoiced\(^43\) a great\(^44\) rejoicing. He said: The lot\(^45\) has fallen for me upon the month in which Moses their master\(^46\) died.

But he did not know that on the seventh of Adar he\(^47\) died\(^48\) and\(^49\) on the seventh of Adar he\(^50\) was born.

Midrashic hermeneutics will naturally search for homiletical symbolism in all the dates that are mentioned in Scripture. For the Jewish homilist, therefore, the date of Purim—i.e., the day chosen by Haman for the execution of his plot against the Jews—strikes us as singularly meager in religious or historical associations, containing as it does not a single festival or major event in the annals of the nation. On further reflection however, that which creates disappointment for the Jewish reader would have been regarded as wonderfully auspicious for the Jew-baiter Haman.\(^51\) This type of reasoning presupposes of course

\(^40\) "was taught"—MSS G, B, W, M, R, Spanish family, Printings, AgE: "It teaches"; YS: "Says R. Hana bar Hanina: It teaches."

\(^41\) See Melamed, *Halachic Midrashim of the Tannaim*, etc., 518.

\(^42\) All other witnesses add: "the month of."

\(^43\) MS Y (only) has here erased: "(and he)."

\(^44\) "great"—\(\sim\) in MS Mf.

\(^45\) "the lot"—AgE: "It."

\(^46\) "their master"—\(\sim\) in MS P, Printings.

\(^47\) "he"—all witnesses except MSS Y, B, Printings: "Moses."

\(^48\) "seventh...died"—MS B: "seventh on which he died he also died—on the seventh of Adar he died."

\(^49\) "on the seventh of Adar he died and"—\(\sim\) in MS P.

\(^50\) "he"—MSS G, O, W, L, R, Mf, HgT\(^1\), YS, AgE, : "Moses"; EY: "Moses our master."

\(^51\) However it is not self-evident that the commemoration of a righteous person's death should constitute an evil omen, rather than a favorable one. See the discussion in R. Jacob Reischer's *ığıyun ya'aqov*.

Other sources also build in different ways on the apparent insignificance of Adar. Thus, *Esther rabbah*, 7:11, *Abba gorion*, 24-6, *Panim aherim A*, 46, *Panim aherim B*, 67-8, the Second Targum and AgE, 29-30 have Haman rejecting in turn all the days of the week [thereby accounting for the scriptural mention of "from day to day," which is not expounded in the Esther-Midrash; cf. Haupt, 128/32: "...they did

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that Israel’s pagan enemies were as erudite in Jewish lore as the rabbis themselves—but that is a common assumption of midrashic exegesis.\footnote{52} In the end the baraita was able to find one historical event that was associated with the month of Adar: the death of Moses on the seventh of that month. This date is not given in the Bible, but is found in Tannaitic tradition.\footnote{53}

\footnotetext[52]{See I. Heinemann, Darkhei ha-aggadah, 40-3. Maharsha takes this idea one step further. He argues that Haman was familiar with the traditional date of Moses’ death, which can be calculated from data supplied by the Bible (see below), but he did not know that this was also Moses’ birthday, since that fact was only derived through rabbinic midrashic exegesis!}

\footnotetext[53]{The earliest datable source for this tradition appears to be Seder 'olam rabbah, 10 [Ratner, B., ed., Midrash seder olam, S.K. Mirsky ed. (New York: Moznaim, 1988), 42; Chaim Milikowsky, “Seder Olam: A Rabbinic Chronology,” Ph. D., Yale University, 1981, 272-4. 477; also cited in TB Qiddushin 38a and Tanhuma Va’ethannan, 5 (end), and paraphrased by Rashi to our pericope]:

“And he said to them, I am a hundred and twenty years old today” (Deuteronomy 31:2). There is no need for Scripture to say “today”; why does Scripture say “today”? —This teaches that on the seventh of Adar Moses was born and on the seventh of Adar he died.

Seder ‘olam goes on to calculate the date by counting backwards from Joshua 4:19 which speaks of the people crossing the Jordan “on the tenth day of the first month.” Based on the information supplied in Deuteronomy 34:5-8 (about the thirty-day mourning period) and Joshua 1:10-11 (giving three days until the crossing of the Jordan, assuming that the count began immediately after the thirty days) it was reckoned that thirty-three days had elapsed between Moses’ death and the tenth of Nisan, bringing us to the tenth of Nisan. See also Leviticus rabbah, 11:6 (228); Song of Songs rabbah, 1:44 (ed. Dunsky, 37); Midrash on Psalms, 18:22 (transl. Braude, 1:253); Midrash peirat mosheh rabbenu (Jellinek, Bet ha-Midrasch, 1:122). [But cf. Tosafot to TB Qiddushin. ibid.] Josephus, on the other hand [Antiquities 4:8:49 (327-8), pp. 632-3] states that Moses died on the “day of the new moon” of Adar. Ps.-Hippolytus [A. Cleveland Coxe, ed., Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus,}
Haman’s Slanders

Haman’s argument, even without midrashic embellishment, succinctly encapsulates the most frequent arguments that have standardly been voiced against Jews,\textsuperscript{54} as a minority stubbornly adhering to its own religious rituals and legal system\textsuperscript{55} and rejecting the gods of the...

\textsuperscript{54}I would like to take this occasion to extend my thanks to James Keegstra, that aspiring contemporary Haman, for providing me with valuable insights into the mind of a classic Jew-hater. Much of my familiarity with the twisted world of pre-modern anti-semites emerged from research connected with my role as expert witness in the trial of “Regina vs. Keegstra” in Spring of 1992, in which the defendant was convicted of the crime of “inciting hatred against an identifiable group, namely the Jews.”


As has been noted by several scholars, some of the arguments which appear in the midrashic retelling of Haman’s arguments also appear in “Addition B” to the Greek Esther which presents a full text of the edict circulated by Ahasuerus at Haman’s instigation. [Versions of this letter are appended to several midrashim; notably \textit{Abbagorion}, 29-31.] See C. Moore’s edition of Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah: The Additions, 190; Paton, 210). Among the claims which appear in this passage are that the Jews “continually set aside the commandments of kings, so that the union... cannot be established” (verse 4); “this nation is continually in opposition to all men, following by their laws an alien life, and evil-affected to our state, working all the mischief they can, that our kingdom may not be fully established” (verse 5). See Moore’s characterization on 195-9, where he notes the remarkable similarity to the letter ascribed to

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majority, including the refusal to acknowledge the majority religion, to eat the food of their pagan neighbors or to intermarry with them, as well as lazily refraining from productive labor on account of their superstitious holy days. In the present instance the homilist has rendered Haman’s denunciation more vivid by transforming it into a dialogue with Ahasuerus, such that each argument is read as if it were the refutation of an unstated objection of the king’s. As with Haman’s original accusations, the midrashic version seems insidious not so much

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Ptolemy Philopator in 3 Maccabees 3:12-29 [Moses Hadas, ed., The Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees, Dropsie College Edition, Jewish Apocryphal Literature (New York: Harper [for Dropsie College], 1953), 50-53] (see especially verses 19, 22-24). Hecataeus of Abdera, writing around 300 B.C.E., already records that neither the slander of their neighbors and of foreign visitors, to which as a nation they are exposed, nor the frequent outrages of Persian kings and satraps can shake their determination [to observe the laws of the Torah].

[Brought in Josephus, Against Apion, 1:191; Menahem Stern, Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism, 1:36, 38, and Stern’s comments on p. 42; Yehoshua Gutman, The Beginnings of Jewish-Hellenistic Literature, Vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1969), 39-73; Johanan Hans Levy, Studies in Jewish Hellenism, translated by J. Amir (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1969), 44-59 (especially 51-3)]; David Rokeah, Jews, Pagans and Christians in Conflict, Studia Post-Biblica, ed. J. C. H. Lebram (Leiden and Jerusalem: Brill and Magnes, 1982). Some of Haman’s arguments also echo the letter sent to Ahasuerus (Artaxerxes) by the Samaritan opposition, as related in Ezra 4:7-16 (see especially v. 13: “...they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll and in the end it will endamage the king”). We have had frequent occasions to observe how crucial that incident was in shaping the rabbinic portrayal of Ahasuerus’ role in the story.

56 This was termed “atheism” by the pagans; see Stern, 1:155, 2:380, 513, 528, 545, etc.


58 Rashi: “From Haman’s responses we can deduce Ahasuerus’ objections.” This way of reading biblical passages is encountered frequently in aggadic homilies; see I. Heinemann, Darkhei ha-aggadah, 132-3.
because it contains out-and-out fabrications, but because of the negative light in which it presents the facts or half-truths.\textsuperscript{59}

[13b] "And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is one people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them" (Esther 3:8).

Says Rava:\textsuperscript{60}

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>MS Y (with variants from MS P and AgE)</th>
<th>MS G (with variants from all other witnesses)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anyone who\textsuperscript{61} does not know how to speak slander like Haman should not speak</td>
<td>There is no one\textsuperscript{62} who knows how to speak\textsuperscript{63} slander like\textsuperscript{64} Haman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He\textsuperscript{65} said to him:\textsuperscript{66} Come, let us annihilate\textsuperscript{67} them.\textsuperscript{68}</td>
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\textsuperscript{59} Paton, 203, suggests that Haman's words were meant to echo Deuteronomy 4:5-8 ("...for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of all the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people..."): “What there is the boast of the Jew, Haman here uses as a reproach.” Moore (39): “Like other minorities in the Persian empire...the Jewish customs were different. That fact...would not have been damning in and of itself. Intending to malign and slander the Jews, Haman had, thus far, accurately described them.”

\textsuperscript{60} “Rava” (in MS Y only: רava)—AgE: “R. Abba”; ~ in HgT\textsuperscript{2}.

\textsuperscript{61} MS P adds: “knows how to speak slander should speak; and if he.”

\textsuperscript{62} “one”—MSS W, L, M, YS: “person.”

\textsuperscript{63} “to speak”— ~ in EY, Printings.

\textsuperscript{64} MSS W, L add: “the wicked.”

\textsuperscript{65} “He”—AgE: “Haman.”

\textsuperscript{66} “him”—MS P and AgE: “Ahasuerus.”

\textsuperscript{67} “annihilate”—Spanish family: “provoke.”

\textsuperscript{68} MS B\textsuperscript{*} adds: “[among us].”
He said to him: I am fearful of their God, lest he do to “that man” as he did to the previous ones.

I am afraid because everyone who provokes them, their God exacts judgment from him.

As in many previous instances, Ahasuerus is presumed to be familiar with the details of Jewish history and to acknowledge (at least as a possibility which must be taken into account) the divine workings in that history.

[13b] He said to them: “There is” — They have fallen asleep [yashenu] from the commandments.

A word play between the consonants of the Hebrew “yeshno” (there is) and the verb “yashenu” (they slept) provides the homilist

69 MS G adds: “because everyone who provokes them, their God exacts judgment from him.”
70 “that man”—MSS W, Mf, Printings, AgE: “me.”
71 Similar conversations between Ahasuerus and Haman in which the monarch expresses his trepidations over the fates of previous kings who tried to oppress the Jews (all of them more elaborate than the vague allusion in the present paragraph) appear in Esther rabbah, 7:13; Abba goriôn, 27; Panim aherim A, 46; Panim aherim B, 68-9.
72 “There is” — in MSS P, Mf, YS.
73 MS W adds: “They have fallen asleep.”
74 “He said to them: ‘There is’...from the commandments” — in HgT.
75 MS P adds: “which they are lacking.”
76 Maharsha argues that the midrash is based on the use of the declined form “yeshno” rather than the shorter, but adequate, “yesh.” [The form is attested in only four places in the Bible, and its vocalization has been challenged by several scholars, who prefer “yeshenna;” a form much closer to the midrashic “yashenu”; see E. Kautzsch, ed., Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar, second English ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 296, n. 2; Haupt, 129/33; Moore’s commentary, 38.] Aside from the fact that “yesh” would sound unnatural in the present verse, it should be noted that the idea of Israel being “asleep” with respect to the observance of the commandments [either the commandments in general, or those which cannot be observed without a Temple, or certain specific ones] or other religious values [e.g., anticipation of the messianic “End”] is

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with an opportunity to ascribe the Jews’ peril to their own laxity in the observance of the Torah. This would carry obvious implications to the preachers’ contemporary audiences, as if to say: Now, as then, your fortunes as a people can be gauged in direct proportion to the level of your religious observance. The midrashically rewritten Esther has thus integrated the Purim story into the central value-concepts of rabbinic Judaism.

[13b] He said to him: There are among them the rabbis.

—He said to him: They are “one people.”

Ahasuerus’ acknowledgment of the spiritual authority of the rabbis is of course taken for granted by the midrash. Haman’s retort, that all Jews suffer the consequences of the shortcomings of a segment of their nation, is a well-known rabbinic moral principle, which

found in several other rabbinic sources, most of them built on Song of Songs 5:2 “I sleep, but my heart waketh.” The plea of the “Congregation of Israel” (the attribution is made explicitly in several of the sources) that she has “fallen asleep” from the commandments is also found in Exodus rabbah, 2:5 (ed. Shinan, 110-11); 33:3; Song of Songs rabbah, 5:2 (ed. Dunsky, 127-8); Tanhuma (Buber) Toledot, 18; Pesiqta rab-bati, 15:6 (ed. Friedmann, 70a-b; transl. Braude, 312-3); Pesiqta derav kahana, 5:6 (ed. Mandelbaum, 87-8; transl. Braude and Kapstein, 98). Esther rabbah, 7:12 uses similar exegesis in the opposite direction: Haman argues that God is asleep to the Jews’ fate, to which God replies ironically citing Psalms 121:5. In light of all this material there is certainly no warrant for Maharsha’s suggestion that the midrash is deriving the word from the root תָּוָא, “change.”

77 See our discussion of this phenomenon in the Concluding Remarks to Chapter Two (#2: Ideological Themes).
78 “He said to him”—~ in MSS M, Mf.
80 “rabbis”—MS G: “righteous.”
81 MSS G, B, W and Spanish family add: “who will ask for mercy.” Spanish family adds: “for them.”
82 “He said to him”—~ in MS Mf, YS, AgE.
83 On the rabbinic idea of the interdependence and mutual responsibility of all segments of the Jewish people, and the sociological background to the theory, see Urbach, The Sages, 644-7. For the principle that “all Israel are guarantors for one an-

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would be conveniently evoked by preachers who were trying to jar their communities out of complacency and urging them to aggressively raise their religious standards.84

[13b] And85 should you say: You are86 creating87 a void in your88 kingdom—89 “scattered”90—They are scattered among the nations.91

It is not obvious from the biblical narrative why the Jews’ being scattered should have been perceived by Haman as grounds for eliminating them.93 The indeterminacy of the verse would thus have fur-

other” see TB Shevu’ot 39a; Sanhedrin 27b; Isaac Lampronti, Pahad yishq (Reggio: Tipografia Della Societa, 1813), 3:77b.

84 According to Maharsha, the word “one” is being read by the midrash as superfluous, which strikes me as likely. Less persuasive is his explanation that the rabbis of that generation are being placed on the same level of religious observance as the laity. It seems far simpler to understand that (according to Haman) the rabbis are being held responsible for the sins of their communities. Cf. Josephus’ paraphrase in Antiquities, 11:6:5 (212): ἡνως ἡλκι Μ πολτρον (“there was a certain wicked nation”). Cf. Esther rabbah, 7:13; Abba gorion, 29, 31; Panim aberim B, 69.

85 “and”—~ in MSS G, W, M, R, Mf, Printings, YS, AgE.

86 “You are”—~ MSS G, O, HgT, L, R, Mf, Printings, YS, AgE: “I am.”

87 “You are creating”—EY: “I shall create”; MS P: “you shall create.”

88 “your”—EY: “the”; MSS L, R: “my”; AgE: “his.”

89 MSS L and Mf add: “Hence it states explicitly” (ונליחד ול ett).

90 MS P and EY add: “and dispersed.”

91 “They are...nations”—~ in AgE.

92 Cf. the charges made by Strabo of Amesia [cited in Josephus’ Antiquities, 14:115]: “This people has already made its way into every city, and it is not easy to find any place in the habitable world which has not received this nation and in which it has not made its power felt” (See Stern, 1:277-8, 280). According to Josephus’ report in Against Apion, 2:125 (Stern, 1:414) Apion cited Jewish statelessness as evidence of the inferiority of their laws and religion.

93 The Greek uses only one word, διέσπαρμένον, to translate both “scattered” and “dispersed.” Moore (39) regards this as an intentional emendation by someone who saw the two terms as synonymous and hence redundant. Most commentators regard the first as referring to the Jews’ being scattered, and the second to their religious separateness; see Moore, ibid.; Paton, 203. The first Targum seems to understand that in spite of their being scattered, they remain separate and unassimilated. See Grossfeld,
nished an occasion for midrashic expansion even had the homilist not already been committed to reading the verse as a series of arguments and refutations. In the present interpretation the adjective functions not so much as a charge against the Jews, but as a refutation of Ahasuerus’ fear of the “ecological” damage that would be caused by destroying a complete province. To this Haman responds that since the Jews are not concentrated into a single geographical region they would not be severely missed, making them easily expendable.

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The Two Targums, 54. The Esther-Midrash offers separate expositions of “scattered” and “among the people,” necessitating different interpretations of the respective phrases.

94 See Rashi. To judge from the midrash’s statements on similar occasions, Ahasuerus’ concerns were probably fiscal; i.e., the fear of losing tax revenues. Maharsha: “A single province which has been laid waste and destroyed will cause damage to other provinces as well, on account of the desolation that is in their midst.”

95 A similar argument is related in Panim aherim B, 68, in which Haman explains that the scattered Jews do not constitute a threat to him. There Ahasuerus retorts that (since they are found in so many places) there is even more reason to fear that they would find and harm him. Cf. ’yyun ya’aqov, who has Ahasuerus suggesting that the scattering of the Jews might be a beneficial phenomenon, essential to the welfare of the world!
[13b] And⁹⁶ should you say:⁹⁷ There is a benefit⁹⁸ ⁹⁹ from them¹⁰⁰

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⁹⁶ "And" — ~ in MSS G, B, O, L, M*, R, HgT, Printings, YS.
⁹⁷ "And should you say"—all witnesses word this in Hebrew except MS O and HgT¹, which word it in Aramaic.
⁹⁸ "is a benefit"—EY: "are fruits."
⁹⁹ AgE adds: "to the king."
¹⁰⁰ "a benefit from them"—all witnesses word this in Aramaic except YS and AgE, which word it in Hebrew.
The charge that Jews, unlike other peoples, did not produce any important benefit for society, was a common theme in ancient anti-

101 MS G adds: “to the kingdom.”

102 Maharsha: “Perhaps people derive some benefit from them, and it is good that they should be scattered in order that they might do some good for the public.”

103 MSS M, HgT add: “Hence it states explicitly” (כımız זים).

104 “this”—MSS B, W, P: “a.”

105 The mule, a notorious exception to the normal laws of biological reproduction, was a source of fascination to the talmudic rabbis, and R. Nehemiah included it among those beings that were created at twilight on the sixth day. See Sifre on Deuteronomy 355 [Louis Finkelstein, ed., Siphre ad Deuteronomium, Corpus Tannaiticum (Berlin: Abteilung Verlag, 1939), 418; transl. R. Hammer, Sifre: The Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy, Vol. 24. Yale Judaica Series (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 372]; Avot derabbi natan B, 37 (ed. Schechter, 95; transl. Saldarini, 217, and Appendix II, 306-10); Mekhilta derabbi shimon ben yohai [J. N. Epstein and E. Z. Melamed, ed., Mekhilta d’rabbi simon b. jochai (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1955), 115; TB Pesahim 54a; Avraham Joseph Wertheimer and Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer, eds., Batei Midrashot (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Cook Publishing, 1950), 1:26. Cf. Mishnah Avot 5:6. See also L. Lewysohn, Die Zoologie des Talmuds (Frankfurt aM: by author, 1858), 144-6; Yehuda Feliks, Mixed Sowing Breeding and Grafting: Kil’ayim I-II, Mishna, Tosehpta and Jerusalem Talmud, a Study of the Halachic Topics and Their Botanical-Agricultural Background, Bar-Ilan University Series of Research Monographs in Memory of...Pinkhos Churgin (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1967), 117, 128-9 for a discussion of the permissibility of using mules in the light of the prohibitions of Leviticus 22:24; Idem., Ha-hai ba-mishnah (Jerusalem: Institute for Mishna Research, 1972), 128. Lieberman, Tosefta ki-fshuṭah, 1:99 and n. 83, cites Aristotle and Pliny on the reported existence of “half-asses,,” mule-like animals that were able to breed. In several places in the midrash, Abraham is said to be taunted for being “a barren mule that does not give birth” [e.g., Genesis rabbah, 11:1 (354); 40 (41):5 (392); 53:10 (565)].

I am unable to figure out the reason why M. Simon (p. 79) chose to translate “like an isolated bough.”

106 “As if to say...reproduce”—only in MS Y (and cf. YS); ~ in all other witnesses.

107 “And should you say: You are creating a void...reproduce”— ~ in MS Mf.
Jewish polemics. In the present case the argument is linked to the verse by means of a midrashic word-play.

\[13b\] And should you say:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MS Y and AgE</th>
<th>MS O (with variants from the Spanish family)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There exists one town of them; there is one province of them—</td>
<td>There is one province of them, or one asqarta of them—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus Apollonius Molon (cited in Against Apion, 2:148; Stern, 1:155) writes that the Jews “are the most witless of all barbarians, and are consequently the only people who have contributed no useful invention (eὐρημον) to civilization.” The same accusation is attributed to Apion (Against Apion, 2:135; Stern, 1:414-5); see also Celsus (cited in Contra Celsum, 3:31; Stern, 2:249, 279, 300); Julian the Apostate (Stern, 2:523, 539).

In Panim aherim B, 68 the argument is formulated as follows: “Just as a mule does not become fertilized, even so none of them ever becomes fertilized to the benefit of the nations of the world, for thus did Moses their master instruct them in the Torah: ‘You shall not intermarry with them’ (Deuteronomy 7:3).”

Maharsha (consistent with his approach throughout the pericope) adds that the word is redundant. Presumably he felt that some further justification was required for such far-fetched word-plays.

And — in MSS B, O, W, Mf, Ashkenazic family, EY, HgT, Printings.

should you say”— all witnesses word this in Hebrew except MS O and HgT, which word it in Aramaic.

one”— Printings: “a.”

This word, which does not appear in the printed editions of the Talmud, was not explained in any of the talmudic dictionaries I consulted. Below on Megillah 16a we find what is apparently the same term spelled “disqarta,” mentioned alongside “nahara” as an geographic administrative unit. Rashi there explains the word as “a small village” [see also TB Gittin 40a and Feldblum’s reference [M. S. Feldblum Dikduke Sopherim Tractate Gittin (New York: Horeb, Yeshiva University, 1966)] to R. Isaiah Ditrani; cf. Liss A., ed., Piskei Hardi...Piskei Hariaz, Vol. 5-6 (Jerusalem: Institute for the Complete Israeli Talmud, 1977), 108. Several commentators regard this word as one and the same with the place-name “Disqarta” which is mentioned several times in the

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And should you say that they are outside your kingdom and you hold no authority over them.


Another less likely identification might be with the Syriac “ashkar” or “ashkarta” meaning “a yoke of land=about two-thirds of an acre; a field, a piece of land, a farm” [R. and J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, reprint ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 435, 31]. [Cf. Drower and Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary*, where “ashkarta,” in the phrase “pum bit ashkarta d-aith Iris sura” (=“Pumbedita, the Academy, situated at the end of Sura”) in the *Haran Gawaita*, is included in the entry “ashkarta” from the Persian for “maid-servant,” and hence declared to be “miswritten.”]

HgT adds: “Hence it states.”

“And”—EY: “Or”; ~ in MS B.

“hold no authority over”—MS B, EY, HgT: “cannot overcome.”

“or one asqarta...over them”—only in *Spanish family*; ~ in all other witnesses.

“In all the provinces of thy kingdom” (Esther 3:8).

According to the readings of most texts (other than the Spanish family), the argument here seems to be a repetition of Ahasuerus’ fear of creating a void in the kingdom, as derived above from the word “scattered.” The Spanish witnesses suggest a different rationale, the fear that if the Jews were concentrated into a single political unit—which especially one that was beyond the control of the empire—then they could effectively counter any threat against their co-religionists.

[13b] “And their laws are diverse from all people” (Esther 3:8).

That they do not eat with us, and they do not drink with us, and they do not marry from among us, and they do not get married to us.

119 Rashi appears to be responding to this difficulty when he explains that the province referred to here is a smaller unit than in the previous segment. Maharsha rejects Rashi’s interpretation as unlikely, and proposes instead that Haman is countering a suggestion that the Jews be gathered into a single territory, thereby remedying the evils of their being scattered; against this Haman points out that they are so widely dispersed as to make such a solution impossible. Maharsha’s interpretation seems much more forced than Rashi’s.

120 “with”—MSS G, W, Mf, Ashkenazic family, Printings: “from.”
121 “and”— ~ in MS R.
122 MS B adds: “that.”
124 “and they do not drink with us”— ~ in First Venice Printing.
125 See the First Targum (Grossfeld, The Two Targums, 54).
126 “marry”—MSS O, W, L, M, P, HgT: “get married.”
127 “from among”—HgT1: “with”; MS R: “to.”
128 “us”—MS W: “them.”
129 “they do not get married”—MS B: “we do not marry.”
130 “to us”—thus only in MS Y and Printings; MS O and EY: “to us from them”; MS R and YS: “from us”; all other witnesses: “from them.”
131 “they do not get married to us”—MS P: “and also we do not.”
In the verse Haman assails the Jews for the fact that all their laws are different from those of the surrounding peoples. The midrashic version focuses only on those laws which enforced Jewish separation from the heathens.

132 This is undoubtedly how it was understood by Esther rabbah, 7:12, which speaks of the non-observance of the Kalendes and Saturnalia. See Herr, “Antisemitism in Imperial Rome etc.,” 152.

Josephus (Against Apion, 2:79) complains of authors like Posidonius and Apollonius who charge the Jews with “not worshipping the gods as other people” (Stern, 1:145-6, 152-3, 409-10); and especially Apion (Against Apion, 2:65) who argues “why, then, if they are citizens, do they not worship the same Gods as the Alexandrians?” (Stern, 1:408-9). Similarly, Tacitus (Histories, 5:4:1): “Moses introduced new religious practices, quite opposed to those of all other peoples. The Jews regard as profane all that we hold sacred; on the other hand, they permit all that we abhor” (Stern, 2:18, 25, 36; see Levy, Studies in Jewish Hellenism, 115-96). Contrast the above with the words of Celsus, brought in Stern, 2:254-7, 284-6. See Schürer (1986), 3:132.

133 The arguments ascribed here to Haman bear an uncanny resemblance to the words of Tacitus (Histories, 5:5:2; Stern, Greek and Latin Authors, 2:19, 26, 39-41; Herr, “Anti-Semitism in Imperial Rome etc.,” 151):

They sit apart at meals and they sleep apart, and although as a race, they are prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women...

The accusation that Judaism promoted the hatred of all gentiles was a staple of Greek and Roman depictions of Jews since the earliest encounters (see also Abgarion, 29-30). Thus Hecataeus of Abdera [cited in Diodorus Siculus’ Bibliotheca Historica, 40:3] relates that Moses “introduced an unsocial and intolerant mode of life” (ἐπάνθροπον τίνα καὶ μισόζευον βίον). See Stern, 1:26-8; on the Greek concern for barbarian ξενηλασία see Stern’s remarks on p. 30. Similarly, Apollonius Molon charged the Jews with being “atheists and misanthropes” (Against Apion, 2:148; Stern, 1:155); Pompeius Trogus states that Moses ordered his people “to have no communication with strangers” (Stern, 1:335-8); Apion (Against Apion, 2:121; Stern, 1:413-4) describes a solemn religious oath sworn by all Jews “to show no good-will to a single alien, above all to Greeks.” Thus also in Tacitus (Histories, 5:5:1; Stern 2:19, 26, 39); Juvenal (Satires, 14:96-106; Stern, 2:102-3, 107); Philostratus (“...a race that has made its own life apart and irreconcilable, that cannot share with the rest of mankind in the pleasures of the table nor join in their libations or prayers or sacrifices” [Stern, 2:341]; see Herr, 155-7). Perhaps the most complete collection of such charges is recorded by Diodorus, Bibliotheca Historica, 34:5:2-4 [Stern, 1:182-5], who is describing the advice given to Antiochos Epiphanes by his friends:

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[The Israelites following the Exodus] had made their hatred of mankind into a tradition, and on this account had introduced utterly outlandish laws: not to break bread with any other race, nor to show them any good will at all. ...Moses...had ordained for the Jews their misanthropic and lawless customs. And since Epiphanes was shocked by such hatred directed against all mankind, he had set himself to break down their traditional practices. ...He ordered that their holy books, containing the xenophobic laws, should be sprinkled with the broth of the meat...

Others object not so much to the content of Jewish law, but to the fact that they are exempted from the laws of the land. Thus Strabo (Josephus, Antiquities, 14:116-17, Stern, 1:277-82). For a different perspective see Diororus 1:94:2 (Stern, 1:171-2) where the law of Moses is characterized as a conception which would help humanity.” See also Stern, 1:513 (Quintillian); 2:220 (Aelius Aristides); Schürer (1986), 3:152-3.

The First Targum (see Grossfeld, The Two Targums, 54) gives a list that includes both types of Jewish observances, those which involve separation and those in which Jews are simply different. This holds true as well for the Second Targum, including such clauses as “They gather the warm waters during Tebeth and relax in the cold baths during Tammuz” alongside “They do not give us their daughters, etc.” Maharsha is unconvincing in his explanation that the midrash is reacting to the fact that it would have been more natural to have written “their laws are diverse from all other laws.” He is however quite accurate in his awareness of where the midrash has diverged from the original meaning of the verse.

An unstated implication of this passage is that it was precisely because of their observance of the laws of the Torah that the Jews were made vulnerable to Haman’s charges [as against the approach encountered elsewhere that attributed the Jews’ danger to their laxity (“sleeping”) in observing the commandments]. Some midrashim to the verse (Abba gorion, 27, attributed to R. Levi; Esther rabbah, 7:12) have the angel Michael voice this protest before God, eliciting a divine guarantee that the Jews will not really be abandoned. These sources likely express the real frustrations that were felt by Jews who, by accepting the limits to socialization that were assured by the halakhic restrictions, were made to look more hostile to their neighbors than they actually were. This frustration is expressed with much greater bitterness in passages like Lamentations rabbah, 1:56, where Israel is described as boldly placing the blame for the destruction of the Temple upon God:

“Did you not write in your Torah “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son” (Deuteronomy 7:3)? If we had lent things to them and taken them in marriage and given ourselves to them in marriage, and had his daughter been with us or mine with him, would they not have accepted me? Hence: “As thou hast done unto me” (Lamentations 1:22)!

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From this point onwards, the midrash has abandoned its method of reading Haman’s arguments as refutations of Ahasuerus’ objections.

[13b] “Neither keep they the king’s laws” (Esther 3:8).

That they pass the year in fiddle-faddle.  

In the context of Lamentations, where there was no “happy ending,” there is of course no room for the consoling assurances that we found in the midrashim to Esther.

134 “That”—MS R: “And.”

135 MS B and Printings add: “whole.”

136 MSS G, L, M, Mf, Spanish family add: “and they do not pay the poll-tax [MSS L, Mf, EY add: “to the king”].”

The translation presented here (thus also in Ginzberg, Legends, 4:405-6: “tomfoolery and fiddle-faddle”) is in disagreement with the widespread rendering found in Rashi’s commentary, which reads שֵׁשׁ כָּל יָמִים as an abbreviation for “שבת היום, פסח היום”: (“today is sabbath; today is Passover,” implying that Jews appear to outsiders to be constantly using their festivals as an excuse to take time off from productive work); an explanation which was probably inspired by a passage in Esther rabbah, 7:12: “...They eat and drink and say ‘the pleasure of the sabbath,’ ‘the pleasure of the festival,’ such that they create a gap in the world’s finances...” [but cf. the wording in Panim aherim B, 68, and the variants of the Cambridge and London MSS listed by Buber in n. 99; R. Isaac Behak’s glosses to Buber’s AgE, 30]. See Jacob Levy, Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim, reprint ed., Vol. 4 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), 11, 515. H. Yalon, “A Contribution to Hebrew Lexicography,” Melilah 3-4 (1950), 118 [reprinted in his Studies in the Hebrew Language (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1971), 161-2] observes that the convention of presenting the words as abbreviations is found only in the printed texts, under the influence of Rashi’s exegesis. He further states that闪闪 is derived from the Hebrew root for delay or procrastination, whereas זומז is related to the Syriac PH', which indicates “to roam, rove, wander about” [Payne Smith, A Compendious Syriac Dictionary, 435]. See the review of earlier lexicographic literature, as well as a fascinating review of the use of the phrase in subsequent Hebrew and vernacular literature, in Dov Sadan, “Shehi Fehi,” Leshonenu la'am 20 (5-6 1969), 147-55. The phrase is also used in the equivalent dialogue which is incorporated into the Second Targum to Esther 3:8, covering the entire calendar- and life-cycles of Jewish observance (See Grossfeld, The Two Targums, 145, n. 25). More recently Ze’ev Ben-Hayyim, [“Word Studies,” in Henoch Yalon Memorial Volume, ed. E. Y. Kutscher, Saul Lieberman, and Menahem Zevi Kaddari, 46-58 (Ramat-Gan and Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University and Kiryat Sepher, 1974), 56-8] has assembled some enlightening parallels to our usage from Mandaic texts. In all of the examples cited by Ben-Ḥayyim, the expression refers to the withering of plants, from which it came to be Continued on next page...
The midrash construes Haman as arguing that the Jewish religious calendar—chock-full as it is with days on which labor is prohibited, or the people are occupied in synagogue prayers and festive meals, etc.—inevitably provides Jews with convenient excuses for remaining indolent, to the detriment of the imperial treasury. Hence

used metaphorically in the sense of corruption or feebleness [cf. Payne-Smith, 561: “worn out...weak and languid”]. See E. S. Drower and R. Macuch, A Mandaic Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), “’sahata’: ...exhaustion, weakness, wasting away, languishing.”

We might note that almost all the midrashic expansions of this verse include lengthy reviews of the Jewish calendar cycle, though there is no consensus about how that review should be attached to the verse. For example, the Second Targum, like the Babylonian Esther-Midrash, seems to connect the festivals to the phrase “Neither do they keep the king’s laws,” though they are presented there not only as occasions for idleness, but also as times when the king was actively abused. On the other hand, the First Targum, AgE, 30 [Buber remarks in n. 28 that there is no exact parallel to this interpretation which generally resembles the Second Targum] and Abba gorion, 26 simply mention the festivals among the laws which are “diverse from all other peoples” [AgE also concludes by quoting “Therefore it is not for the king’s profit to suffer them”]. Esther rabbah, 7:12 and Panim aherim A, 50, link the idea to the verse by means of a word-play on “yeshno”—deriving it midrashically from “shanah” (year) in the sense of “full years” of unproductive feasting. Panim aherim B (68) mentions only Passover as an instance of “mule-like” fruitlessness, as derived from “meporad” (see above).

Cf. Maharsha: “They do not do the king’s labor throughout the year, as if it were Sabbath...or Passover, when they were set free and are exempt from the king’s labor.”

The perception that refraining from all work on holy days was a foolish (and occasionally dangerous) superstition goes back as far as Agatharchides of Cnidus (2nd century B.C.E.; cited in Josephus, Contra Apionem, 209-11 and Antiquities, 12:5-6). See Stern, Greek and Latin Authors, 1:106-9; see also Stern, 1:324-6 (from Horace’s Sermones); 1:549 (Plutarch); 2:349-50 (Dio Cassius). The most cogent statement of this position is probably Seneca’s condemnation of the Jewish sabbath in his De Superstitione (Stern, 1:431), as reported by Augustine:

He declares that their practice is inexpedient, because by introducing one day of rest in every seven they lose in idleness almost a seventh of their life, and by failing to act in times of urgency they often suffer loss...

Tacitus (Historiae, 5:4:3; Stern, 2:18, 25, 37-8) wrote in a similar vein that both the weekly sabbath and the sabbatical year exemplify Jewish “indolence” and “inactivity.” Thus also in Juvenal (Satires, 14:105-6; Stern, 2:102-3, 107). On the general recogni-
what would otherwise have been an unobjectionable matter of legitimate religious observance is treated here as if it were an intolerable instance of unpatriotic behavior.

[13b] "Therefore it is not for the king’s profit to suffer them" (Esther 3:8).

That they eat and drink and are satisfied and go out and 
and belittle the king in the marketplace.

Unlike the previous clauses, in which Haman’s arguments were fundamentally accurate, though colored by his invective, innuendo and one-sided selection, the present argument seems to be entirely fabricated, at least in the form in which it appears in the Yemenite and Spanish texts that speak of belittling the king “in the marketplace.” If we delete this problematic phrase, then the accusation might refer to any of the passages in the Bible or liturgy which feature condemnations of the “Kingdom of Wickedness” or express hopes for the speedy end
of the exile and the restoration of Jewish independence under the messianic king.\textsuperscript{146}

\[13b\] Another version: \textsuperscript{147} "Therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them"—That even if a fly falls into the cup of one of them, he tosses it away\textsuperscript{149} and drinks it, however if\textsuperscript{150} my lord the king touches the cup of one of them he thrusts it to the earth.\textsuperscript{151}\textsuperscript{152}

In this interpretation the Talmud provides us with an excellent example of how the selective juxtaposition of two unrelated rules, taken out of their proper contexts, can create an impression that is as convincing as it is misleading. Thus, the stringencies that govern the handling of wine by gentiles have their basis in the fear that they might have been used for idolatrous libations,\textsuperscript{153} a normal occurrence in

\textsuperscript{146} Second Targum [Grossfeld, The Two Targums, 145-7; partial parallels are contained in AgE, 30-1; Abba gorion, 26; Panim aherim B, 68] reviews the courses of the Jewish day and year, inserting as a refrain that the Jews at every occasion curse the king and revile the rulers. In all these examples it is obvious that Haman is simply inventing fictitious charges. Other midrashic collections identify actual passages in the Jewish liturgy; e.g., Panim aherim B, \textit{ibid}. [the passage is also found in the Cambridge MS to Abba gorion, \textit{ibid}. (Buber, n. 103)] speaks of the recitation of the \textit{Shema} (i.e., the acceptance of the “yoke of Heaven” rather than that of earthly monarchs; Mishnah Berakhot, 1:4) and the Birkat haminnim and the blessing for the “restoration of judges” in the daily \textit{Amidah}. Rashi (apparently on the basis of Esther rabbah, 7:13 or Abba gorion, 30) identifies the offending text as Psalms 10:16, which is incorporated into the “Yehi kevod” segment of the daily morning prayers. The midrashim also mention Psalms 149:7, included as well in the daily “\textit{Pesuqei dezimrah}.” On the function of these passages within the service (they are found in the Tractate Soferim 18.2 and in the \textit{sedarim} of R. Amram and R. Saadiah) see I. Jacobson, \textit{Netiv Binah} (Tel-Aviv: Sinai, 1968), 1:200-2, 215-6.

\textsuperscript{147} MSS L, M add: “And yet.”

\textsuperscript{148} “Another version” --- in MSS W, R, \textit{Printings}, AgE.

\textsuperscript{149} “tosses it away”—AgE: “takes it.”

\textsuperscript{150} “however”—thus only in MS Y and AgE; all other witnesses read: “and if.”

\textsuperscript{151} “to the earth”— -- in MS O.

\textsuperscript{152} MS B, L, Spanish family, \textit{Printings} add: “and does not drink it.”

\textsuperscript{153} On the prohibition of Gentile wine (which is already presupposed in Daniel 1:8 and Judith 10:5; 12:1-2; see Mishnah \textit{Avodah zarah} 4:8-5:11) see Albeck, \textit{Shishah sidrei mishnah}, 4:321; R. Simhah of Dessau (in his glosses printed in the back of Vilna editions of the Talmud) notes that the prohibition in question is ascribed (Mishnah

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antiquity. There exists no such concern with regard to contact with insects.\textsuperscript{154} By comparing these two unconnected halakhot, Haman is made to suggest that Ahasuerus—or Gentiles in general—were perceived by Jews as being inferior to flies.\textsuperscript{155} It is easy to imagine that, then as now, such pseudo-arguments would be employed regularly by malicious adversaries who had acquired just enough familiarity with the details of Jewish laws to uncover their supposed negative implications, but not enough erudition or good will to examine the statements on their own terms.

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Shabbat 1:4; TB Shabbat 17b) to the “eighteen decrees” of the Houses of Shammai and Hillel, which were not enacted until the end of the Second Temple era. On these decrees see Abraham Goldberg, \textit{Commentary to the Mishnah Shabbat} (Jerusalem: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1976); Z. Steinfeld, “Devarim shel goyim ha’asurim veha-mutarim be’akhilah.” \textit{Sinai} 86 (1980), 163-6.

It is of course possible that the midrash also had in mind the defilement that was produced by Gentiles. See Schürer (1986), 2:83-4; Gedalyahu Alon, “The Levitical Uncleanliness of Gentiles,” in Jews, Judaism and the Classical World, 190-234.

\textsuperscript{154}On the halakhic definitions of the “creeping things” that transmit uncleanness (according to Leviticus 11:29-31) see \textit{Sifra Shemini} [I H. Weiss, ed., \textit{Sifra} (Vienna: Jacob Scholossberg, 1862)], Par.5 and Chap. 7; \textit{TB Hullin} 122a-b, 126b-127a; M. Kashner, \textit{Torah Shelemah}, 28:130-5. [There is thus no basis for the “fly-impurity” that is mentioned so frequently in E. P. Sanders, \textit{Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies} (London and Philadelphia: SCM Press and Trinity Press International, 1990).] The fly is of course forbidden to be eaten according to the definition of permissible insects in Leviticus 11:22.

The phraseology here appears to have been influenced by the wording of R. Meir’s observations [TP Sotah 1:7 (17a); see also Numbers rabbah, 9:12] about the different degrees of fastidiousness when confronted with a fly in their cup (an analogy to the different ways in which men can react to their wives’ suspected adultery): “There is a person who, when a fly falls into his cup, he takes it, discards it and drinks it... Woe to the man who, when a fly merely hovers over his cup, takes it and spills it out without tasting it...” Flies in food are cited as examples of distasteful nuisances in \textit{Genesis rabbah}, 88:2 (1078); \textit{TB Berakhot} 10b; Yoma 21a [=Avot derabbi natan A, 35 (ed. Schechter, 105; transl. Golden, 145); B, 39 (ed. Schechter, 105; transl. Saldarini, 233)]; \textit{TB Gittin} 6b; etc.

\textsuperscript{155} Cf. Second Targum: “When they see us they spit on the ground and consider us as something defiled, etc.” \textit{Abba gorion}, 31: “Even our king is considered in their eyes like a menstruating woman.”
The exegetical link to the Bible is a loose one. The mention of the king at this point in the verse suggests that he is in some way being personally insulted by the Jews and their religion.\(^\text{156}\)

**Shekels for Shekels**

[13b] "If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand shekels of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries" (Esther 3:9).\(^\text{157}\)

Says Resh Laqish:\(^\text{158}\) It was clear and evident before him who spoke and the world came into being\(^\text{159}\) that the\(^\text{160}\) wicked\(^\text{161}\) Haman was fated to weigh shekels for Israel. For this reason the Holy One\(^\text{162}\) advanced their shekels before his\(^\text{163}\) shekels.

And this is what\(^\text{164}\) we have taught [in the Mishnah]: On the first of Adar an announcement is made regarding the sheqalim.\(^\text{165}\)

Resh Laqish’s dictum might be a continuation of his earlier statement about how God does not punish without preparing a remedy.

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\(^{156}\) See Maharsha. Rashi’s comment (ר"ש רא"ש ר"ש רא"ש) is obscure. He seems to understand Haman’s argument as saying that while there exist positive justifications for urging the murder of the Jews, no worthwhile purpose would be served by saving them. The ritual prohibition mentioned by Haman would of course have applied equally to any pagan, but his argument was deliberately formulated in such a manner as to single out the king.

\(^{157}\) MS G adds: “Now I do not know how many they were. When they went out from Egypt they were six hundred thousand, and for each one of them I gave (?) a hundred gold denars.” Cf. Panim aherim B, 69.


\(^{159}\) “him who...into being”—MSS B, W, R, Mf, YS: “the Holy One.”

\(^{160}\) “the”—MSS O, M, P, EY: “this.”

\(^{161}\) “wicked”— in MS M, Printings.

\(^{162}\) “the Holy One”—MSS B, W, Spanish family, Printings, YS: “he.”

\(^{163}\) “his”—MS P, EY: “Haman’s.”

\(^{164}\) “And this is what”— in MS P.

\(^{165}\) All witnesses except MSS Y, P, YS add: “and mixed seeds.”
in advance.\textsuperscript{166} Here the principle is homiletically illustrated through the Jewish ritual calendar, in which the announcement to prepare the

\textsuperscript{166} \textit{Tosefta Sheqalim} 1:6 [ed. Lieberman, 201-2] contains a passage which probably exerted an influence on the formulation of the present dictum:

They distrained on Israel for their shekels so that they could be used for the purchase of the communal offerings. This is analogous to an individual who developed a wound on his leg, and the physician would tie him down and cut from the flesh in order to heal him. Even so did the Holy One say to Israel: Distrain upon Israel for their shekels, so that the communal offerings can be offered from them, because the communal offerings bring reconciliation and atonement between Israel and their father in Heaven.

And thus do we find with regard to the levy of \textit{sheqalim} which was offered in the wilderness: "And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel..." (Exodus 30:16).

See Lieberman's commentary \textit{ad loc.} (661). As he observes, the point of this passage is to underscore that the shekel offering must come in the name of the entire community, and hence must be collected even against the will of donors who do not realize that in the long-term it is for their own benefit. The \textit{sheqalim} are at any rate perceived there as a "remedy" [This is of course suggested quite explicitly in the biblical passage itself; see Exodus 30:12: "that there be no plague among them etc.''; 2 Samuel 24:1; 1 Chronicles 21:1; see Ginzberg, \textit{Legends}, 4:111-3; 6:270, n. 119] without any necessary reference to subsequent events.

The chronological placement of Exodus 30 has long been the subject of dispute among Jewish commentators, with many midrashic and medieval authorities asserting that the levy and the construction of the Tabernacle were not commanded until after the episode of the Golden Calf, as a means of atonement or reconciliation. See S. Buber, ed., \textit{Midrash leqah tov} (Vilna: 1884), 210:

...and the Holy One did them a favor and first gave them a balm for their blow, and commanded Moses to admonish them concerning the Tabernacle and all its vessels in order to atone for the affair of the Golden Calf. Let 'And let them make me a sanctuary' (Exodus 25:8) come and atone for 'Up, make us gods' (Exodus 32:1), etc.

In accordance with this view R. Bahya [to Exodus 25:6; Ch. Chavell, ed., \textit{Rabbenu bahya 'al ha-torah} (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1967), 265] observes that the Bible's reason for deviating from the historical sequence was because "such is the way of the Holy One Blessed be He to prepare the antidote before the disease. Our Sages referred to this when they expounded: The Holy One...first creates for Israel the antidote and only then delivers the blow..." [cited by Nehama Leibowitz \textit{Studies in Shemot}, Vol. 2, translated by Aryeh Newman (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, Department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, 1976), 466. Leibowitz, Continued on next page...
mandatory "sheqalim," which made up the fund for the purchase of public offerings in the Temple, commences on the first of Adar, two weeks before Purim. In reality this juxtaposition is scarcely more than a coincidence, since the dates for the bringing of the sheqalim are determined by proximity to the beginning of Nisan, without any intentional reference to Purim. Nonetheless, the concept of (the four special Torah lections which reflected the respective preparations for Purim and Passover) came to be thought of as a single unit, and there is at any rate nothing inherently unacceptable in the premise that God could have manipulated the results of Haman's lottery in order to achieve an appropriate symbolic sequence.

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459-70, presents a penetrating analysis of the various opinions and issues involved]. See also Kasher, Torah shelemah, 20:17-18 (n. 72).

167 The homily refers to the advanced proclamation, not to the actual deadline for the bringing of the shekels. See Maharsha. Note however that in TP Megillah 1:7 (70d) and 3:5 (74a) we read a virtually identical version of R. Simeon ben Lakish’s dictum [there it is cited in his name by R. Levi] except that the conclusion there is:

He [i.e., the Holy One] said: Better that my children's money should precede the money of that wicked one. For this reason we anticipate and read the section on the sheqalim.

See Albeck, Shishah sidrei mishnah, 2:183 for an overview of the evolution of this practice from what apparently originated as the one-time collection described in Exodus 3:11-16, to what was construed as an annual tax from the time of Jehoash (2 Kings 12:5-17; 2 Chronicles 24:14) and afterwards [e.g., Josephus, Antiquities, 16:6:3 (166) [transl. Marcus, 8:274-5]; Urbach, Efraim E., Ha-halakhah: meqoroteha ve-hitpattehutah (Givatayim: Yad Ha-Talmud, 1984), 40-2].

168 On the relevant halakhic regulations see Talmudic Encyclopedia 2:164-7.

169 Tosefot to 16a present a calculation according to which the ten thousand pieces of silver offered by Haman amount to one half shekel for each of the 600,000 Israelites who left Egypt. See Maharsha to our pericope. The calculation seems to be based on Panim aherim B, 69:

He said to him: I will make a deal with you as to the sum. When they left Egypt sixty myriads gave "a bekah for every man" (Exodus 38:26). And behold, a bekah for every man comes to ten thousand shekels of silver. And I am weighing you in the shekels which they weigh for the Holy One Blessed be He (!)...

See also Tosefot harosh to our pericope; the summation in Sirkes' Hagahot ha-ba"h to Megillah 16a; Ginzberg, Legends, 4:412; 6:467, n. 116.
“And the king took his ring from his hand and gave it unto Haman” (Esther 3:10).

Says R. Abba bar Kahana: Greater was the removal of the ring than the forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses who prophesied for Israel;\(^\text{170}\)\(^\text{171}\) because the forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses did not cause them\(^\text{172}\) to reform for the better, but the removal of the ring did cause them\(^\text{173}\) to reform for the better.

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\(^{170}\)“who prophesied for Israel”—~ in AgE:

\(^{171}\)The reference to the “forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses” provides the link to the subsequent excursus (Chapter 10) which deals principally with the subject of the seven prophetesses. The topic will be dealt with in greater detail in the next chapter. Ratner’s edition of *Seder olam* (Ch. 21, p. 90) contains a reference to the “forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses who prophesied for Israel and were recorded in the Scriptures,” but Ratner himself observes (n. 7) that this reading is not supported by other texts and that the tradition about forty-eight prophets seems to be unique to the Babylonian Talmud and works based upon it, while unknown to Palestinian sources. According to the text-critical apparatus in Chaim Milikowsky, “Seder Olam: A Rabbinic Chronology,” Ph. D., Yale University, 1981, the numbers are found only in MSS Milan and Parma and the Mantua printing. According to his stemmatic classification (40-2, 76-82, 52-3) these witnesses all make up an identifiable Italian textual family that is characterized, among other features, by the frequency of interpolations (see also 183-4). On 150 and 175 (n. 85) our passage is listed by Milikowsky among the “additions from other rabbinic works interpolated into the text of SO.”

\(^{172}\)“them”—AgE: “Israel.”

\(^{173}\)“them”—AgE: “Israel.”
In R. Abba bar Kahana’s sardonic observation we might be justified in discerning some of the frustrations felt by a preacher or re-

174 A similar dictum is cited in Lamentations rabbah, 4:25 (ed. Buber, 154) in the name of R. Simeon ben Laqish:

Better was the removal of Ahasuerus’ ring for Israel in Media than the sixty myriads of prophets who prophesied in the days of Elijah. Why? —Because in this there was redemption, and in this there was no redemption.

In spite of the surface resemblance, the respective messages of the two passages are really quite different. Whereas the Esther-Midrash emphasizes that Ahasuerus’ decree inspired general repentance, thereby turning this act of repentance into its main homiletical theme, the Lamentations rabbah text by-passes the stage of repentance altogether (whether or not it might be implied as part of the logical course of the events), suggesting that there is a direct correlation between the danger itself and the redemption. It is clearly the latter element which is of concern to the homilist. That this was the intention of the redactor of the Lamentations rabbah pericope can be deduced from the dicta to which it is juxtaposed there. Preceding it we find:

R. Halab o in the name of R. Johanan says: Better was the removal of Pharaoh’s ring in Egypt than the forty years that Moses prophesied to them. —Because in this there was redemption, and in this there was no redemption.

As noted by the commentators there (see especially Maharzu), it is very unlikely that R. Halabo was crediting the Israelites of Moses’ generation with having repented (an assessment which is refuted by numerous statements to the contrary throughout the book of Deuteronomy). Yeψeh ‘anaf emends the text in order to avoid the apparent implication that Moses’ forty years of prophesy preceded the Israelites’ “redemption” (i.e., the Exodus) in a manner analogous to the other instances there (from Esther and Jeremiah), where the (unheeded) prophesying preceded the respective redemptions. R. Halabo however was not positing such a chronological progression, but merely an ironic contrast between two similar situations, and hence there is no need to alter the text. [On the reference to the “removal of Pharaoh’s ring” Maharzu remarks that there is no biblical source for such an act, and that the image is inspired by the wording in Esther. Maharsha and Yeψeh ’anaf claim that R. Abba bar Kahana’s intention in our pericope was to evoke the associations with Ahasuerus’ extreme and frightening hatred that were midrashically discerned in this act in Esther rabbah, 7:20, Abba gorion, 29.]

In the subsequent segment in Lamentations rabbah “the Rabbis” speak of a similar relationship between the futile preaching of Jeremiah before the destruction of the Temple and the sorrow and suffering that the prophet expressed in the book of Lamentations, which finally succeeded in settling the accounts between God and Israel. Here too there is no suggestion that repentance is perceived by the homilist as the decisive factor (nor does the word “redemption” appear). Cf. Panim aherim B, 69:

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A religious leader whose experience has taught him how fruitless his own efforts are to improve the religious standards in his community, when compared with the more immediate results that are produced by confrontations with calamities and dangers. This interpretation of the issues involved in the story of Esther can claim little support from the biblical text itself, where the events are not connected to moral and religious questions. It is however fully consistent with the midrashic retelling of the story.

The Ditch and the Mound

[13b] “And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee” (Esther 3:11).

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“And the Holy One cried out to Israel and said to them: Your sins have now been repaid etc.” [See Genesis rabbah, 41 (42):3 (407), etc.; on ἀποχή see Krauss, Lehnwörter, 2:100; Sperber, Greek and Latin Legal Terms, 51-2; M. Sokoloff, Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, 69.] According to this passage and Esther rabbah, 7:25, the events of the Purim story are perceived as the settling of the collective accounts for the sale of Joseph (see Yefeh ‘anaf to Esther rabbah).

175 A different understanding of the purpose of this dictum can be found in Urbach, The Sages, 562-3. Urbach cites our pericope in his discussion of the rabbis’ tendency to reprove prophets for being overly critical of Israel:

The criticism of these Amoraim was directed against the all-embracing denunciation and arraignment of the Congregation of Israel, which they regarded as an act of denigration on the part of the prophets in view of its ineffectiveness. However, it is clear that their purpose was not to criticize the prophets, but to point the moral for their own conduct.


176 The narrative in Esther does not describe any actual change in the Jews’ behavior. Rashi observes allusions to a general repentance in the “fasting and weeping and wailing” of Esther 4:3.
Haman

Says R. Abba\textsuperscript{177} bar Kahana:\textsuperscript{178} [14a] The analogy of Ahasuerus and Haman,\textsuperscript{179} what does it\textsuperscript{180} resemble? — Two men, one of whom had\textsuperscript{181} a mound\textsuperscript{182} in his field\textsuperscript{183} and one had\textsuperscript{184} a ditch\textsuperscript{185} in his field.\textsuperscript{186} The owner of the mound says:\textsuperscript{187} 188, 189 Who would give\textsuperscript{190} me\textsuperscript{191} this\textsuperscript{192} ditch!\textsuperscript{193} 194 And\textsuperscript{195} the owner of the ditch\textsuperscript{196} says:\textsuperscript{197} Who would give me this\textsuperscript{198} mound!\textsuperscript{199} 200

\textsuperscript{177} "R. Abba"—MSS B, W: "Rabbah."
\textsuperscript{178} "bar Kahana"—\textemdash~ in Printings.
\textsuperscript{179} "Ahasuerus"—AgE: "two wicked men."
\textsuperscript{180} "it"—MSS G, B, W, M, R, Spanish family, Printings: "the matter."
\textsuperscript{181} "had"—thus only in MS Y and Printings; all other witnesses: "has."
\textsuperscript{182} "mound"—MS L, AgE: "ditch."
\textsuperscript{183} "in his field"—\textemdash~ in HgT\textsuperscript{2}.
\textsuperscript{184} "had"—thus only in MS Y and Printings; all other witnesses: "has."
\textsuperscript{185} "ditch"—MS L, AgE: "mound."
\textsuperscript{186} "and one...field"—\textemdash~ in MS M (and filled in in M*).
\textsuperscript{187} "The owner...says"—MS P, EY: "Said the owner of the mound."
\textsuperscript{188} "says"—MSS G, Printings: "said"; HgT: "would say."
\textsuperscript{189} EY adds: "to the owner of the ditch"; MS M adds: "to him."
\textsuperscript{190} "give"—MS Mf: "take from."
\textsuperscript{191} "me"—\textemdash~ in MS M.
\textsuperscript{192} "this"—MS R, AgE: "the."
\textsuperscript{193} "ditch"—MD L, Printings, AgE: "mound."
\textsuperscript{194} MSS G, Mf, L, M, Mf, Printings, YS add: "for money"; MS P and EY add: "in my field."
\textsuperscript{195} "And"—\textemdash~ in MS Mf, Printings.
\textsuperscript{196} "ditch"—MSS L, M (and changed in M*), Printings, AgE: "mound."
\textsuperscript{197} "says"—HgT: "used to say"; Printings: "said."
\textsuperscript{198} "this"—YS, AgE: "the."
\textsuperscript{199} "mound"—MSS B, L, M (and changed in M*), Mf, Printings, AgE: "ditch."
\textsuperscript{200} MSS G, B, W, Mf, Ashkenazic family, Printings, YS add: "for money." MS P, EY add: "in my field." MS O adds: "And the owner of the trench says: Who would give me this mound!"
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A few days later they 201 chanced upon each other. 202 The owner of the trench said to the owner of the mound: Sell 203 me 204 your 205 mound. 206

He said to him: 207 208 Take it 209 210 for free, and let it be so! 211

The meaning of this parable is relatively transparent: 212 As in the story of the ditch and the mound, 213 thus did Haman wish to "purchase" 214 the Jews in order to massacre them. Ahasuerus was so

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201 "they"—Spanish family: "the two of them."
202 AgE adds: "and."
203 "Sell"—AgE: "Give."
204 MSS G, L, R, Mf, HgT2 add: "this."
205 "your"—MS B: "the same"; MSS O, P: "this"; ~ in MS M.
206 MSS L, M, AgE add: "for money."
207 "He said to him"—MS B: "And the owner of the mound said;" MS P: "or."
208 EY adds: "Let it be so!"
209 "Take it"—~ in MS Mf.
210 "it"—~ in MSS G, W, L, M, Printings, AgE.
211 "and let it be so"—MS B: "and would that you removed it!"; ~ in MS Mf, EY.
212 The correspondences are summarized by Maharsha: "Ahasuerus is depicted as the owner of the mound, which is analogous to the Jews, since he had no need for them. And Haman is represented by the owner of the ditch or pit, who wants the mound only in order to throw it into the pit; thereby fulfilling 'He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it...' (Ecclesiastes 10:8)" [and cf. Ecclesiastes rabbah, 10:8:1 where the last-cited verse is applied to Haman]. On the agricultural realities of mounds and ditches in antiquity see the wealth of rabbinic sources and lexicographical information provided by S. Krauss, Talmudische Archeologie (Leipzig: 1910-2), 2:162 and 545, n. 108. On the tel see also J. N. Epstein, ed., The Gaonic Commentary on the Order Toharot Attributed to Rav Hay Gaon (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv: Dvir and Magnes Press, 1982), 91, nn. 13-15.
213 Unlike most rabbinic parables, the current mashal was not formulated so as to speak of a king [see David Flusser, "Mishlei yeshu veha-meshalim besifrut ha'zal"], in Jewish Sources in Early Christianity: Studies and Essays, ed. H. Safrati, 150-209, 2nd ed. (Tel-Aviv: Sifriyyat Po'alim, 1979); Stern, Parables in Midrash: Narrative Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1991), 19-21], since it does not illustrate the relationships between God and his creatures [though one of the characters represents a mortal king].
214 This is probably an implied allusion to Esther 7:4 where the heroine tells Ahasuerus that "we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, etc." The thematic link

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eager to rid himself of them\textsuperscript{215} that he was willing to let Haman have them for free.\textsuperscript{216}

In the present instance the function of the parable seems to be illustrative and not intended to generate a novel interpretation.\textsuperscript{217} That is to say, although it presupposes an understanding of Ahasuerus’ role in the story, that understanding did not originate with the author of the parable.\textsuperscript{218}

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between that verse and Deuteronomy 26:68 served as the basis for Rav’s “proem” on 11a above and the opening \textit{petihta} of Esther \textit{rabhah} (see our analysis in Chapter 2 above).

\textsuperscript{215} R. Abba bar Kahana is most likely thinking of Ahasuerus’ stubborn hostility to the rebuilding of the Temple, which has often been presented as the justification for the rabbis’ portraying him as “that evil king.”

\textsuperscript{216} The weak link in the metaphor is the identification of the “ditch,” which can represent whatever motivation we elect to ascribe to Haman’s malice. On these kinds of unexplained acts and gaps in the plots of the rabbinic \textit{mashal} (especially with respect to the motivations of the characters) see Stern, \textit{Parables in Midrash: Narrative Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature}, 78-9.

\textsuperscript{217} On these literary distinctions see David Stern, \textit{op. cit.}, 40-5, 48-9, 63-74 and elsewhere [note also his discussion of “mashals of blame” on 54-5]; Jonah Fraenkel, \textit{Darkhei ha-’aggadah veha-midrash}, 329-30. Fraenkel also cites the valuable study of Paul Ricoeur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” \textit{Semeia} 4 (1975), 27-148 (see especially 89-103).

\textsuperscript{218} To the modern or critical reader of Esther there is some ambiguity in the intention underlying Ahasuerus’ reply to Haman “The silver is given to you”; however there is a virtual consensus among the traditional translators and commentators that the king was returning the money. Thus already in the Greek Esther (το ὑμῖν ἄργυρον ἔχε; see Moore, 40, who adduces an interesting parallel in Herodotus, 7:27-9), Josephus [\textit{Antiquities}, 11:6:6 (215), pp. 418-9; το ἄργυρον αὐτῷ χαρισμένον], and accepted in most midrashic works and commentaries (see Paton, 206-7). Thus, \textit{Abba gorion}, 29; Esther \textit{rabhah}, 12:20; Second Targum here [see Grossfeld, \textit{The Two Targums}, 148 and n. 37] all observe that Ahasuerus’ actions do not impress one as good business sense and deduce that “Ahasuerus hated Israel more than Haman.” Some modern commentators [e.g., Haupt (130/34) and Moore (34, 40, translating “Well, it’s your money”) argue on the other hand that Ahasuerus did in the end keep the money. A version of our parable was included in \textit{Panim aherim A}, 46, where it was abbreviated by the scribe.
[14a] "And the king took his ring from his hand" (Esther 3:10).

Says R. Abba bar Kahana: Greater was the removal of the ring than the forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses who prophesied for Israel because all of them did not cause them to reform for the better, but the removal of the ring did cause them to reform for the better.

The unique reading of the Yemenite textual family located R. Abba bar Kahana’s dictum above, thereby preserving the correct order of the biblical verses, as distinct from the remainder of the witnesses which read the exposition of verse 10 after that of verse 11. However the order in the Yemenite texts creates an interruption between R. Abba

219 “Greater”—MS B: “better.”
220 “the”—MS O: “this” (possibly intended to apply to “ring”).
221 MS B adds: “for Israel.”
222 MS L adds: “of that wicked man.”
223 “all of them”—MSS O, Ashkenazic family, EY: “the [“the”—MSS L, M: “those” (possibly to be translated as “whereas”)] forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses which prophesied [“prophesied”—MS O, HgT: “arose”] for Israel”; MS P: “those prophets.”
224 “them”—MSS O, P, EY, YS: “Israel.”
225 “but”—MSS B, P: “and.”
226 “the”—MSS B, O: “this.”
227 “removal”—MS P: “giving.”
228 “for the better”—~ in YS.
bar Kahana’s mention of the “forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses” and the pericope which discusses it.

**Concluding Remarks**

The material included in this chapter dealt primarily with Esther 3:7-8. Esther 3:8 opened a new *seder* in the triennial cycle, a verse which attracted a large concentration of midrashic activity in the Targums and Palestinian *midrashim* on Esther. In the Babylonian Esther-Midrash the main component was Rava’s expansion of Haman’s charges against the Jews, an expansion which bears strong affinities to the parallel material in the other sources, including such ancient works as the “letter of Ahasuerus” included among the Additions to the Greek Esther and several rabbinic *midrashim*. Rava’s version no less than the others provides us with a vivid reflection of the mixtures of truth, slanders, half-truth and innuendo which made up the arsenal of the Jew-haters of antiquity. Employing the hermeneutical methods of midrash, all these sources succeed in eliciting from between the lines and letters of Haman’s accusations as transcribed


230 By contrast, the Babylonian Esther-Midrash preserves only a comparatively faint echo of the elaborate homiletical retellings of 3:7 found in the other collections, in which Haman proceeds through the Jewish calendar searching for a portentous date for the execution of his plot.

231 In addition to the predominant theme we find an assortment of standard midrashic concerns; e.g., the emphasis on the divine plan guiding the events of the story, and the stress on the presence of the rabbis as protagonists hovering close to the central arena of the events.

232 His name is given at the beginning of the talmudic passage and no other rabbis are mentioned afterwards, hence we presume that this unusually long segment, or at least most of it, is being ascribed to him.

233 It would therefore be incorrect to characterize Rava’s comments as expressing the situation or perceptions of Jews in a state of exile. As we noted in our analysis of the passage, similar arguments appear in works dating from the early Second Commonwealth, as well as in contemporary Palestinian midrashic literature.
in Esther 3:8 allusions to anti-Jewish defamations that were current in their own times.

As has been observed by several scholars\textsuperscript{234} this section of the Esther-Midrash—like much of the midrash as a whole—is dominated by the comments of Rava, who is represented here by interpretations of verses 1, 6 and 8 of Esther Chapter 3. There is also one \textit{baraita},\textsuperscript{235} in connection with Esther 3:7, as well as several dicta attributed to Palestinian \textit{Amoraim}, particularly R. Abba bar Kahana.\textsuperscript{236}


\textsuperscript{235} The text in question is anonymous, and introduced as \textit{"tana."} Hence we should regard its authenticity as suspect, in line with Albeck’s reservations outlined at the end of the previous chapter.

\textsuperscript{236} To verses 10 and 11. The two comments by R. Simeon ben Laqish, which are in fact variations on a single tradition, are not actually interpretations of Esther.