



ERETZ HEMDAH ASK THE RABBI SERVICE

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Booing Haman

Question: During the noise-making breaks after Haman’s name in Megilla reading, some people now vocalize their disdain for Haman with sounds and even words. Is that permitted? If words are forbidden, is “Boooo” a word?

Answer: We bend or break normal rules in order to make Purim “lively” in multiple ways. There are the ideas of drinking wine well beyond the norm and that one is exempt from payment for damages caused during the Purim celebration because the mayhem is part of the *mitzva* (Rama, Orach Chayim 695:2). Regarding Megilla reading, the *minhag* that the congregation reads out loud four *p’sukim* was designed “just for happiness, to make the youngsters happy, and encourage them to ...

listen to the reading” (Hagahot Maimoniot, Megilla 1:7). There, words are being said in a fundamentally unnecessary manner, but they are the words of the Megilla. The idea of putting down Haman finds expression in several statements of *Chazal*.

Is showing disdain for Haman grounds to bend any rules? The practices of “banging for Haman” has undergone changes over time, but is codified in the Rama (Orach Chayim 690:17). Normally, it is forbidden to do actions in a juncture where *hefsek* is forbidden (Shulchan Aruch, OC 97:4 regarding returning a *tallit* that fell off). Much of the non-vocal noisemaking is as much of an action, so we see a bending of the rules. However, *hefsek* exists on a scale, and speech is at its top (Mishna Berura 104:10), so we must look for precedent for speaking due to Haman’s name.

The Magen Avraham (690:21) cites a *minhag* from the Levush (OC 690:17) to say “*Shem resh’a'im yirkav*” when Haman’s name is read, so there is indeed strong precedent. While “boo” lacks the profundity of words from Tanach, the fundamental underpinnings seem the same. On the other hand, the Pri Megadim (ad loc.) criticizes the practice, and it is not cited in the body of the Mishna Berura. In its footnotes (Sha’ar Hatziyun 690:57), he explains that he opposes the practice – however, his grounds (like the Pri Megadim’s; they both disapproved the pause in the *leining*) are that the confusion the proclamation brings can cause one to miss part of the *leining*. However, he suggests the following proof that *hefsek*

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is not a problem. The Shulchan Aruch (ibid. 13) validates a practice to elucidate the Megilla reading during the reading; in other words, with proper justification, one can speak things related to the reading. Igrot Moshe (OC I 192) discusses a deflection of the proof, and leaves the propriety of the Levush's *minhag* unresolved. Regarding the complaint about confusion, in most shuls, vocalization is not going to “push the envelope” (see Living the Halachic Process VI, D-11).

Is wordless vocalization better than speaking with word(s)? *Poskim* treat communicating through *remiza* (hinting) as normally a problem, but when needed, preferable to speaking or even moving from one's place during *Shemoneh Esrei* (Mishna Berura 104:1). That refers to hinting with hands or eyes, not to vocalization. Although I have not found a source for it, it is a longstanding practice (probably overused) for when you must not speak to say “Nu, nu” with gestures and intonations, meaning, “Do as I expect you to understand.” This is apparently worse than *remiza* and better than speaking. In some ways, “Boo” is more like speech, as the interjection “boo” is an entry in dictionaries and has a specific meaning (of disapproval), whereas “Nu” can mean anything, depending on context and intonation. If stretched out greatly, “Boooo” is more of a sound than a word, making it is more similar to “Nu.” Animal sounds are definitely not speaking, and would be not too different from mechanical noisemaking.

In summary, there are enough ways to put

down Haman without the more problematic use of words. On the other hand, words might be okay, even unrelated speech does not disqualify Megilla reading (Rama, OC 690:5), and cramping children's style has a price. Each *shul*/rabbi should act according to its character and the religious/experiential needs of the Purim celebrants. ■

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