

Haman Beings: Hanging Ten in Effigy
Adapted from the writings of Dayan Yitzhak Grossman
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The Yeshiva World reports:

Askanim from Agudah, the UJO, Lakewood Vaad, Anti-Defamation League, BPJCC, and Oizrim Jewish Council warn people not to dress in blackface, hang Haman effigies, or wear any costume that stereotypes specific communities.[1]

Regarding the hanging of Haman effigies, the organizations explain:

For many years, the KKK and other racist groups that murdered and lynched minorities used a noose or a hanging doll to threaten and intimidate. Our fellow community members and neighbors often do not know Haman's history, and it's extremely painful and insensitive in their view.

In the course of an online debate about these warnings, one participant declared:

Pirsumei nisa is accomplished by reading Megilas Esther per decrees of our *nevi'im* and *chachamim*, not by questionable shtick like hanging effigies and wearing blackface, which have no source in Chazal.[2]

This article does not enter into debate about these warnings, but merely corrects the misconceptions of the cited comment that hanging Haman in effigy does not accomplish *pirsumei nisa*, constitutes "questionable shtick," and has no source in Chazal.

The earliest (explicit) documented source for the minhag of executing Haman in effigy on Purim appears in a Geonic responsum.[3] The custom is subsequently mentioned in the Sefer He'aruch, composed nearly a millennium ago. The Gemara, in describing the ritual of "passing" a child to Molech,[4] describes it as similar (in form, if not in idolatrous character) to something called "*mashvarta dePuraya*." [5] Rashi explains this to mean:

...in the manner in which the children jump on the days of Purim, when there was a hole in the ground and fire burning inside it, and [children] would jump from one edge to the other.

The Aruch elaborates upon the details of the custom, which in his account sometimes included the hanging and burning of Haman in effigy:

The custom in Babylonia and Elam is that the young men make a form in the shape of Haman, and they hang it on their roofs for four or five days, and on the days of Purim they make a bonfire and they throw that form into it, and they stand around it and sing. And they have a ring suspended in the fire that they hang from and jump from one side of the fire to the other side of the fire. That ring is called "*mashvarta*," i.e., something used for jumping.[6]

The Aruch's account is cited two centuries later in the Orchos Chaim of R' Aharon Hakohen of Lunel,[7] a half-century after that in the Abudraham,[8] and later by the Rama in his Darchei Moshe[9] (although not in his glosses to the Shulchan Aruch).

More recently, although the custom does not seem to have been widely practiced by Ashkenazim, it was by Sephardim. As we have previously noted,[10] R' Meir Mazuz goes so far as to declare that it had been practiced "throughout the Sephardic diaspora until our day," and he bemoans the fact that it has lately been forgotten and abandoned in favor of the (more recent and more problematic, in his view) custom of wearing costumes.[11]

As we have seen above, the customs of *mashvarta dePuraya* were practiced by children or young men. In some accounts, although it was primarily a custom of children, adults would also join in the striking of the Haman effigy with palm branches as it burned, as an allusion to erasing the name of Amaleik.[12] In some accounts, effigies of not just Haman but his ten sons as well were burned.[13] Some explain that the rationale for these customs is to "increase *pirsumei nisa* as much as possible, and to give expression to the hatred of Amaleik and his evil way."[14]

Rav Mazuz recommends "returning the crown to its former [glory]" and reinstating the traditional custom (although he is writing in Eretz Yisrael, in an entirely different cultural context, in which the aforementioned concerns may not apply).[15] In his Yeshivat Kisei Rahamim, "famous for preserving traditions and custom in their purity, without perversions and crookedness," the custom of burning Haman in effigy is indeed still followed today. A pair of pants and a shirt are filled with scraps of paper and cardboard to create the form of Haman, and to the effigy's head is attached "a picture of the contemporary Haman of each year."

On Purim night, the *bachurim* of the yeshiva escort the *rosh* yeshiva with music and dancing from his home to the yeshiva building, where the effigy of Haman has been previously inserted into a large barrel. The *rosh* yeshiva ignites the effigy, and the assembled crowd then bursts into song. The *rosh* yeshiva waits until Haman is totally consumed, and only then does everyone enter the dining room to hear his Purim *drashah*.

While examples of the "contemporary Hamans" whose pictures are attached to the effigies are not provided,

The *bachurim* of the yeshiva have a tradition that virtually every year, the figure burned on Purim night passes from the world before the arrival of the coming Purim.[16]

[1]PSA: This Purim, Use Sensitivity and Common Sense. The Yeshiva World. <https://www.theyeshivaworld.com/news/general/2069041/psa-this-purim-us-e-sensitivity-and-common-sense.html>.

Cf. Jackie Hajdenberg. Jewish groups urge their communities: No blackface this Purim. <https://www.jta.org/2022/03/10/culture/jewish-community-groups-warn-against-blackface-on-purim>.

[2]<https://vinnews.com/2022/03/14/letter-to-the-editor-thanks-agudah-for-calling-out-blackface-and-other-racist-purim-behavior/#comment-1975172>.

[3]Cited in Minhag Sreifas "Haman" *Cheilek* 1 and *Ha'olam Gilyon* 19, *Yom Chamishi*, 11 Adar 5699 (Thu., March 2, 1939). I have not yet been able to locate this responsum.

- [4]Vayikra 18:21.
- [5]Sanhedrin 64b.
- [6]Aruch erech שו"ר.
- [7]Orchos Chaim (Yerushalayim 5716) end of *Dinei Se'udas Purim*, *siman* 42.
- [8]Sefer Abudraham, *Seder Tefilas Purim Ufeirushah*.
- [9]Darchei Moshe O.C. *siman* 690 *os* 4.
- [10]Customs Declaration: The Origins of Minhagei Purim. Mar. 3, 2022.
- [11]Sansan LeYair, Shu"t *siman* 12, cited in Vekaneh Lecha Chaver, *siman* 103-*Minhag Hatachposet* bePurim.
- [12]Kuntres Mamleches Kohanim, printed at the end of the work Perach Shushan (of R' Shushan Hakohen of Djerba), cited in Minhag Sreifas "Haman" *Cheilek* 1.
- [13]See Minhag Sreifas "Haman" *Cheilek* 2.
- [14]Nesivos Hama'arav, cited in Minhag Sreifas "Haman" *Cheilek* 2.
- [15]Sansan LeYair *ibid*.
- [16]Minhag Sreifas "Haman" *Cheilek* 2.