

למודי משה

על המועדים

מגילת אסתר

פורים תשפ"ד

יוצא לאור על ידי ר' משה הריס



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(The *haskomas / michtavei berachah* included below were given on previous *seforim* I brought out)

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החותם לכבוד התורה ולומדיה ובברכת התורה

חיים אהרן בלייער



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Megillas Esther

The Specialty of Megillas Esther

The Gemara (Shabbos 88a) says that Hashem placed Har Sinai over the nation's head and forced them to receive the Torah. However, because of the Purim miracle, the nation received the Torah again, this time willingly and from love. The *Chasam Sofer* (*Drashos* pg. 164) writes, "Therefore, the *Megillah* is more honored and greater than even the Torah itself." There is an aspect of the *Megillah* that is greater than the Torah itself, due to the fact that the Jewish nation accepted it with love.

Since the *Megillah* is so holy, one should listen to the *Megillah* with awe and passion. The *Kedushas Levi* (*Kedushah Rishonah*) writes: "One should listen to the *Megillah* with a fiery passion in his heart. He should have in mind that he is now accepting the yoke of Torah and *mitzvos*. He should think, 'What was, was. From now on, I will keep Hashem's *mitzvos*.' The best time for *teshuvah* is when the *Megillah* is being read, because, at that time, Hakodosh Boruch Hu purifies Bnei Yisroel from Above."

At the Purim miracle, we accepted the Torah again, and this time from love, and these should be our thoughts when we listen to the *Megillah*. (The *Kedushas Levi* says this should also be our thoughts at the Purim *seudah*. We should rejoice with the Torah.)

The *Beis Aharon* (66b) writes: "Tzaddikim say that they see in the *Megillah* everything that will happen that year."

The Satmar Rebbe zt"l said that it is worthwhile for a person to live seventy years to hear the *Megillah* just once.

Fortunate are those who had the merit to hear the Satmar Rebbe read the *Megillah* with an outpouring of his soul. When he came to the words: ואני לא נקראתי לבוא אל המלך (4:11), he cried so much, it was hard to hear the words. He also cried copiously when he read: ומרדכי לא ישתחוה (3:2). – "But Mordechai would not bow and would not prostrate himself"

Reb Yonason Eibshitz zt"l (*Yaaras Devash* 1:3) writes: "Please listen, wise nation, whom Hashem chose from all other nations. Please, don't think *Megillas Esther* is a history book to tell the stories that happened to our forefathers... If that is all the *Megillah* is about, why must we read it twice on Purim? Boruch Hashem, we all know the story. Children make plays, acting out what happened. Rather, it is for the benefits that we

get from the *Megillah* [to recognize and celebrate the miracles Hashem performed for the Jewish nation].

Additionally, there are many Torah secrets in the *Megillah*, and the masters of *kabbalah* elaborate on them. It is also called *Megillas Esther* (which can be translated as “the hidden *Megillah*”) because it contains many hidden secrets of Creation. Furthermore, the *Megillah* can be studied as a *moshul* [parable], discussing the battle and struggle between Bnei Yisroel and the *yetzer horah*... And there are many *mussar* lessons in the *Megillah*, which teach us how to live.”¹

The end of the *Megillah* (10:2) states: הלא ... הלוא ... “All his mighty and powerful acts, and the account of the greatness of Mordechai, whom the king had promoted, are recorded in the book of chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia.” Reb Yechezkel Abramsky *zt”l* explains that the *Megillah* is saying: If you want to study history, there are chronicles on the subject. They tell about Mordechai and his accomplishments in the government. If you want history, you can read those chronicles. But that isn't the purpose of the *Megillah*. The purpose of the *Megillah* is to teach us so much more.

The Gemara (*Megillah* 7a) states several proofs that *Megillas Esther* was written with *ruach hakodesh*. With this awareness in mind, we know that every word is precious.²

One of the *berachos* on the *Megillah* is: שְׁעֵשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנָן הַזֶּה – “Hashem made miracles for our forefathers in those days at this time”.

¹ When a spy in an enemy country has to report to his homeland in code, he can't write things clearly because the message might be intercepted. So, he writes in code, but his government knows how to read between the lines, and they understand the message. This is a *moshul* for the *Megillah*. It is filled with secrets and divine lessons, and one must look closely to find the messages that Hashem wants us to know.

² The *Minchas Elazar zt”l* tells that when Rebbe Mendel of Riminov was imprisoned, the police permitted him to take one item to the prison with him. The Rebbe requested a *Megillah* (although it was Tamuz). Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz *zt”l* instructed Reb Mendel's *talmidim* not to fulfill this request. “If he has the *Megillah*, he'll destroy the entire world.”

The *Minchas Elazar* writes that if Reb Mendel of Riminov could have destroyed the world with the *Megillah* in Tamuz, imagine what he could have accomplished on Purim when we have a mitzvah to read the *Megillah*!

We don't know the meaning of this story, nevertheless, we see the immense holiness that lies within the holy words of the *Megillah*.

The *Sefas Emes* asks: The miracles didn't occur on the 14th of Adar. They happened on the 13th of Adar. So why do we say: בזמן הזה, that the miracles happen on this day? The *Sefas Emes* answers that we are blessing Hashem for the miracles that happen each year. The miracles happen each year on the 14th when we read the *Megillah*. (R' Elimelech Biderman, Torah Wellsprings)

פרק א'

Ignoring the Messages

יהי בימי אחשורוש הוא אחשורוש המלך מהדו ועד כוש שבע ועשרים ומאה מדינה

“And it was in the days of Achashveirosh: he is Achashveirosh who ruled from Hodu to Cush over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces.” (Esther 1:1)

Rashi comments: הוא ברשעו מתחלתו ועד סופו – “He [remained] in his evil from the beginning until the end”. Rashi reveals to us an allusion to the nature of Achashveirosh, one of the main characters in the Purim story. He teaches us that Achashveirosh was an evil person at the beginning of the story and remained evil till the very end. Two questions arise: Firstly, every detail in the *Megillah* teaches us a message that is connected to the theme of Purim – in what way is the fact that Achashveirosh remained evil relevant to the lessons of Purim? Secondly, why, of all the many *reshoim* who feature in the Tanach is Achashveirosh one of the only ones to be singled out for this particular criticism?

By answering the second question we can then understand the first as well. It seems that there are two very significant factors that can cause a wayward person to change his ways; the first is exposure to righteous people. The Torah instructs us to cleave to *talmiday chachomim* and *Chazal* speak at length of the importance of spending as much time as possible with great people because one can learn from their righteous behavior and see first-hand the results of living a spiritual life. A second possible catalyst for *teshuva* is the events surrounding us; when a person is involved in events that seem to be guided by the Divine Hand, he has the opportunity to respond to the Divine message and change his ways.

Achashveirosh merited both opportunities; He married the righteous Esther, whose greatness could not have been hidden from him despite her secretive nature. Moreover, his main advisor towards the end of his life was Mordechai HaTzadik, one of the greatest Sages of the time. Achashveirosh also had the good fortune to be one of the players in the remarkable Purim story - the account of how the very existence of

the Jewish people was threatened, and yet everything was miraculously turned on its head.

It would be difficult to not be positively affected by such great people and by being part of such a miraculous story. Yet Achashveirosh remained the same, greedy, selfish person at the end of the story and indeed the end of his life. Proof to this is in one of the very last *pasukim* in the *Megillah*: "And King Achashveirosh placed a tax on the land and the islands." The *meforshim* explain that when he married Esther he reduced the taxes on his Kingdom so that her home nation might reveal itself to him in order to benefit further from its new connection to the King. At the end of the story he knew her identity, therefore he raised the taxes again. This demonstrates that at the climax of the Purim story all Achashveirosh could think about was money. Another indication that he remained evil is that he never committed to rebuilding the second *Beis HaMikdosh* despite the great benefits he derived from Mordechai and Esther.

We can now understand the connection between Achashveirosh's flaw and the Purim story. The lesson of Purim is to see the Divine Providence even in a time of *hester panim* [when Hashem's Presence is hidden] and to increase our awareness of Hashem in our own lives. Yet it is insufficient if that newfound recognition remains in the realm of the mind and heart. It must bring about an enhancement in one's *avodas Hashem*. The example of Achashveirosh teaches us how not to respond to Divine Providence – remaining oblivious to Hashem's messages and engulfed in base lusts and desires. (R' Yehonosan Gefen)

Why Do Sefardim Observe Purim?

The following is a thought from the *Chida*. The *Chida* writes in a number of places that the miracle of Purim took place in countries outside of Sefard. Sefardim lived in Spain from the time of the *churban Bayis Rishon*. The *pasuk* at the end of Ovadiah writes that the Anshei Yerusholayim were exiled to Sefard, to Spain. That is why Sefardim have a disproportionate number of Kohanim. This is because the Anshei Yerusholayim specifically which was disproportionately Kohanim was exiled to Sefard, to Spain.

During the time of the miracle of Purim, the Sefardim were not: מֵהָדוּ עַד כּוֹשׁ, they were not in the countries from India until Kush. Exactly where Kush is, it is basically Asia. The Sefardim were outside of this challenge. Therefore, the Sefardim were not really subject to the decree of Achashveirosh. The *Chida* writes this in a number of places (see for example: *Leiv Dovid*, *perek 29*; *Nachal Eshkol* on *Megillah*, and in *Botei Nefesh*, in one of his *hagados* on *Tam Mah Hu Omeir*).

The big question therefore is, why are they part of the observation of Purim, if it is an Ashkenazi miracle, why do Sefardim celebrate Purim?

The simple answer would be, that Klal Yisroel are one big nation, and if half the nation is happy, then the entire nation is happy, therefore, all Jews celebrate. However, the *Chida* answers something else, he answers with something which is really the message behind Purim. He says that the Yom Tov of Purim is not just to commemorate what once happened. The Yom Tov of Purim is because the *ohr* of Purim, the light of Purim, the influence of Purim, the impact of Purim, the spirituality of Purim is something that was put there by Mordechai and Esther in Shushan HaBirah and it remains that way from year to year. Every year that *gilui ohr* is *nisgaleh* [revealed] again and again. The Yom Tov of Purim is not to remember what happened. It is to tap into the tremendous *kimu v'kiblu*, the tremendous energy that was put into this day.

The *Chida* is referring to an *Arizal*. The *Ramchal* in *Derech Hashem* says this as well. As a matter of fact, in the fourth Volume of *Derech Hashem*, in the seventh *perek*, the *Chida* writes generally about all times that we observe things, and says: שבשוב תקופת: יאיר עלינו – הזמן ההוא – “Whenever a certain time period returns on the calendar, then: יאיר עלינו – אור מעין האור שהאיר אז ותחודש בנו תולדת אותו התיקון – “It shines on us light which is similar to the first light”. That is in seventh *perek*. In the eighth *perek* he says this specifically about Purim and Chanukah. The Yomim Tovim which are *derabonon*. We observe them because there is a certain light, a certain energy, a certain power that a person can tap into on Purim.

We say: שעשית לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה – “That he did for our forefathers on those days, at this time”. The *nissim* were done a long time ago, but: בזמן הזה – the *zman* [time] is still here, it is still that *zman*, it is still that magical time of Purim where a person can tap into it and use it. This ability to tap in is very special and we shouldn't let it slip away. We shouldn't just sleep away Purim. We shouldn't be busy with *mishloach manos* all day, we must make sure to get a *ruchniosdika* feeling out of the day, we have to make sure to get some spiritual elevation from the day of Purim. The sense of the *kedusha* of Purim, is a sense that a person must be able to pick up on.

The *Chida* explains: This is why they only established Purim the following year. They never established the original year as Purim, only when the next year came round, did they establish Purim. *Chazal* understood that that the *ohr* is incorporated into the day, it is in the *guf hazman*, and they established Purim forever.

The Gemara in *Megillah* (7a) says: בתחילה קבעוה בשושן ולבסוף בכל העולם כולו – “Originally they established Purim in Shushan, then they established it throughout the entire

world". Originally, they established Purim in Shushan, as a commemoration like *birchas hagamel*, to thank Hashem for the miracle, then, in the end, however, when they saw that Purim was a special time, they established Purim worldwide.

This is also *peshat* in: תשועתם היית לנצח ותקותם בכל דור ודור – "There salvation, You have been eternally, and their hope throughout generation after generation". Purim happened many years ago, what does it have to do with all future generations? The answer is: The influence of Purim repeats itself on a yearly basis. We must make sure to tap into it.

So, although the *yetzer horah* will fight strong, and try and distract us, we must make the most of Purim, and make sure to tap into the special *kedusha* of the day, as much as possible. (R' Yisroel Reisman)

The Importance of Every Second

The Medrash relates that Rav Akiva was once in the middle of giving a *shiur* when he noticed his *talmidim* beginning to doze off. He digressed from the subject he had been discussing and asked, "Why did Queen Esther deserve to rule over 127 countries? She merited this because she was descended from Sorah, who lived 127 perfect years." Why did Rav Akiva interrupt his *shiur* specifically to interject this tangent at this time?

The *Chiddushei HaRim* explains that a person could view Esther's kingdom as simply a collection of countries, and for each year of Sorah's life she merited to rule over another one. In reality, each country consists of states, cities, neighborhoods, streets, and even houses. Similarly, a year can be subdivided into months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, and seconds.

Rav Akiva explained that Sorah didn't live a "mostly" good life which allowed Esther to receive the same number of countries as the years of her life. If Sorah would have let up for a week or even a second, it would have resulted in a corresponding deficiency in Esther's empire, causing her to be lacking a city or even just a house. It was only because Sorah's life was equally good from the beginning until the end (Rashi, *Bereishis* 23:1), every second of every day, for her entire life, that Esther's kingdom was complete.

Rav Akiva's *talmidim* were obviously quite tired, and they assumed that if they would take a short nap and miss a little of the *shiur*, it wouldn't have any substantial ramifications. Realizing this, Rav Akiva wanted to teach them that every second of our lives, every word that we say, and every action that we take, have very real and direct consequences.

The Deeper Connection Between Sorah and Esther

The Medrash relates that Rav Akiva was once in the middle of giving a *shiur* when he noticed his *talmidim* beginning to doze off. He digressed from the subject he had been discussing and asked, “Why did Queen Esther deserve to rule over 127 countries? She merited this because she was descended from Sorah, who lived 127 perfect years”.

The question arises, that it is surely not just a sweet coincidence that this number appears in two such seemingly separate places in Tanach. There must be some kind of deeper connection between Sorah and Esther in particular that caused Rebbe Akiva to state that the extent of Esther’s power as Queen derived from the length of Sorah’s life. What is that connection?

In order to be able to answer this, it is instructive to analyze a brief comment of Rashi (*Bereishis* 23:1) with regard to Sorah’s life – he notes that all of her years were equal in goodness. What exactly does this mean? The simple understanding would be that she was equally righteous throughout her life. However, it is possible to offer a different explanation that focuses on how Sorah herself viewed all the years of her life. Much of Sorah’s life was full of tribulations and pain. She was childless until the age of 90, while all her family around her gave birth easily. On two occasions, she was abducted by powerful Kings, and she endured the tribulations of Hagar. Each of these misfortunes alone could be enough to traumatize a person for life. When she finally gave birth to Yitzchok, she was able to enjoy some good years, but these were greatly outnumbered by the ‘bad’ years. Yet, Rashi teaches us, that, evidently, she viewed the difficult years in the same way as the joyous years.

This attitude is expressed in the Gemara in *Berachos* (54a). The Gemara teaches that just as it is appropriate to make a blessing over good happenings, so too it is appropriate to make a blessing over bad happenings. How can a person do this? By recognizing that the challenges and suffering are also essential pieces in the puzzle of the person’s life. We will only fully see how the tribulations were of equal importance to the good times in the Next World. This is why in this world, we bless *Boruch Dayan Emes* [Blessed is the True Judge] at tragic occurrences referring to our acceptance that what happened is for the best even though it is painful. However, in the Next World we will so *‘HaTov VeHameitiv’* [He is good and does good] – the same blessing we say on happy occasions. Yet, we can have an intellectual recognition that all the days of one’s lives are vital and that they all fit in the big picture. Moreover, there are many times when we can see how something painful helped us grow as a person or had positive consequences in the long-term. Doing this will enable a person to see their entire life as a series of

intrinsically connected and essential events, not a bunch of disparate occurrences. When it says that all of Sorah's years were equally good, essentially, it means that Sorah was able to unite all of her life into one continuous event where all the many difficult years were equally 'good' as the years of obvious joy.

What does all this have to do with the connection between Sorah's age of 127 and Esther's rule over 127 nations? To answer this, we need to understand how the Torah views the role of a King or Queen. Rabbi David Fohrman explains:

A queen, when successful, is a uniter. She is not merely someone who makes the rules for a certain territory or decides the fate of her subjects in that territory. A queen does do all that, but if she is really successful, she also unites her subjects in some way, she transforms a mere territory into a nation. The people that comprise a nation are not just individuals, milling around, living in proximity to one another. They have some sort of common cause that binds them together, and the monarch is a living symbol of that cause. Hopefully, she works proactively to advance it. How does a king or a queen advance that cause? At their best, monarchs find ways to join individual talents to create a larger whole. Bob is a blacksmith, Phil is a farmer, Carol is a shepherdess, Beryl is a tailor... and the monarch? The monarch finds a way to incorporate the energies of Bob, Phil, Carol, and Beryl, towards common goals. A king or queen unites unique individuals and directs their talents towards the service of the nation's cause. Esther played such a role on the grandest of stages, on the world stage, uniting peoples across far-flung provinces. Esther's role as a uniter of people had a precedent in Sorah's ability to unite her years. This, Rabbi Fohrman argues, is the deeper connection that Rebbe Akiva was alluding to.

We have seen how a person can merit to be a 'ruler' by uniting – by uniting the years of one's life by recognizing that they are all part of the puzzle and that the 'bad' times are in reality the same as the 'good' times. And by uniting people to serve in a common cause – we may not merit to be a King or Queen, but each person in their life, will have times where he can unite people, whether it be his family, friends, employees or others, to serve a common cause. By excelling in these two aspects of unity, one can emulate Sorah and Esther. (R' Yehonasan Gefen)

Finding the Miracles in *Megillas Esther*

כשבת המלך אחשוורוש על כסא מלכותו אשר בשושן הבירה

**“When King Achashveirosh sat on his throne, which was in the capital city Shushan.”
(Esther 1:2)**

The *Shulchan Aruch* (690:3) rules: צריך לקרותה כולה – “One must read the entire *Megillah*.” The *Mishnah Berurah* adds: “According to most *poskim*, if you didn’t hear just one word of the *Megillah* you aren’t *yoitza* [haven’t fulfilled your duty].”

The *meforshim* explain that this is because every *pasuk* and every word of the *Megillah* expresses another part of the miracle. So, if you missed a word, you missed a brick in the miracle.

The *Megillah* begins (1:2): כשבת המלך אחשוורוש על כסא מלכותו אשר בשושן הבירה – “When King Achashveirosh sat on his throne, which was in the capital city Shushan.” The Vilna Gaon explains that Shlomo HaMelech had a magnificent throne. Many kings wanted to sit on it but failed. Pharaoh Nakeh (Pharaoh the Lame) sat on Shlomo HaMelech’s throne, and one of the decorative lions bit him, and that’s how he became lame. Nevuchadnetzar also wanted to sit on Shlomo’s throne and failed.

Achashveirosh also wanted to sit on a magnificent throne similar to Shlomo’s, so he sought craftsmen to fashion a replica of this unique throne. The craftsmen who knew how to build such a majestic chair lived in Shushan. When it was completed, it was too heavy to transfer to Bavel, so Achashveirosh moved the capital city to Shushan. Shushan became the new capital city of the Persian Empire.

The Vilna Gaon writes: “This is the meaning of: בשושן ... אחשוורוש... Achashveirosh was the first king to live in Shushan. All the kings before him didn’t live there... This is recorded in the *Megillah* so we will recognize Hashem’s wonders and understand that Hashem prepared every step that led up to the miracle for Bnei Yisroel. Mordechai and Esther lived in Shushan, so Hakodosh Boruch arranged that Achashveirosh should move his capital there.”

This is the astounding miracle implied in this *pasuk*. The two *gedolim* of Bnei Yisroel, Mordechai and Esther, from whom will come the salvation for Bnei Yisroel, lived in Shushan, so Hashem arranged that Achashveirosh should move his capital city to

Shushan, right near where they lived! When Haman passed his evil decrees, Mordechai and Esther were on the scene and were able to thwart Haman's evil plans.³

The Vilna Gaon adds: “*Chazal* tell us that one must read the entire *Megillah*, even the parts that are seemingly superfluous. For example, why is knowing about Achashveirosh’s wealth and power important? However, every *pasuk* of the *Megillah* tells us another facet of this great miracle.”

Here’s another spectacular miracle pointed out by the *Alshich HaKadosh*:

Haman arrived at the palace of Achashveirosh just when Achashveirosh wanted to know how to reward Mordechai. If Haman had come earlier, he would have seen that they were discussing rewarding Mordechai (and not rewarding himself, as he thought). If he had come a minute later, someone else would have thought of how to reward Mordechai.

This is to show us Hashem's *hashgachah pratis* down to the most minor details.

The *Malbim* expresses wonder why Achashveirosh didn’t reward Mordechai at the time Mordechai saved his life. Why did he forget to reward him? All he did then was write the episode in his *Sefer Zichronos*. This was so he would get the reward at just the right time.

Also, let's think about what would happen if Haman arrived just one day earlier to request permission to hang Mordechai on the gallows. Achashveirosh would probably agree because Achashveirosh didn’t love the Yidden (as the Gemara tells us). Haman came just at the right time so that the miracles could occur. So, when you read the *Megillah*, keep your heart and mind alert to recognize the miracles. If possible, try to read some commentaries on the *Megillah*. Each word is another facet of the miracle. Let yourself be astounded by the miracles Hashem performs within the rules of nature to save His nation, Bnei Yisroel. (R’ Elimelech Biderman)

³ This also reveals Hashem’s love for His *tzaddikim* and the Jewish nation. Hashem could have had Mordechai and Esther move to the capital city in Bavel, where all Persian kings lived. But Hashem had Achashveirosh and his entire cabinet move to Persia rather than have Mordechai and Esther come to Bavel.

The Rambam (introduction to *Pirush HaMishnayos*) discusses that Hashem takes exceptional care of his *tzaddikim*. He writes that Hakodosh Boruch Hu can give a king a desire to build a beautiful palace, and “perhaps the palace was built for a *chossid* who will stay there one night many years later, and his life will be saved when he stays there.” Similarly, in our story, Achashveirosh moves to Shushan, but it is all for Mordechai, Esther, and the Jewish nation.

True Honor and Splendor (כבוד ותפארת)

בהראתו את עשר כבוד מלכותו ואת יקר תפארת גדולתו

“Where he showed the great wealth of his kingship and the honor of the splendor of his greatness.” (Esther 1:4).

The Gemara in *Megillah* (12a) explains that Achashveirosh at his feast wore the *bigdei kehuna* [garments of the Kohanim]. This is inferred from the *Megillah*'s description of Achashveirosh displaying at his feast: יקר תפארת גדולתו - “The honor of the splendor of his greatness”, which resembles the Torah's description in *Parshas Tetzaveh* of the *bigdei kehunah* as being made: לכבוד ולתפארת – “For honor and splendor” (*Shemos* 28:2). Rashi comments that the Gemara refers here to the garments of the Kohen Gadol, which had been brought from Yerushalayim.

The *Imrei Emes* (*Michtevei Torah* 2), writes that he was asked a question about Rashi's comment by his brother-in-law, Rav Chanoch Tzvi Levin of Bendin. He asked, how did Rashi conclude on the basis of the phrase, יקר תפארת גדולתו, that Achashveirosh wore specifically the garments of the Kohen Gadol? The parallel phrase in *Parshas Tetzaveh*: לכבוד ולתפארת – “For honor and splendor”, was written in reference to all the *bigdei kehuna*, and not only to the special garments of the Kohen Gadol. Why, then, did Rashi assume that the Gemara speaks here specifically of the Kohen Gadol's garments?

The *Imrei Emes* presented an answer to this question which he described as: “Exceedingly good, because it is according to the simple meaning.” He explains: במה שיראה לאומות העולם יקר תפארת בבגדי הדיוט אפילו בגדי לבן גם כן לא יראו התפארת רק בציץ שיראה לאומות העולם יקר תפארת בבגדי הדיוט אפילו בגדי לבן גם כן לא יראו התפארת רק בציץ – “By showing the nations of the world the honor and glory of the garments of ordinary Kohanim, even the white garments, they would not see the splendor; only in the golden head plate, breastplate, *ephod* and robe with the bells”. Meaning, Achashveirosh's objective was to display his wealth and splendor before the dignitaries of foreign countries. This objective would not have been achieved by wearing the plain white garments of the ordinary Kohanim. To the contrary, if he had worn these garments, he would have been ridiculed. In order to impress the dignitaries, he had to wear the golden garments of the Kohen Gadol.

The Tolner Rebbe speaks out, that from these comments of the *Imrei Emes* we learn that our conception of: כבוד ותפארת - “honor and splendor”, differs fundamentally from that of the other nations. We understand that true beauty is inner beauty, the beauty of *avodas Hashem* and fulfilling Hashem's will. Anything that is done for His honor and

to fulfil His will is beautiful and glorious, whereas anything that is not done for His sake has neither beauty nor glory.

Indeed, we have always known how to show honor and glory to matters of *kedusha*. For example, we dress in special clothing for Shabbos, even though the *goyim* don't see any beauty or glory in these clothes. We can see the beauty in our special Shabbos clothes, just as we can see the beauty in the plain clothing of the ordinary Kohanim, which could not possibly be appreciated by members of other nations. We see them as garments made in accordance with Hakodosh Boruch Hu's command for the purpose of serving Him in the *Beis HaMikdosh*, and there is nothing more glorious and beautiful.

This message needs to be reinforced in our generation. Unfortunately, many among us have been attracted to the: כבוד ותפארת - "honor and splendor", of the foreign nations, and they dress their children in clothing that is deemed beautiful and honorable by non-Jews. On Purim, they dress their children in costumes that originate from non-Jewish culture, something our predecessors would never have countenanced, and this can cause grave spiritual destruction, *chas vesholam*.

The Tolner Rebbe then relates what he heard his grandfather say about the time he moved to Eretz Yisroel and saw the way the impoverished Jews of Eretz Yisroel, who barely had any money, prepared themselves and their homes for Shabbos. They spread white sand on the floor of their homes in honor of Shabbos, the food for Shabbos was scarce, and they lit candles in crevices in the stone walls. His grandfather remarked that although he had seen lavish Shabbos festivities in Tulchyn, Russia, and in America, nevertheless, he never saw as beautiful a Shabbos as what he witnessed in Yerusholayim. Indeed, this is a kind of splendor that no non-Jew can appreciate.

On Shabbos *Parshas Tetzaveh*, when we read about the garments of the ordinary Kohanim, which, like the golden garments of the Kohen Gadol, are described with the phrase: לכבוד ולתפארת, we must reinforce this awareness of the distinction between Jewish beauty, which is true, inner beauty, and the external beauty which is appreciated by other nations. We must distance ourselves from all forms of, כבוד ותפארת, which originate from impure sources and ensure to give honor and respect only to matters of *kedusha*, and we will then be worthy of true splendor and glory, אמן בן יהי רצון.

False Impressions

During the era of Purim, there was a terrible decree to destroy the Jews. The decree was not only in this world, but was a heavenly decree as well. *Chazal (Megillah 12a)* teach us that the cause of this decree was because: נהנה מסעודתו של אחשוורוש - "They

took pleasure in the feast of Achashveirosh". But what was so terrible about enjoying a party that it warranted such a devastating decree?

Perhaps the food wasn't kosher. But we know that this was not the case. The *pasuk* says: לעשות כרצון איש ואיש – "to do the will of each man" (Esther 1:8). The Gemara explains this to mean: "Like the will of Mordechai and Haman". So, Mordechai made sure that all the food was kosher *l'mehadrin*. One might suggest that at the *seudah* there was *pritzus* – men and women mingling together, or women dressed improperly, etc. No, on the contrary, this *seudah* was as *tznua'dik* as possible. The men and women were completely separate; the men were outside the palace: בחצר גנת ביתן המלך – "In the courtyard of the garden of the king's palace" (Esther 1:5), and the women were inside the palace, as it says: גם ושתי המלכה עשתה משתה נשים בית המלכות – "Also Queen Vashti made a feast for the women in the palace" (1:9). They weren't even in the building together, so how could there have been *pritzus*?

Perhaps they served *avodah zarah*? But again, we find nothing like that mentioned in any *Chazal*. So why did Klal Yisroel deserve to be annihilated?

However, we do find that Achashveirosh had the *keilim* [vessels] of the *Beis HaMikdosh* displayed at the party. When the Jews at the party saw the *keilim* being used by the non-Jews they should have cried and ripped their clothing. The Yidden may have deserved to be punished for not showing emotion upon seeing the *keilim* being desecrated, but this does not seem to be the reason for the decree to destroy them. The Gemara's words: נהנה מסעודתו – "enjoying the feast", does not seem to be referring to their lack of emotion upon seeing the display of the *keilim*. So, what does: נהנה מסעודתו, mean?

The Awesome Display

It is very important to take note of the *Megillah's* description of *seudas* Achashveirosh: בהראתו את עשר כבוד מלכותו ואת יקר תפארת גדולתו - "When he displayed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his splendid majestic" (Esther 1:4). Achashveirosh's party was a very grand, glamorous affair. The *Megillah* even gives a detailed description of its splendor: חור כרפס ותכלת אחוז בחבלי בוץ וארגמן על גילי כסף - "There were hanging of white cotton and blue wool, caught up by cords of fine linen and purple wool to silver rods and alabaster columns; and there were couches of gold and silver on a pavement of marble, alabaster, mother-of-pearl, and mosaics" (Esther 1:6). This feast was a grand display of wealth, power, and beauty.

Now imagine how this looked to the people who attended the *seudah*. When the Jews walked into this grandiose affair, they were most likely awestruck by all the glitz and glitter, enamored and entranced by the grandeur they saw around them. That is what it means when it says they were, נהנה מסעודתו של אחשורוש.

Throughout the ages, many of the terrible tragedies that have befallen Klal Yisroel have been caused by this same behavior. We look at the external world and we chap *hispeilus* [are awestruck]. We are captivated by the brilliance, wealth and beauty of the culture around us. It seems to beckon Yidden with a message that there is a “real world” out there that is better than ours.

The Big City

R' Yisroel Belsky relates that he once heard a *ba'al mussar* speak about the *tefillah* of *Al Chet* that we say on Yom Kippur. The last one is: על חטא שחטאנו לפניך בתמהון לבב - “On the sin that we committed with a heart full of wonder”. What does: בתמהון לבב, mean?

Suppose a *yeshivah bochur* must go to Manhattan. He goes on the subway, taking a Gemara along with him, and he doesn't lift his eyes from the Gemara during the entire trip. All he is thinking about is how the entire universe was created for Torah, and how that nothing that happens in the world has any real importance outside of Torah. All the movements of empires, politicians, the wealthy, and the power structures – everything takes place only to serve Torah. The world, the universe, the galaxies: “It was all created for Klal Yisroel and the Torah”.

Then the *bochur* steps out of the subway and looks around. He sees huge buildings stretching to the sky. He sees crowds of people, some in elegant clothing, some carrying attaché cases, all looking very important, very busy, and very wealthy. Not one person takes notice of him, standing there with his Gemara in his hand. He looks around, and suddenly a thought begins to creep into his mind: “Maybe there is a bigger world out there. Maybe I'm just a small person, with a Gemara, who isn't really important.” He becomes *botul* [nullified] in his own eyes: ונהי בעינינו כחגבים וכן היינו בעיניהם – “And we were like grasshoppers in our eyes and so we were in their eyes” (*Bamidbar* 13:33).

That's the, נהנה מסעודתו של אחשורוש. That's what happens to Klal Yisroel when they take in this extremely impressive world: they begin to feel small in their own eyes. They feel the need to acknowledge the culture of the external world. They start to wonder: How can we say the whole world out there is: בטל והפקר כעפר האדמה – “nullified and worthless like dirt of the ground”? How can we say it doesn't exist?

The Jews of the Purim era were awestruck by the world, and they began to think of themselves as part of the world. They took pride in considering themselves as part of the non-Jewish culture. They believed that they were important because that world was so important and not because the Torah, Klal Yisroel, and *ma'amad* Har Sinai were important. For thoughts like these we say, על חטא שחטאנו לפניך בתמהון לבב.

Unfortunately, in today's generation as well, many people also feel this displaced sense of pride.

True Importance

We sometimes fail to realize that every word of Torah, each *pasuk*, every Mishnah and Gemara, all the wonderful teaching of the holy *Rishonim* and *Achronim* who explain the Torah Hakedosha, is so much more important than everything else in this world. All those massive buildings are actually there to serve us. They were created – the entire world was: נברא כדי לשמשני – “created to serve me”.

When the Ribono Shel Olam saw how Klal Yisroel were reacting to the splendor of the Persian culture, He had to show them what this glamorous world is really all about: It's a world of filth and murder. It's a world that showed tremendous excitement when a decree to wipe out the Jews was passed. The non-Jew's gloated as they prepared themselves for that tremendous opportunity. This is the real world that the Jew's who attended the party admire so much! And the glorious king who hosted the party is nothing but a drunkard! And in his drunken state, he killed his queen. This is who you are awed by.

Their world is not at all beautiful, it is ugly. But they have a knack for dressing up this ugliness in a very impressive way.

New York City once had a campaign to beautify Fifth Avenue. This is the area where all the luxurious stores and hotels are located, one after another – impressive buildings, everything is so imposing and majestic. It was decided that the one thing that was ruining its beauty were the garbage cans on every street corner. So, they replaced the old garbage cans with elaborate new ones, with special designs and colors to fit perfectly with the decor of Fifth Avenue. Rav Yisroel Belsky relates how he remembers looking at one of them and thinking, “Look at this beautiful shell. It's just rotting food and garbage, all dressed up in a glamorous can. This is the perfect *moshul* for *seudas* Achashveirosh. The king and his ministers, dressed in royal robes encrusted with diamonds and gold, sat in a totally drunken state. The king even killed his wife!”. Then

he relates, he then thought to himself “It’s not just *seudas* Achashveirosh, it’s our entire civilization. Their culture is nothing more than a dressed-up garbage can”.

Is there anything in their world that should really impress us? Do they do anything to compare to the Torah Hakedoshah and to the relationship Klal Yisroel has with the Ribbono Shel Olam? What in their life compares to a simple Shabbos that we experience every single week? Do they have anything as impressive as *simcha shel mitzvah* [the joy of doing a mitzvah]? No. There’s nothing out there that compares. It’s all just emptiness: לא שרירין ולא קיימין בטלין ומבוטלין – “Null and void, and non-existent”.

The world exists only on account of the Torah. It exists only on account of Klal Yisroel. Purim is a time when we must take a very special look at Klal Yisroel and recharge ourselves with protective immunity from the non-Jew’s who surround us in *galus*. That is the lesson that we should all take from Purim and carry with us throughout the year.

Explaining the *Aveirah* of Achashveirosh's Banquet

A Jew and a non-Jew were traveling together and stopped off somewhere along the highway to eat lunch.

“Do you want some wine?” the non-Jew asked.

“No thanks. Jews aren't permitted to drink that wine.”

“How about a sausage? I have extra.”

“No, thank you. We can't eat that either.”

“It is delicious. You’re sure you can't eat it?”

“I'm positive. We are only allowed to eat such foods when one's life is in danger.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, let's say someone is ill, and a doctor says he needs to eat these foods to live.”

“Then you would be allowed to eat it?”

“Definitely. Or let's say a non-Jew takes out a knife and says, ‘If you don't eat this food, I will kill you,’ then we would also be allowed to eat it.”

The non-Jew took out his knife, pointed it at the Jew and said, “Eat my food, or I'll kill you.”

The Jew was afraid and began eating. What could he do? It was *pikuach nefesh* [life threatening].

"I'm sorry I did that to you," the non-Jew said a few minutes later. "I was just joking."

The Jew put down the meat and pushed the wine to the side and said, "I forgive you for playing that prank on me, but I won't forgive you for telling me now that it was a joke. Why didn't you wait until I finished the meal?"

With this story, we can explain the *aveirah* that the Jewish nation committed by eating at Achashveirosh's feast. The sin was that they wanted to be there. They were permitted to eat at this meal because their lives would be at stake if they didn't, but they should have gone with a heavy heart.

Chazal say that they were punished, שנהנו מסעודתו של אחשורוש, because they enjoyed Achashveirosh's meal. The problem was that they looked forward to it and were happy to be there.

The *Chasam Sofer* (*Toras Moshe, Esther, d.h. Isa B'Megillah*) says, that they should have eaten at home before going to the party, so the non-kosher food at the party would be *achilah gasah* (eating after they were full when one doesn't enjoy eating, which isn't called eating, according to halachah). Then it would be as though they didn't eat non-kosher foods. (R' Elimelech Biderman)

Some Insight into Why the Big Feast Needed to be 180 Days

בהראתו את עשר כבוד מלכותו ואת יקר תפארת גדולתו ימים רבים שמונים ומאת יום

"Where he showed the great wealth of his kingship and the honor of the splendor of his greatness, many days - a hundred and eighty days." (Esther 1:4)

Why did Achashveirosh celebrate specifically for 180 days?

The Vilna Gaon in *Kol Eliyohu* explains: According to the Medrash Rabbah (2:1), Nevuchadnetzar hid 1,080 treasures in the Euphrates River. They were revealed to Koresh as a reward for permitting the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdosh*, and they were later inherited by Achashveirosh. The purpose of his making a celebration was to impress everyone with his vast riches. Each day he showed six of the treasures, as is indicated by the six expressions in this *pasuk*, which says that he displayed "*osher*" - "riches" - "*kevod*" - "glory" - "*malchus*" - "kingdom" - "*yekar*" - "splendor" - "*tiferes*" - "excellence" and "*gedulah*" - "majesty" (see *Yalkut Shimoni* 1046).

Consequently, the celebration stretched over 180 days since $180 \times 6 = 1,080$.

Alternatively, the *Likutei Anshei Shem* explains: In the *Beis HaMikdosh* there was a total of 5,400 vessels, as stated in Ezra (1:11): “All the vessels of gold and silver were 5,400; Sheshbazzar brought them up when the exiles were brought up from Bavel to Yerushalayim.” All these vessels were taken in captivity by Nevuchadnetzar when he destroyed the *Beis HaMikdosh* and ultimately acquired by Achashveirosh. During the festivity he displayed daily six treasures of the *Beis HaMikdosh* which were in his possession.

According to the Gemara (Shabbos 126b) a grouping of at least five items constitutes an “*otzar*” — treasure. Consequently, at the rate of six treasures per day (a total of thirty vessels), it took 180 days to show the entire 5,400 vessels ($180 \times 6 \times 5 = 5400$).

An Incredible Calculation Which Personifies the *Gadlus of R'* **Chaim Kanievsky zt”l**

ובמלואת הימים האלה עשה המלך לכל העם הנמצאים בשושן הבירה למגדול ועד קטן משתן
שבעת ימים בחצר גנת ביתן המלך

“At the end of this period, the king made a banquet for seven days in the court of the king’s palace garden for all the people who lived in the fortress Shushan, high and low alike.” (Esther 1:5)

The Medrash Rabbah (Ch. 7) tells us that Reb Yishmoel says 18,500 went to the feast of Achashveirosh. Where do we know this from and what is the significance of this number?

Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt”l explains that this *cheshbon* [calculation] is not a rough estimate, but is rather is an exact calculation. The *Targum Sheini* says that the feast made after 180 days for the people of Shushan, was especially for the Yidden who did not want to partake together with the *goyim*. The *Megillah* tells us that it took place: המלך - בחצר גינת ביתן המלך - “In the courtyard of the garden of the royal palace”.

The Gemara in *Eruvin* (26a) says that the courtyard of a king is a *beis kur* which is 30 *se’ah*. A *beis seah* is 50x50 *amos*, which totals 2,500 square *amos*. Therefore, a *beis kur* which is $30 \times 2,500 = 75,000$ square *amos*.

The Gemara in *Succah* establishes that a person seated occupies a space of one *amoh*. However, Achashveirosh would not have wanted his guests to be squashed, rather he would have wanted them to have ample space so that they were able to stretch out

their arms and legs, so let's assume a space of $2 \times 2 = 4$ square *amos*. So, in an area of 75,000 divided by 4, which = 18,750, 18,750 were able to be seated comfortably.

בשושן הבירה הרגו חמש מאות איש – “In Shushan the capital, 500 people were killed”. The *Targum* says, that the 500 people killed in Shushan were Amalekim. Presumably, those who did not go to the party were the ones who merited to kill these Amalekim because it was those that attended the feast who were the cause of the whole decree.

The *Yerushalmi* (*Sotah* 3:1) asks how much of the *megillas sotah* – the passage written for a woman who had to drink the waters of the *sotah* must be rubbed out to be considered a *mechika* [an erasure]. Beis Hillel say that two letters is considered a *mechika* but less than that not. The *pasuk* says: ומחה אל מי המרים - “They should be erased into the bitter waters”. The Torah tells us: תמחה את זכר עמלק – “To obliterate the memory of Amalek”, using the same expression as by the *sotah*. Therefore, just like by *sotah*, *mechika* means two, similarly by Amalek, in order to fulfill the mitzvah of *mechiyas* Amalek [obliterating Amalek] one has to kill at least two Amalekim.

Mordechai and his followers who did not go to the party must have been a group of 250. Each one killed 2 Amalekim (חמש מאות איש).

Achashveirosh would have certainly prepared seats for all the Yidden in Shushan since he did not know how many would turn up and would not have wanted to leave anyone without a place. The: חצר של מלך – courtyard of the king, held space for 18,750 people. However, Mordechai and his followers, which totaled 250 didn't attend. $18,750 - 250 = 18,500$. The exact number the Medrash gives, for the number of attendees at Achashveirosh's feast.

One Who Follows His Desires, Will Fall and Fall and Keep Falling, Until He Can't Get Any Lower

חור כרפס ותכלת אחוז בחבלי בוץ וארגמן על גילי כסף ועמודי שש מטות זהב וכסף על רצפת
בהט ושש ודר וסחרת

“[There were hangings of] white cotton and blue wool, caught up by cords of fine linen and purple wool to silver rods and alabaster columns; and there were couches of gold and silver on a pavement of marble, alabaster, mother-of-pearl, and mosaics.” (Esther 1:6)

The aforementioned *pasuk* describes at great length the amount of money Achashveirosh spent on his grand feast. The amount he spent was absolutely ridiculous,

he even spent money ensuring that the floors were covered with precious stones and diamonds. The big question is, however, why do we need to know this, what difference does it make to us?

The Gemara in *Megillah* (7a) tells us that *Megillas* Esther was written with *ruach hakodesh*, which means that *Megillas* Esther is not simply another story book. It means that every single word in the *Megillah* is of utmost importance, and if it is written in the *Megillah*, there is a lesson of utmost importance to glean from it. If so, what is the lesson we are supposed take from reading about the tremendous amount of money that Achashveirosh spent on the flooring of the room where his grand feast took place? What difference does it make to us if the floor was made from, *בהט ושש ודר וסחרת*, or from simple stones?

R' Ben Tzion Felman used to say over, that he heard from R' Gavriel Riklis, who heard from the Ponevezher Rov, who heard from R' Asher Kalman MiKelm, that in the next few *pasukim* we learn the story about Vashti. On the seventh day of the feast, Achashveirosh asked that she be brought in front of him so that he could show off her beauty. The Gemara in *Megillah* (12b), explains that he didn't simply ask that she be brought in front of him, he asked that she be brought in unclothed. Vashti refused, "The king got very angry, and his anger was burning inside him", Achashveirosh completely lost his cool, and he was inconsolable, and the only thing that managed to calm him down was the execution of Vashti.

If we stop and think for a second, this story is unbelievable. How could someone like Achashveirosh ask such a ridiculous thing from his queen. Even the lowest of the low don't ask for such ridiculous things. Even more difficult is, when Achashveirosh saw that she refused to come, he was inconsolable and wasn't able to return to his senses until he had her executed. Achashveirosh ruled over 127 provinces, surely, he was a very wise man, otherwise he would never have gotten the job he had in the first place. How could it be that such a successful king would make such ridiculous requests, and how could it be that nothing could calm him down, except for the execution of his queen?

The answer is, that this is why the *Megillah* which was written with *ruach hakodesh* introduces us to the great wealth of Achashveirosh, and tells us about how much money Achashveirosh would spend on seemingly pointless things. Already from the beginning of his reign Achashveirosh got what he wanted. If Achashveirosh had a desire for something he got it, he lived without any limitations, anything he desired he got. If Achashveirosh wanted beautiful curtains made from the most expensive materials he got it, if he wanted the latest whatever it was, he got it. The more he followed his

desires and got what he wanted, the bigger his desires grew. Eventually he got to the stage, that if he had a desire to design the floor which everyone walks on with their muddy shoes with the most expensive stones and diamonds, he got that as well. If he wanted flooring designed from ודר וסחרת ושש ובהט, he got it.

When a person follows his desires, he falls lower and lower and lower, until he can't go any further. He turns crazy, and he will end up doing things that even the lowest of the low would never dream of. Because Achashveirosh got what he wanted, when he wanted it, he ended up asking for crazy things. He fell so low, that he even asked for his wife to turn up unclothed in front of everyone. And because he had stooped so low, and was used to getting what he wanted, he couldn't cope when he was told "NO". The only thing that would calm him down was something ridiculous – the execution of his wife.

The lesson we must take from here is, how dangerous it is to follow our desires, and how low we can fall if we do. Even if now and again we do go after our desires it must be with limitation. If we don't, then we may end up doing things which anyone with even half a brain would realize never to do. One who follows his desires will fall lower and lower and will end up forgetting the line between what is normal, and what is absolutely ridiculous.

On the other hand, *kedusha* is the exact opposite (זה לעומת זה ברא אלקים). If a person overcomes his desires and makes boundaries of what is allowed and what is not allowed, what one is supposed to do, and what one is not supposed to do, he will become elevated and he will climb higher and higher. If one works on overcoming his desires, Hashem will help him continue to climb, and he will be given the strength to do more and more, and he will end up doing things he never dreamed he could ever do. If one works on his *kedusha*, Hashem gives him *siyata dishmayah*. Like it says in *Yoma* (39a): אדם מקדש עצמו מעט מקדשין אותו הרבה מלמטה מקדשין אותו מלמעלה – "If one sanctifies himself a little, (Hashem) sanctifies him a lot, if one works on himself below, they help sanctify him from Above".

The Vilna Gaon on the aforementioned *pasuk* of, על רצפת בהט ושש ודר וסחרת, writes an important lesson in regard to following *teivah* [desire]. He says, "The *yetzer horah* enters into us slowly, first he wants food and drink, then he wants fancy clothes, then he wants nice beds and mattresses, then he wants gold and silver, then he wants precious stones and diamonds, a person never dies with half of what he wants in his hand". In short, the *yetzer horah* tries to make us follow our desires, and slowly slowly before we know it, we end up at rock bottom. We must learn from Achashveirosh not

to follow our *teivos* and on the contrary, to make boundaries. Then *iy'H* we will rise higher and higher and reach levels we never dreamed of.

The Connection Between Achashveirosh's Assorted Golden Drinking Cups and Klal Yisroel

השקות בכלי זהב וכלים מכלים שונים ויין מלכות רב כיד המלך

“Royal wine was served in abundance, as befits a king, in golden vessels, vessels of varied designs.” (Esther 1:7)

Rashi on this *pasuk* points out that the expression used here, is similar to the expression found later: *עם* - ודתייהם שנות מכל עם - “Whose laws are different from those of any other people” (3:8).

However, whilst the first time it is used as a praise, that Achashveirosh served wine in a wide assortment of different golden cups. Haman uses it in a derogatory manner to denigrate the Yidden that they are unlike other nations.

Rav Avraham Itzchak Barzel *zt"l* (Rosh Yeshiva of Mir, Brachfeld) suggests that Rashi is telling us here a wonderful *remez*. Achashveirosh, in bringing many assorted drinking vessels, wanted to show the unique beauty in the design of each one. One may have been a goblet shaped cup, another in a flower shape and another in the shape of a fruit etc. The common denominator being that they were all crafted to drink wine from them. This is the theme behind: *עם* - ודתייהם שנות - “their laws are different”. It does not say: *שונה* - ודתם שונה - “their law is different”, rather it uses a plural expression. Even amongst the Jews themselves they have different laws.

There are 12 *shevotim* [tribes] in Klal Yisroel and the *Chasam Sofer* writes in the name of the *Ari HaKodosh* that there are 12 *nuschois* of *tefillah* corresponding to the 12 gates in Shomayim.

The foolish Haman thought that each part of Klal Yisroel had a different ‘law’, a different way of prayer and different *niggunin* [tunes]. This though is the true beauty of the way in which we serve the Ribbono Shel Oilam. Each group with their own *nusach* and style of *tefillah* but altogether united for the sake of praising Hashem. This may be compared to an orchestra where many different instruments combine their different sound and tunes to harmonize into a melodious symphony.

This is what Rashi wanted to bring out in comparing the two similar expressions. That what Haman meant in a derogatory way was actually a praise of Klal Yisroel in the same

manner that it was an enhancement of the king's party to use assorted golden drinking cups. (*Ovi Mori*)

What R' Yonasan Eibshitz Said When He Was Purim Rav

There is a long standing *minhag* to appoint someone as a "Purim Rav". "Minhag Yisroel Kedoshim", the customs of the Jewish people are considered sacred, and not to be diminished. The custom to appoint a "Purim Rav" on Purim is based on the words in the *Megillah*: ויין מלכות רב כיד המלך - "And the royal wine (creates) a rav, with the power of the king." Indeed, this custom is strictly adhered to in many communities and *yeshivas*, and the person chosen for this lofty position is expected to say ingenious "Purim Torah" and act the part of a proper rav, often with merriment and hilarious results.

Historically, the person about whom the most "Purim Rav" stories are told seems to be R' Yonasan Eibshitz, who as a youngster was already known for his brilliant mind and ability to think quickly under pressure.

One year, the other boys in *yeshiva* elected him to be the Purim Rav. He put on a fake white beard, a rabbinic hat, and a long black coat that dragged on the floor, and he sat down at the front of the room to deliver his prepared lecture.

The boy who had been Purim Rav last year was jealous, and he decided he would challenge Yonasan. He called out: "Maybe instead of talking about Purim, the rav should say a *chiddush* [original thought] on *Bava Kamma*, the *masechta* we are all learning." The other boys laughed.

Instead of getting nervous at the daunting challenge, R' Yonasan shot back: "That's a great idea. The first Mishnah states: ארבעה אבות נזיקין השור והבור והמבעה וההבער – "There are four types of damages: The ox, the pit, the *maveh* and the fire." *Tosfos* asks: Why doesn't the Mishnah add the word, הן – "there are" like it does at the beginning of Rosh Hashanah, and by the *daled shomrim* [four guardians]? The answer is quite simple. The Gemara in *Pesachim* (112b) advises: ניזהא דתורא הן הן – "To calm down an ox, say 'hein hein'". So if the Mishnah had said הן the ox never would have charged or caused damage in the first place. How could someone then be required to pay if no damage was done?" (R' Shmuel Kameny)

What Were They Not Coerced to Do?

והשתיה כדת אין אנס

"And the drinking was according to the law without coercion." (Esther 1:8)

What does the aforementioned *pasuk* mean, that they were not coerced, what were they not coerced to do?

The *Yalkut Me'am Lo'ez* explains: The tradition in Persia at festive meals was that each participant was served a very large cup of approximately two quarts, and he had to drink it in its entirety regardless of the consequences. At this meal, too, Achashveirosh ordered that everyone should be served a large cup filled to the top, lest he be accused of stinginess, but the people were not coerced, and they were permitted to drink as much or as little as they desired.

The *Malbim* explains: The *Megillah* is describing King Achashveirosh's wealth. There was a week-long feast for all the people who were present in Shushan the Capital, and all the drinks were served in golden goblets. Nevertheless, there were enough golden goblets to serve the drinks to the tens of thousands of people, and no one was forced to finish drinking so that his goblet could be used for another guest.

Being Mavater [Foregoing] Gives Life

לעשות כרצון איש ואיש

“To do the will of each man.” (Esther 1:8)

Achashveirosh used the holy utensils from the *Beis HaMikdash* at his *seudah*. The Gemara (*Megillah* 12a) states, “At that time, a *bas kol* [heavenly voice] went out: “Generations ago, people died because they used these utensils, and now you are using them?!” The Gemara refers to Balshatzar, the king of Bavel, who died the night he used the vessels of the *Beis HaMikdash*. This time, the sin caused Vashti's death.

The *meforshim* ask, why didn't Achashveirosh himself die like Balshatzar, who died when he used these holy utensils?

It is repeated in the name of Reb Shlomo Kluger *zt"l* that at this feast, Achashveirosh was *mevater*.

He didn't demand that things be exactly as he wanted. We learn this from the *pasuk* (Esther 1:8): לעשות כרצון איש ואיש, that at the meal, everyone's wishes were respected and fulfilled. Achashveirosh didn't demand that people do as he wanted. And the rule is that when one is *mevater*, this grants him life.⁴

⁴ A source that *vitur* gives life is the Medrash (Yalkut Midrashim, *Rabbeinu HaKadosh*, see also Rosh Hashanah 17a) that Rav Huna the son of Reb Yehoshua ben Levi was *niftar* (perhaps what is called today ‘clinical death’) for a few days. When he came back to life, he said to his *talmidim*, “My children, fortunate is the one who isn't על מדותיו (and is *mevater*). There were

But Vashti wasn't *mevater* this time. She didn't let everyone do as they pleased. This is implied from the *pasuk*: המלכות בית המלכה עשתה משתה נשים בית המלכות – “Queen Vashti also made a feast for the woman in the royal house.” She acted with royalty and power. She acted like a queen, and everyone had to do as she required. Therefore, she got the brunt of the punishment.

We can also explain it in the following way:

Shame and humiliation also save from death, and Achashveirosh was shamed at this meal. His wife Vashti sent a message to Achashveirosh (*Megillah* 12b): “Listen here, my father's stable hand (Achashveirosh used to work in Nevuchadnezzar's royal stables): My father could drink with a thousand people and didn't get drunk. And you drink a drop of wine and become drunk and insane.” This shame saved Achashveirosh from death, and Vashti was killed instead. It says: כלים מכלים שונים, and כלים מכלים can also be translated as shame. The shame saved Achashveirosh.

Another hint is from the *pasuk* (Esther 1:18): וכדי בדיון וקצף, which Rebbe Yechezkel of Kozhmir *zt”l* translated as: “The *bizyonos* and humiliation saved Achashveirosh from Hashem's anger.” (R' Elimelech Biderman)

Why Wasn't Mordechai Worried About Lifnei Iver [Creating a Stumbling Block]

The Gemara in *Megillah* (12a) (according to Rashi) *darshens* from above *pasuk* that Haman and Mordechai were the waiters at the feast. The question is, how could Mordechai agree to do such a thing, surely by serving drinks at such a meal he was causing Klal Yisroel to stumble? Mordechai himself warned them not to attend the feast, so how could it be that he would serve them and cause them to stumble?

R' Chaim Kanievsky (*Tama Dekra*) answers: That Mordechai wanted to be in charge, in order that he would be able to guard the wine, and make sure it was kosher, and wasn't poured for *avodah zorah* or the like. He also wanted to ensure that there were no problems of *bishul akum* [food being cooked by a non-Jew] and *pas akum* [bread baked by a non-Jew], therefore, he helped out, in order that he would be able to start the fire

malachim who pleaded for me that I should live, but their claims weren't accepted. And then came a *malach* who told the court in heaven that I'm always *mevater*, and they immediately freed me from death and granted me life.” We see from this Medrash that being *mevater* grants life. This merit saved Achashveirosh at this feast.

in the kitchen. He did the best he could to save them from *issur*. The *Maharsha* says a very similar *peshat*.

The *Maharsha*, however, argues with Rashi and learns that Mordechai wasn't a waiter, according to the *Maharsha* there is no question on Mordechai.

How Does the Gemara Know that Vashti Contracted Leprosy

גם ושתי המלכה עשתה משתה נשים בית המלכות אשר למלך אחשורוש

“Queen Vashti also made a banquet for women, in the royal palace of King Achashveirosh.” (Esther 1:9)

The Gemara in *Megillah* (12a) asks: בית הנשים מיבעי ליה אמר רבא שניהן לדבר עבירה נתכוונו – “It should have said Vashti made a banquet in the women’s house? Rava answered: The two of them had sinful intentions.”

Later on, in *Megillas Esther* it says: ותמאן המלכה ושתי לבוא – “Queen Vashti refused to come”. The Gemara asks: מכדי פריצתא הואי דאמר מר שניהן לדבר עבירה נתכוונו מ"ט לא אתאי - “Let us see, she was immodest as we said above, that both of them had sinful intentions. Why then would she not come? Rav Yosi ben Chanina said: This teaches that leprosy broke out on her.”

Vashti and Achashveirosh were cut from the same cloth, the Gemara tells us, both of them were immodest. Preservation of their own dignity was not a concern as long as they were the centers of attention. Both Achashveirosh and Vashti threw elaborate banquets so that they would be the center of attention. Achashveirosh wanted people to be awestruck by his opulent and lavish display of wealth. Vashti wanted people to be dazzled by her beauty. Both of them wanted people to indulge in the worst forms of immorality, so that the guests would enjoy themselves at their hosts' expense.

Considering the fact that both Vashti and Achashveirosh were far from prudish, why then did Vashti refuse to appear undressed before Achashveirosh and his guests? The Gemara says that she had been plagued with leprosy. Her beauty was marred, and she would not make a laughingstock out of herself just to satisfy her boorish husband's desires.

Rav Henschel Leibowitz asks why the Gemara had to reach the conclusion that she was plagued with leprosy? Yes, the Gemara initially says that Vashti was immodest and immoral. She was not above making a display of herself in front of the women of her empire. But, perhaps that was as far as she would go. Vashti was not so debased that

she would appear undressed in front of the men of the empire. Maybe she was somewhat immoral and immodest, but not to the extent that she would satisfy her husband's outlandish request!

Rav Leibowitz answers that the Gemara, by its answer, is merely acknowledging a fact of human personality. Once a person allows a bad character trait to permeate their being, reigning in that trait is next to impossible. Once a person allows himself some degree of freedom from restriction, total freedom of restriction is sure to come. Vashti was immodest and immoral. Her immodesty was part and parcel of her personality. The Gemara is perplexed by her refusal to appear without clothes in front of the king – this was not out of the pale for her. She threw a party for the point of showing herself off, so why should she not want to do this further? The only answer that could possibly explain this out-of-character refusal is that she developed some affliction that diminished her beauty, which made her not want to appear in front of anyone. This is the only possible reason why Vashti would act out of character.

The ability to temper oneself and not indulge, as illustrated by Vashti, is extremely difficult. It is written in the name of the *Arizal* that there is good reason why the Yom Tov of Yom Kippur is also referred to as "Yom Kippurim." "Yom Kippurim" means a day like Purim. Yom Kippur is only like Purim, similar to Purim, but not exactly the same as Purim, the *Arizal* said, because the celebration of Purim contains within it some aspects that are loftier than Yom Kippur.

Rav Shlomah Brevda explains that these lofty aspects of Purim are possibly related to the difference in how the two Yomim Tovim are celebrated. Yom Kippur is spent fasting, and Purim is spent feasting. A story is related in which the *Chasam Sofer* was told about a certain individual who many considered holy and pious, as he often fasted and refrained from eating. The *Chasam Sofer* replied that anyone could fast. However, the one who eats with pure intent, for the sake of fulfilling Hashem dictatès, without a hint of indulgence; he is the one that is praiseworthy, holy and pious.

On Purim, we have the obligation to eat, drink, and be merry. However, this merriment is neither for the purpose of whetting our palate nor for satisfying our cravings. We do not celebrate because doing so makes us feel physically good. We celebrate because this is our obligation. The celebration should make us feel spiritually good. Temperance is not easily accomplished. As evidenced by Vashti, restraint, for some, is impossible. However, on Purim, prudence and moderation must rule. We must rejoice, but for the purpose of praising Hashem. We eat and drink, and we may enjoy doing such. However, our underlying motivation must be a pure sense of devotion to Hashem and that

motivation must shine through. Because this balance between celebration and self-restraint is so difficult to achieve, Purim actually contains an element of the celebration that is loftier than Yom Kippur – the maintenance of this equilibrium. (R' Yehudah Prero)

Learning From Charvona to Always “Speak Beneficially About the King”

ביום השביעי כטוב לב המלך ביין אמר למהומן בזתא חרבונא

“On the seventh day, when the King’s heart was happy with wine, he said to Mehumon, Bizsoh and Charvona...” (Esther 1:10)

ויאמר חרבונה אחד מן הסריסים לפני המלך גם הנה העץ אשר עשה המן למרדכי אשר דיבר טוב על המלך עמד בבית המן גבה חמשים אמה ויאמר המלך תלהו עליו

“Then Charvona, one of chamberlains in attendance before the king, said ‘Furthermore, the gallows which Haman made for Mordechai – who spoke beneficially about the king – is standing in Haman’s house; it is fifty cubits high.’ And the king said, ‘Hang him on it.’” (Esther 7:9)

וגם חרבונה זכור לטוב

“And also Charvona, let him be remembered for good.” (*Piyut Shoshanas Yaakov*)

Charvona is mentioned twice in the *Megillah*. The first time he is mentioned is at the beginning of the first *Perek*. He is listed as one of the seven advisors of Achashveirosh listed in the *pasuk* (Esther 1:10). The second time Charvona is mentioned is when Haman finally met his downfall: ויאמר חרבונה אחד מן הסריסים לפני המלך גם הנה העץ אשר עשה המן למרדכי אשר דיבר טוב על המלך עמד בבית המן גבה חמשים אמה ויאמר המלך תלהו עליו - “Then Charvona, one of the chamberlains in attendance before the king, said ‘Furthermore, the gallows which Haman made for Mordechai – who spoke beneficially about the king – is standing in Haman’s house; it is fifty cubits high.’ And the king said, ‘Hang him on it.’” (Esther 7:9)

Charvona is mentioned a third time in the *piyut* of *Shoshanas Yaakov* that we recite after the conclusion of the *Megillah* reading. We say there: וגם חרבונה זכור לטוב - “And also Charvona, let him be remembered for good.”

The *Pirkei D’Rabi Eliezer* notes that the first time he appears in the *Megillah*, Charvona’s name is spelled with an *aleph* at the end and the second time he appears his name is spelled with a *hay* at the end. Therefore, the *Pirkei D’Rabi Eliezer* claims they are not

the same person! The real Charvona is the one mentioned in the first *Perek*. The “second Charvona” was really Eliyohu HaNovi impersonating Charvona! Interestingly, the name Charvona in the *Shoshanas Yaakov piyut* is immediately followed by the expression: - “let him be remembered for good”. About whom else do we find this expression זכור לטוב? It is none other than Eliyohu HaNovi.

Rav Ephraim Waxman offers a beautiful explanation in above: He explains that the above emphasizes how and why the redemption occurred. The *pasuk* states “And Charvona, one of the officers before the king, said ‘Also, behold here is the gallows that Haman made **for Mordechai who spoke beneficially about the King** standing in Haman’s courtyard 50 cubits high.’” The *geulah* came because Mordechai never spoke ill of the Ribbono Shel Olam. *Chazal* say that every time it says the word “HaMelech” in the *Megillah* it is referring to the King of kings. So too, in the expression: אשר דיבר טוב על המלך – “who spoke beneficially about the King”, it is referring to the Ribbono Shel Olam! The Jews of that time, could very well have fallen into the trap of saying “What is Hashem doing to us!” Haman came close to executing his plan to exterminate all the Jews – men, women, and children.

The Jews could very well have despaired and began questioning the Justice of Hashem. “Excuse me! What did we do? Why do we deserve this?” Complaints against Hashem were very likely being murmured. But Mordechai – who spoke good about the King – never complained and never questioned Hashem’s Justice. He never doubted that what was happening was fair and just. He was always, דיבר טוב על המלך – “spoke good about the King”. He accepted “that whatever Hashem does is for the best” (*Berachos* 60b).

The message is that Purim, which is the paradigm of our hope for redemption, foreshadows the way it is going to happen for us again. To ensure the speedy coming of this redemption, we must remember to always be: דיבר טוב על המלך – “speak good about the King”. After thousands of years of Jewish history and thousands of years of suffering – both on a national scale and on a personal scale – the key is to speak positively about the King and not to question and not to complain “Why is Hashem doing this to us!”

This is sometimes very difficult, especially for people that lived through national trials and tribulations, lived through the Holocaust, *lo aleinu*. It is very hard for people who unfortunately have suffered tragedy and *tzoros*. It is a difficult *nisoyan*. But the *Pirkei D’Rabi Eliezer* is telling us, Charvona is telling us, and Eliyohu HaNovi – who is going to usher in and announce the future redemption – is telling us: The key is to act like Mordechai, דיבר טוב על המלך.

ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר – “For the Jews there was Light, Gladness, Joy and Honor” (Esther 8:16) – so too will it be for us, *Im Yirtzeh Hashem*. (R’ Frand)

What Was So Special About Day Seven

We mentioned above the *pasuk* which says: “On the seventh day, the king’s heart was happy with wine”. The Gemara in *Megillah* (12b) asks: “And until now was he not happy?” and the Gemara answers: “The seventh day was Shabbos, the day when Klal Yisroel eat and drink, say *divrei* Torah and sing praise to Hashem, whereas the nations of the world eat and drink, and speak words of garbage”.

The *Achronim* all ask, how does this answer the Gemara’s question?

The Vilna Gaon answers, that בטוב לב המלך בין, doesn’t refer to Achashveirosh, rather it refers to the Ribbono Shel Olam, and since He was happy, it had an effect down below.

We see from here how much one can achieve with his Shabbos meals.

The Belzer Rebbe *shlita* once explained the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (23:3) תערוך לפני שולחן: נגד צוריו, that with what do at our Shabbos tables, we are able to overcome our enemies.

The Tail of Vashti and the Tale of Truman

ותמאן המלכה ושתי לבא בדבר המלך אשר ביד הסריסים ויקצף המלך מאד וחמתו בערה בו

**“But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s command conveyed by the chamberlains. The king was greatly incensed, and his fury burned within him.”
(Esther 1:12)**

Achashveirosh threw a grand party. When he was good and “happy,” he commanded his wife Queen Vashti to appear before those assembled to show off her beauty. Vashti refused to come. According to the Gemara in *Megillah* (12b), her refusal to come was not based on any sudden sense of modesty on her part, rather the *malach* Gavriel came and put a tail on her.

Often, when the Gemara relates an incident of *aggadic* nature such as this, the Gemara is not to be taken literally. The Gemara is teaching a message with this story. We do not need to assume that Vashti literally grew a tail. The *Chofetz Chaim* suggests that the Gemara means something else:

The Gemara says in *Sanhedrin* (96a) that Nevuchadnetzar, King of Bavel, was not born into royalty. How did he become King? The Gemara relates that Chizkiyahu, King of Yehudah, became very sick and he was miraculously saved. Hashem wanted to publicize the fact that the King of Yehudah was miraculously healed so he made a second miracle – namely, the day that King Chizkiyahu was cured lasted 18 hours! That got people’s attention! The whole world realized that it was a miraculous day.

The King of Bavel at that time was a person named Biladan. Biladan said, I need to send congratulatory remarks to the King of Yehudah. “He is so righteous that Hashem changed nature for him, I must send him a letter of congratulations and admiration.” He ordered his scribe (who at the time was Nevuchadnetzar) to draft the letter for him. However, that day, for whatever reason, Nevuchadnetzar was not there. So, the other scribes went ahead and drafted a letter without the input of the chief scribe, Nevuchadnetzar.

The letter salutation was as follows: שלמא למלכא חזקיה שלם לקרתא דירושלם שלם לאלהא - רבא - “Peace to you King Chizkiyahu; peace to Yerusholayim; and peace to the Mighty G-d.” Nevuchadnetzar returned from wherever he was and asked to review a copy of the letter. When he saw the salutation, he objected that the honor of the Mighty G-d should have been placed first not third in the letter. However, the other scribes told him that the original had already been sent off. Nevuchadnetzar ran after the messengers to try to stop them so as not to send the letter with such a “blasphemous” salutation. The Gemara says that he ran four steps in the direction of the courier. He wanted to stop him and reverse the salutation by rewriting it according to proper protocol: שלם לאלהא רבא שלם לקרתא דירושלם שלם למלכא חזקיה - “Peace to the Almighty G-d; peace to the city of Yerusholayim; and peace to King Chizkiyah.”

However, the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* teaches that after he ran those four steps (according to an alternate version in the *Yalkut* he ran only 3 steps) to stop the letter, Gavriel came and stopped him in his tracks so that he would not be able to run any further. The Gemara comments that had Gavriel not come and limited the merit Nevuchadnetzar was gaining for himself by showing Hashem this honor: לא היה תקנה לשונאיהם של ישראל - “There would not have been left a remnant of the enemies of the Jewish people” (a euphemistic way of saying the Jewish people would have been totally wiped out). The Gemara asks, “So what did Nevuchadnetzar get as reward for his walking the four steps?” The Gemara answers that he saw himself and three generations after him become royalty. The four generations were Nevuchadnetzar, Evil Merodach, BalShezzar, and Vashti. Vashti was a great-granddaughter of Nevuchadnetzar.

The *Chofetz Chaim* explains that there is actually no dispute between the version that says Nevuchadnetzar ran four steps and the version that says he ran three steps. He actually ran three full steps. In the middle of the fourth step Gavriel came and stopped him before he had a chance to complete the fourth step. It was cut off in the middle.

That is why the Gemara testifies that if he would have taken four whole steps the Jewish people would have been wiped out! The *Chofetz Chaim* interprets: Since he did not take a complete fourth step, the reign of his fourth descendant (Vashti) was terminated prematurely. Had Vashti remained on the throne, Esther would never have been in a position to save the Jewish people and they would have been wiped out in the time of Haman.

The *Chofetz Chaim* explains further that this is what it means that Gavriel (the same *malach* who stopped Nevuchadnetzar from taking that fourth step) came and placed a tail upon Vashti. The term “*zanav*” [tail] alludes to the fact that it was the tail end of the dynasty of Nevuchadnetzar.

The lesson of this story is that this is how the Ribbono Shel Olam runs this world. The incident with Gavriel happened in the time of Chizkiyahu King of Yehudah – many years before the era of Haman and Achashveirosh. Because of what took place then, Klal Yisroel were saved many years later in the time of Purim.

Events happen or do not happen for countless different reasons, but behind the supposed motivations of people, the Ribbono Shel Olam is manipulating history to carry out His will. Behind the curtains, the Ribbono Shel Olam is pulling the strings.

R' Frand relates the following: When I was in Mexico City, I heard a true story (which appears in the historical archives of the Knesset) from Rabbi David Ordman. Rav Shlomo Lorenz (a former Knesset member of Agudas Yisroel) once met Harry S. Truman, President of the United States. President Truman told Rabbi Lorenz, “You should know that when I agreed to recognize the State of Israel, it went against the advice of my advisors, and it was against every political instinct that I have. But I will tell you why I did it...”

The conventional wisdom is that Harry Truman recognized the State of Israel in 1948 because he had a Jewish partner in the haberdashery business in Independence Missouri many decades earlier who came to him in the White House and asked him for this favor. This is conventional wisdom. Now you will hear the rest of the story from Harry Truman himself.

President Truman told Rabbi Lorenz “I was a little boy growing up in the United States and every little boy growing up in the United States dreams of becoming president. That was my dream. I’ll tell you something else. I was a good Christian boy, and I learned my Bible. My hero in the Bible was Cyrus (Koresh, who was a descendant of none other than Queen Esther). This Koresh is the one who let the Jewish people go back to their homeland and build their Temple (*Beis HaMikdash*). I said, if I ever become President of the United States, I want to imitate my hero and if I ever get the opportunity to let the Jewish people go back to their country and rebuild their Temple that is what I am going to do.” “And that”, he concluded, “Is why I recognized the State of Israel.”

This is the same story: The Yad Hashem [Hand of G-d] at work. Just like with Vashti – we do not know what on earth possessed her to disobey her husband and not come as he ordered. Somehow the Ribbono Shel Olam “sent an *malach*” and made it happen, so that Klal Yisroel should be saved. So too, Harry Truman had this ‘*mishugaas*’ – he wanted to emulate Koresh. There is probably not another person in the world whose main Biblical hero was Koresh, but that was the idiosyncrasy of Harry Truman. Because of that, the rest is history.

Why Did Achashveirosh Need Experts in The Jewish Calendar to Determine What to Do with Vashti?

ויאמר המלך לחכמים ידעי העתים

“And the King said to the wise men who knew the times.” (Esther 1:13)

The Gemara in *Megillah* (12b) explains that, “the wise men who knew the times” were the rabbis who knew how to calculate leap years or determine the day of Rosh Chodesh. Why would Achashveirosh seek their council about what to do with Vashti?

R’ Yonason Eibshitz (*Yaares Devash*, Vol. 1, *Derush* 17) explains: The Gemara in Rosh Hashanah (3a) says that the years of the non-Jewish kings are counted from Tishrei; i.e. if one became a King a few months before Tishrei, when Tishrei arrives he starts the second year of his rulership. The party, which was “in the third year of his reign” (1:3), started in Tishrei. The Medrash observes that in the phrase: ימים רבים שמונים ומאת יום - “many days, one hundred and eighty days” (1:4) — the words, ימים רבים, are apparently superfluous. The Medrash explains that since the minimum of a plural is two, ימים means two days and רבים refers to another three days. This teaches us that before Achashveirosh started the one hundred and eighty days of festivity, he held a private party which lasted five days. Thus, the one-hundred-and-eighty-day feast commenced on the sixth of Tishrei.

Counting from the sixth of Tishrei and calculating based on alternative months of twenty-nine days and thirty days, one hundred and eighty days later would be on the eighth of Nissan. Consequently, the last day of the seven-day festive meal for the people of Shushan, at which he called for Vashti, was on the fifteenth day of Nissan.

Vashti was the daughter of King Balshatzar, who erroneously calculated that Hashem would no longer take the Jews out of exile and that he was thus the sole owner of the vessels of the *Beis HaMikdosh*. He celebrated this on the night of Pesach — the fifteenth of Nissan — and by heavenly intervention he was killed instantly (see Doniel 5:30, Haggadah Shel Pesach, *Vayehi Bachatzi Halailah*). Therefore, this day marked the anniversary of her father's passing and was an occasion for great mourning.

Achashveirosh loved Vashti and endeavored to minimize the iniquity she had committed against him. Consequently, in retrospect he thought that since she had been in mourning for her father's death that day, it had been wrong of him to call her to make a grand appearance before the people on that day and she deserved to be dealt with compassionately.

However, if the third year of Achashveirosh's reign was a leap year, then the festivities actually culminated on the fifteenth of Adar Sheini and Vashti had no justification for her disobedience. Consequently, he called the rabbis who were experts on setting the Jewish calendar, hoping that they would tell him that it was not a leap year, thus providing him with a way to save his beloved Queen Vashti.

Haman Was Struck by the Number 40

ויאמר מומכן [ממוכן] לפני המלך והשרים

“Memuchan declared in the presence of the king and the ministers.” (Esther 1:16)

The Gemara says that the name ממוכן in *Megillas Esther* refers to Haman who was: מוכן לפורענות – “Prepared, or destined, for punishment”. How does the name ממוכן imply punishment? And secondly if Haman was “prepared for punishment,” he should have been called מוכן not ממוכן. What is the purpose of the extra letter *mem*?

Rabbeinu Bechaye (Bereishis 36:12) writes that the Name of Hashem which has the power to defeat Amalek is the Name of forty letters. Therefore, Haman was called Memuchan, Muchan because he was prepared for punishment and Memuchan because it is the Holy Name of forty letters (the *gematria* of “*mem*” is forty) which would bring about that punishment.

The number forty is mentioned in several places in the context of Haman's defeat. The Medrash states that the pole upon which Haman was hanged was fifty *amos* high, but ten *amos* were embedded into the ground, and thus Haman's body was suspended forty *amos* above the ground. The *Targum* (Esther 9:14) says that the bodies of Haman and his sons, who were hanged one after the other, occupied forty *amos* of the fifty-*amos* pole. In that sense Haman indeed was punished by the number forty (the forty *amos* of the pole).

Additionally, the *Targum Sheini* (2:5) says that Mordechai was exactly the fortieth generation after Yaakov Avinu. Hence, Mordechai and his generation were the "forty" that struck Haman.

Why the "Vav" Is Between the Two "Mems"

Why in the aforementioned *pasuk* is his name now written with the "vav" between the two "mems" (מומכן) and not with the "vav" after the two "mems" (ממוכן), as in 1:14 and 1:21?

The *Chida* in *Nechel Eshkol* explains as follows: The Gemara in *Megillah* (12b) teaches that Memuchan is Haman, who was "muchan" — "destined" (מוכן) for trouble (to be hung). The Medrash (*Manos HaLevi*) says that Haman's reign lasted only seventy days. This is derived from the *pasuk*: *כי בן צוה לו המלך* - "For so had the King commanded concerning him" (3:2) — since the word כן has the numerical value of seventy.

When Memuchan is spelled with a "vav" between the two "mems," it is a combination of two words "mum chein" meaning that Haman was a blemish (מום) and indicating prophetically that the Jewish people would suffer from this blemish only "chein" (כן) for seventy days.

Understanding the Decree About Language

להיות כל איש שרר בביתו ומדבר כלשון עמו

"Every man should wield authority in his home and speak the language of his own people." (Esther 1:22)

As a result of Vashti's disrespectful behavior towards him, Achashveirosh had her killed. In order to ensure that nobody in his empire would emulate her, Achashveirosh sent out a royal proclamation decreeing that every man should be in charge of his house. This part of the edict makes logical sense, as it seems to be a direct consequence of the incident with Vashti.

However, Achashveirosh appended a second component to his decree - that every husband should speak in the language of his nation - which appears to be completely unrelated to Vashti's conduct. The problem with her behavior was that she spoke to him in an insolent manner, which seems to be irrelevant to the language in which they conversed. Indeed, the *Ibn Ezra* writes that this second part of Achashveirosh's declaration had nothing to do with Vashti's actions and was included precisely to distract people from focusing on her disgrace of the king and the decree which resulted from it.

The *Chasam Sofer* suggests that the issue of language was in fact quite connected to the humiliation that Achashveirosh suffered at the hands of Vashti. He explains by posing a different question: Even if Vashti was willing to relate her embarrassing message to Achashveirosh's servants, why were they willing to repeat it to him? Weren't they afraid for their own lives to speak to the king in such a manner?

The *Chasam Sofer* explains that Achashveirosh and his servants spoke a language called Sursi, while Vashti spoke a different language called Kasdi. When the servants heard Vashti's message, they didn't understand it because they didn't speak her language. Due to the language barrier, all they understood was that Vashti was refusing to come with them as Achashveirosh had requested, and they assumed that the message was an explanation of her decision, so they returned to Achashveirosh and innocently repeated her words, oblivious to their true meaning.

In reality, the Gemara (*Megillah* 12b) teaches that not only did Vashti refuse to come, but she sent back a message saying that Achashveirosh was a lowly stable boy for her father, who was able to drink a large amount of wine without becoming intoxicated, while Achashveirosh had consumed only a small amount of wine but had clearly gotten drunk, as evidenced by the ridiculous request that he made of her to appear naked at his royal party.

When Achashveirosh heard the message, he was humiliated in front of the noblemen, many of whom also spoke and understood the Kasdi language. In other words, the entire embarrassing situation only came about because Vashti spoke her own language, which the servants didn't understand and naively repeated. In order to prevent this from happening again in the future, Achashveirosh decreed that all wives must speak their husband's language.

The Ribbono Shel Olam Is Always *Makdim Refuah Lemakoh*

Achashveirosh sent out a royal proclamation decreeing that every husband should speak in the language of his nation. R' Tzvi Hirsch Ferber (*Shvil HaTzvi* on *Megillas Esther*) asks what relevance this decree had to the main miracle of Purim. He quotes *b'shem godol echod* that the way of kings was to enforce all those within the rulership of their kingdom to speak the native language of the kingdom and this would encompass any surrounding areas that they would conquer. Certainly, with the kingdom of Achashveirosh the Amalekites would have to speak only the king's native tongue. When the evil decree of Haman was rescinded and the Yidden were given permission to take revenge on their enemies they first sought out those people from Amalek. The Medrash says that the 75,000 slain (9:16) were from Amalek. Now, if all those in the kingdom had spoken the same language it would not have been possible to discern and know whether they were from Amalek or not. Therefore, Hakodosh Boruch Hu was '*makdim refua lemakoh*' – He proceeded the problem with the solution, by facilitating that everyone should speak their own native language thus ensuring that on the day of the miracle the Jews would easily recognize their arch enemies of Amalek and be able to destroy them. (*Ovi Mori*)

פרק ב'

Understanding Why Vashti Was So Against Keeping Shabbos

זכר את ושתי ואת אשר עשתה ואת אשר נגזר עליה

“He remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what had been decreed upon her.” (Esther 2:1)

The Gemara in *Megillah* (12b) says that this refers to the Heavenly decree against Vashti for causing the Jewish girls to disrobe and work for her on Shabbos. Why did she want them to violate Shabbos and why was her punishment meted out necessarily on Shabbos?

The *Yalkut Me'am Lo'az* explains as follows: Cyrus, King of Persia gave the order that the *Beis HaMikdash*, which had been razed by Nevuchadnezar, should be rebuilt. Two years afterward, Achashveirosh, King of the vast Persian Empire, put a halt on the rebuilding. He did this under the influence of Queen Vashti, granddaughter of Nevuchadnezar. She had furiously bellowed “Why are you allowing the rebuilding of what my grandfather destroyed?” (See Medrash Rabbah 5:2, Yeshayah 45.)

Cognizant that in merit of properly observing Shabbos the redemption would come, (Yerushalmi, *Ta'anis* 1:1) Vashti did not allow Jewish women to wear their nice clothing on Shabbos, which is a way of honoring Shabbos. Moreover, she forced them to actually violate it, by performing work. She anticipated that once the women stopped keeping Shabbos, they would influence the men to follow suit. Hence, the Jews would remain in exile and the *Beis HaMikdosh* would not be rebuilt.

Hashem's way of punishment is *midah keneged midah* — measure for measure. Since Vashti stripped the clothing of the Jewish girls and caused them to desecrate Shabbos, and Shabbos is known as Shabbos HaMalkah — Shabbos the Queen (Shabbos 119a) — hence, on the Shabbos, as she celebrated her reign as Queen, she was stripped of her title *malkah* — Queen — and put to death.

Mordechai's Yiddishkeit Preceded His Name

איש יהודי היה בשושן הבירה ושמו מרדכי בן יאיר בן שמעי בן קיש איש ימיני

“There was a Jew who lived in Shushan, who went by the name of Mordechai, who was the son of Yoir, the son of Shimi, the son of Kish, from the tribe of Binyomin.”

(Esther 2:5)

Since his real name was Mordechai and “Yehudi” was only a title he earned for not accepting *avodah zarah* (*Megillah* 13a), the *pasuk* should first state his name and then his title?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe once explained: Unfortunately, sometimes due to outward appearances the only way to know that one is a Jew is by his Jewish name, e.g., Goldberg, Cohen, etc. The *Megillah* is telling us that without even knowing his name, one who would see Mordechai walking in the streets of the capital would immediately know by his beard, peiyos, and attire that “Ish Yehudi” — here walks a Jewish man.

Some Important Lessons in Tefillah, We Must Take from the Purim Story

It is well known that Mordechai HaTzaddik was the *amud hatefillah* [pillar of prayer], he was the prime example of the power of *tefillah*. *Chazal darshen* (*Megillah* 12b) the *pasuk*: איש יהודי היה בשושן הבירה ושמו מרדכי בן יאיר בן שמעי בן קיש איש ימיני, to mean, בן יאיר — “the one who enlightened the eyes of Klal Yisroel with *tefillah*”, בן שמעי — “the son who Hashem listened to his *tefillas*”, בן קיש — “the one who banged on the gates of mercy and they were opened for him”.

We see from the above Gemara that the *tefillos* of Mordechai is what brought the salvation for Klal Yisroel.

There is an additional Gemara, however, which also talks about Mordechai HaTzaddik. The Gemara in *Chullin* (139b) asks: "Where is a *mekor* [source] for Mordechai in the Torah?" and the Gemara answers: מר דרור ומתרגמין מירא דביא – "It writes in regard to the spices taken to make the anointing oil, flowing myrrh and we translate *mor deror* into Aramaic as: *mira dachya*, which resembles the name Mordechai".

The above Gemara needs explanation, what is *mira dachya*? And where is the name of Mordechai hinted at in the words *mor deror*? The *Chasam Sofer* has around twenty different *p'shotim* explaining the above Gemara. However, I would like to bring a novel explanation that I saw brought down from R' Naftoli Kopshitz *shlita*.

It's well known, that the *gematria* [numerical value] of the word, עמלק, is the same *gematria* as the word, רם, which means exalted. This teaches us, that the *yesod* [foundation] of Amalek's *tumah*, which represents the *yetzer horah*, is haughtiness.

Haughtiness, and the feeling that one is able to achieve what he wants without needing to come on to help from the Ribbono Shel Olam is what Amalek stood for. When one feels the above very strongly, he is being influenced directly by his *yetzer horah*. However, even if one only feels this on a very slight level, he is still being influenced by his *yetzer horah*.

The word רם, which means exalted, is made up of the same letters as, מר, which means bitter.

One who feels that he is exalted and suffers from haughtiness will in the end, end up being מר, feeling very bitter. Someone who doesn't subjugate himself to the Ribbono Shel Olam, will end up feeling very bitter. רם brings one to the feeling of מר. Haughtiness and bitterness go hand in hand, where there is one normally the other one can also be found.

Mordechai was the exact opposite of the above. The biggest opposition to Haman was Mordechai. The, זזה לעומת זה, the thing that Hashem created to stand in opposition to Haman was Mordechai. If Haman stood for the ultimate haughtiness and in turn the ultimate bitterness, then Mordechai who stood in opposition to Haman, stood for the ultimate humility and happiness.

מר דרור, which can be translated as free from bitterness, refers to Mordechai who was the exact opposite of Haman.

This is also *pshat* in the Targum of מר דרור, which is מירא דביא. The expression of דביא, is an expression of purity, this represents Mordechai who was pure from any bitterness. The *yesod* of Mordechai, the *tefillos* of Mordechai, which as we explained above brought the salvation, were able to achieve what they did, because they were said with complete subjugation (*hachnoh*) to the Ribbono Shel Olam. Mordechai subjugated himself completely to the Ribbono Shel Olam and didn't take credit for anything - the complete opposite of what Amalek stood for, as a result, he merited that his *tefillos* were answered.

Being *Boiteach* [Having Faith] that Hashem Will Answer

There is another important aspect of *tefillah* that we can learn from the miracle of Purim, a very *yesoidosdika* [fundamental] lesson in *tefillah*.

When one *davens*, besides for completely subjugating himself to the Ribbono Shel Olam, one must have complete *emunah* and *bitochan* that Hashem will answer his *tefillos*. If one *davens* and believes in his *tefillos*, his *tefillos* will be much more powerful. When a person believes that his *tefillos* have a *koach* [strength] to go to Shomayim and change his *matzov* [status], then it is much more likely that his *tefillos* will in fact be able to do so.

If, however, when one *davens* he thinks to himself, who says my *tefillos* will be answered, who says I am worthy, I have so many *aveiros* why should Hashem answer me, etc., etc., then it will be much harder for him to get his *tefillos* answered.

If, however, one *davens* and believes 100% that even though he is not worthy his *tefillos* will be answered, his *tefillos* will be answered much quicker.

Subjugation together with complete *bitochan* that one's *tefillos* will be answered, are two things which will ensure that one's *tefillos* will be answered.

A person who lives with the understanding that even the *tefillah* of a lowly *ba'al aveirah* has the possibility of being answered, is much more likely to have his *tefillos* answered. If one doesn't believe in the power of *tefillah*, and one is in doubt if his *tefillah* has any weight behind it, it he will find it much harder to get his *tefillos* answered.

We find the above *yesod* in the Gaon's *pirush* on the siddur (*Avnei Eliyohu*) where he explains something very strange that happened in *Megillas Esther*.

We say in *shemonah esrei* three times a day the words: משען ומבטח לצדיקים – "Support and trust of the righteous". The Gaon explains on a deeper level the meaning behind the above. He explains, that even though Hashem is trustworthy with those *tzaddikim*

who trust in Him and always answers their *tefillos*, sometimes before they even have to ask for things, Hashem drops a hint that He is there waiting to help them and reminds them that they shouldn't lose trust in Him.

The Gaon cites two examples, one of the examples he brings is, that before Haman was hung on the gallows, Hashem arranged that Haman led Mordechai through the streets and proclaimed, "So shall be done to the man who the king wants to honor". Why did Hashem do this, surely, he could have saved them without it? The Gaon explains, the reason Hashem did this was to help Klal Yisroel strengthen their *bitochan* and trust in Him before He ultimately redeemed them.

When a person *davens* to Hashem without *bitochan* that his *tefillos* will be answered, his *tefillos* aren't so powerful and they are very likely to go unanswered. Therefore, sometimes Hashem gives a person a *mishon* - something to lean on, some support, something to show the person that Hashem wants and desires him and that He is prepared to listen to his *tefillos*. With this reminder, Hashem wants the person to *daven* and trust in Him, and ultimately Hashem will be able to redeem him.

This is what happened, explains the Gaon, in the Purim story. The entire story of Haman leading Mordechai around on a horse and proclaiming, "So shall be done to the man the king wants to honor", didn't need to happen in order to annul Haman's decree. In fact, the decree was annulled because of Esther, so why did Hashem cause the above episode to happen, why did Hashem want Haman to lead Mordechai around on a horse? Hashem orchestrated the entire sequence of events to give Klal Yisroel a boost in *bitochan* and remind them that they have hope and that they should trust in Him.

משען ומבטח לצדיקים. Through Hashem showing Himself, he is reminding and giving Klal Yisroel *chizuk* that they should trust in him. Achashveirosh ruled over the entire world, Haman was second in command to the king, there was a decree to destroy all the Jews, there was nowhere to run to, and what happened next? Mordechai sits on the back of a horse and Haman leads him through the streets. This gave Klal Yisroel hope, this reminded them that there is light at the end of the tunnel, and it helped them see that Hashem was with them, even in these dark times. This gave them a *mishon*, something to lean on. As a result, they strengthened in their *bitochan* in Hashem, which helped them to *daven* better, as a result their *tefillos* were answered, and consequently the *gezeirah* was annulled.

Without this complete *bitochan* in Hashem the *gezeirah* would have remained in place. Only because Hashem gave them this *mishon*, and arranged that Haman lead

Mordechai through the streets, were they able to remain strong in their *bitochan* and were able to *daven* and consequently annul the decree.

Based on the above *yesod*, R' Itzelah Blazer explains a difficult Gemara in Rosh Hashanah. The Gemara in Rosh Hashanah (18a) writes, that there can be two people that go to *beis din* to be judged if they deserve the death penalty or not, and it can be that they both have done the same crime, and this one survives and this one doesn't. Asks the Gemara: "How can it be that this one survives, and this one doesn't?" Answers the Gemara: "Because this one *davened* and was answered and this one *davened* and wasn't answered". Asks the Gemara: "Why was this one's *tefillah* answered and this one's not?". Answers the Gemara: זה התפלל תפילה שלמה נענה וזה לא התפלל תפלה שלמה - לא נענה - "This one *davened* a complete heartfelt *tefillah* and so was answered, whereas this one didn't *daven* a complete heartfelt *tefillah* and so wasn't answered".

Asks R' Itzelah, surely if one is standing in *beis din*, and is being judged if he should live or die, and his life depends on the outcome, he *davens* a complete *tefillah*. What does the Gemara mean, "this one didn't *daven* a complete heartfelt *tefillah* and so wasn't answered"?

R' Itzelah explains, true that both of them certainly *davened* from the bottom of their hearts to Hashem. However, one of them *davened* to Hashem with complete *bitochan* that Hashem will listen to his *tefillah* and believed that his *tefillah* had power. The other one, however, *davened* to Hashem because he thought, "maybe my *tefillah* will work maybe not, I have no other option so I might as well *daven*" however, he doesn't believe so strongly in the power of *tefillah*. Since he *davened* without complete *bitochan* that Hashem answers all *tefillas*, however bad a person may be, Hashem didn't accept his *tefillah*. (Based on a *shmooze* given by R' Naftoli Kopshitz *shlita*)

The Connection Between Mordechai and The Choicest of All the Spices

When the *Megillah* introduces us to Mordechai, it tells us not only his name, but the names of several of his ancestors, recording that he was Mordechai the son of Yoair the son of Shimi the son of Kish. Why does the *pasuk* mention all these ancestors, especially when the commentators point out that these were not his direct father and grandfather, but more distant ancestors? The Gemara in *Megillah* (12b) explains that each name teaches us something: בן יאיר – "the one who enlightened the eyes of Klal Yisroel with *tefillah*", בן שמעי – "the son who Hashem listened to his *tefillas*", בן קיש – "the one who banged on the gates of mercy and they were opened for him".

The Vilna Gaon writes that humans have four senses: sight, hearing, smell, and speech. Three of these are needed for the purpose of learning Torah: sight to see what one is studying, hearing to listen to one's teacher, and speech to share knowledge with others. The sense of smell has no connection to Torah study. Rather, its place is in the *Avodah* (Divine service) in the *Beis HaMikdosh*, as the *pasukim* in the Torah that discuss the *korbonos* repeatedly describe them as a: ריח ניחוח לד' – "a pleasant smell to Hashem. Today, when we do not have *korbonos*, our *tefillos* take their place.

The Gemara in *Chullin* (139b) says that Mordechai is hinted to in the beginning of *Parshas Ki Sisa*, where the Torah lists the spices that were used to create the anointing oil. The first of the spices is called: מר דרור – pure myrrh – which the Targum translates into Aramaic as מרא דביא, which sounds like Mordechai.

The Vilna Gaon explains that by linking Mordechai to the choicest of all the spices, the Torah is teaching us that he is the most connected to the concept of *davening* which corresponds to the sense of smell. For this reason, he had all four of the senses in his *tefillos*, as he lit up the eyes of the Jews with his entreaties, Hashem listened to his *tefillos*, he knocked on the doors of Mercy by expressing his petitions, and his very name and essence connote that his *tefillos* were the epitome of a: ריח ניחוח לד' – "a pleasant smell to Hashem.

Extending this concept, the *Haggadah Shel Pesach Reiach Duda'im* cites the Rambam's opinion (*Hilchos Klei HaMikdosh* 1:3) that the pure myrrh in the anointing oil was made from the blood of a nonkosher animal from India. The *Raavad* disagrees vehemently, arguing that no part of a *treif* animal could ever be used in the *Beis HaMikdosh*. The *Kesef Mishneh* defends the Rambam by suggesting that because the substance in question is dried out and ground into a fine powder, it is legally considered a new object and therefore permitted even though it originated from a non-kosher animal. Even so, why is Mordechai specifically alluded to in an object that has such questionable origins?

The Medrash comments on a *pasuk* in *Iyov* (14:4) that says: מי יתן טהור מטמא, by explaining that the *pasuk* is referring to the concept of something pure emerging from an impure source, such as the *porah adumah* making one person *tahor* but another person *tomei*. One of the examples given is the pure and holy Mordechai who was descended from the impure Shimi ben Geira. The fact that Mordechai's name is hinted to in conjunction with a *treif* animal that according to the Rambam finds its way into the *Beis HaMikdosh* alludes to this Medrash.

As far as why Mordechai's name is hinted to in the Targum instead of in an actual *pasuk* in the Torah, a *sefer* called *Divrei Purim* points out that a critical event in the *Megillah* involved Mordechai's knowledge of other languages which enabled him to discern the plot of Bigsan and Seresh, who spoke in a foreign language assuming that nobody would

be able to understand them. Mordechai's name is therefore hinted to in the Targum's translation of the Torah into a foreign language.

Although the Gemara provides an allusion to Haman in a *pasuk* in *Parshas Bereishis*, Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld suggests that he is also hinted to in the section of anointing spices together with Mordechai. All the 11 spices are fragrant except for חלבנה – “galbanum” (*Shemos* 30:34) – which has a foul odor. Not surprisingly, the word חלבנה has the same numerical value (95) as Haman. (R' Ozer Alport)

Never Become Acclimated to Galus

אשר הגלה מירושלים

“Who had been exiled from Yerusholayim.” (Esther 2:6)

The Gemara in *Megillah* (12a) relates that R' Shimon bar Yochai's *talmidim* asked him what Bnei Yisroel did wrong that caused the *gezeirah* [decree] of Haman – a question of theodicy. He put the ball back in their court and asked them what they thought, to which they replied that it was enjoying the *seudah* of Achashveirosh that was the problem. Rashbi countered that if that was the case, then only the people of Shushan were guilty. Why was everyone else included in the *gezeirah*? Rashbi then gave his own answer – it was bowing to the idol of Nevuchadnetzar years earlier that was the issue. The *talmidim* countered that if Klal Yisroel was indeed guilty of *avodah zorah*, why did they merit the miracle of being saved? Rashbi answered that it wasn't really *avodah zorah* – they bowed to the idol only out of fear. It only superficially looked like *avodah zorah*. Therefore, they experienced the “superficial” threat of Haman's *gezeirah*, but were sure to be *zocha* [merit] to a miracle and saved.

There's a lot that is unclear here. What was the *hava amina* [initial thinking] of the *talmidim* that everyone was at fault because the Jews of Shushan participated in Achashveirosh's party? According to Rashbi, why should a *cheit* [sin] of *avodah zorah* done literally decades earlier rear its head now? And if it really wasn't *avodah zorah*, then why should there have been any *gezeirah*?

R' Sholom Gold has an autobiography (*Touching History: from Williamsburg to Jerusalem*) in which he recounts that R' Shneur Kotler was once the guest speaker at a dinner for Ner Yisroel Toronto (which R' Gold help found) and he addressed himself to this Gemara. Here is a brief summary of what he said:

Close to 70 years before the Purim story Klal Yisroel went into *galus* [exile] and cried: על נהרות בבל שם ישבנו גם בכינו בזכרנו את ציון – “By the rivers of Bavel, there we sat and

wept, as we thought of Tzion". What a difference 70 years made! The problem with the party of Shushan was not that the food wasn't *glatt* or the wine not *mevushal* – it might very well have been. The problem was that participation in such an event meant that we had become acclimated to life in Bavel. We were, if not happy, certainly content. The tears that we cried as we were led into *galus* had long since dried up. It may have been that only the Jews of Shushan partook of the meal, but their participation was a *siman* that something had changed in our attitude toward *galus*.

Rashbi agreed in principle – it was acclimation and acculturation which were the causes of the *gezeirah*. What he disagreed with is the *talmidim's* identification of Achashveirosh's *seudah* as the catalyst. It was decades earlier, explained Rashbi, when Nevuchdnetzar set up his pseudo-*avodah zarah* and demanded that people bow, that the Rubicon was crossed. Had anyone asked a *shailah* whether it was really *avodah zarah*, the answer would have been a resounding "No" (see *Maharsha*). Nonetheless, even if bowing didn't violate the letter of the law, to do so should have broken the hearts of those who had just entered *galus*. How could someone who so recently cried: איך נשיר את שיר ה' על אדמת נבר – "How can we sing a song of Hashem on alien soil?", bow even to a "kosher" idol? Yet they went ahead and did it. They already accepted such behavior as just an acceptable part and parcel of being a Jew in *galus*. It was then that the seeds that led to Achashveirosh's party were planted.

Rav Gold added to this thought a beautiful idea of his own. The Gemara on the next *amud* (12b) has a discussion regarding the lineage of Mordechai. On the one hand, he is called "Ish Yehudi," implying that he came from the tribe of Yehudah; on the other hand, he is called, "Yemini," implying that he came from the tribe of Binyomin. Rav Gold suggested that Mordechai was one of the few who never acclimated to Bavel; he lived with the memory of what life was like before *galus* and yearned to return to Eretz Yisroel. Therefore, he is the only one who could awaken the Jews to their error; he is the hero of the Purim story. "Ish Yemini" means that Mordechai remembered the vow: אם אשכחך ירושלם תשכח ימיני – "If I forget you, Yerusholayim, let my right-hand wither". Mordechai never forgot Yerusholayim, never forgot Eretz Yisroel, never forgot where home really was.

With this idea, we can also understand the *pasuk* we started off with: אשר הגלה מיירושלים – "Who had been exiled from Yerusholayim." Why is it necessary to know what happened to him many years ago?

Based on the above idea we can explain, that as time goes on Jews start becoming accustomed to *galus*, and start to settle and become acclimated to their surrounding

and have no yearning for Moshiach and the *geulah*. However, Mordechai who was the example of what a Yid should be like wasn't like this. He was never content there and always regarded himself as a *galus* Yid – a Jew in exile - and eagerly anticipated the return to his homeland - Yerusholayim.

We must learn from the mistake made at the time of the Purim story and remember that we are in *galus*. If we don't, then Hashem may *chas vesholam* have to send us a reminder.

Her Real Name Was Hadassah, So Why Was She Called Esther?

ויהי אמן את הדסה היא אסתר

“And he reared Hadassah, that is Esther.” (Esther 2:7)

Her real name was Hadassah; why was she called Esther?

R' Moshe Bogomilsky explains: There is a popular question concerning how Esther was permitted to have relations with Achashveirosh. Isn't this one of the three transgressions where one is required to allow oneself to be killed rather than transgress (see *Sanhedrin* 74b)?

According to the *Zohar* (*Devorim* 226a), she in fact did not have relationship with him; rather, a *sheid* - demon - was created which resembled Esther, and whenever the King called for Esther, the demon would appear in her stead. Mordechai created it, using his knowledge of Hashem's holy Name.

Thus, Esther is from the root word of סתר - “concealment” - as in the *pasuk*: אתה סתר לי - “You are shelter [lit. concealment] for me” (*Tehillim* 32:7). Hashem concealed her [hid her] from Achashveirosh while she remained faithful to Mordechai.

Who Says Esther Was Green?

והנערה יפת תאר וטובת מראה

“The maiden was shapely and beautiful.” (Esther 2:7)

The Gemara in *Megillah* (13a) quotes the opinion of Rav Yehoshua ben Karcha, who maintains that Esther was not inherently beautiful. In fact, she was a *yerakrokes* – she had a green complexion – but Hashem miraculously caused her to find favor in the eyes of everybody who saw her. The Gemara does not provide a source for Rav Yehoshua

ben Karcha's opinion, and it seems difficult to understand. If the *Megillah* explicitly testifies that Esther was physically attractive, for what reason did he denigrate her?

The Vilna Gaon explains that specifically Rav Yehoshua ben Karcha had no choice but to reinterpret the *Megillah's* statement about Esther's appearance. The Gemara in *Bava Basra* (15b) records a dispute regarding when Iyov lived, and it quotes several opinions. One of them is that of Rav Yehoshua ben Karcha, who maintains that he lived in the times of Achashveirosh. His source for this is a *pasuk* in *Iyov* (42:15) which states: ולא ירץ נמצא נשים יפות כבנות איוב בכל הארץ - "Iyov's daughters were the most beautiful women in the world". When was there a time in world history that the entire world was searched and examined for beautiful women? In the times of Achashveirosh.

However, this explanation presented Rav Yehoshua ben Karcha with a difficulty. If Achashveirosh set up a royal beauty pageant to seek out the most beautiful woman to be his wife, why didn't he choose one of Iyov's daughters if the *pasuk* testifies that they were the most attractive women in the world at that time, and why did he choose Esther if she was less beautiful? To resolve this question, Rav Yehoshua ben Karcha concluded that Esther's selection had nothing to do with her true appearance, as she was in fact naturally unattractive, but Hashem miraculously caused her to find favor in the eyes of everyone who saw her, which caused Achashveirosh to select her over Iyov's daughters.

The Difference Between Esther and All the Other Girls (1)

ובהקבץ נערות רבות...אל יד הגי ותלקח אסתר אל בית המלך אל יד הגי

"And when many young girls were being brought together... under the charge of Heigai, Esther was taken into the palace, under the charge of Heigai, guardian of the women." (Esther 2:8)

Originally, he is called Heigeh (הֶגֶה) (2:3). Why now in the same *pasuk* is his name first spelled with a *kamatz* (הֶגִי) and then with a *patach* (הֵגִי)?

The *Nachal Eshkol* explains: The word "*patach*" is related to the word "*petach*," which means "opening." To pronounce the *patach* vowel, one must open the mouth. On the other hand, *kamatz* literally means "close," and to pronounce the *kamatz* vowel (in the Ashkenazi pronunciation) the mouth is in a "closed, rounded" position.

The two different spellings and pronunciations of the name "Heigai" relate to the hopes of the girls who were chosen to be potential replacements for the Queen.

Each of the other girls came to the house of the women hoping that it would be closed for admission to all her rivals. Thus, she would be assured the opportunity to become Queen. Each one expressed this feeling by referring to the chief supervisor הַגִּי with a *kamatz*. Esther, on the other hand, came reluctantly and hoping that the doors would be flung open wide (*patach*) with multitudes of beautiful girls seeking entrance, so that she would not even be considered for the position or have only a very slim chance of being accepted. Therefore, in connection with her the *pasuk* refers to the supervisor in charge as הַגִּי, with a *patach*.

For a similar idea see *dvar* Torah titled “The Difference Between Esther and All the Other Girls (2)”.

Esther’s Role in Correcting the Sin of Eating at Achashveirosh’s Party

ואת שבע הנערות הראיות לתת לה

“And seven maids who were fitting to be given to her.” (Esther 2:9)

When Esther was taken to Achashveirosh’s palace along with the other candidates to replace Vashti, she found favor in the eyes of Hegai, who was in charge of guarding the women, and he arranged for her to have seven young women who were fit for her. In what way were these seven young women specifically suitable for Esther? In his commentary on the *Megillah* called *Megillas S’tarim*, the *Nesivos HaMishpot* (Rav Yaakov Lorberbaum of Lisa) explains that even though Esther refused to disclose her identity or nationality, she was miraculously provided with seven girls to assist her who were all Jewish. This made her feel more comfortable, and it was a sign from Hashem that He had not forgotten about her even while she seemed to be abandoned and forlorn in the king’s palace.

What specifically did these young women do to take care of Esther? The *Targum* writes that they made sure to bring her kosher food. Additionally, the Medrash teaches that the reason Mordechai sat in front of the palace gates every day was to try to ensure that Esther would not eat any non-kosher food. Why were Esther’s servants and Mordechai more concerned about her eating kosher food than about her observing other *mitzvos*?

The Vilna Gaon writes that the Jewish people in that generation committed two sins for which they were threatened with destruction. One was that they went to Achashveirosh’s party and ate non-kosher food there, and the other was that they bowed down to a statue in the times of Nevuchadnetzar. To rectify these two sins, they had to engage in both *teshuvah* [repentance] and fasting. The *teshuvah* was intended to rectify the sin of bowing to the idol, and refraining from eating during the fast corrected the sin of eating the food at Achashveirosh’s party. For this reason, there

were two redeemers in the *Megillah*: Mordechai and Esther. Mordechai rectified the sin of bowing down to the statue through his refusal to bow down to Haman, while Esther corrected the sin of eating at Achashveirosh's party.

In light of this explanation, Rav Yitzchok Sorotzkin writes that we now appreciate why there was such a specific focus on Esther not eating non-kosher food while she was in the king's palace, as her role was specifically to rectify this sin, which she did through her dedication to ensuring that she only ate kosher food. He adds that perhaps this was one of Mordechai's deeper intentions in commanding Esther not to reveal her identity, because if Achashveirosh would know that she was an observant Jew, he would gladly give her kosher food, and she would lose the challenge of fighting for it and the merit that she created through her struggles and sacrifice.

The Miracle of a Woman Keeping a Secret

לא הגידה אסתר את עמה ואת מולדתה כי מרדכי צוה עליה אשר לא תגיד

“Esther did not reveal her people or her kindred, for Mordechai had told her not to reveal it.” (Esther 2:10)

It is well-known that Hashem's name doesn't appear a single time in the entire *Megillah*. This peculiarity is traditionally explained as hinting to the fact that the *Megillah* contains only “hidden miracles” but is lacking open miracles which more clearly demonstrate Hashem's Providence. Rav Eizel Charif sharply suggested that nevertheless, one clear miracle remains. Mordechai told Esther not to reveal her religion or nationality, and a woman actually managed to keep a secret!

A Lesson in How to Do Teshuvah Hidden in the Megillah

ובהגיע תור נערה ונערה לבא אל המלך אחשורוש מקץ היות כדת הנשים שנים עשר חדש כי בן ימלאו ימי מרוקיהן ששה חדשים בשמן המור וששה חדשים בבשמים ובתמרוקי הנשים. ובזה הנערה באה אל המלך.

“When each girl's turn came to go to King Achashveirosh at the end of the twelve months' treatment prescribed for women, for that was the period spent on beautifying them: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and women's cosmetics, and it was after that that the girl would go to the king.” (Esther 2:12-13)

The Gemara in *Megillah* quotes Rav Huna who says that “*shemen ha'mor*” is oil from olives which did not reach more than a third of their growth. Such oil was used “because it removes the hair and softens the flesh.”

The Vilna Gaon (Esther 2:12) suggests that the *Megillah's* discussion of how the maidens prepared themselves and smeared themselves with oil in preparation for their audition with Achashveirosh alludes to the way a person must prepare himself to stand before the King of kings on Yom Kippur.

The *pasuk* says that each maiden was given twelve months to prepare to come before the king, just as a *kallah* [bride] is given twelve months to prepare for her wedding (*Kesubos* 57a). The *Zohar* uses the word *na'arah*, maiden, to refer to a person's *neshomah*. Hence, the *pasuk* means that one's *neshomah* is given twelve months to prepare to come before the King, Hashem. The Vilna Gaon explains as follows:

The Gemara in Rosh Hashanah (17a) teaches that Hashem is: מעביר ראשון ראשון - "He removes the first sin that a person commits and does not hold the person accountable for it." The Vilna Gaon explains that this means that Hashem expunges all of a person's *aveiros*, one at a time. The Vilna Gaon adds that Hashem removes a person's *aveiros* only if he does *teshuvah*. However, when a person does *teshuvah* during the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, his *teshuvah* is often done, *b'ones* [under duress] and may not be fully sincere. Therefore, although Hashem removes the *aveiros*, they are not yet completely forgiven. Rather, Hashem gives the person twelve months — the duration of the coming year after Yom Kippur — to prove the sincerity of his *teshuvah*. If he does not repeat the *aveirah* during those twelve months, he shows that his *teshuvah* was sincere, and Hashem then wipes out the *aveirah* entirely and completely exonerates him. Until that time, however, Hashem suspends the *aveirah* while He waits to see if the person will refrain from doing it again. If the person returns to his *aveiros* during those twelve months, Hashem reinstates the *aveiros* on the person's account and counts it against him retroactively (for example, it may increase the punishment decreed for the person due to his other *aveiros*).

When the *pasuk* says that each *na'arah* — referring to every person's *neshomah* — was given twelve months for: ימי מרוקיהן - "The days of their anointing", it refers to the twelve-month period which determines whether a person's *teshuvah* was sincere. ימי מרוקיהן, comes from the word, מרק, which means to "cleanse." The twelve months of ימי מרוקיהן, allude to the twelve months a person is given to completely cleanse himself of his *aveiros* that were temporarily suspended on Yom Kippur.

The *pasuk* continues and describes how those twelve months are to be used to wipe out the *aveiros* that were suspended on Yom Kippur.

First, ששה חדשים בשמן המור - "Six months with *shemen ha'mor*", which Rav Huna says refers to the removal of body hair. Hair is the only part of the body that serves primarily

an aesthetic purpose. As such, it symbolizes the extraneous luxuries in a person's life which keep him ensnared in the pursuit of materialistic pleasure. By working for six months to remove those luxuries, a person is able to extract himself from the lure of worldly pleasures and overcome his *yetzer horah* to sin again. (Rav Moshe Shapiro explains that "softening the flesh" also alludes to removing all external influences which adversely affect the body. Alternatively, it may represent becoming "soft like flesh," an allusion to humbling oneself.)

The next six months are, ששה חדשים בבשמים ובתמרוקי הנשים - "six months with perfumes and women's ointments." After one has removed the "hair" of worldly luxuries, he must strive to bring *kedusha* into his life through the scrupulous fulfillment of *mitzvos aseh* [the positive *mitzvos*]. *Mitzvos aseh* are represented by "perfumes" because they bring a sweet scent into a person's life like perfumes. One also must work on cleansing himself by fulfilling all of the *mitzvos lo sa'aseh* [the negative *mitzvos*], which are represented by תמרוקי נשים - "women's ointments". As mentioned above, the word תמרוקי comes from the word מרק, which means to cleanse oneself of the temptation to sin.

After those twelve months, ובה הנערה באה אל המלך - "With this, the maiden would come to the King." On the following Yom Kippur, twelve months after a person has done *teshuvah* and resolved not to do any more *aveiros* again, the person's *neshomah* is prepared to come before the King to ask for complete forgiveness. Since he successfully avoided returning to his old *aveiros* which Hashem temporarily suspended, Hashem sees that his *teshuvah* was sincere. Hashem then completely forgives the *aveiros* that were suspended on the previous Yom Kippur.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe (in *Alei Shur* 3:16, pg. 430 footnote) adds that this approach explains the *nussach* of the *berachah* in the *shemoneh esrei* of Yom Kippur: ברוך אתה ה' מלך מוחל - "Blessed are you Hashem, the King Who pardons and forgives our *aveiros*... and removes our *aveiros* each and every year." After we say that Hashem pardons and forgives our *aveiros*, why do we add that He "removes our sins each and every year"? If He already forgave our *aveiros*, what is left for Him to remove each year? What is this "removal" of *aveiros* if not forgiveness?

Rav Wolbe explains that the *berachah* refers to the two types of forgiveness Hashem grants on Yom Kippur. First, He looks at the *aveiros* of the year before — the outgoing year, which He suspended last Yom Kippur and for which He waited until this Yom Kippur to see whether the person's *teshuvah* was sincere. If He sees that the person did not return to those *aveiros*, He is מוחל וסלח - "pardons and forgives" them completely.

Secondly, He looks at the *aveiros* of the outgoing year, and if He sees that the person is making an effort to correct his ways and do *teshuvah*, He removes them and suspends them for twelve months until Yom Kippur of the following year. If, on the next Yom Kippur, He sees that the person achieved a full and sincere *teshuvah* for those *aveiros*, He completely pardons the person for his *aveiros*.

The Difference Between Esther and All the Other Girls (2)

ובהגיע תר נערה ונערה...ובהגיע תר אסתר בת אביחיל

“When the turn of every maiden arrived [to come to the King]...And when the turn came of Esther daughter of Avichayil [to come to the King].” (Esther 2:12, 15)

Why is the *trop* [cantillation] on נערה ונערה — “every maiden” [whose turn arrived to come to the King], a *kadma ve’azla* while the *trop* for Esther’s turn to come to the King, is a *munach*?

The Gaon and *Manos HaLevi* explain: “*Kadma ve’azla*” means to get up early and move. “*Munach*” means “resting.” All the other girls were excited and ran eagerly for the chance to be chosen as Queen. Esther, on the other hand, had absolutely no interest in this, and she went slowly and without any excitement.

In fact, the *Megillah* says twice: ותלקח אסתר - “Esther was *taken*” (2:8,16) - by force, against her will.

Originally, when it became known that the King wanted to appoint the most beautiful woman in his country to be Queen, Esther hid and was forcefully brought to the harem. After she had gone through the year-long procedure of preparation and her turn came to be with the King, she had no desire to go and again ותלקח אסתר - “she was taken by force.”

How Esther Managed to Find Favor in the Eyes of Everyone

ותהי אסתר נשאת חן בעיני כל ראה

“Yet Esther won the admiration of all who saw her.” (Esther 2:15)

In the spirit of Purim, Rav Yechezkel Abramsky jokingly questioned how Esther managed to find favor in the eyes of everybody who saw her. As everybody knows that men have different tastes in what traits they find desirable and important in a woman, how could Esther manage to please them all?

Rav Abramsky explains that there was one unique quality that Esther possessed that they could all agree was desirable, something that they'd never before found in a woman: the *Megillah* records that despite being given the opportunity to select anything she wanted to improve her appearance, Esther didn't ask for a thing. When the men heard that there was a woman who didn't want or need anything to enhance her looks, they unanimously agreed that she was indeed unique and special!

Not Only Did Esther Not Violate the Laws of Arayos She Didn't Even Create a Chillul Hashem

ויהיב המלך את אסתר... אין אסתר מגדת מולדתה... ואת מאמר מרדכי אסתר עשה
כאשר היתה באמנה אתו

**“The King loved Esther... Esther would not tell her lineage... and Esther did the commandment of Mordechai, equally as when she was under his guardianship.”
(Esther 2:17,20)**

There are a number of questions that can be asked on the aforementioned *pasukim*: 1) The word את is extra — it could have just said לאסתר? 2) It already says (2:10) that “she did not reveal her lineage and nationality,” why is it repeated? 3) What was the מאמר מרדכי - “[lit.] saying or words of Mordechai” - that Esther did?

In *Kosnas Ohr*, R' Meir Eizenstat explains: Regarding the ox that is stoned for goring a person the Torah says: ולא יאכל את בשרו - “His flesh may not be eaten” (*Shemos* 21:28). The Gemara in *Bava Kamma* (41b) says that from the extra word אֶת בשרו we derive that also: את הטפל לבשרו - that which is auxiliary to its flesh [the hide] is forbidden.

As explained (in the *devar* Torah titled “Her Real Name Was Hadassah, So Why Was She Called Esther?”), when Achashveirosh desired Esther, a demon was created which would appear in her stead. The extra word, את, teaches that Achashveirosh, who was unaware of this, loved את אסתר - that which was subsidiary to Esther - the demon.

Mordechai passed along to Esther the knowledge of how to make the demon, and thus, the *pasuk* tells us that when she needed it to act as a substitute, “she would do [i.e. utter] מאמר מרדכי - “the saying [words] Mordechai taught her” - כאשר היתה באמנה אתו - “while [through this] she remained faithful to him [Mordechai].”

The *pasuk* is also teaching that since “she would not tell her lineage and nationality” not only did Esther not violate the laws of *arayos* [forbidden relationships], but she also

did not cause a *chilul* Hashem [desecration of Hashem's Name]. No one could say that a Jewish lady was violating the laws of her Torah. (R' Moshe Bogomilsky)

Sometimes "No" Is the Best Answer

ובהקבץ בתולות שנית ומרדכי יושב בשער המלך

"And when the maidens were gathered together the second time and Mordechai sat at the king's gate." (Esther 2:19)

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." Achashveirosh 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.

Achashveirosh 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 Achashveirosh 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).

Achashveirosh 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 2:19). Suddenly, Achashveirosh 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 Achashveirosh.

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 Achashveirosh. I don’t want her to be there. I want her out of there. *Takeh!* Let Achashveirosh 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 Achashveirosh 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, veiz 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 Achashveirosh would have thrown her out and she would not have remained the Queen? The Salvation of Klal Yisroel 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 *daven* for something to happen in order to bring about a certain result, but if our *tefilllos* were answered as formulated, they would have brought about the **opposite** result! If our *tefilllos* appear to go unanswered, we should never think “Woe is me – Hashem is ignoring my pleas”. The Ribbono Shel Olam knows better. The Ribbono 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 Ribbono Shel Olam: “Please, Ribbono Shel Olam, 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 *tefillah* 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 Yisroel has salvation. What did Miriam think when Bas Pharaoh took the baby? “*Nebach*, the Ribbono Shel Olam did not listen to my *tefillos!* 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 *davened* for – and it is even better than we could have ever hoped for!

We see this all the time. Someone *davens* for a *shidduch*: “Ribbono 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. “Ribbono 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 Vodaas, and was respected as one of the Gedolei HaDor. 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 Ribbono 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. (R' Frand)

The Modesty of Keeping Secrets

אין אסתר מגדת מולדתה ואת עמה כאשר צוה עליה מרדכי

"Esther refused to disclose her nationality or her lineage, as Mordechai had commanded her." (Esther 2:20)

When Esther was initially brought to the royal palace under the charge of Hegai, she found favor in his eyes, yet the *Megillah* records (2:10) that she refused to disclose her nationality or her lineage, as she had been commanded by Mordechai. A short while later, after Achashveirosh selected her as Vashti's replacement, the *Megillah* again emphasizes that Esther would not reveal her people or her background. As this information was already conveyed a mere 10 *pasukim* earlier, why does the *Megillah* repeat this point, and why would we think that her conduct would change in such a short period of time?

The Vilna Gaon explains that the reason Mordechai told Esther not to reveal her identity was because he was afraid that he and all of the Jews would be killed for attempting to hide her instead of willingly turning her over like loyal subjects of the king. At this point, Esther had now been selected as queen and there had not been any backlash. In fact, the king was so infatuated with her that he threw extra parties and gave tax cuts to show his love for her. Seeing this, Esther could have easily concluded that Mordechai's concern was misplaced, and if she told Achashveirosh that she was a Jew, not only would he not hold it against her people, but he would shower them with favorable decrees. Nevertheless, Esther decided that if Mordechai instructed her not to divulge this information, she would follow his orders with complete faith.

The Gemara in *Megillah* (13b) teaches that due to Rochel's *tznius* [modesty], she merited having the modest King Shaul descend from her, and in the merit of Shaul's *tznius*, he was rewarded with the modest queen Esther being descended from him. The Gemara explains that Rochel's *tznius* was that she gave over the *simonim* [signs] to her sister Leah and did not reveal Lavan's trickery, and Shaul's modesty was that he did not tell anybody that he had been chosen by Shmuel as the first Jewish king (Shmuel 1 10:16). As for Esther's *tznius*, the Gemara cites the fact that she did not reveal her nation or her lineage. In what way do these three episodes demonstrate the attribute of *tznius*?

Although today *tznius* has become associated with clothing, the *Maharal* explains (*Nesivos Olam, Nesiv HaTznius* 1) that the quality of keeping something hidden within oneself instead of publicly sharing it with others is also considered a form of modesty. Since the Gemara teaches that the trait of *tznius* is passed on to one's descendants, he adds that somebody who can keep a secret and knows when to keep quiet is revealing himself to be *meyuchas* [of distinguished lineage].

Taking this one step further, the *Maharal* writes: *ולא תמצא בכל המדות שהדומה יוליד הדומה* - "You will not find in any character trait that a person gives birth to somebody similar to him with regards to that trait, as you find regarding the attribute of *tznius*". One who learns biology will learn that certain genes are dominant, while other genes are recessive. The *Maharal* teaches us that the most dominant gene of all, and the gene which is most likely to be given over to our children is that of modesty, a lesson that we learn from Rochel, Shaul, and Esther.

What Was Esther's Heter to Report the Plot of Bigsan and Seresh to Achashveirosh

בימים ההם ומרדכי יושב בשער המלך קצף בגתן ותרש שני סריסי המלך משמרי הסף ויבקשו לשלח יד במלך אחשורש. ויודע הדבר למרדכי ויגד לאסתר המלכה ותאמר אסתר למלך בשם מרדכי.

"At that time, when Mordechai was sitting in the palace gate, Bigsan and Seresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold, became angry, and plotted to do away with King Achashveirosh. Mordechai learned of it and told it to Queen Esther, and Esther reported it to the king in Mordechai's name." (Esther 2:21-22)

If someone is chasing after a *na'arah me'urasah* [a betrothed girl] in order to have forbidden relations with her the *din* is one is allowed to kill the one chasing her. If someone attempts to kill the man chasing her, and the *na'arah me'urasah* turns around and kills the one who was going to kill her pursuer, and in the end she gets forced to have forbidden relations, is she considered: *Onus* [coerced] and permitted to her husband, or do we say that it is considered as if she did it willingly, as if she wouldn't have killed the one who was going to kill her pursuer then she would have been saved?

Seemingly we can bring proof from a *pasuk* in *Megillas Esther*. The Gemara in *Megillah* (15a) says that Esther was an *anusah* [coerced]. But surely Esther had a way of stopping Achashveirosh, if she wouldn't have told Achashveirosh about the plot of Bigsan and Seresh then they would have gone ahead and poisoned him and he wouldn't have been *mazaneh* with her, so how can the Gemara say she was an *anusah*. It would seem from

the above that if a woman stops someone from killing her pursuer she is still considered *onus*?

However, the above can be refuted based on the *Targum*. The *Targum* writes: ואמרו לאשקאה סמא דמותא דמטול לאסתר מלכתא ולאשיטא ידא במלכא אחשורוש למקטליה בסיפא בבית דמוכיה – “Bigsan and Seresh two of the kings eunuchs who guarded the threshold said, **‘let’s give poison to Esther to kill her, and let’s kill king Achashveirosh with a sword’**. We see that Bigsan and Seresh were planning to kill Esther as well. Since they were planning on killing her as well, we can’t bring any proof to our *shailah*. (R’ Eliyohu Boruch Finkel)

Each and Every Word of the *Megillah* Was Dictated by Hashem

The individual who raised Esther. The man who saved King Achashveirosh from an assassination attempt. The bane of Haman’s existence. The person who exhorted Queen Esther to save her nation by using her power. A member of the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah*. An advisor to King Achashveirosh. All of these descriptions point to one man: Mordechai. The Medrash (Esther Rabbah 6:2) adds an insight into who Mordechai was. “Mordechai, in his generation, was equal to Moshe in his.”

Rav Yonasan Eibshitz writes that the comparison between Mordechai and Moshe helps us better understand the *Megillah*. In the last *pasuk* in the *Megillah*, we are told that “Mordechai was great among the Jews...and spoke peace to all his descendants.” What does it mean that Mordechai, “Spoke peace to his descendants?”

The Gemara in *Bava Basra* (98a) writes that “Rav Mari said: One who is haughty is not accepted even by his household.” If a person is arrogant, even those who are most likely to respect him, who may have an obligation to honor him, his family, will not do such. Moshe, the Torah tells us, was the humblest person to live. As Mordechai is compared to Moshe, it follows that Mordechai was the epitome of humility in his generation as well.

It is the humility of Mordechai that the *Megillah* refers to when it states that Mordechai spoke peace to his descendants. His family accepted him, his children accepted him, and respected his words. Why? Because Mordechai, before addressing his family, spoke peacefully to them; he spoke in a humble, unpretentious, fashion so that his sincerity and pureness of motivation was evident to all.

The attestation of the *Megillah* to the humility of Mordechai itself presents us with a unique insight into his personality. The Gemara in *Megillah* (7a) asks: “Was the *Megillah* written with *ruach hakodesh*?” One answer given to this question is that it must have

been composed with *ruach hakodesh*, as the *Megillah* states: ויודע הדבר למרדכי - "And the matter (the plot to assassinate Achashveirosh) became known to Mordechai." How would Mordechai have known if not for *ruach hakodesh*?

Rav Yonasan Eibshitz is puzzled by the line of questioning. Both Esther and Mordechai are listed in the ranks of the 7 *navios* [prophetesses] and 48 *naviyim* [prophets] of Klal Yisroel. How then could the Gemara query if the *Megillah* was written with *ruach hakodesh*? Of course it was – just look at who wrote it!

What the Gemara is truly asking, R' Yonasan Eibshitz explains, is not whether the entire *Megillah* was composed with *ruach hakodesh*, as it is clear that it was. What the Gemara is asking is whether each individual word we find in the *Megillah* was the result of *ruach hakodesh*, or was the choice of words to express the thoughts contained in the *Megillah* a product of Mordechai's own selection process? The answer, the Gemara tells us, we see from the statement: ויודע הדבר למרדכי - "And it became known to Mordechai." This statement indicates that Mordechai would have only known about his plot because he had *ruach hakodesh*.

We know that Moshe, when writing down the Torah upon the instruction of Hashem, made a letter small, so that the passage ויקרא אל משה - "And Hashem called Moshe" would appear as ויקר אל משה - "And Hashem happened to meet Moshe." In this way, Moshe was trying to reduce his actual stature from someone who Hashem directly called to someone who Hashem "happened upon." This was a manifestation of the humility which Moshe epitomized. Similarly, Mordechai would only testify that he was graced with *ruach hakodesh* if he had to. Only if each word of the *Megillah* was dictated by Hashem would Mordechai include the fact that he was of such high spiritual level that he received information directly from Hashem. Mordechai would otherwise never do such, as his humility would not allow it. By virtue of the fact that this information was included, it is evident to all that each and every word of the *Megillah* was dictated by Hashem. Similarly, the attestation to Mordechai's humility that appears in the last passage of the *Megillah* is there solely because Mordechai was told by Hashem to include it.

Mordechai achieved much in his lifetime. He was respected in the religious and secular worlds alike. Yet he did not let his achievements cloud his judgement. He did not let it affect his personality. He spoke with peace to the nation, and he spoke with peace to his family. Amidst the merriment of Purim, when we may get carried away with the happiness of the moment, the lesson of Mordechai, the message of humility, should

remain clear. Treat with respect, and you will be respected. Act with humility and honor, regardless of the circumstance, and you will be accorded honor.

A Clever Response from the *Chiddushei HaRim*

Sir Moses Montefiore once tried to convince the *Chiddushei HaRim* to introduce secular subjects, particularly the study of foreign languages, into the yeshiva curriculum. He brought proof to his position from *Megillas Esther*.

One of the crucial events in the narrative was when Mordechai overheard Bigsan and Seresh plotting to kill Achashveirosh and relayed the information to Esther so that their plan could be thwarted. Rashi writes that they were conversing in their native tongue. If Mordechai only spoke one language, he would not have been able to comprehend their scheme and put a stop to it. This teaches us the value of learning and being fluent in foreign languages.

The *Chiddushei HaRim* responded that a closer examination yields precisely the opposite conclusion. The only reason Bigsan and Seresh felt comfortable discussing their proposal in Mordechai's presence was because they assumed that as a Jew, he would not understand what they were saying, and they could freely speak in front of him without worry.

Although Mordechai was required to know 70 languages to serve on the *Sanhedrin*, it is clear that Bigsan and Seresh took for granted that the average Jew had no such familiarity. If the Jews of the time had studied foreign tongues, Bigsan and Seresh would have been on guard around Mordechai, and the *Megillah* may have had a very different ending. Thus, it was precisely because they were content to speak only their own language that they were able to be saved.

Why Did Mordechai Reveal to Achashveirosh the Plan of Bigsan and Seresh?

Why did Mordechai reveal to Achashveirosh that Bigsan and Seresh wanted to kill him, what did he care? Additionally, the halachah is that by a non-Jew we say: לא מעלין ולא מורידין – "If he is in danger, we don't try to save him", so why here is Mordechai suddenly so worried about Achashveirosh?

The Yalkut Shimoni (Esther, *remez* 153) offers a number of answers. One answer he says is that Mordechai wanted Achashveirosh to remain alive, as he thought that he would be helpful in the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash*.

Another answer the Yalkut says, is that he thought that if Klal Yisroel needed anything, he would be able to get it from Achashveirosh.

A third answer the Yalkut says is, so that people shouldn't say that all this time he was married to a non-Jew, and nothing happened, and suddenly he marries a Jew, and look what happens.

R' Chaim Brisker answers, that the reason he told Achashveirosh was, because it is better that two non-Jews die then just one. If Achashveirosh would have been killed there would have been one death, however, now that Mordechai told Achashveirosh about the plan of Bigsan and Seresh, two deaths were brought about. Two is better than one.

Saying Something Over in the Name of the Author Brings Redemption to the World

ותאמר אסתר למלך בשם מרדכי

“And Esther told it to the King in the name of Mordechai.” (Esther 2:22)

The Gemara in *Megillah* (15a) learns from here: כל האומר דבר בשם אומרו מביא גאולה לעולם – “Whoever says a thing in the name of the author brings redemption to the world.” The question is, how do we know from Esther that there is always great reward when one says something in the name of the author? Perhaps Esther did it simply because it is unethical to take undue credit.

R' Yonasan Eibshitz (*Yaares Devash* Vol. 2, *Derush* 8) explains as follows: According to the Medrash (Yalkut Shimoni), the two attendants who plotted to poison the King hid the poison and it appeared again miraculously, as the *pasuk* says, “The matter was investigated, and it was *found*” (2:23). So superficially, she was putting Mordechai in great jeopardy. If the accusation was not proven and if Bigsan and Seresh had been vindicated, Mordechai could have been punished severely for falsely accusing them, and the venom of the anti-Semites would have been turned loose on the Jewish people. Hence, it would have been wiser for her not to convey the information in the name of Mordechai, but merely to say, “I heard a rumor...and advise you, my dear King, to have it investigated.”

From her revealing that it was Mordechai who gave her the information, it is evident that she knew that for relating something in the name of the author, there is great benefit to the entire world. It is thus impossible that something unpleasant should occur to the author when the right thing was being done.

Whilst we are discussing the topic of: אומר דבר בשם אומרו – “saying things over in the name of the one who told it over”, I would like to share with you something R’ A. Bookman send me which he heard from Reb Pinny Kahn in Manchester many years ago.

The Mishnah in *Pirkei Avos* (6:6) teaches: כל האומר דבר בשם אומרו מביא גאולה לעולם – “Whoever says over something in the name of the author brings redemption to the world.” The Mishnah cites proof from the aforementioned *pasuk*: ותאמר אסתר למלך בשם מרדכי – “And Esther told it to the King in the name of Mordechai”.

In the *Megillah*, Esther tells Achashveirosh, in Mordechai’s name, that the wine was poisoned, this led to Mordechai being written in the *Sefer Zichronos* and ultimately it led to Mordechai being paraded around by Haman. Whilst this *kavod* to Mordechai and belittlement to Haman, is a sure sign of Hashem’s hand and an important part of the story, nevertheless it doesn't seem to be a central part of the actual *geula*. Therefore, it is a curious example for the Mishnah in *Avos* to use as an example of: מביא גאולה לעולם – “Bringing redemption to the world”.

To answer this Reb Yonasan Eibshitz brings the Gemara in *Berachos* which teaches: “If you *daven* for your friend and you are in the same predicament as he, then you will be answered first”. The *Ya’avetz* explains that if both you and your friend have the same decree against you, it’s like you are both "prisoners" of that decree. So logically, if you are in that same "prison" you have no power to remove your friend from the same decree. After all, of all the people who can help his friend get out of prison, his neighbor in the cell next door is the most powerless of all. Therefore, all the time you are *davening* for your friend, your *tefillos* are going up to Shomayim, up to the Kisei HaKovod but because you are powerless, held back by that very same decree, your *tefillos* are not able to be accepted and are being wasted. Because Hashem hates to see *tefillos* wasted, he first removes the decree from you, so that now your *tefillos* can go ahead and be accepted for your friend and be answered. This is why, when one *davens* for his friend, he is answered first.

We learn in the *Megillah*, that Mordechai would sit outside the palace everyday *davening* for the salvation of Klal Yisroel, unfortunately he was under the same decree as the rest of them. When the 14th of Adar would come around, and the king’s proclamation would allow anyone and everyone to kill Yidden, Mordechai would be included in that decree and so his *tefillos* were powerless.

Now, as a result of Esther telling Achashveirosh that the wine was poisoned, as a result of “Saying things over in the name of the one who told it over”, Mordechai would ultimately be paraded around town, in the king’s royal clothes, on the king’s horse, by Haman, the king’s right-hand man. Now people would see he is a friend of the king. Now, those same people gearing up for the killing frenzy of the 14th of Adar, will make a mental note that this Mordechai, he’s an exception, we can’t go near him. And just like that, Mordechai has been released from the decree on the rest of Klal Yisroel and finally his *tefillos* for the *geulah* are no longer powerless, they can now be accepted and as a result the *geulah* is brought around. And so, we see that this is indeed an example of: כל האומר דבר בשם אומרו מביא גאולה לעולם.

What Was Lost and Found?

יבקש הדבר וימצא

“And the matter was investigated and found true.” (Esther 2:23)

Literally, the aforementioned words mean “and the thing was searched for and found” — what lost thing was searched for and found?

The *Manos HaLevi* explains that Bigsan and Seresh were angry for being overworked by Achashveirosh after he married Esther, so they planned to poison him (*Megillah* 13b). They put a snake in his water decanter so that the water he would drink would become poisoned and would kill him when he drank it. Upon hearing that the King learned of their plan they quickly removed the snake and discarded it and denied the allegation. Miraculously, Hashem created a new snake in the decanter. When the investigators searched for the thing — i.e. the snake — it was found, in the decanter.

Why Did Achashveirosh Not Reward Mordechai Straight Away

ויכתב בספר דברי הימים לפני המלך

“And it was written in the book what Mordechai did to save the king.” (Esther 2:23)

Mordechai told Esther to warn Achashveirosh about the plot of Bigsan and Seresh. After Achashveirosh realized that Mordechai had saved his life, he wrote it down in his book to make sure that he would reward him. The question is, why did he not simply reward Mordechai straight away?

The *Chida* (*Chomas Onoch, Perek 41* in the name of the *Yaares Devash*) explains, that Mordechai told Esther not to mention his name. However, Esther knew: כל האומר דבר

בשם אומר מביא גאולה לעולם – “One who says over something in the name of the person who said it brings redemption to the world”, therefore, she ignored Mordechai and said it over in his name. However, Esther told Achashveirosh to pretend that he never knew that it was being said over in Mordechai’s name, therefore, he was unable to reward Mordechai straight away. Consequently, he needed to write it down, in order that at a later date he would remember.

With this we can also understand why: כל האומר דבר בשם אומר מביא גאולה לעולם – “One who says over something in the name of the person who said it brings redemption to the world”. If Mordechai would have been rewarded straight away, then the whole Purim story may have ended differently. Only because, Esther said over the information in Mordechai’s name, did Achashveirosh have to write it down, and then happen to come across it at a later date just when Haman was trying to destroy the Jews.

פרק ג'

Understanding the Connection Between Haman and the *Eitz*

Hada'as

אחר הדברים האלה גדל המלך אחשורוש את המן בן המדתא האגגי וינשאהו וישם את כסא מעל כל השרים אשר אתו

“Some time afterward, king Achashveirosh promoted Haman the son of Hamdosoh the Agagi; he advanced him and seated him higher than any of his fellow officials.”

(Esther 3:1)

The Gemara in *Chullin* (139b) asks: המן מן התורה מנין - “From where do we see a reference to Haman’s name in the Torah?” To which the enigmatic answer is given: המן העץ – “Did you eat from this tree?” (*Bereishis* 3:11). Without vowels, the Hebrew letters of the word *hamin* (המן) are the same as the Hebrew letters in the name Haman (המן). This is a type of Gemara that cannot be understood on a superficial level. The Gemara is certainly not merely playing a word game!

The Gemara is saying the following: “Where does the Torah allude to the concept represented by Haman?” The answer is that the essence of Haman lies in the *pasuk*: המן העץ – “Did you eat from this tree?” Rav Bergman explains that Haman was an individual who had everything. *Chazal* say he was one of the wealthiest people in the world. He was second in command to the king. He had all that one could ask out of life money, power, family — everything! And yet, what did Haman say? As long as Haman saw

“Mordechai, the Jew sitting at the gate of the king” (refusing to bow down to him) Haman said: וכל זה איננו שוה לי - “All this is worthless to me” (Esther 5:13). Because Haman was lacking one thing, everything else became worthless to him.

Such a person will never be happy. In order for a person to be happy, one must be pleased with his lot in life. Haman represents the antithesis of one who is happy with his lot. He represents the one who is never happy. He can have money, power and prestige and yet declare it all worthless.

The Gemara asks, where do we see this attribute in the Torah — that one can have everything and yet still not be satisfied? The answer is that we find it by Adam in Gan Eden. Adam had literally everything — spirituality, physical luxury, *malochim* to serve him — everything! He lacked only one thing, access to the *etz hada’as* [tree of knowledge]. Adam was not satisfied, and he succumbed to the *chet* that led us down the path to the world as it exists today. Haman personified the same character trait, that of not being satisfied even when one has almost everything.

This is a particularly important lesson for us to know for Purim. The mitzvah of Purim is one of those difficult *mitzvos*, which escapes modern man. The mitzvah is to be happy. One would think the mitzvah of *simcha* [to be happy] is an easy mitzvah, but we know from experience that it is not so easy. Happiness does not come to us easily. We always have so many things to worry about, which makes it very difficult to be happy.

What is the ‘key’ to happiness? A person becomes happy by being *sameach b’chelko* [happy with his portion]. We must think about what we have rather than that which we lack. If a person *boruch Hashem* is living, is surrounded by his family, has his health, lives in a country where he can perform *mitzvos*, he has so much! If only we would learn to not be like the Haman’s of the world. We must get away from the attitude of: וכל זה איננו שוה לי - “All this is worthless to me.” That is the challenge of Purim — to think about what Haman represented and about what a miserable life that is, to never be happy and satisfied. We must contemplate how rotten and disgusting and depressing such an attitude and such a life is. We must rise above that attitude, and instead dwell on and think about that which we do have. Then we can truly fulfil the mitzvah of the day: ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר - “For the Jews there was light, happiness, joy, and honor” (Esther 8:16). (R’ Frand)

Don't Say: Would Have, Should Have, Could Have

The Gemara (*Chullin* 139b) asks: "Where is Haman alluded to in the *Chumash*?" The Gemara answers that his name is indicated in the *pasuk*: המן העץ אשר צויתך לבלתי אכל אכלת – "Did you eat from the tree that I forbade you?" (*Bereishis* 3:11).

Rav Elimelech Biderman comments that this *pasuk* perfectly describes an aspect of Haman's bad nature, because he would constantly mope over the errors of the past. Haman, Amalek, and all those who go in their ways are always asking themselves, *why did I do this? Why did I make this error?* They are always condemning themselves for past errors, and their hearts are filled with remorse. In contrast, *tzaddikim* constantly think about the present, and therefore their hearts are filled with joy.

Even when one sins, it isn't wise to constantly harp on the *aveiros* of the past, because this will draw him down. Although there must be designated times for doing *teshuvah*, it isn't healthy nor productive, in our generation, to be continuously focused on the wrongs of the past. One needs to ignore what happened, and move on.

Certainly, in regard to worldly issues - matters where one doesn't have free will - it is wrong to mope over the past, since we believe that everything happened according to Hashem's master plan.

Rebbe Yechezkel of Kuzmir taught, a person walks thousands of steps each day, and one must believe that every step was destined from heaven. If one doesn't believe this, then in the morning when he says the *berachah*: –המבין מצעדי גבר – "who prepares the steps of man", it is a *berachah levatolah* [a *berachah* said in vain], because he is demonstrating that he doesn't know that wherever one goes is pre-destined from heaven.

It is therefore improper to mope and beat oneself for making a wrong choice in a business venture, or any other decision, because we believe that these are also from Hashem. Our focus, instead, should be on the present.

The Gemara in *Shabbos* (63b) states: טו – עד כאן דברי יצה"ר מכאן ואילך דברי יצר טוב – "until here are the words of the *yetzer horah*. From here on are the words of the *yetzer hatov*." The *Binyan Dovid* explains that when a person thinks all about what happened up until now, it is the *yetzer horah*. When a person's focus is on the present and future, this is the *yetzer hatov*.

After the Holocaust (WWII), someone asked the Satmar Rav to state his impressions and thoughts on the devastating holocaust. He replied, "A Yid doesn't think about what was."

HaRav Moshe Wolfson, *shlita*, Mashgiach of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas related the following story: Once after *kiddush levonah*, the Oleka Rebbe, a *talmid* of the Ba'al Shem Tov, turned around to his *talmidim*, and said: "I want to tell you, my dear *talmidim*, what I just saw in Shomayim. A *neshomah* must come down to this world and do all the 613 *mitzvos*, to do what it is supposed to do, and fulfill its mission. If not, it must come down again. That is the worst thing that can happen to a *neshomah*. A *neshomah* would rather go to *gehinom* than come down to Olam Hazeh again – because it is a big risk. Most people fail! (Rav Wolfson noted that coming down into this world again is like running across Ocean Parkway against a red light.) But the *neshamos* keep coming down again, and again.

"So, the *neshamos* protested. They all came to Duma, the *malach* in charge of the *neshamos* in Shomayim, and they said, 'It's no use. What does the Creator want from us? He keeps sending us down. We spend our seventy, eighty, or ninety years in Olam Hazeh, and we go to the grave, and we go up to the *Beis Din Shel Maaleh*, then they send us down again. Up again, down again. Mission not accomplished. It's no use, there's no end to it; there's no purpose in it! What do they want from us?'

"The *malach* Duma said to them. 'I cannot answer you. I will send you to my superior.' They went to the *malach* who was higher, and they again voiced their protest. He also told them, 'I will send you up above, to a still higher *malach*'. Higher and higher they went, until they reached the *malach* who is in charge of all the *malachim*. He told them, 'I will send you to the Ribbono Shel Olam Himself. I do not know what to answer you.'

"So, they came to the Ribbono Shel Olam and they said, 'Father in Heaven. What is the purpose of it all? We keep coming down again. We are not getting anywhere.'

"So, the Creator told them, 'I will tell you what. You go down again in this world, and if you're going to do *aveiros*... we'll be lenient (as long as it wasn't done rebelliously). One thing I want you to do though: have *emunah*, believe. Believe that everything that happens is from the Ribbono Shel Olam. However, there is one condition: the *emunah* should be of a higher degree. You should never use the word "would." Meaning, never say, "If it **would** have, it **should** have, it **could** have..."

When a person says, I should have done things differently, it implies that he doesn't believe in *hashgachah pratis*. He thinks that his destiny is in his own hands. If one can avoid saying, "I should have," he will succeed in his mission in this world.

For example, Mr. Levi comes home from *Shacharis*, and he has a business appointment. This appointment means that he can make a lot of money. He comes home and

breakfast isn't ready. His wife hurries and makes breakfast, which he gobbles up and hurries to the train, which he misses. With this, he missed his appointment, and because of that, the business deal fell through. So, he comes home and tells his wife, "If you would have made me breakfast on time, I would have made a lot of money. But because of breakfast I missed the appointment." That means he has an imperfect *emunah*. Why? Because he should know that being successful in this business venture depends solely upon *hashgacha pratis* from Shomayim.

Every tiny incident that happens in this world depends upon *hashgacha pratis* from Shomayim. There is individual supervision to such a degree that it is mindboggling. No computer that has ever been invented can understand the *hashgacha* of the Ribbono Shel Olam. The *Ba'al Shem Tov* said that if a blade of straw falls from the wagon, it is *min hashomayim* [Heavenly determined] exactly where it should fall, and exactly which end of the straw should point this way, and which end should point that way. Everything is *hashgacha pratis*. There is nothing that isn't exactly the way the Ribbono Shel Olam dictated that it should be. When I go into the grocery store and buy a loaf of bread, it was determined in Shomayim which kernels of wheat should go into which loaf of bread, and which person should eat it. Everything is *hashgacha pratis* from Shomayim.

So, if someone says, "I **should** have done this, I **could** have done this, if only I **would** have done this..." that is a blemish in *emunah*. It is not perfect *emunah*.

If you are supposed to be successful from a certain business endeavor, the Ribbono Shel Olam will control everything so that you should be successful. And if not, you're going to miss the train. One should be in the habit of saying, "Everything the Merciful One does is for the good" (*Berachos* 60b), and, "*gam zu letova* — this too is for the good" (*Ta'anis* 21a). There is nobody in the world who cares for me and loves me, not my parents, not my grandparents, not my rebbe, as much as my Father in Heaven. He provided for me since I was born. He put together a mother and a father for me. And I had to be born specifically through this mother and father, in specifically a certain month, in a certain week, in a certain day, in a certain hour, in a certain moment so that it all fits into my *mazal* in Shomayim. The Ribbono Shel Olam has a special mission, a special job, a special calling for each individual.

Everything that happens in a person's life, everything that happens in a person's day, everything that happens in a person's moment is all with *hashgacha pratis* from Shomayim. So, someone who really believes won't say, "**would** have..., **should** have..., **could** have..." He's happy with what the Ribbono Shel Olam has sent him, and he thanks Him for taking care of him. In a certain way, he turns to the Ribbono Shel Olam and

says, "I thank you, Ribbono Shel Olam for being my babysitter." This is what Dovid HaMelech said (*Tehillim* 131:2): "As a suckling child near his mother; my soul within me is as a suckling child." The Creator takes care of us like a mother takes care of her baby, and more so. Everything is with *hashgacha pratit*.

"So," said the Oleka Rebbe, "the Ribbono Shel Olam told those *neshamos*, go back down to the world and if you make some mistakes, I will overlook it (as long as they were not done rebelliously). But have *emunah*. Know that everything is with a very detailed heavenly supervision, and the words "would have..., should have..., could have..." should not be in your dictionary." (R' Eliezer Parkoff, *Weekly Chizuk*)

When We Do What Is Right, We Always Win

ומרדכי לא יכרע ולא ישתחוה

"And Mordechai refused to prostrate and bow." (Esther 3:2)

From a simple reading of *Megillas Esther*, it appears that Mordechai refusing to bow to Haman is what provoked Haman to issue the decree to wipe out the Jews. There must have been many Jews at the time who were angry that Mordechai had to be different, rather than just conforming like everyone else. That's what it seemed like, but *Chazal* tell us what really happened. When nine years before that, the Jews benefited from the *seudah* of Achashveirosh, then it was decreed in *Shomayim* that they would be wiped out. The *Meforshim* tell us, because Mordechai did not benefit from that *seudah* and because he did not bow down to Haman, he was the one who was able to be the catalyst to bring about the eventual salvation of the Jews.

No matter what it might look like, when we do the right thing, we always win. And when we do the wrong thing, we always lose. Hashem will not always make it so obvious. In fact, many times it will appear just the opposite, that it is the good people who lose. But it is only a test. Good always wins.

The *sefer Vaveh Ha'amudim* brings a story that a man told about himself: Fifty years ago, I worked in a butcher shop in Haifa. It was basically the only source of kosher meat in the neighborhood. I was living in a very small apartment at the time and I had to drive 30 minutes every morning to take my children to another city to the yeshiva that I wanted them to be in. The clientele in the butcher shop ranged from people just starting to keep kosher to religious people who were very particular about which meat they consumed. The sign on the door said "All our meat is *glatt* kosher" but there were times when the owner of the shop was not able to procure *glatt* meat and, instead, he took what was called "kosher meat" which was on a lower standard. The issue was, he

did not inform the customers of this and there were people who would be mortified to find out they were not getting *glatt* meat. I couldn't watch them buying meat that I knew they would not want to consume, so when that kind of customer ordered his meat, I would tell him in a low voice, "The meat we have today is not for you, come back another day." I was petrified of getting caught by the owner, but I couldn't let the customers be misinformed like that. Eventually the owner caught me and fired me on the spot. During those days it was very difficult to find work. My children were hungry, and I wasn't providing enough for them. But I kept my *emunah* strong, knowing that I did the right thing and Hashem would take care of me.

One day, I met a man who came over to me who saw me looking so depressed and asked me what was wrong. I told him, "You want to know? I live in a small apartment. I have children sleeping on the floor. I must drive 30 minutes each way to take my children to school. I don't have a job and my children are hungry. That's what's wrong."

The man said, "I am a contractor. I just built a brand-new building in a religious neighborhood right near your children's school. The apartments in that building are very spacious. There will be plenty of room for you to fit your children there. I have a deal for you. I will accept your current apartment now as a down payment for an apartment there and the balance you can pay me whenever you get the money." I couldn't believe this offer. I asked the man why he was being so generous. He said, "One day, about two weeks ago, my wife came back from the butcher empty handed, and I asked her where's the meat? She told me a worker there hinted to her that the meat wasn't up to her standards. I admired whoever that person was and I was worried about him losing his job. I just found out that it was you. I want to have the *zechus* of helping you for your heroic acts."

The man concluded by saying, "I thought I was sacrificing for Hashem, but now I see Hashem gave me much more than I ever did. I live in a beautiful apartment in a neighborhood that I want to be in. And *boruch* Hashem, I even found a job here with much better pay."

When we do what is right, we always win. It might not always seem that way, but it is for sure the truth. (R' Dovid Asher, Living Emunah)

After Trying to Persuade Mordechai Once, They Realized There Was No Point Continuing to Try

ויהי באמרם [כאמרם] אליו יום ויום ולא שמע אליהם

"When they spoke to him day by day and he hearkened not to them." (Esther 3:4)

Why in the *Megillah* is it written באמרם - "when they spoke" (with a "*beis*"), while we read it with a *chaf* - באמרם - "as they spoke?" Also, why did they speak to Mordechai "day by day" and not report to Haman immediately after speaking to him initially?

The *Mishteh Hayayin* explains as follows: The people liked Mordechai and respected him very much. When they approached Mordechai for the first time, they anticipated that he would excuse his not bowing to Haman by stating that he was not convinced that the King really ordered it. Perhaps he would say that he hated Haman and that his conscience did not permit him to bow to his enemy. If he would say such things, they were confident that after speaking to him another few times they would persuade him to relent. Thus, there would be no need to bring it to Haman's attention and he would be spared the consequences.

However, they were amazed to hear that his reason was that he was a Jew and he would not bow to Haman because it was tantamount to *avodah zorah*. When they heard this they were convinced that even if they would speak to him "day after day" their endeavors to persuade him would be to no avail.

The *Megillah* is telling us that in reality they spoke to him only once. On that day when: באמרם אליו – they said to him "Why are you violating the King's order?" and he told them that he was a Jew, they decided that this conversation is: כאמרם אליו יום ויום – "as though we would have spoken to him for many days". No matter how long a period we will talk with him, we will not convince him to change his mind about doing something that is contrary to his religion. Consequently, immediately following the first conversation (which accomplished nothing) and concluding that the same would be true if they were to speak to him day after day, they reported to Haman that Mordechai did not bow to him and his reason. (R' Moshe Bogomilsky)

Haman Was a Quasi Jew

ויגידו להמן לראות היעמדו דברי מרדכי כי הגיד להם אשר הוא יהודי

"They told it to Haman, to see whether Mordechai's words would be able to stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew." (Esther 3:4)

What words of Mordechai did they convey to Haman?

The *Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe)* explains: Achashveirosh was once at war with another country. He selected two armies and placed one under the command of Mordechai and the other under the command of Haman. He gave each army a supply of food which was to last for the duration of the war. When Haman mismanaged his allotment and quickly ran out of food, his soldiers became angry and planned a mutiny against him. Helpless, he ran to Mordechai and begged for food for his troops. Mordechai agreed to give him food on the condition that Haman become his slave (Yalkut Shimoni).

According to halachah, when a Jew acquires a gentile as a slave, he is required to put him through a ritual in which he is converted to a quasi-Jew, and he becomes required to fulfill some *mitzvos* (*Chagigah* 4a).

When the people asked Mordechai why he was violating the King's edict to bow down to Haman, he replied, אשר הוא יהודי – "that Haman, by becoming his slave, was really a Jew". As Haman's master, he could not be expected to bow down to him. The people were surprised to hear this and conveyed these words to Haman to see whether Mordechai's words would avail. Haman, knowing this to be true, was embarrassed and filled with rage.

Mordechai Didn't Bow Down to Haman, Regardless of the Idol

אין מרדכי כורע ומשתחוה לו

"Mordechai did not bow down nor prostrate himself to him." (Esther 3:5)

The word: לו – "to him", seems superfluous: To whom else was Mordechai expected to bow down to?

Reb Yonason Eibshitz zt"l (*Yaaras Devash* Vol. 2, 80b) and the *Manos HaLevi* explain that Mordechai was a very humble person who honored everyone. When he would meet someone on the street, he would bow to him and greet him cordially. The only one to whom he refused to do this, was Haman and he would not even respond if Haman greeted him.

Haman wore a large idol, and the people interpreted Mordechai's refusal to bow down as refusal to bow to it. Haman was very eager to see Mordechai bow to him, so he resolved to remove the idol when Mordechai would come into his presence. Nevertheless, Mordechai still refused to bow. When Haman saw that Mordechai was not bowing to him, he realized that Mordechai refused to be subordinate to him and that it had nothing to do with the idol. So, he became filled with rage.

Mordechai refused to bow to Haman even when he removed the idol because he feared that it would be misleading to the Jews. They might not distinguish and conclude from his action that it was permissible to bow to Haman even when he wore the idol.

The Rabbonim Always Know Best

ויבז בעיניו לשלח יד במרדכי לבדו כי הגידו לו את עם מרדכי ויבקש המן להשמיד את כל היהודים
אשר בכל מלכות אחשורוש עם מרדכי

"But he disdained to lay hands on Mordechai alone; having been told who Mordechai's people were, Haman plotted to do away with all the Jews, Mordechai's people, throughout the kingdom of Achashveirosh." (Esther 3:6)

Rav Eliyohu Dessler (*Michtav M'Eliyohu* Vol. 1, 76-77), quoting the Alter of Kelm, derives a fascinating insight into trusting our Sages from the *Megillah*. Historically, the events described in the *Megillah* span a period of nine years, beginning with the party held in

the 3rd year of the reign of King Achashveirosh (1:3) and concluding with the triumph of Mordechai and Esther over Haman in the 12th year of his reign (3:7).

The Medrash relates that Mordechai warned the Jews against intermingling and attending Achashveirosh's lavish and excessive party, but they answered that not to attend would endanger the lives of the entire Jewish nation, and they attended as they felt that saving lives overrode all other concerns. To the naked eye, there were no immediate negative consequences to their attendance, and they surely concluded that they had acted properly and Mordechai had erred in his zealotry.

Nine years later they had surely forgotten the entire affair when Haman was promoted to second-in-command and ordered that every passerby must bow down to him. In reality, it was permitted to do so, as the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (61b) states that there was no actual idolatry involved but merely a question of improper appearance. As a result, the Jews en masse once again maintained that it is obligatory to do so in order to protect themselves and their coreligionists.

Mordechai, on the other hand, felt that it was appropriate to be stringent even where not strictly required to do so by the letter of the law, and he refused to bow down. The Medrash records that once again they begged Mordechai not to endanger their lives, but he refused to listen.

True to their worst fears, Haman learned of Mordechai's intransigence and filled with rage, declared war on Jews everywhere. From the perspective of the Jewish people, their reasoning was once again proven correct and "Rabbi" Mordechai's misplaced piety was to blame for the decree. In reality, things work differently in Heaven.

The Gemara in *Megillah* (12a) states that the Jews of Shushan were deserving of annihilation because, nine years prior, they had refused to listen to Mordechai's advice and had enjoyed themselves at the forbidden bash. While the Sotan convinced them that Mordechai was to blame for their current dilemma, the truth was the exact opposite. It was their failure to respect and heed the Rabbi's instructions which eventually brought about Haman's diabolical decree.

When Mordechai approached them and ordered that everybody must fast for three consecutive days, they could have easily responded, "For too long you've been ignoring us. We kept telling you that your fanaticism was going to get us killed, and now you finally learned the hard way. You made this mess, and now it's your job to go get us out of it!"

This was exactly the “logic” which the evil inclination attempted to impress upon them. Fortunately, in this time of national danger, they were inspired to repent and correct their ways. They chose to listen to Mordechai’s instructions and joined him in the fast which allowed Esther’s risky gamble to succeed.

As happy as they were at the time, the Jews never came to appreciate what Mordechai knew through Divine Inspiration. They never connected the seemingly disparate events to form the big picture that he grasped all along. So many times, it seems so “clear” to us the rightness of our thinking and the error of our leading Rabbis’ logic. At such times we would be wise to remember this lesson of Purim and to recognize that perhaps the Rabbis are privy to pieces of the puzzle that we never even knew existed. (R’ Ozer Alport)

The Brilliant Light Contained in the Month of Adar

הפיל פור הוא הגורל לפני המן מיום ליום ומחדש לחדש שנים עשר הוא חדש אדר

“A lot was cast before Haman, concerning every day and every month, (until it fell on) the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar.” (Esther 3:7)

Rav Gedaliah Schorr points out that since the Jewish months are counted from Nissan, Adar is the final month of the year. On a spiritual level, Nissan represents renewal. It is the beginning of a new year and the first month of spring, when the earth begins to awaken from its winter slumber. It is full of potential and energy, and for that reason, it was chosen as the month for the redemption from Mitzrayim.

The further a month is from the source of light, the darker and more hidden it will seem. For this reason, Haman was ecstatic at the choice of Adar, the last month of the year and not surprisingly the month in which Moshe was taken from us, as the most auspicious time for the annihilation of the Jews.

However, Rav Schorr explains that within the apparent concealment, a pool of light is hidden away. In fact, this source must be even stronger than at other times in order to allow it the ability to penetrate the darkness and not be completely swallowed up. In the midst of the great darkness, the month of Adar contains within it a tremendous source of radiance. When the Jewish people were inspired to properly repent, they were able to access and reveal this brilliant light, reversing all of the negative energy into forces for good. This potential energy is present every Adar, available and waiting for us to tap into it in order to reveal the ultimate light.

How Did Haman Not Know the Date of Moshe's Birth

The Gemara in *Megillah* (13b) says that when the *goral* [lot] landed on the month of Adar, Haman was pleased because this month was not favorable for the Jewish people since Moshe passed away on the seventh of Adar. However, he was not aware that Moshe was born on that same day.

How is it possible that Haman, who knew the date of Moshe's passing, should not know the date of Moshe's birth?

For a *peshat* from the *Meshech Chochmah* see *Dvar Torah* below titled "A Beautiful *Peshat* from the *Meshech Chochmah*".

R' Yonosan Eibshitz (*Yaares Devash* Vol. 1, *Derush* 3) offers an alternative *peshat*: The Gemara in *Kiddushin* (72b) says that before a *tzaddik* leaves this earthly world, a new *tzaddik* is born who will replace him, and according to the *Arizal* there are sparks of Moshe in every generation embodied in that generation's leader. Haman actually knew that Moshe was born on the seventh of Adar; however, since he died on the seventh of Adar, he considered this a "cut-off period" for Klal Yisroel. He did not know that when one *tzaddik* leaves this world, a new *tzaddik* - a new Moshe - is born to replace him and that Klal Yisroel will be victorious over all their oppressors in his merit.

This explains a difficulty in the wording of the Gemara, "He did not know that on the seventh of Adar he (Moshe) died and on the seventh of Adar he was born." Since a person is born before he dies, it should have said the reverse, "He did not know that he was born on the seventh of Adar, but he knew that he died on the seventh of Adar"?

Haman, indeed knew that Moshe was born and died on the seventh of Adar; he did not know, however, that when Moshe died, on the seventh of Adar, another Moshe, i.e. leader and *tzaddik*, was born on the same day.

In fact, Mordechai was a *gilgul* [reincarnation] of Moshe and according to the *Medrash Rabbah* (6:2), Mordechai in his generation was equivalent to Moshe in his generation, and they shared many similar experiences during their respective lifetimes.

Alternatively, R' Yonosan Eibshitz suggests: Moshe was indeed born on the seventh of Adar. However, the Torah relates that: "She (Yocheved) hid him for three months" (*Shemos* 1:2). Thus, when Basya found him floating in the water on the twenty-first of Nissan or the sixth of Sivan (see *Sotah* 13b), it was assumed by all that he was recently born.

The Symbolism of Haman's Offer of Silver *Shekolim*

יאמר המן למלך אחשוורוש ישנו עם אחד מפוזר ומפרד בין העמים בכל מדינות מלכותך ודתייהם שנות מכל עם ואת דתי המלך אינם עשים ולמלך אין שוה להניחם. אם על המלך טוב יכתב לאבדם ועשרת אלפים ככר כסף אשקול על ידי עשי המלאכה להביא אל גנזי המלך.

Haman then said to King Achashveirosh, "There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king's laws; and it is not in Your Majesty's interest to tolerate them. If it please Your Majesty, let an edict be drawn for their destruction, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the stewards for deposit in the royal treasury." (Esther 3:8-9)

We read in the *Megillah* (Esther 3:9) that Haman offered to pay Achashveirosh 10,000 *kikar* of silver in exchange for the right to get rid of the Jews. *Tosfos* in *Megillah* (16a) indicates that this was a half *shekel* for every Jewish person. The simple analysis of Haman's offer is that Haman was afraid that Achashveirosh would object to the loss of Jewish tax revenue if he killed them all. To pre-empt that financial objection, Haman was ready to sweeten the deal for the King by making an offer of 10,000 *kikar* of silver.

Chazal tell us however that Haman was trying to negate the merit of the Jews annual *machatzis hashekel* contribution towards the upkeep of the *Beis HaMikdash*. The Gemara in *Megillah* (13b) writes: Since Hashem knew that Haman would offer *shekels* to Achashveirosh to 'purchase' the right to destroy the Jews, Hashem pre-empted Haman's contribution through the *machatzis hashekel*. The merit of the Jews contributing the annual *machatzis hashekel* protected them (in the future) against Haman's evil desires.

The *Yismach Yisroel* offers a wonderful *peshat* in the above Gemara. Haman's potential for destroying the Jewish people was hinted at in his own description of the nation: "There is a people that is dispersed and divided..." (Esther 3:8). It is only because there is division and unjustified hatred within the Jewish nation that their enemies have the ability to harm them. When the Jews are divided, they represent only individuals — not a *klal* [a communal entity]. When that happens, we have lost our strength.

Haman's whole plot was based on the division of the nation. That is why Hashem insisted that each Jew should give exactly one half *shekel*. The symbolism of the half *shekel* is that each Jew is only a fraction of the entity. He needs to combine with his fellow Jew to make a significant contribution. If we think we can be 'an entire *shekel*

unto ourselves' that is not going to work. Our strength is through the recognition that we need each other, and the realization that we need to set aside our petty differences to come together to provide a complete *shekel*.

This is the strength that ultimately saved the Jewish people. Because of the terrible calamity that was hanging over them as a result of Haman's decree, they decided to put away those 'dispersions and divisions in the nation' and came together as a unit and as a whole.

Mesiras Nefesh Must Be Answered

The Gemara in *Megillah* (13b) relates: אמר ריש לקיש גלוי וידוע לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם שעתיד המן לשקול שקלים על ישראל לפיכך הקדים שקליהן לשקליו והיינו דתנן באחד באדר משמיעין על השקלים – “Rabbi Shimon ben Lokish said: It was obvious and clearly known to the creator of the universe that Haman would weigh coins (to kill) the Jews. Therefore, he had their (the Jews) coins precede his coins, and that is what the Mishnah says: ‘On the First day of Adar we make the announcements about the giving of the yearly *shekolim* coins (to pay for the *korbanos tzibbur* in the *Beis HaMikdosh*)’”.

Tosfos in *Megillah* (16a) says that the 10,000 *kikar* (a specific measure) of silver offered was the same amount of silver the Jews donated for the *adanim* [the sockets for below the planks making up the walls in the *Mishkon* which the Jews erected in the *Midbar*].

It seems that Haman's action of offering 10,000 *kikar* of silver to King Achashveirosh had a spiritual effect that “demanded” an action by the Jews to counteract. It required a donation of the Jews, hundreds of years earlier whilst they were still in the *Midbar*, to merit not being annihilated. (As *Tosfos* points out) It also required the yearly donation to the *Beis HaMikdosh* to counteract that action.

The question is: Why is Hashem worried about Haman giving this money to Achashveirosh? What difference does this make?

Reb Sholom Schwadron answers as follows. The Medrash in *Parshas Terumah* tells us that Haman's entire fortune consisted of 10,000 *kikar* of silver. This means that he was so dedicated to the cause of killing the Jewish nation that he was willing to give up everything he owned to succeed at his task. Such dedication, the desire to succeed at all costs even to the cost of one's entire being and life is called *mesiras nefesh*. *Mesiras nefesh* must be answered. The Sotan himself approaches Hashem and says: “Haman is willing to give up everything” to destroy the Jews. What are the Jews willing to give up for Hashem?” Hashem must answer the demand of the Sotan and He says, “My Children are willing to give up for me. In fact, they gave me back in the desert, the *adanim* [silver

sockets] for the *Mishkon*. They give me a *machatzis hashekel* [half shekel] every single Adar”. That is what Hashem answers the Sotan.

There are several questions that can be asked on the above. First of all, what difference does it make that Haman was dedicated, why does that have an effect in Shomayim? The second problem is why did Hashem choose the mitzvah of *machatzis hashekel* to counteract Haman. Why not point out the donations that were given to build the entire *Mishkon* which was certainly a greater amount donated than half a *shekel* per person? Thirdly, if we compare what Haman was willing to give up to what the Jews gave up and give up yearly. Haman was willing to give up everything to kill the Jews. That shows a dedication, zeal and a passion for his cause. The Jews, on the other hand gave no more than one half a *shekel* for this mitzvah. Why is that the response to the zeal and *mesiras nefesh* shown by Haman? One more question. Obviously, Haman was dedicated to his cause, but his cause was evil. Why should his dedication mean anything to Hashem?

To understand the answer to the first question we can answer that just like there are rules in nature similarly there are rules in *ruchniyus* [the spiritual realm] as well. Just as what goes up must come down, so too there are rules in *ruchniyus*. One of these rules is: When one is totally dedicated to a cause, he automatically receives *siyata dishmaya* [heavenly help] to succeed. That is why once Haman showed his commitment and his zeal with the willingness to do anything to destroy Jews, Hashem had to answer the Sotan with a show of *mesiras nefesh*, a show of complete dedication on the part of the Jews. That was shown by the willingness of the Jews to give the *machatzis hashekel*. (We will *iy'H* explain soon what was so special about giving *machatzis hashekel*.)

R' Chaim Shmuelevitz uses this same idea to explain a *pasuk* in *Parshas Balak*, the *pasuk* says: ויקם בלעם בבקר ויחבש את אתונו – “Bilam awoke early in the morning and he saddled his donkey.” Rashi quotes the Medrash that says: “Hashem says: “You got up early to destroy the Jews. You will not succeed because their father Avraham has already done this before you.” As the *pasuk* states: “And Avraham got up early in the morning and he saddled his donkey”. R' Chaim asks the same question we asked earlier: Why does the action of Bilam waking up early to saddle his donkey require Hashem to respond with, “Avraham their father has done this already”? What is so special about Bilam saddling his donkey? The answer he gives is because Bilam was very aware of his own importance. Everything he did was only to further his own honor and stature in the world. Still, he was willing to forgo his honor and personally saddle his donkey so as to be able to curse the Jews and cause their annihilation. Therefore, that dedication would demand that he be the recipient of *siyata dishmaya* and success. Therefore, Hashem said, Avraham has already shown his dedication to me. He was willing to make the

ultimate sacrifice, literally, and sacrifice his son. Therefore, his children are worthy of being saved because of his dedication.

R' Shimon Schwab uses a very similar explanation. In the same story about Bilam, Bilam in a dream asks Hashem permission to go with the second group of messengers of Balak. Hashem tells him, if they are coming to hire you and you will receive a reward for this, then go with them (*Bamidbar* 22:20 see Rashi). Rabbi Schwab asks why did Hashem give him permission only if he would get paid? The answer is, says R' Schwab, because then his dedication to the cause is not pure. His dedication comes from a desire to be compensated. If his dedication to the cause is anything less than pure, then he will not be deserving of *siyata dishmaya*. He is doomed to failure. If he wants to go, no harm will befall the Jews, and Hashem Himself is willing to allow him to go.

This answers why there was need to counteract the dedication of Haman, but the other questions still need answering. Why rely on the half a *shekel* instead of the donations for the entire *Mishkon*, and how can the giving of a half a *shekel* show a dedication equivalent or better than the giving of 10,000 *kikar* of silver. Perhaps we can understand the above based on a Gemara in *Kiddushin*. The Gemara tells us that when one who is commanded to do a mitzvah, the mitzvah is far greater than one who is not commanded to do the mitzvah but does it anyway. On the surface one would think the opposite is true. One who is not obligated to do a mitzvah and does it anyway, shows a greater love for Hashem by doing the mitzvah than one who is obligated to perform the mitzvah. The Gemara is telling us that this is not so. *Tosfos* explains the reason for this. When a person is obligated to do something, the *yetzer horah* tries desperately to dissuade the person from doing the mitzvah. However, when a person does a mitzvah without being obligated to do so, he has very little standing in his way. After all, he wants to do this because he thinks it's right. He is doing what he desires.

Now we can answer the question. Haman was dedicated to his cause. He was willing to give up everything to get what he wanted. To counteract this action Hashem needed to show that the Jews could also perform an act that was equally meaningful and equally powerful. That act was the giving of half a *shekel*. The act of being told, "You must give half a *shekel*. No more and no less" This action was one that showed dedication to Hashem and his *mitzvos*. The will power needed to overcome one's natural inclination not to want to give what one is obligated to give, is more difficult than giving up 10,000 *kikar* of silver.

This concept is also apparent in a Gemara in Shabbos. The Mishnah in Shabbos (9b) lists many activities that one may not do prior to *Mincha* time. One of the forbidden

activities is to sit down to a meal. Nevertheless, the Gemara says that if one started a meal, then one does not have to stop the meal right away, for *Mincha*. (He may continue until closer to the time for *Mincha*). The Gemara asks what act determines the beginning of the meal? The Gemara answers, when one removes his belt to begin eating. (They used to tie their robes around them with a belt. Prior to eating they used to remove the belt to be more comfortable when eating). The Gemara responds by asking: What is the big deal to put the belt back on? Besides, let him *daven* without a belt. The Gemara answers, one can't *daven* without a belt since the *pasuk* says: "Prepare yourself to greet your G-d." *Tosfos* (10a) says that the Gemara only answered the second question and did not bother with the first question. Reb Yisroel Salanter answers, that by answering the second question no answer was needed for the first question. Once the Gemara explained and proved that one was not allowed to *daven* without putting on the belt, then the question of: "What is the big deal to put on a belt?" is not a question. Once a person is required to put on his belt then it **IS** a big deal to put it back on.

Now everything makes perfect sense. In anticipation of Haman's dedication to the cause of annihilating the Jews, Hashem in his mercy gave us the mitzvah of *machatzis hashekel*, from the times of the *Mishkon* in the *Midbar*. This allowed us to demonstrate our dedication to him by giving the half a *shekel* to the *Mishkon*. By serving Hashem, we show our dedication. By overcoming our own natural instincts and accepting Hashem's will upon ourselves we show the greatest *mesiras nefesh*, the greatest dedication to Hashem and his will.

I heard from R' Falk *zt"l* a very similar idea. He was talking about why there had been an increase in suicide bombing in Eretz Yisroel and why non-Jews are prepared to be *moser nefesh* to kill the Jews. He said the reason is because Hashem puts certain *kochas* [strengths] into the world and they can be used either for good or for bad. If Klal Yisroel use them for good, then the non-Jews have nothing left to use. If, however, we don't use it then the non-Jews will. There is a *ko'ach* of *mesiras nefesh* in the world, if we are *moser nefesh* to learn Torah and keep the *mitzvos* then the non-Jews won't be able to use the *ko'ach* of *mesiras nefesh* against us, as we are already using it. If *chas v'sholam* however, Klal Yisroel becomes very lax in *avodas Hashem*, then the *ko'ach* of *mesiras nefesh* will be given to the non-Jews and they will use it against us. This is unfortunately what was happening in Eretz Yisroel, that's why the number of suicide bombings were going up.

This is the same thing with Haman, Haman used the *ko'ach* of money to try and destroy Klal Yisroel. Either the power of money can be used for good or for bad. If we don't give

tzedokah and don't use money for good, then it will be used against us. Haman gave lots of money to destroy Klal Yisroel, the only way to counteract it is for Klal Yisroel to use money for the good, therefore Hashem gave us the mitzvah of *machatzis hashekel*.

Why Didn't Haman Mention the Jews by Their Name

Why talking about the Jews, Haman says, "there is one people" why didn't Haman mention them specifically?

Haman realized that since the Jews paid taxes and their intelligence made them an asset to the country, Achashveirosh would not readily consent to have them annihilated. Therefore, he spoke to him about: עם אחד - "one people" - i.e. a certain insignificant group, unworthy of mention by name, who were scattered throughout the country. Thus, he not only dissembled regarding their true value, but even implied that they were undesirable vagrants.

Achashveirosh knew precisely who Haman was referring to. However, being a greater anti-Semite than Haman (Medrash Rabbah 7:20), Achashveirosh despised them so much that he would not even utter the word "Jew," and thus told him, "You may keep the money, and regarding 'the people' do as you please." (R' Moshe Bogomilsky)

Either Serve Avodah Zorah or Work, the Jews Can't Have Both

ישנו עם אחד מפזר ומפזר בין העמים... ודתיהם - "There is one people scattered and dispersed among the nations in all the provinces of your kingdom; and their laws are different from those of every people, and they do not keep the laws of the King" (3:8)

Why did Haman give all these descriptions of the Jewish people? He should have just said "There is a people who do not keep the laws of the King, and therefore they should be put to death."

The *Kosnas Ohr* explains: Nevuchadnetzer made a golden statue and ordered the people to bow to it. When the Jews refused, he said to them "Did not in fact Moshe write down in the Torah 'Hashem will scatter you among the peoples... there you will serve gods the handiwork of man'" (*Devorim* 4:27-28). They replied: "Your Majesty! This service does not mean worship, but service in taxes" (see Medrash Rabbah Vayikra 33:6, and *Devorim* 28:64 Rashi).

In the Gemara (*Megillah* 13b) Rashi explains that when Haman said: "They do not observe the King's laws," he meant that they waste the whole year avoiding the King's work with the excuse "Today is Shabbos" or "Today is Pesach," and thus they do not

perform national service or pay various taxes the government imposes on the working people.

In light of the above, Haman now came before the King with the following argument: “There is one nation scattered throughout your kingdom, and they should be worshipping idols, as it is written in their Torah. Should you say that the Torah did not mean idol worship but paying various taxes to the government, why do they constantly claim that their laws prohibit them from working and refrain from paying taxes. They can’t have it both ways — either they must serve idols or perform national service and pay taxes! And since they do neither the King will not gain anything by tolerating them.”

Why Exactly 10,000 Silver Talents

Why did Haman offer to pay 10,000 silver talents, no more and no less?

The *Hagaos HaBach* on *Tosfos* in *Megillah* (16a) explains as follows: Every Jewish male from the age of twenty and up was required to contribute one-half *shekel* annually to pay towards the *korbonos tzibbur*. Money was considered *kofer nefesh* - atonement for the soul (*Shekolim* 2a, *Shemos* 30:15).

The number of the Jewish people who came out of Mitzrayim was six hundred thousand, and this always remained the official count, corresponding to the six hundred thousand *neshamos* which descended to this mundane world.

Thus, Haman calculated that since the average lifetime of a person is seventy years (*Tehillim* 90:10), during a lifetime one contributes a total of twenty-five *shekolim* (one only starts donating from age 20).

Consequently, the entire population of six hundred thousand, over the fifty-year period of a standard lifespan, contributed a total of fifteen million *shekolim* ($600,000 \times 25 = 15,000,000$). Since one ordinary *kikar* [talent] contains 1,500 *shekolim* (unlike the *kikar* in the *Beis HaMikdosh*, which was double — three thousand *shekolim* — see *Shemos* 38:24, Rashi, *Bava Basra* 90b), ten thousand *kikar* are the exact equivalent of the fifteen million *shekolim* of *kofer nefesh* monies contributed by the entire Jewish community for fifty years ($15,000,000 \div 1,500 = 10,000$).

Therefore, Haman offered this amount because he calculated it to be the precise value of the Jewish people, and thus the King would not suffer any loss with their extermination.

A Deeper Understanding of the Purim Miracle

אם על המלך טוב יכתב לאבדם

“If it please Your Majesty, let an edict be drawn for their destruction.” (Esther 3:9)

Megillas Esther revolves around the decree written by Haman and sealed by Achashveirosh to eradicate every Jew, and every year on Purim we celebrate our salvation from their plot by Hashem. Rav Shimshon Pinkus points out that we say in the *Haggadah* that the nations of the world try to destroy us in every generation, but Hashem inevitably rescues us. Ferdinand and Isabella, Stalin, Hitler, and so many others all tried to do the same thing as Haman and Achashveirosh, yet we do not make any Yom Tov in conjunction with them. Why is Purim different?

The Medrash says (Esther Rabbah 7:13) that when Eliyohu heard about Haman’s plan, he pleaded with Moshe to intercede on behalf of his nation, but warned him that Hashem had agreed to it and signed a Divine edict to wipe out the Jewish people. This was unprecedented. Moshe asked Eliyohu: “Did Hashem seal His decree with blood or with clay? If it was sealed with blood, it is too late, but if it was only sealed with clay, then there is still a chance.” Eliyohu replied that Hashem sealed it with clay, so Moshe immediately got to work and instructed Eliyohu to inform Mordechai as well.

Rav Pinkus explains that when we hear this Medrash, we make a big mistake. We think the Medrash means that only an order sealed with blood is serious, but one sealed with clay is no big deal because it can simply be annulled. In reality, once an edict has been sealed by Hashem, it is final, regardless of the type of seal used, as the *Megillah* states (8:8) that once the King has sealed a decree, it cannot be revoked. If so, why did Moshe ask Eliyohu about the seal?

Rav Pinkus explains that the concept of past, present, and future does not exist for Hashem. Everything takes place simultaneously in heaven, a concept that humans cannot grasp. When Moshe asked if the order was signed in blood, he was in essence asking if it had already taken place, even if it had not yet manifested itself in this world. A seal of blood would mean that the Jewish blood was already spilled in heaven, in which case nothing could be done.

To appreciate what happened next, Rav Pinkus gives a *moshul* [parable] of an only child, a little boy named Yankel. One day, as Yankel was walking to school, he was hit by a car. Hatzolah came and rushed him to the hospital, where he was immediately taken into surgery. As his parents were anxiously saying *Tehillim*, the surgeon came out and told

them that he did everything he could, but unfortunately their son's internal injuries were too great, and he did not survive. Yankel's parents cried and held each other, and with a heavy heart, they called the *chevra kadisha* [Jewish burial society] to make funeral arrangements. Just after they hung up the phone, a nurse came running out and screamed: "It was a mistake. We just revived your son, and his heart is beating again."

After lots of intense rehabilitation, Yankel was eventually taken home by his overjoyed parents, but not in the family sedan. They had to rent a special truck for the occasion, as it was filled with every gift their son had ever asked for: a new bike, Legos, games, virtually the entire toy store. It is impossible to put into words the *simcha* his family felt that day after they thought it was all over, and now their Yankel had truly come back to life. This is exactly what happened on Purim more than 2000 years ago. We were Yankel. Hashem *kavayachol* [so to speak] endured a sleepless night after sealing the decree to wipe out His only child – בלילה ההוא נדדה שנת המלך (6:1). It was time for the *chevra kadisha*. What happened next? Whenever we find ourselves in serious trouble, we cry out to Hashem with prayer and *Tehillim* and turn to our Rabbis for guidance. Accordingly, when the Jews heard about Haman's edict and realized that they were facing total annihilation, their first thought was to *daven*. Unfortunately, Mordechai quickly discovered that this avenue was unavailable as Eliyohu informed him that Hashem had consented to Haman's plan.

At that point, the Jews shifted their focus to human intervention. They felt they could not count on Mordechai, as he was the one who caused the predicament by walking past Haman and refusing to bow to him. They realized that they had one last hope: Esther, their sister in the royal palace. Accordingly, when she asked them to fast for her for three days, they knew it was their last chance and went along with her plan.

To their chagrin, Esther then appeared to switch sides. Of all people, she decided to invite Haman to her private banquet with the king. At that point, Hashem had signed them away, Mordechai was responsible for their plight, and now Esther had forged an alliance with the enemy. It appeared that they had been abandoned by everybody.

In their darkest moment, when everything seemed hopeless and everyone they were used to counting on had turned on them, they knew deep down that there was only One hope, so they decided to continue *davening* and trying to reconnect to Hashem against all the odds. Their persistence and devotion in the face of death *kavayachol* broke Hashem's heart and brought them back from the *chevra kadisha*. Their *teshuvah* [repentance] was so intense and unprecedented that it led to *techiyas hameisim* [the resurrection of the dead].

Just like Yankel's parents, the burning love Hashem felt for His resurrected child caused Him to shower us with presents, but instead of a new bike, we got a new *Beis HaMikdosh* and a new Kabbolas HaTorah (Shabbos 88a). Purim was the day when Hashem's *ahava* [love] for us burst forth more than at any other time in history.

Returning to Yankel, what would happen on the first anniversary of his return from the hospital if he would remind his parents of the special day and ask for more toys? They would tell him "That was a one-time deal when Hashem gave you back to us. Don't think that every year on this day you are going to get gifts all over again." Purim does not work this way. What happened on the first Purim takes place annually. Every year on Purim, Hashem feels the identical intense love toward us and showers us with presents once again.

Normally, if a person approaches us and asks for *tzedokah*, we are permitted to inquire and verify whether he is truly needy, but on Purim, there is a unique halachah (*Orach Chaim* 694:3) that: כל הפושט יד נותנים לו - "we should give blindly to anyone who sticks out his hand without asking any questions". Several *meforshim* explain that Hashem also keeps this law. All we have to do is stick out our hands in prayer and ask, and just as on the original Purim, Hashem has oceans of *berachah* waiting to give to His beloved Yankel. (R' Ozer Alport)

How Haman Earned the Title "Tzoreir HaYehudim"

המן בן המדתא האגגי צרר היהודים

"Haman the son of Hamdosa the Agagi the adversary of the Jews." (Esther 3:10)

Haman is described with many adjectives; how did he acquire the title "Tzoreir HaYehudim"?

When Haman maligned the Jewish people, he told the King: ישנו עם אחד מפוזר ומפוד - "There is one nation, scattered and separated" (3:8). explain this to mean that they were in total disharmony. To counteract this, Esther felt that unity was the call of the hour, and therefore she instructed Mordechai: לך בנוס את כל היהודים - "Go gather together all the Jews" (4:16).

In Hebrew, the word "*tzoreir*" means to bind and tie together (see *Bereishis* 42:39, *Chullin* 107b). Haman, through his vicious plot against the Jewish people, united and bound them together. (*Iturei Torah, b'shem* R' Tzvi Yechezkel Michaelson of Varsha)

Keeping Torah and *Mitzvos* Fresh

ויאמר המן למלך אחשורוש ישנו עם אחד מפוזר ומפורד בין העמים בכל מדינות מלכותך ודתיהם שנות מכל עם ואת דתי המלך אינם עושים ולמלך אין שוה להניחם

“Haman then said to King Achashveirosh, ‘There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king’s laws; and it is not in your majesty’s interest to tolerate them’”. (Esther 3:10)

When Haman presented to Achashveirosh his plan for the destruction of the Jews, he argued: ישנו עם אחד - “There exists a certain nation”. The Gemara explains that Haman said: ישנו מן המצות – “There is a certain nation which is sleeping from the *mitzvos*.”

What was the meaning of Haman's statement that the Jews were “sleeping” from the *mitzvos*, and why did he use that argument to persuade Achashveirosh to give him the right to kill them?

Haman reasoned that his attempts to destroy the Jewish people would be successful because the Jews fulfillment of the *mitzvos* had become so heartless; their apathy towards the *mitzvos* would forfeit any special protection they might otherwise have been entitled to receive. Hashem responded to their indolent performance of the *mitzvos midah k'neged midah* [measure for measure] by acting as though He was sleeping, and He did not reveal His presence to them. Indeed, the Medrash relates that Haman claimed that Hashem was: ישן לב מעמו - “Sleeping from protecting His people,” and it cites the *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 44:24): עורה למה תישן א-דני – “Arouse! Why should You sleep, Hashem!” (See Esther Rabbah 7:12, 10:1).

The *pasuk* later in the *Megillah* says: בלילה ההוא נדדה שנת המלך - “On that night, the King’s sleep was disturbed” (Esther 6:1). The Medrash (Esther Rabbah 10:1) comments that this *pasuk* refers to Hashem’s sleep. When the Jews realized the imminent danger that faced them, they did *teshuvah* and turned to Hashem with *tefillah* and fasting. They aroused themselves from their slumber, and in return Hashem aroused Himself from His slumber, so to speak: ויקץ כישן א-דני - “And Hashem woke up like one who sleeps” (*Tehillim* 78:65, Esther Rabbah 7:12). When the Jews did sincere *teshuvah* and accepted upon themselves to fulfil the Torah as though it was the first time they received it, as the *pasuk* says: קימו וקבלו – “Undertook and obligated themselves” (Esther 9:27; Shabbos 88a), then Hashem responded accordingly and treated the Jews with a display of renewed love.

This theme is reflected in other elements of Purim. The Gemara in *Megillah* (7b) states that a person should become intoxicated on Purim: עד דלא ידע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי - "Until he does not know the difference between 'Blessed is Mordechai' and 'Cursed is Haman.'" The *Rema* (*Orach Chaim* 695:2) rules that the Gemara does not mean that one should get drunk, but rather that one should drink a little more than usual and then go to sleep. Perhaps the reason why a person should fulfil the halachah of עד דלא ידע in this way is to commemorate the events of Purim. The Jews were: ישנו מן המצות – "Sleeping from the *mitzvos*," and Hashem reacted as though He was asleep. Through the miraculous events of Purim, the Jews were inspired to do *teshuvah* and to awaken themselves from their slumber, and they thereby became worthy of Hashem awaking from His slumber, so to speak.

Additionally, the Gemara in *Megillah* (10b) says that the name Mordechai (מרדכי) comes from the words *mor deror* (מר דרור) or *meira dachya* (מריא דכי) in Aramaic. *Mor deror* was the first of the spices and herbs used in the *shemen ha'mishchah* [special anointing oil] and the *ketores* (*Shemos* 30:23). Just as the aroma of the ingredients of the *ketores* continually stimulated the senses and no one ever tired of the smell, so too, Mordechai aroused the people to renew their love for Hashem to such a degree that their love would never become dull.

The Mishnah in *Yoma* (26a) alludes to this quality of the *ketores* when it says: חדשים לקטרת (only new Kohanim who had never before offered the *ketores* were permitted to participate in the lottery for offering the *ketores*). A characteristic of the aromatic *ketores* is that its sweet smell arouses people to renew their love for Hashem. Perhaps this quality is reflected in the enactment that only new *Kohanim* may offer the *ketores*. New *Kohanim*, who have never performed the *avodah* of the *ketores*, will perform the mitzvah with great enthusiasm and love.

This element of Purim – the Jews awakening from their slumber – explains why Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi ruled in *Megillah* (4a) that: חייב אדם לקרות את המגילה בלילה ולשנותה ביום – "One is obligated to read the *Megillah* at night and to repeat it at day" This was an odd way to say that the *Megillah* should be read a second time. Indeed, this phrase confused his *talmidim* who thought that he meant that the *Mishnayos* of *maseches Megillah* should be learned (לשנותה) during the day. Why did Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi state his ruling in such a way instead of saying simply that one must "read the *Megillah* again during the day"?

Moreover, *Tosfos* (4a) writes that the main reading is the daytime one. If the first reading of the *Megillah* is at night, why is the main reading during the day?

The answer may be that *Chazal* deliberately enacted that the *Megillah* be read during the day a second time and that the daytime reading be the main one, and they emphasized that the daytime reading is a repetition of the first reading (לשנותה). Their intention was to stress that when we read the *Megillah* a second time, we do so with enthusiasm and excitement to show that we are not bored with the mitzvah. We thereby rectify the shortcoming of the people at the time of Purim. (R' Mordechai Kornfeld)

Why Were the Yidden Punished for Bowing Down to Avodah Zorah in the Days of Nevuchadnezar and Benefiting from the Feast of Achashveirosh at the Time, What's the Connection?

ונשלוח ספרים... להשמיד להרג ולאבד את כל היהודים

“Letters were sent... to destroy, kill and exterminate all the Jews.” (Esther 3:13)

The Gemara in *Megillah* (12a) says that the decree was issued against the Jews because: 1) In the days of Nevuchadnezar they prostrated themselves to an idol and 2) They partook in Achashveirosh's feast.

A long time transpired between these two episodes. Why were they now punished for these two things together?

R' Yonason Eibshitz (*Yaares Devash*, Vol. 1, pg. 20) explains as follows: According to the *Manos HaLevi*, when Nevuchadnezar set up the idol he put the *tzitz* on it, a golden plate which the Kohen Gadol wore on his forehead on which was engraved Hashem's holy four-letter Name (see *Manos HaLevi*, Introduction 7b). If so, the Jews could justify their actions by claiming that in reality they were not bowing to the idol, but to the holy *tzitz*; and despite the fact that it was in the hands of the gentiles, it retained its holiness. They could rationalize that they did not accept the way the Gemara (*Nedorim* 62a) interprets the *pasuk*: וּבְאוּ בְּהַ פְּרִיצִים וְחַלְלוּהָ - “And lawless people will enter the *Beis HaMikdosh* and profane it” (Yechezkel 7:22) - that once these people use the vessels for unlawful purposes, they become profaned.

When the Jews partook of the meal, though death is not the punishment for eating non-Kosher, death was decreed because the food was served in the vessels of the *Beis HaMikdosh*, and according to Rebbi: “If one intentionally uses the property of the *Beis HaMikdosh* for personal benefit, he is put to death” (*Sanhedrin* 83a). In truth, however, they could have justified themselves by arguing that since the vessels were no longer

in the *Beis HaMikdosh* but in the hands of the gentiles, they were no longer consecrated, and hence there was no “*me’ilah*.”

However, in light of both episodes together, either way the punishment would be death: The claim that they did nothing wrong in the days of Achashveirosh since the vessels were not holy would mean that the *tzitz* was also not holy, and thus they had bowed to an idol in the days of Nevuchadnezar. The claim that they did nothing wrong in the days of Nevuchadnezar since they were actually bowing to the *tzitz*, which was holy, would mean that the vessels too were holy and that by blatantly using them for personal needs at the feast of Achashveirosh they incurred the death penalty.

What Was Haman’s Rush

הרצים יצאו דחופים בדבר המלך

“The couriers went out post-haste on the royal mission.” (Esther 3:15)

After Haman made his decree to wipe out and destroy the Jewish people, the *Megillah* stresses that he quickly sent out messengers to promulgate the royal decree. In light of the fact that this took place on the 13th of Nissan and the date of the planned genocide was the 13th Adar, which wasn’t for another 11 months, why did Haman feel such a tremendous sense of urgency?

On a simple level, Rav Elisha Galiko, who served on Rav Yosef Caro's Beis Din in Tzfas, explains that Haman was afraid that Achashveirosh might reconsider and change his mind, so he sent out the letters immediately before he could have a chance to do so. The Medrash adds that this is why Haman’s next step was to sit down to drink with Achashveirosh (3:16), so that he would get drunk and not be able to interfere with the messengers until after they had already departed.⁵

⁵ This reminds me of a story which took place in the times of the *Chofetz Chaim*:

One time, the person who took care of the finances for the Radin Yeshiva came into the *Chofetz Chaim* carrying a plain envelope sent through the Polish Postal System. The envelope contained 500 rubles in cash. We have to assume that the postal system in Radin circa 1920 was no better than the postal system in the United States 90 years later and yet nobody today would put \$500 cash in uncertified mail and expect to see it arrive at where it is supposed to arrive.

The *Chofetz Chaim* told his secretary to find out the story behind this envelope. Who puts 500 rubles in an envelope in the mail without even bothering to get it certified?

Alternatively, Rav Chaim Kanievsky suggests that Haman knew that Pesach was about to start, so he ordered the messengers to leave as quickly as possible in order to disseminate the message of the decree, so that the Jewish people wouldn't be able to enjoy their Yom Tov.

On a deeper level, in his commentary on the *Megillah* called *Mechir Yayin*, the *Rema* (Rav Moshe Isserles) writes that Haman waited until after the first twelve days of Nissan had passed, because those were the days when the *nesiyim* [tribal leaders] brought their offerings during the inauguration of the *Mishkan*. Haman issued his decree on the following day, as a way of saying that the *zechus avos* [merit of our forefathers] has now ended, and the Jewish people have no more protection.

Regardless of why Haman decided to send out the messengers so quickly, Rav Chaim Kanievsky points out that this was yet another hidden miracle in the *Megillah*. If Haman had waited until closer to the actual date to send out his message, when Mordechai and Esther succeeded in convincing Achashveirosh to rescind the decree, they could have simply torn up the paper with the royal decree, and because it was never sent out, nobody would ever know anything about it.

However, now that Haman disseminated the decree immediately, when Achashveirosh wanted to change his mind, he had a dilemma, because he told Esther that everybody knows that anything that is written and sealed with the king's royal seal cannot be

The story was as follows. A certain businessman was trying to make a business deal. He pledged "If this deal is successful, I am going to give 500 rubles to the *Chofetz Chaim's* Yeshiva." Lo and behold, the deal was successful, but it was late in the afternoon. The post office was already closed. So, he figured, alright I'll send it out tomorrow. Then he heard a little voice in his head go off which said "Five hundred ruble? Do you not think the Yeshiva would be happy to receive 50 rubles? Of course they would be happy with 50 rubles! Why do I need to send 500 rubles?"

The man said, "I saw my determination dissipating. I was afraid that if I would wait until tomorrow, it would become 5 rubles. I determined, come what may, I am going to stuff the money into an envelope and drop it into a mailbox – no certified mail, no return receipt required, because I saw that if I would wait any longer, the enthusiasm and determination to do the mitzvah would evaporate.

When moments of inspiration arrive, we must act upon it, before we end changing our minds. Haman used this in a bad way, however, we must learn from Haman, and use it in a good. For more on this idea, see *Dvar Torah* titled, "Seize the Moment".

rescinded. As a result, Esther and Mordechai had only one choice: to send out a new decree which was also signed by the king giving the Jewish people permission to take revenge against their enemies on that day. In other words, the Jews would have been saved whether or not Haman sent out his original decree, but now that he did, they were additionally able to kill Haman and their enemies, something they would not have been able to do if he had waited.

The Cause for Perplexity

והמלך והמן ישבו לשתות והעיר שושן נבוכה

**“The King and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed.”
(Esther 3:15)**

What was the cause of their perplexity?

R' Yonosan Eibshitz (*Yaarev Devash*, Vol. 1. *Derush* 8) explains: According to the famous historian Josephus, in the days of the Greeks and Romans a decree issued in proximity to a drinking party was considered valid only if issued beforehand. However, if it was issued after a drinking party, it was invalid since it possibly reflected the influence of alcohol. The people of Shushan were not sure if the decree could be ignored because Achashveirosh and Haman sat down to drink before the decree was issued, or perhaps it was issued earlier and therefore valid. Hence, the city of Shushan, which was close to the capital was bewildered.

When Esther succeeded in pleading the case of the Jewish people to Achashveirosh, the King told her that “you may write concerning the Jews as it may be good in your eyes, in the King’s name, and seal it with the King’s signet-ring; for an edict which was written in the King’s name...cannot be revoked” (8:8). This statement is contradictory. If the previous letters could not be revoked, how could they write concerning the Jews whatever they desired?

Achashveirosh meant that the first edict could not be revoked; however, they could write about the Jews: “as it may be good in your eyes” i.e. letting everyone know that this edict was issued after the drinking party took place, and therefore it was null and void.

* * *

Alternatively, the Yalkut Shimoni (1056) explains: It was not just the Jews who were perplexed, but: והעיר שושן - “the [entire] city of Shushan.” When the decree was issued, strange things began occurring to the residents of the city. Women, while laying out

their produce on the rooftops to dry, suddenly fell off the roofs and died; men going to draw water from the wells fell in and drowned. They were puzzled and could not figure out why suddenly they were experiencing these many misfortunes.

פרק ד'

The Good Tidings Mordechai Saw in the Words of the Children

ויצא בתוך העיר

“And went out into the midst of the city.” (Esther 4:1)

The Medrash Rabbah (7:16) relates that after Haman had the evil decree written and signed, Mordechai met three children returning home from yeshiva and asked them, “What did you learn today?” The first child quoted the *pasuk*: אל תירא מפחד פתאם - “Do not fear sudden terror” (*Mishlei* 3:25). The second one mentioned the *pasuk*: עשו עצה ולא תהיה - “They will make plans, but it will be foiled; they will discuss plans, but it will not materialize, for G-d is with us” (*Yeshayah* 8:10). The third child quoted the *pasuk*: ועד זקנה אני הוא ועד שיבה אני אסבל ... ואמלט - “Until old age I am with you, to your aged years I will sustain you ... and deliver you” (*Yeshayah* 46:4). Upon hearing this Mordechai was very happy. What good tidings did Mordechai see in the words of the children?

The Gaon in *Kol Eliyohu* explains as follows: The Jewish people were confronted by Amalek three times:

- 1) Upon leaving Mitzrayim, they were suddenly attacked by Amalek (*Devorim* 25:18, Rashi).
- 2) Years later Amalek again attempted to wage war against the Jewish people. To prevent the Jews from identifying his people in their *tefillos* for Hashem’s assistance, he ordered his soldiers to use the Canaanite language (*Bamidbar* 21:1, Rashi).
- 3) Haman was a descendant of Amalek, and he viciously planned the annihilation of the Jewish people.

Mordechai understood the words of the first child, “Do not fear sudden terror...” as an allusion to Amalek’s first attack. The second child’s message, “they will speak, but it will not materialize” - was that regardless of Amalek’s attempts to disguise himself and change his dialect, it would be to no avail because Hashem was with the Jewish people.

When Haman discussed his evil plans for the Jews with his advisors, they told him, "Don't be a fool! Whenever someone has sought to harm these people, their G-d has come to their salvation and destroyed the enemy. Stay away from them or you will suffer the consequences." Haman presumptuously told them, "There is nothing to fear; their G-d is now old and weak and unable to help them" (Medrash 7:16). Mordechai understood the words of the third child as a message from Hashem: "Although Haman thinks that I am old, I have not changed; I will carry, sustain, and save the Jewish people now and at all times."

The Connection Between Mordechai and Yaakov, Haman and Eisav

ויצעק צעקה גדולה ומרה

"And he cried out loudly and bitterly." (Esther 4:1)

The *Arizal* writes that Mordechai was a *gilgul* [reincarnation] of Yaakov, and Haman was a *gilgul* of Eisav, which can enable us to appreciate a number of fascinating parallels between them. The Medrash (Esther Rabbah 8:1) says that, because Eisav screamed when Yitzchok told him that Yaakov had come and taken the *berachos* – ויצעק צעקה גדולה ומרה (*Bereishis* 27:34) – Haman caused Mordechai to scream in a similarly bitter manner - ויצעק צעקה גדולה ומרה.

This also explains why Mordechai refused to bow down to Haman to rectify the fact that Yaakov had bowed to Eisav (*Bereishis* 33:3).

The Gemara in *Chullin* (139b) teaches that Mordechai is hinted to in the section of the Torah that lists the spices that were used in creating the anointing oil (*Shemos* 30:23). The first of the spices is called: מר דרור – pure myrrh, which the *Targum* translates into Aramaic as, מרא דכיא, which sounds like Mordechai. Since Mordechai is associated with the sense of smell and sweet-smelling spices, it is not surprising that when Yaakov came to Yitzchok to get the *berachos*, Yitzchok commented that he smelled the pleasant aroma of Gan Eden entering with him.

The *Ba'al HaTurim* (*Bereishis* 25:34) points out that the word: ויבד – "and he disgraced", appears twice in Tanach, once regarding Eisav: ויבד עשו את הבכורה – "Eisav disgraced the birthright" and once in conjunction with Haman (Esther 3:6): ויבד בעיניו לשלח יד במרדכי – "It was a disgrace in his eyes, and he wanted to kill Mordechai". Just as Yaakov bought the birthright from Eisav with bread and lentils, so too the Medrash teaches

(Yalkut Shimoni Esther 1056) that Mordechai purchased Haman as his servant by giving him food.

When Yaakov thought that Yosef had been killed by a wild animal, the Torah records (*Bereishis* 37:34) that as a sign of mourning he wore sackcloth, something that Mordechai also did in response to Haman's decree.

When Yaakov approached Eisav, he *davened* (*Bereishis* 32:12): הַצִּילֵנִי בְּאֵימֵי אַחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו: –“Please save me from the hand of my brother Eisav”. The *Ba'al HaTurim* points out that the first letters of the first three words can be rearranged to spell Haman.

In an effort to pacify Eisav, Yaakov sent him a gift of many animals and instructed his messengers: וְרוּחַ תְּשִׁימוּ בֵּין עֵדֶר וּבֵין עֵדֶר - “leave a space between each drove” (*Bereishis* 32:17). The *Ba'al HaTurim* points out that the word, רוח, appears only one other place in Tanach: רוח והצלה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר - “relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from some other place” (Esther 4:14).

Finally, Rav Dovid Cohen points out that this insight from the *Arizal* can help us understand why the song we sing on Purim to commemorate the victory of Mordechai is ... Shoshanas Yaakov.

On Yom Kippur the Sotan Has a Day Off

אבל גדול ליהודים וצום ובכי ומספד שק ואפר יצע לרבים

“There was great mourning for the Jews, with fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.” (Esther 4:3)

The Medrash (*Manos HaLevi*) says that the mention of the six descriptions of their sadness (“*eivel*” - “mourning” - “*tzom*” - “fasting” - “*bechi*” - “weeping” - “*mispeid*” - “wailing” - “*sak*” - “sackcloth” - “*eifer*” - “ashes”) was to indicate their *teshuvah* for the six days that they enjoyed the feast tendered by Achashveirosh.

How does this reconcile with the statement in the *Megillah* (1:5) that the King made a seven-day feast for all the people?

R' Yonosan Eibshitz (*Yaares Devash* Vol. 1, pg. 19a) explains: In describing the feast, it is stated that Achashveirosh displayed his riches for: ימים רבים שמונים ומאת יום - “many days, — 180 days.” From the words ימים רבים - “many days” - which are apparently superfluous since it says “180 days,” it is derived that the feast took place in the summer when “*yomim rabim*” - the days are longer (*Rokei'ach*). Thus, from Rosh Chodesh Nissan till Rosh Chodesh Tishrei, with three months being twenty-nine days and the

other, thirty days, there is a total of 177 days, and the 180th day was on the third day of Tishrei. This was followed by another feast for seven days, which culminated on the tenth of Tishrei — Yom Kippur.

The Gemara (*Yoma* 20a) says that the word “*hasatan*” (השטן) - “the Sotan” - has the numerical value of 364 to indicate that Sotan can instigate the Jewish people to sin only on 364 days of the solar calendar and not on Yom Kippur. Consequently, the Sotan did not incite the Jewish people to come to the seventh day of the feast, and thus they exhibited only six forms of sadness to express remorse and repentance for participating in six days of festivity.

Joy Brings Success, Sadness Leads to Failure

ותתחלחל המלכה מאד ותשלח בגדים להלביש את מרדכי ולהסיר מעליו שוקו

“The queen [Esther] was greatly distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordechai, and to remove the sackcloth from upon him.” (Esther 4:4)

The *Tiferes Shlomah* asks: “Why did Esther send clothing to Mordechai? Did she think Mordechai didn’t have clothes to wear?”

The *Tiferes Shlomah* answers that Mordechai and Esther debated how to annul Haman's decree. Mordechai followed the path of crying and mourning to arouse Hashem’s pity and sympathy. Esther believed they would accomplish more with joy, so she sent Mordechai proper clothing.

The *Tiferes Shlomah* writes: “When Esther heard Mordechai's loud cries for Klal Yisroel, she sent him clothing and asked him to remove his sackcloth. She was implying that he shouldn’t be in agony. Instead, he should gird himself with joy and *daven* to Hashem with joy. Mordechai disagreed because one needs to begin with humility and fear and only afterwards with joy.”

They both agreed that joy was necessary. Their debate was only about how to begin. Esther believed they could start with joy, and Mordechai understood they must begin with remorse. However, they both understood that joy was necessary for the salvation to come.

The *Megillah* elaborates on the honor Mordechai received from Haman as Haman led him through the streets of Shushan. Why was this episode so important?

The *Tiferes Shlomah* *zt'l* explains: “Mordechai was asked to ride the king's horse, dressed in the king's clothes. People sang and played music before him. All this was to

make Mordechai happy. Immediately after Mordechai was happy came Klal Yisroel's salvation, and the wonderful miracle occurred."

All honor accorded to Mordechai was just for Mordechai to be happy, and when there was happiness, the salvation arrived.

The Gemara (*Megillah* 16a) says: "Haman took the king's clothing and horse and went to Mordechai. Mordechai began to *daven*, and Haman waited until Mordechai finished *davening*." Then Haman led Mordechai through the streets of Shushan with immense honor.

The *Ben Yehoyada* asks, why did Haman wait until Mordechai finished *davening*? Why didn't he tell him right away that he came to honor him?

He answers: "Haman knew that Mordechai was *davening* with sadness, and Haman preferred it that way. Haman thought, 'If I interrupt his *tefillah*, he will need to *daven* again. And after hearing the good news [that I must honor him], he will *daven* with immense joy, and then it is likely that his *tefillos* will be answered.'"

Haman preferred that Mordechai *daven* with sadness because the *tefillos* are less effective, so he waited patiently until Mordechai finished *davening*.

At the first party, Achashveirosh said: מה שאלתך וינתן לך ומה בקשתך עד חצי המלכות ותעש – "What is your request? It will be granted to you. What is your petition? [Even if it be] until half the kingdom, it shall be fulfilled" (5:6). What better time to express her plea for Bnei Yisroel, but Esther's only request was that Achashveirosh and Haman come to the second feast, which she would host the following day. Why did she push off pleading for the Jewish nation? This seemed like such an ideal time! Achashveirosh told her that almost whatever she asked for, he would give her!

The answer is that Haman was happy at the first party, as it states: ויצא המן ביום ההוא לב שמח וטוב – "That day Haman went out joyous and exuberant" (5:9). Esther knew she couldn't bring down Haman when Haman was happy, so she pushed off pleading for the Jewish nation for the next day.

The next day Haman was sad, as it states (Esther 6:12): אבל וחפוי ראש – "despondent, and with his head covered." That was an ideal time to bring about Haman's downfall. Indeed, Haman was hanged that day. This teaches us that joy brings success (and even for a *rasha* like Haman), and sadness leads to failure. (R' Elimelech Biderman)

One Who Gladdens Hearts on Purim is Compared to Hashem

לדעת מה זה ועל מה זה

“To know what is this and about what is this.” (Esther 4:5)

The Rambam in *Hilchos Yom Tov* (6:18) speaks about the nature of the mitzvah of *simchas Yom Tov*. The Rambam writes: “When he eats and drinks, he must feed the stranger, the orphan, and widow together with the other poor and unfortunate people. However, he who locks the gates of his courtyard and sits down to feast with his wife and children but does not provide food for the poor and embittered of spirit — such is not the rejoicing of mitzvah; it is the rejoicing of one’s own stomach!”

In *Hilchos Megillah* (2:17) as well, the Rambam speaks of the mitzvah of rejoicing on Purim. There the Rambam writes: “It is preferable for a person to be excessive when it comes to the mitzvah of giving gifts to the poor rather than to be excessive when it comes to feasting and sending food portions to friends, because there is no greater or more glorious rejoicing than to gladden the hearts of the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the strangers, for one who gladdens the hearts of these unfortunate individuals can be compared to the Shechinah as it is written: (Yeshaya 57:15) ‘to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the crushed.’”

It would seem to us that if we would speculate when there is a greater mitzvah to gladden the hearts of the widows and orphans — on Yom Tov or on Purim — we would logically think that on Yom Tov there would be a bigger mitzvah. Yom Tov, after all, is *de’O’raisa*, whereas Purim is Rabbinic in origin. Yet the Rambam goes out of his way and says something that he says very rarely in the entire Mishneh Torah — “that one who gladdens the hearts of these can be compared to the Shechinah!” He does not say that concerning *Hilchos Yom Tov*.

What is the Rambam telling us here by saying that a person who makes the less fortunate happy on Purim is comparable to Hashem?

The Medrash in Esther says on the *pasuk*: “To know what is this (*mah ZEH*) and about what is this (*v’al mah ZEH*)” (Esther 4:5) that when Esther queried Mordechai she was alluding to something. She said “What’s happening? What have we done? Never in Jewish history has there been such a decree as Haman has issued. Have they perhaps denied the *pasuk*: ‘This is my G-d’ (*ZEH Keyli*) or perhaps they denied the Ten Commandments about which it is written ‘from this way and that way (*m’ZEH u-mi’ZEH*) were they written?’”

The Medrash continues that Mordechai responded and said that the reason the Jews were suffering was a result of the grandson of 'Karahu.' Who is 'Karahu?' 'Karahu' refers to Amalek about which it is stated, "Who happened to you (*asher Korcha*) on the road" (*Devorim* 25:18). *Chazal* tell us that Amalek represents the antithesis of Belief in this world. Amalek denies the existence of a Creator of the world.

When Mordechai told Esther that the Jews are suffering because of 'Karahu,' he was saying that the Jews were suffering because of a terrible, terrible, lack of *emunah* [belief]. This is a lack of belief that even in our own times we don't see. What do I mean? We have Jews today who do not believe — do they 'believe' more than the Jews in the time of Mordechai and Esther?

What I mean is as follows: The Gemara says that the reason the Jews were deserving of destruction, was that: "They enjoyed the banquet of that evil one" (*Megillah* 12a). What was so bad about partaking in the banquet of Achashveirosh?

Was it *treife*? *Chas vesholam!* "The drinking was according to the law, nothing was forced" (*Esther* 1:8). It was as kosher as could be, according to every stringent opinion. So, what was the sin? The sin was that the Jews attended a feast given by a non-Jew, at which the non-Jew took out the vessels of service (*klei shares*) of the *Beis HaMikdosh* — and the Jews sat there and kept on feasting!

Even Jews who today are totally assimilated, who would not think twice about eating at a non-kosher feast... if their non-Jewish hosts would serve them on the utensils stolen from the holy *Beis HaMikdosh*, their reaction would be: Stop! "These are the utensils of the *Beis HaMikdosh*." Which Jew would not get up and yell, "These are my utensils! These are the vessels of our *Beis HaMikdosh!*"?

The fact that the Jews in Shushan could sit there through a meal and use those vessels was a terrible sin!

What was wrong with them? What was wrong with those Jews was that they were 'hopeless Jews.' They were Jews who had lost all hope. They had counted the 70 years of *galus* [exile] and knew that the *galus* was supposed to be over and yet the *geulah* [redemption] had not yet come. Those were Jews who had seen the building of the Second *Beis HaMikdosh* stopped in its tracks. Those were Jews who had come to the conclusion that there would be no *geulah*. Those were Jews who said "Moshiach is not going to come." Those were hopeless Jews.

The difference between those Jews and the Jews of our day is that today, as non-observant as a Jew may be, he can still believe in Judaism, he can believe in Hashem and redemption, and he knows that there is hope.

That is what the story of Purim restored. There was a decree. The Jews were motivated to do *teshuvah* and the Ribbono shel Olam came back and breathed life into this dead body of the Jewish people and gave them hope. That is what happened on Purim. Hashem took His breath of Life and restored hope to a forlorn nation.

Rav Hutner said there is a mitzvah to emulate the Ribbono Shel Olam. If the Ribbono Shel Olam on Purim brought the dead back to life, if He took hopeless and downtrodden Jews and gave them hope, it becomes our mitzvah on Purim to do the same thing. Therefore, the Rambam says that on Purim there is no greater mitzvah than to gladden the hearts of the unfortunate and downtrodden. The essence of the day is to give hope, meaning, and comfort to broken-spirited people... because that is what the Ribbono Shel Olam did. A person therefore who does this will be comparable to Him. (R' Frand)

The Conflicting Ideologies of the Jewish People and Amalek

יגד לו מרדכי את כל אשר קרהו

“And Mordechai told him everything that had happened.” (Esther 4:7)

One of the recurring themes in the story of Purim is the conflicting ideologies of the Jewish people and Amalek. The Jewish people believe that Divine Providence guides history, nothing is mere ‘coincidence’. In stark contrast, Amalek believes that everything happens by mere chance (*mikreh*). Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky *zt”l* brings out a fascinating idea with regard to this ideological clash. He begins in *Parshas Mikeitz* (42:38), where Yaakov Avinu refuses to send Binyomin to Mitzrayim. He explained his fear that: וקראהו אסון - “perhaps a disaster will happen”. Rav Kamenetsky notes that the Hebrew word for ‘happening’, ‘*mikreh*’, is spelt here with an ‘*aleph*’. In *Parshas Vayigash*, Yehudah recalls the words of Yaakov to the Egyptian Viceroy (44:29): ולקחתם אסון - “If you also take this one [Binyomin] from me, a disaster may happen”. On this occasion, the letter ‘*aleph*’ is omitted from the word, ‘*mikreh*’. What is the reason for this change?

Rav Kamenetsky explains, that the regular spelling of the word, ‘*mikreh*’ is without an ‘*aleph*’, and in this form it refers to mere chance. However, when an ‘*aleph*’ is added, the word ‘*kara*’ (call) is formed. This means that an event is ‘called from Heaven’,

referring to the fact that there is no coincidence, rather everything takes place because of Divine Providence. With this explanation we can understand the divergence of the spelling of the word, *'mikreh'*. When Yaakov is speaking to Yehudah, he expresses his fear that, if Binyomin would travel to Egypt, Divine Providence may decree that some kind of disaster should befall him. Yaakov was well aware that anything that could happen would not be due to mere chance. When Yehudah was recalling Yaakov's words he was speaking to Yosef, whom he thought was a non-Jew who was unaware of Divine Providence. Accordingly, he could not express Yaakov's attitude with regard to Divine Providence because he knew that a non-Jew could not relate to such a concept. Accordingly, he expressed the word, *'mikreh'* without the *'aleph'* to refer to mere chance.

Dayan Chanoch Ehrentrau *zt"l* asked Rav Kamenetsky that a *pasuk* from *Megillas Esther* seemed to contradict the explanation that *'mikreh'* without an *'aleph'* refers to an expression of mere chance. After Mordechai became aware of the Decree to destroy the Jewish people he began mourning. Esther sent her messenger, Hasach to find out what had happened. The *Megillah* (4:7) writes: ויגד לו מרדכי את כל אשר קרהו - "And Mordechai told him about everything that had happened." In this instance, the word, *'mikreh'* is written without an *'aleph'*, which alludes to a belief in chance. According to Rav Kamenetsky's aforementioned explanation, this should imply that Mordechai was describing the events that had taken place as being a result of mere chance, and not Divine Providence!

Rav Kamenetsky answered him that the Medrash dealt with this problem. The Medrash notes the use of the word, *'mikreh'*, and explains that Mordechai was alluding to the fact that the nation that epitomizes the belief in chance, was behind the decree to destroy the Jews. That nation was Amalek, of whom the Torah writes, "who happened (*korcha*) upon you on the way." Thus, Mordechai was not attributing the Decree to chance, rather he was telling Esther that the Decree was initiated by a member of the nation of Amalek (Haman), who represents the belief that everything is mere *'mikreh'* (chance).

On a deeper level, it seems that Mordechai was telling Esther that the reason that Amalek were able to threaten the Jews with destruction, was the very same reason that they were able to attack the Jewish people in the desert. The people had expressed their doubts about the presence of Hashem in their midst, when they exclaimed: "is Hashem amongst us or not?!" (*Shemos* 17:7). When the Jewish people attribute events to chance, Hashem measure for measure, allows us to be subject to the rules of chance and ceases protecting us. Therefore, the people's questioning of Divine Providence

enabled Amalek, the ultimate deniers of such Providence, to attack. So too, at the beginning of the Purim story, the Jewish people were far less aware of Hashem's presence amongst them due to the loss of the *Beis HaMikdosh* and the exile. This decline in belief in Divine Providence gave Haman the ability to threaten them. Only by recognizing that Hashem drives all events, good or bad, could they merit Divine intervention to save them. May we merit to see Hashem's Hand in everything that takes place around us. (R' Yehonosan Gefen)

Time to Show Your True Colors

כי אם החרש תחרישי בעת הזאת רוח והצלה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר ואת ובית אביך תאבדו
ומי יודע אם לעת כזאת הגעת למלכות

“For if you will persist in keeping silent at a time like this, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, while you and your father’s house will perish...” (Esther 4:14)

There was a certain Jew who gave the shirt off his back to any and all comers. This person went to see the Rebbe Reb Bunim of Pishische. The Rebbe told this person that he should not act that way. The Rebbe explained that such behavior only demonstrates that he does not have the ability to say “no”. Such an attribute is not characteristic of *gemilas chasodim*. *Gemilas chasodim* is when a person makes a conscious decision: This person “Yes”; this person “No.” Some people are undeserving. When a person cannot say “no,” all it says about him is that he is not in charge of his emotions. That, per say, is not an admirable quality.

The Rebbe told this person a *vort* from the Chozeh of Lublin. The *pasuk* says that Yaakov was an: **ישב אהלים תם איש** (*Bereishis* 25:27). “*Ish Tam*” is normally translated as a “simple person” or a “naive person”, a person who knows no shtick, a man who does not know how to cheat – that is how we usually picture an “*Ish Tam*”!

And yet *Chazal* say that Yaakov Avinu said about his uncle, Lavan, “I am his match when it comes to trickery.” The Chozeh of Lublin asked – which is it? Was Yaakov an “*Ish Tam*” to whom one can sell the Brooklyn Bridge or was he: אחיו אני ברמאות - “Lavan’s match in trickery”? The Chozeh of Lublin answers that the description “*Ish Tam*” means that Yaakov had control over his *temimus* [his naiveté]. When the situation demanded *temimus*, Yaakov was a *tam*; but when the situation demanded that he not let a conniver run circles around him, he could be as full of tricks as the best of them.

This is why the *Baalei Mussar* say that when we describe a person who is a mensch, we call him a *Baal Middos*. The word *baal* means the person is the master. He is the “*ba’al*” [owner] over his *middos*. He can choose as necessary. Sometimes he will employ this characteristic and other times he will employ that characteristic. There is a place for humility and there is a place for being proud. There is a time and place to be forgiving and there is a time and place to stand up for one’s rights. There is a time to be a man of peace and there is a time to be a man of war.

We need to know when to employ each human attribute. Yaakov was an “*Ish Tam*” – he had control over his “*temimus*” but when the situation demanded it, he could act the other way as well.

If a person’s nature requires him to feed anyone that comes to him, no matter what, he has lost fulfilment of the specific mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim*. It tells us that his kindness and generosity do not stem from the fact that he is a true *Baal Chesed*. They stem from the fact that he has the type of heart that can never say no.

Based on this idea, the *Bei Chiya* (Rav Elisha Horowitz) explains the above *pasuk*. Mordechai tells Esther HaMalkah: כי אם החרש תחרישי בעת הזאת רוח והצלה יעמוד ליהודים - “For if you will persist in keeping silent at a time like this, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, while you and your father’s house will perish...”. This is the time to go to Achashveirosh and plead for your people. If you keep quiet now, you and your family will be wiped out.

The question is, what is meant by the expression: בעת הזאת – “At a time like now”? What does it mean “At a time like now”? Of course it is “now”! It is always “now”. What was Mordechai emphasizing by this expression?

Chazal say that Esther HaMalkah possessed the *middas hashtikah* [the attribute of remaining silent]. She had the capacity to keep quiet. Some people cannot keep quiet, Esther had an inborn capacity to remain silent. The Medrash (on the words “And Esther revealed nothing of her kindred and her people” (Esther 2:20)) says that Esther received this strength of character from her ancestress Rochel. Rochel kept quiet. She did not reveal to Yaakov the secret that it was actually going to be Leah under the *chupah*. Esther inherited Rochel’s *middas hashtikah*. *Chazal* point out that Binyomin, the son of Rochel, possessed this family trait as well. He knew the secret of the sale of Yosef and he refused to share it because of the *cherem* [ban of excommunication] the brothers imposed on anyone who revealed it. Likewise, Shaul (who also came from *shevet* Binyomin and descended from Rochel) also kept quiet. Finally, by Esther as well it is written that, “Esther did not reveal her national origin.”

The *middah* [attribute] of silence is a great thing. However, Mordechai tells Esther there is a time and place for everything. Yes, you possess the *middas hashtikah*, but if you will remain silent AT THIS TIME, tragedy will occur. NOW is not the time for silence. Now is the time to speak up. If you, Esther, are really in charge of your *middas hashtikah* then you will demonstrate that ownership.

There are people who keep silent because they are shy. There are people who are quiet and introverted. They cannot open their mouths. “Esther, now is the moment of truth. Why are you a “*shosekes*” [silent one]? Are you silent because that in fact is your *middah*, which, in this situation demands that you do not keep quiet, or are you merely shy and introverted? Esther, show your true colors: Are you in charge of your *middas hashtikah*, or is it in charge of you?”

[With this concept, we can explain the following idea: All the *shevotim* had a unique stone in the *choshen* worn on the Kohen Gadol’s chest. The stone of Binyomin is *yoshpeh*. The word *yoshpeh* (ישפה) is made up of two words: יש and פה, meaning “There is a mouth.” Binyomin had the *middas hashtikah*. Why did he possess the *middas hashtikah*? Was it because he was too shy to open his mouth? *Chazal* say, no. His trademark stone was, יש פה - “I have a mouth.” I am able to speak when the situation demands it, BUT when the situation demands me to keep quiet – if they tell me do not reveal the secret of the *chet* of selling Yosef – then I am able to keep quiet. Someone who has a mouth, but can keep it closed, demonstrates that he is a *baal* of his *shtikah*.]

This too may be the interpretation of the end of Mordechai’s warning: ואת ובית אביך - תאבדו - “You and your father’s house will be destroyed.” Why is Esther’s father’s house brought into the picture? It is because Mordechai is telling her that if you go ahead and keep quiet now, this will retroactively reveal that your whole genealogy – Rochel, Binyomin, Shaul – did not keep quiet because they controlled their “attribute of silence”, they kept quiet because they were naturally shy people.

Show me by speaking now, Mordechai told Esther, that the *middas hashtikah* that is part of your genealogy, part of your heritage, part of your family, does not come from the fact that you have introverted genes. Show me that your entire *mishpacha* [family] had the ability to control their silences, based on the needs of the moment. (R’ Frand)

Why the Salvation of the Jewish People Occurred Two Hours into the Night

לך כנוס את כל היהודים הנמצאים בשושן וצומו עלי ואל תאכלו ואל תשתו שלשת ימים לילה ויום
גם אני ונערותי אצום כן ובכן אבא אל המלך אשר לא כדת וכאשר אבדתי אבדתי

“Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast on my behalf; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!” (Esther 4:16)

The Medrash relates that Haman came to Mordechai on the night on which he built the gallows intended for Mordechai. He found Mordechai seated with 22,000 children before him, dressed in sackcloth and learning Torah. The children had been fasting for three days. Haman ordered that they be tied in iron chains and appointed guards to watch them. He declared, “Tomorrow I will kill these children first and then hang Mordechai!” All of the children burst into tears. The Medrash says that even though their parents brought them food with which to break their three-day fast, they refused to eat and continued to fast for another night. Two hours into the night, Hashem hearkened unto their cries, and “at that moment, Hashem took the decrees [that He had written to punish the Jews] and tore them up” (Esther Rabbah 9:4).

The Medrash says that Hashem decided to save the Jewish people two hours into the night. What is the significance of these two hours? Why did the salvation of the Jewish people occur two hours into the night?

Rav Moshe Shapiro answers this question based on a statement made in the name of the Vilna Gaon (as cited in *Yeinah Shel Torah*). When Esther told Mordechai to have everyone fast for three days, she said: גם אני ונערותי אצום כן – “Also I and my maidens shall fast as such”. She added: ובכן אבא אל המלך – “With that merit I will come to the king” (Esther 4:16).

The *gematriya* [numerical value] of *בן* is 72. Esther meant that in the merit of the three-day (72-hour) fast, she would come to the king. (The Medrash (Esther Rabbah 9:2) explains that Hashem never ignores the pleas of the Jews when they are afflicted for three days.) However, when she said that she, too, would fast, she said: גם אני ונערותי אצום כן – “Also I and my maidens shall fast as such”. The *gematriya* of *בן* is 70. Esther meant that she would fast for only 70 hours, or two full days and most, but not all, of the third day.

The reason why Esther did not intend to complete her fast on the third day was because she intended to go to the king and invite him to her banquet as part of her efforts to save the Jewish people. Her audience with the king would occur before nightfall on the third day, but she could not stand before the king after having fasted for three full days, weak, disheveled, and with malodorous breath. Therefore, she needed to break her fast two hours early in order to prepare to stand before the king. (The *Targum Sheini* 6:1, in contrast, writes that part of the miracle was that she was disheveled as a result of her fast when she entered the king's chambers.)

The two hours that were missing from Esther's fast were compensated for by the two extra hours that the children fasted into the night. Their *tefillos* were answered exactly two hours into the night, because at that moment Esther's three-day fast was completed!

(This explanation is only consistent with the view of the Medrash which says that Esther appeared before the king to invite him to her banquet on the last day of the three-day fast, there are however various different opinions as to exactly when she went.)

If One Is Fasting, Obviously He Is Not Eating and Drinking, What Was Esther Coming to Add?

The above *pasuk* is very difficult, Esther tells everyone to fast for three days and nights. She says: צומו עלי – “Please fast”, and then she repeats and says: ואל תאכלו ואל תשתו – “Don't eat and don't drink.” Surely if one is fasting then he is not eating and drinking, what was Esther adding by saying: ואל תאכלו ואל תשתו – “Don't eat and don't drink”?

The Gemara in *Megillah* (15a) says: אמר רב ויעבור מדכי שהעביר יום ראשון של פסח בתענית – “Rav said, when the *pasuk* says ‘*vaya'avor* Mordechai’, it means that he passed the first day of Pesach whilst fasting.” Mordechai fasted on the first day of Pesach and missed out on the mitzvah of *simchas* Yom Tov. The *Aruch LeNer* in *Yevamos* (121b) cites the *Yaros Devash* who asks: Why does the Gemara only mention that Mordechai lost out on the mitzvah of *simchas* Yom Tov, why doesn't the Gemara mention that he missed out on the mitzvah of *matzah* as well?

The *Aruch LeNer* at first suggests that there is a dispute between the Gemara and the Medrash. From the Gemara in *Yevamos* (121b) it seems that the fast was for three days and nights without any interruption, whereas the Medrash (Yalkut Esther 1056) says they couldn't fast for three days and nights without interruption. It's not possible, if they did, they would die, therefore, they only fasted for three days, but at night they ate. (When the *pasuk* says: שלשת ימים לילה ויום – “For three days, day and night.” Day

and night are only referring to the first day, for the second two days, however, they only fasted in the day).

With this the *Aruch LeNer* suggests that Rav in the Gemara in *Megillah* is going like the Medrash that they ate at night, since they ate at night they were able to fulfil the mitzvah of *matzah*. The Gemara mentions they fasted on first day Pesach and missed out on *simchas Yom Tov*, but doesn't mention they didn't eat *matzah*, as in fact they did.

A second answer the *Aruch LeNer* suggests, is that Rav can also hold like the Gemara in *Yevamos* that they fasted for three days - day and night, however, they were still able to eat *matzah*. On Yom Kippur even though one must fast, on a *de'O'raisa* level one may eat up until the amount of a *koseves* [date], as less than that isn't considered filling (*Yoma* 81a). It illogical to say the fast that Esther made was more stringent than Yom Kippur. Consequently, by eating a *kezayis* of *matzah* on Pesach which is less than the amount of a *koseves*, one is still considered to be fasting, as just a *kezayis* of *matzah* is not filling. For the mitzvah of *simchas Yom Tov*, one must eat more than a *kezayis*, one has to eat a *beitzah* [size of an egg] which is more than a *koseves*. Mordechai was able to eat *matzah*, therefore, the Gemara only mentions about not fulfilling *simchas Yom Tov* and not about *matzah*.

R' Chaim Ozer once said over the above answer to the *Chazon Ish* (see *Maaseh Ish*, Vol. 1, page 22) and the *Chazon Ish* immediately said that this contradicts a Gemara in *Yevamos* (121b). The Mishnah in *Yevamos* says: אמר רבי מאיר מעשה באחד שנפל לבור הגדול ועלה לאחר שלשה ימים - "Rabbi Meir said: An incident occurred involving a certain person who fell into a great cistern and emerged only after three days." The Gemara (121b) says: תניא אמרו לו לרבי מאיר אין מזכירין מעשה נסים מאי מעשה נסים אילימא דלא אכיל ולא אישתי: - "They said to Rabbi Meir: One can't bring proof from miraculous events. What was miraculous? If we say the fact that he didn't eat and drink for three days and he survived, but it's written: 'Fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day'". The Gemara cites proof from the *pasuk*: וצומו עלי ואל תאכלו, and תשתו, and תשתו, that it's not miraculous to go three days without any food. The *Chazon Ish* asked, that if we learn that Mordechai ate a *kezayis* of *matzah* on *seder* night, just he didn't eat the amount of a *koseves*, then what's the proof that its miraculous to live for three days without eating. Maybe it's true one can't go three days without eating but Mordechai ate a *kezayis* of *matzah*, and perhaps the *matzah* helped him survive?

Perhaps we can answer that true if Esther would have just said: וצומו עלי - "Fast on my behalf", then Mordechai would have eaten a *kezayis* of *matzah* as it's illogical that this

fast should be more stringent than Yom Kippur. However, Esther added in: ואל תאכלו ואל תשתו - "Don't eat or drink", to ensure the people fasted even from eating a *kezayis*. According to this, when the Gemara in *Megillah* says: שהעביר יום ראשון של פסח בתענית: - "That Mordechai past through the first day of Pesach with fasting", it doesn't mean that Mordechai fasted and was *mevateil* the mitzvah of *simchas* Yom Tov, rather he was *mevateil* on all the *mitzvos* of first day Pesach even *matzah*. (See the Gaon on *Megillas* Esther who learns that Mordechai fasted and indeed missed out on the mitzvah of *matzah*.)

The *Aruch LeNer* in his *Teshuvos* at the back of his *sefer* (*Teshuvah* 15) cites that *chocham echod* [one wise person] wanted to say what we just said above that: ואל תאכלו ואל תשתו - "Don't eat or drink", comes to add that they shouldn't even eat a *kezayis* of *matzah*. However, the *Aruch LeNer* says that in *Kesuvim* which is *divrei kabbalah*, when the *pasuk* says an expression of אכילה it doesn't normally refer to a *kezayis*. In the Torah it does but in *Kesuvim* it doesn't. (See, however, the *Chasam Sofer* on *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 567:1, who learns based on this very *pasuk*, וצומו עלי, ואל תאכלו ואל תשתו, that on a fast the prohibition of eating is a *kezayis* and the *issur* of drinking is a *reviyis*.)

The *Aruch LeNer* adds that it's illogical to say that the fast Esther made was more stringent than Yom Kippur. Therefore, it's difficult to say, ואל תאכלו ואל תשתו, comes to add that even a *kezayis* shouldn't be eaten. Especially if it would result in everyone losing out on the mitzvah of *matzah*.

Although the *Aruch LeNer* says it's illogical to say the fast Esther made was more stringent than Yom Kippur, perhaps there is a reason to say it should be more stringent. The Medrash *Shochar Tov* (on *Tehillim* 22) asks: Why the *pasuk* says: וצומו עלי - "Fast on my behalf", and then repeats and says: ואל תאכלו ואל תשתו - "Don't eat and don't drink." The Medrash answers because they benefitted from the *seudah* of Achashveirosh. We see that the fast Esther made was coming as a *kaparah* [atonement] for the sin they did by benefiting from the feast of Achashveirosh. If the fast Esther made was coming for a *kaparah*, then it makes sense that it was more stringent than Yom Kippur. And it would make sense that they refrained from even eating a *kezayis*.

We can add, that the Gemara in *Yevamos* when it cites proof that one can survive for three days without eating cites the *pasuk*, ואל תאכלו ואל תשתו, וצומו עלי. Why does the Gemara bring the whole *pasuk*, why didn't it just bring the first part עלי וצומו? Based on what we said it's very good. If it would just say, וצומו עלי, then perhaps they ate a *kezayis*, therefore, the Gemara brings the entire *pasuk* to show that they didn't even eat a

kezayis. Since they didn't even eat a *kezayis* we see that it's not a miracle to go three days without eating.

Now that we have established that they did indeed fast for three days and nights and didn't eat *matzah*, how could Mordechai and Esther make such a decree? How did they have the *ko'ach* [strength] to annul the mitzvah *de'O'raisa* of eating *matzah*?

Mordechai himself asks this very question. (See Medrash Rabbah (*Parsha* 8) on *Megillas* Esther.) When Esther told Mordechai to issue the decree too fast for three days, Mordechai questioned that the fast would include the first day of Pesach. Esther responded that the whole purpose of Pesach is for the Jews to observe the *mitzvos*, but if there are no Jews, what point is there in having Pesach? (This is similar to the dictum that explains why it is permitted to be *mechalel* Shabbos in order to save a life: חלל עליו הרבה שבתות הרבה כדי שישמור שבת אחת – “Desecrate one Shabbos in order to observe many more” (*Yoma* 85b).) Fasting on Pesach was an act of *pikuach nefesh* (fasting and *davening* in order to save lives) due to the decree of annihilation that had been issued against the Jewish people. Once we understand the context in which the decree to fast was made (that of mortal danger), and we understand that fasting and *tefillah* are indeed effective ways to annul *gezeiras* of Hashem, the question is how could they have had a *havah amina* [initial thought] not to uproot a mitzvah in the Torah. When the entire Jewish people are in mortal danger, it is certainly permitted to annul a mitzvah!

The *Sifsei Chachomim* (*Megillah* 15a) says that the three-day fast had the status of a *ta'anis chalom*, which may be made even on Shabbos or Yom Tov in order to annul a Heavenly decree. So, too, the fast at the time of Purim was made to annul a Heavenly decree that was issued against all of Klal Yisroel. (This answer doesn't fit according to the *Maharil* who says one shouldn't fast a *ta'anis chalom* on Yom Tov.)

Finally, R' Simcha Bunim of Peshischa explains, that Mordechai, perplexed that his *tefillos* were not penetrating the heavens, concluded that he was experiencing the same phenomenon which the *navi* Yirmiyahu cries about: “Though I would cry out and plead, He shut out my prayer” (*Eicha* 3:8)

Therefore, he wisely decided to commit a serious *aveirah* [transgression] to fast on Pesach. The Sotan would relish this and quickly run to the Heavenly tribunal to prosecute him. Thus, when he would be investigated, the entire picture will come to light. It would be recognized that his transgression was actually *lishmah* — with good intent — and the Heavenly intervention he sought to arouse would be forthcoming.⁶

⁶ Only someone like Mordechai can do such a thing, if you *daven* and feel your *tefillos* aren't being answered, don't turn to this approach until you speak to your rebbe first.

Why Didn't Mordechai Give Esther a Get

After Mordechai found out about Haman's decree, he sent a copy of it to Esther, along with instructions that she beseech Achashveirosh on behalf of her nation. She initially demurred, explaining that it is forbidden to appear before the king without being summoned. Mordechai warned her against remaining silent, and told her that perhaps it was for this reason that Hashem placed her in this position. Esther relented and told Mordechai to summon the Jewish people to fast on her behalf, and after three days, she would go in unlawfully to Achashveirosh, adding, "And if I perish, I perish."

On a literal level, Esther was referring to the possibility that Achashveirosh may have her put to death for entering his inner court without being called, but the Gemara (*Megillah* 15a) interprets her words as lamenting the fact that until this point, each time that she had relations with Achashveirosh it was against her will. Now that she was going in to him voluntarily, it would be considered as if she was a willing participant. The halachah is that a married woman who voluntarily has extramarital relations becomes forbidden to remain married to her husband (*Yevamos* 56b). Even after Esther married Achashveirosh, she remained married to Mordechai and continued secretly having relations with him (*Megillah* 13b). However, this was only permitted as long as her interactions with Achashveirosh were against her will. Now that she was willingly going in to have relations with him, she would be forbidden to Mordechai for the rest of her life.

Rav Dovid Feinstein points out that this is yet another example of *hester panim* [Hashem's seemingly concealed face] in the *Megillah*. Esther did exactly what Mordechai commanded her and told her was necessary to save the entire Jewish nation, and yet the very same action which was considered one of the greatest *mitzvos* in Jewish history caused her to become permanently forbidden to her husband.

However, *Tosfos* questions why Mordechai didn't divorce Esther at this time, as any relations that she would have while single - even voluntarily - would not prevent her from subsequently remarrying him. *Tosfos* answers that giving one's wife a *get* [divorce document] must be done in the presence of two witnesses. Mordechai feared that the witnesses might absentmindedly talk about the event, which would eventually make its way to the ears of Achashveirosh, thereby endangering the lives of himself, Esther, and the entire nation. However, the *Rashba* questions why Mordechai didn't give Esther a *get* written in his own handwriting, which according to many opinions effects a divorce even in the absence of witnesses. The *Rashba* cryptically answers: אין משיבין על דברי אגדה – "It is not always possible to ask or answer questions regarding homiletic passages".

The *Noda B'Yehudah* (*Yoreh Deah* 2:161) was once asked to resolve a difficulty with a different homiletic passage. He begins his reply by describing how pressed he is for time to answer even the most pressing and practical questions which come before him and apologizes that he is unable to delve into the esoteric subject at that time. He further justifies his actions by quoting the aforementioned *Rashba*, who writes that such questions can't always be asked and may not have readily apparent resolutions. The overworked *Noda B'Yehuda* then continues, "But now that I've mentioned the *Rashba's* comment, let me tell you the answer to his question!" He suggests that as a historical fact, Mordechai did indeed divorce Esther without witnesses by using a get that he personally wrote, exactly as suggested by the *Rashba*.

If so, why does the Gemara understand Esther as lamenting the fact that she would be eternally forbidden to Mordechai, which according to the *Noda B'Yehudah* should not be the case? He innovatively explains that while it was possible for Mordechai to divorce Esther without attracting attention, thereby preventing her from becoming forbidden to him, there was no parallel option to subsequently remarry her. A wedding must be conducted in the presence of witnesses to take effect, leaving Esther technically permitted to Mordechai, but forbidden for all practical purposes. (R' Ozer Alport)

Neutrality Is Not an Option

כי אם החרש תחרישי בעת הזאת רוח והצלה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר ואת ובית אביך תאבדו ומי יודע אם לעת כזאת הגעת למלכות. ותאמר אסתר להשיב אל מרדכי. לך כנוס את כל היהודים הנמצאים בשושן וצומו עלי ואל תאכלו ואל תשתו שלשת ימים לילה ויום גם אני ונערתי אצום כן ובכן אבוא אל המלך אשר לא כדת וכאשר אבדתי אבדתי.

"If you will surely be silent at this time, salvation will come to the Jews from somewhere else, and you and your father's house will be destroyed. And who knows if it was for this moment that you became queen. Then Esther said to reply to Mordechai: Go, assemble all the Jews to be found in Shushan and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I with my maids, will fast also. Then I will go in to the King though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish." (Esther, 4:14-16)

One of the most pivotal moments in the dramatic story of *Megillas* Esther is when Mordechai forcefully tells Esther that she must risk her life to try to save the Jewish people from Haman's decree, by going to the King without invitation, even though doing so risks punishment by death. Mordechai tells her that, in truth there is nothing

really to worry about, as salvation will come from some place, if it does not come from her. However, if she does not try herself, then she and her father's house will be destroyed. We read this episode every year and there is a tendency to take for granted that what Mordechai said was correct and easy to understand, as it did indeed set the chain of events in motion that led to the salvation of the Jewish people. However, on deeper analysis, Mordechai's argument is somewhat surprising. It would have seemed most logical to implore Esther to risk sacrificing herself, if necessary, for the people because they are in desperate need of her help. Yet, Mordechai makes the exact opposite case – he says that the Jewish people do not need Esther at all. This line of argument could quite conceivably have the wrong effect – it could give Esther an escape route. She could reason that if the Jewish people will be fine without her, why did she need to risk her life anyway.

Mordechai's subsequent point, that if Esther would not get involved, she would be destroyed, is equally difficult to understand. Since Mordechai just said that salvation could come without Esther, why should she be punished for keeping herself safe by doing nothing? At worst, she could be called a coward, but where do we see in the Torah that a coward deserves to die. Indeed, we see in the Torah that when the people went out to war, those who felt fearful were urged not to fight, but to return home – we don't see anywhere that they were punished or deemed worthy of death! So, on what grounds does Mordechai argue that she risks death for the mere crime of acting to safeguard herself?

Rav David Fohrman *shlit'a* (in his wonderful *sefer* "The Queen you thought you Knew", Chapter 9) suggests that the key to solving these problems is a remarkable resemblance between the words and concepts in Mordechai's argument and a seemingly, totally unrelated passage in *Parshas Mattos* which discusses the laws of how a man can annul his wife's vows. The most glaring similarity is that in both sections, the word for being silent – להחריש – is used in a double expression: In the *Megillah*, Mordechai tells Esther: אם החריש תחרישי - "if you will surely be silent". In the passage about vows, the Torah states that if the husband does not annul his wife's vow within a day of her vow, then it remains in force permanently. The *pasuk* describes the man's silence as: ואם לה החריש יחריש לה – "if the man is surely silent" (*Bamidbar* 30:14). These are the only two times in the entire Tanach where the word, להחריש, is repeated consecutively in this fashion.

The similarities continue: The *Megillah* describes Esther as a *na'arah* – the Hebrew word of a girl about to reach adulthood. Likewise, the section in *Mattos* concerns itself with laws pertaining to a *na'arah*; Esther, the *na'arah*, is taken by Achashveirosh as his

wife, and the *na'arah* in *Mattos* also marries. Mordechai instructs Esther how to act towards her husband, while the passage in *Mattos* gives laws that govern the relationship between a *na'arah* and her husband; Mordechai tells the *na'arah* that she is risking her own destruction and the destruction of “her father’s house.” The section in *Mattos* concludes with, “these are the laws of a *na'arah* in her father’s house.” Mordechai warns Esther about how disastrous it would be for her to keep silent, so too, in *Parshas Mattos* it warns of the disastrous consequences of keeping silent. Finally, Mordechai suggests that Esther must break her silence right now, and in *Mattos*, the silence must be broken in a very short amount of time as well.

In order to understand this uncanny resemblance, it is first necessary to analyze the passage in *Mattos* and then we will be able to see how Mordechai was to a large extent, paraphrasing this action and applying its meaning to Esther’s situation. It is permitted for anyone to take a vow, but if a married woman does so, the Torah teaches that at times, her husband can annul her vow. In particular, if a *na'arah* takes a vow that would cause her to experience hardship, such as to never again eat certain healthy foods, then her husband may protest and thereby annul the vow. However, this ability is limited to the day that he first hears about it. If he delays protesting more than a day, he loses the right to annul, and the vow will stand, regardless of what he later says. This man appears to have three options as to how to react to his wife’s vow: He can affirm it, in which case, it is bound forever, he can immediately protest it, in which case it is annulled forever, or he can be silent. However, the details of these laws show us that the third choice is not really a separate option at all. It teaches that silence in this case is akin to actively affirming the vow. Accordingly, if the man remains silent, it is as if he actively affirmed her vow, and she is bound by this potentially harmful oath forever.

This explanation is borne out by the Torah’s use of the word, להחריש, to refer to silence, in contrast with the more commonly used term, לשתוק. Rav Fohrman explains that in the Torah, לשתוק, often describes the quiet of inanimate objects. For example, when Yonah tells the sailors to throw him overboard, he adds that if he does so, then: ישתוק הים – “the sea will be silent” (Yonah 1:12). Anyone or anything can be silent. The other word for silence, להחריש, is only used for sentient beings. What exactly does it mean? Its root is made of ‘ches, reish and shin’, which, as a noun, refers to a חרש – deaf person. Thus, the verb form of this word, להחריש, would seem to precisely mean, “to make oneself deaf” and to act as if one has not heard. The Torah uses this word to describe the husband’s silence in the face of his wife’s discomfiting vow. In the case of his wife’s impetuous vow to accept pain and suffering, the husband can either annul it or maintain it, either by actively affirming it, or by remaining silent. This passage comes to

disarm us from an incorrect approach – that neutrality – doing nothing - is a third option. Neutrality looks like a third option, but it is illusory. Doing nothing is identical to choosing to affirm his wife's pain and a husband that remains silent, is equally complicit in maintaining the pain and hardship of his wife.

Returning to Mordechai's exhortation of Esther, Rav Fohrman suggests that Mordechai was paraphrasing the passage in the Torah and applying it to Esther's situation. Achashveirosh made a verbal declaration that will cause terrible pain. Esther can protest it if she reacts immediately, and thereby annul the decree. Mordechai tells her that it is not for the Jews that she must act, but for herself, for if she is silent, then it is as if she is tacitly affirming the King's decree. In such a case, she will bear responsibility and be punished accordingly. Her choice is to speak out and annul the decree or to remain silent and validate it. If she chooses the latter, then her legacy will be destroyed along with Haman.

We have seen how one of the pivotal moments in the *Megillah* is built around Mordechai's strong speech to Esther. It seems that he was teaching her an idea that applies to everyone in their *avodas Hashem*. There are many times where doing nothing to rectify difficult situations or to help people in need is not considered as being free from guilt. Neutrality is not an option; this is borne out by many *mitzvos* in the Torah, including "do not stand by your brother's blood", rebuke and *hashavas aveidah*. In all these cases, refraining from doing anything is akin to actually harming the person's physical or spiritual needs. Esther made the very difficult decision to risk everything to try to save the Jewish people. May we emulate her in our own way in our daily lives.

A Minyan is Greater than the Tefillos of the Biggest Tzaddik of the Generation

The *Beis Aharon* writes: "I have received the following rule: When one *davens* with a *minyan*, the Shechinah is there, and it accomplishes and corrects all matters, just as it is when the greatest *tzaddik* of the generation *davens*."

We see the power of a *minyan* in halachah. A great *tzaddik* cannot say *kedusha* when he is alone. Even if the nine greatest *tzaddikim* of our nation daven together, they still cannot say *kaddish* or *chazoras hashatz*. Yet, a *minyan* of simple people can say *kedushah* and *kaddish*, etc. This proves the uniqueness of a *minyan*, which even the greatest *tzaddikim* cannot compare to.

The *Yaaras Devash* (Vol.2 *Derush* 9) teaches that Esther told Mordechai that he needed to *daven* with a *minyan* to bring salvations.

It states (Esther 2:5): איש יהודי היה בשושן הבירה ושמו מרדכי - "There was a Jewish man in Shushan HaBirah (Shushan the capital) whose name was Mordechai..."

The *Yaaras Devash* explains that: איש יהודי היה בשושן הבירה, means that Mordechai was the only Yid living there. This is because there were two parts of Shushan: Shushan and Shushan HaBirah.

Achashveirosh and the high-ranking officials lived in Shushan HaBirah, while most Yidden lived in Shushan. Mordechai, a high-ranking official also lived in Shushan HaBirah, and was the only Yid living there.

Esther told him (Esther 4:16): לך בנוס את כל היהודים - "Go, assemble all the Yidden that are found in Shushan..." to *daven* for Esther when she approaches Achashveirosh to plead for their lives.

The *Yaaras Devash* explains that Esther told Mordechai his *tefillos* in Shushan HaBirah were insufficient. He must gather all the Yidden and daven together.

So, we see that even the greatest people of the generation benefit from *tefillah b'tzibbur*. It is the most exalted form of *tefillah*. (R' Elimelech Biderman)

Seize the Moment

ויעבר מרדכי ויעש ככל אשר צותה עליו אסתר

"Mordechai transgressed (the prohibition against fasting on first day Pesach) and did all that Esther commanded from him." (Esther 4:17)

On the 13th of Nissan, Haman approached Achashveirosh with his plan: the complete annihilation of the Jewish people. Achashveirosh agreed, and the wheels were set in motion. The *Targum* tells us that Eliyohu HaNavi came to Mordechai and informed him of all that had transpired. Mordechai immediately sent word to Esther, asking her to appear before the king to beg mercy for her people. Esther responded, "Gather together all the Jews of Shushan, and fast for three days and three nights. After that I will go to the king." Mordechai declared the next three days as a fast.

Rashi notes that the next three next days were the 14th, the 15th, and the 16th of Nissan. That means that Mordechai decreed a fast day on the 15th of Nissan, the first day of Pesach.

Why Not Wait?

This seems difficult to understand. Why would Mordechai decree a fast day on Pesach? The Jews were to be destroyed in Adar, which was eleven months away. Not an anti-

Semite in the land dared to raise a finger against the Jews before then for fear that Achashveirosh might change his mind. If there was almost a full year until actual killing was to take place, why then would Mordechai choose the very next day — a Yom Tov — to fast? Shouldn't he have waited and chosen a more appropriate date in those eleven months to organize a well-prepared *teshuvah* rally?

What makes this even more difficult to understand is that the Jewish people needed every *zechus* [merit] they could get. Mordechai was told that the decree was agreed upon in Shomayim. The problem wasn't with the enemies of the Jews; it was with us. That being the case, surely the more logical approach would have been for the Jews to keep all of the *mitzvos* of the Yom Tov, allowing them to eat *matzah* on the fifteenth. By doing so, they would be in a much better place to stand in front of Hashem and ask for mercy. They could make the fast day at a later date. Why the urgent rush to act?

The answer to this question is based on understanding human nature.

Massive and Immediate Action

Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, went from being a college dropout to being the wealthiest man in the world in a very short time. During an interview about his meteoric ascent, he was asked, "To what do you attribute your great success?"

"I was in the right place at the right time... I guess you could say that I got lucky," he explained. "But, you know, there were a lot of people who were there as well ...but ... I had vision. I saw the potential that was there... But, there were a lot of people at the same place that I was, and a lot of people also had vision... the one difference was that I took **massive and immediate action.**"

This seems to be the answer to the question on this Rashi. As the head of the *Sanhedrin*, Mordechai had the responsibility of the generation on his shoulders — and he recognized human nature. As the Jews of Shushan gathered in the central square, the great *tzaddik* was wearing sackcloth and ashes. When he told them of the decree from Heaven, everyone understood the gravity of the situation. They got it. They recognized that there was no one to turn to, no one to bail them out. According to the ways of this world, there was no hope.

With that clarity of understanding, they then had the ability to harness the most potent force on this earth. By earnestly turning to Hashem as their only salvation, by begging for His mercy, they could potentially overturn the decree. But doing that required the utter and complete perception that there was no other way. At that moment in time, Klal Yisroel had the spiritual awakening and motivation to do just that.

But let's imagine that Mordechai would have set the fast day for the next week, or the next month, or in two months. The fire of excitement would have died down, the sense of impending doom would have weakened, and the *teshuvah* would not have been complete. That is human nature. We hear about something, it moves and awakens us, and we feel a certain way, but that fever pitch fades with time. The next day, the next week, the excitement has weakened. And with it, the clarity goes as well.

Recognizing this, Mordechai seized the moment. He decreed the very next day as a fast. Let nothing stand between this moment of clarity and the reaction we need — total subjugation to Hashem. Because of this, the Jewish people were in fact able to turn around the events, and in place of a holocaust, we now celebrate Purim.

This concept has great relevance to us. We all have moments of inspiration. At certain points of life, events occur that give us a different clarity of vision. We recognize how great our mission is, how fleeting life is, and how little time we have left on the planet. At that moment, we understand things from a very clear perspective. The question is, what do we do at that moment? To be truly successful, we need to utilize those moments of excitement. We must lock them in; we have to take massive and immediate action to harness those moments of clarity into concrete actions. Being inspired is wonderful, but doing something with that inspiration is what allows us to reach greatness. If we live through life's moments of inspiration and don't use them to reach concrete decisions, then it is a waste of the precious opportunities Hashem has given us.

However, when a person does use those moments of inspiration to change his actions, he takes those moments and turns them into permanent acquisitions. By doing so, he spends his time here on the planet in an ever-spiraling climb to spiritual greatness.

Two Short Stories

The above *shmooze* is from R' Ben Tzion Shafier, I would just like to cite two additional short stories which bring out the above point:

Story #1: There was a *bochur* who used to learn in the great Volozhiner Yeshiva. He was known as having the most encyclopedic knowledge ("biggest *baki*") in the entire Yeshiva — which is certainly saying a lot. In Volozhin, they did not go through a cycle of 6 or 8 *masechtos* as is common in many *yeshivos* today. They began with *Berachos* (first *masechta* in *Shas*) and continued through *Niddah* (the final *masechta* of *Shas*). So, someone who was the "biggest *baki*" in Volozhin really knew his stuff!

This fellow was once sitting at a meal, and someone came in and asked him a question. He did not know the answer. Someone else at the table answered, "This is explicitly spelled out in *Tosfos*". The "*baki*" was beside himself with dismay. He forgot a *Tosfos*! What did he do? He got up in the middle of the meal – did not finish his food, did not "*bentch*", ran to the nearest *shul* and took a vow that he would learn straight for the next 7 years. And that's what he did!

There was only one problem: He did not "*bentch*". So, they asked the Rosh Yeshiva – Rav Chaim Volozhiner: Did he do right, or did he do wrong? Rav Chaim Volozhiner answered: He certainly did wrong, by not *bentching*. But had he stopped to recite the *Birchas HaMazon*, in the intervening minutes the passion of the moment would have passed. He would have never made the vow and never gone on to learn the next 7 straight years. It is no small matter to walk away from the mitzvah *de'O'raisa* to *bentch*, but inevitably, had he waited, the inspiration would have dissipated.

Story #2: One time, the person who took care of the finances for the Radin Yeshiva came into the *Chofetz Chaim* carrying a plain envelope sent through the Polish Postal System. The envelope contained 500 rubles in cash. We have to assume that the postal system in Radin circa 1920 was no better than the postal system in the United States 90 years later and yet nobody today would put \$500 cash in uncertified mail and expect to see it arrive at where it is supposed to arrive.

The *Chofetz Chaim* told his secretary to find out the story behind this envelope. Who puts 500 rubles in an envelope in the mail without even bothering to get it certified?

The story was as follows. A certain businessman was trying to make a business deal. He pledged "If this deal is successful, I am going to give 500 rubles to the *Chofetz Chaim's* Yeshiva." Lo and behold, the deal was successful, but it was late in the afternoon. The post office was already closed. So, he figured, alright I'll send it out tomorrow. Then he heard a little voice in his head go off which said "Five hundred ruble? Do you not think the Yeshiva would be happy to receive 50 rubles? Of course they would be happy with 50 rubles! Why do I need to send 500 rubles?"

The man said, "I saw my determination dissipating. I was afraid that if I waited until tomorrow, it would become 5 rubles. I determined, come what may, I am going to stuff the money into an envelope and drop it into a mailbox – no certified mail, no return receipt required, because I saw that if I would wait any longer, the enthusiasm and determination to do the mitzvah would evaporate.

When moments of inspiration arrive, we must take *massive and immediate action*.

Hashem Looks Forward to Seder Night

Why did Esther insist that they fast on Pesach and not wait at least till after Yom Tov?

The *Tiferes Shlomah* explains: According to the *Zohar* (*Shemos* 40b), Hashem looks forward with anticipation to the Yom Tov of Pesach, and His Shechinah personally comes to witness the Jews sitting at the *seder* table and expressing their love for Him. Esther planned that because of the vacuum they would create by forgoing proper observance of the *seder* night, Hashem would realize what He would be missing by permitting the annihilation, *chas vesholam*, of the Jewish people. He would thus come to their rescue and miraculously save them from Haman's evil plans.

פרק ה'

Understanding the Emphasis on Hashem's Appearance at the Sea and at Sinai

ותעמוד בחצר בית המלך הפנימית

"And she stood in the inner court of the King's palace." (Esther 5:1)

The Gemara in *Megillah* (15b) says that as she entered the area which was filled with idols, she felt the Shechinah leave her, so ותעמוד — she stood and prayed: א-לי א-לי למה — עזבתני — "My G-d, my G-d, why have You forsaken me?" According to the Medrash Shochar Tov, with the repetition of "my G-d" she was alluding, "My G-d at the sea, my G-d at Sinai, do not forsake me."

The question is, why the emphasis on Hashem's appearance at the sea and Sinai?

Rav Yonasan Eibshitz (*Yaarev Devash*, Vol.2, *Derush* 10) explains: Hashem appears in different forms. At Kriyas Yam Suf, He appeared as a powerful warrior, and at the giving of the Torah on Har Sinai, He appeared in the form of a merciful Sage (Yalkut Shimoni 246).

According to the *Arizal*, the different forms of revelation depend on the mission to be accomplished. Kriyas Yam Suf was against the laws of nature: Water, which normally flows continuously, stood as a pillar. To emphasize that Hashem governs nature and is not limited by it, He appeared as a powerful warrior who conquers and controls. In contrast, the giving of the Torah was not an act contrary to nature, and therefore He appeared as a merciful Sage.

Esther was pleading with Hashem, “The Jewish people are facing an extremely difficult time. We are being threatened with annihilation. You, my G-d, are the All-powerful; You control nature and are above it. We need Your miraculous help! May it be Your will to perform a miracle on our behalf which is within the laws of nature, as You have done at Sinai, or one which surpasses nature, as You have done at the sea; whatever it may be — please do not forsake me.”

A Thought on Why Esther HaMalkah Referred to Achashveirosh As

A Dog

The aforementioned Gemara in *Megillah* (15b) says that as Esther entered the area which was filled with idols, she felt the Shechinah leave her, so ותעמוד — she stood and prayed: א-לי א-לי למה עזבתני — “My G-d, my G-d, why have You forsaken me?” We mentioned above the Medrash. The Gemara offers a different *peshat*, the Gemara says that she ascribed the Shechinah's departure - to the fact that she had displayed disrespect to Achashveirosh (a king appointed by Hashem to rule) by asking Hashem to save her from ‘the dog’ (as recorded in *Tehilim* 22), a mistake that she immediately rectified by referring to him as ‘a lion’.

In the words of R’ Yisroel Reisman: “I would like to understand Esther. That’s not a fine thing to do - can you imagine a Gadol B’Yisroel using the expression - not a *rosha* - but using the expression dog?! That’s not even a nice expression to use. Why did she use that expression?”

R’ Yisroel Reisman then explains as follows: Rav Hutner (*Pachad Yitzchok, Maamar* 60) says the following: *Chazal* (*Beitzah* 25b) say: שלשה עזין הן – “there are three that have chutzpah”, one of the three is a dog. What is the chutzpah of the dog? Rav Hutner explains, the chutzpah of a dog is that he’s man’s best friend. Why is that chutzpah? The chutzpah is, that he could look at a human being as being on the same level as himself?! The chutzpah of a dog is not when he’s a wild and rabid dog, the chutzpah of a dog is when he’s a warm and friendly dog! The fact that, a dog sees man as his best friend, *oy vey!*

The special uniqueness of: ולכל בני ישראל לא יחרץ כלב לשנו, is not that dogs didn’t attack the Jews, why would a dog attack the Jews, they didn’t bother the dog. It’s that the dogs didn’t even have a friendly bark for the Jews. When Klal Yisroel left Mitzrayim on the morning of Pesach, they were so uplifted, *derhoiben*, that even a dog that looked at a member of Klal Yisroel saw that, that’s not my friend! *Chas vesholam!* A friend - it’s *le’eyla ule’eyla!* A man doesn’t say that a Malach is his friend, and a dog doesn’t say that a person is his friend. Somebody who has no boundaries, inappropriate

relationships, fails to see himself where he is. Someone who can be friendly with a dog, has fallen very low.

Esther says Achashveirosh is a dog. So, we think, like a truck driver calls someone a dog. What!? Esther is one of the seven *Nevios*! If she said dog, she had depth to what she said, a lot of depth. She didn't call him a dog, like a bum in the street calls people a dog. She said the *middah* of a dog, because he has relationships that crosses a boundary, where it's inappropriate. Achashveirosh thinks that he's a *shidduch* for me!? Achashveirosh thinks that Esther HaMalkah - even if he didn't know that she's Jewish, but he saw her fine *middos*, he saw her extraordinary personality, he saw her *yiras* Shomayim, he saw her *ahavas habriyos*, and he thinks that he's a *shidduch* for me? Hakodosh Boruch Hu, save me "*miyad kelev*" - what's *kelev*? *Kelev* is, the danger to me is that he's acting like a *kelev*, he sees me as someone on his level. *Oy, hatzilah*.

Achashveirosh: Dog or Lion

The *Megillah* relates that Mordechai instructed Esther to present herself before Achashveirosh in a desperate attempt to save the Jewish people. Until the news of Haman's decree, Esther had not been in the intimate company of Achashveirosh unless he had requested her presence; this time, however, she would present herself to him on her own accord. She was *halachically* permitted to do this because the survival of the Jewish people was at stake. (The rule of "*yehareg v'al ya'avur*" did not apply, as the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* 74b explains.) This concern was uppermost in Esther's mind as she advanced towards the throne room in silent prayer that Hashem would give her favor in the eyes of the evil king whose golden scepter dictated the fate of those who appeared before him unbidden.

The Gemara says that on her way, Esther passed the royal room of idol worship. At that moment, the Divine Presence that had accompanied her until now departed, and she suddenly felt alone and unprotected. Esther cried out, "My G-d, my G-d, why have You deserted me?" (*Tehilim* 22:2).

She said, "Perhaps You are judging me for a forbidden act done under duress (in order to save Your people) as if it was done willfully?"

"Or perhaps," she continued, "You are upset with me for calling Achashveirosh a 'dog' (*'hatzilah... mi'yad kelev yechidasi,' Tehillim* 22:21)? If so, I shall make amends and call him a lion (*'hoshi'eni mi'pi aryeh,' Tehillim* 22:22)." Esther's reckoning succeeded. The Divine Presence returned to her and she approached the king with renewed confidence -- and Divine protection.

In what way did Esther sin by calling Achashveirosh a dog? Why did belittling the evil king cause the Shechinah to depart from her?

Moreover, how was calling Achashveirosh a dog related to her first concern, that perhaps Hashem was punishing her for an act she did out of compulsion?

Rav Yaakov Emden quotes his father, the Chacham Tzvi, who offers the following answer:

The Mishnah in *Bava Metzia* (93b) teaches that if a lion attacks sheep, the shepherd (who is a *shomer sochar*, a paid guardian) is exempt from damages because he is not expected to be able to repel a lion. Such an attack is considered an "*ones*," beyond the control of the shepherd. However, if the sheep are attacked by a dog, or even by several dogs, the shepherd is held liable for the damages because the attack is not considered an "*ones*." It is within the capability of the shepherd to fend off dogs.

The words of Esther are now understood. Esther justified her action with the claim that she was "*ones*," acting under duress. She then remembered that she had called Achashveirosh a dog in her prayer for salvation, a contradiction to her present claim for Divine amnesty. If Achashveirosh was considered like an attacking *dog*, then her act should not be considered an "*ones*," an act beyond her control, because the attack of a dog can easily be repelled as the Mishnah in *Bava Metzia* states. Hence, she immediately corrected her mistake and admitted that Achashveirosh was more than just a "dog." It was far more appropriate to compare him to a *lion*; after all, his domain extended to vast distances and his power was virtually unlimited. Since Achashveirosh was a "lion," his attack is considered an "*ones*" for which Esther should be vindicated.

Connecting the Dots

יְהִי כִרְאוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה עוֹמֶדֶת בַּחֲצַר נִשְׂא חֵן בְּעֵינָיו וַיּוֹשֶׁט אֶת שֵׁרְבִיט הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדוֹ וַתִּקְרַב אֶסְתֵּר וַתִּגַּע בְּרֹאשׁ הַשֵּׁרְבִיט

"As soon as the king saw Queen Esther standing in the courtyard, she won his favor. The king extended to Esther the golden scepter which he had in his hand, and Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter." (Esther 5:2)

The Gemara in *Megillah* (15b) relates that when Achashveirosh put out his scepter for Esther to touch it, it extended. The Gemara quotes various opinions as to how much it stretched: ובמה אמר רבי ירמיה שתי אמות היה והעמידו על שתים עשרה ואמרי לה על שש עשרה – "How much (was it stretched) Rabbi Yirmiya said it was originally two *amos* and it became twelve. Some say it stretched to

sixteen *amos* and yet others say twenty-four. It was taught in a *beraisa* it stretched to sixty *amos*.”

Try picture the above scene. Imagine a scepter extending from 2 *amos* to 24 *amos*. If the following would happen to us we would drop it. We would be in such shock. Achashveirosh however isn't bothered in the slightest; he just carries on life like normal. Asks the *Darash Mordechai* (R' Mordechai Druk) why? How come Achashveirosh isn't surprised by what was happening?

We find a similar thing by Bilam HaRasha, he hits his donkey and his donkey starts talking to him. Not only doesn't he get a shock, he engages in conversation and starts talking back. Never before has a donkey talked and Bilam is completely unfazed by the whole experience, how come?

Moreover, the Medrash tells us, Haman wasn't sure what to do about Mordechai so he consulted with his wife Zeresh. He had 365 advisors, and no one could come up with a suitable plan except for Zeresh. She said we won't beat them unless we act cunningly. We need to come up with a new plan of destruction, one that has never been tried before. If we throw him into the fire it won't help. Chananya, Mishael and Azariah were thrown into a fire and they survived. If we throw him into a lion's den it won't help, Doniel was thrown into a lion's den and he survived. Prison also won't help. Yosef was imprisoned and he got out. We must come up with a new idea. She came up with the plan to hang him, something that hadn't been done before. We see from the Medrash that Haman and Zeresh knew so much about how Hashem always saves the Jews, why didn't they come to the conclusion that Hashem protects the Jews and just give up? Why didn't they step back for a minute, why did they not see the Yad Hashem [Hand of G-d]?

The answer to all the above is the famous Mishnah in *Avos* (4:21): והקנאה והתאוה והכבוד – מוצאין את האדם מן העולם – “Envy, lust and [the desire for] honor put a man out of the world.” When someone is overcome with a desire, for *kavod*, money, power etc. then sometimes it prevents a person from seeing straight. Someone who is overcome with the above often stops thinking straight, he loses his *seichel hayoshar* [ability to think straight] and starts to follow his desires, and nothing else matters.

The *pasuk* says Esther: נשא חן בעיניו – “Found favor in the eyes of Achashveirosh.” The *pasuk* uses very delicate language but really the *pasuk* means something deeper. *Chazal* tell us he had one thing on his mind, he was thinking about doing *tashmish* [living] with her. Achashveirosh had a major desire for her and therefore nothing else mattered.

True the scepter might be miraculously extending but Achashveirosh had one thing on his mind and one thing only, nothing else mattered.

The same thing was with Haman, Zeresh goes through the history of the Jews and how they always managed to survive, but Haman is so consumed with hate that he was blinded. He wasn't thinking straight and so nothing else mattered. (The same thing was with Bilam as well).

Towards the end of the *Megillah* it says: וישם המלך אחשרש [אחשוורוש] מס על הארץ ואיי הים – “Achashveirosh imposed a tax on the mainland and the islands.” What is the significance of this *pasuk*, why is it so important to know that Achashveirosh imposed a tax? Secondly, why is Achashveirosh written without any ‘vav’, throughout the entire *Megillah* Achashveirosh is always spelled with a ‘vav’, why here is it written without?

The *Darash Mordechai* explains: We have had 9 *Perokim* [Chapters] so far in the *Megillah*, and everything Achashveirosh has tried to do so far has been turned on its head. One would think perhaps Achashveirosh would change his direction in life. However, what happens? Nothing, Achashveirosh is stubborn until the end. Achashveirosh has a desire for money and there is nothing to do to stop him. He just lost lots of money and what does he do? Imposes more taxes, he is stubborn until the end. He just doesn't see the Yad Hashem he follows his desires and nothing will change him.

This is also why here Achashveirosh is spelt without a ‘vav’. The letter ‘vav’ is often used as a ‘vav *hachibur*’. The ‘vav’ comes to connect words together, the ‘vav’ represents connecting the dots. The ‘vav’ represents that one should look at what has happened and think about changing himself; it's time to connect the dots and change. After what has happened so far in the *Megillah* one would think Achashveirosh might think about changing. However, he doesn't, nothing fazes him and he continues to be who he is. He remains blinded because of his desires therefore his name is spelt without any ‘vav’.

An Insight from R' Shimshon of Ostropoli

R' Shimshon of Ostropoli asks two questions on the above *pasuk*: 1) The words: וישט את שרביט - “that was in his hand” seem to be extra. It could have just said: והזיח - “he extended to Esther the gold scepter.” In fact, the second time he extended the scepter to her (see 8:4) the words, וישט את שרביט, are not mentioned? 2) The Gemara in *Megillah* (15b) says that an angel stretched the King's golden scepter, which was

originally two *amos* towards her either twelve or as much as sixty *amos*. If so, why was it necessary that: ותקרב אסתר - “Esther approached”?

R' Shimshon of Ostropoli answers: The golden scepter had a handle. Normally, when the King wanted to extend it to someone, he would hold onto the handle and extend it lengthwise. When Esther appeared, her presence moved him very much, and to show his great love for her, he turned around the scepter and handed her the handle, אשר בידו - the part which was normally in his hand. To show respect to the King, though the handle of the scepter was offered to her, she humbly approached the King and “touched the top of the scepter — the part which was now “in his hand.”

A New Insight into Why Esther Invited Haman to the First Feast

ותאמר אסתר אם על המלך טוב יבוא המלך והמן היום אל המשתה אשר עשיתי לו

“If it please your majesty,” Esther replied, ‘let your majesty and Haman come today to the feast that I have prepared for him’’. (Esther 5:4).

The Gemara in *Megillah* suggests ten explanations why Esther invited Haman to join her at the first feast that she made in the king’s honor as part of her plan to persuade the king to rescind the decree against the Jews. Since she had no intention to reveal her identity as a Jew or to beseech the king to save her people from the evil plot of Haman until the second feast, why did she invite Haman to the first?

The Vilna Gaon (*Kol Eliyohu*) cites the Gemara in *Pesachim* (111a) to explain Esther’s motivation. The Vilna Gaon writes: “Had I been there, I would have added another reason why she invited him.” The Gemara in *Megillah* (15a) says that when Esther heard the news of Haman’s plot against the Jews, it shocked her so much that she became a *niddah*. Three days later, she made the first party for Achashveirosh and Haman. Her motivation was to invite the two of them and to situate herself, a *niddah*, between them.

The Gemara in *Pesachim* says that if a woman walks between two men while she is a *niddah*, a tragedy will result. If she has just begun her state of *niddah*, one of the men will be killed. If she is near the end of her flow, a quarrel will arise between the two men.

Esther reasoned that if she was at the beginning of her state of *niddah*, then either Haman or Achashveirosh would die, and the decree would be annulled. (The Gemara in *Ta’anis* (29a) says that when the senate issued a decree and, subsequently, one member of the senate died, his death was interpreted as an omen that the decree must

be annulled.) If she was at the end of her state of *niddah*, then a quarrel would arise between Haman and Achashveirosh, and again Achashveirosh would rescind the decree. Either way, the decree would be revoked as a result of Esther's strategy. (In the end, her strategy was successful in both ways. A quarrel erupted between Haman and Achashveirosh, and Haman was killed.)

Why Hashem's Name Is Hinted in *Roshei Teivos*

The *Kedushas Levi* (*Kedushah Rishonah*) explains that during the time of the Purim story, Hashem's presence was concealed, and therefore Hashem's name isn't mentioned in the *Megillah*. Although great miracles occurred, they happened within the rules of nature.

However, Hashem's name is found in the *roshei teivos* and in the *sofei teivos* of the *Megillah*. For example, the *roshei teivos* of **היום והמלך יבא המלך** spell הוי"ה, and the final letters of **לי שוה זה איננו** spell הוי"ה. The *Kedushas Levi* explains that this is because Hashem's name (and presence) was seen with several words, which represents several events. Each word represents another aspect of events, and when one takes a collective view of everything that happened in the *Megillah*, that is when one recognizes Hashem's name and presence.

A Valid Request

ויאמר המלך לאסתר במשתה היין מה שאלתך וינתן לך ומה בקשתך עד חצי המלכות ותעש

**“At the wine feast, the king asked Esther, ‘What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half the kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.’”
(Esther 5:6).**

On the above *pasuk* there is a famous *Maharal* which explains what the difference between *she'eila* and a *bakosha* is. *She'eila* is when we ask for something as a means to a greater goal, while a *bakosha* is a request for the end goal itself. To ask for tranquility as a means to serve Hashem better is a great request, and if it's good for us, Hashem will grant it. But to ask for tranquility just for tranquility's sake is not a valid request.

Based on the above *yesod R' Avrohom Schlesinger* explains a difficult Rashi at the beginning of *Parshas Vayeishev*. Rashi writes: “Yaakov wanted to live in peace and tranquility. And immediately afterward, his sorrows with Yosef began. Hashem said: ‘It's not enough that I'm giving the *tzaddikim* eternal tranquility in the next world? They want it in this world as well?’. On the surface level, this statement is very hard to

comprehend. We know Hashem created us just to give us, and He wants us to be happy in both this world and the next. So, what's wrong with having tranquility in both worlds?

R' Avrohom Schlesinger explains, here it says: ביקש יעקב – “Yaakov made a *bakosha*” – and that is why Hashem responded the way He did. Of course, Yaakov wanted tranquility to serve Hashem better, but on his very lofty level, if there was even a 0.0001% of that request to experience peace and tranquility for their own sake, he was held accountable for it.

The lesson is for us on our level. We want tranquility so that we can focus on Hashem more and that's a good request, but we must make sure we're sincere with it. How can we tell?

The Medrash on the *pasuk* in *Iyov*: מי הקדימני ואשלם, says: Hashem tells us that if we want to do a mitzvah badly enough and we do it before we technically have the means to, He is going to give us the ability and the means to perform it going forward. For example, if somebody really wants to give a lot of *tzedokah*, he needs to prove it first by giving as much *tzedokah* as he could before he's blessed with a lot. The Medrash gives another example, if someone really wants a child in order to raise the child in the ways of Hashem then if they don't yet have that ability yet, they should help raise someone else's child in the ways of Hashem by paying for that child's Torah education. Our actions can prove if we are really sincere with our requests.

R' Dovid Ashear related the following two stories:

A rabbi who heads a *shul* as well as a *yeshiva* day school told me, some years back, one of his congregants came into *shul* one day looking very depressed. He asked the young man what was wrong, to which he replied that the day before he went with his wife to the doctor, and they were told it would be impossible for her to ever have children. She was just turning twenty and they had been married for less than a year. The rabbi told him he had just learned this Medrash about if a person really wants a child for the right reasons, they could prove it by paying for another child's education and then Hashem would give them an opportunity to do it with their own child. He then told the young man there was a child in his school whose parents could not afford to pay for tuition, and asked him if he wanted to sponsor that child. The young man happily made a 12 month payment plan and made the first payment on the spot. It was not too long afterward that he discovered his wife was expecting a baby. And *boruch* Hashem, today they have six children.

On another occasion, a different congregant in this man's *shul* came to him saying his wife had five miscarriages in a row after they had one healthy baby. The doctor told them there's an issue with their genes and the odds of them having a healthy baby with a normal pregnancy were astronomical. The fact that they had one was already a miracle. The rabbi told him of the *segulah* mentioned in the Medrash and asked him if he wanted to sponsor a child's Torah education. At first he was skeptical but then he came back and did it. The next time he and his wife went to the doctor, they were told she was expecting, but since there was no chance that a healthy baby would be born, the doctor told them to terminate the pregnancy. The man went to ask one of the *gedolei hador* what to do and the rabbi told him to move forward and *daven* that all will be well. *Boruch* Hashem, against all odds, a healthy baby was born to them. And then, *boruch* Hashem, they had another one after that.

If we truly want things in this world to serve Hashem better and we are truly sincere about it, then if it's good for us, Hashem will give us that ability and enable us to serve Him the way we hope to.

When We Are at the Wine Party, We Can Ask for Anything

In the *Megillah* it says: ויאמר המלך לאסתר במשתה היין מה שאלתך וינתן לך ומה בקשתך עד - חצי המלכות ותעש "The king said to Esther at the wine party, 'What is your request, and it will be yours... Ask for half the kingdom, and it will be granted to you'". The *Minchas Elazar* zt"l says this *pasuk* means that on Purim, when we are at the *משתה היין*, wine party, the King of the world says to the Jewish nation: מה שאלתך וינתן לך - "What is your request. Ask for whatever you want, and I will grant it to you."

Chazal say: חייב איניש לבסומי בפורי' - "A person is obligated to be happy with drinking on Purim". לבסומי, isn't a very common word. It is written only a few times in *Shas*. Interestingly, the Gemara uses the word, לבסומי, twice on the same page (*Megillah* 7b), and it is used with two different translations. The Gemara says that on Purim there is a mitzvah לבסומי, to drink wine. A few lines above that, the Gemara says: רווחא לבסומי - שביחי - "A person always has room to eat something sweet" (one of the translations of לבסומי is sweet). The Gemara relates that one Purim, Abaye came to Mari bar Mar's home to deliver *mishloach manos*. Abaye said he didn't feel hungry when he came to Mari bar Mar's house. Mari bar Mar served him sixty plates with sixty types of cooked dishes, and Abaye ate them all. The final course was pot roast, and Abaye said he had a great appetite; he even wanted to eat the dish. The Gemara says: היינו דאמרי אינשי כפיין - עניא ולא ידע - "This is as people say, 'The poor are hungry, and they don't know it.' אי - נמי רווחא לבסומי שביחי - "Or it is as people say, 'One can always find room for sweets.'"

בסומי has two translations. It means sweets, and it means being happy through wine. The *Yeitav Leiv zt"l* connects the two Gemara's and explains, if one is בסומי בפורי'א, happy with the wine on Purim, רווחא לבסומי שביחי, רווח והצלה, salvations, and will have, בסומי, sweetness, in his life.

What Changed Between the First and Second Feast

אל המשתה אשר אעשה להם

“To the meal I will make for them.” (Esther 5:8)

Although Esther risked her life by going to Achashveirosh when she had not been called, he extended his golden scepter to her. After she touched the end of the scepter and approached, he asked her what she wanted. Esther invited Achashveirosh and Haman to join her at a royal *mishteh* [banquet]. At that meal, Achashveirosh again asked Esther what her request was, and she responded that she wanted them to join her at another feast the following day.

The *Meshech Chochmah* points out a subtle change in the wording of Esther's invitations. When she told Achashveirosh about the first *mishteh* (5:4), she described it as: המשתה אשר עשיתי לו – “The feast I will make for him”, meaning Achashveirosh. The second time, she said (5:8): המשתה אשר אעשה להם – “The meal I will make for them”, referring to Achashveirosh and Haman. Why did she change her wording?

The Gemara (*Megillah* 15b) explains that one of Esther's intentions in inviting Haman to the banquets was to make Achashveirosh suspicious that something was going on between Haman and his wife. When the first *mishteh* came and went without Achashveirosh showing any signs of jealousy, Esther decided to up the stakes.

Although she invited Haman to the first feast, she made it clear that her husband was the guest of honor, describing it as the meal I am making for the king. The second time she implied that Haman would be an equally important guest at the: משתה אשר אעשה להם – “The meal I will make for **them**”, equating Haman to her husband. The Gemara says that Achashveirosh picked up on this subtle change in wording, and this was one of the reasons he could not sleep (6:1). He was worried that there might be a secret plot going on between Esther and Haman to assassinate him.

Still, why didn't Esther present her request on behalf of her nation at the first *mishteh*? Seemingly, nothing changed from one meal to the next, so what was she hoping to gain by delaying her entreaty until the second one?

The *Ibn Ezra* explains that at the first banquet, Esther was watching for a heavenly sign indicating that the time was right. When none was forthcoming, she decided to postpone her plan until the following day. In the interim, she saw Haman being humbled and ordered to lead Mordechai through the streets of Shushan on the royal

horse. Esther interpreted this as a sign from Hashem that now the time was right, and she proceeded with her intervention on behalf of the Jews later that day.

A Gantz Yur Purim – Purim All Year Long

מחר אעשה כדבר המלך

"Tomorrow I will do as the king says." (Esther 5:8)

The *Shem Mishmuel* said there is no *kiddush* on Purim, so we shouldn't make *havdolah*, either. This means we should keep the *teshuvah* and inspiration we attain on Purim for the entire year.

A *bochur* was drunk on Purim and told Reb Mottel Slonimer *zt"l* that he wanted to do *teshuvah*. Reb Motel told him, "Come back to speak with me about it tomorrow." It is easy to say you will improve your ways, but the trick is to do so tomorrow." Do you want to improve your ways then, as well? This is hinted in Esther's words: מחר אעשה כדבר המלך – "Tomorrow I will do as the king says."

A poor person went to a wealthy person Friday night and said, "I need so much money. I have so many debts. Can you give me ten thousand dollars?"

The wealthy man replied, "Could be. Perhaps. But now it's Shabbos. Let's discuss it after Shabbos."

Shabbos morning, the poor man came over to the wealthy man again and said, "In addition, maybe you can give me a loan for one hundred thousand dollars so that I can cover all my debts."

"That is also possible. We'll discuss it after Shabbos."

Shalosh seudos time, the poor man sees that he is connecting well with this wealthy person, so he returns and says, "Perhaps you can make me a partner in your business."

"It could be," the wealthy man replies. "I'm not against it. But now it's Shabbos. Come to me after Shabbos, and we will discuss it."

The poor man is so happy. Finally, he can see the end of the dark tunnel of his *tzaros*. After Shabbos, he looks for the wealthy man, and he can't find him. When he finally finds him, the poor man says, "Nu. What is your decision?"

"About what?" the wealthy man asked.

“What we discussed! Ten thousand dollars for *tzedokah*, a hundred-thousand-dollar loan, and the partnership.”

“We discussed that on Shabbos,” the wealthy man said, “but now it isn't Shabbos anymore.”

Similarly, people make great, lofty plans on Purim, resolutions for the future, but the trick is to actually keep them after Purim passes. It says in *Megillas Esther*: ולא יעבור (9:27), and Rebbe Henoch of Alexander *zt"l* explains that this means that Purim should never pass, never leave us. What we acquire should remain with us forever. (R' Elimelech Biderman)

Haman Had Self Control – How Does That Make Any Sense?

יֵצֵא הַמֶּן בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא שֶׁמֶח וְטוֹב לֵב וְכִרְאוֹת הַמֶּן אֶת מֵרְדֵּכַי יוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ וְלֹא קָם וְלֹא זָע מִמֶּנּוּ וַיִּמְלֵא הַמֶּן חֲמָה וַיִּתְאַפֵּק הַמֶּן וַיִּבּוֹא אֶל בֵּיתוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיִּבְאֵהוּ אֶת אֶהֱבִיּוֹ וְאֶת זֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ

“That day Haman went out happy and lighthearted. But when Haman saw Mordechai in the palace gate, and Mordechai did not rise or even stir on his account, Haman was filled with rage at him. Nevertheless, Haman controlled himself and went home. He sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh.” (Esther 5:9-10)

We see in the above *pasukim* that Haman had some self-control. The difficulty is Haman was Haman **HaRosh**, and we would have thought that such a person would have no self-control and would have killed Mordechai on the spot. The *Kedushas HaLevi*, *Divrei Yechezkel* and *Tama Dekra* all ask the above.

Rashi explains: - “He overcame his anger, as he was scared to take revenge without permission”.

The *Kedushas HaLevi* answers: This is why Esther invited Haman to the feast. Haman ate from the feast of Esther: - “and through partaking of such a meal, some *kedusha* was instilled inside him”. Because he ate from Esther’s feast he had some *kedusha* inside him, and was therefore able to overcome his anger.

Similarly, the *Divrei Yechezkel* on the *pasuk*: - “That day Haman went out happy and lighthearted”, writes:

צִרִיךְ לְהַבִּין אֲמֵי נִכְתָּב אֶצֶל הַמֶּן שֶׁהוּא מִסִּי' אֶל שׁוֹן וְטוֹב לֵב דְּזֵה לֹא שִׁיךְ רַק בְּקִדּוּשָׁה, וַיִּשׁ לומר דְּזֵה גַם כֵּן הִיָּתֵה כּוֹנֵת אֶסְתֵּר שֶׁזִּימְנָה אוֹתוֹ עַל הַמִּשְׁתֵּה כְּדִי שֶׁמִּזֵּה שִׁיאֵכֵל מִסְּעוּדַת הַצִּדִּיקֵת יֵבֵא לְלִבּוֹ הֵרַע אִיזֵה הָאֵרָה וְהִיָּינוּ שֶׁמֶח וְטוֹב לֵב שֶׁעַל יְדֵי כֵּן יִהְיֶה בְּכוּחוֹ שִׁיעֲצוֹר אֶת עֲצָמוֹ לְבַלְתֵּי יִהְרֹג לְמֵרְדֵּכַי בְּחַמְתּוֹ

הגדולה, כמו שכתבו לקמן ויתאפק המן דאין זה מדרך הס"א לעצור ברוחם רק זה היה מסיבת שנהנה מסעודת אסתר היה לו כח להתאפק עדי שיתיעץ עם זרש אשתו ואוהביו ואז ע"י עצתם נתלה על העץ אשר הכין למרדכי.

An Incredible Remez

וכל זה איננו שוה לי

“Yet all this means nothing to me.” (Esther 5:13)

In the above *pasuk*, the word: זה – “this”, seems superfluous; it could have just said: ואיננו שוה לי - “and it means nothing to me”?

The *Likutim MiPardes* explains as follows: Haman told his wife Zeresh and his advisors about the royal treatment the King had afforded him. In the course of the conversation, he also expressed his fear of Mordechai and Esther, observing that together the numerical value of their names (מרדכי-אסתר) totaled 26 (in “single numerals,” taking 40 as 4, 200 as 2, etc.), which is the numerical value of Hashem’s four-letter Name, indicating that He was with them.

Zeresh comforted Haman that he had nothing to worry about, because their names, Haman (המן) and Zeresh (זרש), also added up to 26 (in “single numerals”). Haman responded, “Mordechai alone adds up to 13 as does Esther alone. Thirteen, is also the numerical value of the word “*echad*” (אחד), indicating that the One and Only — Hashem — is with each of them. It also indicates that there is unity between them, and in unity there is strength. However, my name alone adds up to 14 and I am short 12. Thus, the ‘*zeh*’ (זה), which has the numerical value of 12, which you, Zeresh, contribute, is worthless because Hashem is not with us and there is also no unity between us.” (R’ Moshe Bogomilsky)

What Was the Point of the Gallows Being 50 Amos High, The Eye Doesn’t See That High?

ותאמר לו זרש אשתו וכל אהביו יעשו עץ גבוה חמישים אמה

**“Zeresh his wife and all his friends advised that he make a gallows 50 cubits high.”
(Esther 5:14)**

Why did Haman want to make such a high gallows, there doesn’t seem to be any logic behind it. In the end Haman and his ten sons were hung on it, and it needed to be that

high. However, surely Haman never knew about this, and certainly Zeresh didn't, so why did she tell Haman to build the gallows so high?

The simple answer would be, so that everyone could see what happened to Mordechai for not listening to Haman and they would become scared and fearful of him. However, the Gemara in *Eruvin* (2a) says that eye doesn't notice things above 20 *amos*. If so, people wouldn't notice it, so it would seem there was no gain in hanging him so high, so why did the gallows need to be so high? (R' Tzadok HaKohen, *Inyonei Purim* asks the above.)

The *Alshich HaKodosh* answers, Haman saw how in the past Yidden were saved from tragedies. For example, he saw how Doniel was saved from the lion's den, and how Chananya, Mishael and Azaryah were saved from the fire. Therefore, he wanted to: לצרף חמשים כחות הטומאה אשר לעומת חמשים שערי הקדושה – “To use the 50 levels of *tumah* to override the 50 levels of *kedushah*”. Therefore, he built the gallows 50 *amos* high, somehow including in it the *kochas* of *tumah* to override the *kochas* of *kedusha*, and since there are 50 levels, he built it 50 *amos* high.

Rav Yonasan Eibshitz (*Yaaras Devash*, Vol. 2, pg. 123) answers based on a Mishnah in *Bava Basra* (25a). The Mishnah says: מרחיקין את הקברות מן העיר חמישים אמה – “We distance graves from the city 50 *amos*”. Rashi explains, that this is because of the bad smell. Haman wanted to kill Mordechai in the city, but he didn't want it to smell, therefore, he built the gallows 50 *amos* high.

With this he explains something amazing. The Gemara in *Megillah* (16a) explains the *pasuk*: אשר הכין לו, to mean לוי הכין, that when Haman prepared the gallows for Mordechai, he was really preparing them for himself. The question is, where do we see this?

Rav Yonasan Eibshitz explains, that the Yalkut Reuveni (*Parshas Emor*) explains: צדיקים מעלים ריח רע – “*Tzadikim* even when they are dead, don't have a bad smell”. On the contrary: מעלים ריח כבשמים – “They give off a nice smell”. If the gallows were destined for Mordechai, they didn't need to be so high, as Mordechai never gave off a bad smell. From the fact that Haman ensured they were so high, it must be that were for him, therefore, they had to be 50 *amos* high, to ensure that the bad smell was 50 *amos* away from the city.

The Specialty of *Davening* with Sunrise (*Neitz*)

ובבקר אמר למלך

“In the morning speak to the King.” (Esther 5:14)

What was the rush, why did Haman have to speak to the king in the morning?

Rav Yonasan Eibshitz (*Yaares Devash*, Vol. 1, *Derush* 17) explains: The Gemara in *Berachos* (9b) says that the “*vasikin*” - “devoted ones” - who were meticulous in performing *mitzvos*, would rise early in the morning to complete the recitation of *Shema* before sunrise and then say the *Shemoneh Esrei* at sunrise so that they could be: סומך גאולה לתפילה – “recite the blessing about redemption (which follows immediately after *Shema*) together with *Shemoneh Esrei*”. Rabbi Yose ben Elyakim testified: “If one joins the blessing about redemption with *Shemoneh Esrei* at sunrise, no harm will befall him all that day.”

Hence, to be sure that the hanging of Mordechai would be approved by the King, they told Haman to discuss it with the King early in the morning before Mordechai recited *Shema* and the *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Perhaps with this we can understand the widespread *minhag* to *daven* with sunrise on Purim. We see from the *Megillah* the importance of *davening* with sunrise, therefore, on a day where a large focus of the day is about *Megillah*, it only makes sense to *daven* then.

Why Haman Liked the Idea of a Gallows

יטב הדבר לפני המן ויעש העץ

“This suggestion pleased Haman, and he made the gallows”. (Esther 5:14)

The Medrash (9:2) tells us: “Haman had 365 advisors, corresponding to Torah the days of the year, but none of them knew how to advise him as well as his wife, Zeresh. She told him, ‘If Mordechai is a Yid, you must plot wisely how to defeat and kill him because if you don’t plan wisely, you will fail. You must kill him in a way never done to his nation before. If you throw him into a furnace, Chananya and his friends were saved from a furnace. If you will throw him into a lion’s den, Doniel was thrown into a lion’s den and was saved. Perhaps you will put him in jail, but Yosef was released from jail. If you put him in a copper pot and light a fire underneath, Menashah *davened* to Hashem and was saved from exactly that situation. If you exile him to the desert, Mordechai’s ancestors

lived in the desert successfully and multiplied there. If you blind him, behold, Shimshon killed many Pelishtim after he was blinded. I suggest you hang Mordechai, because we don't know anyone from his nation that was saved from hanging.' It states: ויטב הדבר יעשׁו העץ - 'This suggestion pleased Haman, and he made the gallows.'"

This Medrash needs explanation. Didn't Zeresh understand that if Hashem can save someone from a lion's den, a fiery furnace, and many other situations, He can save Mordechai from being hung, too?

The *Agra D'Kalah (Ekev)* answers that when Yidden study and speak about a miracle that occurred in the past, that is a trigger that Hashem will perform that same miracle again. A source to this concept is in *Tehillim* (60:6): נתת ליראיך נס להתנוסס, which can be translated as, "You give to those who fear You miracles so they can make more miracles." They talk about Hashem's past miracles, which cause the miracles to happen again.

Zeresh said, "If you plan to throw Mordechai into a furnace, the Yidden will study the story of Chananya, Mishael, and Azaryah, who were saved from a furnace, and that will draw down the miracle for Mordechai, too. If you plan to place Mordechai in a den of lions, the Yidden will discuss the miracle that happened to Doniel, and Mordechai will be saved." Therefore, Zeresh advised that he harm Mordechai in an unprecedented manner so that the Yidden won't have from where to draw down a miracle.

Their mistake was that they didn't realize that Mordechai was a great *tzaddik* in his own right, and a brand-new miracle would be created for him.

Hatred Disrupts the Correct Order of Things

In the aforementioned *pasuk* it says: ויעשׁו העץ – "And he made the gallows". The advice given to Haman was: יעשו עץ - "let gallows be made", why did Haman make it himself?

The *Alshich* explains: His wife and all his friends told him that the best thing for him would be for Mordechai to be wiped out. However, they cautioned him, that it was below his dignity to be personally involved in the whole sordid process. Therefore: עשו עץ - "Let gallows be made" — by artisans, and: ויתלו את מרדכי עליו - "The executioners will hang Mordechai on it."

Chazal tell us that: שנאה מקלקלת את השורה - "Hatred disrupts the correct order of things" (Rashi to *Bamidbar*, 22:21), and people deviate from the norm when acting out of hatred. Consequently, Haman who hated Mordechai with a passion did not wait for any workers, but immediately: ויעשׁו העץ — he personally made the gallows.

פרק ו'

The Significance of "That Night"

בלילה ההוא נדדה שנת המלך

"On that night, the sleep of the king was disturbed." (Esther 6:1)

The Gemara in *Megillah* (19a) quotes the opinion of Rav Shimon bar Yochai, who maintains that when we publicly read the *Megillah* on Purim, we should begin from the *pasuk* that records Achashveirosh's inability to sleep on one fateful night, as this represents the turning point of the *Megillah*, when Mordechai and Esther's fortunes begin to overtake Haman's.

The *Megillah* records that Achashveirosh's sleepless night occurred: "בלילה ההוא – on that night", which implies that it happened on some well-known night. Rashi writes (*Megillah* 16a) that this night was the 16th Nissan, the second night of Pesach. Why did the turning point of the *Megillah* specifically take place at this time? Pesach is a time of redemption for the Jewish people. The night of the 15th Nissan is well-known as a time when numerous miracles happened throughout Jewish history, as recorded in the *piyut*, ואמר זב ח פסח, that we say at the end of the *seder*. If so, why didn't the critical miracle of Purim also happen on the 15th of Nissan instead of on the following night?

Rav Dovid Feinstein *zt"l* explains that the 16th of Nissan is not Yom Tov in Eretz Yisroel. Only outside Eretz Yisroel, in *Chutz La'aretz* where Jews in exile observe two days of Yom Tov, is this day also considered Yom Tov. In essence, the second day of Yom Tov perfectly symbolizes the concept of Hashem appearing to hide His face from us by reminding us that we are in exile. Because one of the central themes of the *Megillah* is *hester ponim* [Hashem's concealed face], the most appropriate time for the pivotal miracle to occur is on the "hidden" night of Pesach: the 16th of Nissan, which is only a Yom Tov for a person who is in exile and unable to experience Hashem's revealed *hashgochah* [divine providence].

HaMelech (המלך) In the Megillah Refers to Hashem

Although Hashem's name is not mentioned explicitly in the *Megillah*, the holy *seforim* say that whenever it states the word, המלך, alone in the *Megillah*, (not two words like המלך אחרשורש) it refers to Hashem, the King of the world.

The *Maharal* says that, המלך, isn't only hinting at "the King, Hashem." המלך in the *Megillah* means Hashem. Proof of this is in the words: בלילה ההוא נדדה שנת - "That night,

the king's sleep was disturbed." The Gemara (*Megillah* 15b) cites a *machlokes* [dispute] regarding the translation of המלך in this *pasuk*. According to Rav Tanchum, המלך, is Hashem, for He is the King of the world. The *pasuk* is saying that *keviyachol* [so to speak], Hashem, couldn't sleep because it was time to save the Jewish nation. So, we see, according to Rav Tanchum, that the simple translation of, המלך, is the King, Hashem. We think that Achashveirosh or others were pulling the strings and causing events to happen, but, המלך, is our reminder that everything is from Hashem.

This is the message of the *Megillah*, to know that Hashem is with us and performs miracles for us within the rules of nature. The first Mishnah in *Megillah* states, "The *Megillah* is read on the 11th, the 12th, the 13th, the 14th, and the 15th [of Adar], not later and not earlier."

The *Bris Kehunas Olam* writes that the total of these dates equals 65 (11 + 12 + 13 + 14 + 15 = 65), the same as אדנ"י. The name אדנ"י is Hashem's name when He runs the world by the rules of nature. We read the *Megillah* on these dates, which are *gematriya* אדנ"י, because the purpose of the miracle is to know that even a world run by nature is led by Hashem.

The Mishnah adds: לא פחות ולא יותר – "Not earlier and later". This means we can only read the *Megillah* on the aforementioned five dates, not the day before or after. The day before is the 10th of Adar, and the day after is the 16th, together the *gematriya* is 26 (10 + 16 = 26), the *gematriya* of הו"י, Hashem's name for miracles. We can't read the *Megillah* on these days because on Purim, we aren't celebrating the revealed miracles, which are symbolized by Hashem's name הו"י. On Purim we celebrate that even when everything appears natural, Hashem is with us, directing each detail.

What Was the Point of the Miracle of the Book of Chronicles **Reading Itself**

ויהיו נקראים לפני המלך וימצא כתוב

"And they were read before the King and it was found written." (Esther 6:1)

The aforementioned *pasuk* seems out of order, it should have said first that it was found written, and then mention that it was read before the King?

R' Yonason Eibshitz (*Yaares Devash* Vol. 1. *Derush* 17) explains: Since it says "*vayihyu*" (וַיְהִי) - "and they were [read]" and not "*veyihayu*" (וַיְהָיו) - "and they will be [read]" - the Gemara in *Megillah* (15b) derives from the verb form that they were miraculously

read by themselves. After being read, they looked into the book of chronicles and וימצא כתוב — “it was found [freshly] written.”

There is a reason for every miracle that occurs as well as the manner in which it occurs. Why did this happen?

The Gemara in (Shabbos 88a) says that at Sinai Hashem lifted the mountain above the Jews and forced them to accept the Torah. Nevertheless, in the days of Achashveirosh they readily re-accepted it. The *meforshim* ask: “When Hashem offered the Torah to the Jewish people, they immediately responded ‘*na’aseh venishma*’ - ‘we will do and we will listen’ - so why was it necessary to coerce them to accept?”

An answer to this question is that the Torah consists of two parts, the Written and the Oral. The Jewish people were ready to accept the Written Torah, but not the Oral Torah which explains the Written one and transmits the whole corpus of Jewish law. Therefore, it was necessary for Hashem to hold the mountain over them (see *Tanchuma Noach #3, Da’as Zekeinim Miba’alei HaTosfos, Shemos 19:17*).

Hashem’s way of reward is *midah keneged midah* - measure for measure. Since they now accepted the oral part of Torah which was originally not written, with their own volition, He rewarded them with a miracle that something which was originally not written was conveyed orally to the King, which caused the tide to turn and which brought about the salvation of the Jewish people.

Was It Bigsan and Seresh, or Bigsana and Seresh

וימצא כתוב אשר הגיד מרדכי על בגתנא ותרש

**“There it was found written that Mordechai had denounced Bigsana and Seresh.”
(Esther 6:2)**

When Achashveirosh’s sleep was disturbed, he ordered his servants to read him his book of chronicles, where he found recorded that Mordechai had saved him from Bigsana and Seresh’s plan to kill him, which led him to discover that Mordechai had never been properly rewarded for his actions. Earlier, the *Megillah* says (2:21) that Mordechai saved Achashveirosh from the assassination plot of Bigsan and Seresh. Why was Bigsan’s name changed to Bigsana?

The Medrash Talpios explains that Achashveirosh’s scribe was one of Haman’s sons, who did not want Mordechai to be compensated for what he did. Therefore, when he recorded the episode in the royal chronicles, he wrote that Mordechai discovered that: בגתן או תרש – “Bigsan or Seresh were plotting to kill Achashveirosh”. In other words,

one of them wanted to assassinate the king, but because it was not clear which one, there was no choice but to kill both to protect the king. According to this version of events, Mordechai did not deserve substantial remuneration for his efforts, because at the same time he saved Achashveirosh, he was also indirectly responsible for the death of an innocent man.

To ensure that Mordechai received the honor to which he was justly entitled, Hashem split the word **א** by attaching the letter **א** to the end of Bigsan's name and the **י** to the beginning of **תרש**'s name. As a result, the royal book of records now stated that Mordechai saved the king from **בגתנא ותרש**. The *Megillah* alludes to this transformation when it says: **וימצא כתוב** - "and they found that it was written" – hinting that this was not the text that was originally written but was miraculously changed at this time.

Who Is in the Courtyard

ויאמר המלך מי בחצר

"The King said, 'Who is in the court?'" (Esther 6:4)

Why in the middle of the night when his sleep is disturbed does he suddenly ask, "Who is in the court?"

The *Alshich* explains: It cannot be expected that the King himself should attend to all the details of his government. Therefore, in all governments there are chiefs of staff who see to it that the protocols are properly maintained and that nothing happens which can embarrass the King. When the book of records was being read, Achashveirosh was reminded of the great favor Mordechai had done for him. Upon inquiring what honor and dignity had been done to Mordechai for this, he was told that nothing had been done for him. This shocked him greatly, and he asked: **מי בחצר** — "Who is in the court? Who is the one in charge of making sure that such things do not go unnoticed?"

Not knowing what was going on earlier in the night in the palace, Haman gleefully came to the King to get him to agree to his vicious plan. The King's young men said to him: **הנה המן עמד בחצר**, and with this they meant, **הנה המן** - Behold Haman - Haman is the chief of staff over the court. He is responsible to see that such oversights do not occur, and also **עמד בחצר** — it happens that he is currently in the courtyard."

Understanding the Consistent Trop

ונתון הלבוש והסוס על יד איש משרי המלך הפרתמים והלבישו את האיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו
והרכיבהו על הסוס ברחוב העיר וקראו לפניו ככה יעשה לאיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו

“And let the attire and the horse be put in the charge of one of the king’s noble courtiers. And let the man whom the king desires to honor be attired and paraded on the horse through the city square, while they proclaim before him: This is what is done for the man whom the king desires to honor!” (Esther 6:9)

The words: ונתון הלבוש והסוס על יד איש משרי המלך הפרתמים והלבישו את האיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו - “This is what is done for the man whom the king desires to honor”, appear twice in the *Megillah*. The first time is in the aforementioned *pasuk*, when Haman advises Achashveirosh what to do for the man who the king wants to honor. Haman advises that the man who the king wants to honor should be paraded on a horse through the city square, and they should proclaim before him: ונתון הלבוש והסוס על יד איש משרי המלך הפרתמים והלבישו את האיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו - “This is what is done for the man whom the king desires to honor”.

The second time is in *pasuk* 11, when the *pasuk* describes how Haman did what he described for Mordechai. Haman led him through the city square, and he proclaimed in front of him: ונתון הלבוש והסוס על יד איש משרי המלך הפרתמים והלבישו את האיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו - “This is what is done for the man whom the king desires to honor”.

The *trop* [cantillation] on the words: ונתון הלבוש והסוס על יד איש משרי המלך הפרתמים והלבישו את האיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו, is exactly the same both times. R’ Ben Tzion Felman (*Shelomim MeTzion*) brings down a *peshat* to explain the above. When Achashveirosh asked Haman, “What should we do with the man the king wants to honor”, Haman thought that Achashveirosh was referring to him. Like it says in the *pasuk*, “Haman said in his heart, who would the king want to honor more than me”. Since Haman thought Achashveirosh was talking about him, he explained what the king should do with lots of *hislavuv* [excitement], and when he got to explaining the bit about proclaiming in front of him: ונתון הלבוש והסוס על יד איש משרי המלך הפרתמים והלבישו את האיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו - “This is what is done for the man whom the king desires to honor”, since he thought it was for himself, he was very excited.

In the words of R’ Ben Tzion Felman: ונתון הלבוש והסוס על יד איש משרי המלך הפרתמים והלבישו את האיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו בקול גדול ובניגון נפלא שכדי שכאשר יעשו לו כך ברחוב העיר כולם יראו וישמעו את הכבוד הגדול שהוא מקבל ולא יהיה אף אחד שלא יעצור ממעשיו כדי לראותו בכבודו ובהדרו ובעצמו ניגן את הניגון הזה לפני המלך כדי לומר לו שבניגון הזה ובעוצמת קול (He explained what the king should do): With a loud voice and an exciting tune, in order that when this would be done for him in the streets, everyone would stop in their tracks to see and listen to what was happening, and look

at the honor that was being accorded— there wouldn't be a single person who wouldn't stop to look and see the display of honor. He himself sang the tune he wanted in front of the king, to describe what he wanted done for himself."

In the end, Achashveirosh said that Haman should do what he described for Mordechai, as this honor was for Mordechai and not himself. When Haman heard this, he suddenly wanted to down-tone things, like we find in the Gemara in *Megillah* (16a). However, Achashveirosh who realized this said: אל תפל דבר מכל אשר דברת – "Do exactly as you described, don't change anything".

Now, Haman thought, even if he had to lead Mordechai through the streets and proclaim: "This is what is done for the man whom the king desires to honor", he will say these words quietly, and in very bitter tone, in a way that people won't notice, and they will just carry on like normal.

However, Achashveirosh understood Haman's thought process, therefore, he stressed: אל תפל דבר מכל אשר דברת – "Do exactly as you described, don't change anything", don't even change the original tune which you planned on doing. Do it with the same excitement and loud voice which you described originally. Haman was left with no choice and he had to do what Achashveirosh asked, and had to proclaim in front of Mordechai: נכה יעשה לאיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו – "This is what is done for the man whom the king desires to honor", with the same excitement and loud voice as he described. This is why in both places the *trop* on top of these words is exactly the same. It is coming to teach us, that just like originally Haman described it with lots of excitement and with a specific tune, that is what happened in the end.

An Alternative Peshat into What Achashveirosh Was Alluding to When He Said: "Do Exactly as You Described, Don't Change Anything"

אל תפל דבר מכל אשר דברת

"Do exactly as you described, don't change anything." (Esther 6:10)

Achashveirosh specified clearly what Haman was to do for Mordechai, and no one would dare violate the King's order. So why was it necessary to repeat, "Do exactly as you described, don't change anything"?

The *Shaar Bas Rabbim* explains: Haman advised Achashveirosh that the proper way to honor a man whom the King especially wanted to honor was to "Dress him in the royal

robe that the King has worn, and to ride him on a horse that the King has ridden, and to place the royal crown on his head” (6:8). When Achashveirosh heard the mention of the word “crown,” his face reddened, and Haman did not refer to the crown any more in his conversation. Nevertheless, when Mordechai was paraded in the city square, he was wearing the crown, for the King’s instructions to Haman were, “Hurry, get the robe and the horse as you have said, and do all this for Mordechai the Jew.” In addition, he told him, “Do exactly as you described, don’t change anything.” This was an allusion to placing the crown on Mordechai’s head. Being unhappy about it, he did not mention it directly, but alluded to it in a way that Haman would understand.

The *Targum Sheini* writes that he instructed him to go to his treasuries and retrieve the golden crown which was brought for him from Macedonia, the one which he wore on the first day of his ascending to the throne. When Esther saw Mordechai dressed in royal garb with the kingly crown on his head, she gave praise to Hashem for answering him in his time of agony and said to Mordechai, “You have now witnessed the fulfillment of what is written: מְקִיָּם מֵעַפְרָה דָּל מֵאֲשַׁפֵּת יָרִים אֲבוֹיָן לְהוֹשִׁיב עִם נְדִיבִים וְכֹסֵא כְבוֹד יִנְחָלֵם - ‘He raises the needy from the dirt; from the trash heaps He lifts the destitute, to sit with the nobles and to endow them with honor’”.

The Game Changing Lesson Mordechai Derived from the Mitzvah of Kemitzah

ויקח המן את הלבוש ואת הסוס וילבש את מרדכי וירכיבהו ברחוב העיר ויקרא לפניו כנה יעשה
לאיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו

“And Haman took the clothes and the horse, and dressed Mordechai and caused him to ride through the streets of the city and proclaimed before him: ‘Thus shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor.’” (Esther 6:11)

The Gemara in *Megillah* (16a) relates: Haman went and found *talmidim* sitting before Mordechai, and he was demonstrating the laws of *kemitzah* to them...Haman asked the *talmidim*: “What topic are you learning?” They answered him: “When the *Beis HaMikdash* was in existence, one who pledged a *mincha* offering would bring a fistful of flour and would gain atonement through it.” Haman said to them: “Your fistful of flour has come and has pushed aside my ten thousand silver talents.”

Haman was seen approaching the *beis hamedresh* to call Mordechai. Mordechai was very frightened, as he thought that Haman was coming to apprehend him. He alerted his *talmidim* to scatter, lest they be captured together with him. Mordechai was

gripped with a genuine fear that Haman was going to prevail, at least to some degree, and that the Jews would suffer some casualties, *rachmona litzlon*.

In *Ateres Mordechai*, Rabbi Mordechai Rogow, explains that Mordechai knew that he would have nothing to fear if the Jews had staunchly maintained their loyalty to Torah and the *mitzvos*, for Hashem would certainly not abandon His cherished people to fall prey to Haman. However, the state of the Jews was not good. They had participated in the banquet of Achashveirosh, and many of the people had drifted far from the ways of our fathers. There were only a few dedicated individuals who had drawn close to Mordechai, and these were the devoted and trusted *talmidim*. These few, however, were not much of a consolation for Mordechai in face of the rampant departure from tradition that the multitudes had followed. This was the dismal condition that faced Mordechai. Then, at the point of almost total hopelessness, Mordechai studied the laws of *kemitzah* – the fistful of flour.

Suddenly, he detected a message of hope. The entire measure of flour is to be consumed by the Kohen after a small token amount is placed upon the *mizbayach*. Even though only a small representative amount is consecrated for the fire, its effect is far-reaching. To Mordechai, this meant that even though only a handful of *talmidim* had remained loyal, yet, these few were as the fistful of flour, which had the power of consecrating the entire measure. These dedicated *talmidim* were leaders, each with vision and direction, and they would succeed in educating and training the entire nation to rediscover their heritage.

When Haman asked about the day's lesson, he was forced to admit that the message was true. Haman recognized that his attempt to bribe the king with his ten thousand talents of silver was now eclipsed by this small core of dedicated and devoted *talmidim*. The key to the survival of the Jews was that there remained within the Jewish people even a small group of dedicated and committed young people who were prepared to defend the virtuous and true values of the Torah. If these *talmidim* would be prepared to ascend the altar of religious and devoted service of Hashem, then any and all threats from the enemies would vanish. This "handful" of dedicated *talmidim* has within them the ability to ward off all danger and to neutralize all peril.

A Jew Should Never Give Up Hope

The Gemara in *Megillah* (16a) relates: Haman went and found *talmidim* sitting before Mordechai, and he was demonstrating the laws of *kemitzah* to them...Haman asked the *talmidim*: "What topic were you learning?" They answered him: "When the *Beis HaMikdosh* was in existence, one who pledged a *mincha* offering would bring a fistful

of flour and would gain atonement through it.” Haman said to them: “Your fistful of flour has come and has pushed aside my ten thousand silver talents.”

In effect, Haman admitted here, “The game is over. I’ve lost.” He recognized that Mordechai’s teaching of the Torah law regarding the *kometz hamincha* (fist full of flour offering) was going to negate his entire master plan for the destruction of the Jews. Why Haman should come to such a conclusion is very puzzling. On top of that, the fact that Haman reached this conclusion because Mordechai happened to be teaching his *talmidim* the laws of the flour offering and its associated *kemitza* burning on the *mizbayach* begs for deeper analysis.

The *Roke’ach* finds a *remez* [allusion] in the above Gemara. The *Roke’ach* suggests that the conversation between Haman and Mordechai is in fact a reenactment of something that occurred many centuries earlier, namely the meeting between Yaakov (ancestor of Mordechai who was descended from Yaakov’s son Binyomin) and Eisav (ancestor of Haman who descended from Eisav’s grandson, Amalek).⁷

Parshas Vayishlach contains the story of Eisav coming with 400 men to meet Yaakov when the latter was coming back to Eretz Canaan from his years with Lavan. Yaakov, fearing the worst, prepared himself for the encounter with prayer, presents, and battle plans. The *Roke’ach* suggests that this incident laid the blueprint for what was going to happen in the *Megillah* between Haman and Mordechai. The *Roke’ach* writes that the *pasuk*: וילן שם בלילה - “And he slept there that night”, describing the fateful night prior to Yaakov’s encounter with Eisav, contains a hidden code foreshadowing the future event. The last letters of the words: וילן שם בלילה (read backwards) spell out the name Haman (*Hay, Mem, Nun*).

What is the connection between the meeting of Yaakov and Eisav and the meeting of Mordechai and Haman? The *Roke’ach* throws in one additional twist. The *pasuk* in *Vayishlach* states about Yaakov’s preparing an offering for his brother: ויקח בידו מנחה – “he took a gift (*mincha*) in his hand.” The *Roke’ach* says that this too alludes to the laws of the *korban mincha* that Mordechai was learning with his *talmidim*. Again, we may ask, what does one have to do with the other?

The Tolner Rebbe of Yerusholayim suggests that when Yaakov met Eisav and his 400 men, it was very easy for Yaakov to conclude that this was a lost cause. Yaakov had a family of 11 young sons, a camp consisting mainly of women and children. He is meeting

⁷ The *Arizal* writes that Mordechai was a *gilgul* [reincarnation] of Yaakov, and Haman was a *gilgul* of Eisav, this fits very well with the *Roke’ach*.

with Eisav, an experienced warrior, a man of the field, a hunter. Eisav is coming with a band of 400 men, each of whom was presumably of the same ilk as Eisav. This is a situation that looks beyond desperate. It would be the natural inclination of anybody to throw up their hands in despair. However, what does Yaakov do? He does whatever is possible for him to do. He prepares with prayer. He prepares with presents and flattery. He prepares for war, such as he could. The main thing is that he does whatever is possible to do. As meagre as it may seem, he does it anyway.

Yaakov is exhibiting an essential part of what being a Jew is all about: You do not give up! As Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin says in several places, “A Jew should never give up hope, no matter what the odds are, no matter what the situation is (*ayn l'Yehudi l'hisya'esh klal*)”. This explains the fact that Yaakov sent Eisav a present that must have been meager in Eisav's eyes. Can we imagine that Eisav needed the few camels, goats, and donkeys that Yaakov was sending to him? By this time, Eisav was probably a very wealthy man. What is the whole point of sending Eisav this little “*mincha*”, this little present? The answer is, “This is what I can afford. This is what I have. This is the effort (*hishtadlus*) that I am capable of making. This is what I need to do.”

A person can only do what he is able to do. We need to have confidence that the Ribbono Shel Olam will help us accomplish the rest. This idea explains the very interesting *pasuk* cited earlier: “And he slept there that night”. Tomorrow is the fateful meeting between Yaakov and Eisav. He was going to face an army of 400 men. In his mind, he was perhaps on the eve of a massacre of his family. How can a person go to sleep on such a night? However, the *pasuk* testifies about Yaakov: “And he slept there that night”. This is because Yaakov was confident about what he did. He did everything that he could do and that is all that the Ribbono Shel Olam ever asks of anyone.

This incident between Yaakov and Eisav, when Yaakov, rather than giving up hope and throwing up his hands in despair, did what he was capable of doing, set the precedent and provided the blueprint for all future relationships between Jews and *goyim*. You do what you can do, as meagre as it may seem. You *daven* and you hope for the best. But you do not throw up your hands in despair.

This is precisely what Mordechai did. After Esther was taken into the palace and all hope seemed lost, why did Mordechai go every single day to visit her? What was the point? Was it going to help? Why did Mordechai insist that she should not tell her background? After all, it was hopeless, a lost cause! No! Because a Jew persists and does not give up hope. He does whatever he is capable of doing.

Going to the palace every day to check on Esther was the only thing Mordechai could do to try to keep her strong. If that is the only thing I can do, then I am going to do it, despite the fact that it appears to be a hopeless gesture. I am not going to ask myself "What is the likelihood of success? What are the odds? How is this going to help?" You do what you need to do.

Where did Mordechai learn this? He learned it from Yaakov. That is what the *Roke'ach* means that the story of Yaakov and Eisav is the forerunner of the story of Mordechai and Haman. Mordechai learned from his grandfather, Yaakov Avinu, that when faced with what seems to be a desperate situation, we do not throw up our hands in despair. We do our best and leave the rest for Hashem to handle.

According to the Viznitzer Rebbe, this is what totally deflated Haman. When Haman walks into Mordechai and he sees him learning with his *talmidim* - which is in itself a *chiddush* [novelty] – what did they happen to be learning? They should have been learning the laws of dying *al pi kiddush* Hashem. This after all was what most likely was going to happen. However, Haman finds them learning the laws of how to offer a *korban mincha* in the *Beis HaMikdosh*! What *Beis HaMikdosh*? They are in Persia and Haman is about to destroy all the Jews. Common sense would insist that there would never again be a *Beis HaMikdosh*. This is ridiculous! Today we study the *halachos* of *kodshim* and *menachos* because we pray: "speedily may the *Beis HaMikdosh* be rebuilt". However, under the circumstances at that time, they were facing impossible odds. Haman was shocked. "There is never again going to be a *Beis HaMikdosh* – and yet you are learning the laws of the *mincha* offering?!"

When Haman saw that, he said "The show is over – for me!" When dealing with people who even in such dire straits still have optimism and confident faith and are preparing for a seemingly non-existent future - this is a people that will not be defeated. Therefore, Haman says, "Your little *kometz hamincha* is going to neutralize all my plans." This is what the *Roke'ach* means when he says the *mincha* of Yaakov Avinu corresponds to the learning of the *mincha* of Mordechai and his *talmidim*. This has to be one of the preeminent lessons of the story of Purim. No matter how bleak the situation may appear, a Jew never gives up hope.

After the *Megillah* reading, we sing *Shoshanas Yaakov*, a prayer that includes the stanza "All those who have faith in You will never be embarrassed or shamed, those people who put their faith in You." This is the story of Purim and it is the story of Jews throughout our history. There have been many occasions in Jewish history when the

only “logical” and “rational” thing to do was to give up. However, we did not give up. As a result, we are still here.

The *Haftorah* of *Parshas Zachor*, which is about the dramatic story of Shaul HaMelech and Shmuel HaNovi, contains the *pasuk*: נצח ישראל לא ישקר - “Moreover the Eternal One of Yisroel does not lie” (Shmuel I 15:29). This is the message of that *pasuk*. There will always be a Ribbono Shel Olam and there will always be a Jewish people and there will always be a Torah. “It will not be forgotten from the mouth of his children” (*Devorim* 31:21). This is the story of Yaakov and Eisav. This is the story of Mordechai and Esther. With Hashem’s Help, this will be our story when we will greet the Moshiach speedily in our day, *Amen*. (R’ Frand, quoting a *shmooze* from the Tolner Rebbe)

Why Haman Personally Dressed, Paraded, and Had to Make a Proclamation for Mordechai

Why did the King order Haman to personally dress Mordechai with the kingly apparel, parade him in the city square and make a public proclamation about him?

The *Manas HaLevi* explains: In the *Megillah*, the word “HaMelech” - “the King” - refers to Hashem, and the message of the *Megillah* is that Hashem always protects His beloved children - the Jewish people.

Hashem’s way of reward is *middah keneged middah* - measure for measure - and everything that occurs is an act of Divine Providence.

Haman with his evil decree caused righteous Mordechai to do three things: 1) “He rent his clothes and put on sackcloth” 2) “He went out into the midst of the city” and 3) “He cried with a loud bitter cry.” (4:1)

Mordechai deserved restitution for his pain and suffering. Therefore, The King - Hashem - ordered Haman to personally compensate the righteous Mordechai by particularly doing three things for him: 1) Dressing him in royal apparel; 2) Parading him in the city square; 3) Publicly proclaiming before him “so shall be done to the man whom the King - Hashem - desires to honor.”

An Incredible Vort from Rebbetzen Abramsky

Reb Yechezkel Abramsky *zt”l* once related the following:

One year on Purim night, in London, I read *Megillah* for my wife at 1 in the morning. That year on *erev* Purim my *rebbetzen* had a terrible toothache and she wasn’t up to hearing *Megillah* at the ideal time. At 1 in the morning, she felt better, and she asked

me to read her the *Megillah*. When I finished reading the *Megillah* I asked her, “Raizel, what do you think Mordechai was thinking when he was on the horse, and Haman was leading him through the city square proclaiming, “so shall be done to the man who the king wants to honor?”.

She answered Mordechai was probably thinking: “*Kavod* such as this is something fit for drunkards, and isn’t even *kavod*, when is this stupidity going to finish, so that I can get back to my learning”.

What Was the Heter for Mordechai to Have a Haircut from a Non-Jew

ויקח המן את הלבוש ואת הסוס

“Haman took the garments and the horse.” (Esther 6:11)

The Gemara in *Megillah* (16a) relates, that Haman told Mordechai to put on the royal clothes and then ride the horse of the king. Mordechai said, that he was unable to do so, until he had a haircut first, as it’s not respectful to wear the royal clothes without first having a haircut. Esther went around telling all the barbers to close, and Haman was left with no choice, but to perform the haircut himself.

The question is, the Mishnah in *Avodah Zorah* (27a) teaches, that it is forbidden to get a haircut from a non-Jew. R’ Meir forbids doing so in all places, whereas the Chachomim allow it in the *reshus harabim* [public domain], but not in private. If having a haircut from a non-Jew is forbidden, how was Mordechai allowed?

The *Gevul Binyomin* (*Megillah* 17a cited in *Asifas Zekeinim*) answers, that the Chachomim hold that it is allowed in a *reshus harabim*. When Haman gave Mordechai his haircut there were other people present, it was therefore considered like a *reshus harabim* and allowed.

The *Gevul Binyomin* (*Megillah* 17a cited in *Asifas Zekeinim*) offers a second answer. *Tosfos* in *Avodah Zorah* (29a) learns that the *issur* is when the barber is using a razor, and it is very easy to cause damage. If, however, the barber uses scissors where damage is not as likely it is allowed. Haman used scissors when giving Mordechai a haircut (as is clear from the Gemara), therefore, there was no *issur* involved.

The *Madanay Asher* answers, that it’s clear from the *Rishonim* that the reason for the *issur* is that we are scared that the non-Jew will try and kill the Jew. In our case this was not of concern, as Achashveirosh had commanded Haman to get Mordechai prepared,

and he was scared to disobey the king. Since he was scared, there was no concern of the barber trying to kill the Jew, therefore, it was allowed.

A second answer the *Madanay Asher* suggests, is that it's clear from the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh Deah*, 157) that for an *adam choshuv*, important person, it's different. Mordechai was an *adam choshuv*, therefore, it was allowed.

A Peshat from the Rogatchover

וישב מרדכי אל שער המלך והמן נדחף אל ביתו אבל וחפוי ראש

“Then Mordechai returned to the king’s gate, while Haman hurried home, in mourning, with his head covered.” (Esther 6:12)

The Gemara in *Megillah* (16a) writes: כי הוה נקיט ואזיל בשבילא דבי המן חזיתיה ברתייה דקיימא מאיגרא סברה האי דרכיב אבוה והאי דמסגי קמיה מרדכי שקלה עציצא דבית הכסא ושדיתיה ארישא - “As Haman was taking Mordechai along the street of Haman’s house, Haman’s daughter was standing on the roof and saw the spectacle. She thought to herself that the one who is riding on the horse must be her father, and the one walking before him must be Mordechai. She then took a chamber pot full of waste and cast its contents onto the head of her father, (whom she mistakenly took as Mordechai). When Haman raised his eyes in disgust afterward, and looked up at his daughter, she saw that he was her father. In her distress, she fell from the roof to the ground and died.”

The Gemara continues: והמן נדחף אל ביתו אבל וחפוי ראש על בתו וחפוי ראש על שאירע לו - “But Haman hastened to his house, mourning, and having his head covered, ‘Mourning’ over the death of his daughter. ‘And having his head covered’ due to what had happened to him, as his head was full of filth.”

The Gemara says Haman was an *avel* [in mourning] over the fact that he lost his daughter and *chofuy rosh*, because his head was covered with waste. If, so, the *pasuk* should first mention he was *chofuy rosh* and only then say he was an *avel* – the reason Haman became an *avel* was because after his daughter realized she threw waste on him she fell off the roof, why does the *pasuk* mention it the other way around?

The Rogatchover once *derech sachus* [jokingly] offered an answer based on the Gemara in *Bava Kama* (17a). The Gemara says: אמר רבה זרק כלי מראש הגג ובא אחר ושברו במקל - “Rabbah says: If one threw a vessel from a roof and another came and broke it with a stick as it was falling, the one who hit it with the stick is exempt from all liability as we say to him that he broke a broken vessel”.

Tosfos speaks out: נראה דאם זרק אבן או חץ על הכלי ובא אחר וקדם ושברו דפשיטא דחייב ולא – שייך כאן מנא תבירא תבר – “It seems that if a person throws a rock or arrow towards a vessel and another person comes along and shatters the vessel before the projectile strikes it, certainly the one who shattered the vessel (and not the one who threw the rock) is liable.” *Tosfos* says there is a difference between if one throws the vessel itself and if one throws a projectile towards the vessel.

We can apply this distinction to our case. Haman’s daughter poured waste on her father’s head, even before it got there, she realized what had happened and she immediately jumped off the roof. In regard to Haman’s daughter, since she threw herself off the roof, as soon as she jumped, she was already considered dead - like a vessel where we say that as soon as it’s thrown off the roof: מנא תבירא תבר – it’s already considered broken. In regard to Haman however, whose daughter threw waste towards his head, the waste has the status of a projectile going towards a vessel and as long as it hasn’t got there, we don’t see it as if anything has happened. Therefore, as soon as Haman’s daughter jumped off the roof, she was already considered dead, however, Haman was only considered *chofuy rosh*, when the waste actually covered him. Therefore, the *pasuk* says he was *aval*, before it mentions that he was *chofuy rosh*.

However, we can ask on the above as perhaps we only apply the *din* of, מנא תבירא תבר, when it comes to matters involving money, however, in matters concerning *aveilus* who says we apply the above. The Gemara in *Bava Kama* (26b) discusses a case of: זרק תינוק – “Someone threw a child off a roof” and: בא אחר וקבלו בסייף – “Another came along and impaled him on his sword”. The Gemara discusses if the second person is liable for anything? The Gemara cites a dispute between Rabbi Yehuda ben Beseira and the Rabbanon. Rabbi Yehuda ben Beseira maintains the second person is liable: מפני – “Because he brought the victims death closer”. We see, that even though the child will inevitably die, as long as he is still alive if someone brings the child’s death nearer, he is liable. Although the Rabbanon argue and hold that the second one isn’t liable, it’s for a side issue, we see that we don’t say, מנא תבירא תבר, when it comes to *aveilus*.

Additionally, the above *peshat* doesn’t fit with the Gemara in *Megillah*. The Gemara says: שקלה עציצא דבית הכסא ושדיתיה ארישא דאבוה דלי עיניה וחזת דאבוה הוא נפלה מאיגרא – “She then took a chamber pot full of waste and cast its contents onto the head of her father, (whom she mistakenly took as Mordechai). When Haman raised his eyes in disgust afterward, and looked up at his daughter, she saw that he was her father. In her distress, she fell from the roof to the ground and died.” We see that only

after the waste landed on Haman's head and he looked up did his daughter jump, not before that. (*Shalmay Todah*)

Understanding Why Haman's Daughter Took Such Drastic Measures

After Haman finished parading Mordechai through the streets of Shushan, he returned to his home mourning and with his head covered. The Gemara (*Megillah* 16a) explains that when Haman was leading Mordechai through Shushan on the King's royal horse, Haman's daughter overheard what was going on. When she looked down, she could not discern who was who, so she naturally assumed that Mordechai was pulling the horse on which her esteemed father Haman was sitting as he was honored throughout the streets of Shushan.

In her tremendous hatred for Mordechai, she took some garbage from her house and poured it onto the head of the person leading the horse, who she assumed was Mordechai. When he looked up, she was horrified to see that it was her father Haman. She was so overcome by emotion that she jumped out of her house to her death. This well-known incident is difficult to understand. Everyone has done things to his parents that he later regretted, but it should not make him suicidal, especially if it was only an accident. Why did Haman's daughter decide to kill herself when she realized what she had done?

Rav Yitzchok Sorotzkin beautifully explains that Amalek is descended from Eisav, who excelled in one mitzvah: honoring his father. Even though the commentators discuss the sins that the Jews committed that caused them to fall into the hands of Amalek, they add that Amalek also needs their own positive merit, and their primary good deed is the mitzvah of honoring their parents.

This explains why Moshe chose Yehoshua to lead the battle against Amalek at the end of *Parshas Beshalach*, as Yehoshua came from the tribe of Yosef, who did not hurt his father Yaakov through the sin of selling Yosef like the other brothers, so he was the best candidate to lead the battle against Amalek who excelled in the area of honoring their parents.

There was another tribe that had nothing to do with the sin of selling Yosef: Binyomin, from whom Mordechai and Esther were descended, making them perfectly suited to vanquish Haman. Esther had the extra merit of having never caused any pain to her parents because she was born as an orphan from both her father and mother, and she was therefore the perfect foil to Haman. In light of this insight into the strength and

power of Amalek and his descendants, it is now quite understandable why Haman's daughter was so distraught over the pain that she inadvertently caused her father to the point that she committed suicide.

Why Wasn't Haman's Daughter Able to Recognize Her Father

We mentioned above, that Haman's daughter poured garbage on her father by mistake, and ended up so distraught that she killed herself. The question is, how exactly did this happen, why was she not able to recognize the voice of her father?

The *Ben Yehoyada* answers: כי מחמת שהיה מכריז בכמה מבואות ניחר גרונו ונשתנה קולו ונמצא זה אביה - "Since he went through all the streets and alleyways shouting, his throat was effected and his voice started to sound different, and on the contrary this is what confused her, and made her think this wasn't her father".

However, why was she not able to see who he was based on what he looked like?

The *Ben Yehoyada* explains that Haman was embarrassed at what he was doing, so he held his head low and faced the ground. Since he was facing the ground, his daughter who was standing above on the roof top was unable to see him and made a mistake.

However, he then asks, surely, she should have been able to see that the person on the horse was Mordechai and not her father?

He answers that Mordechai was weak from fasting for three nights and two days and was unable to lift up his head whilst on the horse, so he was bent over leaning on the horse, therefore, Haman's daughter couldn't see his face.

Some answer, that Mordechai always ran away from *kavod* [honor], therefore, he specially bent over to hide his face. Since Mordechai made sure to hide his face, Haman's daughter was unable to recognize him. Some say that this is one of the reasons why there is a *minhag* to wear masks on Purim.

The *Ibn Ezra* learns, that Mordechai covered his face with a mask, according to this it's easy to understand why Haman's daughter couldn't see who it was.

However, I think the simplest answer to explain why Haman's daughter couldn't recognize her father's voice, or see who it was is that she was very high up, and it's hard to see and hear from so high up.

Some answer, Haman changed his voice specially in order that people wouldn't recognize that it was him, therefore, his daughter couldn't tell.

Others answer, that Haman's daughter knew the extent of her father's haughtiness, and she knew that he would even do things like sit on a horse and call out by himself: "So shall be done to the man who the king wants to honor". Therefore, although she heard her father calling out, "So shall be done to the man who the king wants to honor", she didn't rule out the option that he was the one on the horse.

One final answer I saw is: Leading Mordechai through the streets was a great embarrassment to Haman. So, after dressing Mordechai in the royal garb, he cunningly turned to Mordechai and asked him for permission to wear his clothing as he led him through the city square. Mordechai consented, thinking this would only intensify Haman's humiliation since the people viewing the parade would recognize that the one leading was really Haman.

When Haman's daughter looked down from the rooftop and saw someone dressed in Jewish garb leading someone in royal garb, she was convinced that the leader was undoubtedly Mordechai and that the one on the horse was her father. However, when her father looked up to her and she saw his face, she realized her error and committed suicide by throwing herself from the roof.

Even Zeresh Understood the Power of Tefillah

כי נפל תפול לפניו

"You will fall before him." (6:13)

Zeresh told Haman: כי נפל תפול לפניו - "You will fall before him [Mordechai]". What was Zeresh saying? Was she telling Haman there is no hope for him and he will fall before Mordechai?

The *Malbim* explains that she was offering advice. She told Haman to humble himself before Mordechai. נפל תפול לפניו, act as though you are weaker than him because then Mordechai will stop *davening*, and then there will be hope for you. But if you fight Mordechai and he *davens* to be saved, Hashem will certainly listen to his *tefillos*.

Indeed, immediately after Haman led Mordechai through the streets of Shushan with immense honor, Mordechai returned to his *tefillos*, as it states (6:12): וישב מרדכי אל שער - "Mordechai returned to the king's gate", and Rashi writes: לשקו ולתעניתו - "That he returned to his sackcloth and fasting". He wisely didn't stop *davening*, and that is what brought about the salvation.

The *Avnei Nezer zt"l* was once ill, and when he began feeling better, he said that sometimes the *yetzer horah* causes people to feel a bit better, so they will stop *davening*. The *Avnei Nezer* noted that Mordechai didn't make this mistake. He continued *davening* even after all the honor he received.

This is one of the lessons of Purim, to believe in the power of *tefillah*. And particularly, on Purim itself, Purim is an *eis ratzon* [special time] for *tefillah*.

In the spirit of Purim, we suggest why Haman's youngest son was called Vayizasa. The reason is that he saw his nine brothers hanging and didn't run away! Therefore, for being so foolish, he deserved the name Vayizasa! (Vayizasa is a name people comically use on Purim to describe someone unwise.)

This joke reminds us that if there's a problem, and you have an opportunity to escape from it, you must be a fool not to utilize it. We are referring to *tefillah* on Purim. Look around yourself for a moment, consider all your neighbors' homes. Is there a family that doesn't have a serious problem? For one, it is related to health; for a second, it is about *shidduchim*; for a third, it is about *nachas*; and for a fourth, it is about *parnassah*. But there's a solution. You can *daven* on Taanis Esther and on Purim. Only a Vayizasa will be callous and not take advantage of these holy times. (R' Elimelech Biderman)

פרק ז'

The Mumar's Eyeball


מי הוא זה ואי זה הוא אשר מלאו לבו לעשות כן

“Who is he and where is he who dared to do this?” (Esther 7:5)

The Apter Rav notes the following in his *sefer Ohav Yisroel*:

The *Megillah* says that Esther requested that the king spare her life, that her people were sold to be destroyed (*nimkarnu l'hashmid*). Why the language “we were sold” - should it not have been “we were decreed for death”? Secondly, why does Achashveirosh say: “*mee hu zeh, v'ay zeh hu*” - who is behind all this? Surely, he was aware of the decree; he himself signed it “*v'yichtov b'shem hamelech*”!

R' Sherira Gaon relates a *ma'aseh* that happened: There was a rich man who owned a *sefer* Torah that was written by Ezra HaSofer. Upon his death, his 2 sons both desired to possess it and the local *beis din paskened* that a drawing would be utilized to determine who would obtain it. The winning brother was elated; the loser was

dejected, notwithstanding that he received other material riches instead. A local *mumar* [heretic] was angry that somebody would prefer a Torah over riches. Therefore, he disguised himself and went to the *shul* housing the *sefer* Torah. At night, when all had left, he took out the *sefer* Torah and opened to the phrase “*v'avadtem es Hashem, u'vayrach es lachmecha*” (you shall SERVE Hashem) (*Shemos* 23:25). He erased the letter “*ayin*” in “*v'avadtem*” and replaced it with the letter “*aleph*”, changing the meaning of the phrase to a blasphemous statement (the word for “serve” became “destroy”). When the “mistake” in the *sefer* Torah was discovered, the owner was shocked and hurt that even if “corrected”, the *sefer* Torah surely must not have been written by Ezra HaSofer. The deceased father came to this man in a dream and revealed to his son what had actually occurred. The father told the son not to have the *sefer* Torah fixed, because it was decreed in heaven that Ezra himself would go and fix the “error”. In addition, the father told the son to go look under the *shulchan* and there he would find the actual “eye” of the *mumar*, as “*ayin tachas ayin*” -- the *mumar* took away the “*ayin*” of the Torah, so his “*ayin*” was taken away (an eye for an eye). As the father said, so it was. 

Based on this, we can answer our initial questions. Originally, Haman approached the king by saying only to enslave the Jews, bribing the king with 10,000 *kikar* of *kesef*. The king agreed to this and a *shtar mechira* [sales document] was drawn up in *lashon hakodesh* [Hebrew]. The king signed this decree and Haman took it to the scribes for transmission. However, before the scribes received it, Haman erased the “*ayin*” of the *shtar's* requirement of servitude “*l'avdam*”, and replaced it with an “*aleph*”, changing the meaning of the *shtar* to one of annihilation (“they shall serve” became “they shall be destroyed”). (The scribes elaborated this theme and added “*l'hashmid, l'harog, v'laavad*” - they shall be killed.) When the king finally was confronted with Esther's pleas for mercy, Esther said that the Jews were originally aimed for slavery “*nimkarnu*”, but now they were aimed for death (maybe she knew this with *Ruach Hakodesh* or maybe Haman's “original” plan had been public knowledge). The king honestly asked “*mee hu zeh?*” Who decreed death on the Jews? I only decreed servitude! That's why he was surprised to learn about this death decree on the Jews - he didn't even know about it! (R' Daniel Lasar)

The Malach Ensured That Esther Was Only “Modeh B'miktzas” to Achashveirosh’s Question

Parshas Mishpotim contains the *halachos* of *shomrim* [watchers]. The *pasuk* writes: “If a man shall give money or vessels to his fellow to safeguard, and they are stolen from the house of the man, if the thief is found, he shall pay double. If the thief is not found,

then the householder shall approach the court that he had not laid his hand upon his fellow's property. For every item of liability – whether an ox, a donkey, a sheep, or a garment – regarding any lost item about which he says, **ki hu zeh!** ('this is it!'), to the court shall come both their claims. Whoever the court finds guilty shall pay double to his fellow." (*Shemos* 22:6-8)

When a person asks someone to watch something for him and it is stolen, any item about which the watchman says "**ki hu zeh**" triggers a requirement for the watchman to swear to the owner. Rashi here brings the *p'shuto shel mikra* [simple interpretation of the *pasukim*], but then brings the *drosha* of *Chazal* on the words "**ki hu zeh**": Namely, that an oath is not imposed on a person unless he admits part of the obligation.

The Gemara derives from these words the *halachic* requirement of "*modeh b'miktzas*" – admitting part of a financial obligation. This applies classically to a loan situation. Reuven claims that he lent Shimon \$200, and he has not yet been repaid. If Shimon denies the loan ever took place, or he claims he already fully paid back the loan ("*kofer hakol*"), he does not need to pay and he does not even need to swear on a Torah level (unless Reuven has some type of proof to back up his claim). However, where there is a partial admission of debt, Shimon must take an oath to support his claim of partial payment. This is derived exegetically from this *pasuk* of "...*Asher yomar 'ki hu zeh...'*".

The *sefer Toldos Yitzchok* explains how this expression teaches the halachah of "*modeh b'miktzas*". In order to appreciate the *Toldos Yitzchok*, we need to understand a little bit about Hebrew grammar. The word "*hu*" (he) is what is known as *lashon nistar*. It is "third person" (like he, she, them and that) and refers to someone out there, as opposed to someone in front of me. On the other hand, the word "*zeh*" (this) is what is known as *lashon nochach*. It is "second person" (like you and this) and refers to someone or something in front of me. The complete denial of debt is *lashon nistar* ("*hu*") because it is third person or distant from me. The admission of debt is *lashon nochach* ("*zeh*") because it is second person or right in front of me. The combination of "*zeh*" and "*hu*" indicates something that is both right here and not right here – a partial admission ("*modeh b'miktzas*").

With this principle, the *Toldos Yitzchok* gives a beautiful interpretation of a *pasuk* in Shmuel. The Ribbono Shel Olam told Shmuel to anoint one of the sons of Yishai as the next king of Yisroel. Yishai presented his oldest son, Elihu, and Hashem told Shmuel that he was rejected. Yishai presented his sons to Shmuel one by one and each one was rejected, until he came to Dovid, who the *pasuk* describes as "reddish in complexion

with beautiful eyes.” (Shmuel I 16:12) At that point, Hashem told Shmuel: “Arise, anoint him, *ki zeh hu* (for he is the one).”

The Gemara says that Shmuel was hesitant to anoint this youngest son of Yishai. Shmuel could not believe that this was going to be the future king of Yisroel because he was reddish in complexion. Shmuel took this reddish complexion to indicate that Dovid was a murderer. (Red like blood.) The Ribbono Shel Olam says, yes, his complexion is red like blood, but he is “*yefeh aynayim*” – when he kills, he only kills with the authorization of *Beis Din*.

Eisav was also reddish in complexion. He was in fact a killer. However, while Dovid was a warrior, he fought with the authorization of the Ribbono Shel Olam. Hashem said “*Ki zeh hu*” – the *ZEH* (what is in front of you) is in fact red, but what is hidden (*nistar*) in that the *ZEH* is a *HU*, a *melech* Yisroel who will only kill with the permission of the *Sanhedrin*.

Rav Meir Shapiro once similarly interpreted a *pasuk* in *Megillas Esther*. The *Megillah* writes that when Esther invited Haman and Achashveirosh to her meal and told the king about the plot to kill her people, Achashveirosh asked: *Mi hu zeh, v'eizeh hu?* (Who is this and which one is he?) (Esther 7:5) Esther responds, “It is...this wicked Haman...” (Esther 7:6)

Rav Meir Shapiro explains beautifully: Achashveirosh hated the Jews just as much as Haman, so when he asks Esther “*Mi hu ZEH, v'eizeh HU?*” his question is “Who are you referring to? Are you referring to *ZEH* – the Haman that you KNOW wants to kill the Jews, as is obvious in front of you – or are you referring to the *HU* – the person who is also trying to kill the Jews but in a way that is not so obvious – that is hidden (Achashveirosh himself)? Achashveirosh is trying to understand – does she really know the ‘score,’ that I hate the Jews as much as Haman does?”

Esther knew the score. Esther knew that it was the *ZEH* (Haman) and she knew that it was also the *HU* (Achashveirosh). She pointed her finger and said “Haman *harah haZEH*” (THIS wicked Haman). The Gemara says she was really pointing at Achashveirosh but a *malach* [an angel] came and pushed her finger away in the direction of Haman, so that she would not reveal to the king what she really understood about him. (R' Frand)

Why Didn't Mordechai Knock Out Haman's Teeth

המן הרע הזה

“This wicked Haman” (Esther 7:6)

In the *Haggadah* we are told that the way to deal with a *rosha* is to knock out his teeth. There is no doubt that Haman was a *rosha*, so why didn't Mordechai knock out Haman's teeth?

According to the Medrash, Achashveirosh once sent two divisions of his army to battle. One was headed by Haman and the other by Mordechai. He gave each one an equal supply of food. Haman was careless and let his soldiers finish the food in a short period of time. Desperately, he came to Mordechai and begged him to give him some of his food, but Mordechai refused. Haman, fearing that his soldiers would revolt against him, sold himself to Mordechai as a slave and, thus, Mordechai supplied him with food.

When a Jewish master knocks out the tooth of his non-Jewish servant, he becomes free (*Shemos* 21:26). Not wanting to lose such a slave as Haman, Mordechai refrained from knocking out Haman's teeth. (R' Moshe Bogomilsky)

Esther's Chance to Do *Teshuvah* for Shaul's Mistake

והמן עמד לבקש על נפשו מאסתר המלכה

“And Haman remained to beg Queen Esther for his life.” (Esther 7:7)

Everything in the *Megillah* illustrates the workings of Divine Providence. How does this principle apply to the episode in which Haman pleads with the Queen for his life?

As explained above, Esther was a descendant of Shaul HaMelech, who erred when he did not follow instructions to kill Agag the King of Amalek. Therefore, by bringing about the downfall of Haman, she was in a sense rectifying her ancestor's iniquity.

According to the Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:1) ultimate *teshuvah* is accomplished when all the details of the situation in which the iniquity occurred are repeated and one does not succumb to the temptation. Since Shaul let Agag live out of pity for him (*Shmuel* 1, 15:9), Esther was therefore now put through the same test. When she had no pity on Haman and was unyielding to his pleas, her ancestor Shaul received his forgiveness and: וחמת המלך שבבה - “the anger of the King — Hashem, King of the universe — abated” (7:10). (R' Moshe Bogomilsky, quoting the *Zer Zahav*)

Why Charvona Suddenly Plucked Up the Courage to Speak Against Haman

ופני המן חפוי

“Haman’s face was covered.” (Esther 7:8)

The *Ibn Ezra* explains that the custom in Persia was, that if the king was angry at a certain person, they would cover over his face, this is what the *pasuk* means: ופני המן חפוי, the king was angry with Haman, therefore, he had his face covered.

However, the question is, why do we need to be taught this in the *Megillah*?

The Brisker Rav explains, that Charvona was one of the low-end ministers of the king, like we find that at the beginning of the *Megillah* he is listed very low down on the list. Being that he was low down, he was too scared to speak up against Haman, who ranked top of the list as he was scared that he would take revenge. However, now that Haman’s face was covered over, and the king was angry with him, he was no longer scared, therefore, this time he plucked up the courage and spoke against him.

How the Gemara Knows That Charvonah Was a Partner with a Haman

ויאמר חרבונה גם הנה העץ אשר עשה המן למרדכי... עומד בבית המן גבה חמשים אמה

“And Charvonah said, ‘Behold there is also the gallows which Haman made for Mordechai... standing in the house of Haman fifty cubits high.’” (Esther 7:9)

The Gemara in *Megillah* (16a) says that Charvonah conspired with Haman to hang Mordechai. How did the Gemara know this?

The Dubner Maggid in *Kol Yaakov* explains with the following *moshul* [parable]: There was a blind beggar who used to make his rounds with a little boy guiding him through the streets. One night before retiring to bed he counted his collection for the day and found that he had collected thirty coins. During the night the young boy stole his wallet. When the beggar arose and realized his misfortune, he cried bitterly. The young boy, frightened of the consequences, handed him the wallet, saying, “I found the thirty coins you lost.” When the blind beggar heard this, he grabbed the boy and began to beat him. The boy sobbed; “I did you a favor; why are you beating me?” The beggar told him, “Obviously, you were the thief because otherwise how would you know that there were thirty coins in my wallet?”

Since Charvonah knew the exact dimensions of the gallows, obviously he was a partner in the plot.

The Gallows Fit for a King

We just mentioned the *pasuk*: גם הנה העץ אשר עשה המן למרדכי אשר דבר טוב על המלך - "Behold, there is also the gallows, which Haman made for Mordechai who spoke good for the King." When did Mordechai ever "speak good" for King Achashveirosh?

Haman's advisors told him to make a gallows and get the King's consent to hang Mordechai. Immediately, he hired one of the best carpenters in Shushan Habirah and instructed him to build a 50-cubit-high pole. The carpenter was not aware of its purpose, but, knowing Haman's wealth, he made it of the most expensive wood and adorned it with gold.

Upon completion, he handed Haman a hefty bill. Somewhat surprised, he said to the carpenter, "Who ever heard of paying such a huge amount for a 50-cubit pole?" The carpenter replied, "Why don't you look at what I did, and then you will agree that my fee is reasonable." When Haman saw the golden pole, he became enraged and shouted, "I wanted this to serve as a gallows for Mordechai; the one you made is *tov al hamelech* - good for the King!"

Upon hearing from Charvonah that Haman said the gallows "is good for the King," Achashveirosh immediately bellowed, "hang him on it!" (R' Moshe Bogomilsky *b'shem* R' Shmuel Tzvi Fuchs)

Understanding the Double "Chaf"

וחמת המלך שככה

"And the fury of the King abated." (7:10)

Instead of "*shachachah*" (with two "*chafs*") it should have said "*shachah*"?

The *Nachal Eshkol* explains: According to the Medrash Rabbah, it was not only Mordechai who intervened on behalf of the Jewish people, but Moshe Rabbeinu too. Thanks to his *tefillos* the decree against them was nullified. The word "*shachachah*" with two "*chafs*" has the numerical value of three hundred and forty-five, the same as the name "Moshe." With this spelling the *Megillah* is alluding that the wrath of HaMelech – Hashem, the King - subsided in merit of Moshe.

Alternatively, the *Maharsha* explains: Achashveirosh never forgave Haman for persuading him to have Vashti executed. In addition, he was angry at Haman for trying to assault Esther while he was out in the palace garden. Now that Haman was hung, the repetition of the letter “*chaf*” indicates that the twofold anger of the King against him abated.

פרק ח'

Why Was Esther Allowed to Accept the State of Haman as a Gift?

ביום ההוא נתן המלך אחשוורוש לאסתר המלכה את בית המן ותשם אסתר את מרדכי על בית המן

“On that day, King Achashveirosh gave Queen Esther the house of Haman. Esther placed Mordechai in charge over Haman’s house.” (Esther 8:1-2)

There is a *mitzvas aseh* [positive commandment] to destroy the memory of Amalek (Rambam, *Hilchos Melachim* 5:5). Since this was “the estate of Haman,” why did Esther accept it as a gift?

According to halachah the property of people who are put to death by the King automatically becomes the King’s possession (Sanhedrin 48b). Since Achashveirosh personally issued the order that Haman be hung, Haman’s property automatically became his. Consequently, it was permissible for Esther to take it since it was no longer considered the property of an Amalakite. Thus, after King Achashveirosh said to Queen Esther and Mordechai the Jew, “Behold I have given Haman’s estate to Esther,” he also added: “and he has been hanged because he plotted against the Jews” (8:8), to emphasize that it was permitted for her to take it since he was hung by the decree of the King.

This is analogous to what the Gemara in *Gittin* (38a) says regarding the land of Aman and Moav. The Torah forbade us from distressing or provoking war with Moav or Amon, and thus we cannot directly take their lands (*Devorim* 2:10,19). However, after they were defeated by Sichon and the land was considered Sichon’s, it was permissible for the Jews to take the land (see R’ Yerucham Perlow’s, *Sefer HaMitzvos*, Vol. 1, pg. 523).

Alternatively, R’ Chaim Brisker explains as follows: According to Rashi (*Devorim* 25:19) this commandment includes men and women regardless of age, and even sheep and oxen, “So the name of Amalek shall not be mentioned even in connection with an animal by someone saying, ‘This animal was of Amalek.’” The Rambam (*Melochim* 5:4) rules that it is a *mitzvas aseh* to utterly wipe out the seven nations that lived in Eretz

Yisroel, as it is written, “You shall utterly destroy them” (20:17) and “You shall not allow any person to live” (20:16), and he concludes, “*Ukevar avad zichram*” — “Their memory no longer exists” (because Sancherev inter-mixed all the nations of the world).

The Rambam (5:5) continues: “It is also a *mitzvas aseh* to destroy the memory of Amalek, as it says, ‘*Timcheh es zeicher Amalek mitachas hashamayim*’ — ‘You shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heaven’ (*Devorim* 25:19).”

1) Why doesn’t the Rambam add “*Ukevar avad zichram*” — “Their memory no longer exists” — as he did regarding the seven nations?

2) Why doesn’t the Rambam mention that there is also a mitzvah to utterly destroy the possessions of Amalek?

The seven nations were those who occupied Eretz Yisroel before the Jewish conquest. Amalek was not one of the seven nations, but he was the arch enemy of the Jewish people. Without any justification, merely out of pure hatred, he fought the Jewish people and sought to annihilate them.

Throughout the millennia there have been “Amalekites” of various kinds, anti-Semites who, regardless of their genealogy, have had an imbedded hatred for the Jewish people and who have seized every opportunity to harm them. The mitzvah of wiping out the memory of Amalek does not only apply to the nation of Amalek, but also to all those who have accepted their vicious obsession with harming the Jews.

Thus, in regard to the seven nations whose existence is no longer known, the Rambam says: “*Ukevar avad zichram*” — “Their memory no longer exists” — and therefore presently the mitzvah of destroying them is not applicable. He does not add these words in regard to Amalek, since the mitzvah applies not only to the nation of Amalek, but to all those who follow the Amalekite philosophy of harming the Jews.

The difference between dealing with the nation of Amalek and dealing with those who follow the Amalekite philosophy is as follows: Wiping out the memory of Amalek also includes utterly destroying their possessions so that the name of Amalek shall not be mentioned, “Even in connection with an animal, by someone saying, ‘This was of Amalek.’” However, in the case of the non-Amalek nations who follow in their steps, only the vicious people must be destroyed.

According to the *Yerushalmi* (*Yevamos* 2:6) Haman was not an actual descendant of Agag the King of Amalek. He was called “Haman the son of Hamedosa the Agagi” to designate him as “*kotzeit ben kotzeit*” — “a murderer and son of a murderer.” Since

he followed in the footsteps of Amalek and pursued their philosophy of harming the Jewish people, it was incumbent upon Mordechai to do everything possible to destroy him, but it was permissible to benefit from his possessions afterwards. (R' Moshe Bogomilsky)

Why Esther Made Mordechai in Charge of Haman's House

Why did Esther appoint Mordechai over the house of Haman?

R' Avrohom Mordechai of Ger explains, that in the famous incident in which Mordechai and Haman were both in command of armies, Haman had to sell himself as a slave to Mordechai for food.

According to halachah: מה שקנה עבד קנה רבו - "Whatever a slave acquires becomes the property of his master" (*Pesachim* 88b). Consequently, in keeping within the realm of halachah, Esther conveyed the house to Mordechai, who in reality was the rightful owner.

Some Insight into the Seemingly Contradictory Words of Achashveirosh

ואתם כתבו על היהודים כטוב בעיניכם בשם המלך וחתמו בטבעת המלך כי כתב אשר נכתב בשם המלך ונחתום בטבעת המלך אין להשיב

"Write for the Jews in the name of the King as you please, and seal it with the King's ring, for something written in the King's name and sealed with the King's ring cannot be retracted." (Esther 8:8)

The *Alshich* raises two questions on the above *pasuk*: 1) Achashveirosh seems to be contradicting himself. If an edict issued by the King cannot be retracted, what will be accomplished by a second letter? 2) Instead of: כתבו על היהודים - "write about the Jews" - he should have said: כתבו ליהודים - "write to the Jews"?

The *Alshich* answers: To save face, Achashveirosh told Esther that he was a sincere friend of the Jewish people and furious at Haman. He told Esther, "We agreed to write '*lehashmid laharog ule'abeid es kol haYehudim*' — 'to destroy, to slay, and to exterminate all Jews' (3:13). However, I had instructed him to put a comma before the word '*haYehudim*' because my intent was that all the *goyim* should be wiped out, and it should be accomplished through '*haYehudim*' — 'the Jews.' Haman left out a comma between the words '*kol*' — 'all' — and '*haYehudim*.' Thus, it can be interpreted to mean 'to annihilate the Jewish people.'

Therefore, I advise you to write a letter explaining ‘*al haYehudim*’ — the reference to ‘*Yehudim*’ in the previous letter — in a way which is favorable and beneficial to you. Consequently, your second letter will merely clarify and support my intention in the first letter: that all the goyim should be killed *al haYehudim* — through the Jews. A second letter which is only for clarification is in accordance with accepted decorum.”

Understanding Why the Sending Out of the Second Letter Was Delayed

ויקראו ספרי המלך בעת ההיא בחדש השלישי הוא חדש סיון בשלושה ועשרים בו

“So, the king’s scribe were summoned at that time, on the twenty-third day of the third month, that is, the month of Sivan.” (Esther 8:9)

The events described at the beginning of the eighth *perek* of the *Megillah* took place on the 13th of Nissan. The letters that were sent out to rescind the original decree to destroy the Yidden were not dispatched until the 23rd of Sivan. They had to wait over two months with the threat of annihilation still hovering over their heads. One reason for the delay is explained by the *Yosef Lekach*. He says that Mordechai was waiting for Haman’s original couriers to return to Shushan. He felt it was essential to use the same messengers as this would add legitimacy to the contents of the second letters despite their apparent contradiction to the intent of the original royal decree sent by Haman.

Another *pshat* can be found in the Medrash Rabbah (*Bereishis* 100:6) at the end of *Parshas Vayechi*.

“The seventy days that Klal Yisroel had to wait before the sending out of the second letter, was because of the *chesed* that the Egyptians did with Yaakov Avinu”.

The Torah records that the Egyptians showed tremendous respect in observing a seventy-day period of mourning when Yaakov Avinu died. In contrast, the Yidden at the time of the Purim story failed to show appropriate honor to Mordechai HaTzaddik as they failed to heed his warnings not to attend the king’s feast. As a result, they were punished by having to continue to live in fear of their lives for a further seventy days until the second letters were sent out.

The *meforshim* point out that the expression: אבל כבד למצרים – “A heavy mourning for the Egyptians” which is used by Yaakov’s death is paralleled with the phrase: אבל גדול - ליהודים – “A heavy mourning for the Yidden” which we find in the *Megillah*.

(R’ Chaim Kaufman related that he said the following *pshat* in the above Medrash in the presence of Rav Leib Gurwicz who very much enjoyed this *vort*.)

Why the Bewilderment

הרצים... יצאו מבהלים ודחופים בדבר המלך

“The couriers...went out bewildered and pushed by the King’s order.” (Esther 8:14)

When the first letters were sent, the *Megillah* writes: הרצים יצאו דחופים - “The couriers went forth hurriedly [by order of the King]” (3:15). Why does it say here, “The couriers went: מבהלים ודחופים - “bewildered and hurriedly”?

The *Manos HaLevi* explains: Throughout history it has been common for the gentiles to persecute, oppress, and torture the Jews. Haman’s decree was nothing new, but merely history repeating itself. Thus, the couriers who usually are quick, went hurriedly. The second letters, however, in which Mordechai called on the Jews to declare war against their enemies, surprised them. Hence, though by nature they operate hurriedly, the King’s consent for the Jews revenge against the gentiles left the couriers: מבהלים - “bewildered.”

A Chakira from the Brisker Rov

ומרדכי יצא מלפני המלך בלבוש מלכות תכלת וחור ועטרת זהב גדולה ותכריך בוץ וארגמן והעיר שושן צהלה ושמחה

“Mordechai left the king’s presence in royal robes of blue and white, with a magnificent crown of gold and a mantle of fine linen and purple wool and the city of Shushan rang with joyous cries.” (Esther 8:15)

The Brisker Rav had a *chakira* [doubt] if the end of the *pasuk*: והעיר שושן צהלה ושמחה - “The city of Shushan rang with joyous cries”, is connected to the first part of the *pasuk*, i.e. since they saw Mordechai wearing royal clothes, therefore, they were in great joy. Or if it is something in its own rite, unrelated to the first part of the *pasuk*, and the *pasuk* is saying two separate things. 1) Mordechai went around wearing royal clothes, and 2) Everyone was happy as the decree had been annulled (unrelated to the fact that Mordechai was wearing royal clothes).

The Brisker Rov resolved his *chakira* from something we say in the *Shoshanas Yaakov piyut*. We mention: שושנת יעקב צהלה ושמחה בראתם יחד תכלת מרדכי - “The rose [that is] Yaakov, was cheerful and glad, when they saw together the royal blue [robes] of Mordechai.” We see that the joyous cries were because they saw Mordechai wearing the royal clothes. I.e. we see that the *pasuk* is one long statement, that the Yidden saw Mordechai wearing the royal clothes, therefore, they became very joyful.

The question is, what is the *peshat* in the above, why is seeing Mordechai in royal clothes room for great joy?

R' Ben Zion Felman writes that he heard from the Brisker Rov's son-in-law, R' Yechiel Michel Feinstein, that in his final years, the Brisker Rov explained why wearing the royal clothes was cause for great joy.

He explains, the fact that Mordechai removed his sackcloth and replaced it with royal clothes, showed that the harsh decree had been annulled. If the harsh decree would have still been in effect, Mordechai would have continued to wear sackcloth, and continued to fast. The fact that Mordechai stopped wearing sackcloth, was a sign that decree was annulled. Once they realized this, והעיר שושן צהלה והשמחה - "The city of Shushan rang with joyous cries".

The Medrash (*Parsha 10 ois 6*) on the *pasuk*: וישב מרדכי אל שער המלך, writes, that after Haman took Mordechai around on a horse and called out in front of him, "So shall be done to the man who the king wants to honor", Mordechai put back on his sackcloth and continued to fast, as the harsh decree was still in effect. We see that as long as the decree was in effect Mordechai wore sackcloth. Accordingly, we can understand that when Mordechai put on royal clothes again and this time kept them on, they realized that the decree had now been annulled, therefore: והעיר שושן צהלה והשמחה - "The city of Shushan rang with joyous cries".

Living Through a Purim Demands Change

ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר

"The Jews enjoyed light and gladness, happiness and honor." (Esther 8:16)

After Haman was killed, Achashveirosh gave his estate to Mordechai and Esther and gave them permission to write a new royal decree, which permitted the Jewish people to gather together and kill their enemies. At that point, Mordechai went out wearing royal garments, which caused the Jewish people in Shushan to rejoice, and as a result, they had light, gladness, joy, and honor. On a literal level, the *Megillah* is informing us that after so much darkness, sadness, and public degradation, the Jews now felt redeemed and experienced light, happiness, and honor.

However, the Gemara in *Megillah* (16b) interprets each of these expressions as a reference to a mitzvah that the Jews were now able to keep: *Orah* (light) refers to Torah, *simcha* (happiness) represents Yom Tov, *sasson* (joy) corresponds to *bris milah*, and *yekar* (honor) refers to *tefillin*. If the *Megillah* wants to tell us that the Jewish people

now had these four *mitzvos*, why does it do it using code words instead of explicitly writing: ליהודים היתה תורה ויום טוב וברית מילה ותפילין? Additionally, if the *Megillah* is informing us that at this point they performed these *mitzvos*, this implies that until now they were lacking these *mitzvos*, but why was that the case?

The *Chasam Sofer* offers an incredible *peshat* based on another *pasuk* in *Tanach* - a *pasuk* in *Parshas Emor*: ולא תחללו את שם קדשי ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל – “You shall not profane My Holy name, that I may be sanctified in the midst of Klal Yisroel” (*Vayikra* 22:32). In the very same *pasuk* that we are warned about the tremendous *aveirah* of *chillul Hashem*, we are warned about the mitzvah of *kiddush Hashem*. What is the Torah coming to teach us by putting these two extremities next to each other?

There is a fascinating Gemara in Sanhedrin (93a). Chananya, Mishael and Azariah were forced either to bow down to *avodah zarah* or be thrown into a fire. They refused to bow down to *avodah zarah* and as a result Nevuchadnezar came and threw them into a fire. The *pasukim* in *Doniel* speak about how they were miraculously saved and how they came out of the fire unscathed. However, the *pasukim* don't discuss what happened to them afterwards. The Gemara picks up on this and asks what happened? One opinion in the Gemara is: ברוק טבעו – “They drowned in spit”. Rashi explains that the *umos ha'olam* [nations of the world] were so disgusted with the Jews that they started spitting at them. They spat so much on Chananya, Mishael and Azariah that as a result they drowned. Why were *umos ha'olam* so disgusted? The reason is they had seen so clearly how Hashem looks after the Jews. They saw with open eyes how there is a Ribbono Shel Olam, and yet there were still Jews who were busy serving *avodah zarah*. After they saw with open eyes how there is a Ribbono Shel Olam, they became so disgusted with the Yidden - how could a Jew not believe in the Ribbono Shel Olam? – as a result of their spit Chananya, Mishael and Azariah drowned.⁸

With this the *Chasam Sofer* explains, that when Hashem does something for the Yidden which creates a *kiddush Hashem* and people continue life like normal, and don't grow and change from the experience, it creates a *chillul Hashem*. If after seeing Chananya, Mishael and Azariah being saved from a fire one doesn't change and continues to serve

⁸ The *Maharsha* explains, that it doesn't mean literally that they drowned from spit, as if that was the case, all the Yidden should have drowned. Rather, it's a *moshul* [parable] and he explains, that wherever Chananya, Mishael and Azariah would go, it would remind people of what happened, and it would create a big *chillul Hashem*. When people would see Chananya, Mishael and Azariah and continue to serve *avodah zarah* it would create a tremendous *chillul Hashem*, therefore, Hashem arranged, that in order to save such a *chillul Hashem*, that Chananya, Mishael and Azariah disappeared.

avodah zarah the same as before, he creates a tremendous *chillul Hashem*. This is *peshat* in the *pasuk* in *Parshas Emor*. Failure to improve oneself after Hashem creates a *kiddush Hashem* results in *chillul Hashem*. Now we can understand why the mitzvah of *kiddush Hashem* and *chillul Hashem* are written in the same *pasuk*.

With this we can return to answer our original question. It's true that at the time of the Purim story the Yidden already had Torah, *tefillin*, *milah* and Yom Tov. However, after seeing the great salvation of Hashem, after seeing a tremendous turnaround of events (*v'nehapochu hu*). After having been on the verge of destruction and then being saved, they witnessed a tremendous *kiddush Hashem*. As a result, everything had to change, and it did change. The next day when they sat down to learn, their Torah was a different Torah. When they put on their *tefillin* it was a different level of putting on *tefillin*. When they celebrated a Yom Tov, the *simcha* involved was different, and finally, when they performed the mitzvah of *bris milah* it was a different type of *bris milah*. When they saw the love Hashem had towards them, their attitude, and the way they performed *mitzvos* changed.

We must learn from the above, and when we sober up from our Purim stupor and go to *shul* the next day, we can't just put on our *tefillin* and *daven* like we do every day, we have to be refreshed and fulfill the *mitzvos* with an added appreciation, and with a new lease of life. Similarly, when we open our Gemara's after Purim, we can't just continue on like we do every day, we have to learn with a new appreciation and new lease of life. If we don't then *chas vesholam* we will be making a tremendous *chillul Hashem*. The final two weeks of a winter *zeman*, must be different and better than the entire *zeman* that proceeds it, otherwise, we are missing a vital lesson which we should be taking from the Purim story.

Why Does the Pasuk Say, "There Was", In the Past Tense

Why does the *Megillah* say: ליהודים היתה אורה – "for the Jews there was light", using the word היתה, which means "there was", which is past tense?

The *Nachal Eshkol* explains: The *sefer Medrash Eliyohu* (R' Eliyohu HaKohen of Izmir) learns that Haman was happy when the lots he cast fell on Adar because the plague of darkness in Mitzrayim took place in that month. His mistake, however, was failing to realize that the Torah states: "For all the Children of Yisroel there was light in their dwellings" (*Shemos* 10:23). The *Megillah* is thus telling us that the foundation upon which Haman built his hopes to annihilate the Jewish people was illusory because he miscalculated and failed to realize that there was light then for the Jews in Mitzrayim.

The Connection Between ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר and Havdolah

After Haman was killed, Mordechai went out wearing royal garments, which caused the Jews in Shushan to rejoice. The *Megillah* records that they had light, gladness, joy, and honor, a well-known *pasuk* that is said each week as part of *havdolah* on *motzei* Shabbos. However, its inclusion is difficult to understand, for this *pasuk* does not appear to have any connection to Shabbos or *havdolah*.

Rav Zelik Epstein notes that the Gemara in *Megillah* (16b) interprets each of these four expressions as a reference to a mitzvah that the Jewish people were now able to safely observe. אורה – “light” refers to Torah, שמחה - “happiness” describes Yom Tov, ששון – “joy” corresponds to *bris milah* and ויקר – “honor” represents *tefillin*. The common thread linking these four *mitzvos* is that they all serve to separate the Jewish people from the other nations of the world.

The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (59a) rules that non-Jews are forbidden to engage in learning Torah (except for the laws pertaining to the *sheveh mitzvos bnei Noach*). Similarly, non-Jews are proscribed from observing Shabbos (*Sanhedrin* 58b), and the Yomim Tovim that commemorate the *yetzias* Mitzrayim are even more unique to the Jews. *Bris milah* represents a covenant between Hashem and the Jewish people (*Bereishis* 17:10-11). Lastly, the Gemara in *Megillah* (16b) says that when the nations of the world see us wearing *tefillin*, it inspires fear among them as they recognize that the name of Hashem is proclaimed on us.

Because each of the four *mitzvos* referenced in this *pasuk* act to differentiate Klal Yisroel, it is quite understandable and appropriate to say it in *havdolah*, in which we thank Hashem for dividing between: ישראל לעמים - “the Jewish people and the nations of the world”.

Hashem Kavayachol Receives His Strength from Us

After Haman was killed, Achashveirosh gave his estate to Mordechai and Esther and gave them permission to write a new royal decree, which permitted the Jewish people to gather together and kill their enemies. At that point, Mordechai went out wearing royal garments, which caused the Jewish people in Shushan to rejoice, and as a result, they had light, gladness, joy, and honor. On a literal level, the *Megillah* is informing us that after so much darkness, sadness, and public degradation, the Jews now felt redeemed and experienced light, happiness, and honor.

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Rav Gedaliah Schorr and Rav Dovid Feinstein explain that these were not new *mitzvos* that the Jewish people suddenly received at this time. They received these *mitzvos* and performed them long before the episode of the *Megillah*. The problem was that they were performing them half-heartedly, by rote. They were going through the motions, but their hearts weren't in it.

The Medrash records that when Haman approached Achashveirosh with his plan to destroy the Jews, Achashveirosh responded that he was scared that he would be punished like everybody else who had tried to start up with them in the past. Haman responded that this time was different, because the Jewish G-d had grown old and no longer had the strength to save them. If Achashveirosh recognized Hashem's power and believed in the miracles He had performed for us previously, how could he be so naive as to think that Hashem suddenly grew old and no longer had the ability to save us?

Rav Eliezer Ginsburg explains that Hashem *kavayachol* [so-to-speak] receives His strength from us, and to the extent that we are strong and committed to doing *mitzvos* with joy and alacrity, Hashem conducts Himself with strength and might to protect us, but when we perform *mitzvos* weakly and without vigor, Hashem's manifested power diminishes. Therefore, when Haman saw that the Jews were doing *mitzvos* without energy, as if they had grown old and weak, he argued that now Hashem would conduct Himself as if He was also old and weak, and He wouldn't be able to come to their defense.

One of the merits through which the Jewish people were saved was that Mordechai was learning Torah with the children. Why was he specifically teaching Torah to the children? Even though the adults were also studying Torah, they had lost their excitement and zeal. Mordechai recognized that everything children do, they do with enthusiasm, and the merit of their learning Torah with passion and fervor would *kavayachol* make Hashem young again and give Him the energy to save the Jews.

With this introduction, we can now appreciate that at this point in the *Megillah*, the hidden miracles that the adults had witnessed while living through these events inspired them to reaccept the Torah that they had originally accepted at Har Sinai under duress, but this time they accepted it willingly and lovingly (Shabbos 88a).

As a result, they no longer felt that they were doing *mitzvos* because they had to. They now learned Torah because they wanted to, as they realized that Torah is the true and only light. They now kept Yom Tov not because of a fear of punishment for desecrating it, but because they recognized that Yom Tov is the true source of *simcha*. They performed *bris milah* on their sons not only because the Torah requires them to do so, but because they understood that *bris milah* is synonymous with *sasson*, and they wore *tefillin* not just to fulfil the daily obligation to do so, but because they internalized that *tefillin* are the true source of Jewish honor.

Rav Dovid Feinstein suggests that for this reason, the *Megillah* refers to itself (9:26) not as a *sefer* [book], but as an *iggeres* [letter], which is unusual. The *Megillah* is one of the books of Tanach; why do we call it a letter? The difference between a book and a letter is that a book is something that after a person has read it once, he knows the plot and isn't interested in reading it again. If somebody compels him to reread it, he will, but his heart won't be in it. A letter, on the other hand, is something that we look forward to receiving in the mail, and as soon as it arrives, we tear it open and read it with excitement. The *Megillah* refers to itself as a letter to teach us that even though we read it year after year and generation after generation, we should do so each time as if we're opening a newly delivered letter that we've been anxiously awaiting. (R' Ozer Alport)

The Joy of Life

In the eighth year of Achashveirosh's rule, on the thirteenth of Adar, every Jewish man, woman and child was to be slaughtered. Young or old, wealthy or poor, they were counted as one, and on that fateful day, the Jewish people would cease to be. According to the ways of the world and according to the natural course of events, that is what should have happened.

But it didn't. In the greatest reversal of fortune, the tables were turned, and the Jews were saved. In a heartbeat, they went from death to life, from despondency to hope, from being sheep led to the slaughter to having Mordechai HaTzadik paraded through the streets of Shushan. The people had lived through an astonishing miracle, and they experienced great joy. "And the Jews of Shushan were jubilant and celebrated."

Yet, when the Gemara describes their elation, it seems to leave out the issue of life and death. Where the *Megillah* says, "To the Jews there was light, happiness, joy and elation," *Chazal* interpret it to mean, "The Jews had Torah, Yom Tov, *Milah* and *Tefillin*," as if to say that the reason the Jews were celebrating was because they again had the opportunity to do these *mitzvos*. The issue of their being granted their lives doesn't seem to weigh into the equation, it as if the Gemara is saying that their entire celebration and their source of joy was that they were now again able to perform these *mitzvos*.

This is very difficult to understand. Granted, these might be additional reasons to celebrate, but isn't life a much greater reason? They were going to die, and Hashem saved them. Isn't that the greatest cause for celebration and giving thanks to Hashem?

(Rashi makes this question even more difficult by adding his comment that Haman decreed against all of these *mitzvos*. But this is not true. Haman's decree wasn't against the keeping of religion at all. It was quite simply death to the Jews. There was no mention of *mitzvos* whatsoever. What does Rashi mean that Haman decreed against these *mitzvos*?)

To understand this, let's fast forward to a modern day, rags to riches story.

Rags to Riches

Born in 1934, Sheldon Adelson was the son of a Ukrainian immigrant. His father drove a taxi, and his mother ran a knitting shop. He grew up in one of the poorest sections of Boston. But even as a young boy, he showed great ambition, first selling newspapers on the street corner, and then running his first business at the age of twelve. He went on to build over fifty businesses, eventually owning the Venetian Sands Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. He became a very wealthy man.

A funny thing, however, happened to Sheldon Adelson in 2003 when he took the Sands Corporation public. The stock skyrocketed, and his assets went from 1.4 billion dollars to 20 billion dollars in a year and a half. *Forbes Magazine* estimates that during this time, his wealth increased at the rate of a million dollars an hour.

A million dollars an hour is a tidy sum of money. To illustrate what that means. Imagine that during this time, he sat down to a nice leisurely lunch. When he got up and walked away, he was a million dollars richer. Or if he went for a dip in the pool, by the time he had dried his hair, he was seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars wealthier. If he took a nice Shabbos nap, by the time he woke up, another three million dollars were in his coffers.

Extremely wealthy people describe getting rich as exhilarating – almost intoxicating. “It is one of the most pleasurable experiences on the planet.” It seems that having wealth is nowhere near as much fun as acquiring it. And here this man was gaining wealth at a dizzying pace. It is difficult to imagine the sense of excitement he must have felt. Wow!!! Life is awesome. More and more! This is indescribably great!

The Answer

This seems to be the answer to the Gemara. When the Jews of Shushan were saved, they saw Hashem taking care of them, orchestrating events, running the world. They saw behind the veil of physicality and recognized their Creator. But more than just seeing Hashem, this experience changed their understanding of life. Someone who has had a near death experience is a changed man. His interests change. His value system changes. The pursuits that once gripped him lose their hold. Because he tasted death, he looks at life differently. And he questions. Why is life so precious? What is the tragedy of death? We all die anyway. Sooner. Later. What difference does it make?

And the real answer is – no difference. Generations come; generations go. They seem so important at the time, and then they pass as if they were never, like dust in the wind. And really nothing matters. Until you understand the purpose of life. Once you understand that Hashem created us to grow, that Hashem put us in this world to shape ourselves into what we will be for eternity, then you understand the value of life. Life is valuable because it is time, time to grow, time to accomplish, time given as the chance to acquire your World to Come. Once you understand that, you understand life, and then you understand the tragedy of death. Death is dreadful because it robs a person of that chance to grow.

Rav Matisyohu Solomon *zt”l*, explained, that this is what Rashi is telling us. When the Jews of Shushan celebrated, it was because they had reached a different understanding of life. A moment earlier, death was upon them. Yet, suddenly, inexplicably, it all turned around. As a result, they were a changed people. They no longer valued the things they once did; they viewed life from a dramatically different vantage point.

And because it was so sudden and the change so complete, it catapulted them to a level of understanding that was unprecedented. It was all clear. And they felt tremendous joy – but joy for a reason, happiness for a cause. They recognized the extraordinary wealth they could acquire with one mitzvah. And this is what brought them happiness.

They understood the value of life. They understood the reason that Hashem put us on this planet. And so, life was precious beyond description because they understood its ultimate value.

This concept should be very relevant to us, as we, too, should be happy beyond description. Every moment of life is an opportunity to acquire wealth of unimaginable proportions – far more than a million dollars an hour. One word of Torah learning is a jewel that will last forever. Putting on *tefillin* once is an eternal treasure far more valuable than anything found in this world.

When a person understands this, his perspective changes. He understands the great opportunity that Hashem has given us: a chance to acquire eternity. He will be filled with happiness and joy, and he will take on life with a passion — he loves life. (R' Ben Tzion Shafier)

The Influence of *Yiras Shomayim*

ורבים מעמי הארץ מתייהדים כי נפל פחד היהודים עליהם

“And many of the people in the land became Jews, because the fear of the Jews befell them.” (Esther 8:17)

Rashi explains this to mean that many people converted and became *gerim* [converts]. At first glance, this seems very difficult to understand. The Rambam (*Hilchos Issurei Bi'ah* 13:14) writes, that when a gentile expresses interest in converting: בודקין אחריו – “An inquiry is made to determine if perhaps he wishes to convert because of fear.” Which *Beis Din* would have accepted these gentiles who sought to become Jews because: עליהם – “they were afraid”.

Additionally, the *Megillah* tells us that when the Jews fought to defend themselves, they killed 75,000 people throughout the kingdom (9:16) and 500 people in Shushan (9:12), and then another 300 in Shushan the next day (9:15). Quite obviously, the Jews did not kill those who converted, and so all these many thousands were those who did not convert. We must ask, then, why did they not also convert out of fear of the Jews?

The Tolner Rebbe suggests an answer based on a precious teaching from his illustrious ancestor, Rav Yitzchak Isaac of Ziditchov, to explain the Mishnah's instruction that: מורא שמים כמורא רבך – “The fear of your rabbi shall be like the fear of Heaven” (*Avos* 4:12). The simple meaning of the Mishnah is that one's fear of his rebbe should resemble his fear of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. But Rav Yitzchak Isaac of Ziditchov explained that one's fear of his rebbe is proportional to his rebbe's fear of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

The greater the rebbe's fear of Hakodosh Boruch Hu, the more the *talmid* will fear the rebbe. Indeed, those who had the privilege of basking in the sacred shadow of the Beis Yisroel can testify to the genuine fear they felt in his presence. In light of the words of the Rebbe of Ziditchov, the reason is clear – the Beis Yisroel generated fear upon those around him because of the great fear of Hakodosh Boruch Hu that he himself felt, which had a profound impact upon his surroundings.

The Tolner Rebbe suggests that this is the deeper meaning of the *pasuk*: ורבים מעמי הארץ מתיהדים כי נפל פחד היהודים עליה. The Jews of that time achieved an exceptionally high level of *yiras shomayim*, and therefore, those souls whose essence were souls of converts experienced a great fear when they saw the Jews, due to the influence of the Jews' fear of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. This led them to truly wish to convert. The others, however, who were not worthy of this level, did not experience this fear, and so when they expressed interest in converting, they were not accepted.

פרק ט'

The Jews Had the Upper Hand Obviously They Did What They Wanted

יכו היהודים בכל איביהם מכת חרב והרג ואבדן ויעשו בשנאייהם כרצונם

“And the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of sword, slaughtering and exterminating; and they did to their enemies as they wished.” (Esther 9:5)

The words: ויעשו בשנאייהם כרצונם - “they did to their enemies as they wished”, seem superfluous; since the Jews had the upper hand, obviously they did as they wished?

A wealthy father who had an only son whom he loved very much instructed the executor over his estate: “When I die, give my son as much as you want from the estate and keep the rest for yourself.” The greedy executor kept 95% for himself and gave 5% to the son. The son, very upset and unable to believe that this was really his father's intention, called the executor to a *Beis Din*. The rabbis listened carefully and ruled that the executor was to give 95% to the son and keep only 5% for himself, explaining to the executor that the father was indeed a very wise man. “His words were, ‘Give my son as much as you want, and the rest keep for yourself.’ Since you demonstrated that you want 95%, that must be the amount that the father wanted you to give his son.”

With the seemingly superfluous words the *Megillah* is telling us that, יעשו בשנאייהם they did to their enemies - כרצונם - exactly as they, the enemies, wished to do to the Jewish people. (*Alshich, Manos HaLevi*)

Why the Word ואת So Many Times?

ואת פרשנדתא ואת דלפון ואת אספתא

“They also killed Parshandosa, and Dalphon, and Asposa...” (Esther 9:7).

When the *Megillah* lists the ten sons of Haman, by each one the *pasuk* says ואת. Why does the *Megillah* need to say ואת every time?

I saw a *peshat* that the *gematriya* of the word ארור – “cursed”, is 407. Similarly, the *gematriya* of the word ואת is 407, therefore it’s written ואת by all of the Haman’s ten sons to show that each one was ארור – “cursed”.

Whilst we are talking about the numerous ואת’s, I would like to mention another *he’orah* I heard. The aforementioned *pasuk* is one of the *pasukim* that everyone reads aloud. Many people when they read the *pasuk* focus on the names, and they say the ואת, off by heart. Especially, as they are trying to say the ten names in one breath. It’s important to make sure that one actually reads the word ואת from the *Megillah*, and doesn’t say it by heart. This same warning applies to the *baal koreh*.

Why The Rambam Omits the Halachah of An Elongated ‘Vav’ for Vyzasa

ויזתא

“Vyzasa” (Esther 9:10)

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 691:4) rules that the letter ‘vav’ which begins the name Vyzasa (Haman’s youngest son) must be longer than the other letters, based on the Gemara in *Megillah* (16b). The *Maggid Mishnah* (*Hilchos Megillah* 2:12) asks why the Rambam does not mention this halachah, but offers no answer.

Rashi (*Shmuel* 1, 15:3) explains that when Shaul was commanded to eradicate Amalek, he was told to kill all the animals of Amalek as well, because the Amalekites were sorcerers, and when threatened, they were able to change their appearance to resemble animals. This is significant in light of the Mishnah (*Keilim* 17:13) which states that dead fish do not become *tomei* (and are not *metamei*) as a *neveilah*, except for the

kelev hayam because when threatened, it runs for shore. As it thus identifies itself with land animals, its true *tumah* status is determined as a land animal which is *metamei*.

The Medrash states that Achashveirosh donned the clothing of the Kohen Gadol, expecting to receive thereby, priestly status and *matnas kehunah* [priestly gifts]. One such gift that Achashveirosh (erroneously) believed a Kohen was entitled to was *ma'aser behameh* (every 10th animal). Achashveirosh held that since when threatened, Amalekites changed into animal form, they had thereby assumed animal status. Therefore, he seized the tenth son of Haman, as a Kohen's due. Haman disagreed, grabbing hold of Vyzasa, and as the two of them struggled and schlepped at Vyzasa, his "vav" stretched and became longer than the other letters.

However, the Rambam rules that: תקפו כהן אין מוצאין מידו – "Once a Kohen grabs something that might be a priestly gift, we let him keep it". As such, Haman was not permitted to schlep Vyzasa back from Achashveirosh and so, the Rambam did not mention the halachah of the lengthened "vav".

Why The Tzibbur Reads the Aseres Bnei Haman Aloud

עשרת בני המן

"The ten sons of Haman" (Esther 9:10)

When the person reading the *Megillah* gets up to the names of Haman's ten sons who were hanged, he pauses while the *tzibbur* [congregation] reads them quickly before he reads them out loud. The Rogatchover Gaon gives a brilliant explanation for this custom. Even though most people don't read the *Megillah*, they fulfil their obligation to hear it through the concept of *shomei'ah k'oneh*, which means that somebody who listens to something is considered to have said it himself.

However, while this principle works for fulfilling our primary obligation to read the *Megillah*, in this case, there's a problem. The Gemara (*Megillah* 16b) teaches that there is an obligation to read the names of Haman's ten sons in one breath to commemorate the fact that they all took their last breaths together at the same time. Ideally, we would say all of their names simultaneously, but since that isn't humanly possible, we read them quickly in one breath.

The Rogatchover explains that although the rule of *shomei'ah k'oneh* makes it legally considered that the listener said something himself, it's not enough to make it viewed as if he said it in one breath, which leaves the listener no choice but to say the names

of Haman's ten sons himself in one breath, as that requirement cannot be fulfilled by listening to somebody else do it.

A Joke in the Spirit of Purim

On Purim, after completing the reading of the *Megillah*, the reader in a certain town recited the *berachah*: ה' שְׁעָשָׂה לִי נִס בְּמִקוּם הַזֶּה – “Blessed are you Hashem, for having performed a miracle for me here”. The *tzibbur* [congregation] immediately asked him why he had substituted this *berachah* which is recited only for a personal rather than a national miracle.

The man responded: “The *Shulchan Aruch* requires that the names of the ten children of Haman who were executed be read in one breath.

“The Gemara states that Haman boasted about his great wealth and his many children and concludes that Haman had many more than ten children.

“Just think,” the man continued, “if they had executed all Haman’s children, and I had to read all their names in one breath, I would surely have died of asphyxiation.

“For me therefore,” he smiled, triumphantly, “It is a personal miracle that only ten of Haman’s children were executed, and I can therefore make a personal *berachah*.”

Why Didn't the Yidden Take from the Spoils?

וּבְבוּזָה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת יָדָם

“And on the spoils, they never set their hands.” (Esther 9:10)

After the death of Haman, Mordechai issued a new decree sealed with the king’s ring giving the Jewish people permission to kill all their enemies and plunder their possessions (8:11). Although they adhered to Mordechai's instructions in slaying their foes, the *Megillah* stresses that they did not take any of the spoils. Why not?

The *Ralbag* writes that Shaul was commanded by Shmuel to destroy the Amalekites and their possessions but erred by keeping some of their animals alive (Shmuel 1 15:9). The Jews in the *Megillah* rectified this sin when they were given explicit permission to take their enemies’ belongings yet refrained from doing so. Rav Aryeh Leib Tzintz offers an allusion to this explanation by noting that the first letters of the four words that record that they abstained from the spoils can be rearranged to spell Shaul.

The *Imrei Emes* adds that it took tremendous self-control for the impoverished Jews to restrain themselves and not take any of the booty. They had a legitimate opportunity to improve their financial circumstances, but they all passed it up for the sake of heaven. Hashem rewarded them by giving the mitzvah of *matanos l'evyonim*, which obligates us to seek out the poor and give them gifts to make up for what they declined to take in the times of the *Megillah*.

The Missing Amah Can Be Found in Haman's Huge and Inflated Head

ואת עשרת בני המן יתלו על העץ

“And let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows.” (Esther 9:13)

The *Shulchan Aruch* rules: “One should read the ten sons of Haman in one breath to show that they were all killed and hung together as one.” The *Targum Sheini* on *Megillas Esther* describes in vivid detail how Haman and his ten sons were hanged. The height of the gallows was fifty *amos*. It was anchored three *amos* into the ground. Haman was hanged at the top, with his oldest son, Parshandosa hung right beneath him, leaving a space of one *amah* between them. Each son was hung in succession with an *amah* of space between one son and the next. Each son took up a space of three *amos*, with the youngest son, Vyzasa at the bottom, hanging three *amos* off the ground.

The problem is this: When we count up the total amount of *amos* listed above, we end up with forty-nine *amos*. (3-anchor, 3-off the ground, 33-the height of eleven people, 10-ten spaces between Haman and his ten sons = 49) What happened to the missing *amah*?

R' Chaim Kanievsky *zt"l* quotes *Tosfos (Chagigah 11a)* that a typical man is the size of four *amos*. The reason why the ten sons of Haman are listed as being only three *amos* high in the *Targum* is because they were killed the day before they were hanged, and based on *pasukim* in the *Megillah* they were not just killed, but decapitated. Therefore, when they were strung up on the gallows, it was without their heads! However, Haman did not get off so easily and did not lose his head in any sort of decapitation. In fact, he was killed through hanging, with a rope around his neck, on the gallows that he prepared for Mordechai, his mortal enemy and would-be victim of his evil ploy! And it is there that we find the missing *amah*. It is none other than Haman's huge and inflated head. (R' Shmuel Kameny)

Why On the Second Day Did They Only Kill Three Hundred

ויהרגו בשושן שלש מאות איש

“And slew three hundred men in Shushan.” (Esther 9:15)

On the first day the Jews killed five hundred of their enemies in Shushan the Capital. Why on the second day did they only kill three hundred in the city of Shushan?

The *Yalkut Me'am Lo'az* explains: According to the Gemara in *Megillah* (16b) though originally Achashveirosh agreed that new letters should be sent out instructing the Jews to avenge themselves and annihilate their enemies, he was shocked and upset to learn that five hundred people were killed in his capital city. Angrily, he said to Esther, “In Shushan the Capital the Jews have slain and annihilated five hundred people.” Then an angel struck him on the mouth, and with a change of attitude he said, “What is your petition now? It shall be granted you.”

According to Beis Hillel (*Terumos* 4:3), one showing a “good eye,” i.e. a generous person, gives one-fortieth of his produce as *terumah* to the Kohen and a bad-eyed person, i.e. a stingy person, gives one sixtieth of the produce. Thus, the difference between the two people is one-third. Beis Shammai says that a “good eye” gives one-thirtieth, and a “bad eye” gives one-fiftieth; thus, the difference is two-fifths.

On the first day of the war, the Jews killed five hundred people. Upon seeing that Achashveirosh exhibited a “bad eye” about how many people he was losing, the Jews killed only three hundred, in keeping with the opinion of Beis Shammai that a “bad eye” gives two-fifths less than a “good eye.”

How Noach Found His Way into the Megillah

ונוח בארבעה עשר בו

“And they rested on the fourteenth day” (Esther 9:17)

How did the Noach manage to get himself included in the text of the *Megillah*?

R' Shlomo Alkabetz (*Manos HaLevi*) quotes a Medrash Pliah, that when Haman's wife Zeresh advised him to erect a pole 50 *amos* high on which to hang his enemy, Mordechai, Haman searched everywhere and could not find such a large pole. His son Parshandosa, however, remembered that on one of his travels to the land of Turkey, he encountered the *teivah* [Ark] of Noach, which had landed on Har Ararat. He travelled there again and retrieved a long piece of wood, 50 *amos* in length, and brought it home

for his father's use. In the end, it was this very same pole that was used to hang Haman, and his ten sons. As a result, while following Hashem's command to build a *teivah* many years earlier, Noach played a large part in the Purim miracle as well. Shouldn't he then be mentioned?

Some Insight into What Seems to be a Discrepancy Between Two

Pasukim

על כן היהודים הפרוזים [הפרזים] הישבים בערי הפרוזות עשים את יום ארבעה עשר לחדש אדר
שמחה ומשתה ויום טוב ומשלוח מנות איש לרעהו

“That is why village Jews, who live in un-walled towns, observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and make it a day of happiness and feasting, and as a holiday and an occasion for sending gifts to one another.” (Esther 9:19)

כימים אשר נחו בהם היהודים מאויביהם והחדש אשר נהפך להם מיגון לשמחה ומאבל ליום טוב
לעשות אותם ימי משתה ושמחה ומשלח מנות איש לרעהו ומתנת לאביונים

“The same days on which the Jews enjoyed relief from their foes and the same month which had been transformed for them from one of grief and mourning to one of festive joy. They were to observe them as days of feasting and happiness, and as an occasion for sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor.” (Esther 9:22)

If one looks carefully at the above *pasukim* he will notice that in the first *pasuk* it mentions only *mishlo'ach manos*, whereas in the second *pasuk* it mentions both *mishlo'ach manos* and *matonas l'evyonim*. Why do we only mention both *mishlo'ach manos* and *matonas l'evyonim* in the second *pasuk*?

R' Chaim Kanievsky explains based on a Gemara in *Megillah* (5b). The Gemara says, initially Mordechai wanted to fix Purim as a Yom Tov, a day that it would be forbidden to do any *melachah*. However, in the end it wasn't fixed as a Yom Tov. Since initially Mordechai wanted to fix Purim as a Yom Tov there is no mention of the mitzvah of *matonas l'evyonim* as one can't give money to people on Yom Tov. In the end, however, since it wasn't fixed as a Yom Tov, money isn't *muktzeh*, therefore, there was a mitzvah of *matonas l'evyonim*, consequently, the *pasuk* mentions it.

With this R' Chaim explains another difficulty with the above two *pasukim*. In the first *pasuk* *mishlo'ach manos* is written with a 'vav', however, in the second *pasuk* it is omitted. R' Chaim explains that the Rambam (*Hilchos Purim* 2-17) writes: “One should spend more money on *matonas l'evyonim* than on his Purim *seudah* and *mishlo'ach*

manos". *Matonos l'evyonim* is more important than *mishlo'ach manos*. Therefore, in the first *pasuk* where it only mentions *mishlo'ach manos* it's written with a 'vav'. In the second *pasuk*, however, where it talks about both the mitzvah of *mishlo'ach manos* and *matonos l'evyonim*, *mishlo'ach manos* is written without a 'vav' to show that *matonos l'evyonim* is more important.

The Gemara in *Beitza* (16a) famously teaches: "Whatever one spends for Shabbos, Yom Tov, or for learning Torah, is returned to him." Based on this perhaps we can offer another answer as to why the first *pasuk* mentions only *mishlo'ach manos*, whereas the second *pasuk* mentions both *mishlo'ach manos* and *matonos l'evyonim*. Originally Mordechai wanted to fix Purim as a Yom Tov, since it was a Yom Tov people were happy to spend lots of money as they were guaranteed to get it back. Even the poor people who had no money were happy to spend freely on their Purim *seudah*, therefore, there was no need for *matonos l'evyonim*. In the end, however, Purim wasn't fixed as a Yom Tov, since it was no longer a Yom Tov, there was no longer a guarantee that people would get paid back. This meant that the poor were now scared to spend any money, therefore, there was a need for the mitzvah of *matonos l'evyonim*. The first *pasuk* was talking about if Purim would have been a Yom Tov, therefore, it doesn't mention *matonos l'evyonim* as there was no need. The second *pasuk*, however, is talking about what happened in the end – in the end Purim wasn't fixed as a Yom Tov, so there was a need for *matonos l'evyonim*.

[The *Yismach Moshe* asks, that if Purim ultimately was not fixed as a Yom Tov why do we mention in the *Megillah* that Purim is a Yom Tov? He answers, that in one way, Purim is a Yom Tov. The Gemara in *Beitzah* (16a) says, "Whatever one spends for Shabbos, Yom Tov, or for learning Torah, is returned to him." This aspect of Yom Tov remains, because no matter how much one spends on Purim, he will be refunded and get that money back. This doesn't fit with the *peshat* we suggested above.]

Why is Mishloach Manos Mentioned Before Matonos L'evyonim

The Rambam in *Hilchos Megillah* (2:17) writes: "It is better to increase in gifts to the poor than in sending portions to one another." If so, why in the *pasuk* is *mishlo'ach manos* mentioned before *matonos l'evyonim*?

The *Apiriyon* (see also *Shu"t Tirosh Veyitzor* 172) answers, that when giving *tzedakah* to the poor, it is very important that one should be extremely careful not to embarrass the recipient. When Mordechai instituted Purim as a day of giving *matonos l'evyonim*, he was greatly concerned lest it become known as the poor man's day to receive handouts. Therefore, he also instituted the mitzvah of *mishlo'ach manos* so that an

observer would be unable to distinguish between *matonas l'evyonim* and *mishlo'ach manos*. To conceal the *matonas l'evyonim*, the *Megillah* preceded it by writing about sending *mishlo'ach manos*.

* * *

With the aforementioned *chiddush* we can understand why no *berachah* is made over the mitzvah of *mishlo'ach manos*.

The *Rashba* (*Teshuvah* 18) writes that when one performs the mitzvah of *tzedakah*, he does not make a *berachah* - because possibly the person will refuse to accept. However, according to *Rema* (*Orach Chaim* 615:4), when one sends *mishlo'ach manos*, he fulfills the mitzvah even if the recipient refuses them.

Consequently, if a *berachah* would be made for *mishlo'ach manos* and not for *matonas l'evyonim*, it would be obvious which gift is which, thus defeating the entire purpose of instituting *mishlo'ach manos*.

Understanding the Extra Word "Ish" (A Joke in the Spirit of Purim)

The word "*ish*" – a man, in the aforementioned *pasuk*: ומשלוח מנות איש לרעהו – "Sending portions a man to his friend", seems superfluous?

In the spirit of Purim, we can explain with the following *moshul* [parable]:

An *apikores* [heretic] who bore a grudge against the town Rabbi, for vehemently ridiculing and denouncing him, decided that Purim would be an opportune time to get even with him. To fulfill the mitzvah of *mishlo'ach manos*, he bought a few pounds of chopped liver which he molded into the form of a *chazer*, put it on a platter, and sent it to the Rabbi. When the Rabbi received it, he took a portrait of himself, put it on a platter, and sent it to "his friend" with the following explanation:

"For a long time, I have been bothered with an extra word in the *Megillah*. When *mishlo'ach manos* is mentioned in the *Megillah*, we are told: משלוח מנות איש לרעהו – "sending portions, a man to his friend". I always wondered, it would have been sufficient to say: משלוח מנות לרעהו - "sending portions to a friend", without the extra word '*ish*'?"

After receiving your thoughtful package, my question was answered. The *Megillah* is saying, the portions being sent should consist of '*ish*' – the type of person you are. Obviously, you fulfilled the mitzvah accurately and sent me a description of yourself. To reciprocate, enclosed is my picture so you may have a vivid description of me."

A Chiddush in Halachah from the Sefes Emes

Based on the *pasuk*: ומשלוח מנות איש לרעהו – “Sending portions a man to his friend”, the *Sefes Emes* (*Megillah* 7b) writes, that one doesn’t fulfill the mitzvah of *mishlo’ach manos* by sending *mishlo’ach manos* to his rav or rosh yeshiva because the mitzvah is to give, איש לרעהו, to a friend, to an equal, and it isn’t proper to call your rebbe, “my friend.” However, the *Sefes Emes* accedes that if a rosh yeshiva gives him *mishlo’ach manos*, this means the rosh yeshiva considers him an equal. So now he can reciprocate and send back *mishlo’ach manos*.

The Villager that Partied the Entire Month of Adar

In one village there was a man who indulged in eating and imbibing during the entire month of Adar. When asked why he did so, he explained:

“Everyone celebrates Haman’s downfall on Purim with food and drink, right?”

“But just think. Haman decreed that all the Jews in the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the empire be annihilated on one single day, the 14th of Adar. How on earth is it feasible to kill all the men, women and children spread out over such a vast empire in a single day?”

“The truth of the matter is that Hashem originally planned to designate the entire month of Adar for the destruction of the Jews. However, aware of their history, and the fact that Hashem intervenes to save the Jews, as He did in Mitzrayim, Haman reasoned that if Hashem saved them from his scheme, they would celebrate their salvation by establishing a Yom Tov such as Pesach. If the month of Adar were set aside for their distinction, and then they were miraculously saved, the Jews would of course turn the whole month into one of rejoicing.

“Haman was so wicked that he wished to prevent such a possibility. He therefore decreed only one day for the realization of his plot, so that in the event of a miracle, the Jews would have only that one day for their partying.”

Here, the villager licked his lips, raised his eyebrows, and said “But I know what his evil plans really were, so I celebrate the entire month.”

Purim and Yom Kippurim

The *Chida* (in his *sefer Nachel Eshkol*) writes that the *roshei teives* of the *pasuk*: איש להתערר ליראה את ה' אלול. This is to teach us, that we should: 'להתערר ליראה את ה' – “work on fearing Hashem, the same way we do during Elul”.

We find a *remez* to this idea in the Mishnayos in Rosh Hashanah (3:9). The Mishnah says: If one passes by a *shul*, or he lives near the *shul* and **he hears the sound of the shofar or the sound of the Megillah**, if he has intention to fulfill the mitzvah he is *yoitsa*. The Mishnah mention both *shofar* and *Megillah* together, to hint at the fact that the *mitzvos* of *shofar* and *Megillah* are related.

ומי שיש לו מוחו בקדקדו ישפוט בצדק כי בעבור שהגדיל ה' עמנו מאוד להצילנו ממות לחיים אין ראוי - לאבד ולהפיר יראה ולפרוק עול תורה ומצוות חם ושלום וגילו ברעדה כתיב ודי למי שיש בזה לב "One who has a brain in his head, will think about how Hashem saved us from death, and gave us life. He will make sure not to waste this opportunity, and won't treat Torah and *mitzvos* lightly, one who has a heart will heed this warning".

The *Tikunei Zohar* (p.57b) describes the greatness of Yom Kippur, referring to it as a day like Purim. This is the reason Yom Kippur is called: יום כ-פורים, translated as "A day like Purim".

The *Mishnah Berurah* (90:28) quotes a *Teshuvos Radvaz* that discusses a prisoner whose jailors permit him to *daven* with a *minyán* for one day. The question is, which day should he choose? Should he request to go to *shul* for Yom Kippur or rather on Purim? The *Radvaz* advises that he go to *shul* at the first opportunity because if he pushes off the offer, one will know what will be. Therefore, right away the following day, he should go to *shul* to *daven*.

Nevertheless, when we study his question, we notice the importance of specifically these two days, Purim and Yom Kippur. He didn't even write Rosh Hashanah. Purim and Yom Kippur are at the top of the list of days we want to be in the *beis medresh*.

When Was Moshe Rabbeinu's Bris, Before or After Megillah (A Good Purim Riddle)

להיות עשים את יום ארבעה עשר לחדש אדר...בכל שנה ושנה

"To observe annually the fourteenth day of Adar." (Esther 9:21)

Moshe Rabbeinu was born on the seventh of Adar, thus his *bris* took place on the 14th day of Adar, which is Purim. Was the *bris* performed before the reading of the *Megillah* or after?

Moshe was a great *tzaddik* and he died on the same day he was born. Since Moshe passed away on Shabbos, he was also born on Shabbos. Thus, his *bris* took place eight

days later on Shabbos — 14 days into the month of Adar. Since it was Shabbos, the reading of the *Megillah* took place on Thursday the 12th of Adar.

A Sharp Response from R' Yonason Eibshitz

לעשות אותם ימי משתה ושמחה

“They were to observe them as days of feasting and happiness.” (Esther 9:22)

The *Rema* rules (*Orach Chaim* 695:2) that most of the festive Purim meal must be eaten before sundown, while it is still Purim. A priest once challenged Rav Yonason Eibshitz to explain why the custom of so many Jewish families is to start the Purim meal just before sundown and to conduct the bulk of the meal during the night, after the holiday has already ended.

Rav Yonason sharply responded with a question of his own. The most popular holiday in the priest's religion falls on December 25th. If the non-Jewish day begins at midnight, why is it so prevalent among his coreligionists to begin their festivities the night before?

Having turned the tables and with the priest now on the defensive, Rav Yonason proceeded to brilliantly answer both questions. The holiday that the non-Jews are observing on December 25th is really the commemoration of the birth of a Jew. As such, it is only proper to celebrate it using the Jewish day and to begin at sundown on the evening before. Purim, on the other hand, commemorates the death of the non-Jewish Haman, and it is therefore fitting for our festive meal to be based on the non-Jewish day and continue into the night. (R' Ozer Alport)

Since When is Purim a Time for Planting Trees

The Gemara in *Megillah* (5a-b) relates that one year on Purim, Rebbi Yehuda HaNassi planted a tree. After extensively discussing the legal ramifications and questioning the permissibility of doing so on Purim, one opinion in the Gemara suggests that he was allowed to do so because this particular tree represented a “planting of *simcha*” in the spirit of the joyful day. The *Darkei Mussar* questions why he felt the need to do so specifically on Purim. Why couldn't he have waited for a more opportune and less hectic time to do so?

He writes in the name of his father-in-law, Rav Yosef Rozovsky, that every Yom Tov has a special lesson and power which may be acquired by one who properly taps into its latent potential. The lesson, such as freedom on Pesach and the ephemeral nature of

earthly possessions on Succos, isn't just for the duration of the Yom Tov, but it is to be absorbed and taken with us for the entire year.

Similarly, Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi chose to plant a tree specifically on Purim to symbolically hint that the joy and gladness we are intended to experience on Purim isn't of the transitory drunken and frivolous variety. It should be a "planting" of a true deeper joy, one which develops from contemplating the miracles in the *Megillah* and results in a genuine trust in Hashem's Providence and the accompanying sense of happiness and tranquility we will feel in our hearts throughout the year to come. (R' Ozer Alport)

Drinking in Moderation

Chazal state that on Purim, one should drink: עד דלא ידע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי - "Until he doesn't know the difference between cursed be Haman and blessed be Mordechai".

So, it seems that we drink on Purim until we don't know. Yet, the *Ahavas Yisroel* of Vizhnitz *zt"l* points out that the first letters of, עד דלא ידע, spell ידע, to know. So, is the goal of drinking to know or not to know?

We will answer in two ways:

Reb Efraim Zalman Margulies *zt"l* of Brod (*Yad Efraim* on *Shulchan Aruch* 695) writes: "In a dream, it was explained that the purpose of drinking is to enable people to be joyous, because (*Tehillim* 104:15) ויין ישמח לבב אנוש - 'Wine gladdens the heart of man.' When one is happy... he can praise Hashem for the miracles with a whole heart... However, he shouldn't drink until his mind becomes foggy because then he won't be thinking about the miracles at all. When *Chazal* say one should drink until he doesn't know the difference between Mordechai and Haman, this means, עד ולא ידע בכלל, that he shouldn't actually get to that state. He should drink and be happy, but if he can't differentiate between Mordechai and Haman, the purpose of drinking is lost. *Chazal* wanted the kind of drinking that leads to praising Hashem. When one [goes beyond that limit] and his mind becomes confused, he won't be able to praise Hashem for the miracles. This was my dream, and I thought about it in the morning and saw it was correct."

עד דלא ידע spells ידע. This hints that even when we drink, our goal is always to know what we are celebrating. If you lose focus from the miracles, you went too far.⁹

⁹ The Gemara tells the story of Rabbah and Reb Zeira, who ate a Purim meal together, and due to the drinking, Rabbah killed Reb Zeira. Afterward, Rabbah resurrected him with his *tefillos*.

Chazal say: חייב איניש לבסומי בפוריא - "One is obligated to be happy *with Purim*." They didn't say לבסומי ביין. To be happy with wine. The goal is not to become intoxicated with wine but to be happy with Purim and the miracles.

A second explanation for why ידע is implied in the *roshei teivos* of עד דלא ידע is from the *Ahavas Yisroel* of *Viznitz zt"l*. He explains that this tells us that when one drinks, one must know his limits. If his drinking results in him humiliating or harming others or causes him to be lax with any of the *mitzvos*, it is time to refrain. We know this because when we are told to drink עד דלא ידע, the first letters spell ידע, because one must always have an awareness of what he is doing or he has gone beyond the limit intended by *Chazal*.

The *Kol-Bo* writes: "One must become intoxicated on Purim, but he shouldn't get drunk because that is forbidden. There is no greater sin than being drunk. Being drunk leads to *shefichas damim* [murder] and *giluy arayos* [adultery]. Rather, one should drink a little more than usual so that he will be happy. In his joyous mood, he should make the poor happy and console them. That is the proper way to be happy."

The *Matteh Moshe* writes that one must be cautious that drinking on Purim doesn't cause him to be lax in any halachah, such as washing for bread, *bentching*, or *davening* properly. He concludes, "All those who [are cautious] and rejoice and praise Hashem for the miracles Hashem performed for our forefathers, their children will be like them, and Hashem will grant them success in all their endeavors."

The *Lev Ha'Ivri* writes that the *Rema* (Reb Moshe Isserles zt"l) was *niftar* at the age of 33, on the 33rd day of the *omer*, and at his *levayah* people said 32 praises. They were looking for one more praise to tell about the *Rema* so that the praises would equal the day of the *omer* and the years of his life. Someone came forward and said: "On Purim, the *Rema* would dress up (so people wouldn't recognize that he is their Rav) and go from home to home to remind people to *daven Maariv*." That was the 33rd praise.

A *kohen gadol* can't marry a widow (see *Vayikra* 21:14). What is the reason for this prohibition?

The *Chida* (*Pnei David, Emor*) explains that when the *kohen gadol* came to the *Kodesh Hakadoshim* on Yom Kippur to do the *avodah*, he would say the שם המפורש – "Hashem's name הוי"ה" as it is written. When the *kohen gadol* said this name, he had a

Reb Efraim Zalman Margolis zt"l (*Yad Efraim*) writes, "They weren't cautious; they drank beyond their limits. This resulted in a סכנה. Therefore, one must be cautious not to drink excessively. One should drink up to עד דלא ידע, but never actually get to that point."

lot of strength. If he had in mind, at that time, that someone should die, it would happen. This is why the Torah forbade a *kohen gadol* from marrying a widow. If permitted to marry a widow, he may choose to kill a husband when he uttered Hashem's name on Yom Kippur so that he can marry his wife. To prevent this, the Torah says a *kohen gadol* may not marry a widow.

Doesn't it seem farfetched that such a murder would ever happen? It is Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, and we are talking about the *kohen gadol*, one of the nation's greatest people. He is in the *Beis HaMikdash*, in the *Kodesh Kadoshim*, and saying Hashem's holy name – something only he can say, and only on Yom Kippur. Could it be that at this most sacred moment, he might intend to kill someone to marry that person's wife? Apparently, it could happen.

Indeed, *Chazal* (*Succah* 52a) say: גדול הימנו יצרו גדול מחבירו - "The greater a person, the greater the *yetzer horah*," and Reb Yechezkel Levinstein zt"l adds, "The greater the moment, the greater the *yetzer horah*." Therefore, it could happen. On Yom Kippur, in the *Kodesh Kadoshim*, while saying Hashem's name as it is written, the *kohen gadol* might wish for someone to die so he can marry that person's wife.

The Torah understands the *yetzer horah* and knows that even this is possible.

We mentioned this, so we shouldn't be surprised that the holy mitzvah of drinking on Purim could result in something negative. But, unfortunately, some people don't understand this. They say: "Purim is one of the holiest days of the year, and drinking is a mitzvah. So how could anything negative come from it?"

But don't be surprised. Drinking excessively could be damaging and lead to danger or sin; therefore, fortunate are those who are cautious. (R' Elimelech Biderman)

Purim Seudah

Years ago, in Holland, the crops became infested with worms, and people feared there wouldn't be anything to eat. The king declared a fast day. On a designated day, everyone had to pray and fast to be saved from this disaster. The problem was that the selected day for the fast was Purim.

The Jewish community asked the *Maaseh Rokeiach* whether they should fast on Purim to appease the king or celebrate Purim like every year.

The *Maaseh Rokeiach* replied, "No one should fast. Have festive meals like every year. Tell the storeowners to give meat and fish for free, and I will pay the stores..."

That Purim, the *goyim* were in their churches, praying and fasting, while *lehavdil*, the Jewish community was celebrating Purim as usual.

The day after Purim, the worms vanished.

The king of Holland summoned the *Maaseh Rokeiach* and asked: "Why didn't the Jewish community obey my decree? I heard you celebrated on the day I commanded everyone to fast and pray."

The king was angry at the Jewish community but also respected them. He held the *Maaseh Rokeiach* in high esteem, and since the worms vanished, he supposed that the Yidden may have acted correctly, and they may have brought about the salvation.

The *Maaseh Rokeiach* replied: "Everyone knows, אין פרעניות באה לעולם אלא בשביל ישראל, - when punishment comes to the world, it is because of Bnei Yisroel. So, we understood that our sins are the root of the infestation and that the solution is when we do *teshuvah* and become more loyal to Hashem's commandments. The day you chose for a fast day was Purim, the day Hashem commands us to celebrate. Since we knew that the primary solution to this agricultural problem was to be loyal to Hashem's decree, we had to celebrate Purim. That was the only way to bring about salvation."

The king accepted his explanation. (This story is recorded in *Divrei Shmuel*).

Singing Songs at the Purim Seudah

It is good to sing songs on Purim at the *seudah*, and you can have in mind many *tefillos* in the words of the songs you sing.

To explain this, we tell a humorous story:

There was a *moser* (someone who slandered the Jewish community to the king), and the Jewish community hated him. Young Jewish children would call him Haman when they saw him.

The *moser* complained to the king that children were calling him Haman, so the king decreed that it is forbidden by law to call anyone Haman.

But the children didn't give up. They found another way to humiliate him. They called him Ben Hamdasa. He went to the king and complained that children were chanting after him, Ben Hamdasa. So, the king set another decree that it is forbidden to call someone Ben Hamdasa.

The children began to say “Kadma v'Azla” when they saw him. They were hinting at the words, ויבא המן, which has the trop of *kadma v'azla* on it.

The *moser* complained to the king that children were chanting after him Kadma v'Azla. So, once again, the king decreed that it is strictly forbidden to call someone Kadma v'Azla.

The children found a solution. When they saw him, they sang the tune of *kadma v'azla*, the tune that is on the words, ויבא המן. So, they kept the rule and didn't call him Kadma v'Azla, but they sang the tune.

The *moser* complained to the king that children are singing when they see him. The king said, “I didn't let them call you Haman, Ben Hamdasa or Kadma v'Azla, but I can't stop them from singing.”

The *nimshal* is that sometimes we *daven* to Hashem, but the *tefillos* aren't answered because there are *kitrugim* that don't permit the *tefillos* to go up. But when we sing songs, no *kitrug* can stop it. The King of the world hears the *tefillah* that is intended in the song and saves Bnei Yisroel. (R' Elimelech Biderman)

Mishlo'ach Manos

ומשלוח מנות איש לרעהו

“And of sending portions one to the other.” (Esther 9:22)

Why did Mordechai institute specifically the mitzvah of *mishlo'ach manos* as a way to celebrate the miracle of Purim?

The *Manas HaLevi* explains: Haman derided the Jewish people, by telling Achashveirosh that though they were only one nation among many nations, they were: מפוזר ומפורד בין העמים – “in total disharmony among themselves”. They lacked love and compassion for their fellow Jews. To counteract this claim, Esther said to Mordechai: לך כנוס את כל היהודים - “Go gather together all the Jews” (4:16), and stress to them the importance of unity and *ahavas* Yisroel.

Since the decree was caused by Haman's allegation that there was disunity among the Jewish people, Mordechai instituted that on Purim we should exchange edibles with friends to demonstrate our unity and love for one another.

Alternatively, the *Terumas HaDeshen* (111) and *Levush* (695) explain, the reason for *mishlo'ach manos* is to ensure that everyone has a sufficient amount of food for their meal and that they are able to properly rejoice on Purim.

According to the first reason, *mishlo'ach manos* was instituted for the benefit of the giver, and according to the latter view, it was instituted for the benefit of the recipient. A *halachic* difference between the two views pertains to the question of whether one fulfills the mitzvah of *mishlo'ach manos* when the recipient refuses to accept it. If the purpose of the mitzvah is to demonstrate the unity and love that the giver has for his fellow, then he has fulfilled the mitzvah. However, if it is for the benefit of the recipient, to enhance his *simchas* Purim, then the mitzvah has not been fulfilled. Even if it is for the latter reason, *mishlo'ach manos* is sent even to those who are blessed with affluence in order not to cause any embarrassment to those who are lacking by singling them out. (See *Shu"t Chasam Sofer, Orach Chaim* 196)

A Segulah to Help Concentrate in Davening

אמר עם הספר ישוב מחשבתו הרעה

“Achashveirosh commanded that they should write in a book, that he had retracted from his bad thoughts.” (Esther 9:25)

It's brought down from the Gaon, that a *segulah* to be saved from bad thoughts during *davening*, is to look inside the *siddur* when *davening*. The above is hinted at in the aforementioned *pasuk*: אמר עם הספר – *daven* with a *siddur*, הרעה, ישוב מחשבתו הרעה, – then you will be saved from bad thoughts.

Understanding Why Sometimes Purim Is Spelt With a 'Vav' and Sometimes Without

על כן קראו לימים האלה פורים על שם הפור

“Therefore, these days are called Purim, because of the lot.” (Esther 9:26)

Throughout the *Megillah*, Purim is spelt without a *vav* (פרים), however, there are two exceptions: The aforementioned *pasuk* which talks about Purim in the times of Mordechai and Esther, that year Purim was a Purim with complete *simcha*, as that year they were saved from death, and they had received the Torah *b'ahavah* [with love]. However, in future years Purim wasn't with complete *simcha*, like we say in *kinnos* איך אעלוך בפור, therefore, Purim is spelt without a *vav*.

Similarly, the *pasuk*: ימי הפורים לא יעברו - “These days of Purim shall not be revoked” is written without a *vav*, as it is referring to Purim in the future, like the Yerushalmi *darshens*: “Purim will not be annulled even in the days of Moshach”. At that time, once again Purim will be a time of complete *simcha*, therefore, Purim is written with a *vav*. (R’ Chaim Kanievsky, *Tama Dekra*)

Why Is Purim Called “Purim” and Not “Pur”

Purim is called Purim because we were saved from the lots that Haman drew. The question is, however, why is Purim called Purim in the plural, surely Haman only drew lots once, so it should be called Pur, in the singular, and not Purim in the plural?

The *Maharal (Ohr Chodosh)* answers: Purim is split over two days, on the 14th of Adar the enemies were killed, and on the 15th of Adar the Yidden celebrate with *mishteh* and *simcha*. Even though these two days are the result of one lot, since they are two separate days with different activities, we refer to it as Purim in the plural.

* * *

R’ Chaim Kanievsky in *Tama Dekra* answers based on the Medrash. The Medrash says: Haman originally drew lots to pick a suitable day of the week, and each day had a different reason why it wasn’t suitable. Therefore, he decided to pick a month, and then found a suitable month. Since Haman drew two lots, one for weeks and then one for the month, we call Purim, Purim in the plural.

* * *

R’ Yonsasan Eibshitz (*Yaares Devash, Derush 3*) answers: In order to be sure that the day determined by the ‘lot’ was indeed correct, Haman made two lots. In one box he placed 13 pieces of paper, each containing one of the Hebrew months of the year (the miracle of Purim took place in a leap year). In the other box he put 385 pieces of paper, each containing a number from 1 to 385, for all the days of the year. Haman thought as follows: If, for instance he pulled the month of Sivan (the third month) from the first box and the number 200 from the second box, then something would be wrong, since the 200th day of the year cannot occur in the third month.

Haman was pleased when he pulled Adar Sheini (the thirteenth month) from the first box, and the number 368 from the second, because this came out to be the 13th day of Adar Sheini, and obviously the two lots supported each other. Hence, the Yom Tov is known as “Purim,” because of the two lots.

* * *

Finally, here is an incredible *peshat* R' Shmuel Kameny sent me: Haman was quite adept with these lots. And what exactly were these lots? They were your basic six-sided dice. Each side has on it a number from one to six, and the number on the top together with the number opposite on the bottom, will always equal seven. If the six is the top number, the one is always opposite. If it's a three on top, the bottom will be a four. Now, quotes the Bobover Rebbe, Haman took three small square stones and wrote a number from one to six on each side. He then threw them down and watched as they settled on three numbers: One, three, and three. Applying these numbers to the age-old Jewish practice of interchanging Hebrew letters for numbers, he transposed these numbers into the letters, *Aleph*, *Gimmel*, and *Gimmel*. These letters spelled out Agog, the Amaleki king who fought against the Jewish people Haman's great, great-grandfather. He knew that this was a good sign for him and in a manner in which only he understood, he deciphered the lots to determine the 14th day of Adar as his day of destruction.

What happened next is unusual. Rather than call it quits, Haman unthinkingly flipped over the stones and rested them in the position where the numbers that were formally on bottom, now sat on top. They were: six, four and four. By using the same system of changing the numbers for letters again, we now have the letters *Vov*, *Daled*, *Daled*, which when rearranged spells out the name of none other than Dovid HaMelech, the righteous king who led the Jewish people to victory in battle and brought them to the height of glory.

This is where the villain realizes that he has a problem. Throughout the entire story of Purim, the "Hand of Hashem" was evident in secret, yet miraculous ways. These are the words of the *Kedushas Zion*, who quotes the *Shevet Mussar*, who derives it from the Medrash. Haman understood that these lots were not insignificant little stones that had no meaning. He used them specifically because he realized that when cast for a specific purpose, they held valuable information. Plans can be devised; fates can be realized, and history can be altered — all through the secrets that are concealed within these small dice. Hashem, therefore, used Haman's own devices to turn the tables on him. By inexplicably turning over the dice — he writes that Haman just wanted to see what was on the other side of the dice! Didn't he know what he would find? — Haman caused his entire *mazul* to be overturned, and instead of reaping a glorious victory that would forever cement him in the Amaleki "Hall of Fame" as the one who finally destroyed the Jews, he came to the crashing realization that the G-d of Dovid HaMelech and the

Jewish people would never allow for their destruction. This turn of events — or shall we say “overturn” of events, is the true “*V’nahaphoch Hu*” in the story of Purim, and thus we celebrate this theme on this holiday.

The *pasuk* in *Megillas Esther* tells us: “Therefore, they called these days ‘Purim’ on account of the ‘Pur’ (Lot).” Based on this *pasuk*, it’s very unclear. If the holiday is named for the central event of the lot that was cast by Haman, then why is it called “Purim,” which is plural for lots? Shouldn’t it have better been named “Pur” in the singular? After all, weren’t we always taught that Haman made a single lottery and decided on a date from that? – But now, we understand very clearly why this holiday is named the way it is. Under the constant guidance of Hashem’s All-Powerful Hand, the evil villain Haman inexplicably and without knowledge of why and what he was doing, basically “Shot himself in the foot”. Instead of just throwing down his stones once and leaving them be, he turned over his dice – in effect, casting a second lot. This second lot was the final one and it spelled out the eventual turn of events in a way that even Haman understood. Thus, the name Purim.

The Connection Between *Megillah* and *Hakhel*

וימי פורים האלה לא יעברו מתוך היהודים וזכרם לא יסוף מזרעם

“And these days of Purim shall not be revoked from amidst the Jews, and their memory shall not cease from their seed.” (Esther 9:28)

On the aforementioned *pasuk* the Gaon is troubled by two points: 1) What is the difference between the phrase: וימי פורים האלה – “these days of Purim” and the phrase: וזכרם – “their memory”? 2) Additionally, why in the first part of the quote does the *pasuk* refer to: היהודים – “the Jews”, while the later part speaks of: מזרעם – “their seed”?

To reconcile these difficulties, he explains that, “these days of Purim” refers specifically to the Purim *seudah*, while “their memory” hints to the reading of the *Megillah*. Additionally, the phrase “the Jews” refers to adults, whereas “their seed” refers to children under the age of *bar* or *bas* mitzvah. Therefore, the *pasuk* is to be understood as follows: “And these days of Purim,” i.e., *simchas* Purim and *seudas* Purim, “shall not be revoked from amidst the” adult “Jews,” i.e., over the age of *bar* or *bas* mitzvah, “and their memory,” the *Megillah* reading, “shall not cease from their seed,” i.e., those who are minors.

We see from the Gaon a big *chiddush*, we see that there is a *chiyuv* even on *ketanim* [children] to hear *Megillah*. The question is, which *ketanim* is the Gaon referring to? Children who have reached the age of *chinuch*, or even children that haven't yet reached the age of *chinuch*?

The truth is, there may be a *mekor* [source] for the Gaon from the Yerushalmi. The Yerushalmi (2:5) teaches: שאף הן באותו בר קפרא אומר צריך לקרותה לפני נשים ולפני קטנים - ספק - "Bar Kapora said: One needs to read *Megillah* in front of women and **young children**, as they were also at risk of being wiped out".

There are in fact those who hold that there is an obligation to bring children that haven't yet reached the age of *chinuch* to *shul* to hear the *Megillah* reading (see *Leket Yosher, Orach Chaim* page 153, and *Rokeach* 236).

Proof to the above can be brought from the *Shulchan Aruch*. The *Shulchan Aruch* mentions the *din* of reading *Megillah* to children twice. Once in *siman* 689 where he writes: הכל חייבים בקריאתה אנשים ונשים וגרים ועבדים משוחררים ומחנכים את הקטנים לקרותה - "Everyone is obligated to read *Megillah*, men, women, converts, freed slaves, and we even educate children in the mitzvah."

And again at the end of the *siman* the *Shulchan Aruch* writes: מנהג טוב להביא קטנים - "It's a good custom, to bring **young boys and girls** to hear *Megillah*".

The question is, why does the *Shulchan Aruch* mention the *din* that one should bring children to hear *Megillah* twice?

The *Biur Halachah* explains, that the second *din* the *Shulchan Aruch* brings is referring to children who have reached the age of *chinuch*. However, this doesn't answer the question, because at the beginning of the *siman* the *Mechaber* writes, that children are obligated, so why does he need to repeat it. The *Biur Halachah* suggests another *peshat*, that the second *din* is because of *b'rov om hadras melech* – that it is preferable to perform a mitzvah along with a large group.

However, if the *Biur Halachah* is correct, that the *minhag* to bring children is just to fulfil *b'rov om hadras melech*, it doesn't fit well with the continuation of the Yerushalmi. The *mekor* that there is a *chiyuv* on children to hear *Megillah* is the Yerushalmi, and in the continuation of the Yerushalmi it says: ר' יהושע בן לוי עבד כן מכנש בניו ובני ביתיה וקרי - "R' Yehoshua ben Levi did the above, and he gathered, his sons and his household and read in front of them the *Megillah*". If *pshat* is like the *Biur Halachah*, that the reason is because of *b'rov om hadras melech*, then R' Yehoshua ben Levi should

have taken them to *shul*, a place where there is lots of people and not merely gather them together at home. We see from the Yerushalmi that bringing children isn't because of *b'rov om hadras melech*, if so, what is the *Shulchan Aruch* adding when he says: מנהג טוב להביא קטנים וקטנות לשמוע מקרא מגילה – “It's a good custom, to bring young boys and girls to hear *Megillah*”?

Some *Rishonim* learn (see *Ravyah, Megillah* 569) that even children that haven't yet reached the age of *chinuch*, have a mitzvah to hear the *Megillah*.

It would seem that this is what the Gaon intends to say by saying: וזכרם לא יסוף מזרעם – “and their memory,” the *Megillah* reading, לא יסוף – “shall not cease from their seed,” even from children that haven't yet reached the age of *chinuch*. The question is, what is this *din*? and what is the difference between *Megillah* reading and the *mishteh v'simcha* of Purim, that by *Megillah* there is a mitzvah to read in front of young children, whereas by *mishteh v'simcha* there is no such mitzvah? What is *pshat* in the Goan?

There is one other mitzvah, where we find that there is a mitzvah to perform it in front of young children - the mitzvah of *Hakhel*. The *pasuk* says: והקהל את העם האנשים והנשים – “Gather together the people – men, women and children” (*Devorim* 31:12).

The Gemara in *Chagigah darshens*: טף למה הם באים כדי ליתן שכר למביאייהו – “The children for what reason do they come? To give reward to those who bring them”. We see from here, that by the mitzvah of *Hakhel* there was a mitzvah to bring even children that hadn't yet reached the age of *chinuch*.

The Rambam in *Hilchos Chagigah* (3:1) explains the *yesod* behind the mitzvah of *Hakhel*. From the Rambam we can see why there is a *chiyuv* to bring children, and from there we will be able to understand why there would be a mitzvah to bring young children to hear the *Megillah* reading.

The Rambam writes: מצות עשה להקהיל כל ישראל אנשים ונשים וטף בכל מוצאי שמטה בעלותם – “It is a *mitzvas aseh* to assemble all Yisroel, men, women, and children, after the close of every *shemittah* year, when they go up to make the pilgrimage, and recite to them sections from the Torah which will urge them to perform the precepts and encourage them to cling to the true religion.”

In Halachah 6, The Rambam adds the following: גרים שאינם מכירין חיבין להכין לבם ולהקשיב: אזנם לשמע באימה ויראה וגילה ברעדה כיום שנתנה בו בסיני אפלו חכמים גדולים שיודעים כל התורה כלה חיבין לשמע בכונה גדולה יתרה ומי שאינו יכול לשמע מכון לבו לקריאה זו שלא קבעה הכתוב אלא לחזק דת האמת ויראה עצמו כאלו עתה נצטוו בה ומפי הגבורה שומעה שהמלך שליח הוא להשמיע – דברי האל – “Converts who did not know Hebrew were required to direct their hearts

A Novel Interpretation of What it Means “Purim Will Never be Annulled”

In the *piyut* for *Parshas Zachor* we say: אם כל המועדים יהיו בטלים ימי הפורים לא נבטלים – “Even if all the Yomim Tovim will become annulled, Purim will still be observed”. This is based on a Medrash in *Mishlei* (9:1):

שכל המועדים עתידים בטלים וימי הפורים אינם בטלים לעולם שנאמר וימי הפורים האלה לא יעברו - מתוך היהודים - In the future all Yomim Tovim will be annulled. Purim, however, will never be annulled, as it says in the *pasuk* (Esther 9:28): “And these days of Purim shall never cease among the Jews”.

Rav Zvi Hirsch Ferber in his *sefer* on *Megillas Esther* quotes Rav Yechezkel Cohen of Sunderland who asks that the Medrash says that all the Yomim Tovim will become nullified, so why does the *piyut* say ‘if’ which implies there is a doubt?

He answers based on the *Chazal* (*Megillah* 14) which says that when Achasveirosh removed his signet ring and gave it to Haman it had a greater effect than the 48 *nevi'im* and 7 *nevios* that warned Klal Yisroel but failed to convince them to do *teshuva*. The *nevi'im* and *nevios* never managed, whereas the transfer of authority from Achashveirosh to Haman did achieve the effect of making the Yidden do *teshuva*. Rav Cohen explains if Hashem were to see that the Jewish people would fail to observe the Yomim Tovim and were, *chas vesholom*, to be *mechalel* Shabbos then He would see that another ruler similar to Haman would arise that would prompt us to do *teshuva* and after that this *rosha* would be destroyed.

This is what it means: אם כל המועדים יהיו בטלים - if we annul the Yomim Tovim, then, ימי הפורים לא נבטלים - “Purim will not be nullified, as Hashem will arrange another Haman to put us back on the right track! (*Ovi Mori shlita*)

A Related Idea

The Gemara relates (*Gittin* 57b) that some of the grandchildren of Haman studied Torah in Bnei Brak. How are we to understand this? The descendants of our greatest enemy joined the Jewish people?

Rav Chaim Kanievsky related a parable given by the Dubno Maggid: A prince was choking on a bone. An enemy of the king passed by, and seeing the son of his enemy, he gave the prince a powerful blow. The blow hurt the prince but succeeded in dislodging the bone from his throat. The king’s enemy was brought to judgment for striking the prince. It was ruled that since he struck the prince, he must be executed.

However, since he had also (unwittingly) saved the prince's life, his children would be granted titles of nobility.

The same happened with Haman. He indeed struck the Jews a mighty blow, and for that he was punished, as he deserved. However, Haman's decree inspired the Jews to repent. As the Gemara states (*Megillah* 14a), all the *nevi'im*, with their numerous warnings, could not get the Jews to repent completely, but when Haman received Achashveirosh's ring, the Jews repented and reaffirmed their acceptance of the Torah. For this, Haman deserved some reward, and thus some of his descendants merited to join the Jewish people and study Torah.

Rav Chaim adds that Pharaoh was similarly rewarded, for the same reason. Although he mercilessly subjugated the Jews, our slavery made us worthy of receiving the Torah. Since in Heaven no good deed is left unpaid, Pharaoh was rewarded, as the Medrash states (*Otzar HaMidrashim* p. 361), by surviving the splitting of the Yam Suf and later becoming king of the city of Nineveh.

A Related Idea – A Glimpse into The Tremendous Award that Awaits Us

The Medrash teaches that *Perek* [Chapter] 30 of *Tehillim* (which is recited daily) "Mizmor Shir Chanukas Habayis" was composed by Mordechai HaTzaddik, his students, Haman HaRasha, Esther HaMalkah, Knesses Yisroel, and Ruach HaKodesh. (Each one said one or two *pasukim*.)

The Medrash says: "When Haman came to Mordechai he said, 'Get up and get dressed! How bad is my *mazul*! Yesterday, I prepared the gallows, and HaKodosh Boruch Hu prepared a crown for you. I was preparing rope and nails [to hang you], and HaKodosh Boruch Hu was preparing the king's clothing for you. I wanted to tell the king to hang you on the gallows, and he told me to lead you on his horse.' Haman dressed him... When Mordechai was riding, he praised HaKodosh Boruch Hu. 'I exalt you Hashem, because You raised me, and you didn't allow my enemies to rejoice...I shouted to you, and you healed me...'"

The Medrash also cites the words that Haman said: "That *rosha* [Haman]; what did he say [as he led Mordechai through the streets]? He said, "When things were tranquil, I said that I would never fall. [But now I realize] that it was Your will that made me mighty. You concealed Your face, and I was frightened."

It was an unusual moment of truth, when Haman said these few wonderful words to Hashem. He recognized that his might, wealth, and fame were given to him from

Hashem, and Hashem could easily take them away from him. His righteousness lasted a brief moment. Immediately afterwards, Haman reverted to being the *rosha* he always was, but for one moment he was righteous. What was his reward?

The Gemara tells us that one of Haman's descendants taught Torah to his students in Bnei Brak, according to the *girsa* [textual version] of the *Ein Yaakov* in *Sanhedrin* (96b) it was Rav Yehuda brei d'Rav Shilas. How did Haman merit this? The *Shem MiShmuel* said that he merited it because of the righteous words that he said while leading Mordechai through the streets of Shushan. Even Haman's good deed didn't go to waste. All virtuous deeds, from each and every person, are rewarded.

The *Shem MiShmuel* concludes: "This is a lesson for all people, even those who are on terribly low levels – may Hashem save us. They shouldn't consider it to be insignificant every [good] word they say, and even every good thought they have. Even when one doesn't have the strength to continue on this good path, nevertheless, it will be extremely beneficial for him, to the extent that no mouth can say it, and no heart can comprehend just how far these matters go."

We learn from this the extraordinary reward that awaits us. If Haman was rewarded with a descendent, who taught Torah, because of the two *pasukim* he said, how much reward we should expect for the many virtuous deeds we do!

Why Megillas Esther is Referred to as "Words of Peace and Truth"

דברי שלום ואמת

"Words of peace and truth." (Esther 9:30)

In *Megillas Esther*, the *Megillah* is referred to as: דברי שלום ואמת – "Words of peace and truth". This is an unusual description. Most people if asked to describe the *Megillah* would likely call it the book of *pirsumay nisa* [publicizing the miracles]. Why is the *Megillah* called "words of peace and truth"? How do these words personify the entire *Megillah*?

According to the Gaon only the first description – "words of peace" – refers to the *Megillah*. "Truth" refers to the Torah. The Gemara in *Shabbos* (88a) teaches that at the time of Purim, the Jews renewed their acceptance of the Torah. So "words of truth" refers to the Torah they accepted.

But why is the *Megillah* called “words of peace”, and why is this description put together with the acceptance of the Torah? What is the connection between these two themes? Clearly there is a message here?

The *Megillah*'s Message

Rav Yerucham (*Da'as Chochmah U'Mussar* vol. 1 pg.77) writes that one can come to appreciate the vast contrast between the behavior of the Yidden and of the *umos ha'olam*, by analyzing the people who represented each of them in the *Megillah*.

The *Megillah* gives a lengthy, detailed description of Haman's and Achashveirosh's behavior. Look at how the foolish king made a ridiculously extravagant party to show off his riches, only to get so drunk that he killed his own wife. See how Haman, his prime minister, a man who had the greatest riches in the world, couldn't handle when one person didn't bow down to him. In his rage, he ordered the murder of an entire nation.

Why does the *Megillah* give such detailed descriptions of their actions? So that we will see the evil *middos* the *umos ha'olam* exhibit and how they lead a person to act in such a horrific manner. We should be repulsed by their behavior and learn how not to conduct ourselves.

The *Middos* of Mordechai and Esther

By the same token, there is much detail describing the behavior of Mordechai and Esther, two righteous people, each of them the epitome of a Yid. Through them, the *Megillah* teaches us how a person with exemplary *middos* behaves. It teaches us how a Jew is expected to conduct himself.

For example, the *Megillah* tells us that when Esther was brought to Achashveirosh: לא בר בקשה דבר - "she did not request anything" (Esther 2:15). She had no ambition to be queen of the entire world, even with all the wealth and power and honor it would bring her. She understood that these things have no real importance. She was the exact opposite of Haman and Achashveirosh. They needed everything. She needed nothing.

Another example of Esther's remarkable *middos tovos* is shown when Mordechai told her to warn the king about the plot to kill him. She made Achashveirosh aware that it was actually Mordechai who deserved the credit for saving him. She could have easily taken credit for saving the king and earned great honor, but she didn't, because being honest was of prime importance to her, more than all the honor in the world.

Similarly, we learn in the *Megillah* of Mordechai's *middos*: ויהי אמן את הדסה היא אסתר - "And he raised Hadassah, she is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for

she had no father or mother” (Esther 2:7). The first thing we hear about Mordechai is his tremendous act of *chesed* – raising someone else’s child. And when Esther was taken away: *ובכל יום ויום מרדכי מתהלך לפני חצר בית הנשים לדעת את שלום אסתר* – “And each and every day, Mordechai would pace in front of the courtyard of the house of the women to know Esther’s wellbeing” (Esther 2:11). That’s caring for another person.

The *Sefas Emes* (Purim 5637) points out that it was a span of four or five years from the time that Esther was taken to the palace until the Purim miracle occurred. And every single day, Mordechai would go to check on her, because she was an orphan. He writes that this deed alone was enough of a merit for Klal Yisroel to merit the Purim miracle.

“Words of Peace”

If we focus on the different people presented in the *Megillah*, we see two contrasting personalities – Mordechai and Esther with their stellar *middos* representing the Yidden, and Achashveirosh and Haman with their evil *middos* representing the *umos ha’olam*. We must learn the proper behavior by analyzing both types – how to behave and how not to behave.

With this, we can explain why the *Megillah* is referred to as “words of peace”. Refined character traits are the root of peace between people. People with proper *middos* do not harbor hatred, nor do they quarrel. They are people of peace. The *Megillah*, which teaches us how to behave properly, is appropriately called “words of peace”.

Mordechai HaYehudi

After reading the *Megillah*, we recite *Shoshanas Yaakov*. In it, we curse Haman who, as it says: “attempted to destroy us”. We describe the evil that he did. We then bless Mordechai HaYehudi, but we make no mention of how he saved Klal Yisroel. We simply refer to him as the Yehudi. Why is that?

Based on the above, we can answer that Mordechai merited saving Klal Yisroel simply because he acted as a Yehudi. He was the epitome of how a Jew is supposed to behave, and that is why he merited to be Klal Yisroel’s saviour. There is indeed the perfect description for him – a Yehudi.

That’s a Yid

A non-frum *kibbutznik*, a man who did not even know *krias shema*, travelled with his wife to England for an operation. When he returned to Eretz Yisroel after the surgery, people who were acquainted with him noticed that he had begun moving towards

teshuvah. “What happened?” asked his friends. “Why the newfound interest in Judaism?”

“I’ll tell you,” he answered. “When I was in the hospital in England, a man with a long beard came around every single morning to see what we needed. He took care of all of our needs. Growing up on a *kibbutz*, I never got to know ‘a Yid.’ Now that I’ve seen what a Yid is, I would like to be one as well.”

That is the definition of a Yehudi: someone with exemplary *middos*, someone who cares for others. This is the lesson we learn from Mordechai HaYehudi.

Middos Before Torah

HaRav Chaim Vital writes that the Torah never discusses good *middos*, because *middos* come before the Torah. Only with proper *middos* can one receive the Torah. This explains why the *Megillah* is called: דברי שלום ואמת – “words of peace and truth”, with “peace” coming before “truth”. Before mentioning the reacceptance of Torah, it stresses the *middos tovos*, because they are a prerequisite to Torah. At the time of Purim, before Klal Yisroel reaccepted the Torah, they had to purify their *middos*; they had to learn the lessons from their leaders, Mordechai and Esther.

The *Megillah* and the *Mezuzah*

The Gemara in *Megillah* states that the *Megillah* needs to be written with *sirtut* [lines below the words] just as is needed in the: אמיתה של תורה – “The truth of the Torah”. *Tosfos* in *Gittin* 6b explains that “the truth of Torah” refers to the *mezuzah*. The *Megillah* requires *sirtut* just as a *mezuzah* does.

The *Chasam Sofer* (*Drashos* vol. 1, pg. 246) asks, “Why is the *mezuzah* described as, “The truth of the Torah”, more than any other part of the Torah? Also, what is the connection between the *Megillah* and the *mezuzah*?”

He explains that the *mezuzah* represents Hashem’s loving kindness to His children: He stands outside our homes, guarding us inside, despite this being below the dignity of a king, certainly for the King of kings. The *mezuzah*, therefore, demonstrates to us the extant one must go to do kindness for others. We must do for others, despite all of our reasons why it may not be in our own best interest. This, says the *Chasam Sofer*, is the meaning of, “the truth of Torah”. The *emes* and *chesed* of the Torah is the most apparent in the *mezuzah*.

Similarly, says the *Chasam Sofer*, the details of the miracle of Purim are based on the *chesed* Mordechai did for Esther the orphan. Despite being the *gadol hador*, he went

to the gates of the palace every day to see how she was faring. He paid no attention to his own honor; he focused solely on helping another Yid. It was in the merit of this *chesed* that both he and Esther became Hashem's messengers to rid the world of the evil of Amalek. The *middah tovah* of kindness demonstrated in the *Megillah*, which was the prerequisite to the reacceptance the Torah, is similar to the: אמיתה של תורה – “The truth of the Torah” of the *mezuzah*. It is the lesson we learn from Purim, so we too can be worthy of accepting and learning the Torah. (HaRav Yerucham Olshin)

True Achdus

לקים את ימי הפרים האלה בזמניהם

“These days of Purim shall be observed at their proper time.” (Esther 9:31)

The *Megillah* records that Esther and Mordechai instructed the Jews of their generation to establish the observance of the days of Purim in their proper times. The Gemara in *Megillah* (2a) derives from the plural reference to “times” of celebration that the day on which walled cities observe their Purim festivities (15th of Adar) must differ from the day on which un-walled cities do so (14th of Adar).

Rav Zev Leff notes that Purim is known as the Yom Tov of *achdus* [unity], as we focus on joining together to hear the *Megillah* and eat the festive Purim meal, sending packages of food to friends and family, and remembering to help our poor brethren so that they may also enjoy their meals. If so, wouldn't it have made for more of a sense of community for *Chazal* to insist that all Jews should specifically observe Purim together at the same time?

Rav Leff answers that if everybody is acting in the exact same manner at precisely the same time in an identical fashion, this can hardly be called true togetherness. The reason they would feel united wouldn't be because of any genuine, deep-rooted sense of identification with other Jews, but merely because they all happen to be doing the same thing at the moment.

True *achdus* is when one Jew is able to tolerate and accept that another Jew is conducting himself differently than he is, and to nevertheless recognize that each in his own unique way is equally fulfilling the will of Hashem. *Chazal* further obligated us to send *mishlo'ach manos*, which represents the concept that one Jew sends food from his personal kitchen, prepared according to his customs and preferences, to his friend, who in a demonstration of genuine unity happily partakes of it. In order to teach us this

lesson about the definition of authentic *achdus*, Esther and Mordechai specifically mandated that Purim be observed on different days.

A Beautiful Peshat from the Meshech Chochmah

The *Megillah* records that Mordechai and Esther sent letters to all of the Jews to establish the observance of the days of Purim “on their proper dates.” This expression is difficult to understand; when else should Purim be celebrated if not at the time that the miracle occurred? The *Meshech Chochmah* explains that non-Jews begin their day in the morning and end it at night, while the Jewish day is the opposite, beginning and ending at sundown. Since the story of the *Megillah* was based on Haman’s decree, it is reasonable to assume that he, being a non-Jew, issued an order that the Jews should be killed on the day of the 13th of Adar and the following night, what Jews would call the night of the 14th of Adar.

If so, Rav Meir Simcha suggests that the miracle of Purim occurred during the day of the 14th of Adar and the following night, what we call the night of the 15th of Adar, while in Shushan it was on the 15th of Adar and the following night, what we call the night of the 16th of Adar. Nevertheless, Mordechai and Esther emphasized that the Jews should observe Purim “on their proper dates,” based on the Jewish calendar which begins and ends at sundown.

In light of this, he brilliantly explains the mistake of Haman. The Gemara teaches (*Megillah* 13b) that when Haman cast his lots, he was excited that they fell out in the month of Adar which was the month when Moshe died. The Gemara adds that Haman's mistake was that although Moshe died on the 7th of Adar, he was also born on the 7th of Adar because Hashem completes the years of the righteous, in which case it doesn't reflect negatively on the *mazal* of the Jews in the month of Adar. But if Haman knew when Moshe died, why didn't he also know when he was born?

The *Meshech Chochmah* explains that Moshe was born on the 7th of Adar, but on which part of the 7th of Adar was he born? Rashi writes (*Shemos* 2:2) that when Moshe was born he filled up the house with light, so he must have been born at night when it would be noticed that he was filling up a dark house with light. When did he die? The *pasuk* (*Devorim* 32:48) says that he died in the middle of the day on the 7th of Adar.

Haman mistakenly thought like a non-Jew that the day starts in the morning and ends at night, in which case Moshe didn't die on the same day that he was born. Haman thought that Moshe was born on the 6th of Adar and died on the 7th of Adar, in which case the month of Adar had a bad *mazal* for the Jews. In reality, the Jewish day begins

and ends at sunset, in which case Moshe was born and died on the 7th of Adar, and the *mazal* of Adar was in fact good for the Jews.

פרק י'

Achashveirosh Lost Popularity

וישם המלך אחשרש מס על הארץ

“King Achashveirosh levied taxes upon the land.” (Esther 10:1)

Throughout the *Megillah* Achashveirosh is spelled with either one or two “vavs.” Why is the “vav” omitted entirely here?

The *Orah V'Simcha* explains: Public officials are highly lauded when they reduce taxes and criticized and scorned when they increase taxes. Not knowing Esther's nationality, the King proclaimed an amnesty (from taxes) for all the provinces in her honor when he married her (2:18), thus enhancing his popularity with all the people. Now that he had levied taxes, he immediately lost some of their admiration and to indicate the decline in his popularity, his name is not spelled as fully as previously.

An Important Lesson to Take from Achashveirosh

וכל מעשה תקפו וגבורתו ופרשת גדלת מרדכי אשר גדלו המלך הלוא הם כתובים על ספרי דברי הימים למלכי מדי ופרס

“All his mighty and powerful acts, and a full account of the greatness to which the king advanced Mordechai, are recorded in the Annals of the Kings of Madai and Persia.” (Esther 10:2)

At the very end of the *Megillah*, we are told that the full story of Achashveirosh's reign in Persia is written: על ספרי דברי הימים למלכי מדי ופרס – “On the history books about the kings of Madai and Persia.” The *Megillah* here is informing us that more material about the history of the time period of the Purim story is available in other texts, but the facts that we need to know appear here, in *Megillas* Esther. Every history book is written from its particular perspective, and we need to make sure to learn our history from the texts which were written with the correct perspective. Therefore, the *Megillah* emphasizes that although other information is written elsewhere, the information that we need in order to understand the story of Purim from a proper Torah perspective is written here, in the *Megillah*.

Rav Chaim Ha'kohen of Aram Soba (1585-1655), however, adds further insight into this *pasuk*. Achashveirosh was a very evil man, who authorized the extermination of an

entire nation without giving it a second thought – but nevertheless, there is something very important that we can learn from him. Namely, he made a point of writing down the favors done for him, and repaying those who did those favors. The *Megillah* tells that Achashveirosh had it written in the empire's chronicles that two servants plotted to assassinate him, and their plot was foiled by Mordechai. And when Achashveirosh discovered that Mordechai was not rewarded for this, he immediately demanded that he be granted special honor and distinction in gratitude for saving his life. This is something we can all learn from Achashveirosh, and that we all should learn.

Rav Chaim Ha'kohen interprets on this basis the *pasuk*, על ספרי דברי הימים, Although the history books written by the Persian scribes, quite obviously, have no sanctity, they nevertheless received an "*aliya*" – an "elevation" – by virtue of the fact that they speak of Achashveirosh's admirable quality of gratitude. And thus the *pasuk* states: על ספרי דברי הימים, using the word "*al*" (literally, "on"), as opposed to the prefix "*be-*" ("in"), to allude to the fact that these books received an "*aliya*," they acquired some level of importance and value, because they teach us about the importance of showing appreciation.

We all are the beneficiaries of kindness. Our family members, our friends, our work associates, and so many other people in our lives are constantly doing things to help us. If Achashveirosh understood the importance of showing appreciation and feeling a debt of gratitude, then certainly we should, as well. Just as importantly, we are all the beneficiaries of Hashem's great kindness each and every moment of our lives. As in the time of the Purim story, these kindnesses are often hidden, or otherwise difficult to see and recognize. But we need to pay attention, open our eyes and take note of all that Hashem does for us. When we live with this mindset, being attuned to recognize and appreciate Hashem's unlimited kindness, we will experience true joy and happiness each and every day, celebrating all the good in our lives and feeling fortunate and blessed to have received so much from our Creator.

An Important Lesson in Chinuch

כי מרדכי היהודי משנה למלך אחשורוש וגדול ליהודים ורצוי לרוב אחיו דרש טוב לעמו ודבר שלום לכל זרעו

"For Mordechai, the Yehudi, was viceroy to King Achashveirosh; he was a great man among the Jews, and found favor with the multitude of his brothers; he sought the good of his people and spoke with peace to all his posterity." (Esther 10:3)

The *Ibn Ezra* makes two very interesting comments on this *pasuk*. He says regarding the phrase: ורצוי לרוב אחיו - "He found favor with the multitude (literally the majority) of his brothers," that because of jealousy, a person cannot find favor with everyone. It is impossible to be perfectly popular.

Then the *Ibn Ezra* comments on the buildup of praises that we have in the *pasuk*. The concluding, and seemingly greatest praise is that: ודבר שלום לכל זרעו - "He spoke with peace to all his posterity." The *Ibn Ezra* comments that this means he was on good terms with all his children and grandchildren.

This seems anti-climactic. Is this the greatest thing we can find to say about Mordechai HaYehudi? The *Ibn Ezra* says this is indeed a great praise.

Think of all the children and grandchildren that Mordechai had, did each one turn out exactly like Mordechai would have wanted? If Mordechai would have wanted all his children and grandchildren to become *talmiday chachomim*, do we expect that is the way it would have worked out? Or, if he wanted them all to be expert businessman, do we expect that is the way it would turn out? Maybe there would be a black sheep in the family that became a *talmid chocham*!

And yet, he spoke in peace to all descendants. He was able to maintain a peaceful relationship with all his children and grandchildren. This, the *Ibn Ezra* tells us, is a great thing. Because of the natural fear that children have towards parents, it is not always true that there is a loving relationship between parents and children. If Mordechai could maintain such a relationship this is indeed the highest accolade that the Torah can offer him.

This is a very important lesson for all of us. We try to raise children and we have certain ideals and standards of how we would like our children to be. It does not always turn out like that. But we should always strive to maintain a relationship where we can, at least, speak peacefully with all our offspring. (R' Frand)

A Most Important Lesson, Tucked Away in the Last *Pasuk* of the *Megillah*

Rav Shlomo Alkabetz (author of the *Lecha Dodi*) wrote a *sefer* on *Megillas Esther*, called *Manos HaLevi*. (In fact, Rav Shlomo Alkabetz distributed the *Manos HaLevi* to his friends together with his *mishloach manos*.) In the *Manos HaLevi*, Rav Alkabetz asks why the aforementioned *pasuk* is the last *pasuk* in the *Megillah*. After ten *Perokim* of the *Megillah* why is this *pasuk* the fitting conclusion of the whole story of the *Megillah*?

He also asks what the expression: כי מדכי היהודי, is coming to do. Under normal circumstances, "כי" means "because," which implies that what follows is the answer to a question. The *Manos HaLevi* wants to know what question is being answered. He explains that this *pasuk* is indeed the "answer" to the entire *Megillah* that was just read. What is the question that this is coming to answer?

There is a big question that we can ask about the story of the *Megillah*. If we would have been in Shushan at the time of the story, I really doubt whether we would have listened to what Mordechai had to say. If we analyze the story, the person who seemingly caused all the problems that threatened the Jewish community was none other than Mordechai himself!

Picture it in our day and time. There is this powerful man, Haman, who wants everyone to bow down to him or else..., but the *gadol ha'dor* insists, "I am not going to bow down to him."

As a result of the refusal of this one person to bow down, the whole decree of Achashveirosh to exterminate the Jewish community, from young to old, was triggered. In fact, *Chazal* say that the Jews of the time criticized Mordechai, telling him, "You are sending us before the sword of the wicked Haman because of this unbending, obstinate, irrational, fanatic behavior of yours. You are going to get us all killed." That is, in fact, what almost happened.

So, when Mordechai later comes and rallies the people to be strong in the face of the decree, why do they listen to him? Did he not lose all credibility as a trusted leader? Would the people not be inclined to tell him, "We told you so! It is your fault that we find ourselves in this predicament in the first place!" Would we not expect the masses to send him off to some corner of the country, and leave them alone to somehow try to dig themselves out of the mess he created? Why did they listen to him? Would we listen to such a person nowadays, under similar circumstances?

The answer is introduced with one word – the word that introduces the last *pasuk* of the *Megillah*: "Ki..." (Because...)

This can be explained by an insight of the Ponevezher Rav in *Parshas Vayeitzei*. When Yaakov came to the well at that fateful meeting with Rochel, the *pasuk* says, "The shepherds came to the well and rolled the stone off the opening of the well...". Yaakov confronted them and asked them, "My brothers, what are you doing over here? It is not the time of day when you should be bringing in the flocks. Why are you quitting work in the middle of the day?" (*Bereishis* 29:2-7)

The next time you drive by a construction site and you see a whole bunch of workers looking at the hole in the ground, doing nothing, smoking and schmoozing, try pulling over your car and rolling down the window and saying to them, "Hey guys, listen, you are on tax payers' money. You should be working now. What are you doing over here?" You had better not stick around for the answer.

And yet, Yaakov Avinu gives these herdsmen *mussar*, and they respond politely to him. They explain their circumstances to him. What is the explanation? The Ponevezher Rav explains, it is because Yaakov used one word “*acha*” [my brothers]. This word was not rhetoric. It was not just a figure of speech. They sensed Yaakov Avinu’s concern for them. He is a stranger giving them *mussar*, but they felt this kinship and closeness to him, such that they were willing to accept his chastisement.

That was Mordechai’s secret as well. He stood on his feet in the midst of the community and said, “My dear brethren, all the gates are closed, except the Gate of Tears. Look at the people of Ninveh. Let us take them as our example, and let us fast and do *teshuvah*.” Mordechai rallied them, but he rallied them with words of endearment, calling them “My brethren,” and showing his concern for them.

Perhaps the people felt that Mordechai made a mistake originally. Maybe they did not understand what he did or why he did it, but they knew that it must have been for their benefit. When you have a sense of closeness with someone, when you feel that he loves you and is interested in your welfare, then you can give him *mussar*.

This is what the climax of the *Megillah* is teaching. Do you want to understand the whole story here? How could it be if they believed that Mordechai got them into the trouble they were facing, they still listened to him? The answer is: כי מדכי היהודי משנה – “BECAUSE Mordechai HaYehudi, the viceroy to King Achashveirosh, and the leader of the Jewish people, was beloved by all; he sought the welfare of his nation and spoke peace to all his descendants.” Because he was beloved by all, and they knew that he was always seeking their welfare — that is why they listened to him, despite his having potentially been the source of their problem. When such a relationship exists, then he is given lots of leeway.

That is what the last *pasuk* of the *Megillah* is coming to explain. (R’ Frand)

Believing In the Hashgacha of Hashem Before We See the End of the Story

The halachah is: הקורא את המגילה למפרע לא יצא - “If someone read the *Megillah* starting from the end, he does not fulfil his obligation properly”. The Ostrovtsa Rebbe explains, when we read the *Megillah* in order, at the outset we don’t seem to understand why we need to know that Achashveirosh threw a party and that Vashti also made a party and that a new queen was chosen and so on. But when we get to the part where Achashveirosh can’t sleep one night and asks for his *sefer zichronos* to be read, that is

when everything starts becoming clear. That is when we see how the hand of Hashem was working for years in advance to set the stage for that moment. Mordechai hearing the plot of Bigsan and Seresh, Esther relating it to the king in his name and so on. To start from the end of the story and go back to see the hand of Hashem, anybody can do. In fact, the *Megillah* tells us, many people converted to Judaism after they saw this story in its entirety. The job of the Jew, however, is to be able to say: "This is from Hashem," before he sees the bigger picture. We have to read the *Megillah* from its beginning and say the entire time, "This was from Hashem, and that was from Hashem," even before all the pieces are tied together.

Most of the time in life, we will not be able to see the full picture and there are many questions people have as to why things are happening. The best thing we could do is say: "This is also from Hashem for the best reasons. Just because I don't see how, doesn't mean it's not true." Every question is going to have a great answer. If we can believe now, before we see the answer, that is where all the glory lies.

The following two stories bring out this point perfectly:

Story #1: The first story which was told over by Dr. Meir Wikler is a story which took place in 1987 when Aish HaTorah sponsored a forum on how to achieve happiness, and they had Rabbi Zelig Pliskin as the featured speaker. The event was held in the King David Hotel in Yerushalayim and drew a standing room only crowd. The rabbi explained to the audience how a person is free to choose the attitude in which he will view any situation. And if he chooses to adopt a positive perspective, he is capable of achieving happiness in any situation. At the end of the class, there was a question-and-answer period. A middle-aged man stood up to ask the first question. He introduced himself saying his name is Steve and how much he enjoyed the class. Then he said, "Honestly, Rabbi, do you really expect us to believe that a person can re-frame any situation in a positive light? Certainly, there are some situations that cannot be viewed positively. For example, you will not be able to find one in a million who will feel good about getting a flat tire on a highway."

During the brief pause that followed, Rabbi Pliskin thought about how to respond. What would he say that would be acceptable to Steve? The hushed crowd waited anxiously for the reply. But suddenly, the man sitting right next to Steve, named Alan, asked permission to address the question and Rabbi Pliskin happily gave him the floor. Alan said, "A couple of years ago I had a serious heart condition. After the doctor examined me, he said if I wanted to see my next birthday, I had to radically alter my lifestyle. I had to quit smoking immediately. He put me on a strict low fat salt free diet, and I had to

cut back on my 12-hour work days at my law firm. I couldn't use the subway or drive in rush hour traffic, and I wasn't allowed to do any exercise or even lift a suitcase. Believe me rabbi, I was scared so I followed my doctor's orders religiously. After twelve months, the doctor himself couldn't believe the recovery I made. He was so pleased, he told me, I was no longer in danger and could resume regular life again. I was so excited! I was afraid I wasn't hearing him correctly, so I asked him to be more specific.

'Alan', he said, 'you can exercise now, and you can lift whatever you want. You can even change a flat tire if necessary. Your electrocardiogram is excellent.'

"I floated home that night, I was on Cloud Nine. Two days later, on my way to work in a thunderstorm, I suddenly heard a loud thumping noise. I pulled over and saw I had a flat tire. As I opened the trunk to get the jack and spare tire, I burst into tears. Tears of euphoria. It suddenly hit me, I'm allowed to change a flat tire! I was so grateful to have made such a complete recovery and then demonstrate to myself by changing my own flat tire." Alan then sat down and Steve sat speechless, together with the rest of the audience.

A question that Steve thought was impossible to answer – how could anybody be happy with a flat tire – was shown to have the simplest answer. Every question we have is going to be answered even more simply than that.

As an aside, Rabbi Pliskin observed that the one person who was capable of giving the answer happened to be at the class that night and happened to be sitting right next to the questioner. The *hashgocha* of Hashem is amazing. As for us, we have to believe in the *hashgacha* of Hashem before we see the end of the story.

Story #2: A second story is a story I heard from Rav Ephraim Wachsman: Rav Wachsman relates that his wife's grandparents lived in Vienna when the Nazis invaded. They had three little children, and they ran to France to escape the Nazi onslaught. They found themselves in the city of Bayonne and were trying to escape Europe. The streets were choked with thousands of refugees, and nobody knew where to go. How do you find passage, how do you travel? He wanted to go to England, but he had no clue how to go about it.

Then he saw a half drunken sailor. He went over to him and asked him are you traveling? It turned out that he was a Yugoslavian captain, and he was sailing tomorrow to England. "You're welcome to come along with us, but you have to have a visa to get into England."

Where do you get a visa? He found out that in a nearby town was a British embassy, so he promptly travelled the long distance. He prepared himself to beg for mercy to stamp his passport and allow him into England. But when he got there his heart dropped. The gates of the embassy were swamped with thousands of refugees trying to get visas. They were all begging to get in, but the guards blocked the doors and let no one in. There was no chance he could fight through that crowd. Suddenly it began to thunder and rain. It was such a heavy downpour that everybody began to run for cover. The guards also ran inside to seek shelter. He too began to run and suddenly he found himself inside the embassy. He looked around him and saw that right in front of him was a door with a sign, Consular General. The very person he needed to give him a visa! He knocked and entered, and he was standing face to face with the person in charge of stamping the passports.

“What are you doing here? What do you want?” he asked.

“I’m a Jew,” he answered. “I have a wife and three little children. I have passage tomorrow on a ship to England if only you’ll help us and give us a visa. You are the only one who can save my life. Please have mercy!”

The Consul was very moved, and he said, “Sure, give me your passport and I’ll stamp it.”

He reached into his pocket and... He had left his passport at home. He fainted on the spot. In his eyes this was the worst moment in his life. They poured cold water on him and revived him. And the Consul asked what happened?”

“Well, I don’t know what happened, but it seems that I don’t have my passport. I must have left it at home.”

“Don’t worry,” he said. He took out a piece of paper and he wrote, “Those who are listed below on this paper have passage and have permission to enter England.” He signed his name at the bottom and stamped it and he gave him the blank piece of paper.

Rav Wachsmann’s grandfather went and found every single Jew he could find and filled the paper with names from top to bottom. All the Yidden on that visa arrived safely in England. Today they all live in England and have beautiful families.

This all came about from the worst moment in his life.

Sometimes you see it the very next day, and sometimes it takes many years. But the Ribbono Shel Olam is weaving that tapestry, the Ribbono Shel Olam is writing a *Megillas* Esther, and eventually we will see how the plan of the Ribbono Shel Olam will triumph

and the Ribbono Shel Olam wants only our benefit. The lesson we must take from *Megillas* Esther is that we have to believe in the *hashgacha* of Hashem before we see the end of the story.

שושנת יעקב

What Was So Special About *Techeiles* Mordechai

שושנת יעקב צהלה ושמחה בראתם יחד תכלת מרדכי

“The rose [that is] Yaakov, was cheerful and glad, when they saw together the royal blue [robes] of Mordechai.” (*Piyut Shoshanas Yaakov*)

The above *piyut* [liturgy] is very difficult to understand: Was the happiness of Klal Yisroel really from seeing the fancy clothes that Mordechai was wearing, surely, the happiness was from the fact that they were saved: ממייתה לחיים – “From death to life”, and that they were *mekabel* [accepted] the Torah with extreme *ahavah* [love]. Not from the fact that they saw the fancy clothes that Mordechai was wearing?

We also have to understand some *pasukim* in *Megillas* Esther. It says: “Mordechai left the king’s presence in royal robes of blue and white, with a magnificent crown of gold and a mantle of fine linen and purple wool and the city of Shushan rang with joyous cries. The Jews enjoyed light and gladness, happiness and honor” (Esther 8:15, 16). From these *pasukim* it seems that Klal Yisroel were full of joy and happiness due to the clothes that Mordechai was wearing. Again, we can ask, surely the reason they were happy is because they were saved from being killed and they accepted the Torah, why do the *pasukim* say they were happy because of the clothes they saw Mordechai wearing?

The *sefer Liflagos Reuven* (in a letter at the end of Vol. 1, *Likutei* Purim) cites an answer to the above from R’ Yonason Eibshitz. He answers that when Haman came to dress Mordechai in royal clothes, Mordechai needed to take off his own clothes. Haman wanted to hide that it was him who was leading Mordechai through the streets, so he brazenly put on Mordechai clothes, so people would think that it was Mordechai leading Haman through the streets and not vice versa. The Gemara in *Megillah* (16a) teaches that Haman’s daughter did indeed get mixed up and that’s why she ended up pouring garbage on Haman. Mordechai was happy for Haman to take his clothes off except for one item; Mordechai didn’t let Haman take off his *tzitzis*. When Klal Yisroel saw Mordechai riding on the horse, they were only happy and full of joy when they saw: תכלת מרדכי – “The *tzitzis* that Mordechai was wearing”. It was only because of the *tzitzis*

that they were able to recognize that it was Mordechai on the horse and not Haman. So, it's true that they weren't happy because of the clothes that Mordechai was wearing, but when they saw the *tzitzis* they realized it was Mordechai on the horse, and they realized Hashem was saving them.

The above answers the *lashon* of the *piyut*, but we still have to understand the *pasukim* in *Megillas* Esther. The *pasukim* in *Megillas* Esther are talking about after Mordechai was taken around by Haman on the horse, the *Megillah* is even talking about after Haman had been hung, yet, it still it sounds like they were only happy when they saw Mordechai's clothes. Why, what was so special about his clothes?

Perhaps we can explain based on something the *Rema* says in his *sefer Machir Yayin*. The *Rema* is bothered that by Mordechai it says: ותכריך בוץ וארגמן - "A mantle of fine linen and purple wool" (Esther 8:15), whereas earlier on in the *Megillah* (1:6) when it describes the fancy drapery that Achashveirosh put up for the big feast it says: אחוז בחבלי בוץ וארגמן - "Caught up by cords of fine linen and purple wool." Why does the *pasuk* change, and one time refer to wool and linen as one item together, and one time refer to them as two separate items? The *Rema* explains that *techailes* is wool, and *butz* is linen, if they were to be mixed together then there would be an *issur* of *shatnez*, therefore, it can't be that Mordechai wore them together. Therefore, by Mordechai the *pasuk* says: ותכריך בוץ וארגמן, the word תכריך, means wrapped up in wool and linen, however, the two materials were not woven together. However, by Achashveirosh who had no need to worry about *shatnez* it says: אחוז בחבלי בוץ וארגמן, which means that the wool and linen were tied together.

The *Megillas Storim* (written by the *Ba'al Nesivos*) on the aforementioned *pasuk* in the *Megillah* (1:6) writes, that the reason that the *pasuk* by Achashveirosh says: אחוז בחבלי בוץ וארגמן, was because Achashveirosh wanted to make everyone at the feast transgress the *issur* of *shatnez*. Therefore, he specifically made the seats they sat on from wool and linen. The *peshat* of the *Nesivos* fits very well with the *diyuk* of the *Rema*.

Rashi on the *Megillah* really answers the difficulty of *shatnez* by adding in one word. Rashi (8:15) says: מעטה בוץ טלית העשוי להתעטף - "A wrap of linen, a *tallis* in which to enwrap oneself." Rashi learns that Mordechai was wrapped up in a *tallis*. (See also the Gaon on *Megillas* Esther who learns that, בלבוש מלכות, means a *tallis*, תכלת means the *techeiles* strings of the *tzitzis* and וחור refers to the white strings.) According to Rashi, even if Mordechai was wearing *shatnez* it was *mutar* as the mitzvah of *tzitzis* overrides the *issur* of *shatnez*.

If the above is true and that the reason Mordechai was able to wear *shatnez* was because he was doing the mitzvah of *tzitzis* and a *mitzvas aseh* [positive commandment] overrides a *mitzvas lo saseh* [negative commandment], then we can perhaps answer why Klal Yisroel were so overjoyed when they saw Mordechai's clothes.

R' Akiva Eiger (*Gilyan HaShas*) in *Yevamos (7a)* explains why an *aseh* overrides a *lo saseh* even though we normally say that a *lo saseh* is more stringent. R' Akiva Eiger explains because when we perform a *mitzvas aseh* we are doing it out of *ahavah* [love] for the Ribbono Shel Olam. Whereas when we are careful not to transgress on a *lo saseh* we are only doing it out of *yirah* [fear] for the Ribbono Shel Olam, doing *mitzvos* out of *ahavah* is more special than performing *mitzvos* due to *yirah*.

When Klal Yisroel saw the: תכלת מדכי – “The *tzitzis* of Mordechai”, when they saw he was wearing *shatnez* because he was performing a mitzvah, they saw the specialty of doing *mitzvos* out of *ahavah* for the Ribbono Shel Olam. When they saw that the *aseh* of *tzitzis* overrides the *lo saseh* of *shatnez*, they realized what it means to do *mitzvos* because of *ahavah*. This inspired them to accept upon themselves the Torah again with *ahavah*, and through being *mekabel* the Torah, Klal Yisroel were *zocha* [merited] to many special things. Therefore, it was indeed the fact that they saw Mordechai clothes (his *tzitzis*) that brought them to: ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר.

In light of the above we can suggest a new understanding in the *piyut* of *Shoshanas Yaakov*. The simple understanding of: שושנת יעקב צהלה ושמחה בראתם יחד תכלת מדכי, is that the entire Klal Yisroel saw together, however, based on what we said above we can offer a new understanding. The *pasuk* says by the *issur* of *shatnez*: לא תלבש שעטנז - צמר ופשתים יחדו - “You shall not wear cloth combining wool and linen.” (*Devorim* 22:11). Mordechai, however, was fulfilling the mitzvah of *tzitzis* and was allowed to wear *shatnez*. When Klal Yisroel saw, בראתם יחד, that Mordechai was wearing wool and linen together, they saw the power of what it means to serve Hashem *b'simcha*. When Klal Yisroel saw that an *aseh* overrides a *lo saseh* because an *aseh* is serving Hashem with *simcha*, they went ahead and were inspired and accepted the Torah *b'simcha*, this brought them great happiness and joy and resulted in: ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר. (R' Eliyohu Boruch Finkel)

The Message of Techeiles

After we finished reading the *Megillah* we sing a song called *Shoshanas Yaakov*, which begins by expressing the tremendous joy the Jewish people felt when they saw Mordechai wearing turquoise garments. Although these words are well known, they

are difficult to understand. Why was the color of Mordechai's clothing a cause for *simcha*?

Rav Chaim Zvi Senter points out that the Torah (*Bamidbar* 15:38) instructs us to place *techeiles* threads on our *tzitzis*. The Gemara (*Menachos* 43b) explains that when a person sees the turquoise threads, they should remind him of his spiritual obligations, for *techeiles* is similar in color to the sea, which in turn resembles the appearance of the sky, which is comparable to Hashem's Kisay HaKovad [Throne of Glory]. Why did Hashem command us to apply a dye that is so many steps removed from its ultimate purpose instead of requiring the use of a different color that is directly like the Kisay HaKovad?

Rav Senter suggests that the indirect chain is intended to teach us that even when Hashem's Providence is not clearly visible, it is nevertheless present, even though the passage of a lengthy period of time is sometimes necessary for it to become revealed. As the *Megillah* unfolds, the veil of confusion is slowly lifted, and by the end, it has become clear that the entire series of events was Divinely orchestrated. Accordingly, the *techeiles* robes that Mordechai wore symbolized the awareness of Hashem's involvement and protection, even when it seems hidden, and it was this appreciation of Hashem's master plan that generated such happiness and celebration.

Like the Jews in Shushan, we also experience moments of doubt in our lives and dark periods that can feel insurmountable. At such times, it behooves us to remember the message of the *techeiles*, that even when there is no salvation in sight, Hashem is hiding just beyond the curtain, guiding every second of our lives with absolute precision.

The Difference Between Chanukah and Purim

ותקותם בכל דור ודור

“You have been their eternal salvation and their hope throughout the generations.”

(*Piyut Shoshanas Yaakov*)

Following the *Megillah* reading, we sing the *piyut* of *Shoshanas Yaakov* which includes the statement: ותקותם בכל דור ודור - “You have been their eternal salvation and their hope throughout the generations”. What does this phrase mean?

Prior to singing *Shoshanas Yaakov*, we actually say a *berachah* on concluding the *Megillah* reading: ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם הרב את ריבנו והדן את דיבנו והנוקם את נקמתנו - והמשלם גמול לכל אויבו ונפשנו והנפרע לנו מצרינו ברוך אתה ה' הנפרע לעמו ישראל מכל צריהם הא- - ל המושיע - “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who takes up our

grievance, judges our claim, avenges our wrong; exacts vengeance for us from our foes, and Who brings just retribution upon all enemies of our soul. Blessed are you Hashem, Who exacts vengeance for His people Yisroel from all their foes, the G-d Who brings salvation.” The language of this *berachah* is in the present tense.

On Chanukah, we say in *Al HaNissim* a similar *tefillah* except it is in the past tense: רבת את ריבם דנת את דינם נקמת את נקמתם - “He fought our fight; He judged our claim; He avenged our wrong”. What is the significance of this change in tense, why on Chanukah are the verbs in the past tense and on Purim are they in the present tense?

The Vilna Gaon says regarding the *pasuk*: להגיד בבקר חסדך ואמונתך בלילות - “To speak of Your kindness in the morning, and of Your faithfulness at night” (*Tehillim* 92:3), that morning (בוקר) connotes days of redemption. Redemption is bright like the morning sun. When Klal Yisroel are redeemed, when they are in Eretz Yisroel at peace in their land, then things appear to us like morning. Likewise, evening and nighttime are metaphors for *galus* [exile]. When we are in *galus*, it is a time of: ואמונתך בלילות - “Your Faithfulness at night,” meaning we do not see the *yad* [hand] of Hashem, which is hidden. At such times, it appears as if we are abandoned, *chas v’sholam*. The quality that sustains us through the night of our *galus* is our: ואמונתך בלילות, that despite our *galus*, Hashem is still interested in us and still cares about us.

The paradigm of the quality of, ואמונתך בלילות, is the Yom Tov of Purim. Purim is the Yom Tov of *galus*. During the Persian *galus*, it looked for a time as though Hashem had abandoned Klal Yisroel. (“The decree went forth to destroy and eradicate every Jew from young to old in a single day.”) The attribute of: ואמונתך בלילות - “Your Faithfulness at night,” is what kept them going. Purim is a paradigm of an event in history when Klal Yisroel thinks they are abandoned but then discovers that Hashem is still interested and He still loves us. He is still fighting our battles even when we are in *galus*.

That is why on Purim our *tefillah* is in the present tense: הרב את ריבנו והדן את דיננו והנוקם את נקמתנו - “Who fights our battles, who judges our claims, who avenges those who wrong us.” Even when we are in *galus*, when it appears so many times that things are lost — until this very day we are surrounded by people who want to destroy us — even now Hashem is presently fighting our battles.

Chanukah is a miracle that occurred when we had a *Beis HaMikdash*. We knew that the Ribbono Shel Olam was involved at such a time in history. That era is in the past, so we speak of the Chanukah narrative in the past tense. However, on Purim while we are still in *galus*, we need to hear that the Ribbono Shel Olam not only DID IT for us in the past, but he DOES IT for us in the present as well.

Purim is a Yom Tov that speaks to us presently and that is why *Chazal* wrote in *Shoshanas Yaakov* the words: ותקותם בכל דור ודור - "And their hope throughout the generations." Our hope is that what happened on Purim will keep happening for us even now. Our hope is not only for then but also for every generation (including the present) where they are: עומדים עלינו לכלותינו - "Standing up against us and attempting to destroy us".

Another answer I saw as to why after *Megillah* we say: הרב את ריבנו והדן את דיננו - "Who fights our battles, who judges our claims", whereas on Chanukah in *Al HaNissim* we say: רבת את ריבם דנת את דינם - "He fought our fight; He judged our claim." Is that on Chanukah the *gezeirah* [decree] of the Yevanim was on Torah and *mitzvos* like we say: להשכיחם תורתך ולהעבירם מחקי רצונך - "To make us forget the Torah and *mitzvos*". When there is a *gezeirah* against Torah and *mitzvos* the way of the world is, we leave it for others to sort out the problems and to work on being *mevateil* the decree. On Purim, however, it was a decree on the bodies of Klal Yisroel, they wanted to literally wipe out the Jews. When it comes to such a type of decree then suddenly everyone gets involved and does what they can. Therefore, on Chanukah we say, רבת את ריבם דנת את דינם, in the plural, as people left the uprooting of the decree for others, on Purim, however, when everyone felt it was upon them to sort out the decree we say, הרב את ריבנו והדן את דיננו, in the singular.

From Up High Everything Looks Different

ארור המן אשר בקש לאבדי ברוך מרדכי היהודי ארורה זרש אשת מפחידי ברוכה אסתר בעדי

**"Cursed be Haman who sought to destroy me, blessed be Mordechai the Jew.
Cursed be Zeresh the wife of my terrorizer, bless be Esther who shielded me."
(*Shoshanas Yaakov Piyut*).**

After we finish reading the *Megillah*, we sing the *piyut* known as *Shoshanas Yaakov*, in which we proclaim that Haman and his wife Zeresh are cursed, while Mordechai and Esther are blessed. At that point, we have already finished reading the *Megillah*, and it is quite clear that Mordechai and Esther had much happier endings than Haman and Zeresh, so why is it necessary to reiterate this self-evident point, and what lesson is it coming to teach us?

The Vilna Gaon explains that the term: ברוך - "blessed", refers to a person who may have endured terrible suffering, but eventually comes out happy. On the other hand, somebody who is: ארור - "cursed" might enjoy lengthy periods of great success and joy, but ultimately his end will be bitter. The *Lekach Tov* explains that in the *Megillah*,

Mordechai experienced tremendous anguish: He was exiled from Israel, Esther was forcibly taken away from him and given to Achashveirosh, and he was challenged and threatened by Haman. However, in the end, Mordechai ultimately enjoyed success, as he wore royal clothing, received Haman's estate, and his name and reputation were respected throughout the land.

Haman, on the other hand, initially achieved unparalleled bounty and blessing. He had wealth, honor, children, and power. As a result of his anger at one individual, he had the ability to issue a decree to destroy an entire nation. However, although Haman seemingly had it all, his end was one of disgrace and humiliation, as everything he knew and had was reversed in a matter of hours.

This is the lesson of the *Megillah*. Many times in life, we see people around us who seem to have it all, yet no matter how hard we try to perform Hashem's will, nothing ever seems to go our way. Since *Chazal* would not have included *Megillas* Esther in Tanach unless it had a relevant message for every generation, it is insufficient for us to view it as a one-time historical event, for its message is eternal and relevant to each of us. We therefore reiterate in *Shoshanas Yaakov* the triumph of Mordechai and Esther over Haman and Zeresh to help us internalize the recognition that if we follow in the spiritual paths of Mordechai and Esther, the time will ultimately come when we will merit following in the footsteps of their success and happiness as well, and indeed, many have the custom to add: ברוכים כל הצדיקים ארורים כל הרשעים – "Blessed are all the righteous, and cursed are all the wicked".

As we learn from the *Megillah*, there is often much more going on beneath the surface than meets the eye. Although Hashem seems even more hidden today than in Mordechai and Esther's era of *hester ponim*, that just means that our job is that much harder to look behind the veil and discover the hidden miracles that are still taking place for anybody who wants to find them.

There is a well-known *tzaddik* in Yerushalayim named Rav Gamliel Rabinovitch, to whom people turn for *berachos* and advice with all types of problems. He once related that he once took a trip to some *kevorim* in the North of Eretz Yisroel. Along the way, he noticed a tall office building that had just been built and was advertising for tenants. There was a large banner near the top of the building that said: מלמעלה הכל נראה אחרת – "From up high, everything looks different". He pulled over and took a picture of the sign, and when he returned home, he had it blown up and taped to the inside of one of his closet doors. He explained that often, when people open up and share their pain, they express it in a way that seems to question Hashem's treatment of them. When

that happens, he opens the door and shows them the sign with the message: מלמעלה – From up High with a capital H, there is another perspective, and the situation may appear quite different.

Even in the *Megillah* itself, where Hashem's name is not mentioned a single time and He appears to have abandoned us, He is still there protecting us through Mordechai and Esther. (R' Ozer Alport)

א פרייליכן פורים

This *sefer* was compiled by R' Moshe Harris. For any comments, feedback or to subscribe to receive my weekly *parsha* booklet email: limudaymoshe@gmail.com or call 0583249052.

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