ESTHER 3:14. Hiding Genocide From The King

פַּתְשֶׁגֶן הַכְּתָב, לְהִנָּתֵן דָּת בְּכָל-מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה, גָּלוּי, לְכָל-הָעַמִּים–לִהְיוֹת עֲתִדִים, לַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.

Hiding the inconvenient truth is an essential part of any political plot.

The plot of Megillat Esther, at least at its superficial level, only makes sense if we assume that King Ahashverosh was not aware of the content of Haman’s decree. As it happens innumerable times in all kinds of political contexts, monarchies and democracies, ministers, government officials or advisers many times hide certain information from the King or the president due to partisan or personal considerations, etc. Haman not only did not reveal to Ahashverosh that the edict he was about to write decreed the genocide of the Jews, but it is reasonable to assume that he did everything necessary to prevent the content of that edict from reaching the ears of the king.
Rabbi Almosnino in his masterful work Yede Moshé explains one of Haman’s tactics to hide the information from the king, and how this is mentioned with exquisite subtlety by the text of Megillat Esther.

KETAB HADAT
There were two official documents announcing the edict. The first document was the *ketab hadat* (chapter 3:14). This was the official text. And in spite of not having been written directly by the king, this document was officially read in presence of the king for final approval. According to Rabbi Almosnino, this document was drafted in an ambiguous way. It

only mentioned that all the subjects of the empire *“should be prepared for that day (□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□), the 13th of Adar”*, awaiting new instructions. Like a modern ad saying “Save the date, instructions to follow” . This document was read publicly in Shushan as well as in all the cities of the Persian empire.

With this ambiguous document Haman made the king think that the final plan was to strip the Jews of their civil privileges and take their properties and assets (□□□□□), and thus, forcing them into slavery. In this way, Haman suggested, the Jews “who disobey the king’s laws and follow their own laws” would be punished, and an important sum of money would be collected for the royal coffers. Haman would have justified the deliberate inaccuracy of this text, explaining to the king that if the edict were more explicit, the Jews would discover its content, escape, hide their property, etc. and the surprise factor would be lost.

PATSHEGEN HAKETAB

The second document was the *patshegen* of the *ketab hadat* (chap. 3:13). The word *patshegen* means: explanation. This second text (called in that verse *sefarim*) provided the details of the implementation of the *ketab hadat* and explicitly mentioned that on that day it would be allowed, I quote, *“in all the provinces of the king, to destroy, kill and exterminate all Jews, young and old , children and women, on that same day, the thirteenth day of the twelve month, which is the month of Adar, and their possessions would be given to looting. “* Rabbi Almosnino maintains that this second text was written by Haman, without the king’s knowledge, and was sent through the “couriers” to all corners of the empire, together with the first document. However, this second document was not revealed in the capital city, Shushan, to prevent its content from reaching the ears of the King. All that was announced in Shushan was the *ketab hadat*, the first ambiguous document that only mentioned the date for which citizens should prepare while waiting for new instructions. The king, thus, did not

know the nature of Haman's true plan.
In this way it is also understood why while in all the cities of the empire Jews were in mourning (Esther 4: 3), in Shushan, the city was perplexed, that is, people—Jews and non Jews—were *confused* because they did not know what that mysterious edict was about.

THE TWO DOCUMENTS
At the beginning of chapter 4, the Megilla says that Mordekhai knew about the content of the second document, and in verse 8 we can clearly see the distinction between these two texts. Verse 4: 8 says that Mordekhi "gave to Hatakh a copy of the Patshegen, [the instructions for the implementation of the] ketab hadat … mentioning the genocide of the Jews, so that Hatakh would show it to Esther, to be notified, and he will send her to see the King, to implore his favor and to intercede before him for her people. " Mordekhai hands Hataj a copy of the second document," the patshgen" of the ketab hadat, a document that the common people of Shushan did not know about, to show to Esther and proceed with the plan: INFORMING Ahashverosh that he had been tricked by Haman—who is hiding from the King the genocidal plan— and convince the King to prevent this.

The rest of chapter 4 deals with Esther's difficulties in reaching the next step: getting an audience with the king.

To read the book of Rabbi Almosnino, see this link. The subject that we explained today is briefly mentioned on pages 452-453 (.□□□-□"□ □□□)

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