

Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

NOTE: Because of a family trip to the “Old Country,” I shall be unable to prepare Devrei Torah for the next two weeks. You may download archived material for Ki Tisa (Parah) and Vayakel/Pekudei (HaHodesh) from www.PotomacTorah.org.

During a non-leap year, we always read Tetzaveh during the week that includes the birthday and yahrzeit of Moshe (7 Adar). Tetzaveh is the only parsha during Shemot, Vayikra, and Bemidbar in which Moshe's name is absent – however the entire parsha consists of God speaking directly to Moshe. Hashem presents Moshe with details on how to make special garments for the kohanim (and Kohen Gadol) and how to perform the dedication ceremony for the Mishkan. Tetzaveh is the second half of a conversation that opens at the beginning of Terumah. Since there is no break in Hashem's instructions to Moshe, it is obvious that God is continuing to speak to him. Commentators, however, find many reasons why the Torah does not include Moshe's name in the parsha. One interpretation is that after the sin of the golden calf, Moshe told God that if He did not forgive B'Nai Yisrael, He should remove his name from His book (the Torah). Although Hashem did forgive the people, He did omit Moshe's name – from the parsha that we normally read during the week that includes Moshe's birth and death.

Next Shabbat we read Ki Tisa, the parsha that includes the story of the golden calf (Egel Zahav). The fact that Moshe's name is missing from a parsha before Egel Zahav is one of many indications that the Torah is not always in chronological order.

Tetzaveh is especially appropriate to read as we prepare for Purim. While Moshe's name is missing from Tetzaveh, Hashem's name is absent from the Megillah – although again it is obvious that God is operating as a shepherd, nudging events from behind, piling coincidence upon coincidence to save B'Nai Yisrael. Haman, a direct descendant of Amalek, convinces the head of 127 provinces to authorize him to exterminate the Jews. The Torah provides links and hints throughout to point an informed reader to seventy layers of depth in its words. The Megillah similarly uses hidden methods to show how God saves B'Nai Yisrael, even when He does not communicate directly with any person and when there are no prophets to hear and announce God's words.

Rabbi Eli Yogev observes that Adar and Elul, six months apart from each other, both prepare us for what comes next. Elul prepares us for the solemn events of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We listen to the shofar each week day to remind us to perform teshuvah and be ready for judgment and the cleansing of Yom Kippur. Adar reminds us to give matanot la'evyonim (gifts to the poor), mishloach manot (food gifts to others), listen to the message of Zachor (warning us of Amalek and other anti-Semites), listen to the Megillah, and rejoice at a seudah (festive meal). These activities promote inclusion and love of our fellows, two important themes as we prepare for Pesach. The focus on Aharon and Moshe reinforces the themes of Purim and Pesach. After spending much of winter reading about animosity among siblings

(much of Sefer Bereishis), the love and respect of Aharon and Moshe for each other (and for their sister Miriam) point the way to love and respect, the feelings that we should have toward fellow Jews as well as to other members of our family. Rabbi Moshe Rube reminds us that our concern for fellow Jews has no boundary and extends, for example, as far as New Zealand, where his congregation actively prepares for Purim.

Rabbi Marc Angel distinguishes two types of hatred. Rational hatred follows the model of Paro, who fears that the rapidly swelling Jewish population could become part of an invading force to overthrow the Egyptian government, something that had happened previously when another nation took over Egypt. Irrational hatred, in contrast, is baseless. Amalek hates and attacks Jews because there are weak, elderly, and poor members who are easy targets. Haman continues this hatred because one Jew (Mordechai) will not bow down to him. The Jews are not interested in attacking Amalek or Haman. The senseless hatred of Amalek continues as it has for thousands of years – Rome, the Crusaders, many majority groups in Europe for two thousand years, Hitler, many Arab countries in recent times, and many anti-Semites in numerous countries now.

Over the centuries, many Jews have tried to assimilate – to copy the non-Jews. One lesson from history is that assimilation does not reduce or eliminate anti-Semitism. Our tradition implies that when we Jews are open and faithful to our traditions, other groups respect us. While living as practicing Jews does not eliminate anti-Semitism, others respect us more when we respect ourselves. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, taught this lesson, and I suspect that most Rabbis agree. Hannah and I try to live and teach this lesson to our children and grandchildren.

Note: we are leaving right after Purim to visit family and friends in the Old Country (Los Angeles). I shall not be able to post next week, and I suspect that we shall arrive home too late to post the following week as well. Meanwhile, hopefully you will be able to download from www.PotomacTorah.org and enjoy some of these archive materials in our absence.

Shabbat Shalom; Purim Samaich

Hannah and Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Dvar Torah: Tetzaveh: Easy Come, Easy Go

By Rabbi Dovid Green © 5758

In last week's parsha a list of all the materials needed for the building of the Tabernacle is given. At the end of the list come the precious stones which were placed in the clothing of the Kohein Gadol – The High Priest, which are discussed in this week's parsha. Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz asks why these stones, which are highest in value, are enumerated last.

They should be first.

Rabbi Shmuelevitz answers that they come last because a basic, important ingredient was missing. That is that since these stones came to the donors easily, without toil, there was no great act of good will in giving them. That is why they are enumerated last.

Rabbi Shmuelevitz bases this on the premise that it seems that human nature is that things which we toil over are the things most dear to us. Things which come easily don't require much of our effort, and since we put so little into them they don't take up a big place in our hearts. Hence the saying, "easy come, easy go."

The central institution of "avodah," service of G-d, must be founded on the highest level of good will – giving that which was toiled over, and is very dear to the donors.

This is an important point in many areas of life. What we invest time and effort into will turn out to be the things we hold dearest. The Sages (Tractate Derech Eretz Zuta) say as follows: *One who wishes to love another person should get involved in doing good for them.*

Conversely, there are so many things in life which we invest effort and in the last analysis really didn't deserve the place of prominence in our lives which we ascribed to it. A wise person tries to discern which things in life deserve his most strenuous efforts.

Haman, the "bad guy" in the Book of Esther, required everyone to bow to him when he passed by. Mordechai refused to bow. Haman, a rich and extremely powerful person could not appreciate any of his "blessings" so long as Mordechai refused to bow. This attitude ultimately led to Haman's downfall.

Haman's efforts were only directed to self-aggrandizement. He invested every fiber of his being to going up the ladder toward further honor and recognition. His mistake is a lesson to all generations.

In our generation, which provides us with so many things to get involved in, we constantly must ask ourselves as follows. "Are we really dedicating our lives to things of substance?" Or, like Haman, are we chasing after empty dreams which vanish as soon as our eyes are opened? Let's learn from Haman. Let's consider what is truly important and deserving of our precious time. Let's make our toils and efforts something fit to give to the King of Kings.

Good Shabbos.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5758-tetzaveh/>

Can a Person Write a Megillah in English? – Purim, Unity, and Diversity

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021, 2023

We know that a sefer Torah must be written in Hebrew. But what about a Megillah? The answer to this question is rooted in how we look at Purim. Is Purim a holiday of unity or one of diversity?

The theme at the end of the Megillah is one of unity. We are told to send mishloach manot, gifts to one another, which create a sense of warmth, friendship, and respect. We are told to give matanot la'evyonim, gifts to the poor, which instills a sense of responsibility to those in need in our community.

The theme of unity, however, seems to be contradicted by an earlier theme of the Megillah: one of disunity and diversity. When speaking with Achashverosh, Haman says "*the Jewish people scattered throughout the land.*" We are scattered and disconnected from one another.

It is often said that the end of the Megillah is a response to Haman's earlier claim. The mitzvot of mishloach manot and

matanot la'evyonim are established to cultivate and express a deep sense of connectedness and unity among the people.

On deeper reflection, however, it seems that it was Haman who was actually right! We were, and we are now, scattered throughout the land! The end of the Megillah, rather than underscoring the principle of unity, serves to undermine it in unheard of ways. Purim is the only holiday on our calendar celebrated on different days – some people on the 14th and others on the 15th of Adar, depending if one lives in a walled city or not.

As Ramban notes, this is completely shocking. Why and how can any holiday be instituted this way? A major part of a holiday is that it brings all the people together. History has shown that when a religion has different groups who observe the same holiday on different days, the groups divide off and become different denominations. Why institute this dividing line that risks becoming a wall that can cleave the people asunder?

The secret to this lies in understanding that Purim is both a day of diversity and of unity. It is a holiday of the diaspora – the only chag based on the experience of Jews in galus — in exile. When we were in Israel, particularly during the First Temple period, although there were sinners who worship idols, we were one cohesive people with shared customs and practices. In exile, however, we spread throughout the lands, into different host countries. We adopted their cultures and their languages. Indeed, a recurring theme in the Megillah is Achashveirosh sending decrees to each country *“in their own script and their own language”* (Esther 8:9).

We can and have embraced this diversity as something good. It is a model of the salad bowl against a melting pot. A melting pot seeks to make everything the same. A salad bowl is beautiful and tasty because it is made up of different ingredients existing side-by-side and cohering together.

We, as a people, are a salad bowl: Jews are Sephardi, Ashkenazi, and Teimani (Yemenite). There are Russian Jews and there are Jews of color. All of this diversity of customs and practices adds to the richness of us as a people. To become a salad bowl, however, these components must also adhere. Our goal in galut is to treasure this diversity and at the same time to bring it all together. Not with a uniformity that flattens differences, but with a unity that integrates all these differences into one larger whole.

There is a great deal of work that has to be done to achieve this. We too often allow our different cultures, languages and practices to become a wedge that drives us apart. We have to exert intentional effort if we do not want to become separate tribes that have little or nothing to do with one another.

This is the true message of Purim. Not a rejection of Haman's statement, but as a fundamental principle that exists alongside it. It is a chag of galut, of differences; these differences are given expression by its astonishing celebration on different days. And yet, the actual practices of the chag – sending gifts and giving to the poor – cultivate and reinforce that this diversity lives within a larger unity and connectedness. As Haman said, with all our being spread out throughout the land, we are still am echad, one people.

Which brings us back to our question of whether a Megillah can be written in English. Focusing on the chag's emphasis of a multiplicity of cultures, our Sages rule that a Megillah can be written in the vernacular of each community and used to fulfill the mitzvah – especially for those who don't understand Hebrew. It is written “according to their script and their languages.” “Their languages” – in English, “and with their script” – using English characters.

This ruling has been powerfully relevant to my family. My son doesn't understand Hebrew, and he has gone year after year feeling completely excluded from the reading of Megillah. My wife and I – really, my wife – found a perfect solution in this halakha. We commissioned a Megillah to be written in English, and now my son is able to read it in a language and script that he can understand. He has said that it is the first time that the mitzvah has felt meaningful. It is now an act that connects him to God, and hopefully to the Jewish people.

We often struggle between these two poles. At times, unity turns into uniformity, and diversity goes out the window. Why not have a minyan for Spanish speakers and English speakers alongside those who can daven in Hebrew?, my son asks. And too often, diversity rules the day, and we create only separate communities, not a larger one that brings us all together as one people. This Purim, perhaps we should start a new custom of having a salad bowl at our seudah! But

more importantly, let us all work to invest intentional effort to bring a larger unity to our diverse cultures and languages.

Chag Sameach!

* [note: Hebrew text omitted because of issues keeping the words correct across various software]
<https://library.yctorah.org/2010/02/how-to-encounter-god-build-a-house/>

Genuine Love: Thoughts for Parashat Tetsaveh

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Commentators have noted the unusual fact that the name of Moses does not appear in Parashat Tetsaveh. This is in sharp contrast with his brother Aaron whose name recurs frequently in this Torah portion. Since this Parasha focuses on the garments to be made for and worn by Aaron as he assumes his role as High Priest, it is reasonable to suggest that the Torah wished to highlight Aaron and draw attention away from Moses.

Some have suggested that Moses himself wished to keep his name out of this section in order to pay full homage to his brother. In his humility and genuine love for his brother, Moses chose to cede the stage entirely to Aaron. This example of brotherly love harks back to an earlier story in the book of Shemot.

When the Almighty first called on Moses to go to Egypt to lead the Israelites, Moses demurred. He was a humble shepherd who did not feel worthy of the enormous responsibility of leadership. Moreover, Moses may have thought that his older brother Aaron had a better claim to lead the people than he did. Aaron, after all, lived among the Israelites and knew their situation first hand. Moses had been living for many years in Midian. How would Aaron react when he learned that God chose Moses rather than him? God reassures Moses that Aaron would see Moses “and rejoice in his heart.” Aaron was such a fine human being that he fully rejoiced in Moses’s success. He was not envious, not insulted, not feeling bad for being passed over.

Just as Aaron’s love for Moses was selfless, so Moses’s love for Aaron was also selfless. Each of them willingly and full heartedly rejoiced in the success and honor of the other. They didn’t let their egos get in the way.

Genuine love is a special gift. It requires the ability to identify fully with the beloved. The Hebrew word for love, ahavah, derives from the root meaning “to give.” A loving person is a giving person. Imperfect “love” is when one is really interested in one’s own pleasure and advantage, when one is more interested in taking than in giving.

In order to love selflessly, one must have inner confidence. One with a weak sense of self has trouble loving because his/her ego intrudes. Interest in bolstering one’s own ego detracts from the ability of sharing love fully with another.

It is very difficult to give a full and generous compliment. People want to protect their own egos. When they compliment others, they feel a threat to their own frail sense of self. The compliment and [inner thoughts] go like this: you’ve done well [but I can do better]; you’ve achieved something great [but not as great as what I have achieved]; you are loveable [but not as loveable as I am]; you are beautiful, smart, successful [but you have many shortcomings too.]

People with weak egos constantly seek validation and recognition. They want their pictures and names in the newspapers. They make outrageous statements, or dress outrageously, or do outrageous things so that they will be noticed. They don’t want to share the limelight because they fear that they will be eclipsed by others.

Moses and Aaron set examples of selfless love. They genuinely rejoiced in each other’s success. Their egos and self-interest did not factor into their mutual respect and commitment.

In demonstrating their respect and love for each other, they thereby demonstrated their own greatness of spirit. They set a model worthy of emulation.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/genuine-love-thoughts-parashat-tetsaveh>

The Spirit of Amalek Lives! Thoughts for Shabbat Zakhor

By Rabbi Mark D. Angel *

This week's maftir portion includes verses commanding us to obliterate the memory of Amalek, the classic arch-enemy of the people of Israel. Yet, the Torah also lists other peoples who oppressed the Israelites. The Egyptians enslaved us for centuries; the Edomites and Moabites harmed us – yet only Amalek is singled out for our eternal enmity.

Rabbi Yosef Sarfati, in his book *Yad Yosef*, offers a poignant comment. There are two kinds of hatred. One kind can be justified by rationalization. For example, the Egyptians hated the Israelites because they feared that the Israelites would multiply greatly and would join the enemies of Egypt in battle. Other enemies feared that the Israelites would overrun their lands. Even if these fears and rationalizations were unwarranted, the enemies of Israel based their hatred and anti-Israelite violence on some sort of justification. Such hatred, says Rabbi Sarfati, ultimately weakens, and can actually die away. Once the rationale for hating has past, the hatred itself can dissipate.

There is a second kind of hatred which is totally baseless. This is the hatred symbolized by Amalek. Amalek offered no justification for its opposition to Israel; it had nothing to gain by attacking the Israelites. Amalek was imbued with pure and undiluted anti-Israelite sentiments. This kind of hatred, so totally unfounded and irrational, is much more difficult to eradicate. Therefore, the Torah commands us to be exceedingly vigilant regarding this latter kind of hatred, typified by Amalek.

Sadly, this irrational hatred of Jews has been passed by Amalek throughout the generations, up to our own day. There are those who hate Jews, hate Israel with a blind, irrational hatred. They have nothing to gain from hurting us, and have no reason to cause us ill. Yet, they seem to be infected with a disease of hatred for which they cannot be (or do not wish to be) cured. For them, Israel and the Jews are always wrong. Don't confuse them with facts.

Rabbinic tradition teaches that Israel can defeat Amalek by strengthening our own spiritual condition. When we live according to the highest teachings and values of Torah, when we live in a spirit of love and compassion, then we undermine the forces of Amalek. [emphasis added]

This is not a theoretical discussion. The Jewish community needs to mobilize itself to uproot the forces of Amalek in our world. Baseless hatred against us will not simply disappear on its own. Oppression of Jews will not suddenly come to a halt through wishful thinking. Rather, we need to utilize all legitimate methods available to us to help eradicate anti-Semitism, and to work with all people of good will who share our dream of a world freed from irrational hatred, bigotry and violence.

If Amalek is so evil, why was it necessary for the Torah to command us to remember to be vigilant against Amalek? Wouldn't we have done this by ourselves, without needing any reminder? The answer is: People do become forgetful and complacent. If they themselves are not immediately faced by the crisis, they tend to believe that the crisis is not so bad after all. The Torah reminds us not to drop our guard, but to feel the immediacy of the challenge. Amalek exists. It is corrosive to the well-being of the Jewish people, and indeed to the well-being of a harmonious world. We need to strengthen ourselves spiritually. We need to stand up in every available forum, in order to promote the rights and honor of the Jewish people--and all decent human beings. In our eternal vigilance against Amalek, the Jewish people stands as a

beacon of strength for the dignity of all humankind.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/spirit-amalek-lives-thoughts-shabbat-zakhor>

Clothing of Dignity: The Kohein and Me

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

The clothing of the Kohanim were magnificent. Each Kohein wore specially fitted garments of distinction to perform the service in the Beis Hamikdash. As the Torah describes the garments: “*For honor and for glory.*”)Shemos 28: 2 and 40(

The commentaries attribute two basic themes to the importance of these garments. Firstly, the Chinuch)99(explains, they assist the Kohein in recognizing the importance of the service. As the Kohein changed into these garments, he tuned into Hashem and the service in a far greater way than if he would've just come in and began. Secondly, these garments were a way to provide distinction to the Kohanim who were dedicated to the service. As the Rambam)Moreh 3:45(explains, most people do not recognize a person for his intrinsic worth. They judge people by their external appearance. It is therefore necessary to adorn the Kohanim appropriately so that people will appreciate them.

These two understandings of clothing — for the wearer and for the observer — are not limited to the garments of the Kohanim. Each of us dresses with an awareness that the clothing we wear is an expression of self, and also causes a perception in others. When we discuss clothing, we realize that there is much more to it than just making sure that our bodies are covered. Effective dressing helps us get into the mind frame to be the noble people we are meant to be, and to make it easier for others to appreciate who we are.

I know of a very sincere graduate of the Yeshiva system who was taking some summer classes in a local college. One day, a girl in the class came over to him and said, “You are really cute and handsome,” and without warning, she reached out and caressed his face.

The young man was stunned and shattered. He needed this particular course for accreditation and never thought that someone would approach him in this way. He went to his mentor to ask how to process the shock he was in and what he can do better.

Interestingly, his mentor suggested that although it was the summer and quite hot, he should dress in business attire with a tie and jacket, even as everyone else was dressing down with a summery mood. He should carry a sefer at all times and strive to project a different image than that of a young man who blended in and could be approached so easily and casually. Clothing defines us to ourselves and also in how others perceive us.

Remarkably, even Tzniyus, commonly translated as laws of modesty, is not just about what parts of the body are covered. Tzniyus is also about making sure that we are projecting an appropriate image. No one ever thought of going up to the Queen of England and caressing her cheek. Her mode of dress and regal conduct precluded that. Likewise, the way we dress projects how we want to be perceived. It is not just the Kohanim who are acting in service to Hashem. Each of us is a treasure described as a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.)Shemos 19:6(

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

Parshas Tetzaveh – Understanding Unity

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer* © 2021

Unity is indisputably one of the foundational principles of Judaism. Unity was a prerequisite for the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Charity and caring for those in need is a fundamental element of every Jewish holiday. At the beginning of the Yom Kippur service, we make a public declaration allowing all to join the service, for a fast day is only complete when we include the sinners and wicked among us into our group. The primacy of unity is clear in the mitzvos of Purim, as well. The Megilla is ideally supposed to be read in a public fashion, maintaining a national awareness of our identity. The Purim festive meal is ideally shared with friends, and we are required to at least share food with friends through Mishloach Manos, and to spread the joy to those in need through Matanos L'evyonim – Gifts to the Poor.

It is equally indisputable that slander and hurtful speech are anathema to a Torah lifestyle as they are the basis for so much strife and destruction. Indeed, we find that one of the garments of the High Priest, the Me'il – the outer robe, was intended as an atonement specifically for these sins. (Erchin 16a) Rav Shmuel Greiniman quotes the Chofetz Chaim giving a detailed illustration of this atonement. The Me'il was made of techeiles, a bluish green thread, intended to remind us of the sky and G-d's Heavenly throne, where our words of slander would be judged, and that the slander itself is brought before G-d's Throne of Glory. The lip of the garment was folded inward, reminding us of the value of holding our words in, and how doing so can quell arguments before they explode out of control. There is a weaver's work around the lip, instructing us to utilize our power of imagination in controlling our desire to speak – we should imagine as if our lips are woven shut on the outside, using the visual imagery to calm the urge to speak freely without care. The lip was folded over to strengthen it so it shouldn't tear, reminding us that silence is the key to avoiding tears in our relationships. When we ignore barbs and insults, they slow down; when we respond in kind, they only increase. Pomegranate shapes of thread and ringing golden bells were woven along the bottom, indicating a time for silence and a time for noise. Speech of Torah and growth is to be lauded, but otherwise silence is best. Every aspect of the Me'il is intended to illustrate the evils of slander and the importance of care and concern in this area.

There is a well-known quip that the best place to hide something is in plain sight. In the introduction to the Mesillas Yesharim -- Path of the Just -- Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato zt"l teaches us that this applies to philosophies, as well. Just as we don't look closely at items that are lying out in the open, so too we don't carefully study concepts that are widely accepted and known to be true. However, just as the item lying in public view may be more than it seems, so too, widely accepted concepts can be much more subtle and nuanced than they appear. With this in mind, it is worth considering why we find such a singular focus on the importance of unity and the evil of slander. While they are certainly significant and important, there are many important concepts. Why has this issue been chosen as a central theme of a Torah true lifestyle and a critical focus of a G-d fearing individual? Why of all sins is slander spoken of as rising up before G-d's Throne of Glory?

Perhaps part of the answer can be found in the mitzvos of Purim. In order to properly celebrate our survival and G-d's redemption and love, we need to share our joy with others. If we fail to properly share the joy, then it seems we are missing the essence of our celebration. On Purim, we are not simply celebrating our own existence, but rather the existence of our nation as a whole and the privilege of being part of that whole. Every member of our nation is a unique and critical part of that whole. If there are rifts between us, then we are all incapable of being who we truly are. Only when we put aside our individual pride or pain for the sake of communal unity and success are any of us able to achieve what each of us is meant to accomplish.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer's new Dvar Torah did not arrive before my deadline. Since I did not receive his Dvar Torah in time, I am running his message from 2021.

Parshat Tetzaveh
By Rabbi Herzl Heftz *

[Rabbi Hefter did not submit a Dvar Torah this week. We hope to include his Devrei Torah frequently in coming weeks]

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Creativity is Next to Godliness

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

In the last chapters of the book of Shemot, we read of women and men who were endowed with a divine spirit of wisdom, intelligence and knowledge and who were responsible for the creative craftsmanship required for the detailed construction of the tabernacle. If these words resonate with our perception of creation, it is because the bible uses the same terminology for both:

In Genesis we find the divine spirit hovering over the abyss at the dawn of creation, before the formation of heaven and earth.

In the book of Proverbs 3:19:20(the Creator's intellectual tools of the trade are identical to those of the builders of the tabernacle.

God established the earth by wisdom, He founded the heavens by intelligence, by His knowledge the depths burst apart.

What about craftsmanship? When discussing the categories of work forbidden on Shabbat, the Talmud states)Yom Tov 13:2(:

The definition of the work forbidden on Shabbat is derived from the type of work involved in the construction of the tabernacle, and since the Shabbat itself is a reminder that the world was created by God, who rested on the seventh day, the equation is complete: God ceased craftsmanship on the seventh day, and so did the builders of the tabernacle, but during the other six days both Creator and craftsmen were engaged in the same type of activity.

By giving us a detailed account of the construction of the tabernacle and the roles of the spinsters, weavers, carpenters, jewelers and goldsmiths, the Torah teaches us that creativity is the Image of God. Just as the whole creation speaks of the might and wisdom of the Creator, so does every creative insight of the human being. Whether crafting words, threads or stones, inventing gizmos and apps, taming nuclear power or decoding the secrets of the DNA, the creative, inventive and ever-curious mind mirrors and emulates God.

Weaving, Language and Creation

A beautiful Midrash compares the creation of the universe to an ongoing act of weaving by God, from two spools, one of fire and one of snow, which keep expanding on an infinite heirloom)any association with or similarity to actual facts and findings of cosmology is not coincidental!(. Another Midrash explains that the creation of mankind culminated with the gift of language or, a statement with which modern science concurs, albeit in a somewhat different phrasing: "language created *Homo sapiens*")Martin Nowak, *Homo Grammaticus*, *Natural History*, 12/2000, p. 44(. The two Midrashim artfully entwine and interweave the concepts of creation and language with those of creativity and weaving, because using our verbal skills correctly is a form of art. Just as the seemingly meaningless threads join in the hand of a master weaver to display patterns, images and stories so the human mind fabricates language, letters to words, words to sentences.

“We think of our lives - and of stories - as spun threads, extended and knitted or interwoven with others into the fabric of communities, or history, or texts... words that connect weaving with storytelling: text, texture and textile, the fabric of society. Words for disintegration - fraying, frizzling, unravelling, woolgathering, loose ends. A storyteller or a listener can lose the thread... The processes of cloth-making are knitted and knotted into our brains, though our houses no longer have spindles or looms.”)A.S. Byatt, The Guardian, 6/20/2008(.

The metaphors and connotations of language, garment making and creativity can be positive or negative. The positive ones include the first reference to cloth-making, by the Creator Himself)Gen. 3:1(, the love-invested hand-knitted sweaters from grandma, the personally embroidered korachas)Syrian Talet bags(and the famous TED conferences, whose acronym stands for Technology, Education and Design, or in other words: inventiveness, language and creativity. On the negative side, the Hebrew word for clothes)תְּבַדֵּל(is derived from the same root as treason, and throughout history deception, promiscuity and witchcraft were associated with women engaged in weaving or spinning yarn to the extent that in the 16th century, King Louis XIII of France banned the making of lace.

Why was there such fear and resentment of the craft? Because creativity represents a power which cannot be contained or controlled, it is a manifestation of the free spirit of mankind and of the uniqueness of each human being. Tyrannical, oppressive regimes sought therefore to eliminate, quell or control linguistic, as well as artistic, creativity.

In contrast, the Torah speaks volumes of the importance of creativity and of harnessing our talents to the advancement of spirituality, one of whose manifestation is the aesthetic experience. It does so by delegating the most sacred role, the creation of the fabrics which will envelop, protect and clothe the holy tabernacle, the symbol of the dwelling among humans of the Divine Providence, to the wise women who spun the magnificent yarns of blue, royal purple, crimson and white

Bring Back the Tinkerer

Alongside the women, the undisputed stars of the 450 verses dealing with the fabrication and construction of the tabernacle are the artisans. The names of Operation Tabernacle's masterminds are symbolic: Bezalel ben Uri is the one under God's wings, son of light, and Oholiab ben Ahisamach is supporter and companion, the one who dwells at the Father's tent. These men led a team of creative designers, tinkerers and craftsmen, who, as mentioned before, emulated God's creation by using their God given talents.

While the Torah encouraged creativity, which in ancient time was acquired by apprenticeship and hands-on experience, it is a sad reality of modern society that most of our schools lack any serious program or incentive for young minds to develop such skills and talents, not just in elementary and high schools, but in higher education institutions as well.

Take for example the case of NASA, which recruited many new young engineers several years ago, only to be encountered with a weird mental block plaguing these graduates of the leading schools in the country, a block which rendered them incapable of solving problems. A comprehensive study comparing the problem solvers with the non-solvers found that the problem solvers used to tinker and work with their fingers as kids. The problem solvers, in contrast, triggered many areas of their brains and established a line of communication between the abstract and the physical world. The extremely sophisticated knowledge that the theoretical engineers digested was two-dimensional, ethereal and impractical, based on books alone and not fully engaging the tremendously flexible power of the human brain. As author David Eagleman explains, there are many possible solutions to any given problem, a fact that those who tinker learn more easily than theoretical scientists)*Incognito: The Secret Lives of the Brain*(.

Outside of NASA, how often does a person need the services of a tinkerer or hold an object made by one? An iPhone user tinkers constantly, and other devices are inspired by a tinkerer. Steve Jobs, the adopted son of a mechanic, who grew up taking apart appliances and then cars, admired the beauty and the elegance that go beyond the utilitarian purpose of an object, and eventually became the man who has revolutionized four industries.

In his book *Free to Learn*, Peter Gray describes the Sudbury Valley School, the visionary school founded in the late 60's by Daniel Greenberg, in which students ages 4-19 have free access at all times to workshops and materials of all kinds. This approach has allowed thousands of students to develop their skills and artistic talents, and provided them not only with a solid profession but also with *joie de vivre* and peace of mind. One of them, Tom, speaks of his experience at the school)pp. 107-109(:

"I was in sixth grade and I was doing anything I could do to rebel against the system...]in[Sudbury Valley there was nothing to rebel against... so we just played..."

Tom fell in love with the Plasticine workshop where he would work with a friend from morning till night, making models of towns with hotels and saloons, vehicles, factories, people, tanks and weapons. Today he is a master machinist and invents high-tech industrial machines.

The state of creative education, especially in our Jewish schools, makes one wonder. If God had commanded us to build the tabernacle today, would we be capable? Would our kids be capable? Do we nurture and encourage the natural artistic talents with which God endows us or do we limit and force our knowledge and learning style into set frames and boundaries?

The Torah commands us to be creative in any way and form possible, because our home, our family, our lives, are the eternal tabernacle in which a Divine spark is lit, and we must build and craft it, just like the builders of the tabernacle: with wisdom, intelligence and knowledge, imbued by the divine spirit and urged to engage in a thoughtful and life-transforming craftsmanship.

Shabbat Shalom.

Suggested readings: *The Element*, by Sir Ken Robinson; *Free to Learn*, by Peter Gray; *Steve Jobs*, by Walter Isaacson, pp. 1-85; *Incognito: The Secret Lives of Our Brain*, by David Eagleman; and *Spinning Fantasies*, by Miriam B. Peskowitz.▲

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Adar: The Month of Inclusion

By Rabbi Dr. Eli Yoggev *

We are in the month of Adar, and Purim is just around the corner. What spiritual work should we be focusing on during these special days?

The Shem Mishmuel)Pikudei 5(teaches us that the month of Adar is parallel to another month on the Jewish calendar, the month of Elul. They are both preparatory months; however, each one prepares us in a different manner.

Elul prepares us for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur through fear. We blow the shofar, we say special prayers, and we do teshuvah in anticipation of the "Days of Awe." The month of Adar, on the other hand, prepares us for the month of Nisan through love. In the month of Nisan we were redeemed by Hashem, the greatest expression of divine love. I would add that in this month we were formed into a nation, which points to interpersonal love and connection among the Jewish people. With this final idea in mind, we can put forward that Adar prepares us for Nisan and Passover through its emphasis on inclusion.

This is pointed to in the mitzvot of Adar's holiday, Purim. We exchange mishloach manot, food items, with each other; we give presents, matanot la'evyonim, to the needy; and we join together for a celebratory seudah)meal(. All of this promotes

inclusion and strengthens our love for each other, a true preparation for Nisan.

This imperative of being as inclusive as possible, alongside our fear of God, is alluded to in our Torah portion. Last week's parsha, Terumah, discussed multiple vessels of the Mishkan, pointing to the need for holy spaces — spaces in which we come close to Hashem and cultivate fear of Hashem. Tetzaveh focuses on holy individuals, by means of its descriptions of the Kohen's garments. This clothing enables the Kohen to serve God in the best way possible and develop fear of God.

At the conclusion of these descriptions, we are presented with one more vessel, the mizbeach haketoret, the incense altar (Ex. 30:1-10). The commentators ask why the Torah waited until the end of our parsha to describe the incense altar. It seems out of place. The incense altar should have been listed with the other vessels, way back in Terumah!

Perhaps the answer points to this need for inclusion alongside our fear of God. Parsha Terumah with its vessels and Parsha Tetzaveh with its garments teach us to fear Hashem. And the mizbeach haketoret, at the conclusion of these descriptions, promotes inclusion. How so? The ketoret consisted of eleven spices. One of the spices, the chelbenah, did not smell very good. The sages explain that the Torah included it nevertheless to remind us to be inclusive of others who may symbolically not smell as "fragrant" as we would like them to.

Whether we find ourselves with people who are foreign to us or with individuals who may not perform the commandments the way that we do, we should nevertheless love and embrace them, just as we include the chelbenah among the other aromatic spices. This incense teaching appears at the end of our discussions on holy spaces and holy individuals to remind us that being inclusive and loving is of utmost value.

During Elul, we put a lot of energy into teshuvah, introspection, and strengthening our fear of Hashem. During Adar we must be equally as fervent with the special service of the month: being inclusive toward one another. This is not only the central theme of Purim; it is true for the whole month of Adar. We must draw others close who may be far from Judaism, who may feel lonely or apart from our community. We must heed the voice of those in need of warmth and connection. If we do this, we will properly prepare ourselves for the month of Nisan and the holiday of Passover, which celebrates the exodus and our coming together as one unified nation.

Wishing you a Shabbat Shalom and a Purim Sameach!

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<https://library.yctorah.org/2023/03/adar-the-month-of-inclusion/>

Shavuon Terumah

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

What is Purim?

While any of us can google that and find a plethora of approaches, I prefer the most simple, straightforward and obvious answer.

Purim is about how Jews can still thrive both as Jews and as citizens of whatever non-Israel country we find ourselves in. The whole Purim story tells of how two Jews, Mordechai and Esther, used their influence and power while in a foreign country to avert disaster. At the end of the story, Mordechai finds himself in an even greater position of power in the empire, and Esther still remains queen. The land of Israel is not mentioned, and we are left with hope that we as a people can survive and thrive in a country not our own.

One of my teachers, Dr. Aaron Koller, described Megillat Esther as the foil to the book of Ezra where Ezra seeks to establish the country of Israel as the only legitimate Jewish community in the world and the only place where Jews can possibly be successful and stick to their traditions. Esther and Mordechai beg to differ.

Of course we love Israel and place it in the center of our national consciousness as the Jewish homeland. But Purim is the unique holiday that shows us the other side of the coin: that a Jewish community can be anywhere in the world and still be proud, successful and have enough democratic influence in the government to make sure our needs are met. Diaspora Jewry, including the Jews of New Zealand, should love and respect Israel and also see themselves as their spiritual and scholarly equals.

How do we do this? How do we build a Jewish community without a Jewish homeland under our feet? Purim shows us the way through its 4 special rituals and mitzvot:

Megillah – Every community, no matter where it's located, needs a common story to bind us together. At AHC, we will read the story of Esther both morning and night so we can all hear the message that no matter where we are, we are proud and strong Jews and members of our common democratic society that we inhabit with other cultures.

Mishloach Manot – We send food gifts to our friends and family and even people we may not know. This reinforces the practice of showing care and love to all our fellow Jews, an essential part of binding us together wherever we are.

Matanot Laevyonim – We give money to the poor. A community shows its power by how it takes care of its members who are down on their luck. Strengthening our most vulnerable strengthens us all. On Purim we give money to whoever asks and don't check after his or her Jewish, financial, or religious background. On this special day we make a special effort to open our hearts and wallets to all who need.

The Seudah – We have a festive meal on Purim day. Because a community that eats together stays together!

And as a bonus, we wear costumes on Purim. To show all the masks we must wear to get along as Jews within our community and be part of the society around us. It may seem complicated, but it can be done and Purim shows us how.

I wish everyone a festive and joyous Purim and extend my personal invite to join us at all or any one of our Purim events and services at our brand new site in Remuera!

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand.

Rav Kook Torah **Tetzaveh: Moses and the Priestly Garments**

Where was Moses?

The commentaries noted an unusual fact about the Torah portion of Tetzaveh — it is the only parashah, from when we first read of Moses' birth in the book of Exodus, in which Moses is not mentioned. [ed. note: Rav Kook repeats a common error here. While Moshe's name appears in every parsha from Shemot to the end of Sefer Bemidbar, his name does not appear in a few of the parashot in Sefer Devarim.]

The Ba'al HaTurim)Rabbi Jacob ben Asher, 1269-1343(explained that this was a consequence of Moses' defense of the Jewish people after the Sin of the Golden Calf. At that precarious juncture, Moses pleaded with God to forgive the Israelites; and if not, then "please remove me from Your book that You have written")Exod. 32:32(.

The Sages taught that "The curse of a sage comes true, even if it was contingent on a condition]and that condition was

not met[")Makkot 11a(. Thus, even though God did forgive the Jewish people, Moses' vow was partially fulfilled, and his name was removed from the portion of Tetzaveh.

The question arises: why was this parashah, which describes the special garments of the kohanim, chosen as the one in which Moses is not mentioned? Also, why was Moses punished for valiantly defending the Jewish people?

Concession for Weakness

According to the Midrash, God originally intended to appoint Moses and his descendants to be kohanim. God, however, became disappointed with Moses due to his repeated refusal to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, and He transferred the priesthood to his brother Aaron)Zevachim 102a on Exod. 4:14(. But while Moses lost the priesthood, he still retained the potential to be a kohen.

In fact, when the Tabernacle was dedicated, Moses did serve as the kohen, bringing the dedication offerings)Exod. 29(. It is surprising that Moses did not wear the special garments of a kohen during his one-time service. If a kohen does not wear these special clothes while serving in the Temple, his service is rendered invalid)Zevachim 17b(; and yet Moses performed the dedication service just wearing a white robe)Avodah Zarah 34a(. Why didn't Moses need to wear the priestly garments?

In general, clothing is a concession for human weakness. The Hebrew word begged)clothing(comes from the root *baggad*, meaning "to betray." In the Garden of Eden, there was nothing wrong with being naked. It was only after Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil that they needed to hide behind clothes — a necessary but tragic betrayal of their natural purity.

The same is true for the priestly garments. Each of the eight garments, the Sages taught, comes to atone for a particular transgression: arrogance, slander, improper thoughts, and so on)Zevachim 88b(. Were it not for these sins, the kohanim would have no need for these special clothes.

Beyond Clothing

The Talmud relates that the white robe that Moses wore when he served in the Tabernacle had no seams. In other words, his robe had no clear and distinct boundaries, nothing to emphasize its separation from his body. It was almost as if Moses needed no clothing at all.

Moses was not tainted by the Sin of the Golden Calf, a sin that the Midrash)Shemot Rabbah 32:1(links to the sin of Adam. Therefore Moses did not need the extra clothes of the kohanim. He understood that, due to the Sin of the Golden Calf, the kohanim would need to wear special garments. Therefore he asked God: "*Please remove me from Your book*" — please remove me from the portion of Your book that commands the kohanim to wear special clothes. I was not involved in the Sin of the Golden Calf, and I have no connection with the need for these clothes.

What is so terrible about the priestly garments? These clothes indicate that the kohanim suffer from a fundamental dissonance. While they wear their special clothes, the kohanim are *shluchei dedan* and *shluchei deRachmana*, our emissaries to God and God's emissaries to us. But when they remove the priestly garments, they become private individuals once again.

Moses, on the other hand, was a "servant of God")Deut. 34:5(. This was not an honorific title, but a description of his very essence, regardless of what clothes he wore. Divine service was not a duty that Moses took upon himself during certain hours of the day. It was his defining quality.

God heeded Moses' request and removed his name from the portion of Tetzaveh. And indeed Moses had no need for these clothes, but performed the Divine service wearing only a seamless white robe.

)*Sapphire from the Land of Israel*. Adapted from *Shemuot HaRe'iyah Tetzaveh*)1929(, quoted in *Peninei HaRe'iyah*, pp. 175-176.(

The Counterpoint of Leadership (Tetzaveh 5774. 5781)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

One of the most important Jewish contributions to our understanding of leadership is its early insistence of what, in the eighteenth century, Montesquieu called “the separation of powers”]¹[. Neither authority nor power was to be located in a single individual or office. Instead, leadership was divided between different kinds of roles.

One of the key divisions – anticipating by millennia the “separation of church and state” – was between the King, the head of state, on the one hand, and the High Priest, the most senior religious office, on the other.

This was revolutionary. The Kings of Mesopotamian city states and the Pharaohs of Egypt were considered demigods or chief intermediary with the gods. They officiated at supreme religious festivals. They were regarded as the representatives of heaven on earth.

In Judaism, by stark contrast, monarchy had little or no religious function)other than the recital by the King of the book of the covenant every seven years in the ritual known as hakkel.(Indeed the chief objection to the Hasmonean Kings on the part of the Sages was that they broke this ancient rule, some of them declaring themselves High Priests also. The Talmud records the objection: “Let the crown of kingship be sufficient for you. Leave the crown of priesthood to the sons of Aaron.”)Kiddushin 66a(The effect of this principle was to secularise power.]²[

No less fundamental was the division of religious leadership itself into two distinct functions: that of the Prophet and the Priest. That is dramatised in this week’s parsha, focussing as it does on the role of the Priest to the exclusion of that of the Prophet. Tetzaveh is the first parsha since the beginning of the book of Exodus in which Moses’ name is missing. It is supremely the priestly, as opposed to prophetic, parsha.

Priests and Prophets were very different in their roles, despite the fact that some Prophets, most famously Ezekiel, were Priests also. The primary distinctions were:

1. The role of Priest was dynastic, that of Prophet was charismatic. Priests were the sons of Aaron. They were born into the role. Parenthood had no part in the role of the Prophet. Moses’ own children were not Prophets.
2. The Priest wore robes of office. There was no official uniform for a Prophet.
3. The priesthood was exclusively male; not so prophecy. The Talmud lists seven women who were Prophets: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah and Esther.
4. The role of the Priest did not change over time. There was a precise annual timetable of sacrifices that did not vary from year to year. The Prophet by contrast could not know what their mission would be until God revealed it to them. Prophecy was never a matter of routine.
5. As a result, Prophet and Priest had different senses of time. Time for the Priest was what it was for Plato: the “moving image of eternity,”]³[a matter of everlasting recurrence and return. The Prophet lived in historical time. Their today was not the same as yesterday and tomorrow would be different again. One way of putting this is that the Priest heard the word of God for all time. The Prophet heard the word of God for this time.
6. The Priest was “holy” and therefore set apart from the people. He had to eat his food in a state of purity, and had to avoid contact with the dead. The Prophet by contrast often lived among the people and spoke a language they understood. Prophets could come from any social class.

7. The key words for the Priest were tahor, tamei, kodesh and chol: "pure," "impure," "sacred," and "secular." The key words for the Prophets were tzedek, mishpat, chessed and rachamim: "righteousness," "justice," "love," and "compassion." It is not that the Prophets were concerned with morality while the Priests were not. Some of the key moral imperatives, such as "*You shall love your neighbour as yourself,*" come from priestly sections of the Torah. It is rather that Priests think in terms of a moral order embedded in the structure of reality, sometimes called a "sacred ontology."¹⁴ [Prophets tended to think not of things or acts in themselves but in terms of relationships between persons or social classes.

8. The task of the Priest is boundary maintenance. The key priestly verbs are le-havdil and le-horot, to distinguish one thing from another and apply the appropriate rules. Priests gave rulings, Prophets gave warnings.

9. There is nothing personal about the role of a Priest. If one – even a High Priest – was unable to officiate at a given service, another could be substituted. Prophecy was essentially personal. The Sages said that "no two Prophets prophesied in the same style")Sanhedrin 89a(. Hosea was not Amos. Isaiah was not Jeremiah. Each Prophet had a distinctive voice.

10. Priests constituted a religious establishment. The Prophets, at least those whose messages have been eternalised in Tanach, were not an establishment but an anti-establishment, critical of the powers-that-be.

The roles of Priest and Prophet varied over time. The Priests always officiated at the sacrificial service of the Temple. But they were also Judges. The Torah says that if a case is too difficult to be dealt with by the local court, you should "Go to the Priests, the Levites, and to the Judge who is in office at that time. Inquire of them and they will give you the verdict")Deut. 17:9(. Moses blesses the tribe of Levi saying that "*They will teach Your ordinances to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel*")Deut. 33:10(, suggesting that they had a teaching role as well.

Malachi, a Prophet of the Second Temple period, says: "*For the lips of a Priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth*")Mal. 2:7(. The Priest was guardian of Israel's sacred social order.

Yet it is clear throughout Tanach that the priesthood was liable to corruption. There were times when Priests took bribes, others when they compromised Israel's faith and performed idolatrous practices. Sometimes they became involved in politics. Some held themselves as an elite apart from and disdainful toward the people as a whole.

At such times the Prophet became the voice of God and the conscience of society, reminding the people of their spiritual and moral vocation, calling on them to return and repent, reminding the people of their duties to God and to their fellow humans and warning of the consequences if they did not heed the call.

The priesthood became massively politicised and corrupted during the Hellenistic era, especially under the Seleucids in the second century BCE. Hellenised High Priests like Jason and Menelaus introduced idolatrous practises, even at one stage a statue of Zeus, into the Temple. This provoked the internal revolt that led to the events we recall on the festival of Chanukah.

Yet despite the fact that the initiator of the revolt, Mattityahu, was himself a righteous Priest, corruption re-emerged under the Hasmonean Kings. The Qumran sect known to us through the Dead Sea Scrolls was particularly critical of the priesthood in Jerusalem. It is striking that the Sages traced their spiritual ancestry to the Prophets, not the Priests)Avot 1:1(.

The Kohanim were essential to ancient Israel. They gave the religious life its structure and continuity, its rituals and routines, its festivals and celebrations. Their task was to ensure that Israel remained a holy people with God in its midst. But they were an establishment, and like every establishment, at best they were the guardians of the nation's highest values, but at worst they became corrupt, using their position for power and engaging in internal politics for personal advantage. That is the fate of establishments, especially those whose membership is a matter of birth.

That is why the Prophets were essential. They were the world's first social critics, mandated by God to speak truth to

power. Still today, for good or otherwise, religious establishments always resemble Israel's priesthood. Who, though, are Israel's prophets at the present time?

The essential lesson of the Torah is that leadership can never be confined to one class or role. It must always be distributed and divided. In ancient Israel, Kings dealt with power, Priests with holiness, and Prophets with the integrity and faithfulness of society as a whole. In Judaism, leadership is less a function than a field of tensions between different roles, each with its own perspective and voice.

Leadership in Judaism is counterpoint, a musical form defined as "the technique of combining two or more melodic lines in such a way that they establish a harmonic relationship while retaining their linear individuality."⁵ It is this internal complexity that gives Jewish leadership its vigour, saving it from entropy, the loss of energy over time.

Leadership must always, I believe, be like this. Every team must be made up of people with different roles, strengths, temperaments and perspectives. They must always be open to criticism and they must always be on the alert against groupthink. The glory of Judaism is its insistence that only in heaven is there one commanding Voice. Down here on earth no individual may ever hold a monopoly of leadership.

Out of the clash of perspectives – King, Priest and Prophet – comes something larger than any individual or role could achieve.

FOOTNOTES:

]1[Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together: Recreating Society*)Bloomsbury Academic, 2009(.

]2[Attributed to Lao-Tsu.

]3[Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, abridged and with an introduction by Thomas Bender*)The Modern Library, New York, 1981(, 584.

]4[This is not to imply that there is no role for governments; that all should be left to voluntary associations. Far from it. There are things – from the rule of law to the defence of the realm to the enforcement of ethical standards and the creation of an equitable distribution of the goods necessary for a dignified existence – that only governments can achieve. The issue is balance.

FOOTNOTES:

]1[Charles-Louis Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*)Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952(.

]2[In Judaism, power, except that exercised by God, is not holy.

]3[Plato, *Timaeus* 37d.

]4[On this rather difficult idea, see Philip Rieff, *My Life Among the Deathworks*)Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 2006(. Rieff was an unusual and insightful critic of modernity. For an introduction to his work, see Antonius A.W. Zondervan, *Sociology and the Sacred: An Introduction to Philip Rieff's Theory of Culture*)Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2005(.

]5[*American Heritage Dictionary*, 5th ed., s.v. "Counterpoint")Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2011(.

Discussion Questions for Tetzaveh

1. What was so revolutionary about the institution of these three different leadership roles?
2. Which of the 10 distinctions between Priest and Prophet illustrates their differences most acutely?

3. How would you answer the question that was raised in this piece: Who are Israel's prophets at the present time?

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/tetzaveh/the-counterpoint-of-leadership/> Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

I Am More Than My Name

By Karen Kaplan* © Chabad 2023

Names are important. Parents deliberate over names for their children, business owners agonize over how best to name their products, and when G d created Adam on the 6th day of Creation, the first job He gave him was to name all the animals.

And yet, in this week's parshah, Moses' name isn't mentioned. Our greatest prophet! A man who spoke to G d face-to-face and flawlessly transmitted His Torah to us! And his name isn't mentioned this week, not even once? Why?

Our Sages explain that it was in response to Moses' plea to G d, when the people sinned with the Golden Calf: "*Forgive them or erase me from Your book.*" Even though the people were ultimately forgiven, Moses' request was fulfilled through the omission of his name in this parshah.

The Rebbe adds another layer to this striking omission. He says this teaches that a person's name is not one's essential identity; it is merely the means by which we can be identified to others.¹ A name is a label, and it's a quick, useful way to identify someone or something in an external and non-essential way. But the essence of a person can't be reduced to something as simple as a name.

My name is Karen. I always thought it was a good name. Not hard to remember, easy to spell. But as I've written before, these days "Karen" has become a pejorative label for a woman who reeks of arrogance and entitlement. There are people who, when introduced to me, would hear that name, and think they know all about me. I may be named Karen, but I am not my name!

Nicknames, especially derogatory ones, not only affect how others see a person, but also how one sees oneself. I wasn't athletic as a child. I was so clumsy that when my mother sent me to ballet classes, the teacher suggested I try piano lessons instead. The other kids began calling me "Karen the Klutz," and so, I avoided sports, didn't join teams, never learned to dance.

A silly little childhood nickname, and yet I let it define what I could and couldn't do. Those names, those labels that we toss about so casually, reduce people — including ourselves — to a single identity that may or may not be a positive one.

What You Do Isn't What You Are

We tend to think we know a person just by hearing a word or two about them. Whether it's a job description, physical characteristic, or nickname, all these labels do the same thing: they focus on a simple identity and ignore the essence.

And yet, we go through our days doing just that: pigeonholing people with a word or two.

What do you think of when you think of a gravedigger? It's a job where brawn, not brains, is required. It's an honest and necessary profession, but "nice Jewish girls" don't dream of growing up and marrying gravediggers. Would it surprise you to know that one of the great Talmudic Sages, Abba Shaul, was a gravedigger? Or that Hillel, who became the leader of the Sanhedrin, chopped wood for a living? Or that Albert Einstein, one of the greatest scientists in history, worked for years as a clerk in a patent office?

Beyond the Name

Let's get back to Moses and the Rebbe's comment about names and essential identity. Although Moses' name isn't mentioned in the parshah, Moses-the-person permeates it. The parshah describes building the Tabernacle and the inauguration of Aaron as the High Priest. Moses appears throughout the text, as he is not only the person transmitting the parshah to the people, he's the one who will inaugurate the Tabernacle and install Aaron as Priest. Whether he is referred to by his name, "Moses," or "you")as in the parshah(, there is no doubt he is the main character in the narrative. He is more than his name.

In fact, according to the Midrash, Moses had ten names! And G d also has many names. But when we think and talk of G d, we all understand that none of those names defines G d; they only reflect a particular attribute. Even stringing all those names together wouldn't suffice. They are just a simple way to identify G d in one of His aspects, but we all know He is not limited by any name.

We need to remind ourselves that we are all created in His image; we have souls containing a spark of Him within us. We, like G d, are not limited by our names. Even if we added all of Moses' ten names together, they wouldn't add up to the person that is Moses.

So, next time you see a garbage collector, think of Abba Shaul the gravedigger. Think of Einstein the clerk. Think of Hillel the woodchopper. Think of Moses, our greatest teacher, whose name wasn't even mentioned once in our parshah. And remember what the Rebbe taught: one's name is not one's essential identity.

We are all very much more than a name.

FOOTNOTE:

1. Lightpoints, adapted from *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 26, pp 204-206.

* Active volunteer in Evanston, IL.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5833694/jewish/I-Am-More-Than-My-Name.htm

Tetzaveh: Infinitely Finite

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnfsky *

Infinitely Finite

You shall make sacred vestments for your brother Aaron, for dignity and splendor.)Ex. 28:2(

"Dignity")כבוד(refers to the esteem a person inspires in others. "Splendor")תפארה(denotes beauty resulting from a harmonious blend of contrasting colors or features. Such harmony can only be achieved if there is a higher organizing principle at work, which blends the components into a whole rather than leaving them a chaotic jumble of clashing hues.

Thus, "dignity" describes G-d's finite revelations to us, which He adjusts according to our ability to accept and appreciate Divine consciousness. "Splendor," in contrast, describes G-d's infinite revelations, through which He overwhelms us with experiences beyond our ability to process.

The merging of "dignity" and "splendor" in the high priest's garments is the manifestation of G-d's supra-infinity – His ability to express Himself in both infinite and finite terms – in a way that our limited perception can appreciate.

The fact that the high priest's garments are designed in order to channel these types of Divine revelation teaches us that-- as members of the "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" – we are all blessed with the ability to receive G-d's finitude,

infinity, and supra-infinity, and have the ability to teach others how to achieve these types of Divine consciousness, as well.

– From Kehot's Daily Wisdom #3 *

Gut Shabbos,
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Purim Sameach

Volume 29 , Issue 20

Covenant and Conversation Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Ethic of Holiness

There is an important principle in Judaism, a source of hope and also one of the structuring principles of the Torah. It is the principle that God creates the cure before the disease (Megillah 13b). Bad things may happen but God has already given us the remedy if we know where to look for it.

So for instance in Chukat we read of the deaths of Miriam and Aaron and how Moses was told that he would die in the desert without entering the Promised Land. This is a terrifying encounter with mortality. Yet before any of this, we first hear the law of the red heifer, the rite of purification after contact with death. The Torah has placed it here to assure us in advance that we can be purified after any bereavement. Human mortality does not ultimately bar us from being in the presence of Divine immortality.

This is the key to understanding Terumah. Though not all commentators agree, its real significance is that it is God's answer in advance to the sin of the Golden Calf. In strict chronological terms it is out of place here. It (and Tetzaveh) should have appeared after Ki Tissa, which tells the story of the Calf. It is set here before the sin to tell us that the cure existed before the disease, the tikkun before the kilkul, the mending before the fracture, the rectification before the sin.

So to understand Terumah and the phenomenon of the Mishkan, the Sanctuary and all that it entailed, we have first to understand what went wrong at the time of the Golden Calf. Here the Torah is very subtle and gives us, in Ki Tissa, a narrative that can be understood at three quite different levels.

The first and most obvious is that the sin of the Golden Calf was due to a failure of leadership on the part of Aaron. This is the overwhelming impression we receive on first reading Exodus 32. We sense that Aaron should have resisted the people's clamour. He should have told them to be patient. He should have shown leadership. He did not. When Moses comes down the mountain and asks him what he has

done, Aaron replies: "Do not be angry, my lord. You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, 'Make an oracle to lead us, since we do not know what happened to Moses, the man who took us out of Egypt.' So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewellery, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this Calf!" Ex. 32:22-24

This is a failure of responsibility. It is also a spectacular act of denial ("I threw it into the fire, and out came this Calf!").[1] So the first reading of the story is of Aaron's failure.

But only the first. A deeper reading suggests that it is about Moses. It was his absence from the camp that created the crisis in the first place.

The people began to realise that Moses was taking a long time to come down from the mountain. They gathered around Aaron and said to him, 'Make us an oracle to lead us. We have no idea what happened to Moses, the man who brought us out of Egypt.'

God told Moses what was happening and said: "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have wrought ruin." (Ex. 32:7)

The undertone is clear. "Go down," suggests that God was telling Moses that his place was with the people at the foot of the mountain, not with God at the top. "Your people" implies that God was telling Moses that the people were his problem, not God's. He was about to disown them.

Moses urgently prayed to God for forgiveness, then descended. What follows is a whirlwind of action. Moses descends, sees what has happened, breaks the tablets, burns the Calf, mixes its ashes with water and makes the people drink, then summons help in punishing the wrongdoers. He has become the leader in the midst of the people, restoring order where a moment before there had been chaos. On this reading the central figure was Moses. He had been the strongest of strong leaders. The result, though, was that when he was not there, the people panicked. That is the downside of strong leadership.

But there then follows a chapter, Exodus 33, that is one of the hardest in the Torah to understand. It begins with God announcing that, though He would send an "angel" or "messenger" to accompany the people on the

Sponsored by Esther and Ari Jacobs
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of Ari's mother, Dubba Freida bat Yehoshua, a"h, (Doris Jacobs)
on 14 Adar
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Shabbat Zachor - Parashat Tetzave

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rest of their journey, He Himself would not be in their midst "because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way." This deeply distresses the people. (See Ex. 33:1-6)

In verses 12-23, Moses challenges God on this verdict. He wants God's Presence to go with the people. He asks, "Let me know Your ways," and "Pray let me see Your glory." This is hard to understand. The entire exchange between Moses and God, one of the most intense in the Torah, is no longer about sin and forgiveness. It seems almost to be a metaphysical inquiry into the nature of God. What is its connection with the Golden Calf?

It is what happens between these two episodes that is the most puzzling of all. The text says that Moses "took his tent and pitched it for himself outside the camp, far from the camp" (Ex. 33:7). This must surely have been precisely the wrong thing to do. If, as God and the text have implied, the problem had been the distance of Moses as a leader, the single most important thing for him to do now would be to stay in the people's midst, not position himself outside the camp. Moreover, the Torah has just told us that God had said He would not be in the midst of the people – and this caused the people distress. Moses' decision to do likewise would surely have doubled their distress. Something deep is happening here.

It seems to me that in Exodus 33 Moses is undertaking the most courageous act of his life. He is, in essence, saying to God: "It is not my distance that is the problem. It is Your distance. The people are terrified of You. They have witnessed Your overwhelming power. They have seen You bring the greatest empire the world has ever known to its knees. They have seen You turn sea into dry land, send down food from heaven and bring water from a rock. When they heard Your voice at Mount Sinai, they came to me to beg me to be an intermediary. They said, 'You speak to us and we will hearken, but let not God speak to us lest we die' (Ex. 20:16). They made a Calf not

By Sari & Russell Mayer, Avi, Atara, and Arella
on the occasion of the 39th yahrzeit (11 Adar)
of Sari's father, Dr. A. Abba Walker
(Avraham Abba ben Shlomo, z"l)

By David & Judy Marwick
in memory of Claire S. Marwick, a"h,
(Chaya Hinda bat Shmuel)
on the occasion of her first yahrzeit, 7 Adar

because they wanted to worship an idol, but because they wanted some symbol of Your Presence that was not terrifying. They need You to be close. They need to sense You not in the sky or the summit of the mountain but in the midst of the camp. And even if they cannot see Your face, for no one can do that, at least let them see some visible sign of Your glory.”

That, it seems to me, is Moses’ request to which this week’s parsha is the answer. “Let them make for Me a Sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst.” (Ex. 25:8)

This is the first time in the Torah that we hear the verb sh-ch-n, meaning “to dwell,” in relation to God. As a noun it means literally, “a neighbour.” From this is derived the key word in post-biblical Judaism, Shechinah, meaning God’s immanence as opposed to His transcendence, God-as-One-who-is-close, the daring idea of God as a near neighbour.

In terms of the theology of the Torah, the very idea of a Mishkan, a Sanctuary or Temple, a physical “home” for “God’s glory,” is deeply paradoxical. God is beyond space. As King Solomon said at the inauguration of the first Temple, “Behold, the heavens, and the heavens of the heavens, cannot encompass You, how much less this House?” Or as Isaiah said in God’s name: “The heavens are My throne and the earth My foot-stool. What House shall you build for Me, where can My resting place be?” (Is. 66:1)

The answer, as the Jewish mystics emphasised, is that God does not live in a building, but rather in the hearts of the builders: “Let them make for me a Sanctuary and I will dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8) – “among them,” not “in it.” How, though, does this happen? What human act causes the Divine Presence to live within the camp, the community? The answer is the name of our parsha, Terumah, meaning, a gift, a contribution. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying ‘Tell the Israelites to bring Me an offering. You are to receive the offering for Me from everyone whose heart moves them to give.’ (Ex. 25:8)

This would prove to be the turning point in Jewish history. Until that moment the Israelites had been recipients of God’s miracles and deliverances. He had taken them from slavery to freedom and performed miracles for them. There was only one thing God had not yet done, namely, give the Israelites the chance of giving back something to God. The very idea sounds absurd. How can we, God’s creations, give back to the God who made us? All we have is His. As David said, at the gathering he convened at the end of his life to initiate the building the Temple:

Wealth and honour come from you; you are the ruler of all things ... Who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. (I Chronicles 29:12, 29:14)

That ultimately is the logic of the Mishkan. God’s greatest gift to us is the ability to give to Him. From a Judaic perspective the idea is fraught with risk. The idea that God might be in need of gifts is close to paganism and heresy. Yet, knowing the risk, God allowed Himself to be persuaded by Moses to cause His spirit to rest within the camp and allow the Israelites to give something back to God.

At the heart of the idea of the Sanctuary is what Lewis Hyde beautifully described as the labour of gratitude. His classic study, *The Gift*, [2] looks at the role of the giving and receiving of gifts, for example, at critical moments of transition. He quotes the Talmudic story of a man whose daughter was about to get married, but who had been told that she would not survive to the end of the day. The next morning the man visited his daughter and saw that she was still alive. Unknown to both of them, when she hung up her hat after the wedding, its pin pierced a serpent that would otherwise have bitten and killed her. The father wanted to know what his daughter had done that merited this Divine Intervention. She answered, “A poor man came to the door yesterday. Everyone was so busy with the wedding preparations that they did not have time to deal with him. So I took the portion that had been intended for me and gave it to him.” It was this act of generosity that was the cause of her miraculous deliverance. (Shabbat 156b)

The construction of the Sanctuary was fundamentally important because it gave the Israelites the chance to give back to God. Later Jewish law recognised that giving is an integral part of human dignity when they made the remarkable ruling that even a poor person completely dependent on charity is still obliged to give charity.[3] To be in a situation where you can only receive, not give, is to lack human dignity.

The Mishkan became the home of the Divine Presence because God specified that it be built only out of voluntary contributions. Giving creates a gracious society by enabling each of us to make our contribution to the public good. That is why the building of the Sanctuary was the cure for the sin of the Golden Calf. A society that only received but could not give was trapped in dependency and lack of self-respect. God allowed the people to come close to Him, and He to them, by giving them the chance to give.

That is why a society based on rights not responsibilities, on what we claim from, not what we give to others, will always eventually go wrong. It is why the most important gift a parent can give a child is the chance to give back. The etymology of the word Terumah hints at this. It means not simply a contribution, but literally something “raised up.” When we give, it is not just our contribution but we who are raised up. We

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survive by what we are given, but we achieve dignity by what we give.

[1] In Deuteronomy 9:20, Moses discloses a fact which has been kept from us until that point: “God also expressed great anger toward Aaron, threatening to destroy him, so, at that time, I also prayed for Aaron.”

[2] Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2006).

[3] Maimonides *Hilchot Shekalim* 1:1, *Mattenot Ani* 7:5.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

“You shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under Heaven; do not forget!” (Deuteronomy 25:19). Each year on Shabbat Zachor, the Sabbath that precedes the festival of Purim, we read from a selection in the Book of Deuteronomy about the need to remember the vicious attack on the most vulnerable of the Jews by the nation of Amalek. Interestingly, however, there is another record of the battle that appears elsewhere in the Torah, containing additional elements of the incident.

That account is in the Book of Exodus, which we read on Purim morning prior to the Megillah: “And then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Refidim... And God said to Moses, ‘...I will blot out (“emche”) the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven!’” (Exodus 17:8-16). It is important to note that this section appears in its historical context, following the exodus and prior to the giving of the Torah.

This is not so in Deuteronomy, where the reference to Amalek appears without warning and is out of historical context. “Remember what Amalek did to you by the way, when you were coming out of Egypt; how he met you by the way, and smote your hindmost: all that were feeble in the rear, when you were faint and weary; and they did not fear God.

Therefore it shall be, when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land that the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, to possess it, you shall blot out (“timche”) the remembrance of Amalek from under Heaven; do not forget!” (Deuteronomy 25:17-19).

A number of questions arise from these passages. First, the account in Deuteronomy provides many more details about the attack in question, greatly enriching our understanding of the contemporaneous account in Exodus. Why separate the dissemination of details into two sections?

Second, since the commandment is to blot out the memory of Amalek, what do its two different verb forms signify? In Exodus, God informs Moses, “I will blot out (“emche”) the memory of Amalek”, whereas in Deuteronomy, Moses tells the people, “YOU shall blot out (“timche”) the memory of Amalek”. Who is to actually do the job?

Finally, why is there a need for a special Sabbath dedicated to remembering Amalek's genocide attempt, when only several days later, we will celebrate Purim, which records the destruction of Amalek's infamous descendant, Haman?

To answer these questions, we turn to Maimonides' Laws of Kings, where he codifies the commandment regarding the destruction of the seven indigenous nations in the land of Canaan. He concludes that this directive is no longer feasible, as "their identity and memory have been lost," due to a policy of mass population transfer ordered by King Sancherib of Assyria, which "mixed the nations" that he conquered (BT Brachot 28a). However, in the following paragraph, as Maimonides codifies the mandate to destroy Amalek, he omits mention of its identity having been lost (Laws of Kings, 5:4-5).

On this basis of this critical difference, my revered mentor, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, z"l, cited his grandfather, Rav Chaim of Brisk, who distinguished between the physical nation of Amalek and the ideology of Amalek. The former once lived near Canaan (and which has since been rendered indistinguishable by Sancherib's population transfer), while the latter's goal is to destroy Israel and our unique message of compassionate righteousness and moral justice for the world.

Indeed, the ideology of Amalek exists in every generation, with many different identities, from Sparta-Rome, to the Ottoman Empire, to Nazi Germany, to ISIS and to modern-day Iran. They each believed that to the powerful victor belong the spoils; they each maintain that might makes right!

With this in mind, our two passages can be better understood. The verses in Exodus describe the nation of Amalek attacking the Jewish People with the aim of nothing less than total genocide. Even as we took up arms in self-defense, the Almighty promises that He will finish the job for us ("I will blot out Amalek").

But Amalek is not merely a specific nation at a specific moment of Jewish history. It is an ideology, Amalek-ism, if you will: the denial of the Israelite mission promised to Abraham the first Hebrew, that we will eventually teach all the families of the earth God's without design of a world of peace and universal love.

From this perspective, the passage in Deuteronomy that we read on the Sabbath before Purim deals with the larger issue of Amalek-ism, not simply with the ancient nation of Amalek. It is no wonder, then, that this command to destroy Amalek is not within the historical context of the exodus from Egypt. Rather, it is in the context of commandments, the means by which we are distinct and through which we will ultimately become a light unto all the nations, when everyone will accept at least the moral

commands of our holy Torah, when all peoples will beat their swords into ploughshares and will make love instead of war (Isaiah 2).

Therefore, it is specifically on Shabbat – a taste of the idyllic World to Come – before the holiday when we bested the original Amalek, that we are commanded to "blot out" not only Amalek but Amalek-ism, by eventually converting all nations to the acceptance of Jewish morality, at the very least!

The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Purim in Hell

The Jewish calendar is punctuated by many happy occasions. The Torah requires us to celebrate three major festivals—Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot—and to do so joyously. Our Sages instituted two additional festive holidays, Chanukah and Purim. Without question, it is this latter holiday that evokes the greatest exhibitions of joy and gaiety. Already at the time of its inception, the 14th day of Adar is described as "a day of merrymaking and feasting, as a holiday and an occasion for sending gifts to one another." (Esther 9:21) For many centuries, Jews have emulated those practices and have attempted to recreate the atmosphere of that historic moment when "the Jews enjoyed light and gladness, happiness, and honor." (ibid. 8:16)

There have certainly been times in Jewish history when it has been relatively easy to recapture the mood of that triumphant time. But the nature of Jewish history is such that almost every year is marred by tragedy, national or personal, which makes joyous celebration challenging, if not impossible. It is difficult to make merry when one is burdened by woes, particularly when those woes threaten the very existence of our people. One wonders, for example, how the joyous holiday of Purim was celebrated in the ghettos and concentration camps of Eastern Europe during the terrible years of the Holocaust.

One prominent Holocaust historian, Dr. Esther Farbstein, has investigated this very question. In her book, *Hidden in Thunder: Perspectives of Faith, Halachah and Leadership during the Holocaust*, she examines numerous documents which describe the religious experiences of those who were condemned to celebrate Purim while enslaved in the hellish conditions of places like the Warsaw Ghetto.

Before drawing upon her research, I must point out that this Shabbat immediately precedes the Purim festival, which occurs later next week. In anticipation of the imminent holiday, we supplement the weekly Torah portion with a brief paragraph from the parsha of Ki Tetzet (Deuteronomy 25:17-19). There, we are instructed, "Remember what Amalek did to you...after you left Egypt—how, undeterred by fear of God, he happened upon you...when you were famished and weary..." We are further urged to never forget his stealth and

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treachery. This passage urging us to remember, Zachor..., is thus known as Parshat Zachor.

We anticipate Purim by recalling the enemies from whose genocidal threats we were delivered by Divine Providence. We especially recall Amalek, who was both the biological and ideological ancestor of the villain of the Purim story, Haman, the archetype of all subsequent persecutors of our people.

Our task is now expanded. Not only must we reflect on how Purim was celebrated in the throes of the Holocaust, but we must also contemplate the unbearable task of remembering foes of the very distant past at the very moment when the blades of Nazi bayonets touched our throats. Why remember ancient Persia and the biblical wilderness when the dreaded furnaces of Treblinka were already spewing smoke?

Dr. Farbstein describes in comprehensive detail the Purim "festivities" in the jaws of the Nazis, and so I recommend her book to you. I will limit myself to descriptions of Purim in the Warsaw Ghetto, as recorded in the journals of Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapira, the martyred Hasidic leader known as the Rebbe of Piasecsna. These journals were hidden in a milk can and recovered from the rubble years after World War II. Quotations from these journals were read into the record by the prosecution as evidence against Adolf Eichmann at his notorious trial.

Most fascinating is the sharp contrast between the Rebbe's homiletic interpretations of a key phrase in the Amalek passage at the time of the first Purim in the Ghetto, in March 1940, versus his interpretation two years later in 1942.

The phrase in question is *asher karcha baderech*, which I have translated above as, "how he happened upon you." The Midrash, quoted by Rashi, creatively suggests that the word *karcha* contains the root *kor*, which means "cool" or "cold." Hence, the phrase could be translated as "how he cooled you off." As Rashi puts it, the Jewish people were "on fire" with spiritual enthusiasm when they left Egypt. No enemy dared to confront them. Amalek, extinguished that "fire," "cooled them off," and diminished their enthusiasm.

In the early spring of 1940, the conditions of the Warsaw Ghetto were extremely difficult. Yet, as the Rebbe reports, they were bearable. He, of course, had no way of knowing that the Nazis had designated that very day of Purim 1940 as the beginning of their Aktion, their diabolical scheme to systematically "eliminate" the Ghetto's Jewish population.

And so, the Rebbe broadens the interpretation of "cooling off" to refer to German culture. He writes: "Before Amalek attacked the Israelites, many Jews admired Amalek's culture. They were 'cooled off' to our own Torah culture. They thought that Amalek's culture was

beautiful, ethical, and had much practical wisdom. So too it is with the German culture. We admired its literature, philosophy, and scientific contributions. We were thus 'cooled off' to our own culture. Now we see German culture for what it is—immoral, murderous, and brutal." The Rebbe thus sees the Ghetto experience as a lesson not to be seduced by the facades of alien cultures, but to recognize their immoral essence.

Fast forward two years to Purim 1942. By that time, the Rebbe is aware that the Ghetto experience is much worse than "extremely difficult." In his own words, it is "unprecedented evil...Unique in the history of the human race...Heretofore unimaginable decadence..." The Rebbe now sees that his reality cannot be compared to previous Jewish suffering. It transcends all prior persecutions, destructions, exiles, and pogroms. It is unspeakable.

Nevertheless, he persists with his Torah teaching, but this time he lends a different homiletic twist to "how he cooled you off." Now he is concerned that the tortured remnants of the Ghetto would become "cooled off" to future spiritual repair. They had become so reduced in their humanity and in their religiosity that they could never be rehabilitated. For two full years, Torah study and mitzvah observance were absolutely impossible. He feared that they had become "cooled off" to future Torah study and mitzvah observance. He pleaded with his audience, by now drastically reduced in size and barely clinging to life, that they retain their religious enthusiasm and resist being "cooled off".

Two very different levels of hell forced the Rebbe to adopt two very different homiletic interpretations.

So much for the supplemental Torah readings about Amalek on the Shabbat before Purim. So much for Parshat Zachor.

But what about his homily for the day of Purim itself? On that day in 1940, the Rebbe imparted a moral tour de force to his audience and, through them, to all of us. He noted the time honored word-play comparing Purim, to Yom HaKippurim, or Yom Kippur. What connection can there be between a day for "feasting and merrymaking" and a day for repentance and atonement?

The Rebbe answers: The Talmud, citing the view of Rabbi Judah the Patriarch, states that on Yom Kippur the essence of the day effects atonement, so that even if the individual's repentance is insincere he nevertheless receives atonement. Similarly with regard to Purim: even though one may not have experienced a joyous holiday, nevertheless, the divine salvation and joy which Purim bestows upon are active and effective even here, even now."

The Rebbe's message was designed to encourage his audience, deprived as they were of any semblance of "light and joy". For deep within them was a tiny spark of hope which, in the eyes of the Almighty, counted as "feasting and merrymaking".

Today, more than eighty years since he delivered his message, it must also encourage us. We may have ample reasons to feel discouraged, depressed, perhaps even desperate. However, if the half-starved and wretchedly bereaved members of the Rebbe of Piaczesna's community could respond to his plea to find within themselves a modicum of joy, so can we overcome our moods and concerns, and celebrate this year's Purim joyously.

Let this Purim echo that Purim of long ago so that our people enjoy "light and gladness, happiness and honor".

A Personal Note from Rabbi Weinreb

I encourage you to enjoy Purim to the fullest, but control your consumption of intoxicating beverages. Be especially careful about serving alcohol to minors and to adults who are drinking excessively. When asked exactly how much to drink, I advise drinking nothing stronger than wine and to be sure that you remain sober enough to learn, understand, and coherently repeat the current Daf Yomi! With Rashi and Tosafos! And be sure that you are capable of davening mincha and maariv with kavanah!

I repeat my annual reminder of the "vort" of Chavi's revered ancestor, the Chassidishe master, R' Yechezkel of Kuzmir. He would say, "At this time of year, Jews traditionally greet one another with blessings for a freiliche (happy) Purim and a kosher Pesach. But I say that we should bless each other with a kosher Purim and a happy Pesach. A kosher Purim without unseemly frivolity and degrading drunkenness, and a happy Pesach without unnecessary housecleaning and dietary stringencies that hamper the festive mood that Yom Tov requires."

And so, I conclude by wishing you all a kosher Purim and a joyous Pesach—and a Shabbat Shalom!

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Be Very Careful About What You Daven For

We all know the story very well. Vashti refused to accede to the wishes of her inebriated husband to appear before him. In response, he in effect said, "Off with her head." Ahashverosh woke up from his drunken stupor and realized that he needed a new wife. He held a "Beauty Contest" to choose the new queen. "...and Esther was taken to the king's palace, under the charge of Hegai guardian of the women." (Esther 2:8) Lo and behold, Esther is chosen as the Queen of Persia-Media.

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Ahashverosh was very pleased with Esther. She was beautiful. She was charming. He had only one problem with her. "Esther refused to reveal her origins or her people..." (Esther 2:20). Apparently, this fact drove Ahashverosh crazy. For some reason, he wanted to know what she was hiding from him. The pasuk says: "Then the king made a great banquet for all his officers and his servants – it was Esther's banquet – and he proclaimed an amnesty for the provinces, and gave gifts worthy of the king's hand." (Esther 2:18).

Ahashverosh declared a tax holiday in the name of the Queen for all citizens of his empire in order to ingratiate himself to Esther. His plot was, if I put out this decree declaring the tax amnesty in her name, she will break down and reveal to me that which I desire to know. However, the plan did not work: "Esther refused to reveal her origins or her people." (Esther 2:20).

The very next pasuk reads: "And when the maidens were gathered together the second time and Mordechai sat at the king's gate..." (Esther 2:21). Suddenly, Ahashverosh holds another Beauty Contest! Why did he do that? He loved Esther! The Gemara (Megillah 13a) writes that he took counsel from Mordechai. He asked, "Mordechai, how do I get her to tell me where she is from?" Mordechai said, "I'll give you great advice: Have another beauty contest as if you are going to pick another wife. Women are always jealous of the "thigh of their rival"! She will want to ingratiate herself to you to regain her favored status, and she will break down and tell you her secret!" The Gemara says that nevertheless, Esther still refused to reveal her origins to Ahashverosh.

What was Mordechai thinking? Did he actually think that Esther would break down because of another beauty contest and reveal her secret that Mordechai forbade her to tell? The answer is that Mordechai thought "Esther hates being there in the palace with Ahashverosh. I don't want her being there. I want her out of there. Takeh! Let Ahashverosh find another wife, another beauty, and let him get rid of Esther, and the problem will be solved." In other words, Mordechai's intent was not that this would induce Esther to reveal her origins. His intent was in fact that Ahashverosh should find another wife! Esther the righteous will be freed from this horrible situation in which she found herself. Mordechai's plan did not work.

Let me ask: When this did not work, what was Mordechai thinking to himself? "Oy, vei iz mir! Nebach! She is still stuck in the palace! My grand plan on how to extricate Esther from this predicament did not work! Woe is me!"

But what would have happened if Mordechai would have been successful in this plan and Ahashverosh would have thrown her out and she would not have remained the Queen? The Salvation of Klal Yisrael would not have happened. This is one of the great lessons of

life: Do not try to run the world. Be very careful about what you daven for. Sometimes we daven for things because we think that will bring our salvation, and they turn out to not be our salvation.

The take-away lesson from the way Chazal present this story is that sometimes we pray for something to happen in order to bring about a certain result, but if our prayers were answered as formulated, they would have brought about the opposite result! If our prayers appear to go unanswered, we should never think “Woe is me – the Almighty is ignoring my pleas”. The Ribono shel Olam knows better. The Ribono shel Olam wanted Esther to be in the palace, and therefore nothing was going to get her out!

We see a similar phenomenon in the beginning of Parshas Shemos. Moshe Rabbeinu’s parents put him in a little basket in the Nile River to hide him from Pharaoh and to save their child. What happened? “And Pharaoh’s daughter descends to bathe by the Nile...” (Shemos 2:5) The daughter of the tyrant who ordered that every Jewish boy should be drowned is the first person to come across the floating basket! Miriam is standing a short distance away on the banks to watch what is going to be with her brother (Shemos 2:4).

When Miriam sees the daughter of Pharaoh approaching the floating basket, what must she have been thinking? “Oy vey iz mir! Of all the people in the world to come down to bathe in the Nile right now, this is the worst person who could possibly have shown up!” Miriam must have been davening with great intensity to the Almighty: “Please, Master of the Universe, please do not let her notice the basket with my baby brother inside! If Bas Pharaoh sees Moshe, she will most likely drown him. He will not have a chance!”

What happens? Miriam’s prayer was not answered! Pharaoh’s daughter sees the little baby and decides to take him into the palace, to hire his mother to nurse him, and ultimately, as a result of this, Klal Yisrael has salvation. What did Miriam think when Bas Pharaoh took the baby? “Nebach, the Ribono shel Olam did not listen to my prayers! He didn’t answer me!”

And yet, what do we know? This was the yeshua (salvation). This was another example. We daven for “X” because we think “X” is going to be good, and what unfolds is exactly the opposite of what we prayed for – and it is even better than we could have ever hoped for!

We see this all the time. Someone davens for a Shidduch: “Ribono shel Olam, I want this shidduch to go through, I want this shidduch to happen so badly! This will be the best thing in the world for me!” And then the shidduch does not work out. The person is crushed with disappointment. “Oy vey iz mir – woe is me!” Sometimes people do not realize that they have been saved from great pain!

We see this in business. “Ribono shel Olam, if this deal succeeds, I will be so successful...” We see this all the time.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, zt”l, before he came to America, applied for a rabbinic position in Europe. Someone else also applied for the job. Rav Yaakov said “In all honesty and in all modesty, I was a much better candidate for that position in Lithuania.” The other fellow got the job. Rav Yaakov said about himself that he was very depressed about this development. “What will be with me and my family?”

Nebach, what did he need to do? He had to come to America. He came to America, eventually became a Rosh Yeshiva in Yeshivas Torah Vodaath, and was respected as one of the Gedolei HaDor (Greatest Rabbinic personalities of his generation). The “winning candidate” was unfortunately killed out with the entire city by the Nazis. How much did Rav Yaakov daven that he should get that position! How disappointed he was that he didn’t get that job!

But such, my friends, is life. We don’t know what is good for us and we don’t know what the Ribono shel Olam has in mind for us. That is why the best Tefillah is “V’HaTov b’Einecha assei” (And that which is good in Your Eyes, do) and likewise “Maleh mish’alos lee’beinu l’tova” (fulfill the requests in our heart – for good!). I don’t know what is good; You know what is good. Fulfill the requests of our heart for good.

This is the lesson that we learn from Mordechai and Esther. We also learn it from Moshe and Miriam and Bas Pharaoh. And we see it time and time again in our own lives.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Three important lessons about successful Jewish parenting appear at the commencement of Parshat Tetzaveh. The Torah gives us a mitzvah in Shemot 27:20, “lehaalot ner tamid” to guarantee that there would be a continuous flame in the Sanctuary in the wilderness. From the book of Mishlei, Proverbs 6:23, we know that, “Vetorah ohr” – Torah is the greatest light of our lives. For this reason, many of our commentators compare the imperative to kindle the light in the Sanctuary to the importance of conveying the essence of the light of our Torah through to the generations to come.

When it comes to kindling lights, I can identify three rules. We all have experience of lighting menorah, birthday or shabbat candles. Rule number one is that you can never predict whether that wick will co-operate or not. Rule number two is that you have to have patience. Sometimes you’ll need to use match after match after match. Sometimes you’ll have to hold a long match next to a wick, waiting patiently for the wick to take on that light. And rule number three is presented to us by Rashi on Shemot 27:20, at the beginning of our

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parsha. Rashi says, “Madlik,” – “You must kindle that light,” – “ad shet’hei shalhevet olah me’eleicha,” – “Until you can step back knowing that the flame will be burning of its own accord.”

In similar fashion when it comes to Chinuch, Jewish education, in our homes we have to be mindful of these three rules. Rule number one: you can never predict how any one particular child will respond – and sometimes the response of the same child can change from one age to another. Rule number two: we have to show an enormous amount of patience and love, often giving the warmth of our presence and our encouragement to our children. And rule number three: we discharge our responsibility when we successfully raise our children so that they can stand up and be proud of their Yiddishkeit, independently of ourselves, enthusiastically embracing the values, the content, and the practises of our Torah.

No wonder therefore that here the Torah is describing the ‘ner tamid’, the continuous flame which stands as a symbol of the continuous flame of our Judaism in this world. So to be successful parents, let’s be mindful of these three rules. First, you never know how our children might respond. Secondly, we have to show an enormous amount of patience and love and thirdly, let’s guarantee that our children will be fired up with enthusiasm and passion about their Judaism, not performing it only because we want them to, but performing it because they appreciate how fortunate they are to have the privilege of following a life filled with Torah to the extent that one day, please God, they in turn will pass on the glorious flame of our Judaism through to the generations to come.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Kippah For Men And Why Not For Women? When describing the unique clothing of the Kohen Gadol-High Jewish Priest in our Torah Portion, one of the garments is a *Mitznefet-Hat*, which the Talmud states (Zevachim 88b) that wearing it atones for sins of haughtiness, since things on top (of one’s head) atone for thinking one is on top. Maharsha (1555-1631) commentary on this Talmudic passage (Maharsha commentary on Zevachim 88b) connects the *Mitznefet* to the wearing of a Kippah today, and says that a head covering brings a fear or awe of God, because the wearer is mindful that there is someone on top of him, thus diminishing one’s haughtiness. This explanation helps explain a very strange name of the Kippah - a *Yarmulka*. What does this strange word signify? It is actually made up of two words in Aramaic – *Yarei Malka* – the fear of the King (of Kings). This is what a Jew should feel when wearing a Yarmulka-Kippa. If this is the reason, then the question must be asked: why is this practice only reserved for men, and not Jewish women, who also want to and should feel an awe of

heaven? And we will see that this is not a uniquely “man’s” Mitzvah-Commandment, a time-bound positive commandment, that some women today might wish to adopt themselves. Even if we understand that many traditional women cover hair once they are married, which might be the equivalent of a Kippah, why is it not the practice of young girls to wear the kippah until they are married? Is their fear of heaven any less than that of men?

Kippah-Skullcap-Yarmulka in Talmudic Times - All three of these names for this custom refer to the same round traditional garment that Jewish boys and men put on their heads. Although a Kippah may be made of any material, color and size, the specific material (crocheted or black velvet), color (all white, all black or styled) or size usually identifies that Jewish man with a particular sect within traditional Judaism. But we will demonstrate that, although this custom seems universal today, there is no mention of this practice in the Torah, and the paucity of sources in the Talmud shows how little this was practiced during those times.

In scanning the Talmud, there are only four sources that directly relate to wearing a Kippah. When Nachman was born and as a boy, the idol-worshipping Chaldeans foresaw in their astrology that this boy would grow up to be a robber (Shabbat 156b). Nachman’s mother took their prediction seriously, and from that day onward, she “forced” her son to wear a Kippah, in order that her son feel the fear of heaven and receive God’s mercy to change that prediction. That man grew up to be Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak, and not a robber.

In Talmud Kallah (Kallah 2:9), two particular Rabbis had the insight to tell a person’s history and moral standing simply by looking at his or her face. When a certain person walked by, Rabbi Eliezer said that this person was a product of an adulterous relationship, while Rabbi Yehoshua said that his parents did not observe Jewish family purity laws. Then, two children walked by, one with his head covered and one with his head uncovered, and they made similar remarks. This passage shows us that there must have been some Jewish children and adults at the time who covered their heads. Rabbi Hunah, the son of Rabbi Yehoshua, was famous in the Talmud (Shabbat 118b) for proclaiming that he never walked more than four cubits in his life without covering his head. This passage shows that Rabbi Hunah must have been unique for his time, in that he always covered his head. Finally, there is a Midrash, which seems to be “anti-Kippah” (Midrash, Vayikra Rabbah 27:6). This Midrash points out one of the differences between a human King and the King of Kings, God. A human king sends his emissary to the people, and the people immediately show great respect, by removing their head coverings, and treating this person with awe and respect. But God himself approaches the people and, as they say the Shema prayer, they need not stand, and they *need not cover their heads!* Thus, it seems that Jews covering their heads, at least in Talmudic

times, not only was not obligatory, but also few Jews observed this custom.

Must Traditional Jewish Men Today Wear a Kippah? - Rabbi Yonah Gerondi (1200-1263) was of the unique opinion that Jewish men were indeed required to cover their heads at all times, in order to develop a sense of fear of heaven (Rabbeinu Yonah, Sefer Hanahagot Tzadikim, Sefer HaYirah 6). But this seems to be a lone view. Maimonides does not obligate a male Jew to wear a Kippah at all times, but does state (Maimonides, Hilchot Tefillah 5:4) that in prayer, a Jew may not have his head uncovered, implying that in the synagogue and prayers (including blessings on food at home), Jews at the time of Maimonides must have covered their heads with a Kippah for prayers and in synagogue, but at no other time.

In his book, *Beit Yosef*, Rabbi Yosef Karo seems to rule like Maimonides, that it is forbidden to recite a blessing with an uncovered head (and enter a synagogue without a Kipah), even though others disagree, and permit this practice (*Beit Yosef* on Tur, *Orach Chaim* 91:3). Similarly, Rabbi Karo rules in his Code (*Beit Yosef* on Tur, *Orach Chaim* 91:3) that a Jew should not recite a blessing with an uncovered head, or enter a synagogue without a Kippah, but acknowledges that not all agree with this ruling. In another ruling, Rabbi Karo also specifically says that *it is not a Jewish law to wear a Kippah (at other times, outside the synagogue, like Rambam)*, and it is only a “person with great virtue” who does so (*Beit Yosef* on Tur, *Orach Chaim* 91:3). But then in his Code of Jewish Law, Rabbi Karo seems to contradict himself. He writes that it is *forbidden* for a Jewish man to walk without a Kippah, at any time. However, *all of the commentaries immediately “correct” any misimpression and say that the intention of this law is not to obligate males to wear a Kippah, but it is just a “great virtue”* (Shulchan Aruch, *Orach Chaim* 2:6, with commentary of Magen Avraham and others).

If there is any doubt in the true meaning and implication of the Shulchan Aruch, whether there is an obligation or not to wear a Kippah today, one only needs to read the words of Rav Moshe Feinstein, the greatest American Rabbi decisor of Jewish law of the 20th century. In answering a question whether a Jewish man can wear a tiny Kippah, Rabbi Feinstein explains, in his very first written *Teshuva* (*Responsa Igrot Moshe* 1:1), that this is not forbidden technically in Jewish law, since there is no Jewish law requiring a Kippah at all. This opinion is based on all the sources cited above and wearing of a Kippah as only a “virtuous act.”

Thus, we must ask: If wearing a Kippah is not obligatory in Jewish law, according to Shulchan Aruch, why do almost all traditional Jewish men today cover their heads today at all times?

Today’s Kippah Wearing is Not Directly Related to The Above Sources - One of the 613 Mitzvot-commandments, not related specifically to covering or not covering one’s head, is an overarching prohibition not to

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imitate the customs of non-Jews, especially if their origin might have been religious in nature (Leviticus 18:3). Therefore, certain types of dress, behaviors, or haircuts, whose origin is pagan, are forbidden (for example, celebrating January 1st as a holiday is forbidden, since its origin was religious (See chapter on “Secular Dates” vol. 1 for full explanation of this concept). One of the prominent customs of the Christian Church, based on verses in I Corinthians 11, was the prohibition of remaining in a church with one’s head covered. Thus, every man entering a church was obligated to remove his hat when entering.

In a seminal piece, Rabbi David HaLevi Seigel (1586-1687) writes (*Turei Zahav* on *Orach Chaim* 8, no. 3) in his *Turei Zahav* that although covering one’s head is not obligatory in Jewish law, nevertheless, because uncovering one’s head is a prominent Christian practice, it now became obligatory for Jews to cover their heads at all times, under the prohibition of “not imitating the non-Jewish customs”. As a result of this ruling, wearing a Kippah quickly became adopted by all Jews in Eastern Europe as standard practice, and remains in force today, even though most people are unaware of the origin of the practice and are not even Christian. Since it was a Church practice and Jews adopted the opposite practice, Kippah wearing becomes obligatory today in traditional Jewish law.

Lest the reader think this was not a very prominent custom, the remnants of uncovering one’s head (inside) has very strong implications in etiquette and elsewhere, even in secular society today, although men wearing hats went out of style in 1961 [in the 1960s?]. For example, it is generally considered forbidden to wear a hat in court, even today. If a man fails to remove his hat before the judge enters the courtroom, he is likely to be reprimanded. It is a rule/law, passed, in the U.S. House of Representatives that it is forbidden to remain in that chamber wearing a hat. It has always been etiquette, based on the original Church practice, to take off one’s hat in a restaurant, home, classroom, and the theater. This writer remembers an announcement before playing the National Anthem at baseball games, for all men to remove their hats, including baseball caps, and this practice remains in effect today.

As a result of the Taz ruling, wearing Kippot became universal in Eastern Europe. But in Sephardic communities, where the Church or Mosque practice did not require removing one’s head covering, the universal practice of always wearing a Kippah was never adapted, since covering one’s head was never forbidden. Thus, it is still the custom in a few Sephardic communities today (countries or communities where there was no Christianity), where many men wear Kippot in synagogue and for prayers, but not in the street. However, with the mixtures of cultures after World War II, most Sephardic communities have adopted the custom of wearing Kippot all the time. Rabbi Feinstein explains this -- why come Sephardic communities do not wear Kippot on the street, in that same responsum (*Turei Zahav*

on Orach Chaim 8, no. 3), but emphasizes that for the overwhelming numbers of Jews today, especially in non-Arabic countries, must wear a Kippah, and it has the force of law. This concept is echoed by Chafetz Chaim, as he writes (Mishna Berura on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 2, no. 1) that today it is a strict violation of Jewish law to even sit in one's home without wearing a Kippah.

The concept of wearing a Kippah to differ from Christians could already be seen in the 1400's (long before Taz), when Rabbi Yisrael Bruna (Responsa Mahari Brunah 34) was asked about Jewish students who made fun of one student in the class that did not wear a Kippah (it was not family's his custom yet), and the questioner wanted to know if ostracizing this boy was legitimate. Rabbi Bruna says (already in the 1400's) that wearing a Kippah is a demonstration by Jews that they do not follow non-Jewish customs, and wearing a Kippah is a fundamentally Jewish concept. Thus, the boys were correct in their behavior.

If so, then Why Don't Jewish Women Wear Kipot Today, Before Marriage? - Now that it has been established that men must wear a Kippah today, our original question becomes even more compelling: If wearing a Kippah shows piety and the awareness of Someone above, and if a Jewish boy cannot enter a synagogue or make a prayer without a Kippah, why not Jewish girls? It is true that there is a custom for traditional Jewish married women to cover their hair. But what about before marriage? Why shouldn't Jewish girls wear a Kippah as well, especially in synagogues or while praying?

The author asked many Rabbis this question, without receiving a satisfactory answer. He also learned many sources in order to find even one Rabbi who discussed this issue. Finally, he found a very prominent Jerusalem Rabbi and decisor of Jewish law, Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg (1916-2006), who deliberated on this issue. After citing many of the above sources, showing how uncovering one's head was part of Church practice, Rabbi Waldenberg reveals (*Responsum Tzitz Eliezer* 12:13) that while it was a strong custom/law or men to uncover their heads in Church, the custom was equally strong in Church for women to *never* remove their head covering, based on the same verses in *Corinthians*. Therefore, it never became secular practice for women to remove their head coverings inside any building, like it was for men. Thus, in order for a Jewish girl to demonstrate that she does not accept the customs of the Church, she would have to go without a head covering (the head covering for women after marriage is not an issue, since that preceded the Church itself). If young Jewish girls were to cover their heads today to show their fear of God, they would be violating the prohibition of not imitating non-Jewish customs. Thus, the Rabbis at the time rule regarding women, the commandment not to follow non-Jewish customs trumped any obligation to cover their heads as a sign of awe of God. Rabbi Waldenberg does note one community that is the exception (that proves

the rule). In all the communities in Tunisia (where was very much separated from most of the Jewish world, and certainly was a non-Christian society), it was indeed the custom for all Jewish girls to wear a Kippah for prayer, blessings and in the synagogue, which, given the above sources and Rabbinic opinions, is a perfectly logical conclusion for that society.

* This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Yakov Haber Prophecy, Divine Calling, and the Eradication of Amalek

I. "And He called to Moshe, and He spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying" (Vayikra 1:1). This introductory verse to the entire Chumash Vayikra serves as the source of many fundamental teachings about the nature of prophecy, Torah and the relationship of Hakadosh Baruch Hu and the Jewish people and their beloved leader. Rashi, quoting Chazal, explains that keria is lashon chiba, an expression of endearment. By calling Moshe Rabbeinu by name before speaking to him, G-d was demonstrating his great affection toward him. Rashi further quotes from our sages that the phrase "to Moshe" teaches us that the sound of G-d only reached Moshe's ears and no one else's. On the phrase "from the Tent of Meeting", Rashi similarly comments that the sound stopped within the mishkan and did not go outside, not because of the faintness of the sound - the opposite being true, the sound of G-d is enormously powerful (Tehillim 29) - but rather because Hashem caused the sound to stop. The commentaries on Rashi and the Toras Kohanim from which he is quoting analyze the necessity of two seemingly redundant derashos of the sound not being heard by other people nor outside the mishkan. (See commentary of R. Eliyahu Mizrachi, Gur Aryeh and others.)

Perhaps we can suggest an approach linking these various teachings and with it gain a greater insight as to the nature of the miracle of a powerful sound stopping within the limited confines of the mishkan. Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah, Chapters 7-10), Ramchal (Derech Hashem 3:3-5) and others elaborate as to the nature of prophecy and the crucial distinctions between the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu and that of other prophets. What clearly emerges from their respective presentations is that prophecy is not a loud voice created by Hashem heard by the physical ears of the prophet. Rather, it consists of an intense cleaving of the mind of the prophet with the Glory of Hashem's Presence, the result of which is a communication from Hashem to a human being. The nature of this communication is often overpowering, nullifying the sensations and functionality of the prophet, Moshe's prophecy being an

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exception to this rule. The communication is direct, crystal clear and leaves no room for doubt in the mind of the prophet that a Divine communication was conveyed to him. Perhaps this is the deeper meaning of Chazal's words quoted by Rashi that the sound only reached Moshe and no others, notwithstanding its powerful quality. It was not a specific miracle of the stopping of sound waves which ordinarily would spread further, but was a fundamentally different kind of communication penetrating to the very being of the prophet, in this case, Moshe Rabbeinu. Hence, only Moshe "heard" the sound and no one else did since it was not transmitted via ordinary or even miraculously created sound waves but consisted of an entirely different form of direct communication.

The Jewish people merited this form of Divine communication at ma'amad Har Sinai "hearing" - or, more properly stated, "receiving" in their minds - the first two of the Ten Commandments. Not being on a level worthy of such prophecy and filled with fright because of its overwhelming nature, they pleaded with Moshe to be their representative in hearing the Divine message, after which only Moshe received this Divine communication and faithfully transmitted it to the Jewish people (Shemos 20:15-18). At first glance, Klal Yisrael totally lost the opportunity to directly "hear" Hashem's message after their pleading with Moshe to receive the Divine Torah and teach it to them. But Chazal teach us שkol משה כישראל וכמשה, שkol רב כתלמיד ר' - "Moshe is equivalent to Yisrael and Yisrael to Moshe; the Rav is equivalent to the student and the student to the Rav" (Mechilta, Yisro, 1). The great leader, Moshe Rabbeinu, not only faithfully led the people; in addition, in a very real spiritual manner, he represented the people. The concept of the Jewish people was included in his very being. I heard from my great Rebbe, Rav Chaim Ya'acov Goldwicht zt"l, that Moshe's "rays of glory" (Shemos 34:29 ff.) were a manifestation and conglomeration of all the "mini-rays" initially received by the Jewish people as a result of ma'amad har Sinai but subsequently lost because of the sin of the golden calf (ibid. 33:4-6). It was as if Moshe were the epicenter and the aggregate of the people.^[1] Rambam (Hilchos Melachim 3:6) characterizes the Jewish king in a similar way: "His heart is the heart of the nation," and hence his glory is the glory of the nation. If so, we can suggest that the transmission of the Torah to Moshe was, in a sense, ultimately a transmission to the entire Jewish people, not just because they subsequently heard the Torah from him but because he represented them.^[2] We can further suggest that the affection demonstrated by Hashem's calling Moshe to the mishkan, besides being directed toward the individual Moshe, was really a manifestation of the affection Hashem has for the entire Jewish people

II. The maftir this week, Parshas Zachor, contains the Divine commandment to remember the Amalekite attack against the Jewish people and to eradicate the nation of

Amalek. Much has been written from halachic, hashkafic and philosophical perspectives concerning this atypical mitzvah. One major topic of discussion is the morality of eradicating an entire nation. The question is all the more heightened in light of the many attempts by other nations and members of other religions to do exactly the same thing to the Jewish people. Most prominent of these attempts is the foiled attempt of Haman, "להשמדת הָרָגוֹ וְלֹאכְדָת כָּל הַיְהוּדִים מִנְגָעָר וְעַד זָקָן טָבָע נְגָשָׁם", described in Megillas Esther and the more recent horrific eradication of a complete third of Jewry during the Holocaust. The troubling, often unasked, question beckons loudly: How can the Jewish people be commanded to do to other nations that which other nations have attempted and even unfortunately largely done to us?! This question was raised by no less a prominent figure than King Shaul. As we read in this week's haftorah, >"וַיָּבֹא שָׁאֵל עַד עִיר עַמּוֹק וַיָּבֹא בְּנָהָל" - "And Shaul came to the city of the Amalekites and battled in the valley" (Shmuel I 15:5). Presumably commenting on the fact that verse 5 states that Shaul fought Amalek in the valley before the actual battle is described in verse 7, the Talmud (Yoma 22a) presents an additional interpretation that the first battle was a conceptual one: R. Mani stated: On the matters of "the valley". At the time that Hakadosh Baruch Hu commanded Shaul, "Go and smite Amalek," he (Shaul) thought, 'If even for one life [lost, found on the road], the Torah commands to bring an eglah arufah [in a valley], for all these lives [of Amalek] all the more so! Even if the people sinned, how did the animals sin?! Even if the adults sinned, how did the children sin?! A heavenly voice came out and pronounced, "Do not be overly righteous!"

Shmuel harshly rebukes Shaul Hamelech after his claim that he wished to use the Amalekite animals as offerings to Hashem: "Behold, listening is better than an offering, to obey more than the fat of rams!" (ibid. v. 22). "Since you have despised the Word of Hashem, He has despised you as king!" (v. 23). Following this, Shmuel unceremoniously dispatches of Agag, the Amalekite king spared by Shaul. "And Shmuel said, 'As your sword bereaved women, so your mother shall be bereaved!' And Shmuel sliced Agag before G-d in Gilgal" (v. 33).

But what is the answer to Shaul's claims? Clearly the Ribono shel Olam has declared Amalek to be evil. The Brisker Rav, Rav Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveichik, (Al HaTorah 160) comments that the war against Amalek only applies upon specific commandment of a prophet. Yehoshua fought against Amalek upon being commanded to do so by Moshe; Shaul warred against Amalek after hearing Shmuel's command. I have heard that conceptually, a prophet is needed to declare that Amalek in that particular generation is still acting like their evil predecessors. Our Torah demands of us at the right time to wipe out these evildoers who are still following their evil ways, whose primary pursuit is destroying the righteous, this plan being the motivation

for Amalek to war against the Jewish people throughout all of history.

More fundamentally, human beings are not in a position to challenge Divine authority. This is exactly the content of Shmuel's rebuke to Shaul as well as the message of the heavenly voice described in the above-quoted Gemara, "Do not be overly righteous!" Do not think that your human intellect can lead to a greater level of morality than that which is commanded by the Torah. We certainly do not always comprehend the Divine Will. Even reasons for mitzvos, oftentimes presented and analyzed by Rishonim and Acharonim, are not reasons in the classic sense of the motivations the Legislator of the Torah laws had in mind. Rather, they are human attempts at gaining some additional understanding of the wisdom emerging from the Divine revelation, "hashkafic nuggets"^[3] enhancing our understanding, but never sufficiently "cracking the Divine code."

This then is the root of the morality of the commandment to destroy Amalek - explicit Divine command often beyond human logic. But other religions also claim or have claimed a Divine command to persecute the Jewish people! The answer to this claim I believe is rooted in having utter confidence in the exclusive truth of Judaism. Much has been written about the fact that Judaism is the only religion to claim a national revelation of its Torah to an entire generation. Moshe Rabbeinu was selected as the shliach for transmitting the rest of the Torah to Klal Yisrael after they requested that the Divine communication to them cease as mentioned above but only after hearing the first two commandments directly from G-d and the fact that Moshe was being chosen as the shliach. Whereas some feebly attempt to dismiss the power of this claim, the fact remains that no other world religion has a national revelation tale as part of its traditions.

[4] There is a straightforward reason for this. You cannot fabricate such a narrative without paying the price of being disproven by the next generation discovering that no one is able to testify about that national revelation. This is why the Torah places such an emphasis on the Exodus from Egypt and ma'amad Har Sinai and faithfully transmitting the tradition of these events to our descendants. As developed above, the prophetic experience is not a mere "loud voice". This is an erroneous claim often advanced in order to futilely propose that the national revelation claim was made up.^[5] The entire Jewish people for a short period of time and the faithful transmitter of Torah, Moshe Rabbeinu, received Divine communication in a manner which left no room for doubt. It is this that gives us the confidence that whatever Hashem asks us to do, whether logical or not, seemingly fitting our version of morality or not, is indeed moral, just and proper.^[6] The fact that a descendant of Agag, Haman, indeed attempted to eradicate the Jewish people, provides hindsight insight into the dangers of not following the Divine command.

Any member of any religion claiming a Divine commandment to harm others which is not verified by a national revelation tradition -

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only Judaism possesses one - does not have the moral sanction to such a claim, and therefore such a claim is morally reprehensible and inherently false. This assertion applies equally for anyone or any nation who does so based on claims of racial superiority, military supremacy or any other secular argument.^[7]

The eradication of Amalek and the concepts and forces this nation represents - lack of Divine providence, atheism, immorality, might makes right and mockery to name a few - is associated with the messianic unfolding. When the world approaches its ultimate state of perfection, the half-name of Hashem, Y-K, mentioned in the maftir - which many explain represents an incomplete understanding of Hashem's ways when evil can exist in the world - blossoms into the full name of Y-K-V-K mentioned every day by Jews worldwide in the Aleinu prayer "V'haya Hashem l'melech al kol ha'aretz bayom hahu yiye Hashem (Y-K-V-K) echad u'shmo echad." In a world of confusion, delusion and rampant evil let us all redouble our spiritual efforts - with all the values antithetical to what Amalek represents: belief in G-d and His providence, being faithful to Divine morality, helping the unfortunate and reverence for sanctity - to partner with the Master of History in bringing about this blessed era.

[1] See Midrash (Shemos Rabba 1:27) about Moshe's intense concern for Jewish people even before he was appointed their leader. Perhaps this nullification of his individual self to the Jewish people is what qualified him to represent them so intensely. I am indebted to Rav Shay Schacter for presenting this source in a powerful shiur (available on yutorah.org) calling us to action in light of the current humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.

[2] See Be'er Yosef, by Rav Yosef Tzvi Salant (Vayikra p. 5 ff.), who explains that Klal Yisrael were only able to reach a high level of prophecy at ma'amad Har Sinai even temporarily because of the unity formed before this great event. This seems to reflect an important fundamental concept. The Torah was conveyed to Klal Yisrael as a whole, indivisible entity, not to a group of individuals, hence the terms Klal Yisrael and Knesses Yisrael. When the "body politic" was not able to directly receive the message of Torah, its leader, Moshe Rabbeinu, who was equivalent to it, received it for the people in this communal entity. Nonetheless, Midrashim describe how Klal Yisrael did lose out to some extent by not receiving the communication directly and will once again receive such direct communication in the messianic era.

[3] A term I have heard in the name of Rav Michael Rosenzweig shlit'a.

[4] See Permission to Receive by Rabbi Lawrence Klemens.

[5] Some have even resorted to claiming that Moshe Rabbeinu anachronistically invented electricity and, behind Har Sinai, boomed an imaginary loud voice to convince the Jewish people of the truth of revelation. It is quite remarkable that rather than accept the power of the national revelation narrative, some have resorted to converting Moshe into the Wizard of Oz!

[6] See Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah Chapter 8), Sefer Ikkarim (Maamar 3), Ramban (end of Bo and Glosses to Sefer Hamitzvos, negative commandments 2) and more who greatly elaborate on this fundamental truth.

[7] The thoughts presented here have been crystallized in my mind, b'chasdei Hashem, after the

cataclysmic events of 9/11, 2001 and after reading some eye-opening essays in its aftermath about the problem of religion commanding seemingly immoral acts, specifically one by Rabbi Dr. David Shatz.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah: Rabbi Label Lam

A Deeply Personal Way

You shall place the Urim and the Tumim into the Choshen of judgment so that they will be over Aaron's heart when he comes before HASHEM, and Aaron will carry the judgment of the children of Israel over his heart before HASHEM at all times. (Shemos 28:30)

the judgment of the children of Israel: [I.e., the solution of] the matter about which they [the Israelites] are judging and debating, whether or not to do something – Rashi

The Urim v' Tumim was some kind of mystical instrument for determining or divining truth. Stones and letters would light up and a Kohen with Ruach HaKodesh would be able to discern the message while the pedestrian- layman who stood by would remain clueless.

Where has this device disappeared to. We could all use a little Divine guidance?

The Piaseczno Rebbe, Rabbi Klonimus Kalman Shapiro wrote in Sefer Derech HaMelech that we may still have this type of Heavenly help even nowadays. He claims that we may still have access to prophecy even though we have been a non-profit organization for the past 2400 years.

He writes: "There is a type of prophetic knowledge that comes when one looks in a holy book. Not knowledge of the future, for that ceased when the Temple was destroyed. Rather, it is a call to the service of G-d and the holiness of Israel.

At times, we have all experienced looking into a holy book and suddenly becoming extremely moved by a certain idea. A word pierces our heart and gives us no rest for years, until it can transform us into a different person, and sanctify and uplift us.

What is going on? We have already heard this idea from others, and seen it in books, yet we remained untouched. Yet now, the matter suddenly penetrates our heart and mind. This is a form of the Urim v' Tumim. (the breast plate worn by the High Priest) There too, all the letters were written, yet only some of them would shine in the eyes of the Kohen; and only a Kohen with Divine Inspiration. Another Kohen would stand by him and not see a thing."

Isn't it amazing! We all come to Shul on Shabbos and review the same Parsha and yet every person finds different points that catch their attention. If I would give 50 different people a Sefer Tehillim and ask them to highlight one Possuk each week that speaks to them, one that jazzes their soul, what is the likelihood that any two would have the exact same 50 verses highlighted!? That's a rhetorical question. Way beyond highly improbable!

All throughout Mishlei Shlomo HaMelech writes in the persona of the Torah, "Listen My son...". Not only do we learn Torah as an intellectual exercise or a scholarly discipline

but at the same time we are shopping for truth. Again, Shlomo HaMelech writes, "The Truth, acquire it but don't sell it!" We are on a buying mission. Many people walk through a store but everybody zeroes on what suits them best.

The main questions are, "What is the Torah teaching us and what is HASHEM saying to me?" You can hear it in the writings of the Chofetz Chaim. You can almost feel the warmth of a Rebbe and smell the sweet breath of a father whispering to his child. He is talking to us. We are not just "learning up" his books, but rather we are imbibing his loving advice. The Torah is talking to each of us in an intimate and a deeply personal way.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

"If You Remain Silent at This Time":

Esther's Moral Development and Ours

by Harav Aharon Lichtenstein *[Excerpted - For the full article, see the Additional Articles at <http://torah.saadia.info/5783/tetzave/yhe.pdf>]*

Purim is compared to Yom HaKippurim - indeed, there are many parallels between these two occasions. Both are days of public assembly and soul-searching. My remarks today should be seen in this context... Reading and understanding the megilla requires that we understand what happened to ESTHER, and take note of the various stages of her development. What is the actual story of the megilla from this point of view?

I believe that Esther's development finds expression on two interrelated levels: strength of character and moral awareness. The Esther depicted in the closing chapters is entirely different from the Esther of the opening chapters. Who is the Esther who appears on the scene in the second chapter? A beautiful and comely girl, but powerless. She is devoid of initiative and independence. She is under Mordekhai's patronage; he treats her as his daughter. Even if we adopt the opinion that she was his wife, we are clearly dealing with a woman who lives completely under her husband's wing. "And whatever Mordekhai said, Esther would do - just as when she was still in his home" (2:20). There is a certain lack of sophistication about her, a simplicity and innocence. This point is emphasized not only in her character but also in her outer appearance. She wears no makeup; she is completely natural, a simple, innocent and honest girl.

At the same time, what is equally apparent is her passivity. She does whatever Mordekhai asks her to, because she lives in his home. And when she lives in the royal palace - no longer under the patronage of Mordekhai she does everything according to orders, completely devoid of individual will...

A glance further on reveals how this innocent girl suddenly displays initiative that we would never have expected of her. She takes on Achashverosh and Haman at their own game; she displays cunning: "Let him come today... let him come tomorrow." She leads them by the nose. She leads Haman into a trap, simultaneously arousing the anger and desire of Achashverosh. Together with her personal initiative, her inner, spiritual, national and moral identities are also realized and come to the fore.

The anonymous Esther reveals herself and is transformed into a specific, singular Esther, belonging to a special nation. From here onwards Esther not only displays initiative in the sphere of political manipulations, but, brimming with self-confidence, faces up to Haman. Here Esther takes her place as a worthy member of the royalty, as a leader. Her leadership is so outstanding towards the end of the Megilla that to some degree it overshadows even that of Mordekhai.

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Suddenly Mordekhai's own achievements come only in the wake of Esther's initiative. How does Mordekhai come to possess Haman's home? Through Esther. Who writes the megilla? While Mordekhai is still debating, Now it is Esther who is prepared not only to stand before Achashverosh, but also to send a letter to the Sages and demand, "Write me down! Remember me for all generations!" Is this really the same innocent girl who "did what Mordekhai told her,"

The answer - the difference between the end and the beginning - must be sought in the middle of the story, in particular, in four verses in which the change occurs. These verses represent the key to the entire Megilla. After the royal decree to exterminate all the Jews is issued in Shushan, she begins to awaken somewhat from her inactivity and passivity. What eventually gets her to act? Mordekhai disturbs her. "And she sent clothing to clothe Mordekhai and to remove the sackcloth from upon him, but he did not accept it". Instead of trying to have the royal decree canceled, she begs: "Go and make him stop this nonsense; let him accept the decree as it is, let him put on his clothing again." And despite everything, this still represents progress. She no longer displays complete passivity and helplessness. Something has started to move, and once there is concern for the individual Mordekhai, once the mire of passivity has been abandoned and some action is being taken, things start to happen.

Mordekhai refuses to take Esther's advice and persists in his appeal to her. "Know, my dearest, that the entire nation of Israel - young and old - is in danger." All around the swords are being sharpened, the ammunition is being gathered, but Esther remains unmoved... At this point, Mordekhai sends her a message: "AND MORDEKHAI SAID TO REPLY TO ESTHER: DO NOT IMAGINE THAT YOU WILL ESCAPE IN THE KING'S PALACE FROM [AMONG] ALL THE JEWS."

But Mordekhai doesn't put her reaction down to weakness. He takes his gamble all the way, appealing to the deepest recesses of the Jewish soul. If you really cared, if you considered your own soul to be at stake, would you be able to say, "For a whole month I have not been called to the king"? Mordekhai will not compromise. He understands that if one knows what the situation is, one must be prepared for self-sacrifice, taking care that not personal interests but rather national interests will dictate one's plans and actions.

At any rate, this is also the turning point. The excuses fall away; Mordekhai rejects, one by one, all of her claims and considerations. It is now that the young, passive, powerless Esther faces her moment of truth, and she prevails. She passes the test. And it is now that she rises to her full height and reveals herself - not just in title, but in essence - as Queen Esther.

At this moment Esther realizes that what is at stake is not just another private matter involving Mordekhai. She realizes the dimensions of the threat, the potential tragedy looming over the whole of Am Yisrael, including herself. She is no longer the anonymous Esther; she is prepared to reveal herself, to identify herself openly. Well aware of her true destiny, Esther presents herself before Achashverosh. She discards personal considerations in favor of public ones. Only after she has passed the test is she capable of standing before Achashverosh, appearing before the people, leading the camp, initiating action, demanding and even deciding events.

The key to the question of where we find the transition from the retiring Esther of chapter 2 to the regal and commanding Esther of chapter 9 is to be found in the Esther of chapter 4. In the zero-hour of chapter 4, the fateful showdown between Mordekhai

and Esther decided between apathy and empathy, selfishness and selflessness.

As mentioned earlier, the megilla is a story of development on two levels: one in terms of strength of character, initiative and courage, and the other in terms of moral awareness, of reassessing priorities. The two processes go hand in hand: when Esther finds the WILL to achieve an important end, she finds the ABILITY to do so as well. This is the essence of Mordekhai's message to her - if there is a will, there is a way. But first, you must truly will it.

And this is indeed what happens. Once Esther cares enough, she thinks hard and arrives at a solution. Her two-pronged plan consists of prayer - "Gather all the Jews," a call to the Almighty - and donning her royal garb in order to find favor in the eyes of a very human king. There is fasting and crying and tearing the heavens, together with an easy smile and moving to action. When the will prevails, suddenly it becomes apparent that one possesses the means to accomplish. Those potential character traits which until now have been concealed burst outward. Deeply hidden treasures that have lain dormant in the recesses of the soul reveal themselves in the wake of the will and initiative, and prove themselves capable of overturning worlds, canceling decrees, changing the fate of an entire nation.

Such Was Esther's Redemption Then. And the Same Applies to Us Today. -

We are all, to some degree, Esther. Each of us, for whatever reason, has doubts as to his ability to accomplish. We, too, are hesitant: "What, we're going to achieve all that? We're going to save Am Yisrael? I'm going to put a stop to assimilation? Little me? I'm just a youngster; I can achieve only little: a little bit in my neighborhood, a little bit in a youth group, a little bit in the family. But to start a revolution? To determine the future of a nation? To avert an evil decree? Little me?"

Here comes the demand. I don't want to use Mordekhai's words, but I do want to at least pose the question: how much of our resignation is motivated by supposed "inability" and how much is a result of the fact that our concern simply doesn't run deep enough?

Esther's concern doesn't run deep enough for two reasons, both extremely serious. On one hand, perhaps she doesn't act because of a lack of knowledge. True, she was told about the decree, she heard something, but with only half an ear - she didn't pay much attention. What penetrated the depths of her soul was only the family issue.

The question is obvious: how can this be? The whole of Shushan is shouting it out, there are posters on every corner, children in the streets are sharpening swords, everyone knows. Can it be that only Esther, who is right in the middle of all of it, in the palace, doesn't see?

Today too, everyone knows that Am Yisrael is in grave danger. There is danger of assimilation, danger of mixed marriages, danger of people losing their way, danger of being cut off from roots and values. Can it be that only you can't see it? As if this information is hidden somewhere? Is there any difficulty involved in obtaining the statistics on Jewish education in Israel and in the diaspora? Someone who cares enough can get his hands on the figures: sixty percent of Jews in the diaspora are being lost! And the situation here in Israel is nothing to be excited about. A person is quite capable of finding out, if he's interested enough, the number of students who "drop out" of the national-religious system!

But even more serious are Mordekhai's words to Esther. At a certain stage there is an effort to give her the benefit of the doubt: "Well, it certainly sounds very strange: the whole of Shushan knows, except the queen?" Still - maybe they told her it was

just a possibility, a thought, and she may have thought that the danger wasn't imminent. But after copies of the decree of annihilation were distributed, and Mordekhai brought them to her attention, can Esther still say, "What do you want from me?"

Herein lies the ultimate question. It is directed to each and every one of us. Let each person do as Esther did: stand before himself, stand before God, and once the situation is quite clear to him, ask himself, "Where am I, who am I, what comes first, what is vital and what is secondary?" This does not imply that what is secondary is necessarily unimportant: Esther's plans of being queen and ruling over 127 provinces certainly represented serious career considerations. The question is not whether one's personal plans are inherently improper. Rather, a person must ask himself not only whether what he is doing is good and worthy, but whether it is the best and most worthy thing that he could do. He has to keep asking himself, "Is this really what the circumstances require? Is this the best that I can do at this time?"

Chazal teach that God once criticized no less than the ministering angels themselves. When God saved the Israelites at the Red Sea by drowning the Egyptians, the angels requested to do what would appear to be their rightful job, to fulfill themselves, to express their innermost souls - they wished to break out into a joyous song of praise to God. God said to them: Indeed, song is beautiful and wonderful; it gives expression to the soul. But there are times when even song itself is not worthy of the ministering angels. "My creatures are drowning in the sea, and yet you sing my praise?!"

The angels' song itself is not necessarily wrong; it is just inappropriate at that given time. The question is one of priorities. It is good and worthy to sing, but is that all that needs to be done at this particular time?

"My creatures are drowning in the sea" - a sea of assimilation, a sea of ignorance, a sea of alienation from Knesset Yisrael, a sea of disconnection from roots. And you - who are capable of moving the carriage out of the mud, you who could lend a hand, you who could uplift the nation, you who could be inculcating values - you offer song?!

This is the real question. If you understand the situation - and there is no reason or excuse not to - then you hear the cry that emanates from every part of the country, from every corner of the globe, expressed in the spiritual dangers surrounding us and threatening us on every side. Someone who cares knows what is going on, and once he knows he must ask himself: What significance does this knowledge have for me? To what extent does it cause me pain? To what extent do I identify with world Jewry, in fasting and prayer? To what extent is my spiritual world structured such that Knesset Yisrael and its dangers are on one side and I, with my considerations and private plans, am on the other?

Like Esther, we will all have to ask ourselves the question when the time comes: We could have saved; did we? What will be our answer then? More importantly, what is our answer today? [Based on a *sicha* delivered on Purim 5744 Summarized by Aviad Hacohen Translated by Kaeren Fish and Ronnie Ziegler]



BS"D

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Ignoring the Obvious, Acknowledging the Concealed
Although Purim and Pesach commemorate two miraculous events in our history, the nature of these miracles is entirely different. Purim celebrates the prototype of a hidden miracle, whereas the events surrounding yetzias Mitzrayim were an open

manifestation of Hashem's involvement in this world. Amalek appears at both of these pivotal moments. Following yetzias Mitzrayim it was Amalek that attacked Bnei Yisrael. Centuries later it was Haman, the descendant of Amalek, that set the stage for the miracle of Purim. Why does Amalek play a role in both the concealed and revealed miracles that occurred?

After krias Yam Suf, the entire world was in awe of the manifestation of Hashem's Presence. A detailed description of the reactions of the inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael and the surrounding areas of Edom and Moav are related in Az Yashir. Amalek was well aware of the magnitude of krias Yam Suf, and nevertheless attacked Hashem's people. This reaction can only be understood if Amalek convinced themselves that what appeared miraculous was in fact only coincidental; that it "just happened" that the sea split at the precise moment that it did, that it was "just bad luck" that the sea returned to its original position just as the Egyptians were pursuing the Jews. One who wants to deny the obvious Hand of Hashem in this world will convince oneself of anything no matter how absurd it is.

Chazal highlight this attribute of Amalek by focusing on the phrase "הָרַק בְּדָרְךָ" - Amalek "happened" to attack. The philosophy of Amalek was that everything just happens, and as such there was no need to fear Hashem and they could be victorious over the Jewish people in battle if they would have good luck. This worldview of Amalek was the essence of Haman's plan to annihilate Klal Yisrael. The method he used to choose a date to execute his plan was bizarre - he simply drew lots, which is the ultimate game of chance. Chazal once again notice the significance of happenstance in Amalek and Haman's mindset. When Mordechai related to Esther the tragedy that was about to befall her people, the Megilla invokes the phrase describing the events "הָרַק אֲשֶׁר" - just happened" as a hint that the descendant of the original "הָרַק אֲשֶׁר" had appeared. What is our response to a worldview that views everything as just chance and luck?

Immediately prior to Amalek's attack, the Jewish people had questioned if Hashem is really in our midst. After seeing the ten makkos and krias Yam Suf and after eating manna that fell from heaven, how can such a question have even be asked? To ignore the obvious yad Hashem was an invitation for Amalek to attack.

What is the way to correct this failing that brought about Amalek? Hashem would perform a miracle that really could be attributed to chance. There would not be any rivers turning to blood, and no sea splitting would save the Jewish people from Haman. Rather, palace intrigue and "coincidental" events would combine to deliver the Jewish people from Amalek's descendant. What would be our reaction to such events? Would we attribute it to good luck that Esther just happened to be in the right place at the right time? No - Klal Yisrael rose to the challenge. Led by Mordechai and Esther, the Jewish people recognized the Hand of Hashem that had been revealed, which was no less significant than the miraculous Hand of Hashem that orchestrated krias Yam Suf.

The two yomim tovim of Purim and Pesach complement one another in commemorating Hashem's protection and redemption of His people. Whether displayed in an open miraculous manner or disguised by natural events, Hashem's love is apparent to all who search for it. The parshiyos that deal with the Mishkan highlight Hashem's Presence that is clear for all to see. Miracles such as the light of the menorah that remained lit and the bread of the shulchan that retained its warmth were commonplace as long as Hashem's presence hovered over the mishkan and subsequently the Beis Hamikdash. Tragically, this miraculous existence would come to an end. During galus we live in a world resembling Purim rather than Pesach. And yet, we continue to sense Hashem's Presence, albeit in a hidden way, throughout our long exile. We look forward to the day that Hashem's Presence will once again be clear for all to see. When the Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt and the philosophy of Amalek will cease to exist, the entire world will acknowledge the yad Hashem in its full glory.

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subject: Rav Frand - He Was Among His People

Parshas Tetzaveh

He Was Among His People

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1239 The Case of the

Woman Who Slept Through Licht Bentching Friday Night. Good Shabbos!

Aharon Became Kohen Gadol Because he was from Among the People

In this week's parsha, Aharon and his descendants are chosen to be the Kohanim: "Now you bring near to yourself Aharon, your brother, and his sons with him, from among the Children of Israel – Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, Elazar and Isamar, the sons of Aharon – to minister to Me." (Shemos 28:1) Forevermore, Aharon's descendants became the Kohanim, who did the Avodah in the Beis HaMikdash. They duchen (administer the Priestly Blessings). In the future, im yirtzeh Hashem, they will again do the Avodah in the future Beis HaMikdash. They will receive the matnos kehunah (priestly gifts). They are a privileged class.

The Medrash Rabbah connects the above-cited pasuk with the pasuk in Tehillim, "Had your Torah not been my preoccupation, then I would have perished in my affliction." (119:92) and makes the following comment: When the Ribono shel Olam told Moshe to make Aharon and his descendants the Kohanim, it bothered Moshe (that he and his descendants were not given this privilege). Hashem told Moshe, "The Torah had been Mine and I gave it to you. If not for the Torah, the world would be destroyed." In other words, He told Moshe: "What is your problem that Aharon and his sons have the Kehuna? I had the Torah and I gave it to you!"

This Medrash is difficult on two points. First, it seems strange that Moshe was upset by hearing that Aharon and his sons would be the Kohanim. Why was he upset? Was he jealous of his brother? That is impossible to accept. If Aharon was not jealous of Moshe Rabbeinu, his younger brother, because of his own sterling middos (Shemos 4:14), certainly Moshe would not be jealous of his older brother. Moshe, too, had sterling middos! So what was Moshe upset about?

Second, how did the Ribono shel Olam try to mollify Moshe Rabbeinu? If Moshe Rabbeinu was, for some reason, bothered about the Kehuna, how does it help that Hashem had given him the Torah? What does one thing have to do with the other? Furthermore, the Torah was not given just to Moshe, it was given to the entire nation! Rav Avraham Buxbaum, who is a rabbi in Miami, Florida, sent to me a Torah thought from the Yismach Moshe, Rav Moshe Teitelbaum (1759-1841; grandfather

of Rav Yoel Teitelbaum, the ‘Satmer Rebbe’ zt”l (1887-1979)). He says a beautiful pshat in this Medrash, explaining what was bothering Moshe Rabbeinu, and what Hasehm’s response was that “I gave you the Torah.” The Yismach Moshe writes that Moshe Rabbeinu was not jealous of Aharon. He was perfectly happy for Aharon and his children to be the Kohanim. Rather, Moshe Rabbeinu was bothered that “If You did not make me the Kohen Gadol, it must be because there is something wrong with me.” Moshe was perturbed: “What is my problem?” Truth be told, Moshe Rabbeinu had a closer relationship with the Ribono shel Olam than Aharon did. No human being in the history of the world had a closer relationship with Hashem than Moshe Rabbeinu (perhaps excluding Adam). Logic would have dictated that the role of “Ambassador of Hashem” (which is the role played by the Kohanim, and by the Kohen Gadol in particular) should be given to the person on Earth with whom Hashem is closest. “I am not jealous of my brother, but still, I wish to know, what did I do wrong?”

The Yismach Moshe says that Hashem answered Moshe: There is in fact nothing wrong with you – and that itself is the reason why you cannot be the Kohen Gadol! It is because you are too perfect!

We need to understand the role the Kohanim played in the time of the Beis HaMikdash. Who did the average Jew relate to? He brought his terumos and matnos kehunah to the Kohen, but more importantly, if he did something wrong, if he failed to fulfill a mitzvas asei (positive commandment), to whom did he go to bring a Korbon Olah? If he unintentionally desecrated the Shabbos, he needed to bring a Korbon Chatas. Who did the Jews go to when they needed someone to handle their ritual requirements? They went to the Kohen. Therefore, the Kohen must be the type of person who understands that people make mistakes. Sometimes people stumble. Sometimes people succumb to their passions. Sometimes people sin. The Kohen must appreciate that. Moshe Rabbeinu did not have that quality in his resume. Aharon HaKohen did have that quality in his resume because he himself stumbled in connection with the Egel Hazahav (Golden Calf).

Aharon knew what it meant to sin and he knew what it meant to have to bring an atonement. He knew what it meant to have to do teshuva (repenting). Therefore,

Aharon was more fit for the job of Kohen Gadol because he could say, “I have been there and done that.” Therefore, says the Yismach Moshe, this is what the Ribono shel Olam answered to Moshe: “I gave you the Torah.” Moshe, you can understand that a person may relate to some things and not to others. The Gemara (Shabbos 86b) records that when Moshe ascended Heavenward (to receive the Torah) the Malachei Hashares (Ministering Angels) asked Hashem, “What is someone born to a woman doing among us?” In other words, they asked, “Why are You giving the Torah to people?” The malachim claimed that the Holy Torah should stay in Heaven “here with us, with the Holy Angels.” Hashem told Moshe to respond to this challenge.

Moshe answered: What does it say in the Torah? It says “I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out of Egypt.” He turned to the malachim and asked, “Were you ever in Mitzraim?” What else is written in the Torah? “You shall have no other gods before Me.” Moshe turned to the malachim and asked, “Do you malachim have a Yetzer Harah for Avodah Zarah? Do you dwell among the nations who still worship Avodah Zarah?” “Do you ever do work that you need to rest on Shabbos?” Etc., etc. The point of the Gemara is that Moshe told the Malachei Hashares – You malachim do not need a Torah. We need a Torah because we are human beings. We have passions and evil inclinations. We have all the things that make us human. We are the people who need Torah. You angels cannot relate to a Torah.

The Yismach Moshe writes that this is what the Ribono shel Olam said to Moshe Rabbeinu. I gave you the Torah because you are a human being and you can relate to it. You can say about the Torah’s mitzvos, “Yes. We have been there and done that. They all relate to us.”

Therefore, you, Moshe Rabbeinu, should comprehend my rationale for giving the Kehuna to Aharon. Aharon needs to deal with people who did aveiros. He knows how to handle that, because he himself sinned. Just as you convinced the malachim that you deserve the Torah because it relates to you, so too, you should understand that Aharon has the job of being mechaper for those who did aveiros because kapara is something to which he relates.

Using his approach here, the Yismach Moshe also explains a Rashi in Parshas Shemini (Vayikra 9:7). Rashi

asks, why does Moshe Rabbeinu need to tell Aharon “Approach the Mizbayach?” Rashi answers that Aharon was embarrassed and afraid to approach the Mizbayach. He feared – I have shamed myself with the aveira of the Egel Hazahav and now you want me to be the Kohen Gadol? Moshe responded to him: “Why are you embarrassed? That is why you were chosen! (l’Kach nivcharta).”

This fits in beautifully with what the Yismach Moshe wrote. This is EXACTLY why Aharon was chosen to be the Kohen Gadol – BECAUSE HE HAD SINNED! He was experienced and knowledgeable about stumbling and doing teshuva. He was chosen for that reason. It is nothing to be embarrassed about.

Finally, the Yismach Moshe says, with this insight, we can better understand the pasuk at the beginning of Parshas Tetzaveh, quoted above: “Now you, bring near to yourself Aharon, your brother, and his sons with him, from among the Children of Israel...”. Aharon and his sons were chosen precisely because they were AMONG THE PEOPLE. They are very human. They know how to do teshuva, so they are appropriate for the job of accepting korbonos in the Beis HaMikdash. Moshe, you are on a different level. You have your own job – but the Kehuna is not it. The Kehuna requires an understanding of failing and possessing a Yetzer Hara, of being human. That is why Aharon was chosen to be Kohen Gadol.

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subject: S P E C I A L S - Purim: The Hidden Miracle
For the week ending 4 March 2023 / 11 Adar 5783

Purim: The Hidden Miracle

by Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov used to tell the story of a poor man who once dreamt that if he would travel to a certain bridge in Vienna, he would discover a great treasure. After having the same dream two or three times in a row, he began the long trek by foot. Arriving in Vienna after many months, he noted that the bridge was patrolled by foot-guards and as a result he could dig at the base of the bridge only for a few hours in the middle of the night and had to laboriously cover up his work before the morning. After digging for months, he was finally apprehended. When the guard accused him of espionage, the Jew responded that he was simply following the dream he had in Warsaw. The guard laughed derisively: "How stupid you are to follow your dream. I too had a dream that under a pauper's hut in Warsaw I would find a buried treasure. Do you think I would ever bother to make such a foolish trip?"

And lo and behold, the pauper went home to his own town, his own house, his own bed, and discovered that the treasure was there all the time. He didn't have to go anywhere. All he had to do was look and he would find. Rav Nachman commonly offered no explicit moral for his parables. He used to say that even if you learn nothing from the story, at least you enjoy the story. Here, however, the moral here is clear.

We spend our lives and energies looking for excitement, fulfillment, happiness and closeness to Hashem. We somehow dream that it exists elsewhere, wherever we are

not! If we only had another job, another family, another community, then.... This story reminds us that happiness and fulfillment must come from within, that Hashem is close to us in whatever situation we find ourselves, and if all we do is look — we will find. If we don't look, however, the wealth that is literally at our feet will never be discovered. We will live and we will die never realizing who we were and never discovering who we could have been.

And, as Rabbi Zusha taught us long ago that although there is no tragedy in our not being as great as our forefather Avraham, how infinitely sad it is if we never become our essential selves.

The message of this story is important the entire year but has special connection to Purim. We often seek the Hand of Hashem in the flamboyant, the dramatic, the miraculous or the supernatural — that which is far removed from the mundane experiences of our daily lives. Purim, which is a nes nistar (a hidden, non-supernatural miracle, which could be misunderstood as a series of coincidences) occurring in galut (a time of concealment), through a heroine whose very name connotes concealment (Esther), teaches us to see Hashem and feel His loving embrace in whatever place we are. And by reminding us that surface appearances do not correspond with inner realities, ultimate purposes, and final meanings, Purim should impel all of us to search for that hidden treasure within, the core reality that underlies the superficial. And if we search, we shall surely find.

from: **The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust**

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subject: Covenant and Conversation

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

TETZAVEH

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Beethoven rose each morning at dawn and made himself coffee. He was fastidious about this: each cup had to be made with exactly sixty beans, which he counted out each time. He would then sit at his desk and compose until 2:00 p.m. or 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon. Subsequently he would go for a long walk, taking with him a pencil and some sheets of music paper to record any ideas that came to him on the way. Each night after supper he would have

a beer, smoke a pipe, and go to bed early, 10:00 p.m. at the latest.

Anthony Trollope who as his day job worked for the Post Office, paid a groom to wake him every day at 5:00 a.m. By 5:30 a.m. he would be at his desk, and he then proceeded to write for exactly three hours, working against the clock to produce 250 words each quarter-hour. Through this method, he wrote forty-seven novels, many of them three volumes in length, as well as sixteen other books. If he finished a novel before the day's three hours were over, he would immediately take a fresh piece of paper and begin the next.

Immanuel Kant, the most brilliant philosopher of modern times, was famous for his routine. As Heinrich Heine put it, "Getting up, drinking coffee, writing, giving lectures, eating, taking a walk, everything had its set time, and the neighbours knew precisely that the time was 3:30 p.m. when Kant stepped outside his door with his grey coat and the Spanish stick in his hand."

These details, together with more than 150 other examples drawn from the great philosophers, artists, composers, and writers come from a book by Mason Currey entitled Daily Rituals: How Great Minds Make Time, Find Inspiration, and Get to Work.^[1] The book's point is simple. Most creative people have daily rituals. These form the soil in which the seeds of their invention grow.

In some cases they deliberately took on jobs they did not need to do, simply to establish structure and routine in their lives. A typical example was the poet Wallace Stevens, who took a position as an insurance lawyer at the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company where he worked until his death. He said that having a job was one of the best things that could happen to him because "it introduces discipline and regularity into one's life."

Note the paradox. These were all innovators, pioneers, ground-breakers, trail-blazers, who formulated new ideas, originated new forms of expression, did things no one had done before in quite that way. They broke the mould. They changed the landscape. They ventured into the unknown.

Yet their daily lives were the opposite: ritualised and routine. One could even call them boring. Why so? Because – the saying is famous, though we don't know who first said it – genius is one per cent inspiration, ninety-nine per cent perspiration. The paradigm-shifting

scientific discovery, the path-breaking research, the wildly successful new product, the brilliant novel, the award-winning film, are almost always the result of many years of long hours and attention to detail. Being creative involves hard work.

The ancient Hebrew word for hard work is *avodah*. It is also the word that means “serving God.” What applies in the arts, sciences, business, and industry, applies equally to the life of the spirit. Achieving any form of spiritual growth requires sustained effort and daily rituals.

Hence the remarkable aggadic passage in which various Sages put forward their idea of *klal gadol baTorah*, “the great principle of the Torah.” Ben Azzai says it is the verse, “This is the book of the chronicles of man: On the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God” (Gen. 5:1). Ben Zoma says that there is a more embracing principle, “Listen, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut. 6:4). Ben Nannas says there is a yet more embracing principle: “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). Ben Pazzi says we find a more embracing principle still. He quotes a verse from this parsha: “One sheep shall be offered in the morning, and a second in the afternoon” (Ex. 29:39) – or, as we might say nowadays, *Shacharit*, *Mincha*, and *Maariv*. In a word: “routine.” The passage concludes: The law follows Ben Pazzi.[2]

The meaning of Ben Pazzi’s statement is clear: all the high ideals in the world – the human person as God’s image, belief in God’s unity, and the love of neighbour – count for little until they are turned into habits of action that become habits of the heart. We can all recall moments of insight when we had a great idea, a transformative thought, the glimpse of a project that could change our lives. A day, a week, or a year later the thought has been forgotten or become a distant memory, at best a might-have-been.

The people who change the world, whether in small or epic ways, are those who turn peak experiences into daily routines, who know that the details matter, and who have developed the discipline of hard work, sustained over time.

Judaism’s greatness is that it takes high ideals and exalted visions – image of God, faith in God, love of neighbour – and turns them into patterns of behaviour. *Halacha* (Jewish law) involves a set of routines that – like those of the great creative minds – reconfigures the brain, giving

discipline to our lives and changing the way we feel, think, and act.

Much of Judaism must seem to outsiders, and sometimes to insiders also, boring, prosaic, mundane, repetitive, routine, obsessed with details, and bereft for the most part of drama or inspiration. Yet that is precisely what writing the novel, composing the symphony, directing the film, perfecting the killer app, or building a billion-dollar business is, most of the time. It is a matter of hard work, focused attention, and daily rituals. That is where all sustainable greatness comes from.

We have developed in the West a strange view of religious experience: that it’s what overwhelms you when something happens completely outside the run of normal experience. You climb a mountain and look down. You are miraculously saved from danger. You find yourself part of a vast and cheering crowd. It’s how the German Lutheran theologian Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) defined “the holy”: as a mystery (*mysterium*) both terrifying (*tremendum*) and fascinating (*fascinans*). You are awed by the presence of something vast. We have all had such experiences.

But that is all they are: experiences. They linger in the memory, but they are not part of everyday life. They are not woven into the texture of our character. They do not affect what we do or achieve or become. Judaism is about changing us so that we become creative artists whose greatest creation is our own life.[3] And that needs daily rituals: *Shacharit*, *Minchah*, *Ma’ariv*, the food we eat, the way we behave at work or in the home, the choreography of holiness which is the special contribution of the priestly dimension of Judaism, set out in this week’s parsha and throughout the book of Leviticus.

These rituals have an effect. We now know through PET and fMRI scans that repeated spiritual exercise reconfigures the brain. It gives us inner resilience. It makes us more grateful. It gives us a sense of basic trust in the source of our being. It shapes our identity, the way we act and talk and think. Ritual is to spiritual greatness what practice is to a tennis player, daily writing disciplines are to a novelist, and reading company accounts are to Warren Buffett. They are the precondition of high achievement. Serving God is *avodah*, which means hard work. If you seek sudden inspiration, then work at it every day for a year or a lifetime. That is how it comes. As a famous golfer is said to have said when

asked for the secret of his success: “I was just lucky. But the funny thing is that the harder I practise, the luckier I become.” The more you seek spiritual heights, the more you need the ritual and routine of halacha, the Jewish “way” to God.

[1] Mason Currey, Daily Rituals (New York: Knopf, 2013).

[2] The passage is cited in the introduction to the commentary HaKotev on Ein Yaakov, the collected aggadic passages of the Talmud. It is also quoted by Maharal in Netivot Olam, Ahavat Re'a 1.

[3] A point made by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik in his book Halakhic Man.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/perceptions-5781-tetzaveh-purim/#:~:text=But%20non-walled%20cities%20will%20actually%20get%20to%20read,he%20in%20the%20story%20of%20Purim%20as%20well%3A>

Parshas Tetzaveh and Purim

Posted on February 23, 2021 (5781) By

Rabbi Pinchas Winston | Series: Perceptions

Shabbos Night

MOST OF the Jewish world will celebrate Purim on Erev Shabbos, the 14th of Adar. Shabbos itself however will be Purim for Jews living in cities that were walled back at the time of Yehoshua bin Nun. They won’t celebrate Purim on Shabbos only because the rabbis didn’t want people carrying their Megillas Esther on Shabbos in places lacking an eiruv. So, instead, the people of Jerusalem will read the Megillah at the same time everyone else does, on Thursday night and Friday morning. They will also give their Matanos L’Evyonim on Friday, because as the Talmud says, it is connected to the reading of the Megillah. But that is all the Purim they will celebrate before Shabbos, on which they will add “Al HaNissim” in their bentsching since it is technically Purim for them.

On Sunday, they will finally have their “Mishteh,” before which they will have to fulfill their obligation of Mishloach Manos. They will not say “Al HaNissim” however in their prayers or bentsching because it will already be the 16th of Adar, and no longer Purim. Hence the name “Purim Meshulash,” which basically means “Purim in three parts.” So, for all intents-and-purposes, Shabbos is normal. In Jerusalem, they will read “And Amalek came” for Maftir, and the Haftarah of Parashas Zachor again. But non-walled cities will actually get to read the regular Haftarah of Tetzaveh, which only happens every couple of years.

Nevertheless, there is a connection to Purim in the parsha as well. A central part of the parsha deals with the clothing of the

Kohen Gadol, and that shows up here in the story of Purim as well:

“When he showed the riches of his glorious—kevod—kingdom and the honor of his majestic—tifferes—greatness” (Esther 1:4).

Rebi Yosi bar Chanina said: “This teaches that [Achashveros] wore the priestly clothing. [Proof is how the same terms are written with regard to the priestly vestments, as] it is written here: “The riches of his glorious—kevod—kingdom and the honor of his majestic—tifferes—greatness.” And it is written there [regarding the priestly clothing]: “For glory—kavod—and for majesty—tifferes” (Shemos 28:2). (Megillah 12a) Was Achashveros just being a despotic boor by taunting a downtrodden people whose loyalty he needed? Or was something else more profound going on, and tied to this week’s parsha, that even he didn’t realize or understand?

Shabbos Day

CLOTHES MAKE the man, or so the expression goes. But when it comes to the bigdei kehunah, it was a lot more than that. The clothing itself was part of the service of the Kohen Gadol, part of the process of interceding on behalf of Klal Yisroel, as the Talmud explains:

Why was the section [in the Torah that discusses] offerings juxtaposed to the section [that discusses the] priestly clothing? To tell you that just as offerings effect atonement, so too, priestly vestments effect atonement. The kesones—tunic—atonement for bloodshed... The michnsayim—trousers—atonement for forbidden sexual relations... The mitznefes—mitre—atonement for the arrogant... The avneit—belt—atonement for thought of the heart... The choshen—breastplate—of the High Priest atones for improper judgments... The ephod of the High Priest atones for idol worship... The me'il—robe—of the High Priest atones for malicious speech... The tzitz—diadem—of the High Priest atones for brazenness... (Zevachim 88b)

Thus, even though the clothing of the Kohen Gadol was made to honor his office, it was also made to allow the Kohen Gadol to intercede on behalf of the Jewish people. While the Kohen Gadol wore his unique and holy clothing, atonement occurred for the Jewish people on an hour-to-hour basis. It wasn’t something to rely upon when committing a sin, but it was something to fall back on if sin happened to occur.

But that was only while a worthy Kohen Gadol wore them. The clothing itself was ineffective if worn by an unworthy kohen, and how much more so by a boorish gentile king.

But then again, was this not the message that the king was in fact sending to his Jewish constituents? “Eat, drink, and be merry!” Achashveros insisted, “since you’ve lost your special status, and can no longer atone for your sins, like the rest of us! So blend in and become part of the Persian family!” It’s a good thing that Achashveros didn’t learn Talmud, especially Tractate Megillah. That’s where it says:

Regarding Avraham it is written: “And he said, ‘God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?’” (Bereishis 15:8). Avraham said before The Holy One, Blessed Is He: “Master of the Universe! Perhaps, God forbid, the Jewish people will sin before You, and You will do to them as You did to the generation of the Flood, and as You did to the generation of the Dispersion”

God told him: “No, I will not do that.”

Avraham then said before Him: “Master of the Universe! How will I know this?”

God told him: “Take Me a heifer of three years old (Bereishis 15:9).”

With this, God intimated to Avraham that even if his descendants will sin, they will be able to achieve atonement through sacrificing offerings.

Avraham said before Him: “Master of the Universe! This works out well when the Temple is standing, and offerings can be brought to achieve atonement. But when the Temple will no longer be standing, what will become of them?”

God answered him: “I have already established for them the order of offerings. Whenever they read those portions, I will deem it as if they sacrificed an offering before Me, and I will pardon them for all of their iniquities.” (Megilah 31b)

It was God’s failsafe plan for the Jewish people, effective anywhere in the world and in every generation. It’s the reason why we’re still here, and Achashveros is not. The Torah wasn’t kidding when it referred to the entire Jewish people as “a nation of kohanim.”

Seudas Shlishis

PERHAPS THIS is the most important message of the story of Purim, and the clothing of the Kohen Gadol. It was also what drove Mordechai to put everything on the line, and take the incredible chances he did to spark the redemption.

It is the lack of understanding of this message that is responsible for the general spiritual malaise of the Jewish people today, and why so few people are driven today to do what Mordechai did back then. It doesn’t matter that it was a different period of history, and that prophets still remained then and not today.

He’s the same God He has always been, running His world by the same Torah He always has, and we are the same people He chose back at the beginning, over three millennia ago. Not as much has changed as we think it has, just how distant our minds have become from our hearts.

If our hearts were closer to our minds, then we’d feel how God is right there, despite the hester panim. We’d believe that, though our world seems to have drifted so far away from a Torah one, that God took this into account when He first gave Torah to the Jewish people. Just as the mitzvos are as relevant today as ever, so is the Torah’s narrative, of which we also are a part.

And not only is our period of history, with all of its modern insanities, part of the Torah narrative for redemption, it is the end of it. The redemption it predicted millennia ago is in our time. When the prophets, thousands of years ago, made predictions about the End-of-Days, they saw us. The only question they may have had was how many of us will see Him... Him behind the politics, Him behind the crises, and Him behind the successes and “natural” miracles.

Wherever the Jewish people go, God goes with them.

Whenever they are ready to do teshuva, He is ready to receive it. Whenever we need to atone, the means always exist. We just have to recall this, believe it, and then take advantage of it.

Melave Malkah

ONE OF the most heart-wrenching pictures I ever saw was of a curtain of shul Aron HaKodesh over the door of a gas chamber. It was the Nazi’s way of mocking the Jewish people one last time as they passed under it on their way to certain death. Was this a cruel joke by God, or His way of telling His people that their deaths were to Him like a Sefer Torah being returned to its Aron HaKodesh? Did God use the Nazi’s obsessive desire to degrade Jews to express His “obsessive” love of His people, and the eternal reward He had prepared for them?

Unquestionably the latter.

Similarly, when the very unholy Achashveros donned the very holy vestments of the Kohen Gadol, he had his own message in mind. But THE King just took advantage of that to send His own message to the Jewish people: You may not see Me, but I am here with you. You may not believe in Me, but I still believe in you. When you’re ready to come home, I will be waiting for you.

Perhaps this is another reason for the absence of Moshe’s name in this week’s parsha. In fact, Moshe Rabbeinu probably had no problem writing himself out of it, because it put the entire spotlight on God and His relationship with His people...without any intermediary. On the surface of it, Parashas Tetzaveh and Purim may seem worlds apart. But below that surface, they teach and encourage the very same message about God and His people.

Purim Samayach.

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiiy@theyeshiva.net> via www-theysihiva.ccsend.com

reply-to: info@theyeshiva.net

subject: Prepare for Purim With Rabbi YY!

February 29, 2012

Futile Revenge of a Bird

When G-d Told Haman: "Even I Could Not Destroy the Jews!"
On Anti-Antisemitism & Jewish Eternity

A fascinating Midrash compares Haman to a foolish bird attempting to take revenge on an ocean that destroyed its nest. This deceptively simple fable tells about the secret behind Anti-

Semitism, the inner conflict within the Jewish psyche, and the meaning of Jewish history. A journey into the heart of what it means to be a Jew.

The Frog

A lonely frog, desperate for any form of company, telephoned the Psychic Hotline to find out what the future has in store for him.

His Personal Psychic Advisor advises him, "You are going to meet a beautiful young girl who will want to know everything about you."

The frog is thrilled and says, "This is great! Where will I meet her, at work? At a party?"

"No," says the psychic, "in a biology class."

The Bird and the Sea

As our brothers and sisters in Ukraine face brutal uncertainty, let us pay heed to a Midrash about the Purim story which occurred in present-day Iran, in ancient Persia.

It is a fascinating and enigmatic Midrash [1] describing the plot of Haman, the villain of the Purim story:

"What is a suitable parable for the vicious Haman? To what can he be compared? To a bird which made its nest on the shore of the sea, and then the sea came and swept away the nest. The bird said: I will not budge from here until the sea becomes dry land, and the dry land becomes the sea. What did the bird do? It took some water from the sea in its mouth and dropped it on dry land, and took dirt from the land and dropped it into the sea. Its friend came and stood alongside. He said to the bird: You ill-fated, hapless one! How do you ever hope to succeed in destroying the sea?"

"Similarly, G-d said to Haman the Evil One: Fool of fools! I myself planned to destroy the Jewish people and was unsuccessful, as it is written [2] 'He intended to destroy them [and would have] were it not that Moses, His chosen one, stood before Him in the breach to return His wrath from destroying,' and you, Haman, think you will be able to decimate and annihilate them?! I swear by your life, that your head will be in place of theirs; they will be saved and you will be hanged."

At first glance, the Midrash is saying that the annihilation of the Jews is as impossible and ludicrous as the draining of the ocean, beak-full by beak-full, by a bird. The bird is so blinded by its anger at the sea for destroying its nest, that it does not realize the absurdity of its quest.

Yet the Midrash is perplexing.

1) The role of a metaphor in Midrashic and Talmudic literature is to explain and clarify a difficult concept, an abstract idea. What is the concept being clarified via this metaphor of a bird attempting to drain an ocean? What component of the Haman story begs for enlightenment to be understood only via this metaphor?

2) In the Midrashic fable, the sea first sweeps away the bird's nest, arousing its quest for revenge. What is the paralleled

meaning of this sequence of events? What did the Jewish people – compared to the sea – do to Haman – compared to the bird -- to trigger his desire to destroy them? Is the Midrash suggesting that we, the Jews, were guilty of his hatred [3]?

3) The bird was quite foolish in its strategy to dry an ocean drop by drop. It is a ludicrous proposition. Haman -- the viceroy of the greatest empire of the time, who had the full cooperation of the mightiest man in the world, King Achashveirosh – had a well-thought-out plan, and it came dangerously close to fruition. Why then is he compared to the bird trying to drain the ocean, defined as the "fool of fools?"

4) The Midrash relates that "G-d said to Haman the Evil One: Fool of fools! I myself planned to destroy the Jewish people and was unsuccessful." How can G-d be "unsuccessful?" Who can possibly stop G-d from executing His plans?

Why the Jews?

In truth, this simple fable in the Midrash captures the secret behind Anti-Semitism, the inner conflict within the Jewish psyche, and the ultimate meaning of the long Jewish story. In this Midrashic metaphor, we are invited on a journey into the heart of what it means to be a Jew and how to ensure Jewish continuity. [4].

What was it that really perturbed Haman about the Jewish people? What was it about the Jews that struck such a deep chord in so many Haman's throughout the ages, including during our very own times? "Why the Jews?" is one of the oldest mysteries of civilization. Are we really that different? The Midrash, in its own inimitable way, gives us perspective. Like that little desperate bird trying to take revenge for a nest which the sea swept away, Haman felt that as long as the Jews were alive, the nest he attempted to build would be washed away.

One millennium before Haman was born, at the foot of a lone mountain, the Jewish people received a gift that transformed their destiny and changed the landscape of human civilization. It was an experience that imbued Jewish life with the nobility of transcendence, the majesty of Divine ethics, and the grandeur of holiness. The gift of the Torah inculcated Jewish life with great moral and spiritual responsibility, but it simultaneously bestowed upon the Jewish heart, the Jewish home, the Jewish family, and the Jewish community a piece of heaven, a glow of eternity.

But what is heaven for one person may spell hell for another; piano lessons for a 4-year-old Mozart is a paradise, while for another child the lessons may be a living purgatory. Heaven for the Jews was hell for the Hamans of the world. If G-d exists, then the moral law prevails, and there must be limits to power and self-aggrandizement. If G-d exists the barbarian must vanquish himself. Haman felt that two diametrically opposing and mutually exclusive powers were competing for the heart of

humanity. If his “nest” was to take root, the Jews must be obliterated [5].

2300 years later this notion was captured by a contemporary Haman, Adolf Hitler. He remarked that “The Jews have inflicted two wounds on the world: Circumcision for the body and conscience for the soul. I come to free mankind from their shackles.”

But Haman, the avid student of history [6], knew that this was no simple task. He had seen many powerful and seemingly permanent “nests” washed away by the Jewish “sea.” He knew what had happened to Pharaoh, Sisera, Goliath, Sancheirav, and Nevuchadnezzar; how they each attempted to “drain the sea,” to eradicate the Jew once and for all and how they each ended up eradicated and forgotten themselves. Like that poor frog that ends up having its moment of glory in a biology class, all of these cultures and civilizations today appear only in history classes...

Yet the Jew still remained. Not only in Wikipedia, but in real life as well. What was the secret of this “sea?”

It is here where Haman invented an ingenious strategy. Haman believed that he had the “final solution” which had eluded all of his predecessors; he knew how to solve the “Jewish problem,” this time for real. And that was by taking beak-full after beak-full of water and dumping it on dry land.

Haman’s Final Solution

The key to this puzzle lies in reflecting on another Talmudic metaphor concerning “sea” vs. “dry land.”

The Talmud relates the following story [7]:

The Evil [Roman] Empire had prohibited Torah study. Pappus the son of Yehuda came and found Rabbi Akiva making large public gatherings and teaching Torah. Pappus said to him: Akiva! Aren’t you afraid of the authorities? And Rabbi Akiva replied: I will give you a parable.

A fox is walking along a river. He sees the fish frantically scurrying from one place to another.

He says to them: From whom are you running?

From the nets and traps of the fishermen.

Why don’t you come up to the dry land, and we will live happily together, just as our forefathers did!

The fish replied: Is it really you whom they call the cleverest of animals? You are not clever, rather a fool! If we are afraid in the place of our vitality, how much more so in the place of our death!

Rabbi Akiva concluded: If the life is tough as we are sitting and studying Torah, about which it is written “It is our life and the length of our days,” how much worse it will be if we cease to study Torah.

The Torah – Rabbi Akiva is saying -- is to the Jew what the water is to the fish. It is his necessary habitat, the source of his vitality, it is where he can live, breathe, thrive, and be most creative. Like a fish washed up ashore, the Jewish soul

deprived of Torah, will struggle to find real endurable meaning on “dry land,” in an environment unsuitable for his spiritual DNA to flourish and express itself fully. He, like the fish, will flip and flop, experiment with different ideologies and lifestyles, desperately attempting to find solace for his aching soul. He may become a Darwinist, a Marxist, a Bundist, a Buddhist, or what have you, failing to realize that by his essential nature he must remain in his water.

Haman, therefore, understood that what he had to do was dry up the sea; sever the relationship between the Jewish people and their Torah. His goal must be to antiquate the Torah, to teach the Jews how to become “land animals.” He must invite them, in the words of the fox, to “live together with us in peace as our forefathers did.” Once the fish was out of the water, it would be vulnerable to destruction.

And the time seemed ripe for this endeavor.

Out of the Waters

The Talmud asks [8], why was annihilation decreed on the Jews of that generation? Because they enjoyed the feast of that wicked man (Ahashveirosh, the Persian king).” As the book of Esther relates in its opening chapter, the Persian monarch threw a major feast, and the Jews of Shushan, the capital of the Persian Empire, enjoyed the feast.

Note the words: The Talmud does not state that they were guilty of eating non-kosher food (if so, it would not make a difference who was serving the meal – a wicked or a righteous person, nor is death the penalty for eating non-kosher food), in fact, the Talmud relates [9] that there was a designated kosher section at the king’s feast. The issue was that “they enjoyed the feast of that wicked man.” It was not the food; it was the psychological transformation of the Jewish psyche: Their dignity and sense of inner worth did not stem from their own soul and identity; it came from being invited to the Persian “White House,” from rubbing shoulders with the Iranian celebrities and from having their photos appearing on the front pages of “The Shushan Times.” As they took their places among the Persians, Medians, Babylonians, Chaldeans and the other nationalities at the feast, they felt that they finally “made it.” After seventy years of exile, they had set themselves free from the “Jewish stereotype,” they were now a member of equal standing in the family of nations at Ahashveirosh’s table [10].

Alas, the fish left the water and it was given a royal welcome! Everybody was cheering for the fish which finally made it out of its “prison,” the fish was flipping and flopping to demonstrate its excitement. But inside – it was dying...

This, then, was Haman’s strategy: Dry up the sea, take the Jews out of the water, introduce them to dry land, and they will become vulnerable to destruction.

So “G-d said to Haman: Fool of fools! I myself planned to destroy them and was not able to do so... and you, Haman, thought you would be able to decimate and annihilate them?!” This divine response captures the essence of Jewish existence. G-d Himself, so to speak, could not destroy the Jews. Why? Because the Jew is one with G-d at his or her very core. that innate connection and oneness can never be obliterated because it is intrinsic and essential. Just as no one can destroy G-d, no one can destroy His people, as the prophet Malachi says, “I G-d have not changed, and you have not been destroyed.” G-d says: Even I cannot destroy them, because at their core they are Divine; it is not something that anyone can change. It is who they are. The Jew is the manifestation of the Divine light in this world.

The relationship between the Jew and Torah is innate, intrinsic, and essential, and it can never be severed; only eclipsed. Unlike the fish, the Jew can never really leave the water. What occurred at Sinai was that Torah had become part of the very DNA of the Jew; he can love it, he can hate it, but he can’t ignore it. He can embrace it, he can run from it, but he cannot stop being defined by it, if sometimes only negatively.

Jewish DNA

The Anti-Semites of the world never loved secular, modern, and assimilated Jews any more than religious and observant Jews. They acutely felt that the Jewishness of the Jew is embedded into his or her very essence, no matter the amount of “nose jobs” or “soul jobs” he or she undergoes.

And paradoxically, this very truth has become our very source of eternal life. Since the Jewish people can never sever their relationship from Torah, our sea can never dry, and our existence can never be obliterated.

This is what G-d is telling Haman: Even I have tried... When the Jews sinned, I planned to destroy them, but I could not because My relationship with them proved deeper than all of our “issues” with each other. It is like the relationship between parents and children: Parents sometimes harbor deep resentment toward the behavior of children who make their lives miserable. Sometimes a parent has been tempted to write-off a child, to stop helping him, even to stop loving him. But they can’t... The inner bond proves far more powerful. “A kind is a kind,” a child is a child.

Haman’s strategy was brilliant, but he failed to understand “vos eiz a yid,” what is a Jew. He did not realize that Torah to the Jew is what the piano was to Mozart, and even more. The fish will never fully leave the water, and the Jews will never die. And this gives us all perspective on how we ought to view and embrace each Jew, no matter who he or she is. If he was Jewish enough for Hitler to send him to the gas chambers he is Jewish enough for me to love him, embrace him and be there for him. We need to be here for each other unconditionally, and we ought to remember that as we become more saturated with

Yiddishkeit and Torah, we bring light and salvation to each of our brothers and sisters.

(This essay is based on an address by the Lubavitcher Rebbe on Purim 5720 (1960) and Purim 5724 (1964)).

[1] Esther Rabbah 7:10. [2] Psalms 106:23. [3] The Yafah Anaf to Midrash ibid. suggests that it was Haman’s revenge against the war of the Jews against his great-great-grand father Amalek. Yet this begs the question: Amalek, too, launched an unprovoked war against the Jewish people when they left Egypt. [4] For alternate explanations for this Midrash, on the Kabbalistic and Chassidic realm, see Or Hatorah Megilas Esther; Sefer Hamamarim 5629 p.87; Pelech HaRimon Shemos Megilas Esther pp. 370-379. In essence, this essay, based on Sichas Purim 5764, presents the Kabbalistic explanation in relevant language. [5] This is the depth behind the famous Talmudic metaphor about the “pit” and the “mound” (Megilah 14a), explained at length in Sichas Purim 5725, translated and discussed in a previous Purim essay. [6] See Talmud Megilah 13b. [7] Berachos 61b. [8] Megilah 12a. [9] Megilah ibid. Esther Rabah 2:13. [10] See at length the Sichos of Purim 5722, 5726, 5727 (1962, 1966, 1967). Likkutei Sichos vol. 31 pp. 170-176 and references noted there. This is one of the most prevalent themes in the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s Purim Farbrengens (gatherings) over the years, as he fought for the soul of American and world Jewry.

from: Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

date: Mar 2, 2023, 7:03 PM

subject: Tidbits • Parashas Tetzaveh - Zachor

REMINDERS

We fulfill the positive Torah commandment of Zechiras M’chiyas Amalek, to remember to eradicate Amalek, through the special krias haTorah of Parashas Zachor (Devarim 25:17-19). The baal korei must have in mind to be motzi the participants in this mitzvah through his leining. One should understand the meaning of the words of these pesukim (see Parashah section below.) Many congregations say yotzros for Parashas Zachor during shacharis. Two sifrei Torah are taken out. The haftarah for Parashas Zachor is read. Av Harachamim is omitted.

Men who inadvertently missed the leining may be yotzei with the krias hatorah of Purim morning (in this case one should advise the baal korei to be motzi him in that mitzvah). The obligation of women in this mitzvah is a matter of dispute. The minhag in many communities is for women to try to attend Shul for the kriah. Many communities hold a special keriah for women who could not attend Shul, although some advise against this practice. If a woman doesn’t hear the leining, many poskim advise that she can simply read the pesukim from a chumash.

The final opportunity for Kiddush Levana is Monday, Purim night, March 6th at 11:41 PM Eastern Standard Time.

Shushan Purim is this coming Wednesday, March 8th. There is an inyan of simchah on Shushan Purim as well. Tachanun and Lamenatzei'ach are omitted.

Daf Yomi: Erev Shabbos is Nazir 39. Daf Yerushalmi: Pe'ah 16.

Mishnah Yomis: Erev Shabbos is Eiruvin 8:7-8.

Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rabbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to do the same!

“וְנַעֲתַתִּי שָׁמָה לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל” “And I shall meet there with the Bnei Yisrael” (Shemos 29:44)

On learning of Haman's decree to annihilate the Jewish people, Mordechai immediately donned a sackcloth and led a teshuvah movement. However, because of the sackcloth, Mordechai was not permitted to enter the royal courtyard. Wouldn't Mordechai want to have a presence at the royal palace at this critical period to try and intercede? Furthermore, due to Mordechai's sackcloth, his communication with Esther was restricted to sending messages via Hassoch. Shouldn't he have removed his sackcloth briefly to speak with Esther directly?

Rav Yitzchok Feigelstock zt"l explains that Mordechai was demonstrating that all such decrees are a direct message from Heaven calling on the Jewish people to change. Therefore, the only true path to salvation is heeding the call to teshuvah. Political strategy, power plays and protekzia would be entirely ineffective without Klal Yisrael's heartfelt prayers and return to Hashem. In fact, only once Mordechai confirmed that the nation was engaged in tefillah and doing teshuvah could Esther undertake her hishtadlus and invite Haman to the fateful parties that led to the reversal of the decree and the festival of Purim. The pasuk refers to the Mishkan as a “place of meeting” for us and Hashem. Rav Shmuel Berenbaum zt"l quotes Rav Chatzkel Levenstein zt"l: The Chofetz Chaim had a special room where he read the distressing letters he received from world Jewry. In this dedicated room he would cry out to Hashem, beseeching Hashem to have mercy on his fellow brethren. Although we lack the actual Mishkan, we do have our places of tefillah. We must establish our places of prayer as the true place to seek help, as Hashem always hears our prayers.

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date: Mar 2, 2023, 11:07 PM

subject: Rabbi Reisman's Chumash Shiur

5782 Topic – Why Moshe Rabbeinu's does not appear in the Parsha

As you know, in Parshas Tetzaveh Moshe Rabbeinu's name does not appear. In the Shach Al Hatorah found also in the Nachal Kedumim which is the Chida on the Parsha, they write the lesson from the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu's name does not appear in the Parsha is (שלא יקלו עצמן). A person has to be careful what he says about himself. Don't say negative things about yourself. Moshe Rabbeinu shouldn't have said it and because he said it it came true and he ended up having a Parsha without his name in it.

(שלא יקלו עצמן) It is a common theme that we know that Al Tiftach Peh L'satan. Don't say things that are not proper. Moshe Rabbeinu said as is found in 32:32 (מַחְנֵנִי נָא, מִסְפְּרָךְ), erase me from Your Sefer. He shouldn't have said that, and therefore, that is a lesson. It is a lesson that we know. We try not to say negative things.

Let me share with you a question that I have. Rav Chaim Kanievsky has a Sefer on things that are Segulos for remembering. As you know, Rav Chaim has an incredible memory and he has knowledge of Kol Hatorah Kulo which is really incredible. He writes in one of his Kuntersin things that are helpful to a person that a person should be able to remember. One of the things is that a person should say I have a terrible memory and I always forget everything. A person should say that. Can you imagine that a person should say that I have a terrible memory and I always forget everything. That is my best recollection of what he said.

My question is a person should say that I always forget everything? Isn't that terrible? It is one of the biggest Tzar that a Yid has the pain of learning and forgetting. It is very painful when we learn and we forget. We know it is that way and it is part of the Tzar of Limud Hatorah the fact that we tend to forget things.

So why is it that when it comes to such a thing Rav Chaim says that it is a good thing to say it, that a person should say it. Why isn't that Al Tiftach Peh L'satan? I don't know. But right now I will do anything to be able to remember things a little bit better and certainly if Rav Chaim says it is a good thing then I am going to say it. That I should have Siyata Dish'maya that I should remember things B'ezras Hashem. At least I will remember to say this particular thing.

3 – Topic – A Vort directly on a Posuk in the Parsha

Let us start with the first word 27:20 (הַצְבָּא). The Parsha begins with (הַצְבָּא) and you should command and as you know it is very unusual. Besides that it doesn't say Moshe Rabbeinu's name but okay there is a reason for that. Besides that it doesn't say Moshe Rabbeinu's name why (הַצְבָּא), it should say Tzav Es Bnei Yisroel. What is the (הַצְבָּא)?

There is a Klei Yakar in Parshas Ki Sisa 30:23 which also has the word (הַצְבָּא) and the Klei Yakar refers back to our Posuk in Parshas Tetzaveh that Moshe Rabbeinu is the source of miracles. Moshe Rabbeinu is the source of things that have

Nitzchios. What Moshe Rabbeinu did had permanence. (אָמֵן תְּצִוָּה) when it says (הִשְׁאֵל) it means it should come from you, it should be something that comes from you. From you meaning from your Kochos Hanefesh. Moshe Rabbeinu did the Nitzchios.

(הִשְׁאֵל) says the Klein Yakar the Parsha of the Menorah is in Parshas Emor it is not in this week's Parsha to light the Menorah. What is in this week's Parsha the Ner Hamaravi (נֵר הַמָּרָבֵי). It says one Ner. Over there it says Neiros and here it says Ner. Here it is the Ner Hamaravi. (אָמֵן תְּצִוָּה) Moshe Rabbeinu with your Kochos Hanefesh you command that it be lit. it should come from you the lighting of the Ner Hamaravi. When it says (הִשְׁאֵל) it shows something of a permanence.

What is Gevaldig is that in next week's Parsha Parshas Ki Sisa when it talks about the Shemen it says 30:23 (קְרֵב, לְכָה אָמֵן וְאַשְׁר). What does the (הִשְׁאֵל) have to do? Regarding the Shemen Hamishcha, the Gemara in Horayos which we are learning in the Mishmar on Daf 11 says that the Shemen Hamishcha lasted forever. They used it for Keilim, they used it for people, they used for everything and it stayed the complete jug of Shemen Hamishcha and it lasted forever. (הִשְׁאֵל) shows permanence.

I happen to have seen the Abarbanel says it there as well and he says that just like the Man that was put away by Moshe Rabbeinu had permanence, had Nitzchios forever, this was also forever. Ad Kan this is what the Klei Yakar says and he brings a few more times when it says (הִשְׁאֵל).

According to this now I understand. We have the Mesorah which I don't know if it comes from a Gemara or from a Medrash but there are a number of Achronim among them the Ohr Hachaim Hakadoesh who say that Moshe Rabbeinu didn't go into Eretz Yisrael because if he had built the Beis Hamikdash it would never have been Chorev. The Ribono Shel Olam wanted that when there would be a time of punishment the punishment should fall on Eitzim and Avanim, stones and wood and not on people, and therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu didn't go in because if he would have gone in and built the Beis Hamikdash it would have been permanent.

How do you that if Moshe Rabbeinu built it would have been permanent? That is the idea of the Klei Yakar. Whatever Moshe Rabbeinu does has Nitzchios. Moshe Rabbeinu's Torah is Nitzchi. Whatever Moshe Rabbeinu brought to Klal Yisrael personally is Nitzchi and that is the idea of (הִשְׁאֵל). It is a code word, it should come from you. Tzav Es Bnei Yisrael is to Klal Yisrael and you are a member of Klal Yisrael. (הִשְׁאֵל) when it personally comes from you that is something else.

Zechiras Amalek: An Ancient Enemy, A Modern Foe

By Michal Horowitz on Mar 02, 2023 08:01 am

This Shabbos we will read Parshas Tetzaveh. The sedra speaks of the bigdei kehunah (the priestly vestments), further details regarding the Mishkan, as well as the mizbayach ha'zahav (golden altar).

A second sefer Torah will also be taken out from the aron kodesh, and from this we will read from Sefer Devarim 25:17-19, to fulfill the mitzvas asay d'Oraisa of זְכָר אֶת אָשָׁר-עֲשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלָק, Remember that which Amalek did to you on the way as you were leaving Egypt. At the end of his life, Moshe exhorts us to remember and never forget – לֹא תִשְׁכַּח – the attack of Amalek against the tired, the weary, the weak ones at the rear. Moshe is referring to the Amalekite attack against the newly freed Israelites slaves forty years prior, when the nation was but a few weeks away from the Exodus (Shemos 17:8-16). With great savagery and daring, Amalek – a nation that does not fear G-d – had no qualms or fears about launching an attack against Am Yisrael.

Why is this Torah portion publicly read every year the Shabbos before Purim, when men and women (and many children) all go to hear these ancient words of Torah read aloud, in fulfillment of the mitzvah of 'zachor' 'Thou shall remember'? The wicked oppressor, Haman, who stood up to destroy, kill and obliterate all Jews (Esther 3:13) was known as הָמָן הַאֲגָגִי (Esther 8:3); Haman, a descendant of Agag, King of Amalek. Hence, before we read of the salvation on Purim with Mikrah Megillah, we fulfill the mitzvah of Zechiras Amalek; not only do we remember Amalek, the grandson of Eisav (Bereishis 36:12), and Haman ha'rasha m'zerah Amalek, but we must remember every Amalek in every generation that rises to destroy us.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav zt'l, teaches in the name of his grandfather Rav Chaim Brisker zt'l, that Amalek is anyone in every generation who rises up to destroy us.

This past Yom Rishon 5 Adar 5783 (Sunday 2/26/23), 21 year-old Hillel Menachem Yaniv HY"D and his brother, 19 year-old Yagel Yaakov Yaniv HY"D, were shot at point blank range while driving through the Arab village of Huwara on Route 60, the primary north-south traffic artery in Judea and Samaria.

The two brothers were hesder yeshiva students, and were killed while driving back to their yeshivot from their home in Har Bracha.

Hillel, a student in Kiryat Shemona in northern Israel, had recently completed his military service in the Israeli navy, and was set to resume his yeshiva studies. Yagel Yaakov, a student at the Givat Olga hesder yeshiva, had been helping his yeshiva open up a branch in Tirat HaCarmel, and was set to begin his pre-induction process ahead of his formal draft into the army. Hours after the attack, the boys' mother sent a recorded voice message to the youth of Har Bracha. "I spoke with my children

from: contact@michalhorowitz.com

date: Mar 2, 2023, 11:03 AM

subject: [New post] Zechiras Amalek: An Ancient Enemy, A Modern Foe

and you're also like my children...I want to tell you something," she said. "We received a slap from HKB" H, a powerful slap. I don't know why. We're trying to find the good things and the chessed – that beforehand we had a family Shabbat, that we had good conversations with them yesterday, that we took a family photo. HKB" H sends chassadim (kindnesses), He sent us – together with the painful blow – chassadim. We have a hole, a huge hole in our hearts. Nothing will close this hole – not construction [of a new yishuv], not protests, not anything. And family smachot will just be a bandaid. The hole will remain. We'll learn to live with it, and live with it b'simcha and continue, and draw strength from you and our children. If you ask what to do, increase your limud Torah – both of them were on the way to limud Torah. Do meaningful service in the army. There are no words, there are no words that can comfort, that can express...we're depending on you."

זכור את אַשְׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמּוֹק, בָּרוּךְ בָּצָאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם – Remember what Amalek did to you... תַּמְמִית אֶת-זִכָּר עַמּוֹק, מִמְּנַחַת הַשְׁמִימִים; לֹא, תַּשְׁחַט, erase the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens do not forget.

Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z'l writes, "It is remarkable (to note) that biblical Hebrew has no word for history. Modern Hebrew had to borrow a word: historia. The key word of the Hebrew Bible is not history but memory. Zachor, the command to remember, occurs time and again in the Torah. And with equal insistence, there is the command not to forget... The word zachor in one or other of its forms occurs no fewer than 169 times in the Hebrew Bible... Jews were to become a people of memory... The Hebrew verb zachor signifies more than a consciousness of the past. Rabbi Lord Jakovobits pointed out that the word yizkor, the name given to the traditional Jewish prayer for the deceased, is in the future tense... We remember for the sake of the future, and for life.

"There is a profound difference between history and memory. History is his story – an event that happened sometime to someone else. Memory is my story – something that happened to me and is part of who I am. History is information.

Memory, by contrast, is part of identity. I can study the history of other people's cultures, and civilizations. They deepen my knowledge and broaden my horizons. But they do not make a claim to me. They are the past as past. Memory is past as present, as it lives on in me. Without memory there can be no identity... Our nation has a continuing identity to the extent that it can remember where it came from and who its ancestors were...

"Our covenant is essentially linked to education and memory, for the journey is long – longer than many lifetimes – and only when each generation hands on to the next what it has heard and learned and prayed for does the journey continue; and only if the journey continues is history redeemed... To be a Jew is to

know that over and above history is the task of memory" (The Jonathan Sacks Haggada, Maggid Books, p.37-41). This Shabbos Parshas Zachor, as we prepare to celebrate the simcha of Purim, let us first fulfill the mitzvah of zachor: thou shall remember. We remember the past to build for the future: זִכְרֵי מוֹת עַזְלָם, בִּינוֹ שְׁנוֹת דָּר-נוֹר; שָׁאַל אָבִיךָ וְנִזְכַּר – Remember the days of old, understand (and build) the years from generation to generation; ask your father and he will tell you, your elder and he will say to you (Devarim 32:7). לְזֹכֶר נְשָׂמַת הַקּוֹדְשִׁים וְהַתּוֹרִים שִׁמְרָה נְפָשָׁמָה עַל קְדוּשַׁת הָאָרֶץ וְעַל קְדוּשַׁת הַשָּׁם. יְהִי זָכָר בָּרוּךְ

Pshuto Shel Mikra in Tetzaveh

Rav Immanuel Bernstein <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>

Thu, Mar 2, 6:59 AM (18 hours ago)

PSHUTO SHEL MIKRA

From the Teachings of Rav Yehuda Copperman zt"l

PARSHAT TETZAVEH

Halachah LeSha'ah and Halachah L'Dorot

וְכַפֵּר אַהֲרֹן עַל קָרְבָּנוֹתָיו אַחֲת בְּשָׁנָה בְּפֶרְשָׁרִים אַחֲת בְּשָׁנָה בְּפֶרְשָׁרִים עַל יְלִדּוֹתֵיכֶם קָדְשָׁקְדָשִׁים הַוְאָה לְהַ

Aharon shall atone on its corners once a year, from the blood of the sin-offering of the atonements once a year he shall atone on it for your generations, it is holy of holies to Hashem. (Shemot 30:10) In the end of Parshat Tetzaveh, the Torah describes the dedication and halachot pertaining to the Mizbach HaZahav, the golden mizbeach on which ketoret was offered. The final pasuk of that parshah informs us that one time a year, this Mizbeach had an additional function, as well; for once a year blood from korbanot offered on Yom Kippur would be sprinkled on its corners.

A Vessel of the Mishkan in Parshat Tetzaveh

Before we get involved in a specific discussion regarding the problems of this concluding pasuk, it is appropriate to quote the words of the Sefer ha-Or who discusses why the sugya of the Mizbach HaKetoret appears at all in Parshat Tetzaveh, which deals mainly with the bigdei kehunah, and not in Parshat Terumah, which is the parshah that deals with the Mishkan and its keilim (30:1, s.v. mizbeyach):

This Mizbeach was not mentioned together with the other keilim in Parshat Terumah, for the purpose of this kli was not to cause the Shechinah to dwell among us, as was the case with the other keilim, concerning which it says (Shemot 25:8-9) "שְׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם. כָּל אֲשֶׁר אָנֹי" — I will dwell in their midst. In accordance with all that I am showing you, the form of the Mishkan and the form of its vessels." [1] Nor was its purpose to cause the revealed vision (מְרַאַת הַבָּנָה) of Hashem's Glory to descend, which was the case with the korbanot, concerning which it says (ibid. 29:43) "וְנִעֲשֶׂת יְשָׁאָה לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" — I will meet there with Bnei Yisrael," [2] and Moshe similarly attested [3] (Vayikra 9:6) "זֶה תְּצִדְקֵר אֲשֶׁר אָזְהָה הִ' פְּעֻשָׂו" — this is the matter that Hashem has commanded you to do, and the Glory of Hashem will appear to you." Rather, the role of this Mizbeach was to give honor to Hashem after He accepts with favor the avodah of His people (through) the morning and afternoon korbanot, [4] and to seek His Countenance ("לְשַׁחַד פְּנֵיו") through the offering of ketoret, as it says (Divrei HaYamim 1, 16:29)

“**קְבֹוד שְׁמוֹ שָׂא מְנֻקָּה וּבָאוֹ לְגִנְיוּי**” — Give unto Hashem the Glory of His Name, take up an offering[5] and come before Him.” With these words, written in his characteristic brief style, the Seforno lays out before us three distinct functions (“three dinim”) that are related to the Mishkan and its components, as well as an explanation of their distribution between the Parshiyot of Terumah and Tetzaveh. These parshiyot describe what is required in order to attain the following objectives:

To cause the Shechinah to reside among Bnei Yisrael, through the Mishkan and its keilim.

To bring about the vision of kevod Hashem, through the morning and afternoon korbanot.

To give honor to Hashem and seek His Countenance, through the ketoret.

This final avodah takes place on the inner “golden” Mizbeach in the Mishkan, as opposed to the offering of korbanot that takes place on the outer “copper” Mizbeach in the Courtyard. Both of these are called “mizbeach,” although they have different functions, and even act in different “directions.” The outer Mizbeach serves to bring the Shechinah “downward,” while the inner Mizbeach sends an expression of honor to Hashem “upward,” of account of Him accepting our avodah, as well as to seek His Countenance. The key to understanding the differing functions of the two mizbechot lies primarily with observing the place in the Torah where they appear.

Some Difficulties in the Pasuk

Having discussed briefly the function of the inner Mizbeach, as explained by the Seforno, we now come to the main topic of this chapter, of the relationship between halachah lescha’ah and halachah l’dorot — a halachah that was only relevant at a particular time in history and halachah as it applies for all generations — and how both are addressed by the Torah.

When we consider the concluding pasuk of the parshah, we see that there are a number of difficulties that may be raised.

Kefeilut (Redundancy) — The pasuk states the halachah of “**אחת בשנה**” — twice.

Kefeilut (Redundancy) — The pasuk describes the avodah — “**ככפר**” — twice.

The word “**לדורותיכם**” — for your generations” is only mentioned in the second half of the pasuk , not in the first half.

Two Yesodot

The Sar HaTorah, R’ Meir Simcha HaKohen of Dvinsk, in his peirush Meshech Chochmah, suggests a unique way of understanding this pasuk and its component parts. In order to fully understand his approach, written in his characteristic terse style, let us first preface with two yesodot (foundations).

The first yesod comes from the beit midrash of the Vilna Gaon, who explains that the seder termed “The Yom Kippur Avodah,” which is described in Parshat Acharei-Mot, exists in two capacities:

Halachah LeSha’ah — The halachah as it applied to Aharon (and perhaps Elazar as well) in the Midbar, when he was able to enter the Kodesh HaKodashim at any time he wanted, as long as he did so accompanied by the Seder Ha’Avodah as described in Parshat Acharei-Mot.

Halachah L’Dorot — The halachah as it applies to the Kohen Gadol in subsequent generations, namely, that he may only enter the Kodesh HaKodashim once a year, on Yom Kippur.

The second yesod comes from the beit midrash of R’ Eliyahu Mizrahi, the foremost among the mefarshim to Rashi’s peirush on the Torah. The Mizrahi (Devarim 25:4 s.v. disho) tells us that we must always pay careful attention to whether the verb precedes the noun, or the noun precedes the verb, in every pasuk that we encounter.

If the verb comes first, then it attains a wider scope. For example, the Torah says (Devarim 25:4) “**לَا תִּמְצַס שׂוֹר בְּגִישָׁן**” — you shall not muzzle an ox while it threshes.” Since the words “**lo tachsom**” came first, the meaning is expanded to denote “**מִכֹּל מָקוֹם**” — under any circumstances.”[6] In this instance, the words “**lo tachsom**” constitute a message in their own right, comprised of a subject (Bnei Yisrael), a verb (muzzling) and an object (prior to being qualified — anything!). Hence, there is no need to restrict the scope of the prohibition to the final words “**bedisho**” — while it threshes.”

However, if the noun is mentioned before the verb, the scope of the verb is limited to the noun. For example, the Torah says regarding shemittah (Vayikra 25:5) “**אַתָּה סְפִית קָצִיר לֹא תִּקְצֹר**” — the wild growth of your harvest you shall not reap.” Here, the use of the noun is specific, restricting the prohibition of reaping exclusively to “the wild growth of your harvest,” and we cannot detach it from the verb and say “**mikol makom**.” The reason for this is that the words, “the wild growth of your harvest” are not in themselves a sentence, as they are missing a verb, and therefore can only be seen as being connected to the verb that follows — “**lo tiktzor**.”

The Meshech Chochmah’s Explanation

Based on the yesodot that we just discussed, let us now present the words of the Meshech Chochmah, which will provide us with a magnificent answer to the dual references in our pasuk (Vayikra 16:3, s.v. bezot):

This is the meaning of the pasuk in Parshat Tetzaveh, which begins “**וְכַפֵּר אֲנָרָן עַל קָרְבָּנִי אַחַת בָּשָׁנָה**” — Aharon shall atone on its corners once a year,” which obligates (every Kohen Gadol) to atone (at least) once a year, including Aharon. However, Aharon specifically has the possibility of performing this avodah more than once a year, any time he wishes and feels himself able to do so,[7] while once a year for him is obligatory.

However, in subsequent generations (“**לדורותיכם**”), the pasuk says “**מִזְמָרָן (דַּוְקָא)**” — from the blood of the sin-offering of the atonements he shall atone,” for then it is possible only once a year and no more. (The reason for this is) since l’dorot there is no Cloud present,[8] he may only enter “once a year.” Therefore it says “**אַחַת בָּשָׁנָה יִכְפֵּר**” — once a year he shall atone,”[9] where the critical emphasis is that this may be done only once, not twice.

Let us summarize the way the Meshech Chochmah reads our pasuk as follows:

“**וְכַפֵּר (לֹא הַגְּבָלָה) אֲנָרָן (דַּוְקָא) עַל קָרְבָּנִי אַחַת בָּשָׁנָה (לִפְחוֹת, בְּכָהָן גָּדוֹל לְדוֹרוֹת)**”

And Aharon (specifically) shall atone (without restrictions) on its corners once a year (at least). By contrast, regarding a Kohen Gadol l’dorot,) from the blood of the sin-offering of the atonements, once a year (only) he shall atone on it for your generations.

And so, our pasuk describes the halachah both for Aharon, the Kohen Gadol lescha’ah, as well as for the Kohen Gadol l’dorot, regarding the Seder Ha’Avodah of Yom Kippur!

[1] These pesukim teach us that the goal of the Mishkan and its keilim were to cause the Shechinah to dwell among us.

[2] This pasuk appears at the end of the perek that discusses the outer Mizbeach on which the korbanot were offered.

[3] In the parshah of the korbanot of the Miluim Days, which served as a prelude to korbanot l'dorot. The Seforno has identified two separate functions within the Mishkan. The first is bringing the Shechinah to dwell among Bnei Yisrael, which was brought about through the Mishkan and its keilim. And, the second is causing the revealed vision of Kevod Hashem to descend, which was achieved through the korbanot. The Mizbeach Hakotoret, however, fulfills neither of these roles.

[4] These were the morning and afternoon tamid offerings, whose procedure has already been detailed in perek 29.

[5] The Seforno explains that in our context, the offering (minchah) is the ketoret.

[6] This includes even before the ox has started threshing; see Gemara Bava Metzia 90b.

[7] Accompanied by the Seder Ha'Avodah described in Parshat Acharei-Mot.

[8] That is, throughout the course of the year, in the way that it was for the duration of our time in the Midbar, so that the Mishkan on any given day had the kedushah that the Beit Hamikdash l'dorot only had on Yom Kippur.

[9] And not “**וְכִפֵּר אַחֲת בָּשָׁנָה** — he shall atone once a year,” in which case we would be able to explain the word “**כִּפֵּר**” as extending beyond the scope of the “**אַחֲת בָּשָׁנָה**.”

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 subject: Purim Misconceptions

Purim Misconceptions

Rabbi Avraham Rosenthal

“Rabbi, can you clear up a few issues I have?”

“What is bothering you, Mr. Fried?”

“Well, there are several aspects of Purim that I really have difficulty understanding. For example, the idea of getting drunk is very abhorrent to me. Is there really an obligation to get stone-drunk? It seems to me that it should be totally forbidden!”

IS THERE A MITZVAH TO GET DRUNK?

“This is an excellent point. The source of the mitzvah of drinking on Purim is a Gemara (Megillah 7B): Said Rava: A person is obligated ‘livsumei’ on Purim, until he does not know the difference between ‘curse Haman’ and ‘bless Mordechai.’”

“What does ‘livsumei’ mean?”

“There is disagreement among the Rishonim and the poskim. There are two basic groups, that of Rashi and that of Kol Bo. First, let us discuss the opinion of Rashi and those who understand the Gemara like him. They explain that ‘livsumei’ means ‘to get drunk.’

“Although they interpret ‘livsumei’ the same way, they disagree regarding the continuation of the Gemara. The Gemara relates an enigmatic story. Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira ate a Purim Seudah together. Rabbah got drunk and slaughtered Rabbi Zeira. The next day, Rabbah davened, and brought Rabbi Zeira back to life. The following year, Rabbah again invited Rabbi Zeira to the Purim Seudah, but Rabbi Zeira refused, saying that miracles do not happen all the time.

“Some Rishonim (Rabbeinu Efraim, Meiri, and others) contend that although we are to understand ‘livsumei’ to mean ‘get drunk,’ and Chazal indeed instituted that one is to get drunk on Purim, this halacha is no longer in force. This is alluded to by the fact that the Gemara quotes this incident, showing the harmful effects of such activities.

“On the other hand, others are of the opinion that the reason the Gemara quoted the story was to indicate that Rava’s statement, ‘a person is obligated to get drunk,’ is to be taken literally. Also, from the story, itself, we see that this is the halacha, since Rabbah invited Rabbi Zeira to join him again the following year. (Pri Chadash 695:2) In addition, the Chasam Sofer points out that Rava, who was the individual who originally made the statement that ‘one is required to get drunk on Purim...’ lived after Rabbah, and after the story took place, Rava still expressed the halacha as he did. Therefore, it is difficult to say that the Gemara wished to indicate through the story that this is not the halacha.”

“Wow! There really is a halachic basis for getting drunk. What is the other opinion that you mentioned?”

“There is another group of Rishonim who hold that it is not possible that Chazal obligated us to become drunk, as this is a tremendous sin and may cause one to do serious transgressions. Therefore, they explain that the word ‘livsumei’ means ‘to be happy.’ This is accomplished by drinking more than one is accustomed to. (Beis Yosef 695 quoting Orchos Chaim, Rokeach 239:11, Rema 695:2 quoting Kol Bo) In fact, the author of the Yesod v’Shoresh HaOvadah (12:7) points out that the correct Hebrew word for ‘to get drunk,’ is ‘lehishtaker.’ Chazal do not use this word; rather, ‘livsumei.’”

“But, I do not understand, Rabbi. According to this opinion that one should not get drunk, how does one reach the stage of ‘until he does not know the difference between ‘curse Haman’ and ‘bless Mordechai’?’”

“There are several explanations to this. Some contend that one should drink enough that he cannot say all the verses of the piyut, ‘boruch Mordechai, arur Haman, barucha Esther, arurah Zeresh, baruchim kol hatzdkim, arurim kol harasha’im.’ (Tosafos, Ran) Others explain that ‘not knowing the difference’ refers to not being able to calculate the gematria of ‘boruch Mordechai’ and ‘arur Haman’ and to realize that they are the same. (Rabbeinu Yeruchom) And there is a third explanation, that one should not be able to remember which verse is first, ‘boruch Mordechai’ or ‘arur Haman.’ (Kaf HaChaim 495:16)

“The common thread among these explanations is that one does not need to get stone-drunk to fulfill the mitzvah. Rather, it is sufficient for him to drink enough that he lacks clarity of thought.”

“I am very grateful to you for setting me straight. I now see that there is halachic basis for getting drunk. Practically speaking, though, what should one do?”

“The poskim are also in disagreement. The Kaf HaChaim (16) quotes the Arizal that one should get drunk. Rav Yaakov Emden (in his Siddur) tells us that his father, the Chacham Tzvi, would get drunk. The Shulchan Aruch (695) simply quotes Rava’s statement as stated in the Gemara, and the Rema understands this to mean that one should get drunk. He adds however, ‘some say that one should not get drunk, rather drink more than he is accustomed to and go to sleep, and since he sleeps, he does not know the difference between baruch Mordechai and arur Haman.’ The Mishnah Berurah (5) quotes the Pri Megadim that this is the proper thing to do.”

“But if that is the opinion of the Rema, Pri Megadim and Mishnah Berurah, why do so many great people get plastered?”

“The Biur Halacha (695, s.v. ad d’lo yada) quotes the Chayei Adam, that ‘since the miracle took place because of wine, therefore, the Sages obligated a person to get drunk, and, minimally, to drink more than he is accustomed to... However, one who knows himself -- that he will be lax with one of the mitzvos such as washing hands or bircas hamazon, or he will not daven...or he will act with too much levity -- should not get drunk, and all of his actions should be for the sake of Heaven.’ In addition, Rav Wolbe zt”l wrote a similar, if not more explicit thought in Alei Shor (vol. II, page 468): ‘A very great person, who is sure of himself, may get totally drunk on Purim. For us small people, small in learning and in Divine service, it is sufficient on Purim to be more happy (l’hisbaseim) than we are accustomed to be, and we do not need to get drunk. We should be prepared to protect the greatness of the day so that it does not, chas veshalom, turn into a day of frivolity and idleness.’

“It is clear from this that it all depends on the person. If a person will get closer to Hashem by drinking and there is no concern of laxity in mitzvos, he may do so. Otherwise, it is probably not a good idea.”

D.U.I.

“As long as we are on the topic of drinking, I have another question. I thought that after drinking intoxicating beverages, one may not daven. Yet, I see many people on Purim davening, when they are clearly drunk. Can you clarify for me the halachos of davening under the influence?”

“Actually, the Rema (99:3) justifies the practice of davening even after having drunk intoxicating beverages. He reasons that since our wines are weak, people daven even after drinking, and, especially, if one davens from a siddur, he does not have to be concerned about being a little tipsy.”

“However, since the Mishnah Berurah (17) quotes the Pri Megadim that this is only a justification and it is not proper to follow this practice, let us review the relevant halachos. Depending on how much one imbibed, there are three levels of being drunk: 1) one who can still speak respectfully to an important person, 2) one who cannot speak respectfully to an important person, and 3) one who has reached the drunkenness of Lot, or he is totally oblivious to what is going on around him.”

“One who drank a revi’is (2.9 oz. or 86.4 ml.) or more of wine, ideally, should not daven until the effects of the alcohol wear off. With other intoxicating beverages, the amount is that which would affect him to the same degree as a revi’is of wine. This is true, even if he is accustomed to drinking alcoholic beverages and does not easily become intoxicated. However, if he did, in fact, daven, he has fulfilled his obligation.”

“If one realizes that by waiting until the effects of the alcohol wear off the time of davening will have passed, he is allowed to daven. However, it is recommended that he daven from a siddur.”

“All of the above applies to a person who is lucid enough to speak respectfully to an important person. However, if one is intoxicated to the point where he cannot do so, it is absolutely forbidden for him to daven, even if he will miss the time of davening.”

“If, while in that situation, he does daven, his tefillah is considered an abomination, and upon becoming sober, he must daven again. And if, by the time he became sober, the time of davening has passed, he must make up that tefillah, after davening the next tefillah.”

“These halachos apply also to Kri’as Shema and its brachos. However, if one sees that he will miss the time of Shema while waiting for the effects of the alcohol to dissipate, he should say Shema, even if he is not lucid enough to speak respectfully to an important person. However, he should omit the brachos. If one read Shema while inebriated, and he sobers up before the time of Shema ends, he should read it again.”

“Can someone who is drunk recite bircas hamazon?”

“The Mishnah Berurah (185:6) rules that, ideally, one should recite bircas hamazon before reaching the situation where he cannot speak respectfully to an important person. However, if he has already reached that stage, he should, nevertheless, recite bircas hamazon.”

“The same applies to reciting brachos in general. If one cannot speak respectfully to an important person, ideally he should not recite any brachos. Nevertheless, if he already became obligated to recite the bracha, for example, if he ate and is required to recite a bracha acharonah, he should recite the bracha, even in this situation.”

(Mishnah Berurah 99:11)

“You said that there is a third category of being drunk, where one is totally oblivious of his surroundings. How is this situation different?”

“This is the most stringent category. A person who has reached this level of drunkenness is viewed in halacha as being a ‘shoteh,’ an idiot, and is exempt from all mitzvos. He may not daven or recite any brachos, and if he does so, he has not fulfilled his obligation.”

“Therefore, when he becomes sober, he must daven again.”

“Can someone who is drunk be counted as part of a minyan?”

“According to the Mishnah Berurah (99:10), even before one has reached the stage of the drunkenness of Lot, he should not be counted as part of a minyan.” (See also Ishei Yisrael 22:24, footnote 81 for other opinions)

LASHON HARA AND PURIM SHPIELS

“Another issue I wanted to discuss with you is the practice of belittling people during Purim shpiels. Why is this permitted?”

“There is a line of reasoning that tries to justify this practice based on a Tosafos in Gemara Succah (45A). The Mishnah describes the service in the Beis Hamikdash on Hoshanah Rabbah. The Mishnah concludes with, ‘from the hand of the children, they grab their lulavim and eat their esrogim.’ Tosafos, quoting Rashi, explains that the adults would take and eat the lulavim and esrogim of the children. Although it is normally forbidden to steal from children, in this case, it was permitted, because it was their custom and it was assumed that everyone forgave each other.”

“Tosafos uses this concept to justify an apparently common medieval practice of entertaining the bride and groom at their wedding by having a mock jousting match.”

"I hope that people in our day and age don't try to reinstate the practice."

"Agreed. During the match, the combatants would sometimes tear each other's clothing and damage each other's horses. Tosafos rule that since their custom was to do so for the simcha of chassan and kallah, they are exempt from paying damages.

"This concept, that acts of simcha are, under certain circumstances, exempt from the laws of damages, also applies to Purim. The Rema (695:2) maintains that if someone injures his friend because of simchas Purim, he is exempt. This is used as a basis to permit Purim shpiels.

"However, in truth, this is no basis whatsoever, as this leniency is only applicable when there is no intent to cause harm and it is not done out of hatred. In addition, the Mishnah Berurah (695:13) contends that there is a difference between minimal and significant damage, and the custom is not to exempt one who causes significant damage. Many Purim shpiels include lashon hara and motzi shem ra, and cause embarrassment to the subject of the joke."

"I heard of one yeshivah where the Rosh Yeshivah and Rebeim review the shpiel beforehand to determine that the jibes are not too harsh. This seems to indicate that they are willing to forego their honor. Does this permit the lashon hara?"

"I do not think so. And in this case, the lashon hara is worse, because the subject of the jokes is a talmid chocham. Even though the Gemara says that if a talmid chocham foregoes his honor it is not necessary to honor him, this applies only when it comes to honoring him.

However, he is not allowed to permit someone to belittle or make fun of him. The Gemara in several places mentions how terrible it is to degrade talmidei chachamim. One Gemara says that Yerushalayim was destroyed because of this sin (Shabbos 119b). Also there is a story about Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimon who was punished for hearing how a talmid chocham was degraded and did not protest. (Baba Metzia 84b) (See Shu"t Yechaveh Da'as vol. V, 50 and Moadim u'Zmanim vol. II, 191 in the footnote, for a full discussion.)

"It is worthwhile to keep in mind that one never knows how much damage can be done by a joke. (Yechaveh Da'as ibid.)

LO SILBASH

"Another issue that I am having trouble with is understanding the practice of men dressing up as women, or vice versa. I thought that the Torah prohibited this."

"You are correct that there is a Torah prohibition of men wearing women's clothes and vice versa. Nevertheless, there was a custom to be lenient on Purim. The Rema (696:7) quotes this custom with an explanation that they were accustomed to do so, because of simcha. He then quotes another opinion that it is forbidden, but concludes that the custom is like the first opinion.

"The Mishnah Berurah (30), though, quotes several Acharonim who are stringent about this. He also contends that where a man is wearing only one item of a woman, and it is recognizable that he is a man, one need not protest against it, although this is incorrect dress. In addition, the Aruch HaShulchan (696:12) maintains that, although there was a custom to be lenient in the earlier generations, nowadays, one should be strict. Also, even according to the lenient opinion, this applies only to Purim itself. There was never a custom to be lenient at celebrations during the Purim season.

THE REACCEPTANCE OF THE TORAH

"Let me share with you a thought on Purim from the Chafetz Chaim. "The possuk says (Ester 9:27), 'they established and they accepted.' Chazal understood this to mean that the Jewish People experienced a willing reacceptance of the Torah that they had previously accepted at Har Sinai against their will.

"The obvious question is, how is it possible to say about the people of the generation who experienced the ten plagues, the splitting of the sea, and the receiving of the Torah at Har Sinai, where they actually heard Hashem speaking to them, that they needed to be forced into accepting the Torah? They themselves said, 'na'aseh v'nishma,' which indicates a willing acceptance!

"Rather, explains the Chofetz Chaim, Chazal are informing us of what was going through the minds of the people of that generation. They were not refusing, chalilah, to accept the Torah. However, they were concerned that they would not be able to live up to the demands of a Torah-lifestyle throughout all the generations. Would they be able to be shomrei mitzvos in foreign lands and under hostile governments? This is especially so if the Torah requires a distancing between Jew and non-Jew, something that could foster the non-Jew's hatred. Haman's decree to annihilate the Jews was prompted by the fact that Mordechai would not bow to him, since he was wearing an idol.

"What happened when the Purim miracle occurred? Achashveirosh made a complete about-face. He gave a command to hang his most important minister, about whom, not too long before, he had commanded that everyone must bow. For the nation that, several days earlier, he had ordered must be annihilated, he was now doing whatever they wanted.

"The Jews learned from this episode that it is possible to live a proper Jewish life in exile. What is expected of them is to have the desire to keep the Torah, and be willing to be moser nefesh for it. If they do their utmost, the power of the Torah will protect them and Hashem will save them.

"This is why there was a willing reacceptance of the Torah during the days of the Purim miracle. All of their doubts regarding keeping the Torah in diverse situations were laid to rest.

"A freilichen Purim!"

Parshas Tetzaveh: A Continual Offering

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. A CONTINUAL OFFERING

Over these few weeks, we are reading about the command to construct the Mishkan (Sanctuary) B and the fulfillment of that command by the B-nei Yisra=el. After being commanded to build the Mishkan, all of its vessels and accouterments, the B-nei Yisra=el were adjured to sacrifice the Olat haTamid -the continual burnt offering. The Olat haTamid is offered up twice daily:

AThe one lamb you shall offer in the morning; and the other lamb you shall offer between the evens (between noon and the end of the day).@ (Sh=mot 29:39) The Olat haTamid claims primacy not only as the first sacrifice mandated (besides the Pessach); its significance is alluded to in many Parashiot relating to the sacrificial order: Ybesides the Olat haTamid and its libation appears fourteen (14!) times in Bamidbar (chapters 28-29). Every sacrifice brought is to be offered up Ybesides the Olat haTamid i.e. after the daily Acontinual@ sacrifice. It is from these verses that the dictum AFrequency causes precedence@ is derived:

Kol haTadir meHavero Kodem et Havero (That [ritual] which is more frequent than another precedes that other.) (Mishna Zevahim 10:1) An example of the application of this concept is found in the eighth chapter of Berakhot (and its parallel Sugya in the last chapter of Pesachim) where Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagree about the order of the two B=rakhot recited at Friday night Kiddush. The Gemara explains Beit Hillel=s position (that the blessing over the wine is recited before the blessing over the Shabbat), by applying the rule of frequency generates precedence. Since the recitation of the blessing over wine (YBorei P=ri Haggafen) is perforce more frequent than the recitation of the blessing over Shabbat (YM=kaddesh haShabbat), the blessing over wine precedes the blessing over Shabbat.

II. DEFINITIONS OF *TAMID*

I would like to raise two questions about the Olat haTamid; one formulaic and the other fundamental. The formula used to describe the daily sacrifices: Tamid, is somewhat misleading here. In other usages in Tenakh, the term Tamid indicates unceasing presence or action. For example:

The fire shall be Tamid (constantly) burning on the altar, it shall never go out.@ (Vayyikra 6:6 B see MT Hilkhot T=midin uMusafin 2:1).

The fire is always to be burning on the altar B this constitutes Tamid. The well-known prayer of David:

I have set God before me Tamid (constantly)@ (T=hillim 16:8) expresses David=s unceasing awareness of the Divine Presence.

In our case, however, the constancy of the daily offerings is much more limited, indeed occasional. AThe one lamb shall you offer in the morning, and the other lamb shall you offer between the evens.@

How can the Torah describe these offerings as Tamid when they are brought at two separate junctures of the day?

One might argue that the meaning here of Tamid is not the same as in the verses quoted above; that here it indicates that the practice is to be constant, i.e. day in and day out (without missing a day). This could be termed Arelative constancy@- relative to the demands of the ritual, it is practiced constantly. For instance, we would describe someone who keeps Shabbat regularly as one who Aalways keeps Shabbat@, even though there are six days out of seven when this is impossible. Relative to the Mitzvah of Sh=mirat Shabbat, however, he fulfills them regularly; this justifies the appellation AShomer Shabbat.@

One might argue that B except for R. Yose. (BT Menahot 99b): The Lehem haPanim (showbread) is to be before God ATamid@. The old loaves were replaced each week with the new loaves. According to the first opinion in the Mishna, four Kohanim slid the old loaves off of the table as four others slid the new loaves on to the table; this in order to fulfill the

requirement of Tamid. R. Yose disagreed, saying that even if one set of loaves was removed totally and the other then put in its place, this still fulfilled the requirement of Tamid. In the Gemara, a more detailed opinion of R. Yose=s is quoted:

R. Yose says: Even if they removed the old set of loaves in the morning and set up the new set of loaves in the evening, this is Tamid.

R. Yose could have argued Arelative constancy@ and explained that as long as the bread was there every week, it is considered Tamid. R. Yose=s refusal to use this argument indicates that the demand of Tamid is not relieved via relative constancy; we must redefine constancy for each case individually.

III. GENERATING PRECEDENCE

Kol haTadir meHavero Kodem et Havero (That [ritual] which is more frequent than another precedes that other.) This legal concept is derived from the law of the Olat haTamid . A fundamental question, shooting its curious arrows of inquiry beyond the formula of Tamid, begs to be answered here. Why does frequency translate into precedence in Halakhah? Conventionally, occasional and unusual occurrences are more exciting, exotic and inspiring. That which is constant is mundane, humdrum and usual; the religious psyche seeks and thrives on the occasion, the festivity; that which removes us and helps us to transcend our everyday existence. How can we compare an everyday sunset to Halley=s comet? Isn=t the Sh=ma Yisra=el of Nei=la [at the end of Yom haKippurim] a hundredfold more inspiring than the Sh=ma Yisra=el of a midwinter=s Tuesday evening?

One answer that is tempting utilizes a reversal of assumption: Precedence itself does not indicate significance; contrariwise, precedence indicates a lack of significance. That which is more common goes first B in order to build up to the less common, more exciting event or ritual. This sense of ordering practice with the intent of creating a spiritual climax is inviting; it appeals to our dramatic and suspenseful entertainment mentality. This answer, however, cannot withstand the test of the juxtaposed Halakha.

Following the formulation of the rule that Afrequency generates precedence@, the next Mishnah in Zevahim (10:2), asserts a comparable principle: ASanctity generates precedence.@ Kol haM=kudash meHavero Kodem et Havero (That [ritual] which is holier than another precedes that other.) Clearly, the precedence of that which is holy is comparable to the precedence of that which is frequent. Since we would not assume that the holier ritual is practiced first in order to build up to one less holy; our theory of spiritual climax which explains the precedence of that which is frequent is apparently disproved.

We now have two problems to solve: Why does frequency generate precedence; and how can we refer to the daily offerings as Tamid when they are not an unceasing practice?

IV. RAMBAM=S APPROACH

Alt is a Mitzvat >Aseh to offer in the Sanctuary two lambs of the first year every dayY@ (Sefer haMitzvot, Mitzvat >Aseh #39; Mishneh Torah: introduction to Hilkhot T=midin uMusafin, Mitzvah #1).

Rambam defines the two daily T=midin as one Mitzva. This is similar in formula to Rambam=s definition of the Mitzvah of Reading the Sh=ma. (Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat >Aseh #10; Mishneh Torah: introduction to Hilkhot K=ri=at Sh=ma; see, however, Sefer haMitzvot of R. Sa=adia Ga=on where K=ri=at Sh=ma is counted as two Mitzot, morning and evening separately; see also Ramban=s critique on Sefer haMitzvot, Shoresh #9). The two daily offerings (as well as the two daily readings of the Sh=ma) are not two separate Mitzvot; each pair constitutes one Mitzvah. This presentation is itself difficult; how can two separate actions, each defined separately (at the very least, each has its own time parameter. For another distinction, see B.T. Menahot 50a and MT T=midin uMusafin 1:12) be considered one Mitzva?

One possible avenue of response is that of >Ikkuvah (interdependence). We find other Mitzvot which are composed of various actions; since each one is necessary for the fulfillment of the Mitzvah, each is regarded as an Ikkuvah to the performance of the Mitzvah; it therefore becomes part of the same Mitzvah. By way of example, each of the four species taken on Sukkot is an Ikkuvah to the performance of the Mitzvah (Mishna Menahot 3:6; Mishneh Torah: Hilkhot Lulav 7:5).

Therefore, if one lacked an Etrog, and took the Lulav, Hadas and Aravah, it would be (from an Halakhic standpoint) a meaningless action. Since all four species are an Ikkuvah B a necessary component B to performing the Mitzvah, they must be considered one Mitzvah (one could, of course, define causality in the inverse direction thusly: Since all four comprise one Mitzva, each then becomes a necessary component to its fulfillment).

Applying Ikkuvah to the T=midin would have to work as follows:

Since each offering (morning and afternoon) is necessary for the fulfillment of the Mitzvah, they must be defined as one Mitzvah. The same rule would have to apply to the morning and evening readings of the Sh=ma=, in order to defend Rambam=s grouping of these two readings into one Mitzvah. The Halakhah, however, does not bear this out. Rambam (Hilkhot T=midin uMusafin 1:12) following the Gemara in Menahot (50b), rules that if the morning Tamid was not brought, even if this neglect was intentional, the afternoon Tamid is still brought. The one exception to this rule (Rambam, BT Menahot ad loc.) is rooted in a concern extrinsic to our problem. Similarly, regarding the reading of the Sh=ma=, if one neglected to read the Sh=ma= in the morning, this does not exempt him from the obligation to read the Sh=ma= in the evening, neither does neglecting the evening reading prevent the morning reading from being a complete obligation (see BT Berakhot 26a).

Clearly, Ikkuvah is not Rambam=s reason for considering both T=midin (and both readings of the Sh=ma=) as one Mitzva. How very frustrating! Instead of answering the two questions above, we have compounded the problem by adding a third. Why does Rambam count the two daily T=midin (and, correspondingly, the two daily readings of the Sh=ma=) as one Mitzva? We can answer this by returning to the Gemara=s discussion of the demand for Tamid in the fulfillment of the Mitzvah of Lehem haPanim B a section we referred to above (end of Section II).

V. THE *LEHEM HAPANIM*

The Torah states:

You shall take choice flour, and bake twelve loaves of it; two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. You shall place them in two rows, six in a row, on the table of pure gold. You shall put pure frankincense with each row, to be a token offering for the bread, as an offering by fire to YHVH. Every sabbath day Aaron shall set them in order before YHVH Tamid as a commitment of the people of Israel, as a covenant forever. They shall be for Aaron and his descendants, who shall eat them in a holy place, for they are most holy portions for him from the offerings by fire to YHVH, a perpetual due. (Vayyikra 24:5-9) The Lehem HaPanim (showbread), which rested on the Shulhan (table) Tamid was replaced with the new set of loaves every Shabbat. According to the Mishnah (Menahot 11:7) , there are two opinions of how the bread was replaced while maintaining the constancy of Tamid. According to the first opinion, as the new bread was placed on the Shulhan, the old bread was slid off.

R. Yose, however, was of the opinion that such temporal proximity was unnecessary. In a Baraita (quoted in BT Menahot 99b), R. Yose is quoted as saying that even if the old bread was removed in the morning and the new bread replaced in the evening, this still constitutes Tamid.

R. Ami (ibid) derives the following rule from R. Yose=s statement:

Even if one only read one chapter [of T=nakh] in the morning and one chapter in the evening, he has fulfilled >The scroll of this Torah shall not disappear from your mouth= [and you shall study it day and night] (Yehoshua 1:8).@ R. Yohanan, quoting R. Shim=on b. Yohai, states: AEven if one only read the Shema= in the morning and in the evening, he has fulfilled >It shall not disappear= @ (BT Menahot ibid)

VI. TWO DEFINITIONS OF CONSTANCY

There are two ways of defining constancy. The simplest, most common way is Aconstancy = continually recurring@ (American Heritage Dictionary). Rambam=s formula in the enumeration of the Mitzvot, counting both daily T=midin as one Mitzvah helps us (and even forces us) to reevaluate the definition of constancy. A less common, but possibly more valid definition within the oeuvre of Halakha is: AConstancy = frequent expression of an unceasing relationship.@

By way of example, a happily married couple is endlessly in love. Nevertheless, the expression of their mutual affection must, perforce, be limited by the other demands and manifestations of their lives. Each member works, studies and perhaps plays separately. By delegating birthdays, anniversaries, certain holidays and the like, the frequent Aromantic interlude@ serves as an indication of their unending love for each other. These days function as Asignposts@ in the relationship; the mood and spirit of such occasions helps to define the ongoing nature of the relationship (Within the pale of the Shir haShirim model, this can serve as an analogy for the relationship between God and the Jewish people. Shabbat is a beautiful example of a Arelationship signpost@ which helps define the relationship during the rest of the week).

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All three questions which we asked can be answered as one: The daily offering is called Tamid, for it is the symbol of constant devotion to God. Since the daily T=midin function as daily Apoles@ to the relationship (the morning Tamid is the first sacrifice of the day. Except for the Pessah, the afternoon Tamid is the last), they are one Mitzvah; a continuous Mitzvah of Olah which has its expression at the extremes of the day. So, too, is the reading of the Sh=ma; Awhen you lie down and when you rise up@ is a way of assigning special times to that relationship- instructively, these times are, once again, at the extremes of man=s day, just as the times for the Tamid are at the extremes of the Sanctuary day (there are no sacrifices offered at night; MT Ma=aseh haKorbanot 4:1).

Kol haTadir meHavero Kodem et Havero (That [ritual] which is more frequent than another precedes that other) is now understood. All Mitzvot are a symbol of the covenant between the Jewish people and God; that Mitzvah which is more frequent indicates that it represents a more significant element in that relationship (much as we remain in closer contact with close friends and family than with mere acquaintances); therefore it demands precedence. QED

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Parshat Tetzaveh: Kohenization

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

[Just a quick footnote to last week's shiur: besides Ibn Ezra, whom I mentioned, Ramban (35:1), Abravanel (35:1), and Cassuto all understand that the worship of the Egel results in the cancellation of the plan to build the Mishkan.]

PARASHAT TETZAVEH:

Parashat Tetzaveh continues Hashem's description to Moshe of the structure of the Mishkan (portable Temple) and its accoutrements, but moves from the topic of the structure of the Mishkan and the details of the Kelim -- the topic of Parashat Teruma -- to the topic of the Kohanim, the Priests. The Priestly section (not to be confused with what Bible critics call "P") splits into three subsections:

- 1) Introduction: The command to select Aharon & sons as Kohanim.
- 2) Part I: Clothing of the Kohanim.
- 3) Part II: Initiation process of the Kohanim.

In the 'Kohenic context,' I want to deal with two basic questions:

1) Function: the Kohen has many specific jobs. But what is behind all of his responsibilities? What is the function of a Kohen in Bnei Yisrael? Does the Kohen work for God or for the people? We will approach this question by breaking it down into two smaller questions:

- a) What are the jobs of the Kohen?
- b) How do these jobs express the basic function of a Kohen?

2) Orientation: how does the Kohen's function -- his role in the nation -- affect his orientation toward God and toward the people? When he takes on all of the jobs included in being a Kohen, does he remain the same person with a new job, or does the new job redefine him? This is a question every religious leader has to answer for himself or herself: What is the relationship between one's function as religious leader and one's personal religious identity? Is there any room left for the religious leader's personal religious fulfillment and creativity? In looking at this question, we will look at two processes in the creation of a Kohen:

- a) "Depersonalization"
- b) "Repersonalization"

THE FUNCTION OF THE KOHEN:

What are all of the Kohen's jobs? (We will focus on the Kohen Gadol in particular, since we have the most information about him and since the Kohenic qualities are most sharply expressed in him.) For those which are well known, we will leave out the sources:

- 1) AVODA (sacrificial service in the Temple): offering korbanot (sacrifices), burning the ketoret (incense), lighting the Menora (candelabrum), maintaining the Shulhan (table) and its bread.
- 2) BLESSING Bnei Yisrael with the Birkhat Kohanim (Priestly blessing).
- 3) TEACHING:
 - a) VaYikra 10:8-11 -- "God spoke to Aharon: ' . . . Distinguish between holy and unholy, between pure and impure, and . . . teach the Bnei Yisrael all of the laws which God has told them through Moshe.'"
 - b) Malakhi 2:6-7 -- (in context, the Navi [prophet] is criticizing the corrupt Kohanim of his time and reminding them of the Kohanim of old, whose exemplary qualities he describes): "The teaching of truth was in his [i.e., the priest of old] mouth; no evil was found on his lips. In peace and uprightness he walked with Me, and he returned many from sin; for the lips of the Kohen shall keep knowledge, and they [Israel] shall seek teaching at his mouth, for he is a messenger ['malakh'] of the Lord of Hosts."

4) JUDGING:

a) Tzara'at: the Kohen is empowered to diagnose Tzara'at, the disease described by the Torah in detail in Sefer VaYikra (ch. 13-14) which, according to Hazal (Arakhin 15b), comes as a punishment for slander and other sins.

b) Sota: the Kohen is instrumental in the process of investigation and trial when a woman is caught sequestered with a man other than her husband, and is accused by her husband of infidelity.

c) Deciding difficult questions of halakha: Devarim 17:8-9 -- "When a matter of law escapes you, whether of blood, civil law, ritual lesions, or matters of strife in your gates, you shall get up and go up to the place which God, your Lord, will choose [referring to the future Temple]. You shall come to the Kohanim-Leviyyim and to the judge of that time, and seek [the law], and they will tell you the judgment."

d) Decisions of national importance: the Urim ve-Tummim (Shemot 28:30), the divine oracle, is operated by the Kohen.

5) REPRESENTING BNEI YISRAEL before God. Some examples from our parasha:

a) Efod: 28:6-13 -- the Kohen Gadol wears the Efod (a sort of apron) as part of his uniform; significantly, the Efod bears two special stones, one on each shoulderpiece, each of which has the names of six of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael carved into it. The Torah stresses that Aharon is to wear the Efod and thereby bring these names before God "as a remembrance": Aharon appears before God as the representative of the people whose names are carved into the stones he bears.

b) Hoshen: 28:15-30 -- the Hoshen, or breastplate, bears twelve stones in which are inscribed the names of the tribes; the Torah stresses also here that Aharon carries them "as a "remembrance" before God, like the stones of the Efod.

c) Tzitz: 28:36-38 -- the Tzitz is a sort of headband made of gold which Aharon wears on his forehead; the words "Kodesh la-Shem," "Holy to God," are inscribed on it. Its function is to atone for all of the sacrifices the people bring under improper conditions (such as when the sacrifice has become ritually impure). The Tzitz 'insists' (see Rashbam) that despite the shortcomings of the people's korbanot, all of the offerings are ultimately "Kodesh la-Shem," dedicated wholly to God, and should therefore be accepted by God.

6) The Kohen creates the backdrop for God's "Kavod" to appear to the people: In VaYikra Perek 9, the inauguration of the Mishkan takes place. Its climax is when Aharon completes 'setting up' the Korban on the Mizbe'ah so that the 'Kavod' (glory) of God can be revealed to the people, who are assembled to watch. Aharon finishes his duties, and then the Kavod appears as a fire from heaven which descends and consumes the korban on the Mizbe'ah. This is a pattern which appears in several places in Tanakh (perhaps most notably in the story of Eliyahu's challenge to the prophets of Ba'al on Har ha-Carmel).

Now that we have all of the Kohen's jobs in front of us, we can deal with the next question: What is the function of the Kohen?

The Kohen mediates between God and the people; the Kohen is a bridge over which traffic moves in both directions. He represents God to the people and the people to God:

1) Kohen acting as God's representative to the Bnei Yisrael:

- a) Teaching: he is a "malakh Hashem Tzevakot," an angel/messenger bearing God's word.
- b) Judging, especially using the Urim ve-Tummim, which express God's instructions.
- c) Creating the stage for God's revelation to the people.
- d) Birkhat Kohanim: passing down God's blessing to the people.

2) Kohen acting as the people's representative to God:

a) Avoda: the Kohen conducts the national worship of God by bringing Korbanot Tzibbur (collective offerings from the entire nation) and maintaining the various functions of the Mishkan, the national center of avodat Hashem (service of Hashem). He facilitates individual worship/avoda by bringing the korbanot of individuals before God.

3) Wearing Bigdei Kehuna: the stones on the Hoshen and Efod with the names of the tribes represent the nation's coming before God; the Tzitz insures that even when the people's korbanot are not perfect, they are accepted by God.

ORIENTATION OF KOHEN:

We now come to our second basic question about the Kohanim: how does the function of being a bridge between God and Bnei Yisrael impact on the orientation of the Kohen toward his own identity? Is there still a person under all of the Bigdei Kehuna (is there a man under that rabbinical beard), or does the office of Kohen overwhelm the Kohen's personal identity?

Part of the Torah's answer is communicated by the structure of Parashat Tetzaveh. The 'Kohanim' section, which takes up most of Parashat Tetzaveh, is surrounded by 'Mishkan' sections:

I: Instructions for Aron (Ark), Shulhan (Table), Menora (Candelabrum), Mizbah ha-Nehoshet (Brass Altar), Mishkan (portable Temple)

II: The "Kohanim" material of Parashat Tetzaveh

III: Instructions for Mizbah ha-Ketoret (Incense Altar), Shemen ha-Mishhah (oil of anointing), Ketoret (Incense), and Kiyyor (Washing-Cistern).

In other words, the Kohanim section appears to interrupt the Mishkan section. Why not first finish talking about the Mishkan and Kelim before starting with the Kohanim? The point of putting the Kohanim section here may be to show us that it is not an "interruption," that the Kohanim share something very basic with the Kelim of the Mishkan: becoming Kohanim means that Aharon and his sons are transformed by their function into Kelim, in a sense. Their personal identity is overcome by their function as bridges between God and Bnei Yisrael.

Imagine you're trying to get from Manhattan to New Jersey, and you want to take the bridge. If the bridge starts to dance as you try to cross it, twisting into different shapes, swaying to its own rhythm, bucking up and down, you'll never get across! Aharon and his sons have become this bridge: since they function as bridges between God and the people, their own identity must be subordinated to their function as mediators. Inserting their own personalities, their own religious orientations, their own spontaneity into their function as Kohanim would interfere with the 'traffic' trying to cross the bridge. Instead of representing God to the people and the people to God, they would be taking advantage of their powerful position to represent only themselves to the people and to God. A Kohen must become depersonalized; he must become objectified, almost dehumanized, in his function of Kehuna.

Now we can take a look at the parasha and see how this theme plays out: how the Torah depersonalizes the Kohanim and objectifies them so they can perform their function properly.

DEPERSONALIZING THE KOHANIM:

1) "THE CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN": Kohen as the carrier of begadim (clothes):

a) The Torah gives detailed instructions for the construction of the Efod, Hoshen, and Tzitz; in fact, the Torah focuses so much on the clothing that the Kohen who is to wear them seems secondary to them! The Kohen is to wear the Efod and Hoshen with the names of the tribes on the stones so that the people will, symbolically, come before God. His function, then, is to be the wearer of the Begadim, the carrier of the people before God. The clothes are the point; the Kohen merely carries the clothes on his body. The Urim ve-Tummim, carried inside the Hoshen, also put the focus on the beged and point away from the individual inside: the Urim ve-Tummim is an oracle of sorts, consulted on important issues, and the Kohen is merely a mediator for the expression of God's will through the oracle. He carries around this source of revelation. The Tzitz as well, with its message of "Kodesh la-Shem" ("dedicated to God"), relates not to *Aharon's* dedication to God, but to the *people's sacrifices* dedication to God. Aharon's clothing communicates to God and communicates to the people, but he himself is merely the nexus for this communication. He is secondary to it; instead of taking an active, participatory, human role, he is objectified, passive, facilitative.

b) Besides the appointment of the Kohanim and the creation of their clothing, the Torah also communicates a succession plan for the Kehuna Gedola. Here again, the Torah spends most of its space describing the transfer of the begadim, not the wearer and his qualities (29:29-30). One gets the sense that what is being created in Parashat Tetzaveh, and passed from father to son when the time comes, is an "office" of Kohen Gadol, an office which transcends (perhaps even ignores) the importance of its holder. This perspective is also implicit in the Torah's description of Aharon's death (BeMidbar 20:23-28), which takes pains to describe how Aharon's Bigdei Kehuna are removed and put onto his son before he dies. The

passing of the office is expressed most sharply by the passing of the begadim, not the passing of personal authority or honor, because the begadim truly express the character of the Kohen's function: carrier of the begadim, facilitator of a relationship.

c) In Shemot 28:35, the Torah says: "It [the Me'il, a robe with bells on it] should be upon Aharon for serving, so that its sound is heard when he enters the Holy, before God, and when he goes out, so that he will not die." Rashi comments, "So that he will not die" -- from the negative you can infer the positive: if he has them [the begadim], he will not incur the death penalty; but if he enters [the holy area] without one of these pieces of clothing, he is condemned to death at the hand of Heaven." Ramban disagrees with Rashi that this particular pasuk expresses the general prohibition of the Kohen's serving without the requisite begadim, but he agrees that there is such a prohibition, derived from a different pasuk. He says: ". . . We learn this [i.e., the prohibition of serving without the requisite begadim] from . . . Sanhedrin (83a) and Shehitat Ha-Kodashim (Zev. 17b): 'One [a Kohen] missing clothing who serves [i.e., performs sacrificial service in the Temple], how do we know that he suffers death? Rav Avahu said in the name of Rav Yohanan . . . 'Gird them with the belt, and put the turbans on them, and their Kehuna should be a law to them forever' (29:9) -- when their clothing is upon them, their Kehuna [priesthood] is upon them; when their clothing is not upon them, their Kehuna is not upon them, and they are 'Zarim' [the halakhic term for non-kohanim]; and the Master has said, 'A Zar who performs sacrificial service, suffers death . . . '"

In other words, according to this Gemara, a Kohen without all of his begadim is not a Kohen! He is a "Zar," a "stranger," the Torah's term for a non-Kohen, and he suffers the same fate a Zar would suffer for illegally performing the Avoda: death by the hand of Heaven. For our theme, the point is clear: the focus is completely on the begadim; the Kohen is merely the carrier.

2) PARALLELS BETWEEN THE KOHANIM AND THE KELIM (vessels of the Mishkan):

In several contexts, the Torah draws parallels between the Kohanim and Kelim. This contributes to the theme of depersonalization and objectification, especially since many of the parallels appear in the initiation process of the Kohanim. The Kohanim's initiation objectifies them and depersonalizes them, perhaps to express to them what their orientation to their Kehuna should be. Examples of these parallels (besides the inclusion of the 'Kohanim' section inside the 'Mishkan' section, mentioned above):

- a) God commands Moshe to "take" Aharon and his sons as Kohanim: "Bring close to you Aharon, your brother, and his sons . . . Aharon, Nadav, Avihu, Elazar, and Itamar, the sons of Aharon." This list of people sounds a lot like the lists of materials which we find in profusion all over the parshiot of the Mishkan. Usually, we find a command to build a certain Keli and then a list of materials: for example, the Torah commands the creation of Bigdei Kehuna and then lists the materials out of which they are to be made: ". . . The gold, blue, purple, red, and fine linen" (28:5). There are Kelim to be created -- the Bigdei Kehuna -- and the materials are gold, blue, purple, red, and fine linen. In parallel fashion, there is a Keli to be created -- the Kehuna -- and the 'materials' are Aharon, Nadav, Avihu, Elazar, and Itamar.
- b) The Kohanim are anointed with oil, just as the Kelim are (see 30:25-33, 29:7, 29:21, and 40:9-16).
- c) The Kohanim are anointed with blood, just as the Mizbe'ah (altar) is, and in fact, the blood used for the Kohanim is from the same animal as that sprinkled on the Mizbe'ah (see 29:12, 29:16, 29:20-21).
- d) "Kiddush": the Kohanim are sanctified, as some of the Kelim are (see 29:37, 29:1, 29:21, 28:41).
- e) Passivity: throughout the period of their initiation, the Kohanim are completely passive while Moshe does all of the Avoda (sacrificial service). Moreover, they remain passive while Moshe performs various functions on them! (See VaYikra 8:6-14.) Moshe is "makriv" (brings close) the raw human pre-kohen material to the Ohel Mo'ed; Moshe washes the kohanim; Moshe dresses them; Moshe anoints them with oil; Moshe sprinkles them with blood. They stand, passive, like the lifeless, personality-lacking kelim of the Mishkan.
- f) Parallels between Kohanim and korbanot: Moshe is "makriv" the Kohanim, the same word used with regard to korbanot (and actually the root of the word "korbanot"!), see 28:1, 29:4, 29:8, 29:10); Moshe is "rohetz" (washes) them, a function also performed on some of the korbanot in the same context (see 29:4, 29:17).

3) REPRESSION OF HUMANITY: In several contexts, the Torah expresses the idea that the Kohen, particularly the

Kohen Gadol, is not allowed the 'luxury' of expressing his emotions at the expense of the Avoda to which he is bound. Even when a close relative dies, he must remain in the Mikdash, before God, doing the Avoda, rather than leaving the Mikdash to mourn his loss. For him, the religious and national responsibility of the Kehuna must always supersede the personal and human.

This is most painfully and dramatically expressed by Aharon's reaction to the death of his sons, Nadav and Avihu, when they bring a "foreign fire" before God and are consumed in His fire. Moshe instructs Aharon that he is not to mourn, not to interrupt his duties as Kohen, not to leave the Mikdash. He tells Aharon that God has said, "Through those who are close to Me I am sanctified; I am honored in front of the entire congregation"; in response, Aharon is simply silent (VaYikra 10:3).

Many mefarshim understand God's statement -- "Through those who are close to Me I am sanctified" -- as a reference to Nadav and Avihu; as sanctified kohanim, chosen servants of God, they are the ones "close to God." By killing them for their slight disobedience, God inspires the awe of the people, hence, "I am honored in front of the entire congregation." But Rashbam disagrees. He paraphrases Moshe's command to Aharon after the death of his sons:

RASHBAM:

"Moshe said to Aharon, 'Do not mourn, do not cry, do not stop doing the Avoda, because what I am telling you is the word of God, that 'I will be sanctified through those close to Me' -- 'through the Kohen Gadol, who is close to Me to serve Me, I wish to be sanctified, and I do not wish that My name be profaned along with My Avoda,' for this is what God has told me [Moshe], that 'the Kohen Gadol . . . should not undo his hair or remove his priestly clothing, and not leave the Mikdash, and not profane thereby the Mikdash of his God' -- so if you do not leave the Mikdash, it remains holy" . . . Therefore, "Do not abandon your Avoda, for you are the Kohen Gadol, and do not leave [the Mikdash], and do not profane, but instead let God and His Avoda be sanctified through you. As a result, "Before the entire congregation shall I be honored" -- the honor of the Shekhina is that he [Aharon] sees his sons die, yet he puts aside his mourning for the service of his Creator. "Aharon was silent" -- silenced his mourning: he did not cry and did not mourn . . ."

According to Rashbam, the function of the Kohen, especially the Kohen Gadol, is to remain always dedicated to God and to prioritize God over all personal needs. Aharon responds by silencing his mourning; he maintains his Kehuna and suppresses his humanity, as the Kohen must.

[There is also the inhumanity of Shevet Levi's vengeance against the worshippers of the Egel, even when they are his own relatives (see Shemot 32:26-29 and see Devarim 33:8-10, where Moshe praises their "inhuman" fealty to God), but we will leave that for another time.]

"REPERSONALIZATION":

The 'depersonalization' of the Kohanim brings us to something we touched on last week: the potential danger in doing the Avoda. Evidence of this danger is all over the Torah: the Kohanim are warned to wear the Me'il, to wash from the Kiyyor, and to wear the Mikhnasayyim (pants), all "so that they do not die" (!!); the Kohanim (and others) at Har Sinai are warned not to go up the mountain so that God does not "destroy them"; a Zar who does the Avoda suffers death at the hands of Heaven, as does a Kohen who serves without the proper begadim.

The function of the Kohen is to act as a bridge between God and the human community of Bnei Yisrael. This means that the Kohanim have to surrender their personal identity and humanity to a significant degree. What happens if a Kohen fails to surrender to his kohenic function, if he stubbornly insists on expressing his own personality and achieving his own spiritual goals through his privileged access to Hashem? Perhaps a look at Parashat Pekudei, several weeks ahead of us, will provide an answer:

Many have pointed out the pattern of the repeated phrase, "Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe" ("Just as Hashem had commanded Moshe") in Parashat Pekudei; this phrase appears there about fifteen times, describing how Moshe and the people built and prepared the Mishkan and each of its appurtenances exactly as instructed by God: "Just as Hashem had commanded Moshe." But the pattern of "Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe" does not end at the end of Parashat Pekudei. Parashat Pekudei is followed by a 'parenthetical' section, a "Manual for Korbanot" (AKA Parashat VaYikra and the first part of Parashat Tzav). This parenthetical section ends in the second half of Parashat Tzav, where the Torah picks up the Mishkan narrative once again, describing the eight-day process of the initiation of the Mishkan and the Kohanim. Tellingly, this narrative picks right back up with the "Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe" pattern we note in Parashat Pekudei; fifteen additional repetitions of this phrase appear here, describing how all of the events of the initiation take place "exactly as

Hashem had commanded Moshe." What is it all about? What is the Torah trying to communicate with this pattern?

In all, the Torah repeats the pattern of "Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe" thirty times, with slight variation, though Pekudei and then Tzav and Shemini. The people do exactly what God commands -- to the letter, to the "T," exactly, exactly, exactly. But then the pattern comes to a sudden end:

Shemot 38:22 -- "... Asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
Shemot 39:1 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
Shemot 39:5 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
Shemot 39:21 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
Shemot 39:26 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
Shemot 39:29 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
Shemot 39:31 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
Shemot 39:32 -- "... Ke-khol asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
Shemot 39:42 -- "... Ke-khol asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
Shemot 39:33 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem"
Shemot 40:16 -- "... Ke-khol asher tziva Hashem oto"
Shemot 40:19 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
Shemot 40:21 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
Shemot 40:23 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
Shemot 40:25 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
Shemot 40:27 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
Shemot 40:29 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
Shemot 40:32 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
VaYikra 8:4 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem oto"
VaYikra 8:5 -- "... Asher tziva Hashem ..."
VaYikra 8:9 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
VaYikra 8:13 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
VaYikra 8:17 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
VaYikra 8:21 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
VaYikra 8:29 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"
VaYikra 8:35 -- "... Asher tziva Hashem be-yad Moshe"
VaYikra 8:36 -- "... Asher tziva Hashem be-yad Moshe"
VaYikra 9:6 -- "... Asher tziva Hashem"
VaYikra 9:7 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem"
VaYikra 9:10 -- "... Ka'asher tziva Hashem et Moshe"

The pattern crashes to a catastrophic and tragic halt with VaYikra 10:1 --

VaYikra 10:1 -- "ASHER **LO** **TZIVA** OTAM."

The Torah sets up the pattern of "ka-asher tziva Hashem," reporting Bnei Yisrael's strict, unwavering obedience to Hashem's exact instructions for the Mishkan, in order to shatter the perfection with the report that Nadav and Avihu bring an offering of ketoret (incense) which God did NOT command - "asher LO tziva Hashem." For this crime, they die.

A Kohen qua Kohen must forfeit his identity, his humanity, his search for ways to express and experience his own spirituality; he does exactly "Ka-asher tziva Hashem" -- because he is a faithful Keli Mikdash, merely a bridge. The moment the Kohen's personal, self-representing religious identity returns -- the moment he uses his position as Kohen to pursue personal religious aspirations -- at that moment, he negates the process of depersonalization and objectification which made him a Kohen. Repersonalized, representing only himself, he is a Zar, a non-Kohen, and what he brings is Zara, "Eish Zara" (a "foreign fire").

Shabbat Shalom

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PARSHAT TETZAVEH

Order in the 'court-yard'? Certainly that's what we'd expect to find when the Torah presents the laws of the mishkan; and that is exactly what we do find - most of the time.

However, there is one glaring exception - that relates to the placement of the laws of the **mizbach ha-ktoret** at the end of Parshat Tetzaveh (instead of at the beginning of Parshat Teruma).

In the following shiur, we will first clarify our question; afterward we will offer an explanation that relates once again to the thematic connection between the mishkan and Ma'amad Har Sinai.

INTRODUCTION

Recall, from last week's shiur how Parshat Tetzaveh forms part of the larger unit (chapters 25 thru 31), which we referred to as **tzivui ha-mishkan** [the commandment to build the mishkan]. This unit contains a complete set of laws in which God explains to Moshe how the mishkan is to be built and how it will operate.

In that shiur, we discussed the controversy concerning when and why this set of laws was first given to Moshe Rabeinu. In the following shiur, we analyze the internal structure of this unit, to show how (and why) it actually contains **two** distinct units - that overlap in a very special manner.

A VERY LONG 'DIBBUR'

Before we begin, we must make one general observation concerning why parshiot Teruma and Tetzaveh (i.e. Shmot 25:1-30:10) should be considered a distinct 'sub-unit'. Note how Parshat Teruma begins with God's commandment to Moshe to "speak to Bnei Yisrael and tell them..." (25:1) - followed by a lengthy set of instructions that continues all the way until the end of Parshat Tetzaveh (i.e. 30:10). To prove this, simply note how the next "dibur" doesn't begin until the opening pasuk of Parshat Ki Tisa. [See the new "dibur" in 30:11, while noting that there has not been any similar opening statement since 25:1. However, from 30:11 till the end of chapter 31, every parshia in a separate "dibur"! We'll return to this observation later in the shiur.]

Therefore, we begin our study with an analysis of this first 'sub-unit' (i.e. 25:1 thru 30:10). Afterward, we will discuss how the six short 'parshiot' in Parshat Ki Tisa (30:11 thru 31:18) that follow, even though they are outside this unit, complete the larger unit of "tzivui ha-mishkan" - the commandment to build the Mishkan.

AN OUTLINE OF TERUMA/TETZAVEH

The following outline summarizes the topic of each parshia within this unit of parshiot Teruma/Tetzaveh. Study it carefully, noting how it appears to follow in a rather logical order (at least until the very end). It will clarify our opening question.

[Follow this chart with a Tanach Koren at hand.]

Introduction - Donation of the materials (25:1-7)

& the purpose of this project:

"Ve-asu li mikdash ve-shachanti betocham" (25:8-9)

Vessels in the Kodesh Kodashim (innermost sanctuary)

Aron - the ark to house the "luchot" (25:10-16)

Kaporet - the special lid for the ark (25:17-22)

Vessels in the Kodesh (main sanctuary)

Shulchan - the table for the show-bread (25:23-30)

Menora - the candelabra (25:31-40)

The Ohel Mo'ed [The tent housing these vessels] (26:1-37)

Yeriot - The canvas of the tent - from cloth & goatskins

Krashim - the wooden beams supporting this tent

Parochet - the curtain to partition the Kodesh Kdoshim

The Chatzer [The outer courtyard & its vessels]

Mizbeiah Ha-Ola (the altar / 27:1-8)

Chatzer - the outer courtyard

its curtains and poles (see 27:9-19)

Oil For The Menora (27:20-21)

[A priori, we would have expected to find this commandment with the **menorah**. See further iyun.]

The 'Bigdei Kehuna' - (28:1-43)

Six parshiot describing the priestly garments

The Seven-Day Inaugural Dedication Ceremony (29:1-37)

Olat Tamid (29:38-46)

The daily offering on the altar (after its dedication)

The Mizbach Ha-Ktoret

- the incense altar (30:1-10)

[This seems 'out of place', as we will discuss.]

As you review this outline, note the logical order of its progression. It begins by describing the 'aron' - the most sacred object in the mishkan, situated in the 'kodesh kodashim'; then continues with the vessels located in the 'kodesh', followed by the 'ohel mo'ed' [Tent of Meeting], which houses these vessels. Afterward we find the 'mizbach ha-ola' - which is located outside this tent - and the courtyard ['chatzer'] that surrounds it. This unit concludes with the 'bigdei kehuna' - the special garments for the kohanim who will officiate in the mishkan, followed by the details of its seven-day dedication ceremony (and the daily sacrifice that will be henceforth offered).

However, the final parshia describing the "mizbach ha-ktoret" appears to be totally 'out of place'. After all, this golden altar is one of the three vessels situated in the kodesh. Clearly, this parshia should have been recorded in chapter 26 together with the laws of the "shulchan and menorah - the other vessels located in the ohel mo'ed.

To verify this point (that the mizbach ktoret is recorded out of place), simply note the parallel mention of these vessels in Parshat Vayakhel (see 35:13-15, 37:10-29, & 39:35-39). There the laws of the mizbach ktoret are consistently recorded together with the laws of the menorah and the shulchan.

Furthermore, this 'displacement' of the mizbach ha-ktoret is only half the problem. We will now explain how the psukim that precede this parshia place this golden altar in even greater 'isolation'!

OUT OF 'PLACE' and 'OUT' OF PLACE

Review the above outline once again, noting how the parshia of the olat tamid (29:38-46) forms what 'should have been' the conclusion of this unit. Let's take a closer look at this parshia, noting how its concluding verses forms a beautiful summary for this entire unit (see 29:42-44):

"Olat tamid for all generations, in front of the ohel mo'ed - the place where we will meet to speak to you from there."

[note how this pasuk 'matches' 25:22!]

And I will sanctify the **OHEL MO'ED** (& its vessels),

[summarizing chapters 25 & 26]

the **MIZBEIACH** (i.e. the **chatzer**),

[summarizing chapter 27]

and the **KOHANIM...** (i.e. their garments & dedication)

[summarizing chapters 28 & 29]

(see 29:44)

As you review these psukim, note how the words in **CAPS** correlate to the primary topics in the above outline! But that's not all, for the next pasuk forms almost a perfect 'bookend' for this entire unit: "ve-shachanti betoch bnei Yisrael..." (see 29:45) - matching: "ve-asu li mikdash ve-shachanti betocham" (see 25:8) - the opening commandment of this entire unit - found at the beginning of Parshat Teruma!

Finally, to top it off, this parshia concludes with its 'grand finale' - that connects the purpose of this mishkan to the very purpose of the entire process of Yetziat Mitzrayim:

"And they shall know that I am their God who took them out of Egypt - **le-shochni** betocham - **in order** to dwell among them; I am the Lord their God" (see 29:42-46).

Thus, chapters 25 thru 29 form a clearly defined unit with 'matching bookends'. But this only magnifies our opening question regarding the placement of the laws concerning the **mizbach ha-ktoret** (in the next parshia / see 30:1-10) - for it is not only 'out of place' - it is totally isolated - outside this 'shechina' unit!

This total isolation of the mizbach ha-ktoret forces us to search for a thematic reason for the Torah's intentional placement of these laws after the closure of the shechina unit.

BACK TO HAR SINAI

To suggest an answer to this question, let's return once again to the conceptual parallel between the mishkan and Har Sinai, as discussed in last week's shiur, and as explicated by Ramban:

"... the hidden purpose ['sod'] of the mishkan is for God's **glory** which dwelled ('shachan') on **Har Sinai** to dwell upon it..." (Ramban on 25:1, see TSC shiur on Teruma).

According to Ramban, the very purpose of the mishkan was to serve as a vehicle that could perpetuate the Sinai experience! This purpose is reflected in the numerous parallels that exist between Ma'amad Har Sinai and the mishkan. For example:

* The **aron**:

contains the **luchot ha-eidut** (25:21), the everlasting testimony of the covenant forged between God and bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai (see 24:3-12).

* The **keruvim**:

situated above the **kaporet** (on top of the **aron**), serve as the site from where God will continue to speak to Moshe. There, Moshe will receive the remaining mitzvot, just as he had received the dibrot from God on Har Sinai.

* The **mizbach ha-ola**:

where Bnei Yisrael will offer their **olot & shlamim**, is similar to the **mizbeach** that Bnei Yisrael built at the foot of Har Sinai, upon which they offered **olot & shlamim** (see 24:4-8).

Following this train of thought, we should expect to find a parallel as well between the mizbach ha-ktoret and Ma'amad Har Sinai - a parallel that may shed light on why the Torah places the mizbach ha-ktoret after the Shechina unit of the mishkan was completed. To find it, we must first consider a more general parallel between Har Sinai and the mishkan.

THREE MECHITZOT

One of the most striking parallels between the mishkan and Har Sinai relates to the concept of '**mechitzot**' - boundaries. At Har Sinai, the **people** are instructed to remain at the **foot** of the mountain while the **kohanim** are permitted to come a bit closer (see 19:22; 24:1-2 & 24:9). Only **Moshe** is granted access to the **top** of the mountain (see 19:20-24 & 24:2 & 24:12).

In regard to the mishkan, we find a very interesting parallel. The **people** are permitted to proceed only as far as the outer courtyard of the mishkan (where the **mizbach ha-ola** is located). The **kohanim** are allowed into the "**kodesh**" (where the **shulchan & menorah** are located), and only Moshe (and Aharon) can enter the "**kodesh ha-kodashim**" (where the **aron** & **keruvim** are located).

[Additionally, Bnei Yisrael may enter the courtyard only after first purifying themselves (i.e. they must be "tahor"), just as a purification process was required in preparation for Ma'amad Har Sinai (see 19:10-15).]

The following table summarizes this parallel:

GROUP	HAR SINAI	THE MISHKAN	FUNCTION
Moshe	top of mountain	Kodesh kodashim	dibur
Kohanim	mid-mountain	Kodesh (ohel mo'ed)	meeting
People	foot of mountain	Chatzer (courtyard)	korbanot

So how does the **mizbach ha-ktoret** fit into all this?

In our shiur on Parshat Yitro, we discussed the dialectic nature of the encounter between God and Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai. Ideally, Bnei Yisrael should have heard the commandments directly from God ['panim be-panim']. However, as mortal man is incapable of withstanding God's Presence (see Devarim 5:4-5, 20-25), God found it necessary to 'buffer' this encounter. due to this tension, God found it necessary to cover Har Sinai with a **cloud** before revealing himself:

"Behold I am coming to you **be-av he-anan** - in the **thickness** of a **cloud** - in order that they can hear as I speak to you..." (see 19:9)
 "... And Har Sinai was full of **smoke** ['ashan'], for God had come down upon it with fire..."
 (see 19:16-18 and the TSC shiur on Parshat Yitro).

In this manner, the **anan** (cloud) on Har Sinai effectively served as a **buffer** between:

- Bnei Yisrael at the **foot** of the mountain, and
- God's revelation at the **top** of the mountain.

One could suggest that the **mizbach ha-ktoret** serves a similar function. When the **ktoret** [incense] is offered on the coals of this small altar, it creates a cloud of smoke (see Vayikra 16:13) in the "**kodesh**". In this manner, this "**anan**" [cloud of smoke] forms a buffer between Bnei Yisrael, who stand outside in the **chatzer** - and God, whose presence dwells in the "**kodesh ha-kodashim**".

THE AXIS: -Aron -- Mizbach Ktoret -- Mizbach Ola

This interpretation is supported by two key psukim that describe the relationship between the **mizbach ha-ola**, **mizbach ha-ktoret**, and the **kodesh kodashim**.

The first pasuk stresses the connection between the **mizbach ha-ola** and the **ohel mo'ed**. As you study this pasuk, note how redundant it appears to be:

"olat tamid [the daily offering on the mizbach ha-ola]
 - for all generations,
 - in front of the entrance to the **ohel mo'ed** -
 - before God [lifnei Hashem]
 - from where I will meet you
 - to speak to you there" (see 29:42).

Surely, the Torah could have explained where this public offering is brought in half the words; yet for some reason the Torah wishes to emphasize a thematic connection between the "**olat tamid**" and the place where God will speak to Bnei Yisrael.

Then, in the next 'parshia', the Torah provides explicit instructions concerning where to place the **mizbach ha-ktoret**. Note once again the 'wordiness' of this pasuk, and how it relates to the pasuk above:

"And you shall **place** it [the mizbach ktoret]
 - in front of the **parochet**,
 - which is over the **aron ha-eidut**,
 - in front of the **kaporet** which is upon the **eidut**
 - from where I will meet with you." (see 30:6).

It is for this reason that the Torah emphasizes that the mizbach ktoret must be located between these two focal points, i.e. along this very same **axis** that connects the **mizbach ha-ola** with the **kodesh kodashim**.

In fact, later on in the same chapter, when the Torah explains how the ktoret was made, it emphasizes this point once again:

"...and you shall grind it very fine, and **put it**:
 - before the testimony [lifnei ha'eidut]
 - in the tent of meeting [ohel moed],
 - where I will meet with you; - it shall be for you most holy." (see 30:36)

A 'PROTECTED' DIVINE ENCOUNTER

In a manner very similar to what took place at Har Sinai, God 'comes down' from the heavens, as it were, to the **kodesh kodashim**; while Bnei Yisrael come from their camp, to stand before God in the **chatzer** of the mishkan.

Hence, the main section of the **ohel mo'ed** serves as a buffer between God and Bnei Yisrael. There, the **ktoret** must be offered each time the **kohen** enters to perform his service, which creates an **an'an** [cloud of smoke] to 'protect' the **kohen** when he enters the **kodesh**:

"And Aharon shall offer the **ktoret** daily, in the morning before tending to the **menorah**, and when lighting the **menorah** in the evening..." (30:7-8).

[Note also Vayikra 16:2, where Aharon must also offer ktoret to create a similar cloud of smoke to protect himself before entering the **kodesh ha-kodashim** on Yom Kippur!]

With this background we can answer our opening question. One could suggest that by placing the commandment to build the **mizbach ha-ktoret** after the summary psukim at the very end of this unit, the Torah alludes to its unique function as a 'buffer' in this covenantal encounter. As - 'realistically' - Bnei Yisrael may not be worthy of this encounter, the Torah commands Bnei Yisrael to place the **mizbach ktoret** in the **kodesh** to serve as a buffer, to protect them for the Shechina that dwells in the **kodesh kedoshim**.

[Note the similarity between the nature of this 'protected encounter' in the mishkan and what we referred to in our shiur on Parshat Yitro as 'plan A,' by which God speaks to Moshe while 'covered by a cloud' so that the people can only overhear their conversation. See Shmot 19:9! See also Devarim 5:5.]

Furthermore, the dialectic nature of this encounter is highlighted by the placement of the laws of the **mizbach ha-ktoret** outside this Shechina unit, yet within the same dibur!

THE KTORET UNIT

Up until this point, we have treated parshiot Teruma/Tetzaveh as one, integrated unit, as indicated by the single **dibur** that introduces these two parshiot. Now we must consider the remaining parshiot (in Parshat Ki Tisa) that form the final six paragraphs of the greater **tzivui ha-mishkan** unit.

Take a minute to review the beginning of Ki-Tisa (i.e. 30:11-31:17), noting how it describes several other mitzvot concerning the mishkan that were also 'left out' of the **Shechina unit**.

When we list these parshiot in order, we find once again a set of 'bookends':

30:1-10 **mizbach ha-ktoret** (* bookend 1 *)
(as explained above)

30:11-16 **Machatzit ha-shekel** -
money collected to fund the **ohel mo'ed**

30:17-21 **Ki'yor**
the faucet for the kohanim to wash their hands

30:22-33 **Shemen ha-mishcha**
special oil to anoint the mishkan's accessories and the kohanim

30:34-38 **Ktoret** (* bookend 2 *)
the incense for the **mizbach ktoret**

[At this point, the **laws** concerning the mishkan end. Chapter 31 discusses the appointment of Betzalel to build the mishkan and the prohibition to work on **Shabbat** (to preclude the possible, mistaken notion the work for the mishkan on shabbat is permissible). Whereas these do not involve laws directly relating to the construction of the mishkan and its accessories, we have omitted them from this table.]

The above table shows how (1) the **mizbach ktoret** and (2) the mitzvah to make the **ktoret** delineate a second unit, which contains several peripheral commandments regarding the mishkan.

A PARALLEL STRUCTURE

As your review these parshiot, note how a rather amazing parallel structure emerges; pointing to the direct connection between this **Ktoret** unit and the previous **Shechina unit**. Note how each of these peripheral commandments in the **Ktoret** unit corresponds (in the same order!) to a related topic in the **Shechina unit**!

The following table illustrates this parallel:

TOPIC	SHECHINA UNIT	KTORET UNIT
Accessories in the mishkan	aron, kaporet, shulchan, menorah	mizbach ktoret
Ohel Mo'ed	yeriot, krashim	machatzit ha-shekel le-avodat ohel mo'ed
Chatzer	mizbach ha-ola	kiyor
Dedication	bigdei kehuna & milu'im (to anoint the kohanim)	shemen ha-mishcha
Daily Offering	korban tamid on mizbach ha-ola	ktoret tamid on mizbach ha-ktoret

The mitzvot found in the **Shechina unit**, which focus on God's 'hitgalut' in the mishkan, are complemented by the mitzvot in the **Ktoret unit**, which focus on the need to protect Bnei Yisrael in this special encounter.

Note as well how all of the mitzvot in the Ktoret unit emphasize either kapara (see shiur on Yom Kippur, where we explained how kapara involves protection from God's hitgalut) or warn of impending death if not performed properly (see 30:10; 30:12; 30:21; 30:33; 30:38; relate to Devarim 5:21-23!). Protection is required from the potential punishment enacted should man not prepare himself properly for this encounter with God in the mishkan.

In this manner, the laws of the **mizbach ktoret** can serve as an eternal reminder of how man must not only value his ability to enjoy a relationship with God, but also remain aware of the natural limits of this encounter.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

=====

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Be sure to see Ramban on 30:1, where he explains why the **mizbach ha-ktoret** is at the end of the unit. See also Seforim & Chizkuni. Relate these approaches to our analysis of this unit in the above shiur.

B. In our discussion of the overall structure, we noted that (B) comprises the complete unit of **tzivui ha-mishkan**. Note that this complete unit includes **seven** dibur's. [A dibur is each time the Torah introduces God's speech to Moshe with, "Va-yedaber Hashem el Moshe leimor" or "va-yomer ...," etc.

[See 25:1, 30:11, 30:17, 30:22, 30:34, 31:1, and 31:12.]

One could view these dibur's as allusions to the seven days of creation. The first **dibur**, covering the entire **Shechina unit**, may reflect the concept of God's creation of **light / Shechina** (see Rashi on Breishit 1:3). The next four deal with other mitzvot of the mishkan. [Admittedly, they don't work out as good as the rest.] The sixth **dibur** describes the appointment of Betzalel to build the mishkan. This may parallel God's creation of man on the sixth day. Just as man in Creation [**perek aleph**] was to master the material world and utilize his God-given talents towards a divine purpose, so must Betzalel organize the materials collected and use his God-given talents to oversee the construction of the mishkan. To do so, he requires 'ruach Elokim' (31:3/ relate to the creation of man 'be-tzelem Elokim').

The seventh **dibur** is the mitzvah to keep **Shabbat**! (See 31:15.) This may serve as the basis for the many Midrashim that describe the mishkan as the pinnacle of the creation process. This reflects, once

again, the biblical theme that the natural world needs to be directed towards a divine purpose. This is the duty of man not only in the mishkan, but also throughout his daily life, as well.

C. A FULL TIME JOB

Recall from our original outline how the first two psukim of Parshat Tetzaveh (i.e. the mitzvah to light the menorah /see 27:20-21) also appears out of place. If we follow the logic of the structure of the **Shechina unit**, it should have been recorded together with the mitzvah to build the menorah (just as the mitzvah to offer the **lechem ha-panim** is included with the mitzvah to build the **shulchan** / see 25:30).

Nevertheless, the Torah transfers these psukim from chapter 26 and juxtaposes them with the mitzvah to make the **bigdei kehuna** (in chapter 28). Why?

One could suggest that in doing so, the Torah alludes to a more important role of the **kohanim**. Aside from the honor and glory of their position, as reflected by their special garments, their primary job is to 'spread the light' of Torah - the message of mishkan, as represented by the **aron ha-eidut** at its focal point - to Bnei Yisrael.

It is this mitzvah of the **kohanim**, to disseminate the Torah, which may explain why it referred to as a "chukat olam le-doroteichem - an everlasting law for all generations" (see 27:31). Even when the mikdash lay in ruins, this mitzvah forever remains the obligation of our religious leaders.

D. ADDITIONAL SOURCES & RESEARCH

Re: The 'displacement' of the mizbach ha-ktoret

We explained that the Torah 'transferred' the discussion of the mizbach ha-ktoret to the end of the mishkan unit to emphasize its role as a 'buffer', protecting Bnei Yisrael from the 'hashra'at ha-Shechina' that occurs in the mishkan. This general idea appears in the Vilna Gaon's "Aderet Eliyahu". The Gaon explains that neither the ktoret nor the machatzit ha-shekel (which the Torah discusses immediately following its discussion of the mizbach ha-ktoret) was indispensable for 'hashra'at ha-Shechina'. They come into play once the Shechina has already descended, in order to bring kapara for Bnei Yisrael. Though the Gaon does not mention the 'buffer' idea developed in the shiur, his explanation does feature the concept of a need for kapara when the Shechina descends and the mizbach ha-zahav as filling that role. Like the Gaon, the Seforno also writes that the mizbach ha-zahav is not necessary for the Shechina to descend. However, rather than pointing to atonement as the ktoret's primary function, the Seforno views it as an expression of kavod to Hashem, and hence a prayer of sorts asking the Almighty to accept the korbanot offered on the other mizbe'ach. The Ramban also writes along the lines, describing the mizbach ha-zahav as an expression of kavod rather than a means of bringing the Shechina.

This point, whether or not the ktoret is required to bring the Shechina, appears to be subject to dispute. The Midrash Tanchuma, Tetzaveh 15, writes clearly that the Shechina would not descend into the mishkan until after the ktoret was offered. This is also the view of the Da'at Zekeinim mi-Ba'alei ha-Tosafot on Shmot 25:6. This view would oppose the position of the Seforno and Vilna Gaon.

Several different answers to the question of this parsha's location appear in other mefarshim. Some Acharonim, including the Meshech Chochma (30:1), view the location of this parsha as an allusion to the halacha allowing the offering of ktoret even without the mizbach ha-ktoret. The Or Ha-chayim (25:9) also sees here a subtle allusion to a technicality, that Shlomo Ha-melech built his own mizbach ha-ktoret rather than using Moshe's. (This assumption is somewhat controversial - see Torah Shleima, milu'im to Parshat Tetzaveh, 29.) The Tzror Ha-mor (30:1) writes that the Torah places this parsha last to indicate the unique stature of the mizbach ha-ktoret as the most important of all the klei ha-mikdash. A similar theory is advanced by Rav Dov Rabinowitz ("Da'at Sofrim"), who claims that Bnei Yisrael are worthy for the ktoret, the most exalted of all the offerings, only after they have loyally executed all the commands of the previous chapters and the Shechina has taken its residence in the mishkan. Rav Zalman

Sorotzkin (Oznayim la-Torah 30:1) suggests precisely the opposite: lest one afford too much importance to the mizbach ha-zahav over the mizbach ha-nechoshet, the Torah extracted the former from the discussion of the klei ha-mikdash in order to emphasize that the mizbach ha-nechoshet actually constitutes the primary altar. The Netziv understands the Torah's structure as intended to underscore the distinct themes symbolized by the two mizbachot. The mizbach ha-nechoshet - along with the menorah - represents Torah, whereas the mizbach ha-ktoret symbolizes gemilut chasadim. The Torah emphasizes their symbolic distinction by separating them; their coexistence in the hechal points to the need for the two to work in tandem. The Malbim, who develops an elaborate system of symbolism with regard to the mishkan and its accessories, views the mizbach ha-ktoret as representing the spiritual result of the avoda performed in the mishkan. It is therefore presented last and apart from the rest of the mishkan's components, as it represents that which is attained as a result of that was discussed beforehand.

Esther: Peshat and Derash in Megillat Esther

Byline:
Rabbi Hayyim Angel

ESTHER

PESHAT AND DERASH IN MEGILLAT ESTHER^[1]

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel

INTRODUCTION

Elisha ben Avuyah said: one who learns as a child, to what is he compared? To ink written upon a new writing sheet; and one who learns [when] old, to what is he compared? To ink written upon an erased writing sheet. (*Avot 4:20*)

Megillat Esther is among the most difficult biblical books to study anew, precisely because it is so familiar. Many assumptions accompany us through our study of the Megillah, occasionally clouding our perceptions of what is in the text and what is not.

Any serious study of the *peshat* messages of the Megillah must begin with a clear sense of what is explicitly in the text, what can be inferred legitimately from the text, and what belongs primarily in a thematic exposition, using the text as a springboard for important religious concepts. This chapter will consider some pertinent examples from Megillat Esther.

PESHAT CONSIDERATIONS IN THE MEGILLAH

A. THE SAUL-AGAG REMATCH

On five occasions in the Megillah, Haman is called an “Agagite.”^[2] Several early traditions consider this appellation a reference to Haman’s

descent from King Agag of Amalek, whom Saul defeated (I Sam. 15).^[3]

Similarly, several midrashic traditions identify the Kish of

Mordecai's pedigree (2:5) with Saul's father (I Sam. 9:1).^[4] From this vantage point, Mordecai's recorded pedigree spans some five centuries in order to connect him and Esther to Saul. If indeed Haman is of royal Amalekite stock, and Mordecai and Esther descend from King Saul, then the Purim story may be viewed as a dramatic rematch of the battle between Saul and Agag.

However, neither assumption is rooted in the text of the Megillah. The etymology of "Agagite" is uncertain; while it could mean "from King

Agag of Amalek," it may be a Persian or Elamite name.^[5] Had the author wanted to associate Haman with Amalek, he could have dubbed him "the Amalekite." The same holds true for Mordecai and Esther's descent from King Saul. If the Megillah wished to link them it could have named Saul instead of "Kish" (Ibn Ezra). It is possible that the Kish mentioned in the Megillah is Mordecai's great-grandfather rather than a distant

^[6]
ancestor.^[6]

Regardless of the historical factuality of the aforementioned identifications, a strong argument can be made for a *thematic* rematch between the forces of good and evil which runs parallel to Saul's inadequate efforts to eradicate Amalek. In this case, the association can be inferred from the text of the Megillah itself.^[7] The conflict between Mordecai and Haman as symbolic of a greater battle between Israel and Amalek is well taken conceptually, but it is tenuous to contend that the biological connections are manifest in the text. However, if the midrashim had received oral traditions regarding these historical links, we accept them—*ve-im kabbalah hi, nekabbel*.

B. ASSIMILATION

It is sometimes argued that the turning point in the Megillah is when the Jews fast (4:1-3, 16-17; 9:31), thereby repenting from earlier

assimilationist tendencies demonstrated by their sinful participation in Ahasuerus' party. According to this reading, Haman's decree was direct retribution for their communal sin. However, the text contains no theological explanation of why the Jews "deserved" genocide; on the contrary, the sole textual motivation behind Haman's decree is Mordecai's refusal to show obeisance to Haman (3:2-8). By staunchly standing out, Mordecai jeopardizes his own life and the lives of his [8] people.

Moreover, there is no indication in the Megillah that the Jews ever did anything wrong. On the contrary, the references to the Jews acting as

[9] a community display them mourning and fasting, first spontaneously, and then at Mordecai's directive (4:1-3, 16-17; 9:31). They celebrate their victory by sending gifts to each other and giving charity to the poor (9:16-28).

Consider also Haman's formulation of his request to exterminate the Jews: "Their laws are different from every nation" (3:8). Several midrashim find in Haman's accusation testimony that the Jews observed the commandments and stood distinctly apart from their pagan

[10] counterparts.

Curiously, the only overt indications of foreign influence on the Jews in the Megillah are the names Mordecai and Esther, which likely derive from the pagan deities Marduk [11] and Ishtar. [12] However, the use of pagan names need not indicate assimilation of Mordecai and Esther, nor of the community at large. [13]

Not only is there no textual evidence of Jewish assimilation—on the contrary, the Megillah consistently portrays Jews positively—but there is no rabbinic consensus on this matter either. The oft-quoted Gemara used to prove assimilation states:

R. Shimon b. Yohai was asked by his disciples, Why were the enemies of Israel [a euphemism for the Jews] in that generation deserving of extermination? He said to them: Answer the question. They said: Because

they partook of the feast of that wicked one. [He said to them]: If so, those in Shushan should have been killed, but not those in other provinces! They then said, answer the question. He said to them: It was because they bowed down to the image. They said to him, then why did God forgive them [i.e., they really deserved to be destroyed]? He replied: They only pretended to worship, and He also only pretended to exterminate them; and so it is written, “For he afflicted not from his heart.” (*Megillah* 12a)

R. Shimon b. Yohai’s students suggested that the Jews deserved to be destroyed because of their willing participation in Ahasuerus’ party, but they did not state what was wrong with this participation. *Song of Songs Rabbah* 7:8 posits that the Jews sinned at the party by eating nonkosher food. Alternatively, *Esther Rabbah* 7:13 considers lewdness the primary sin at the party.^[14]

A contrary midrashic opinion is found in *Midrash Panim Aherim* 2, which relates that the Jews specifically *avoided* the party. Related sources describe that the Jews cried and mourned over Ahasuerus’ festivities.^[15]

Within the aforementioned rabbinic opinions, we find controversy over what was wrong with the party and the extent of the Jews’ participation (if any). But this entire discussion becomes moot when we consider that R. Shimon b. Yohai *rejects* his students’ hypothesis on the grounds that only Shushan’s Jewry participated; the Jews in other provinces never attended either of Ahasuerus’ parties.^[16]

R. Shimon b. Yohai then submits his own opinion: the Jews bowed to “the image.” Rashi avers that the image refers to the statue of Nebuchadnezzar erected and worshipped generations earlier (see Daniel chapter 3), while Meiri (*Sanhedrin* 74b) quotes an alternative reading of our Gemara, which indicates that the “image” was an idol that Haman wore as people bowed to him.^[17]

Both possibilities present difficulties: According to Rashi, the Jews were to be punished for the transgression of their ancestors, though there is no evidence that they perpetuated this sinful conduct. According

to Meiri's alternative reading, the question of R. Shimon b. Yohai to his students simply becomes more acute: only the members of the king's court in Shushan bowed to Haman. Most Jews of Shushan, and all Jews from the outer provinces, never prostrated before Haman.

In any case, the Gemara concludes that the Jews bowed without conviction. God "externally" threatened the Jews in return, that is, the threat was perceived, not real. The Gemara never resolves the theological question of why the Jews deserved such a harsh decree. The text of the Megillah consistently portrays the Jews in a favorable light, and the Gemara's ambivalence over the theological cause of the Purim story only supports this positive assessment. In light of these factors, we must relegate discussions of assimilation to the realm of *derekh ha-derash*, that is, assimilation is something to be criticized, but the Megillah is not engaged in this condemnation—rather, it is concerned with other religious purposes.

C. RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

The Megillah makes no mention of the distinctly commandment-related behavior of the heroes, nor of the nation. Other than the term *Yehudi(m)*, there is nothing distinctly Jewish in the Megillah. Most prominent is the absence of God's Name. Also missing are any references to the Torah or specific commandments. In this light, the holiday of Purim could be viewed as a nationalistic celebration of victory. The only sign of religious ritual is fasting; but even that conspicuously is not accompanied by prayer. The omission of God's name and prayer is even more striking when we contrast the Masoretic Text with the Septuagint additions to the Megillah—where the Jews pray to God and God intervenes on several occasions. In the Septuagint version, God's

[18]

Name appears over fifty times.^[18] It appears unmistakable that the author of the Megillah intended to stifle references to God and Jewish religious practice. The second section of this chapter will address the question of why this is so.

D. MORDECAI'S DISOBEDIENCE

Mordecai's rationale for not prostrating himself involves his Jewishness (3:4), but the Megillah does not explain how. Many biblical figures bow to kings and nobles as a sign of respect, not worship; notably

[19] Esther bows to Ahasuerus in 8:3. The text suggests that Mordecai did not want to honor the *king* and his command (see 3:2-4), but this explanation seems puzzling. Would Mordecai endanger his own life and

[20] the lives of all Jews for this reason? *Esther Rabbah* 6:2 finds it unlikely: But Mordecai did not bow down nor prostrate himself before him (3:2). Was Mordecai then looking for quarrels or being disobedient to the king's command? The fact is that when Ahasuerus ordered that all should bow down to Haman, the latter fixed an idolatrous image on his breast for the

[21] purpose of making all bow down to an idol.

Other rabbinic sources contend that rather than wearing an idol, Haman [22] considered himself a deity.

Nevertheless, the text never alludes to idolatry in regard to Haman, [23] nor anywhere else in the Megillah. It appears that technical idolatry did not figure into Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman. In the second section of this chapter, we will consider alternative responses to this question.

To conclude, certain midrashic assumptions are without clear support in the biblical text, and there often is disagreement in rabbinic sources. Both Mordecai and Esther's biological connection to Saul and Haman's descent from Agag of Amalek are debatable. There is no evidence of Jewish assimilation, nor is there testimony to overtly Jewish religiosity. Finally, it is unclear why Mordecai refused to bow to Haman, which is surprising given the centrality this episode has in the narrative.

Although these ambiguities make an understanding of the Megillah

more complicated, they also free the interpreter to look beyond the original boundaries of explanation and to reconsider the text and its messages anew.

THE CENTRAL MESSAGES OF THE MEGILLAH

A. AHASUERUS AS THE MAIN CHARACTER

In determining the literary framework of the Megillah, Rabbi David Henshke notes that, viewed superficially, chapter 1 only contributes Vashti's removal, making way for Esther. However, the text elaborately describes the king's wealth and far-reaching power. This lengthy description highlights the fact that there is a different plot. The king's power is described in detail because it is central to the message of the Megillah. Moreover the Megillah does not end with the Jews' celebration. It concludes with a description of Ahasuerus' wealth and power, just as it begins. The bookends of the story point to the fact that the Purim story is

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played out on Ahasuerus' stage.

The other major characters—Esther, Mordecai, and Haman—are completely dependent on the good will of the king. For example, the political influence of Esther and Mordecai ostensibly contributed significantly to the salvation of the Jews. However, their authority was subject to the king's moods. Esther knew that Vashti had been deposed in an instant. The king even held a second beauty contest immediately after choosing Esther as queen (2:19). When the moment to use her influence arrived, Esther was terrified to confront the king to plead on behalf of her people. The fact that she had not been summoned for thirty days reminded her of her precarious position (4:11).

Mordecai, who rose to power at the end of the Megillah, likewise must have recognized the king's fickleness. Just as the previous vizier was hanged, Mordecai never could feel secure in his new position.

Rabbi Henshke points out that after Haman parades Mordecai around Shushan (a tremendous moral victory for Mordecai over his archenemy), Mordecai midrashically returns to his sackcloth and ashes (see *Megillah* 16a). After Haman is hanged, which should have ended the conflict between Mordecai and Haman, only *the king* is relieved, because

the threat to his own wife is eliminated (7:10). Even after Ahasuerus turns Haman's post over to Mordecai, Esther still must grovel before the king (8:1-6). The Jews remain in mortal fear because of the *king's decree*, irrespective of Haman.

B. GOD AND AHASUERUS

Most of the main characters of the Megillah have counterparts: Mordecai opposes Haman; Esther is contrasted to Vashti (and later Zeresh). On the surface, only Ahasuerus does not have a match—but

[25]

behind the scenes, he does: it is God. While God's Name never appears in the Megillah, "the king" appears approximately 200 times. It would appear that Ahasuerus' absolute power is meant to occupy the role

[26]

normally assigned to God elsewhere in Tanakh.

Everyone must prostrate before the king's vizier—how much more respect is therefore required for the one who appointed him! And one who enters the throne room without the king's permission risks his or her life—reminiscent of the Jewish law of the gravity of entering the Holy of Holies, God's "throne room." Even the lavish parties at the beginning of the Megillah fit this theme. Instead of all the nations of the world coming to the Temple in Jerusalem to serve God (Isa. 2:2-4), all the nations of the world come to the palace in Shushan to see Ahasuerus' wealth and to get drunk.

[27]

C. THE MEGILLAH AS SATIRE

Along with Ahasuerus' authority and absolute power comes a person riddled with caprice and foolishness. Ahasuerus rules the world, but his own wife does not listen to him. He makes decisions while drunk and accepts everyone's advice. Rabbi Henshke convincingly argues that the primary point of the Megillah is to display the ostensible power of a human king while satirizing his weaknesses.

The patterns established in chapter 1 continue throughout the Megillah. Haman is promoted simply because the king wants to promote him. This promotion occurs right after Mordecai saves the king's life and is not rewarded at all. Despite the constant emphasis on the king's laws,

Ahasuerus readily sells an innocent nation for destruction and drinks to that decision (3:11-15). Later he still has the audacity to exclaim, “*mi hu zeh ve-ei zeh hu!*” (who is he and where is he, 7:5). Despite the king’s indignant proclamation, the answer to his question is that it is the king

[28]

himself who is the enemy of the Jews! [\[28\]](#)

The striking parallel between Haman’s decree (3:11-15) and Mordecai’s (8:7-14) further illustrates the king’s inconstancy: both edicts follow the identical legal procedure and employ virtually the same language, yet one allows the Jews to be exterminated while the other permits the Jews to defend themselves. The decree of self-defense rather than a repeal of Haman’s decree of extermination demonstrates that Ahasuerus is subservient to his own decrees to the point where he cannot even retract them himself (1:19; 8:8, cf. Dan. 6:9, 13, 15-16). Finally, the Bigtan and Teresh incident (2:21-23) serves as a reminder that the king’s power was precarious and that his downfall could arise suddenly from

[29]

within his Empire. [\[29\]](#)

D. MORDECAI’S DISOBEDIENCE

We may identify two layers of motivation for Mordecai’s not bowing to Haman: Rabbi Yaakov Medan asserts that Mordecai does not bow because he needs to send a strong message to Israel: passivity in the face

[30]

of evil can cause even more harm in the future. [\[30\]](#)

In light of Rabbi Henshke’s analysis, another answer emerges: Mordecai wishes to oppose the king’s command (3:2, 4). Once the king promotes Haman (especially right after Mordecai had saved the king’s life yet received no reward), Mordecai recognizes the fickle character of the king. Even further, Mordecai perceives that Ahasuerus had “replaced” God as the major visible power in Shushan. Thus Mordecai finds himself battling on two fronts. While superficially he opposes Haman, his defiance actually is also a spiritual rebellion against Ahasuerus. Therefore the text stresses that Mordecai was violating the king’s decree by refusing to prostrate before Haman.

The Gemara lends conceptual support for this dual battle of Mordecai. After Mordecai learns of the decree of annihilation, he begins to mourn:

“And Mordecai knew all that had been done” (4:1)—what did he say? Rav says: Haman has triumphed over Ahasuerus. Samuel says: the higher king has triumphed over the lower king (Rashi: a euphemism for “Ahasuerus has triumphed over God”). (*Megillah* 15a)

According to Rav, Haman was the primary threat to Mordecai and the Jews. Mordecai bewails Haman’s manipulation of the weaker Ahasuerus. According to Samuel, Mordecai perceives that Ahasuerus was too powerful. That Ahasuerus allowed such a wicked individual to rise to power weakened the very manifestation of God in this world. Rav’s response addresses the surface plot, the conflict between Haman and Mordecai. Samuel reaches to the struggle behind the scenes—God’s conflict with Ahasuerus.

E. AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE WORLD OF AHASUERUS

Instead of stopping at its satire of the king, the *Megillah* offers an alternative lifestyle to the world of Ahasuerus. As was mentioned earlier, the *Megillah* consistently portrays the Jews’ character in a positive light. In 3:8, Haman contrasts the laws of the Jews with the laws of the king. Thus Jewish laws and practices are an admirable alternative to the decrepit values represented by Ahasuerus’ personality and society.

Ahasuerus is a *melekh hafakhpakh*, a whimsical ruler. His counterpart, God, works behind the scenes to influence the Purim story

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through the process of *ve-nahafokh hu* (9:1).^[31] In the world of the *hafakhpakh* everything is arbitrary, self-serving, and immoral. There is no justice: a Haman can be promoted, as can a Mordecai. In contrast, God’s

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world of *ve-nahafokh hu* is purposeful and just.^[32] Although the reader is left wondering why the Jews were threatened in the first place, God had justice prevail in the end.

Even in their victory, however, the Jews remain entirely under the

power of Ahasuerus. As a result, Purim is crippled as opposed to most other holidays:

[Why do we not say Hallel on Purim?]...Rava said: There is a good reason in that case [of the exodus] because it says [in the Hallel], “O servants of the Lord, give praise”— who are no longer servants of Pharaoh — But can we say in this case, O servants of the Lord, give praise—and not servants of Ahasuerus? We are still servants of Ahasuerus! (*Megillah* 14a)

CONCLUSION

The showdown between Haman and Mordecai is central to the surface plot, whereas the more cosmic battle that pits God and Mordecai against the world of Ahasuerus permeates the frame of the *Megillah* from beginning to end.

The reader is left helpless in the face of the question of why the Jews deserved this decree. The Jews appear completely righteous, and it specifically is the heroic integrity of Mordecai which endangers them in the first place. Yet the reader is led to confront God honestly, confident by the end that there is justice in the world, even when it is not always apparent to the human eye. This piercingly honest religiosity has been a source of spiritual inspiration throughout the Jewish world since the writing of the *Megillah*. The *Megillah* challenges us and brings us ever closer to God—who is concealed right beneath the surface.

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____ This chapter is adapted from Hayyim Angel, “*Peshat and Derash in Megillat Esther*,” *Purim Reader* (New York: Tebah, 2009), pp. 59-76; reprinted in Angel, *Creating Space between Peshat and Derash: A Collection of Studies on Tanakh* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2011), pp. 186-201.

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____ See 3:1, 10; 8:3, 5; 9:24.

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____ Mishnah *Megillah* 3:4 requires that *Parashat Zakhor* (Deut. 25:17-19) be read the

Shabbat preceding Purim. Mishnah 3:6 mandates that the narrative of Amalek's attack on the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod. 17:9-17) be read as the Torah portion of Purim. Josephus (*Antiquities* XI:209) asserts that Haman was an Amalekite.

[4] See, for example, *Megillah* 13b.

[5] Yaakov Klein, Mikhael Heltzer, and Yitzhak Avishur et al. (*Olam HaTanakh: Megillot* [Tel Aviv: Dodson-Iti, 1996, p. 217]) write that the names Haman, Hamedata, and Agag all have Elamite and Persian roots.

[6] Cf. Amos Hakham's comments to 2:5 in *Da'at Mikra: Esther*, in *Five Megillot* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1973); Aaron Koller, "The Exile of Kish," *JSOT* 37:1 (2012), pp. 45-56.

[7] Hakham suggests that "Agagite" may be a typological name, intended to associate Haman conceptually with "Amalek," i.e., he acts as one from Amalek (the same way many contemporary Jews refer to anti-Semites as "Amalek" regardless of their genetic origins). Jon D. Levenson (*Old Testament Library: Esther* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997], pp. 56-57) adds that Saul lost his kingdom to David as a result of not killing Agag; now Mordecai will reclaim some of Saul's glory by defeating Haman the Agagite—although the Davidic kingdom stopped ten years after Jeconiah was exiled (2:6).

[8] See discussion in R. Haim David Halevi, *Mekor Hayyim ha-Shalem* (Hebrew), vol. 4, pp. 347-351.

[9] Although the Jews' mourning and fasting may indicate that they were repenting from sins, the text avoids any reference to what these sins might have been. These religious acts just as easily could indicate a petition to God in times of distress.

[10] See *Esther Rabbah* 7:12; cf. *Megillah* 13b; *Abba Gorion* 26; 2 *Panim Aherim* 68; *Aggadat Esther* 30-31; *Esther Rabbah* and *Targum Esther* 3:8. Carey Moore (*Anchor Bible 7B: Esther* [New York: Doubleday, 1971], p. 39) translates *mefuzzar u-meforad* as "scattered, yet unassimilated." Hakham (on 3:8) suggests this possibility as well.

[11] Mordecai is a variant of “Merodakh” (= Marduk). See Jer. 50:2; cf. II Kings 25:27 (~Jer. 52:31); Isa. 39:1. See *Megillah* 12b; *Esther Rabbah* 6:3; 2 *Panim Aherim* 62; *Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* 50; 1 and 2 Targum Esther 2:5, for midrashic explications of Mordecai’s name.

[12] See *Megillah* 13a (several alternative midrashic etymologies of the name Esther are given there as well). Yaakov Klein, Mikhael Heltzer, and Yitzhak Avishur et al. (*Olam HaTanakh: Megillot* [pp. 238–239]) maintain that the name Esther derives from the Persian word “star” (meaning “star” in English as well). They reject the derivation from Ishtar, since a *shin* in a Babylonian word (Ishtar) would not be transformed into a *samekh* in the Hebrew (Esther).

[13] Even if pagan names suggest assimilation, it is possible that their host rulers gave them these names, as with Daniel and his friends (Dan. 1:7). Cf. *Megillah* 13a: “The *nations of the world* called Esther this after Ishtar.” At any rate, it is clear that Esther needed to conceal her Jewish identity, so her using the name Hadassah would have been unreasonable.

[14] Cf. *Esther Rabbah* 2:11; *Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* 48. Other midrashim look to other eras for theological causes of the Purim decree. *Esther Rabbah* 1:10 turns to the Jews’ violation of Shabbat in the time of Nehemiah. *Esther Rabbah* 7:25 considers the threat in the Purim story retribution for the brothers’ sale of Joseph. *Esther Rabbah* 8:1 blames Jacob’s deception of Isaac.

[15] See midrashim cited in *Torah Shelema* I:52, 60, 61.

[16] *Song of Songs Rabbah* 7:8 concludes that even if only a few Jews participated in the party, all of Israel still could be held responsible because of the principle of *arevut*, corporate national responsibility.

[17] See, e.g., *Esther Rabbah* 6:2.

[18] For further discussion of the Septuagint additions, see Carey Moore, *Anchor Bible 44: Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah: The Additions* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 3-16; 153-262.

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See Gen. 23:7; 27:29; 33:3; 42:6; I Sam. 24:8; II Sam. 14:4; I Kings 1:23. Amos Hakham notes that the terms *keri'ah* and *hishtahavayah* (in Est. 3:2, 5) are collocated exclusively in regard to God, or to pagan deities.

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Mordecai is a hero, but it is less evident whether his actions always should be considered exemplary (majority opinion), or whether he should be considered a hero for reacting properly to a problem that he had created in the first place. See Rava's opinion in *Megillah* 12b-13a; *Panim Aherim* 2:3. One also could argue that Mordecai was willing to assume personal risk but did not anticipate a decree of genocide against his people.

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See also *Esther Rabbah* 7:5; *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* 50; *Abba Gorion* 22; *Panim Aherim* 46; *Esther Rabbah* 2:5, 3:1-2; *Targum* 3:2; Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, 6.5 and 8; Ibn Ezra; *Tosafot Sanhedrin* 61b, s.v. Rava.

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Megillah 10b, 19a; *Esther Rabbah* 7:8. Cf. *Sanhedrin* 61b, with *Tosafot ad loc.*, s.v. Rava.

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R. Yitzhak Arama was perhaps the first to argue that the reasoning of idolatry is *derekh ha-derash*. See Barry Dov Walfish, *Esther in Medieval Garb: Jewish Interpretation of the Book of Esther in the Middle Ages* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), p. 69. The closest implicit reference to pagan practices in the text is Haman's lottery.

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R. David Henske, "Megillat Esther: Literary Disguise" (Hebrew), in *Hadassah Hi Esther* (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 1999), pp. 93-106.

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Cf. *Esther Rabbah* 3:10: "Everywhere in the Megillah where it says, 'King Ahasuerus,' the text refers to Ahasuerus; every instance of 'the king' has a dual holy-secular meaning" (i.e., it refers both to God and to Ahasuerus).

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Earlier commentators also address the issue of why God's Name is not mentioned in the Megillah. Ibn Ezra opines that the Megillah would be translated for distribution throughout the Persian Empire; since pagan translators may substitute the name of a pagan deity for God's Name, the author of the Megillah deliberately

avoided referring to God. Rama (*Yoreh De'ah* 276) suggests that there was doubt whether the Megillah would be canonized (cf. *Megillah* 7a); therefore, they omitted God's Name anticipating the possibility of rejection, which would lead to the mistreatment of the scrolls. For a more complete survey of medieval responses to this issue, see Barry Dov Walfish, *Esther in Medieval Garb*, pp. 76-79.

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For a thorough analysis of the use of irony in the Megillah, see Moshe D. Simon, "'Many Thoughts in the Heart of Man...': Irony and Theology in the Book of Esther," *Tradition* 31:4 (Summer 1997), pp. 5-27.

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Megillah 16a: "And Esther said, 'the adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman' (7:6)—R. Eliezer says: this teaches that Esther began to face Ahasuerus, and an angel came and forced her hand to point to Haman."

One should not overlook Esther's remark to the king (7:4): were she and her people to be sold into slavery, she wouldn't have protested, indicating that the king and his interests are too important to trouble for anything short of genocide! Cf. 8:1-4, where Ahasuerus turns Haman's wealth over to Mordecai and Esther but does nothing to address his diabolical decree. The king's priorities are depicted as incredibly perverse in these episodes. Compare *Megillah* 11a: "'He was Ahasuerus' (1:1)—he was wicked from beginning until his end." This Gemara penetrates beneath the king's ostensible benevolence toward the Jews at the end of the Megillah, remarking that he was no better than before.

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Although Bigtan and Teresh failed in their efforts, King Xerxes—who often is understood by scholars to be Ahasuerus—was assassinated by other court officials within ten years of the Purim story (465). See Moore (*Esther*), p. 32. For analysis of the biblical and extra-biblical evidence to identify Ahasuerus with Xerxes and Esther with his wife Amestris, see Mitchell First, "Achashverosh and Esther: Their Identities Unmasked," in [???????](#).

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R. Yaakov Medan, "Mordecai Would Not Kneel or Bow Low—Why?" (Hebrew), in *Hadassah Hi Esther*, pp. 151-170.

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R. Yonatan Grossman demonstrates how the entire Megillah is structured chiastically around the principle of *ve-nahafokh hu* (Yeshivat Har Etzion, Virtual Bet Midrash 2007 [<http://vbm-torah.org/archive/ester/01ester.html>]).

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See R. Avraham Walfish, "An Ordinance of Equity and Honesty" (Hebrew), in *Hadassah Hi Esther*, pp. 107-140.

Byline:

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The Book of Esther and the Gift of Transformation

Byline:
Alana Ruben

Esther is the antidote to Eve. Unlike Adam and Eve, whose breakdown in trust and communication resulted in humanity's collective exile—lives, relationships, and societies out of balance, Mordechai and Esther, through their creative partnership, not only saved the Jewish People, but brought joy, light, and stability to the kingdom. Esther, and specifically her intelligent rescue strategy for herself and her people, provided a psychologically wise, embodied process leading to empowerment, growth, and greater wholeness. She is the one, who by personally transforming herself, transforms the whole kingdom. *Megillat Esther* is essentially about exile and redemption —individually and collectively, and holds the secret of how to return home to ourselves and our land whole.

Encoded in the Book of Esther are the answers to many of our collective, universal questions. How do we build a more just world? What must we do to restore a sense of the sacred to our marriages, homes, and society? How do we rekindle love in our relationship with the divine after heartache and disappointments? How do we become our most empowered selves?

The goal of marital union in Judaism was never simply to procreate but to bring into the world greater *kedusha* (holiness), prosperity, and security, not just for one's family, but for all of society. The Jews' victory in the fifth century BCE and all Purim celebrations hence were the consequence of Esther's capacity to transform herself from a passive adopted daughter, then mute wife into a woman who knows how to ask instinctually and strategically for what she needs from Mordechai, her community, and ultimately from her husband, the king.

As we read in the final chapters, Esther's transformation blessed the whole kingdom. The loyal, righteous Mordechai replaced the tyrannical, war-mongering Haman as the Prime Minister. The brave, assertive actions of Esther resulted in a more honest, transparent union and balance of power between the king and queen. And, through the constantly maturing, evolving union of Esther and Mordechai, there emerged an individuation map on how to survive and redeem ourselves from exile—move from a state of spiritual alienation and powerlessness to honest self-expression and integrity—via uprooting the seeds of distrust between men and women planted by Adam and Eve.

By the end of the *megillah*, Esther is no longer a queen in name only, a mere figurehead, *inconsequential to the king and kingdom*. Through her spiritually rich process and clever plan that will be discussed in detail, Esther becomes embodied, creative, enthroned, active, majestic, visible, articulate, prolific, and sovereign. She becomes a warrior, writer, and ruler who is loved by her people.

Equally important, by the end, not only is Esther's status changed in the eyes of the king, but Mordechai has changed as well. Mordechai is no longer "The Jew sitting at the gate of the King" but welcomed into the palace, named as viceroy. After Esther raised her standing in the eyes of the king, she used her power *to raise materially the man who raised her spiritually*. And, most importantly, in the end, together, they raise their people in the eyes of the nations, from a physically scattered, vulnerable, cowering, shameful, community of exiles, into a spiritually unified victorious, blessed tribe. Their security and status so significantly increased that other nations desired to convert, learn their laws, and join in their covenant.

What Was the Secret to Esther's Success?

Hadassah was Esther's given Hebrew name at birth. The name Hadassah reveals to us Esther's hidden potential: *Hadas* means myrtle. In the ancient world, myrtle was a medicinal plant known for its ability to heal pain and fever. Myrtle, the symbol for victory (*netzah*) in the ancient world, was strewn in the streets after military victory: "The sweet smell of victory" is the scent of *hadas*. Myrtle became associated with weddings and love as ancient Israelites would dance before the bride and groom waving myrtle. Within young Esther, we see planted her potential to heal the pain of exile, achieve victory, and assert great spiritual strength and power. These powers become activated via remembering the extra letter "heh" added to her name; activating her co-creative relationship to the transcendent.

Esther is first introduced to us as motherless and fatherless, an orphan living in Shushan, Persia. After her parents' death, Esther was adopted by her much older first cousin, Mordechai Ben Yair (Yair, meaning enlightened). Mordechai is introduced as Esther's "*oman*," guardian. "Guardian" (*oman*) is similar to the word for faith (*emunah*) and artist (*uman*). Much like artists were entrusted with creating holy vessels for the Temple, parents are entrusted with caring for and raising children, potential vessels for the divine. To be the guardian of a child is a sacred responsibility, requiring great faith in one's self, the child, and God. Mordechai's faith in Esther is returned by Esther's faith in Mordechai. Their relationship, rooted in faith and devotion to one another, was maintained through their daily connection via messengers for the many years that Esther was in the palace. Throughout the Book of Esther, we witness a man and woman, alternatively guarding over each other, raising one another physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

As a young girl, Esther is presented as passive. She is *taken* by Mordechai as a daughter, *taken* to the palace, and *selected* for special treatment. She is adaptive, a survivor, one who, when necessary, can either blend in with the wall mosaic or enchant the king. In the harem, she was treated like a dress-up doll, a plaything, admired for her malleability, beauty, and form.

Was it Esther's nature or survival instincts that assisted her in finding grace and favor in the eyes of all who saw her? Was she a master at playing the roles expected of her? In Jungian terms, Esther has the markings of "a fantasy woman," one who lacks a secure identity. When our Jewish identity is lacking, we quickly assimilate or lose ourselves in the projections of others. Esther could be read as a symbol of the Jewish soul within each of us who, after generations in exile, risks being exterminated or lost to assimilation, unless we gain the ability to claim fully our uniqueness and assert our identity.

How Did These Monumental Transformations Occur?

They started inside of Esther. These types of transformations begin inside of our individual souls when we commit, despite the risks, to realizing and revealing our uniqueness and personal beliefs. Esther spoke in her own defense and then for her people. She spoke bravely from her heart to the one who held ultimate power over her life and death.

Esther's husband, King Achashverosh, drove away his first wife, Vashti, when she stood for her principles. Vashti's "No" to the King cost the kingdom their queen, and all other wives their freedom of expression. The whole kingdom suffered. Partnership and national prosperity are impossible without the full participation, expression, and sovereignty of women.

The removal of Vashti changes everything not just for the women in the kingdom, but soon after for Esther, Mordechai, and the Jews. Vashti's "No" to the king's exploitative request leads to the crowning of Esther. After Esther is crowned, Haman, the spiritual offspring of Amalek, the eternal antagonist to divine order, rises to Prime Minister. Haman demands full obeisance. Haman can be viewed psychologically as the inner drive for power, the evil inclination, or doubt. Mordechai's refusal to bow to Haman, his enemy, provokes a decree of genocide against all Jews.

Dressed in sackcloth and ashes, Mordechai delivers via messenger to Esther the edict of Haman and commands Esther to immediately go before the King and beseech him, and plead for the lives of her people. Mordechai does not say "plead for your own life."

Esther pauses. Esther thinks. She doesn't agree with Mordechai's plan. She does not want to be a martyr, to stupidly sacrifice her own life and achieve nothing as a result. She has lived in the palace for close to seven years; she knows the king's temper and temperament, and such a plan will most likely cost her life.

How Does Esther Change the Balance of Power?

Esther commands Mordechai to do something on her behalf: to gather their people. Esther's assertion changes the balance of power. Mordechai must obey her request before she will go before the king. Mordechai subjects his will to Esther, who until now has followed his commands.

Esther knows she will not succeed alone but needs the energetic force, prayers, and commitment of the community. Esther tells Mordechai that she has not been called before the King in *thirty days*. Esther may fear that she is already spiritually dead to the King, and her appearance, uninvited into his court, will justify him erecting her literal gravestone, and naming a new queen. Mordechai reminds her that there is still hope; she must act on behalf of her people. "Do not delude yourself into thinking that out of all the Jews you alone will be spared in the palace. Because if you keep silent at this time, relief and safety will come for the Jewish People from another place." Another "vehicle" will be provided: Do not doubt that Love, the Neshama, and the Jewish People are all eternal.

Mordechai as Esther's spiritual guardian then reminds her that this is her moment to claim her role as protector of her people. If you do not make yourself a mouthpiece, an actor, a speaker, like Moses did, on behalf of the divine will, another person will be chosen. "And who knows if it was for this moment that you became queen, arrived into royalty."

To arrive into royalty means to have achieved our full human power: experience ourselves placed firmly on the ground, capable of moving and acting in our full majesty as self-determining human beings living in alignment with divine law; using our capacity to decide, act, choose good over evil.

Esther must decide whether she is prepared to raise herself to her fullest human potential, or remain passive.

Mordechai deeply loves and believes in Esther. He is a true "*oman*": spiritual trainer and physical guardian. Esther knows that Mordechai would never ask her to go before the king if he didn't believe in her. But, more importantly, Mordechai fully grasped the spiritual risk to Esther if she doesn't reveal herself now and go.

Why Will Esther and Her Father's House Be Destroyed?

Cowardice is deadly to the soul. Not only does cowardice weaken the soul, but so does hiding weaken one's spiritual strength. Remaining in hiding will weaken Esther, and lead her to perish if not physically then spiritually. Esther's cowardly choice to "assimilate" into the palace will lead to her own self-destruction; her father's house will perish. "Assimilation" can be read synonymously with "hiding."

Mordechai reminds Esther of her full Hebrew name, *Hadassah bat Avihayil* (my father, the valiant soldier). You are the offspring of a *valiant father* and have the capacity of becoming an *eshet hayil*, a valiant woman, a soldier. Esther pauses, thinks, then sends back the following message to Mordechai: Go and gather all the Jews in Shushan and fast for me! Don't eat and don't drink for three days and nights, and I and my maidens will also fast...and then I will go to the king. She reminds him again that he's asking her to break a law punishable by death. Esther concludes: "If I perish, I perish."

Esther willingly offers herself as a vessel and representative for the much larger vessel, *keneset yisrael*. She chooses to act *in relationship with the spiritual support of her community* but understands her survival, first and foremost, is essential to their continuance. Mordechai, acting as her spiritual partner, rounds up the Jews in Shushan requesting that they fast on her behalf. *He is working with her*. His soul is serving the needs of her soul, and thus did "all that was commanded upon him by Esther."

Esther begins at this moment to take possession of her power: earthly, intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and creative power. Like the Kohen haGadol on Yom Kippur, Esther prepares to enter the king's inner chamber, by joining her people in fasting. However, when she goes to make her request to the king of Persia, a volatile man, she takes a practical approach; beginning with meeting the king, face to face, soul to soul. She does not send her invitation via messenger.

What Is Esther's Strategy?

Before meeting the king face to face, Esther spends three days meeting herself face to face; reclaiming her spiritual power as a Jew, reconnecting to her emotions, embodying her core values and spiritual aim. After fasting, prayers, and reflection, she dresses in *malkhut* (garments of royalty) and walks deliberately, confidently, mindfully to the threshold. Her husband sits, surrounded by guards, on his throne. When she arrives at the doorway, she and the King take in each other's presence, and perhaps for the first time "Esther haMalka" is seen by the king as a queen, his queen.

Esther does not run in hysterically, falling on her knees begging for her life, because she knows that her husband is not a compassionate man. Haman and her husband are both ruthless. There is no pity in the palace. The way to her insecure, gluttonous, alcoholic husband's heart is through his stomach, chalice, and pride. She knows, like Haman, what he hungers for most is honor and respect.

When the King extends his scepter and asks, "What is your petition? What is your request? Up to half of the kingdom, I will grant to you." Esther asks to have the honor of his company at a feast that she has already prepared especially for him and his closest

confidant, Haman. Her greatest pleasure would be to receive his company at a private feast made in his honor. What husband could refuse that? Her innocent request intrigues the king, maybe even moves his heart. My wife could have anything, and all she asks for is time with me at her table. His messenger is sent at once to bring Haman to accompany the king to the feast. Before Esther approaches the king, she already has prepared the feast. Before Esther asks for what she wants, she gives.

When the King asks Esther for a second time, "Queen Esther, What is your request? Up to half of the kingdom, I will give to you," Esther pauses... is this the right time? She listens to her instincts, intuition, and says: "...if it is good for the king... come tomorrow again to a feast, and I will act according to the king's desire and word." She feels or knows that the time is not right. Tomorrow Esther will submit her request, and do what her conscience demands. Is she taking her time or creating a space within which divine assistance may arise?

Divine assistance does arrive in the middle of the night. The king cannot sleep, and discovers the scales of justice are not balanced in the kingdom. A Jew saved his life by reporting on two traitors and was never rewarded. Now, years after the actual events, Mordechai is paraded through town in the king's attire on the king's horse, led by Haman proclaiming: "This is what's done for the man the king wishes to honor."

Soon after the events, both the king and Haman arrive at Esther's second feast in very different states of mind from the day before. The king is tired but relieved to no longer be in anyone's debt. Haman is irritable, sensing the winds shifting away from his sails. For the third time, the king asks Esther: "What is your request, what is your petition, up to half the kingdom and it shall be granted." Queen Esther, knowing her own life would be of more value to the king than the lives of the Jews, firmly asks for the right to live: "Give me MY LIFE (*nafshi*) for my request! And, for my petition, my people."

Esther is well aware that either she or Haman will be executed at the feast; only one of them will be permitted to walk out alive. Her purpose requires that she lives to fulfill her destiny as queen, save her people. She must be victorious over Haman, eradicate him and all of his followers. She does not mince words: "For we were sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, killed, annihilated....if we had just been sold to be servants and slaves, I would have remained silent. For that, I would not have troubled you."

Curiously, Esther has neither named Haman, nor blamed the King. She has simply presented the facts. As expected, the king is infuriated! Who would have the nerve to sell his wife? Steal his property?! The king asks: "Who is this person?" Esther stares evil in the eye, points her metaphoric sword at Haman, and declares war against her enemy: "The evil Haman." Haman trembles before "the king and queen." Haman fears them as a united force. However, the king is not sure whom to believe or what to do. His heretofore "trophy-wife" is accusing his most trusted advisor. The king rises and exits to the terrace. Esther exercising her power, naming evil, liberates the king from the influence of Amalek, Haman.

The king begins to regain his own individuated power.

The king steps out in a confused rage, and Haman feels the weight of judgment hanging over him. He throws himself at the mercy of the queen. Thus, instead of Esther throwing herself at the king begging for mercy, Haman throws himself on Esther pleading for his life. *A complete reversal was created by the force of Esther's strategic thinking.* When the king returns from the terrace, Haman has implicated himself by forcing himself on top of his queen. The king trusts his own sense of sight, and has evidence and witnesses to the truth of Esther's accusations: Haman is guilty. The gallows that Haman had erected in his garden to hang Mordechai are then used the same day to hang Haman. Evil succumbs to its own instrument of death.

Esther reveals to the king that Mordechai is her relative; "the one who in the past spoke well of the king." That very morning the king had heard that Mordechai had saved his life; thus the king transfers to Mordechai his ring, power, and agrees to save the lives of Esther and Mordechai. However, he says that he cannot reverse an edict stamped with the King's seal. What is written and sealed cannot be revoked.

Not deterred in her mission to save her people—just like Moshe appeared many times before Pharoah, demanding "Let my people go!"—Esther spent the next three months beseeching her husband to save her people. Finally, on the 23rd of Sivan, Esther prevails. The king relents: "Esther and Mordechai can write what they see fit and seal it with his ring." Esther, the warrior-queen, sends out an edict granting the Jewish People the right to assemble, fight, and defend themselves. "They may do to their enemies what their enemies wished to do to them."

How Does Esther Lead the Jewish People to Victory?

Esther steps into her full birthright as *Hadassah*, "the one who brings victory and healing." She prepares her people to overcome their enemies, Amalek: the force in the world seeking to cool their passion for divine service and eradicate their divine message and destiny. Each person must wage their own battle against Amalek, the inner and outer forces that prevent them from living fully, passionately, Jewishly—and must fight the narrowing forces that prevent one from growing into their potential, and returning home whole to one's self.

With the arrival of the king's new edict written by Mordechai, throughout the 127 provinces, there was light, gladness, happiness, and honor. In every city, there were celebrations bringing others into the flock of the Jewish People. Mordechai is dressed by the king in *malhut* [royal clothing]. It's a known Jungian spiritual principle that the feminine aspect strongly influences the masculine: Once Esther has differentiated herself and

claimed her true identity, Mordechai must equally change; appear publicly dressed in *malhut*.

Good triumphs over evil. Light over darkness. The small over the mighty. The king is so impressed with the *powerful victory and leadership* of his queen that for a fourth time he asks Esther, “what is your request and petition.” She requests to repeat tomorrow what she did today, and her request is granted.

And the memory of these days shall be remembered and celebrated by every generation... never perish from among their descendants. And then, Queen Esther, daughter of Avihayil, wrote and ratified with Mordechai the Jew letters of Purim, for a second time, and sent to Jews in the 127 provinces, *sefarim*, words of peace and truth...Esther's ordinances...were recorded in a book.

Conclusion: How Do Esther and Mordechai Rectify Humanity?

According to a midrash, at the End of Days, we will only celebrate one holiday, Purim: a joyous day of feasting while giving gifts and charity; a universal holiday, open to all who wish to celebrate the miracle wrought through the sacred process and partnership of Esther and Mordechai, as well as the Jewish community and the divine. “In the end, Mordechai the Jew ruled alongside the king, establishing order for the Kingdom...and demanded good for the sake of his people, speaking words of peace to all of *his seed*.”

We alive today are “*his seed*.” Mordechai and Esther planted seeds of peace, goodness, truth, light, prosperity, and joy for future generations. The spiritual partnership of Esther and Mordechai, *clothed in their full human majesty (malhut)*, is the spiritual *tikkun* for the naked, half-covered Adam and Eve who were banished by God from the Garden of Eden. Mordechai and Esther took the responsibility upon themselves to become spiritual parents to their people in exile, and model an evolving, co-creative relationship between each other and the divine.

Byline:

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MEGILLAT ESTHER, ITS 'HIDDEN' MESSAGE

Is the Megilla a satire? It certainly contains many strange details that beg interpretation. But if so, why would a satire be included in the Tanach. In the following shiur, we attempt to 'unmask' Megillat Esther by considering its historical and prophetic setting.

INTRODUCTION

We begin our study with one of the most well known psukim of the Megilla:

"**ish yehudi** haya be-Shushan ha-**bira** - u-shmo
Mordechai" (see Esther 2:5).

Even though this pasuk is proudly read aloud by the entire congregation, most people do not appreciate its prophetic 'sting'. However, an ear tuned to the prophecies of Zecharia and familiar with Tanach immediately catches its irony, as:

ish yehudi - implies more than simply someone who is Jewish;
ha-bira - implies more than just 'the capital city'; and
Mordechai - is not a Jewish name!

* The phrase **ish yehudi** is mentioned only one other time in the entire Tanach - in Sefer Zecharia 8:23. There it describes a devout Jew in the city of Jerusalem - leading a group of non-Jewish followers in search of God.

* the word **ha-bira** in Divrei Ha-yamim (see 29:1 & 29:19) is used by King David to describe specifically the bet ha-mikdash (the Temple). Prior to the time period of Megillat Esther, the Hebrew word bira finds no other mention in Tanach.

* The name **Mordechai** is probably the most provocative word in the entire Megilla for it stems from the name of the Babylonian deity -Marduk (see II Kings 25:27 & Yeshayahu 39:1). Prior to the Babylonian exile, no one would have dared give his son such a 'goyish' name.

[This does not imply that Mordechai was assimilated, rather his name may reflect the assimilation of his generation.]

And this may be only one of many psukim of the Megilla that are filled with irony and possibly satire. Yet, if this conclusion is correct, we must explain why the Megilla would employ satire to deliver its prophetic message. Furthermore, we must also determine more precisely what that prophetic message is, and how it relates to our celebration of Purim.

To answer these questions, our shiur will take the following steps:

- I. Base our above assumption that the Megilla should contain a prophetic message, related to its historical setting.
- II. Review both the historical and prophetic setting of the time period of the Megilla.
- III. Search for a thematic connection between this setting and the story in the Megilla, and support it with both textual and thematic parallels from other books in Tanach.
- IV. Explain why the Megilla employs this unique style.
- V. Explain how the celebration of Purim, as defined in the Megilla, relates to this theme.

PART I - 'HESTER PANIM'

As every book of the Tanach contains a prophetic message, Megillat Esther should be no different. It is commonly understood that the Megilla teaches us how to see the 'hidden hand' of God behind the events that ultimately lead to Bnei Yisrael's salvation from Haman. Some even suggest that the Megilla's use of the name Esther (from the Hebrew verb 'lehasfir' - to hide) instead of her real name - Hadassa (see 2:7) teaches us this very lesson.

However, if the Megilla wants to show us how God saved His people, why isn't this message explicit? Furthermore, why isn't God's Name ever mentioned? Most every other sefer in Tanach expresses this point explicitly. Why is Megillat Esther different?

Furthermore, most all other seforim in Tanach explain not only how God saves Am Yisrael, but also why they are being punished. This theme of divine retribution is explicit in the Torah in the tochachot (Vayikra 26:3-46, Devarim 11:13-17, 28:1-69, etc.) and reiterated over and over again by all of the prophets. In fact Chazal's explanation of the name Esther reflects this very same concept:

"Esther min ha-Torah minayin?"

[What is the source in Torah for the story of Esther?]

"ve-Anochi haster aster panai ba-yom ha-hu"

[I will surely hide my face from you on that day.]

(Devarim 31:18 / See Chullin 139b).

However, if we take a closer look at that pasuk in Devarim, we find that its message is significantly different. Rather than explaining how God 'saves' Am Yisrael in a 'hidden manner', it explains how God 'punishes' them:

"And God told Moshe, after you die... this nation will leave Me and break My covenant... And My anger will be kindled against them on that day and I will forsake them, ["ve-histarti panai"] and I will hide My face from them... and many evils and troubles shall befall them - & they will say on that day, these evils are because God is not among us.

- Ve-anochi haster astir panai ba-yom ha-hu -

and I will hide My face from them on that day because of all the bad that they have done... [Therefore,]

- Write down this song and teach it to Bnei Yisrael, so that it will be My witness..." (see Devarim 31:16-18).

In these psukim, God warns Bnei Yisrael that should they betray His covenant, great evil will befall them. Even though it may appear to Bnei Yisrael that God has left them, these psukim teach them that God only appears to be 'hiding His face' ['hester panim'] from them. Nonetheless, Bnei Yisrael are expected to realize that their punishment is from God. Therefore, Moshe is to teach Bnei Yisrael Shirat Ha'azinu in order that they recognize this. The shira will teach Am Yisrael to contemplate their predicament and relate their punishment to their wayward behavior. To verify this point, simply read Shirat Ha'azinu [note especially 31:19-20].

Above all, Shirat Ha'azinu explains how we are to determine why we are being punished. In that song, we are told:

"Zechor yemot olam, binu shnot dor va-dor..." (Devarim 32:7).

[Remember the days of old; consider the years of ages past.]

The shira teaches us to contemplate our history, especially how and why we were chosen (see 32:8-9), in order to realize why we are being punished. It reminds us that when something does go wrong, it is our fault, not God's (see 32:4-6!).

Even though God may hide His face, Shirat Ha'azinu does promise that God will ultimately redeem His people, however, not necessarily because they deserve redemption. Rather, God will have mercy on our pitiful predicament (see 32:26-27, also 32:37-38) and save us at the 'last minute'.

Most all of the prophets deliver a very similar message. They explain to Bnei Yisrael what they have done wrong, and hence why they are being punished. Prophecy teaches man not only to thank God for salvation, but also to recognize his faults and correct his mistakes.

Therefore, the Megilla should be no different, and especially because its name alludes to the pasuk in Chumash that commands us to search for a reason why we are punished.

[This supports the Gemara's question in Masechet Megilla 12a (middle) "sha'alu talmidav et Rashb'i: mipnei ma nitchayvu..."]

Even though the Megilla does not provide an explicit reason for this impending punishment, this background and its name suggest that we search for a 'hidden' (or implicit) one. To find that reason, we must consider prophetic and historical setting of that time period.

PART II - HISTORICAL AND PROPHETIC SETTING

The opening psukim of the Megilla immediately point us to its time period (see 1:1-3). Achashverosh is a Persian king who reigns from India to Ethiopia in the city of Shushan. Considering that Cyrus (=Koresh) was the first Persian king, the story in Megillat Esther takes place during the Persian time period and thus after the time period when the Jews had an opportunity to return to Jerusalem.

Even though there is a controversy concerning precisely which Persian King Achashverosh was, he most certainly reigned after Koresh (the first Persian king), and thus, after Yirmiyahu's seventy years were over.

[Note: If you are not familiar with this time period, it is highly recommended that you review Kings II 23:31-25:12, Ezra 1:1-10 and 3:1-4:7, and Yirmiyahu 29:1-15. As you read Ezra 1:1-9, note how the Jews who did not make 'aliya' were encouraged to send 'money' instead! Seems like not much has changed in 2500 years!]

For those of you unfamiliar with this time period, here is a quick overview:

In the first year of his reign, Koresh issued his famous proclamation allowing and encouraging all of the Jews of the Persian Empire to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. The prophets clearly understood this historic decree as the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecy (see Ezra 1:1-9, II Divrei Ha-yamim 36:20-23). As God had promised, the time of redemption from the Babylonian Exile had come.

YIRMIYAHU'S SEVENTY YEARS

To appreciate the prophetic importance of this opportunity, we need only quote Yirmiyahu's final message to the Babylonian Exile in regard to what was 'supposed' to happen when these seventy years were over:

"Thus said the Lord, when the 70 years are complete, I shall remember you and keep my promise to return you to this land.... [At that time.] you shall call out to Me - you shall come and pray to Me - and I will hear you...and you will ask for Me and find Me; if you will search for me with all your heart. Then I will be there for you, and I shall turn away your captivity and gather you from all the nations wherein you may be dispersed... and I will return you to the land from which you were exiled ..." (29:10-14).

According to Yirmiyahu, the return of the Exile would not be automatic. Rather, it was God's hope that their return would be catalyzed by sincere repentance and a yearning to return. In other words, God intended for the Babylonian Exile [as the word 'exile' implies] to be temporary. People don't stay in 'exile' unless they are forced to be there. Exile implies that one cannot return to his own land. [Otherwise the translation of 'galut' would be 'diaspora' instead of 'exile' / hey, not a bad idea!]

Note as well how Yirmiyahu's message is congruent with a primary theme of Chumash, i.e. God's desire for the Jewish people to become His 'model' nation - a vehicle through which all nations will come to recognize God (see Devarim 4:5-8 & Shmot 19:4-6). Recall as well that in that ideal setting, the bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim was to serve as a symbol of this national purpose.

[See previous shiurim on Parshiot Re'eh, Noach, and Vayetze.

Recall that the mikdash is referred to as: "ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem le-shaken **shmo** sham" / see Devarim 12:5-14.]

God's decision to destroy that Temple and exile his people was for a rehabilitative purpose. According to Yirmiyahu, God's hope was for the Exile to 'learn its lesson' during these seventy years in Bavel. Afterward, God hoped that the nation would be spiritually ready and anxious to return to their homeland, and to reconstruct their symbolic shrine - the Temple in Jerusalem.

Precisely as Yirmiyahu had predicted (seventy years after Bavel had risen to power), the opportunity to return arose when the Babylonian empire fell to Koresh (= Cyrus the Great), the first king of the Persian Empire (see Yirmiyahu 25:11-12, Ezra 1:1).

A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Unfortunately, the response of the Exile to this historic opportunity was less than enthusiastic. A group of some forty thousand did return; however, the majority of Am Yisrael remained in Bavel. For an insight into the tragedy of the missed opportunity we need only quote the explanation given by Rav Yehuda Ha-Levi in Sefer Ha-Kuzari (II.24):

"Had the entire nation enthusiastically answered the divine call to return to the Land, the idyllic prophecies of the return to Zion would have been fulfilled and the Shchina would have returned. In reality, however, only a small portion returned. The majority remained in Bavel, willfully accepting the exile, as they did not wish to leave their homes & businesses etc." (sounds familiar...)

Even those who did return lacked enthusiasm. The apathy of the returnees is echoed in the prophecies of Chagai and Zecharia, the prophets of this time period (see Chagai 1:1-3; 2:3 see also Zecharia 4:10; 6:15; 7:4-7; 8:6.

- How does all of this relate to Megillat Esther?
- How could it not relate?
- Could the fact that Am Yisrael remained scattered among the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire, while they could have returned a generation or two earlier to Jerusalem, not relate to the prophetic message of the Megilla?

Considering that Yirmiyahu's seventy years are over, why are so many Jews living in Shushan and all over the Persian empire during the time period of Achashverosh?

Could not this fact alone supply sufficient reason for God to consider Am Yisrael negligent of their covenantal responsibilities?

With this in mind, we must now take a second look at the Megilla in search of at least a 'hint' of this theme.

PART III - THE THEME OF THE MEGILLA AND ITS SATIRE

Based on this historic and prophetic setting, one could suspect that the impending destruction of Am Yisrael by Haman may be a Divine punishment for their apathy. After all, the Jews living in the Persian empire appear to have:

- * preferred Shushan over Yerushalayim;
- * opted to subjugate themselves to Achashverosh rather than respond to God's call to return to their land;
- * Replaced the bet ha-mikdash with the palace of Achashverosh! ["ve-nahafoch hu"]

Even though this prophetic message is not explicit in the Megilla, we will now show how it may be hidden in its satire.

[Note: Before we continue, it is important to clarify a problematic issue. We are about to relate many elements in the story of the Megilla to a satiric commentary on Persian Jewry. This does not mean that these events did not actually occur. The story of the Megilla is true and based on historic facts. However, its prophetic message is conveyed through the use of literary tools, such as satire and irony. Often, criticism is more poignant when delivered implicitly rather than explicitly. (Lehavdil, take for example George Orwell's criticism of the Russian revolution in 'Animal Farm'.)]

TEXTUAL AND THEMATIC SUPPORT

For a start, we will bring two examples where there appears to be an 'echo' of God's voice behind certain statements in the Megilla.

For example, the story of Vashti may reflect God's utter disappointment with Am Yisrael for not returning to Israel to fulfill their divine purpose, to become God's 'model' nation:

"[Vashti was called to] come to the king and show all the nations her beauty... but she did not come as the King commanded, and he became very angry..." (see Esther 1:9-12).

Is not Vashti's behavior similar to that of Am Yisrael? Is not the King's conclusion similar to God's? Is not the fear that all the women in the Persian kingdom will now disobey their husbands ironic? If Am Yisrael (destined to be an 'or la-goyim') does not respond to its divine call, what could God expect from other nations?

[Note that in earlier prophecy, Am Yisrael is often compared to God's wife - see Hoshea 2:4,16-18. See also Zecharia 1:1-3, note 'shuvu eilai...' and 'va-yiktzof', compare 1:12.]

Furthermore, who is the real king in the Megilla? Chazal raise the possibility that the word 'ha-melech' [the King] in the Megilla may be 'kodesh', as it often [in a hidden manner] may be referring to God and not to Achashverosh.

Even Haman's petition to Achashverosh to destroy Am Yisrael may echo a similar complaint that God may have against His own nation:

"There is a certain nation scattered among the nations whose laws are different than any other nation, but the laws of the King they do not keep, and it is not worthwhile for the King to leave them be" (3:8).

In a certain way, Haman's accusation is similar to God's threat in Shirat Ha'azinu to destroy am Yisrael for not keeping His laws (32:26). After all, what purpose is there for God to keep His people if they refuse to obey Him and fulfill their divine goal?

Even though these first two examples may appear a bit 'stretched', a more convincing textual proof is found in the parallel between Achashverosh's palace and the bet mikdash. This parallel is significant for it reflects the fact the Bnei Yisrael had neglected the bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim, preferring instead to be dependent on the palace of Achashverosh. We begin by comparing the overall structure of each:

KODESH KODASHIM - CHATZER PNIMIT

The Megilla refers to the most inner chamber of the king's palace as the 'chatzer ha-pnimit' (5:1), where entry to anyone is forbidden under threat of death - unless called to enter (as Esther feared in 4:11). Here we find an obvious parallel to the kodesh ha-kodashim in the mikdash (Purim - kippurim!).

KODESH - CHATZER CHITZONA

The 'waiting area' outside the inner chamber is called the 'chatzer ha-chitzona' (6:4). Here 'ro'ei pnei ha-melech' (1:14) like Haman himself are allowed to enter freely. This is parallel to the kodesh where kohanim are permitted to enter.

[See description of the Temple in Yechezkel 40:18-19.]

AZARA - SHA'AR BET HA-MELECH

In front of the palace is 'sha'ar bet ha-melech' where people like Mordechai are permitted to stand (2:18,21). However, here one must dress properly ('aveilut' is not permitted), therefore he cannot be there dressed in sackcloth (see 4:21). This area is parallel to the azara in the mikdash.

YERUSHALAYIM - REHOV HA-IR SHUSHAN

This is the area 'lifnei sha'ar ha-melech' (4:2) or 'rechov ha-ir' (4:6) where Mordechai can dress in sackcloth. This is parallel to the city of Yerushalayim surrounding the mikdash.

This parallel is strengthened by the Megilla's use of the word bira to describe Shushan. As we explained in our introduction, in Divrei Ha-yamim, the only other time in Tanach prior to Megillat Esther where this word is mentioned, bira describes specifically the bet ha-mikdash, and in the context of its purpose to serve as a national center and symbol of God's Name. [See DH I 29:1 & 19, you should read from 29:1-25 to see the context. (You'll find there a familiar passage from davening, which maybe you will now understand a little better.)]

[See also Masechet Middot I:9, where the Mishna refers to the bet ha-mikdash as the bira.]

Other parallels to mikdash are found in the use of key words such as 'yekar ve-tif'eret' (1:4); 'tekhelet, butz, ve-argaman' (1:6) in the Megilla's description of the king's party.

[Based on these psukim, the gemara (Megilla 12a) claims that Achashverosh donned the 'bigdei kohen gadol' at his party!]

Even the 6-month party followed by a seven-day special celebration may parallel the six months that it took to build the mishkan (from Yom Kippur till Rosh Chodesh Nissan) followed by

the seven-day 'milu'im' ceremony. Likewise, Chazal explain, 've-keilim mi-keilim shonim' (1:7) as referring to the vessels of the bet ha-mikdash.

Chazal even suggest that Haman's decree may have been Am Yisrael's punishment for drinking from these keilim or alternately for their participation in and enjoyment of the royal party (see Megilla 12a).

[Note that according to pshat, the keilim had returned with Sheshbatzar during the time of Koresh (see Ezra 1:7-8).

However, the Midrash emphasizes the thematic connection between the party and Bnei Yisrael's lack of enthusiasm to build the mikdash.]

Hence we can conclude that the Megilla's satire suggests that during this time period Am Yisrael had replaced:

- * God with Achashverosh;
- * God's Temple with Achashverosh's palace; and
- * Yerushalayim ha-bira with Shushan ha-bira! ['ve-nahafoch hu']

70 DAYS / 70 YEARS

Another seemingly unimportant detail in the Megilla concerning when the two decrees were sent might also allude to this prophetic backdrop.

Recall that the original decree calling for the destruction of the Jews was sent out on the 13th day of Nisan (3:12). Several days later Haman was hanged and Esther pleaded from the king to repeal this decree (8:3-6). Achashverosh agreed; however, the actual letters were not sent out until the 23rd of Sivan - some two months later (8:9)! What took so long?

By carefully comparing these two dates, we again find an amazing reminder of Yirmiyahu's prophecy of the seventy years. Between the 13th of Nisan until the 23rd of Sivan - 70 days elapsed (17+30+23). During these seventy days, all of the Jews throughout the Persian empire were under the tremendous peril of impending destruction, thinking that their doom was inevitable. Could this be an ironic reminder to the Jewish people that they had not heeded Yirmiyahu's prophecy of what he expected from Bnei Yisrael once the seventy years had expired (see 29:10-14)?

A similar concept of suffering for a sin, a day for a year (and vice versa), is found twice in Tanach in related circumstances. After the sin of the 'meraglim', the forty days are replaced by the punishment of forty years of wandering. Here, too, the nation opted not to fulfill their divine destiny, preferring a return to Egypt to the conquest of Eretz Yisrael. Yechezkel, too, is required to suffer 'a day for each year.'

[For 390 days followed by an additional 40 days, he must lie on his side and repent for the sins of Israel and Yehuda that led to the destruction of Yerushalayim (Yechezkel 4:1-14)!]

A similar claim is made by the Midrash which suggests that Achashverosh threw his 180 day party in celebration of the fact that Yirmiyahu's seventy years were over and the bet ha-mikdash was not rebuilt. In pshat, this explanation is unreasonable. Why should the most powerful king of civilization worry about the prophecies of Yirmiyahu, while the Jews themselves do not listen to him? However, on the level of drash, this explanation is enlightening. Chazal, in the spirit of the Megilla - 've-nahafoch hu' - put into Achashverosh's mind what should have been in the mind of Am Yisrael, i.e. the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecy of seventy years and the desire to return.

PESACH AND PURIM

Based on our understanding thus far, it is also understandable why Israel's salvation from Haman's decree comes only after Am Yisrael collectively accept a three day fast. This fast takes place on the 15, 16, & 17th of Nisan. Interestingly enough, the events that led to the repeal of Haman's decree take place 'davka' during the holiday of Pesach - the holiday on which we celebrate our freedom from subjugation to a foreign nation and the beginning of our journey to the Promised Land.

PART IV - WHY SATIRE?

We have shown that the Megilla is laced with allusions to the fact that Am Yisrael does not answer its divine call during the Persian time period. But the question remains, why is this message only hinted at but not explicitly stated by Chazal? Most probably for the same reason that it is not explicit in the Megilla.

This is the power of satire. In order to strengthen the message, a powerful point is not explicitly stated, but only alluded to. The direct approach used by the other 48 nevi'im of Tanach had not been very successful.

[See Masechet Megilla 14a (top) - "gedola hasarat ha-taba'at shel Haman yoter mi-48 nevi'im..."!]

One could suggest that Anshei Knesset Ha-gdola, in their decision to write (see Bava Batra 15a) (and later canonize) Megillat Esther, had hoped that a satirical message would be more powerful than a direct one. Hence, Midrashim of Chazal that comment on the Megilla may follow a similar approach.

[Note how the prophet Natan's message to David ha-melech in regard to his sin with Bat-sheva was much more powerful because he used the 'mashal' of kivsat ha-rash" (see II Shmuel 12:1-7!).]

PART V - THE MINHAGIM OF PURIM

Up until this point we have explained how the satire in the Megilla may reflect a prophetic censure of Am Yisrael in Bavel for not returning to Yerushalayim when the opportunity arose during the time of Koresh. However, if our assumptions are indeed correct, then we would expect the outcome of the Megilla, or at least the celebration of Purim for future generations to reflect this theme.

Instead, we don't find any 'mass aliyah' movement after our salvation. Nor does the celebration of Purim (with 'mishteh' and sending 'mishloach manot') appear to reflect this theme in any manner.

However, with a 'little help' from the prophecies of Zecharia, we can suggest an answer for these questions as well. To do so, we must first identify who the specific Persian King Achashverosh was.

SOME MORE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The topic of the history of the Persian time period is very complicated and the subject of a major controversy between most Midrashei Chazal and the historians (& a minority opinion in Chazal). To explain this controversy is beyond the scope of this shiur, instead we will simply present the two conflicting opinions concerning when Achashverosh reigned.

According to Seder Olam (and hence the majority opinion in Chazal), Achashverosh was the Persian King immediately after Koresh, but before Daryavesh, and thus the story of the Megilla takes place after 'shivat tzion' (the return to Zion during the time of Koresh) but before the second bet ha-mikdash is actually built.

According to this opinion, the events of the Megilla had a tremendous affect on the situation in Yerushalayim. Only two years after the story of Megilla, King Darius, son of Esther gives the Jews permission to return and build the Second Temple. Construction began during the second year of Darius (= Daryavesh).

The events of the Megilla also appear to have catalyzed a major aliyah movement. According to Chazal, Ezra's aliyah from Bavel took place only a few years afterward, during the seventh year of his reign of Daryavesh (who Chazal identify with Artachshasta / see Ezra 7:1-9).

Thus, according to Seder Olam's opinion, the events of the Megilla indeed had a major effect on the rebuilding of the Temple and shivat tzion - the return to Zion.

According to most historians (and a minority opinion in Chazal / see Targum ha-shiv'im & Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer chapter 49), Achashverosh was the Persian king who succeeded Darius (486 - 465 BCE), and thus the story of the Megilla takes place some forty years after the second Temple was built, and thus after Chagai & Zecharia's plea to return and fulfill the potential of Bayit Sheni. [Its construction began in 521 BCE / in the second year of Darius the Great; hence the story in the Megilla takes place in 474 BCE.]

According to this opinion, no major event takes place

immediately after the events in the Megilla. In fact, over two decades pass before a new wave of olim come with Ezra and Nechemya to help strengthen the city of Yerushalayim. [The historians identify Artachshasta with Artexerxes, not the same king as Darius.]

If our assumption concerning the satire of the Megilla is correct, why don't we find a mass aliyah movement immediately after the miracle of Purim. [Jews of the twentieth century could ask themselves a similar question!]

Furthermore, according to either opinion, shouldn't the manner by which we celebrate Purim relate to this theme and satire?

Finally, why is it necessary to celebrate Purim for all generations? Purim is not the only time in our history when Bnei Yisrael are saved from terrible enemies. Chazal go even one step further. They claim that Purim will be the only holiday kept at the time of the final redemption! (See Rambam Hilchot Megilla, Esther 9:28 and commentaries).

THE MEGILLA AND SEFER ZECHARYA

If we follow the opinion of the 'historians' in regard to the time period of Megillat Esther, then the prophecies of Zecharia concerning the potential of Bayit Sheni precede the story in the Megilla. If so, then we posit that numerous textual parallels between the Megilla and Sefer Zecharia are intentional. In other words, when 'anshei knesset ha-gdola' wrote Megillat Esther (most likely during the time period of Ezra / see Bava Batra 15a), they assumed that anyone reading the Megilla was familiar with Sefer Zecharia, and hence would understand the implicit meaning of these parallels.

We will now show how the Megilla may suggest that Am Yisrael's predicament during the time period of Achashverosh was caused because of Zecharia's prophecies (a generation earlier) were not taken seriously! To appreciate this message, we must study Zecharia chapters 7-8.

For a background, review the first six chapters of Sefer Zecharia, noting how they focus on one primary theme - the return of the Shchina to Yerushalayim. However, Zecharia warns numerous times that the Shchina's return will be a function of Am Yisrael's covenantal commitment (see 6:15). Redemption is indeed possible; however, Zecharia insists that the 'spiritual' return of Am Yisrael was no less important than their physical return:

"Shuvu eilai.. ve-ashuva aleichem" (1:3, see also 8:7-8).

[It is highly suggested that you read at least the first two chapters of Zecharia (note 'hadassim' and 'ish rochav al sus' in chapter 1, and 'prazot teshev Yerushalayim' in chapter 2) and then chapters 7-8 before continuing.]

SHOULD WE FAST ON TISHA BE-AV?

According to Chagai 2:18, construction of the Temple began on this same year, i.e. during the second year of Daryavesh. Zecharia chapter seven opens two years later when an official delegation from Bavel arrives in Jerusalem to ask Zecharia a very fundamental question:

"Ha-evkeh be-chodesh ha-chamishi?" Should we continue to fast in the 5th month (i.e. the fast of Tisha Be-av)? (see 7:3)

The question appears to be quite legitimate. After all, now that the Temple is rebuilt, there no longer appears to be a need to fast. However, Zecharia's lengthy and official reply (7:4-8:23) to this question contains an eternal message that relates to the very nature of the ideal redemption process.

In Zecharia 7:4-7, God appears to be quite disturbed by the people's question regarding the need to fast. Instead of showing their interest in the greater picture of the redemption process, the people seem only to be interested in whether or not they have to fast. In the eyes of the prophet, their question reflected a general attitude problem in regard to the entire redemption process.

God's answer implies that the fast of Tisha Be-av is not a divine commandment - rather it was a 'minhag' instituted by Chazal to remember not only the Temple's destruction, but also the reason why the churban took place (see 7:5-6). Thus, God explains, feasting or fasting is man's decision, while God is interested in

something much more basic - that Bnei Yisrael keep the mitzvot which they had neglected during the first Temple period (see 7:5-14).

Zecharia continues his answer with two chapters of 'musar' (rebuke) in which he emphasizes the most basic mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael must keep in order for the Shchina to return:

"EMET u-mishpat shalom shiftu be-sha'areichem, ve-chesed ve-rachamim asu ish et achiv. Almana, ve-yatom ve-anu al ta'ashoku..." (7:8-10).

- Truth, social justice, helping the poor and needy, and thinking kindly of one's neighbor, etc.

God is anxious for His Shchina to return, but in order for that to happen, Yerushalayim must first become a city characterized by truth (8:1-3). God foresees the return the exiles from lands in the east and west. With their return, God and His nation will become once again covenantal partners, through "emet & tzedaka" (see 8:7-8).

Finally, after many words of encouragement and repeated 'musar' (see 8:11-17), God finally answers the original question concerning the fast days. Should Am Yisrael return to Israel and keep "emet ve-shalom, the four fast days commemorating the destruction of Yerushalayim will become holidays:

"tzom ha-rvii, v'tzom ha'chamishi... [The four fast days] will be instead for Yehuda days of celebration... [on the condition that] they will love **emet & shalom**" (see 8:18-19 / note parallel to Megilla 9:30-31!)

After two chapters of rebuke, Zecharia finally answers the people's original question. Should Bnei Yisrael indeed show their devotion to God, i.e. if they practice 'emet u-mishpat shalom', then the fast days, the days of crying for Jerusalem, will become holidays instead.

Should Bnei Yisrael indeed love keeping emet & shalom (these two words simply summarize the primary points raised by Zecharia in this perek), then the redemption process will be complete.

ISH YEHUDI

Zecharia concludes this prophecy with his vision of numerous people from many great nations will one day come to Yerushalayim in search of God. They will gather around the ish yehudi, asking for his guidance, for they will have heard that God is with His people (8:20-23).

Had Am Yisrael heeded this prophetic call in the time of Koresh and Daryavesh, then they would not have been scattered among 127 provinces during the time of Achashverosh. One could suggest that instead of celebrating with the Persians at the party in Shushan, the Jews could (& should) have been celebrating with God at His bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim.

The ish yehudi would have been in the bira in Yerushalayim, making God's Name known to other nations; instead, the Megilla opens as an ish yehudi is found in the bira of Achashverosh in Shushan, ironically carrying the name of foreign god.

[One could also suggest that Mordechai's institution of the yearly celebration of Purim relates specifically to this prophecy. First of all, note how this day is described as one that turns around from 'yagon' to 'simcha', from 'mourning to holiday' (see Esther 9:22). Purim may symbolize the manner in which the fast days for Jerusalem will one day become holidays.]

This parallel to Zecharia could explain the reason for the special mitzvot that Mordechai instituted for Purim in his first letter (see 9:20-22). They reflect Zecharia's repeated message of helping the needy (matanot le-eyyonim/ note 7:10) and thinking nicely of one's neighbors (mishloach manot ish le-re'ehu / note 8:16-17!). Once a year we must remind ourselves of the most basic mitzvot that we must keep in order that we become worthy of returning to Yerushalayim and rebuilding the Bet ha'mikdash.

Certain halachot instituted by Chazal may reflect this message. Interestingly, Shushan Purim is replaced with Yerushalayim Purim for the walled cities from the time of Yehoshua bin Nun replace the walled city of Shushan! [See Yehoshua 21:42 and its context,

compare to Esther 9:2.]

SHALOM VE-EMET

Although this explanation for certain minhagim of Purim may seem a bit 'stretched', textual proof is found in the closing psukim of the Megilla (9:29-32 / read it carefully!).

Mordechai and Esther need to send out a second 'igeret' (letter) explaining and giving authority ('tokef') to the minhagim of Purim explained in the first igeret. What was the content of this special second letter? To our surprise, one short phrase:

"Divrei shalom ve-emet"! [See 9:30, read carefully.]

These two key words point us directly back to Zecharia's prophecy about the fast days becoming holidays (read Zecharia 8:18-19 again)! They explain not only when, but also why the fast days will become holidays - i.e. if Bnei Yisrael keep shalom and emet! The second igeret may simply be an explanation of the purpose of the minhagim of Purim - Mordechai and Esther use this letter to explain to Am Yisrael why Purim has been established - a yearly reminder of the prophecies of Zecharia which remain unfulfilled.

The continuation of this igeret strengthens this interpretation. Under what authority (tokef) does Mordechai institute these halachot?

"Ka'asher kiymu al nafsham divrei ha-tzomot ve-za'akatam" (9:31) [Compare these psukim carefully to Zecharia 8:18-19.]

Recall, God had told Zecharia that fast days and feast days are up to man to decide. Now, according to the second igeret, just like ('ka'asher') the prophets instituted four fast days in order that we remember Yerushalayim, Mordechai institutes a 'feast day' to remember Yerushalayim.

[Note that this pasuk cannot be referring to our Ta'anit Esther, for if it refers to the three day fast, that fast was a one time event and was not "al nafsham ve-al zar'am". Likewise, it cannot be the fast of the 13th of Adar, as that custom only began during the time period of the Ge'onim. Therefore, it must refer to the four fast days on Jerusalem.]

So why didn't everyone return immediately afterward to Israel?

Most probably, after the events of the Megilla, a mass return to Yerushalayim was not realistic. Nonetheless, Mordechai wanted to institute a holiday that would remind Am Yisrael that should such an opportunity arise (once again), that they will know how to relate to it properly. Sefer Zecharia and its theme of shalom ve-emet serve as the spiritual guide.

[This interpretation may help explain why the celebration of Purim will remain even after our final redemption.]

Purim, therefore, has deep meaning for all generations. Its message may have been 'hiding' behind the costumes, the drinking ("ad de-lo yada"), the 'purim Torah', and 'shalach mannos'. It may have been lost within our ignorance of Tanach. Its message, however, remains eternal, just as our aspirations for Yerushalayim and the establishment therein of a just society - remain eternal.

purim sameiach,
menachem

Megillat Esther: She'Asah Nissim la'Avoteinu

by Rabbi Yitzhak Etshalom

I. WHERE IS GOD IN THE MEGILLAH?

Every year on Purim, Jews all over the world fulfill the Mitzvah of K'riat haMegillah – reading the complete Book of Esther from a proper scroll. Before beginning, the reader/leader recites three B'rakhot – the middle of which is Birkat haNes (the blessing recited at the commemoration of a miracle): Barukh...she'Asah Nissim la'Avoteinu baYamim haHeim baZ'man haZeh (Who performed miracles for our ancestors in those days at this time [of year]). Considering that, unlike the Exodus (and all other Biblical miracles), God's hand is nowhere to be found in the text of the story of Esther and Mordechai, we have to wonder which miracle is the focus of this thanksgiving to God? For which Nes are we praising God? (Parenthetically, the same question could be asked in reference to Hanukkah, where the most central "miracle" we celebrate is a military victory which did not, from the accounts we have, include any miraculous intervention in the conventional understanding of the word. To whatever extent this shiur answers the question vis-a-vis Purim, that answer should carry the same validity for the Hanukkah question. Significantly, Purim and Hanukkah are the two occasions when this B'rakhah is recited.)

A second question, certainly related to the first, focuses on one of the unique features of the Megillah. As is well known, Esther is the only book in T'nakh with absolutely no mention of God (by any Name). Much as the Midrash interprets some occurrences of "the king" in Esther (e.g. 6:1) as a reference to God, this is certainly not p'shat. Why is this story even included in the Biblical canon?

Before moving on, it is prudent to note that some approaches within Rabbinic literature see "hidden Nissim (miracles)" throughout our story; these are, however, not evident from the p'shat. In keeping with the general approach of this shiur, we will try to identify the Nes/Nissim within the text of the Megillah.

In order to provide satisfactory answers to these two questions, we will have to address two issues – the nature of a Nes and a new understanding of the story line in Megillat Esther.

II. NES L'HITNOSES

The root of Nes is N-S-S – which means "banner". See, for instance, the verse in T'hillim (60:6): "You have given those who fear You a Nes l'hitNoses – (a raised banner), to rally to it out of bowshot."

A miracle (i.e. deliberate suspension of the laws of physics in order to save the righteous individual or people) is a raising of the banner of God's Name in the world – hence the word Nes. (See also B'resheet 22:1 and see if this approach explains Avraham's "trial" – see also Midrash Rabbah ad loc.)

There is more than one way in which God's Name becomes glorified in this world. Besides an overt intervention, it is possible for human beings to make His Name manifest by demonstrating the most noble of traits. Keep in mind that we are all created in God's "Image" (whatever that may mean...conscience, free will etc.). When we demonstrate the most noble side of human existence and utilize those traits in the most productive manner possible, this is another (certainly more subtle) demonstration of God's power and glory. It is possible for a Nes to take place within the realm of human valor; although it should be stated that unless the people in question take the next step and utilize this experience to enhance their direct relationship with God, it may be that the whole enterprise would be considered a vain effort.

I would like to suggest that the two most noble human traits, each of which is a reflection of the Tzelem Elokim (Image of God) which sparks all of us, are Wisdom and Courage. I am not talking about wisdom or courage in the usual sense; rather about a special kind of wisdom, a unique type of courage and a special synthesis of the two. We will explore these two characteristics throughout the story and clarify how each was utilized in the most productive and positive manner to bring about the successful salvation of the Jews.

Instead of focusing on one or two passages in the Megillah, we're going to read through the whole story and point out the key "Nes-points" along the way. You'll need a copy of the text – all citations, unless otherwise noted, refer to chapters and verses within the Book of Esther.

As we read through, I will point out several other "layers" of the story – or, alternately, several other ways to read the story and the various messages embedded in the text. As usual, we will be reading the text alone; I will point out various Rabbinic interpolations and interpretations as needed for support and illustration.

III. CHAPTER 1

A) THE PARTY (1:1-1:8)

One other "layer" of the story is satiric; especially when viewed within the context of the rest of T'nakh (as will be explained later), the text

is a clear parody. Of what...we will see.

As the story opens, we meet our first player: Achashverosh. Although he is described as a powerful king, ruling over 127 provinces from Hodu (India?) to Kush (Ethiopia?) – we soon find that his power is more illusion than reality.

First of all, the party about which we read in the first chapter (1:3-8) seems to be his inauguration ball (see v. 2); yet it only takes place in the third year of his rule. This seems to indicate that the transfer of power into his hands was not so smooth. We will soon see that plots abound in and around his court and that his control over the realm is not very secure.

The description of the party brings three issues to the fore:

The many allusions to the Mishkan (Tabernacle) / Mikdash (Temple). Keep in mind that the Ba'al haMegillah (author) expects every reader to be familiar with T'nakh and will pick up any word-associations made here. Among the materials described here are several which are prominent in the Mishkan: T'khelet (royal blue), Argaman (purple), Kesef (silver) and Shesh (marble). Indeed, the Midrash posits that the vessels which Achashverosh used at this party were the vessels of the Mikdash – this interpretation was probably motivated by the many Mikdash-associations in the description of the party.

(Rav Menachem Liebtag has a fascinating shiur on exactly this point – with many more illustrations. You can find it at his Tanach Study Center Website: it comes highly recommended!)

Achashverosh seems to be very insecure – both personally and politically. He spares no expense to show off his wealth – and specifically invites the governors, ministers and soldiers of the Persian and Medean armies. It seems that he is trying to consolidate his power and bring the military into his good graces. At the end of his six-month party (!), he invites all the citizenry of Shushan to his gala bash. This insecurity will increase and become a prominent feature in the events of the Megillah.

The image of Achashverosh's kingdom, a monarchy governed by protocol. Note how often the word Dat – a Persian word meaning "custom" or "protocol" – shows up in the Megillah: 20 times! (Save for one verse in Daniel, it doesn't appear in any other books of the T'nakh). This would seem to indicate that everything in Achashverosh's realm was done "properly" and that the system was orderly and just. We soon find that this kingdom of Dat is just as illusory as his power.

B) VASHTI (1:9-22)

Vashti is not, properly speaking, a "player" in this narrative. She is much more of a foil, presented as the set-up for the story to unfold. Even after she is gone (dead? exiled?), her shadow hangs over the palace – but more on that later.

The first indication that Achashverosh's power is a lot of fluff is when he decides to show off his beautiful queen (presumably to outshine the beauty of their wives) – and she refuses to come out! This great king, protector of the realm, defender of the empire, ruler of Persia, etc. etc. controls nothing! His own queen refuses him and is not obedient to his wishes. (Although in modern times this would seem to prove nothing about his political power – in Persia of 2500 years ago, this "failing" was quite telling – as we see from the tone of the letters sent out at the end of the first chapter).

We soon learn something else about the king. For all of his power – he never makes any decisions (is he passive-aggressive?). As a matter of fact, he doesn't ever say "no" to any of his advisors! A strange king – a classic "yes-man" sitting on the throne.

We get some insight into how his advisors have learned to "play him". Memuchan (who the Gemara identifies as Haman) knows that if he advises the king to kill (or banish) Vashti on account of her defiance of the king – the drunk monarch may wake up on the morn and feel foolish and humiliated that he had to exile the queen for his own honor – and take out his anger on Memuchan. In order to get the king to "get rid" of Vashti, Memuchan appeals to Achashverosh's sense of justice. He is the defender of men's rights throughout the kingdom and must act decisively on behalf of all the poor princes and governors throughout the Empire whose wives will surely rebel, following Vashti's (unpunished) lead. By appealing to Achashverosh's sense of nobility, the wise advisor allows the king to do what he wants without feeling a sense of humiliation.

Two more notes about the first chapter. First of all, as the Gemara points out, this first set of letters (v. 22) seems to be quite foolish. The king sends out letters to every province, announcing that every man rules in his own house!!??!! (According to the Gemara, this caused the second letters – announcing the "loosing" of Jewish blood – to be taken less seriously by the citizenry who already cast a jaundiced eye on this king's pronouncements).

Second, as R. David Hentschke points out (Megadim vol. 23), the king has to send these letters to each province in their own language (v. 22 – this phrasing shows up several times in the Megillah). As powerful as the king may be, he hasn't been successful in establishing Persian as the language of the realm; perhaps his rule is not so ironclad as it might seem (reminds us a bit of the USSR??).

IV. CHAPTER 2

A) A NEW QUEEN (2:1-4)

We are quickly reminded of Achashverosh's inability to decide anything for himself. It takes his servants to suggest finding a new queen by gathering all of the maidens to Shushan for a "tryout" with the king.

As any student of T'nakh remembers, such a call went out once before – when David was old and near death. As we read in the beginning of Melakhim (Kings), they searched for a young maiden throughout Yisra'el – and found Avishag haShunamit. Note the contrast – whereas the one girl was found (although many undoubtedly would have wanted to be chosen); here, all the girls have to be forcibly brought to Shushan (note the wording in v. 3). And why not...who would want follow Vashti?

There is another interesting allusion in v. 3: The phrase v'Yafked haMelekh P'kidim v'Yik'b'tzu reminds us of a nearly similar phrase used in the first "Jew in the foreign court" story. When Yosef successfully interprets Pharaoh's dreams, he advises that Pharaoh appoint officers to collect the wheat of the seven plentiful years – Ya'aseh Pharaoh v'Yafked P'kidim...v'Yik'b'tzu... (B'resheet 41:34-35). This allusion is not for naught; the Ba'al haMegillah is showing us how Achashverosh and his servants viewed these young girls – just like wheat to be collected and brought to the palace.

B) MORDECHAI AND ESTHER (2:5-20)

We are immediately introduced to our two heroes – Mordechai and Esther. It is critical to note that both of these names are not only Persian (and not Hebrew) – they are both pagan names related to various gods of the pantheon! The Esther-Ishtar-Astarte connection is well-documented (besides the fact that the Megillah explicitly gives her "real" name – Hadassah); our heroine is named for the goddess of fertility. The Gemara (BT Menahot 65) gives Mordechai a more "Jewish" name – Petah'ya – and, again, the Mordechai-Marduk (god of creation in many mythologies throughout the Near East) connection has been extensively written up.

Why do these two righteous people, through whom God saves His people, have such names?

[note: Jews taking – or being given – non-Jewish "alternate" names when in the foreign court is the norm in T'nakh. Note Yoseph, who is named "Tzoph'nat Pa'a'ne'ach" by Pharaoh; Daniel, who is named "Belt-Shatzar" by N'vuchadnetzar, as well as Daniel's three companions. Note that Jews were occasionally given names which were associated with pagan gods – compare Daniel 1:7 with 4:5. Mordechai and Esther seem to be two examples of the same phenomenon. Note that according to the Gemara (BT Megillah 13a), the name "Esther" was given to her by the non-Jews, in response to her beauty.]

Even more curious is Mordechai's insistence that Esther not reveal her identity (as a Jewess) while in the palace (v10, 20). As we shall soon see, even Mordechai's identity was not obvious; he was not distinguished in any external way from any other citizen.

There are a couple of verses which are telling within the scope of Esther's successful entrance into the palace.

(v. 16) – Esther was finally chosen in the seventh year of Achashverosh's reign – in other words, the selection of a queen took four years. (One very tired king! – See 2:12; even in his hedonistic behavior, he followed Dat!).

(v. 17-19) Compare the royal feast in honor of his queen (ironically – "in place of Vashti" – the dead (or exiled) queen's shadow hangs over the palace and Esther is likely aware that her fate may be no better than her predecessor's) with v. 19. As much as the king loves Esther – his servants are bringing more virgins into the palace! Insecure is the best description of anyone with a position of power in this court.

C) THE PLOT (2:21-23)

As we all know, this little paragraph is critical to the later success of our heroes. Note, however, that it is Achashverosh's own guards – who are charged with defending him – who are plotting against him. This kingdom is, indeed, unstable and always ready for a shake-up.

V. CHAPTER 3

A) ENTER HAMAN (3:1-7)

Suddenly – and very much out of the blue – Haman is elevated to a position of importance in the kingdom. This again demonstrates – despite the appearance of Dat – the helter-skelter way in which power and impotence, success and failure – even life and death – are handled most capriciously in the palace.

As much as we know about Achashverosh's terrible insecurity – we quickly learn about Haman's personal devil – his ego. Imagine that the king of the greatest empire on earth has just appointed a relative nobody (as it seems Haman was beforehand) to be grand vizier and that all citizens should pay him homage. Wouldn't he be too enthralled with the sudden attention and respect to care about one or two people who don't bow down? Not Haman – his ego just takes him right past all the knee-benders and focuses his attention on the one person who refuses to bow – Mordechai. As much as we would expect him to be happy with the new position – he is merely enraged (and seemingly obsessed with that rage) at Mordechai.

Note that it isn't obvious to Haman that Mordechai is Jewish – Haman has to find that out from someone else in order to figure out which

nation to destroy (as he wants to annihilate all of Mordechai's people. By the way, this paints Haman as much less of an ideological anti-Semite than we are used to thinking – but that belongs to another shiur.) Evidently, Mordechai's behavior – or, at least his dress and external demeanor – did not mark him as a Jew. Just like his niece, he seems to have been quite assimilated (see the Book of Ezra for more background on this phenomenon).

Now – Haman, the grand vizier of the kingdom of Dat, decides to wipe out an entire nation due to the slight to his ego. How does he decide when to do it? By lottery (Pur)! What a joke this Dat proves to be!

B) ACHASHVEROSH AND HAMAN (3:8-15)

There isn't a whole lot say here; the dialogue between these two speaks for itself. Although everything is done properly, the reader instinctively feels that a king who is willing to condemn a people without even finding out who they are (read 3:8-11 carefully) is not doing a good job of running his empire.

In order to keep an eye on the story, let's put together the chronology of events. The king's party (Vashti's farewell bash) took place in the third year of his reign. Esther was crowned – and Mordechai saved the king's life – in the seventh year. Haman had the letters (allowing the anti-Semites to kill the Jews) sent out on Nissan 13 in the twelfth year of the king's reign. In other words, Esther has been queen for a bit more than four years by this time – and her identity was still a total secret.

VI. CHAPTER 4

A) ESTHER AND MORDECHAI (4:1-17)

Mordechai finds out about this plot – and begins to demonstrate signs of "Teshuvah" (repentance). (Compare 4:1,3 with Yonah 3:5,6,8) He does not, however, do this in front of the palace gate, where he seems to retain his composure. He does, however, get the message in to Esther as to what is going on and he pleads with her to go to the king and have Haman's order overturned.

We are immediately reminded of how capricious this king really is. The beloved queen hasn't seen the king in thirty days (v. 11) (and probably wonders in whose arms he sleeps tonight) – and even she is subject to death if she comes to him unbeckoned unless he agrees to see her (shades of Vashti again)!

At this point, Mordechai sends the message which turns Esther around – and she begins to demonstrate not only her tremendous commitment and courage to her nation; but also an amazing type of wisdom – those very characteristics which reflect her Tzelem Elokim in the most powerful way.

For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this. (4:14)

Mordechai told her about the B'rit (covenant) between God and the B'nei Yisra'el. We are promised that we will outlive all of the Hamans – but that B'rit only applies to the nation as a whole, not to individuals or families. Esther – you may make it through this next upheaval – and you may not. In any case, the Jews will be saved, as God always has His ways of keeping the B'rit.

Esther realizes the wisdom and truth of this argument and acquiesces to Mordechai's plea. Now, she plans her strategy...let's take a peek behind the scenes. First, a few words about this remarkable type of wisdom.

It is natural to see everything in life through the eyes of our experience. This is why honest people often find it difficult to disbelieve others or question their motivations; they cannot recognize the lie in the other person's words because they have no such possibility inside of their own hearts. In the same way, kind people often ascribe positive motives to questionable behavior of others – because they could never recognize mean thoughts in others as they have no such thoughts in their own persona.

It takes a tremendous type of wisdom to separate yourself from what you instinctively feel and how you usually view the world and to see it from the other person's perspective. While this may be easy in a sympathetic conversation (although not nearly as easy as it seems); it is most difficult when deciding how to fight an enemy. The trick is to learn how to think like the enemy – without becoming the enemy.

This was perhaps the greatest miracle of Hanukkah – that the Maccabees were able to think like Greeks (it certainly took great strategy to outfox that mighty army with a small band) – without becoming Greeks (well, not for a couple of generations at least).

In the same way, we will see how Esther manipulates Achashverosh and Haman into a fateful (and, for Haman, fatal) collision course – simply by playing them according to their own personalities and weaknesses.

VII. CHAPTER 5

A) ESTHER AND ACHASHVEROSH (5:1-5)

Let's keep in mind that Esther is risking her life to come into Achashverosh's throne room – and she knows that the king knows this. In other words, she is aware that Achashverosh will consider her request to be very important – important enough to risk her life. We would think that when the king favors her and agrees to grant nearly any request – “even until half the kingdom” – that she would seize this opportunity and ask for salvation and for Haman's orders to be rescinded.

Instead, she invites Achashverosh and Haman to a special party she has prepared for that very evening. Why didn't she ask for salvation at this point?

Esther understood a great deal about politics. Remember – she hasn't seen the king for thirty days. Even if she is still his favorite – she is still not on the “inside” right now. Haman, on the other hand, has just had a drinking party with the king (3 days earlier), celebrating their letters sent out to kill the Jews. If she were to accuse Haman, the king might not believe her and the whole effort would be lost.

She invites the two of them to a party. As disgusting as the prospect sounds, it is the first step in a brilliant plan of psychological warfare.

Let's consider how each of them would react to this invitation:

Haman, as the consummate egotist, has his ego blown up even bigger than before (as we will soon see). He alone is invited to sup with the king and queen!

Achashverosh, on the other hand, must be suspicious. There has already been (at least) one plot on his life – now, Esther risked her life just to invite him and Haman to a party? Is something going on between the two of them (more on this later)? Are they plotting against me?

B) THE FIRST PARTY (5:6-8)

At this party, the king expects to find out what Esther really has on her mind – maybe his suspicions were for naught? Instead, she surprises him by asking him to return – with Haman – for another party the next night!

Following the psychological makeup of our two party guests – each of the states of mind described above became exacerbated.

Esther knew that Haman's ego would continue to grow – and she also knew that he would leave the palace via the gate – and see Mordechai sitting there. Just feed his ego – and he will self-destruct.

C) HAMAN AT HOME (9-14)

Indeed, Haman becomes so enraged when he sees Mordechai that, after a short bragging session with his family, he runs back to the palace to ask Achashverosh to allow him to hang Mordechai immediately. He cannot wait eleven months to kill his arch-nemesis – he needs satisfaction right away (ah, the impetuous egotist.)

VIII. CHAPTER 6

A) HAMAN AND ACHASHVEROSH (6:1-10)

Why couldn't the king sleep? The Gemara provides the obvious answer – he had thoughts of plot and coup on his worried mind. Why did he call for his chronicles to be read? It seems that this powerful king, ruler over 127 provinces – had no friends. There was no one he could trust or turn to. Esther had planted a terrible bug in his mind – two parties in a row with Haman – what are the two of them planning to do? Indeed – what have they already done?

Just as the king discovers that he owes Mordechai a favor from over four years ago – and decides that the way to gain the allegiance of the citizenry is to publicly demonstrate the rewards of loyalty to the crown – Haman turns up in the outer courtyard of the palace. The king had to wonder what Haman was doing there so late at night (!?!) The king summoned Haman for some advice – and for a chance to take him down a peg or two. Now, the king demonstrates some acumen of his own.

In 6:6, the king asks Haman what to do for someone he really favors. Haman, that old egotist, is so caught up in his own power, that he describes a truly regal parade which he assumes will feature him as the honoree. How very surprised he is when the king orders him to take the self-same Mordechai and lead him on the king's horse.

(Note that the phrase to be called out while leading this honoree: Kakhah ye'Aseh la'Ish Asher... shows up in one other place in T'nakh. This is the beginning of the formula of Halitza – the refusal of Levirate marriage, which accompanies the woman's disdainful spit. [D'var[D'varim 25:9]ur own conclusions about the satiric effect accomplished by the Ba'al haMegillah).

B) HAMAN AND MORDECHAI (6:11-14)

Haman returns to his house “in mourning”. The Rabbis have a lot to say about the events of this morning – but, even on a p’shat level, it is clear that Haman’s fortunes have taken a significant turn for the worse. He is quickly rushed to the second party – and, in his case, his own farewell.

IX. CHAPTER 7

A) THE SECOND PARTY (7:1-9)

This is the denouement of the story as far as we are concerned. Haman still doesn’t know who Esther is – but he is clearly shattered and his ego is as fragile as ever. Achashverosh is equally disturbed and must be getting more confused by Esther’s repeated parties without asking for what she really wants (it is clear that the king knows she wants something more – which is why he keeps asking her).

Now, she pulls out all the cards. The king thinks that she and Haman are hatching a plot against him (and have been having an affair?) – and suddenly Haman is revealed as the villain who is plotting against her. Haman thinks that he is still on the road to satisfaction in the matter of the Jews; he’ll just need to wait until Adar. He has no idea that Esther is one of “them”.

Esther points to Haman and all is lost. The confusion and anger of the king, the confusion and fear of Haman – create an emotional jumble which ultimately leads to the king’s explosion when he finds Haman lying on Esther’s divan, begging for mercy. Haman is erased and (here we go again) Mordechai takes his place (compare 8:2 with 3:10). The capricious king has (for the meantime) elevated the Jews and they are saved. We all know, however, that the happy ending of the story isn’t permanent and that the rocky shores of existence in exile (which is probably one of the sub-messages of the Megillah) are not safe for Jews.

X. POSTSCRIPT

We have taken a cursory look at some of the events as described in the Megillah and found that Esther displayed extraordinary wisdom and courage in her successful effort to save her people. We are very right to regard this as a Nes as it is a reflection of God’s Image as found within our heroine. God’s Name is not found – because, unlike Pesach, this is not a story about the suspension of the laws of nature. It is, rather, a story about human strength and nobility used in the most positive and productive effort imaginable – the salvation of Am Yisra’el. (That and a really great satire of the Persian Kingdom)

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