ESTHER 3:6. Megalomania

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The villain of the story of Purim is Haman ben Hamedata, a descendant of Amaleq. King Ahashverosh appointed Haman as his Chief of Staff. The King also issued an unusual order (Esther 3:2) all the officers of the King's court must prostrate to Haman. Everyone followed the King's order except one man: Mordekhay.

According to the rabbis Mordekhay refused to prostrate to Haman not out of disrespect, but because Haman had been also made a priest, a representative of a Persian idol he was carrying with him. The Rabbis deduced this insight from the special wording the Megila uses to describe the honors due to Haman. The people were ordered to *bow down* and *kneel down* to Haman (*likhroa' ulhishtahavot*). Now, while bowing down is a sign of respect and honor, kneeling down is an unequivocal act of religious worship. Mordekhay made clear that as a Jew he would not kneel down to Haman, even at the expense of his own life. But the unexpected happened. When Haman learned about Mordekhay's offense, "he felt contempt to kill Mordekhay alone" (3:6), and anticipating the megalomaniac practices of a mob boss, he decided to teach Mordekhay a lesson by killing all Mordekhay's brothers and sisters living in the Persian Empire. In other words, the entire Jewish nation.

How would Haman execute his plan? To persuade the King was relatively easy. Among other things, because there were zero operating costs involved. On the contrary: in exchange for the King's edict, Haman offered ten thousand talents of silver for the Royal treasury (3:9). Now, how would Haman recruit so many soldiers and forces to persecute, find and execute hundreds of thousands of Jews throughout the huge Persian Empire?

Haman came up with a shrewd evil plan, which the Megila briefly describes with two key words: *ushlalam la-boz*. A Royal Decree was sent to all the King's subjects saying: If you kill a Jew on a specific day (Adar 13), you are not to be prosecuted, the police will not oppose you, on the contrary, law-enforcement forces will be on your side. And, on top of that, you can keep for you the Jew's money, his assets and his properties. It was a genius evil plan. There was no need for professional army forces, or trains to transport the Jews to death camps or gas chambers. Our Rabbis explained that there was no shortage of volunteers for the job. Many people, were fighting among themselves to be the first to kill the Jews on the assigned day and keep their money!

Had Haman succeeded (and he was very close!) it would have been the end of the Jewish people, has veShalom. At the end, as we all know, Mordekhay and Esther devised an effective plan, and HaShem, from

behind the scenes, saved us from extinction.