

FROM THE EDITOR

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Movies about superheroes have taken over theatres and, for the last few years, origin stories, detailing how those superheroes and their archenemies came to be, have been all the rage. But, did you know that almost all of the great superheroes were created by Jews?¹ Superman. Captain America. Batman. Spider Man. The Hulk. The Fantastic Four. X-Men. Ironman. The Avengers.

So, what makes superheroes so inherently Jewish? Some say that, for their Jewish authors, "It was nothing more than a rebranding of their Biblical heroes flavored [sic] with the deeply held religious expectation and anticipation of the Messiah."² Many even say that Moshe Rabbeinu was one of the influences for Superman, who was forced to be sent away from his parents as a baby in order to escape certain death and to be raised in a foreign environment, complete with a Hebrew name from his birth parents (Kal-El) and a foreign name from the people who raised him (Clark Kent).

Whether he realised it, the creator of Superman also managed to copy another idea from his Jewish background. According to one version of the story³, Superman actually had a hand in creating his archenemy, Lex Luthor. When they were both young, Superboy came to the rescue of his good friend, a teenage Lex Luthor, saving him from a laboratory fire. But, when Superboy blew out the flames, he spilled chemicals that caused Lex to go prematurely bald, earning Lex's lifelong hatred towards him.

Believe it or not, our forefathers – Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov – had a hand in the creation of our own archenemy, the one nation that Hashem commanded us to eradicate from the earth: Amalek.

Around Purim time, we often hear about Amalek, and with good reason. Although Purim is a rabbinic holiday, we actually connect a mitzvah from the Torah to it. Each year, on the Shabbos that falls out just before Purim, we add a special Torah reading called "zachor" ("remember") with which we fulfil, by hearing it, the mitzvah of remembering what Amalek did to us when we left Egypt, cowardly ambushing us from behind. Amalek is the nation that stands against G-d in this world, and who, at the height of the world's awareness and presence of Hashem – following all of the miracles and wonders that took place during the going out from Egypt – had the chutzpah to viciously attack us.

So, what's the connection between Amalek and Purim? The wicked Haman is referred to in the Megillah as "the Agagite" because he descended from King Agag, who was a descendant of Amalek. We often hear about the fact that Haman's existence was the fault of Shaul HaMelech (King Saul), who failed to follow Hashem's explicit command to him to destroy everything from Amalek – every man, woman, infant, and even their animals. Because of Shaul HaMelech's misplaced mercy, we were nearly annihilated just over 500 years later when King Agag's descendant, Haman, tried to destroy us.

But where did Amalek come from? A quick glance at a Chumash⁴ makes it obvious that Amalek was related to the wicked Eisav, the evil twin brother of our patriarch, Yaakov – but we have to look to the gemara⁵ to find out how the nation of Amalek actually came into being – the "origin story" of our archenemy.

There was a woman named Timna, who was the daughter of kings – a princess. She wanted to convert and to become part of the Children of Israel. She went to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, but they would not accept her.

She was so sincere and so desperately wanted to be a part of the Children of Israel that she thought that it would be better to be a maidservant to a distant relation of ours than it would be to be a princess in another nation! So, she went and became a concubine to Eisav's son, Eliphaz, because he was from the seed of Yitzchak. From this relationship, Timna gave birth to Amalek.

Our Sages teach that Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov erred. They shouldn't have distanced Timna and they should have instead permitted her to convert.

While Eliphaz grew up on the lap of his grandfather, Yitzchak, Eliphaz's son, Amalek, grew up on the lap of his grandfather, Eisav, who bitterly hated Yaakov.⁶ Eisav's deep hatred coupled with Amalek's likely strong resentment towards all of the Avos (forefathers) for having rejected his mother was a recipe for disaster, resulting in a tremendous and relentless source of pain for the Children of Israel.

We often say that we, the Jewish people, are our own worst enemy – doing things that harm our own interests, but, sometimes, our enemies exist simply because we helped to create them, just like in the best origin stories.

Freilichen (happy) Purim from everyone at JL.

ROBERT SUSSMAN, EDITOR

PHOTOGRAPH: SUPPLIED

¹www.haaretz.com/amp/israel-news/culture/MAGAZINE-supermensches-comic-books-jewish-history-1.5393475

²The Jewish Origins of our Comic-Book Superheroes (Oakland University Religious Studies and Center for Religious Understanding)

³See Adventure Comics #271 (1960) (via Quora)

⁴Bereishis 36:12

⁵Sanhedrin 99b with Rashi

⁶See Sefer HaToda'ah

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JEWISH LIFE is published by Total Publishing
(Pty) Ltd ©2008.

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ISSN 1994-8670

Total Publishing (Pty) Ltd

P.O. Box 52339, Saxonwold 2132

The views expressed in this issue of
Jewish Life are not necessarily those
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Certified for the period

July - December 2018: 12 423

