ESTHER 4:3. 70 days of terror

The idea that characterizes Purim, and distinguishes Purim from other celebrations, is *venahafokh hu,* a phrase mentioned at the beginning of the ninth chapter of the book of Esther, that summarizes the final outcome of what happened in those days. venahafokh hu means, more or less than in the end "everything turned upside down", in an unexpected positive way.
Unlike other occasions in which our existence as a people was threatened, in Purim we not only survived the threat of total extermination, but in the end we also liberated ourselves from those who sought our death.
In the next lines I will try to explain this in more detail.

THE DEATH SENTENCE

Purim happened in the year 474 BCE, 12th year of Ahashverosh. At that time the Jewish people was in a vulnerable situation. Why? Because all Jews lived under the same "political roof" and the death sentence decreed upon the Jews of the Persian Empire meant the extermination of all the Jewish people; the "final solution" with which every anti-Semite dreams.The strategy to assassinate every single Jew was to encourage the murderers to kill their Jewish neighbors and acquaintances assuring them that, according to the new law, the executors would suffer no consequence for those crimes, and in addition, the assets of the Jewish victims would be available for the executors. The Jews were forbidden to defend themselves. And the imperial army would be on the side of the perpetrators. All this is expressed directly or indirectly in the edict that Haman signed and sent on behalf of King Ahashverosh to every city throughout the Empire.The decree established that the genocide of the Jews, the mega execution of approximately 250,000 souls, would take place on the 13th of Adar of that year. The letters containing the royal edict were sent 11 months earlier, the 13th of Nisan.After Ester and Mordechai

thwarted Haman's sinister plan and he was executed, new official letters were sent announcing that the Jews could defend themselves against their enemies, and that they would count on with the backing of the imperial army. These letters were dispatched on Sivan 23, that is, 70 days after the first letters were sent.

WERE THE JEWS ABLE TO ESCAPE?

When you read the Meguilla seriously, you have to make a huge effort to visualize what the Yehudim must have suffered during those 70 days of terror. The Midrashim tell us that many Gentile neighbors were showing their sharp knives to the horrified Jewish mothers, telling them that with those weapons they would kill their little children. The Midrash also explains that the perpetrators celebrated in advance the massacre, and distributing their possessions.
Referring to the seemingly inexplicable urgency of Mordechai to overturn Haman's decree, despite the fact that it would have taken nine months for its implementation, Rabbi Yom Tob Tsahalon (1559-1619) explains in his book *leqah tob* that the Jews were probably "detained" or "enslaved" (□□□□□□□□), with the collaboration of the imperial army, to prevent them from escaping with their possessions, or saving their lives, before the 13th of Adar.
Thinking of Europe 1940-1945 it is not difficult to imagine "forced labor camps" where thousands of Jews were imprisoned, awaiting the day of their execution. The Yehudim were not able to do anything to defend themselves. They prayed, fasted and waited for a miracle, which ultimately happened.
Following this idea of □□rabbi Tsahalon, we can suppose that with the arrival of the second letter in which the previous edict was reversed, the Jewish prisoners were released, and the perpetrators were deprived of their freedom, waiting for their execution on the day 13 of Adar.

WHO WERE THE ENEMIES OF THE JEWS?

It is quite possible that the enemies of the Jews were "opportunists," ordinary people who responded to Haman's invitation to "kill a Jew and keep his assets." During Second World War, something similar happened with ordinary citizens of Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, etc. who betrayed their Jewish neighbors, knowing that they will be killed, to keep their houses and possessions …
In his book Eshkol haKofer, Rabbi Abraham Saba (1440-1508) suggests a different theory. The Persian Empire had an approximate population of 50,000,000 people. Almost half the population of the entire planet at that time (Wikipedia). The gigantic empire included 127 provinces with thousands of different civilizations, peoples and tribes. Rabbi Saba says that to exterminate the Jews, Haman recruited his own people, the Agaguites, the ethnic descendants of Amaleq. These first "anti-Semites" believed, like the modern Nazis, that their existential mission is to destroy the Jewish people. The Agaguitas became the executing arm of their highest representative: Haman. Rabbi Saba explains that once Haman was executed for treason to the king, all those who collaborated with Haman suffered the same fate as Haman, that is: execution by order of the King, since they were considered accomplices in the crime of "high treason".

Venahafokh hu "and at the end, things turned upside down" means that in Purim not only did we miraculously save ourselves from a certain death, but we also freed ourselves from those who sought to destroy us. The number of criminals executed on the 13th and 14th of Adar of 474 BCE, **75,800**, gives us a rough idea of the magnitude of the Jewish genocide that was providentially prevented.