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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **PURIM** - 5772

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Divrei Torah for B'nai Torah
Purim - 14 Adar, 5766

Divrei Torah on Purim
AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER ZT'L
Remember that which Amalek did to you on the way when you went forth from Egypt." (Devarim 25:17)

After the downfall of Egypt, the Israelites felt secure and became somewhat self-reliant. This great generation certainly did not forget their Father and King, yet a minute degree of trust in Hashem's help was subtracted from their minds. Therefore Amalek came to refresh their Awareness of the need for Hashem's constant help. This is therefore one purpose of our many enemies, to remind us always to call for help from Hashem and to become more aware of Him.

We see this principle clearly in the Purim epic. Picture the scene: two wine drinkers are reclining on festive couches. One says, 'sell to me all the Jews in your empire for destruction,' and the other replies, 'they are yours for the asking'. And Achashverosh removes his ring of royal authority from his finger and hands it to Haman the sworn enemy of the Jews.

Suddenly the Jews saw doom staring in their face.

Now the Jewish nation arose, under the leadership of Mordechai, in a mighty effort of the spirit, never before equaled. On this the Talmud asserts: "The removal of the ring was greater (accomplished more) than 48 prophets & 7 prophetesses" (Megilah 14A). Whatever the prophets

(including Moshe) achieved, it was less than that which Haman (from Amalek) accomplished. Resulting in, "They accepted again the Torah in the days of Achashverosh" (Shabbat 88A). And this time it was without any reservations. Because they knew they were doomed, they fasted for three days and achieved a complete repentance in a national experience never even remotely equaled in the history of Mankind.

And then, suddenly, there is Haman hanging and also his ten sons, neatly in a row!!

But Israel has an alternative. If we cry out in gratitude always to Hashem, we do not need any harassment from the nations; for crying out of grateful happiness gains even more favor from Hashem. Shabbat Shalom

From your friends at Yeshiva Gedolah Bet Yisrael Founded by R' Avigdor Miller ZT'L
From Sam Gindi and David Bibi

INNERNET MAGAZINE - Dubner Maggid
"UNDERSTANDING THE PURIM CHARACTERS"

"In the third year of his reign, [Achashverosh] made a feast for all his officers and servants, with the legions of Persia and Media, and the nobles and officials of the provinces in attendance. He showed off the glorious riches of his kingdom and the opulent splendor of his majesty for many days -- 180 days." (Scroll of Ester 1:3-4)

To shed light on this passage, we note that there are two distinct types of hospitality. The first type is where the host sincerely wishes to benefit his guest, by providing nourishing food to the hungry, serving refreshing drink to the thirsty, or honoring the venerable. The second type, an ignoble one, is where the host does not have the welfare of his guests in mind at all, but has invited them merely for his own aggrandizement. Here the host's goal is to get his guests to praise him in public for his outstanding hospitality and his great wealth -- his gold and silver vessels, and his extraordinary treasures. A person angling for praises will invite all passersby into his house, serve them copious food and drink, and show off to them all his treasure stores, in order to dazzle them.

We can tell which purpose a person has in mind by seeing how he reacts when some untoward event occurs during an affair he is hosting. Suppose, for example, that some gold or silver item is misplaced or damaged during the affair. Although all people are taken aback when they suffer a loss, different hosts will react differently to such a loss. If the host's sole intent is to benefit and honor his guests, then he will avoid showing dismay over the loss, in order not to upset or embarrass his guests. He will say to himself: "I will not demoralize my guests over this. I will just chalk up the loss as part of the cost of the banquet and let my guests dine in peace. The One Who commanded us to take in wayfarers and give honor to worthy men will eventually restore my loss."

It is the exact opposite with a host whose sole intent is to aggrandize himself -- to achieve widespread fame -- and who does not care about the welfare or honor of his guests at all. Were it not for his desire to show himself off, he would close his door so that no wayfarer should come within his view, and would show no favor or honor to visitors whatsoever. To a person who is merely seeking to be glorified, possessions are extremely important.

Therefore, if one of his possessions is misplaced or damaged during an affair he is hosting, he cannot hold himself back even for a second. He is overcome with agitation over any mishap to the precious possessions that bring him honor. Since his sole motive in hosting the affair is to show himself off, the mishap completely ruins the affair for him, since the loss injures his pride. Hence he loses his composure entirely, with no concern for his guests. It is likewise when any other untoward event occurs that causes some slight injury to his pride.

Accordingly, the Megillah makes a point here of describing the motivation behind Achashverosh's banquet, so that we can understand

his behavior later on. In this banquet, Achashverosh displayed fabulously indiscriminate generosity. But his whole purpose was merely to bring himself glory and honor. He was not interested at all in the welfare and honor of his guests. As the Megillah states, "He made a feast for all his officers and servants, with the legions of Persia and Media, and the nobles and officials of the provinces in attendance." But the sole purpose of this feast was to show off "the glorious riches of his kingdom and the opulent splendor of his majesty." He was not trying to benefit or honor his guests at all.

This is reflected in how Achashverosh reacted when he suffered a slight blow to his pride, by his wife Vashti's refusal to comply with his order to appear before him. Achashverosh turned everything upside down. He could not muster the willpower to hold back until after the feast was over, and then bring her to justice. The Megillah indicates that the episode with Vashti occurred during the feast itself: Vashti was summoned when "the king's heart was merry with wine." Yet after this episode we do not find in the Megillah any further discussion of the feast. Apparently the whole feast came to an end, and everyone fled home in face of the king's wrath.

Thus a small mishap ruined the entire great feast. The reason is that, as we explained above, it was merely for his ego's sake that Achashverosh made this feast in the first place. The wrath he displayed at Vashti's disobedience was in proportion to the egoism that had motivated him. Because everything he did was for the sake of showing off his glory, when his pride was slighted he put everything to an end.

Magnificence All Her Own

[Contrast this to Esther, who radiated a deep beauty and charm.] An analogy brings out the point. A man and his son go to a tavern where food is served. The waiter sets before them a portion of meat flavored with various spices, but the father refrains from eating it. The son is baffled. He asks: "Father, why aren't you eating this meat? It has such a nice aroma from all the spices." The father answers: "My son, this meat is spoiled. The way it is all dressed up with spices proves it. If the meat were fresh, it would not need any spices." Something that is good in its own right does not need to be dressed up to arouse appreciation.

Esther is a case in point: she was viewed with favor in her own right, without any external aids. The Megillah (Esther 2:15) relates that when Esther's turn came to be taken before the king, she did not ask for any of the adornments that the other young women had asked for. Nonetheless, Esther was viewed with favor by all who saw her. The other women prettied themselves up with all sorts of adornments and cosmetics. In addition, when they went into the king's chamber, they came with royal musicians who played long, moving serenades to enhance the king's appreciation of their beauty.

Whatever beauty the king saw in them could easily have been due to these external trappings; it could not be said that they themselves were viewed with favor. But Esther did not ask for any of these things. Hence, when the Megillah states that Esther was viewed with favor by all who saw her, this means Esther herself- without external trappings.

In this vein, King Solomon declares (Proverbs 31:30): "Grace is false, and beauty is vain." A woman whose beauty is merely physical must don silver and gold ornaments for enhancement. Thus, her grace and beauty are due largely to the ornaments. But, King Solomon continues, "a God-fearing woman -- she shall be praised." That is, she herself will be praised -- without any need to beautify herself with ornaments or other aids.

Excerpted with permission from "Voice of Rejoicing and Salvation" - Commentary of the Dubner Maggid on the Book of Esther. Translated by David M. Zucker. Published by Feldheim Publishers - <http://www.feldheim.com>

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In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag

Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by

RABBI MENACHEM LEIBTAG

MEGILLAT ESTHER, ITS 'HIDDEN' MESSAGE

Is the Megilla a satire? It certainly contains many strange details that beg interpretation. But if so, why would a satire be included in the Tanach. In the following shiur, we attempt to 'unmask' Megillat Esther by considering its historical and prophetic setting.

INTRODUCTION

We begin our study with one of the most well known psukim of the Megilla:

"Ish yehudi haya be-Shushan ha-bira - u-shmo Mordechai"

(see Esther 2:5).

Even though this pasuk is proudly read aloud by the entire congregation, most people do not appreciate its prophetic 'sting'. However, an ear tuned to the prophecies of Zecharya and familiar with Tanach immediately catches its irony, as:

ish yehudi - implies more than simply someone who is Jewish;

ha-bira - implies more than just 'the capital city'; and

Mordechai - is not a Jewish name!

* The phrase ish yehudi is mentioned only one other time in the entire Tanach - in Sefer Zecharya 8:23. There it describes a devout Jew in the city of Jerusalem - leading a group of non-Jewish followers in search of God.

* the word ha-bira in Divrei Ha-yamim (see 29:1 & 29:19) is used by King David to describe specifically the bet ha-mikdash (the Temple). Prior to the time period of Megillat Esther, the Hebrew word bira finds no other mention in Tanach.

* The name Mordechai is probably the most provocative word in the entire Megilla for it stems from the name of the Babylonian deity -Marduk (see II Kings 25:27 & Yeshayahu 39:1!). Prior to the Babylonian exile, no one would have dared give his son such a 'goyish' name.

[This does not imply that Mordechai was assimilated, rather his name may reflect the assimilation of his generation.]

And this may be only one of many psukim of the Megilla that are filled with irony and possibly satire. Yet, if this conclusion is correct, we must explain why the Megilla would

employ satire to deliver its prophetic message. Furthermore, we must also determine more precisely what that prophetic message is, and how it relates to our celebration of Purim.

To answer these questions, our shiur will take the following steps:

- I. Base our above assumption that the Megilla should contain a prophetic message, related to its historical setting.
- II. Review both the historical and prophetic setting of the time period of the Megilla.
- III. Search for a thematic connection between this setting and the story in the Megilla, and support it with both textual and thematic parallels from other books in Tanach.
- IV. Explain why the Megilla employs this unique style.
- V. Explain how the celebration of Purim, as defined in the Megilla, relates to this theme.

PART I - 'HESTER PANIM'

As every book of the Tanach contains a prophetic message, Megillat Esther should be no different. It is commonly understood that the Megilla teaches us how to see the 'hidden hand' of God behind the events that ultimately lead to Bnei Yisrael's salvation from Haman. Some even suggest that the Megilla's use of the name Esther (from the Hebrew verb 'lehashtir' - to hide) instead of her real name - Hadassa (see 2:7) teaches us this very lesson.

However, if the Megilla wants to show us how God saved His people, why isn't this message explicit? Furthermore, why isn't God's Name ever mentioned? Most every other sefer in Tanach expresses this point explicitly. Why is Megillat Esther different?

Furthermore, most all other seforim in Tanach explain not only how God saves Am Yisrael, but also why they are being punished. This theme of divine retribution is explicit in the Torah in the tochachot (Vayikra 26:3-46, Devarim 11:13-17, 28:1-69, etc.) and reiterated over and over again by all of the prophets. In fact Chazal's explanation of the name Esther reflects this very same concept:

"Esther min ha-Torah minayin?"

[What is the source in Torah for the story of Esther?]

"ve-Anochi haster aster panai ba-yom ha-hu"

[I will surely hide my face from you on that day.]

(Devarim 31:18 / See Chullin 139b).

However, if we take a closer look at that pasuk in Devarim, we find that its message is significantly different. Rather than explaining how God 'saves' Am Yisrael in a 'hidden manner', it explains how God 'punishes' them:

"And God told Moshe, after you die... this nation will leave Me and break My covenant... And My anger will be kindled against them on that day and I will forsake them, ["ve-histarti panai"] and I will hide My face from them... and many evils and troubles shall befall them - & they will say on that day, these evils are because God is not among us.

- Ve-anochi haster aster panai ba-yom ha-hu -

and I will hide My face from them on that day because of all the bad that they have done... [Therefore.]

- Write down this song and teach it to Bnei Yisrael, so that it will be My witness..." (see Devarim 31:16-18).

In these psukim, God warns Bnei Yisrael that should they betray His covenant, great evil will befall them. Even though it may appear to Bnei Yisrael that God has left them, these psukim teach them that God only appears to be 'hiding His face' ['hester panim'] from them. Nonetheless, Bnei Yisrael are expected to realize that their punishment is from God. Therefore, Moshe is to teach Bnei Yisrael Shirat Ha'azinu in

order that they recognize this. The shira will teach Am Yisrael to contemplate their predicament and relate their punishment to their wayward behavior. To verify this point, simply read Shirat Ha'azinu [note especially 31:19-20.]

Above all, Shirat Ha'azinu explains how we are to determine why we are being punished. In that song, we are told:

"Zechor yemot olam, binu shnot dor va-dor..."

(Devarim 32:7).

[Remember the days of old; consider the years of ages past.]

The shira teaches us to contemplate our history, especially how and why we were chosen (see 32:8-9), in order to realize why we are being punished. It reminds us that when something does go wrong, it is our fault, not God's (see 32:4-6!).

Even though God may hide His face, Shirat Ha'azinu does promise that God will ultimately redeem His people, however, not necessarily because they deserve redemption. Rather, God will have mercy on our pitiful predicament (see 32:26-27, also 32:37-38) and save us at the 'last minute'.

Most all of the prophets deliver a very similar message. They explain to Bnei Yisrael what they have done wrong, and hence why they are being punished. Prophecy teaches man not only to thank God for salvation, but also to recognize his faults and correct his mistakes.

Therefore, the Megilla should be no different, and especially because its name alludes to the pasuk in Chumash that commands us to search for a reason why we are punished.

[This supports the Gemara's question in Masechet Megilla 12a (middle) "sha'alu talmidav et Rashb"i: mipnei ma nitchayvu..."]

Even though the Megilla does not provide an explicit reason for this impending punishment, this background and its name suggest that we search for a 'hidden' (or implicit) one. To find that reason, we must consider prophetic and historical setting of that time period.

PART II - HISTORICAL AND PROPHETIC SETTING

The opening psukim of the Megilla immediately point us to its time period (see 1:1-3). Achashverosh is a Persian king who reigns from India to Ethiopia in the city of Shushan. Considering that Cyrus (=Koresh) was the first Persian king, the story in Megillat Esther takes place during the Persian time period and thus after the time period when the Jews had an opportunity to return to Jerusalem.

Even though there is a controversy concerning precisely which Persian King Achashverosh was, he most certainly reigned after Koresh (the first Persian king), and thus, after Yirmiyahu's seventy years were over.

[Note: If you are not familiar with this time period, it is highly recommended that you review Kings II 23:31-25:12, Ezra 1:1-10 and 3:1-4:7, and Yirmiyahu 29:1-15. As you read Ezra 1:1-9, note how the Jews who did not make 'aliya' were encouraged to send 'money' instead! Seems like not much has changed in 2500 years!]

For those of you unfamiliar with this time period, here is a quick overview:

In the first year of his reign, Koresh issued his famous proclamation allowing and encouraging all of the Jews of the Persian Empire to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. The prophets clearly understood this historic decree as the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecy (see Ezra 1:1-9, II Divrei Ha-yamim 36:20-23). As God had promised, the time of redemption from the Babylonian Exile had come.

YIRMIYAHU'S SEVENTY YEARS

To appreciate the prophetic importance of this opportunity, we need only quote Yirmiyahu's final message to the Babylonian Exile in regard to what was 'supposed' to happen when these seventy years were over:

"Thus said the Lord, when the 70 years are complete, I shall remember you and keep my promise to return you to this land.... [At that time.] you shall call out to Me - you shall come and pray to Me - and I will hear you...and you will ask for Me and find Me; if you will search for me with all your heart. Then I will be there for you, and I shall turn away your captivity and gather you from all the nations wherein you may be dispersed... and I will return you to the land from which you were exiled ..." (29:10-14).

According to Yirmiyahu, the return of the Exile would not be automatic. Rather, it was God's hope that their return would be catalyzed by sincere repentance and a yearning to return. In other words, God intended for the Babylonian Exile [as the word 'exile' implies] to be temporary. People don't stay in 'exile' unless they are forced to be there. Exile implies that one cannot return to his own land. [Otherwise the translation of 'galut' would be 'diaspora' instead of 'exile' / hey, not a bad idea!]

Note as well how Yirmiyahu's message is congruent with a primary theme of Chumash, i.e. God's desire for the Jewish people to become His 'model' nation - a vehicle through which all nations will come to recognize God (see Devarim 4:5-8 & Shmot 19:4-6). Recall as well that in that ideal setting, the bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim was to serve as a symbol of this national purpose.

[See previous shiurim on Parshiot Re'eh, Noach, and Vayetze. Recall that the mikdash is referred to as: "ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem le-shaken shmo sham"/ see Devarim 12:5-14.]

God's decision to destroy that Temple and exile his people was for a rehabilitative purpose. According to Yirmiyahu, God's hope was for the Exile to 'learn its lesson' during these seventy years in Bavel. Afterward, God hoped that the nation would be spiritually ready and anxious to return to their homeland, and to reconstruct their symbolic shrine - the Temple in Jerusalem.

Precisely as Yirmiyahu had predicted (seventy years after Bavel had risen to power), the opportunity to return arose when the Babylonian empire fell to Koresh (= Cyrus the Great), the first king of the Persian Empire (see Yirmiyahu 25:11-12, Ezra 1:1).

A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Unfortunately, the response of the Exile to this historic opportunity was less than enthusiastic. A group of some forty thousand did return; however, the majority of Am Yisrael remained in Bavel. For an insight into the tragedy of the missed opportunity we need only quote the explanation given by Rav Yehuda Ha-Levi in Sefer Ha-Kuzari (II.24):

"Had the entire nation enthusiastically answered the divine call to return to the Land, the idyllic prophecies of the return to Zion would have been fulfilled and the Shchina would have returned. In reality, however, only a small portion returned. The majority remained in Bavel, willfully accepting the exile, as they did not wish to leave their homes & businesses etc." (sounds familiar...)

Even those who did return lacked enthusiasm. The apathy of the returnees is echoed in the prophecies of Chagai and Zecharya, the prophets of this time period (see Chagai 1:1-3; 2:3 see also Zecharya 4:10; 6:15; 7:4-7; 8:6).

How does all of this relate to Megillat Esther?

How could it not relate!

Could the fact that Am Yisrael remained scattered among the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire, while they could have returned a generation or two earlier to Jerusalem, not relate to the prophetic message of the Megilla?

Considering that Yirmiyahu's seventy years are over, why are so many Jews living in Shushan and all over the Persian empire during the time period of Achashverosh?

Could not this fact alone supply sufficient reason for God to consider Am Yisrael negligent of their covenantal responsibilities?

With this in mind, we must now take a second look at the Megilla in search of at least a 'hint' of this theme.

PART III - THE THEME OF THE MEGILLA AND ITS SATIRE

Based on this historic and prophetic setting, one could suspect that the impending destruction of Am Yisrael by Haman may be a Divine punishment for their apathy. After all, the Jews living in the Persian empire appear to have:

- * preferred Shushan over Yerushalayim;
- * opted to subjugate themselves to Achashverosh rather than respond to God's call to return to their land;
- * Replaced the bet ha-mikdash with the palace of Achashverosh!

["ve-nahafoch hu"]

Even though this prophetic message is not explicit in the Megilla, we will now show how it may be hidden in its satire.

[Note: Before we continue, it is important to clarify a problematic issue. We are about to relate many elements in the story of the Megilla to a satiric commentary on Persian Jewry. This does not mean that these events did not actually occur. The story of the Megilla is true and based on historic facts. However, its prophetic message is conveyed through the use of literary tools, such as satire and irony. Often, criticism is more poignant when delivered implicitly rather than explicitly. (Lehavdil, take for example George Orwell's criticism of the Russian revolution in 'Animal Farm'.)]

TEXTUAL AND THEMATIC SUPPORT

For a start, we will bring two examples where there appears to be an 'echo' of God's voice behind certain statements in the Megilla.

For example, the story of Vashti may reflect God's utter disappointment with Am Yisrael for not returning to Israel to fulfill their divine purpose, to become God's 'model' nation:

"[Vashti was called to] come to the king and show all the nations her beauty... but she did not come as the King commanded, and he became very angry..." (see Esther 1:9-12).

Is not Vashti's behavior similar to that of Am Yisrael? Is not the King's conclusion similar to God's? Is not the fear that all the women in the Persian kingdom will now disobey their husbands ironic? If Am Yisrael (destined to be an 'or la-goyim') does not respond to its divine call, what could God expect from other nations?

[Note that in earlier prophecy, Am Yisrael is often compared to God's wife - see Hoshea 2:4,16-18. See also Zecharya 1:1-3, note 'shuvu eilai...' and 'va-yiktzof', compare 1:12.]

Furthermore, who is the real king in the Megilla? Chazal raise the possibility that the word 'ha-melech' [the King] in the Megilla may be 'kodesh', as it often [in a hidden manner] may be referring to God and not to Achashverosh.

Even Haman's petition to Achashverosh to destroy Am Yisrael may echo a similar complaint that God may have against His own nation:

"There is a certain nation scattered among the nations whose laws are different than any other nation, but the laws of the King they do not keep, and it is not worthwhile for the King to leave them be" (3:8).

In a certain way, Haman's accusation is similar to God's threat in Shirat Ha'azinu to destroy Am Yisrael for not keeping His laws (32:26). After all, what purpose is there for God to keep His people if they refuse to obey Him and fulfill their divine goal?

Even though these first two examples may appear a bit 'stretched', a more convincing textual proof is found in the parallel between Achashverosh's palace and the bet mikdash. This parallel is significant for it reflects the fact the Bnei Yisrael had neglected the bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim, preferring instead to be dependent on the palace of Achashverosh. We begin by comparing the overall structure of each:

KODESH KODASHIM - CHATZER PNIMIT

The Megilla refers to the most inner chamber of the king's palace as the 'chatzer ha-pnimit' (5:1), where entry to anyone is forbidden under threat of death - unless called to enter (as Esther feared in 4:11). Here we find an obvious parallel to the kodesh ha-kodashim in the mikdash (Purim - kippurim!).

KODESH - CHATZER CHITZONA

The 'waiting area' outside the inner chamber is called the 'chatzer ha-chitzona' (6:4). Here 'ro'ei pnei ha-melech' (1:14) like Haman himself are allowed to enter freely. This is parallel to the kodesh where kohanim are permitted to enter.

[See description of the Temple in Yechezkel 40:18-19.]

AZARA - SHA'AR BET HA-MELECH

In front of the palace is 'sha'ar bet ha-melech' where people like Mordechai are permitted to stand (2:18,21). However, here one must dress properly ('aveilut' is not permitted), therefore he cannot be there dressed in sackcloth (see 4:2!). This area is parallel to the azara in the mikdash.

YERUSHALAYIM - REHOV HA-IR SHUSHAN

This is the area 'lifnei sha'ar ha-melech' (4:2) or 'rechov ha-ir' (4:6) where Mordechai can dress in sackcloth. This is parallel to the city of Yerushalayim surrounding the mikdash.

This parallel is strengthened by the Megilla's use of the word bira to describe Shushan. As we explained in our introduction, in Divrei Ha-yamim, the only other time in Tanach prior to Megillat Esther where this word is mentioned, bira describes specifically the bet ha-mikdash, and in the context of its purpose to serve as a national center and symbol of God's Name. [See DH I 29:1 & 19, you should read from 29:1-25 to see the context. (You'll find there a familiar passage from davening, which maybe you will now understand a little better.)]

[See also Masechet Middot I:9, where the Mishna refers to the bet ha-mikdash as the bira.]

Other parallels to mikdash are found in the use of key words such as 'yekar ve-tiferet' (1:4); 'tekhelet, butz, ve-argaman' (1:6) in the Megilla's description of the king's party.

[Based on these psukim, the gemara (Megilla 12a) claims that Achashverosh donned the 'bigdei kohen gadol' at his party!]

Even the 6-month party followed by a seven-day special celebration may parallel the six months that it took to build

the mishkan (from Yom Kippur till Rosh Chodesh Nissan) followed by the seven-day 'milu'im' ceremony. Likewise, Chazal explain, 've-keilim mi-keilim shonim' (1:7) as referring to the vessels of the bet ha-mikdash.

Chazal even suggest that Haman's decree may have been Am Yisrael's punishment for drinking from these keilim or alternately for their participation in and enjoyment of the royal party (see Megilla 12a).

[Note that according to pshat, the keilim had returned with Sheshbatzar during the time of Koresh (see Ezra 1:7-8).

However, the Midrash emphasizes the thematic connection between the party and Bnei Yisrael's lack of enthusiasm to build the mikdash.]

Hence we can conclude that the Megilla's satire suggests that during this time period Am Yisrael had replaced:

- * God with Achashverosh;
- * God's Temple with Achashverosh's palace; and
- * Yerushalayim ha-bira with Shushan ha-bira! ['ve-nahafoch hu']

70 DAYS / 70 YEARS

Another seemingly unimportant detail in the Megilla concerning when the two decrees were sent might also allude to this prophetic backdrop.

Recall that the original decree calling for the destruction of the Jews was sent out on the 13th day of Nisan (3:12). Several days later Haman was hanged and Esther pleaded from the king to repeal this decree (8:3-6). Achashverosh agreed; however, the actual letters were not sent out until the 23rd of Sivan - some two months later (8:9)! What took so long?

By carefully comparing these two dates, we again find an amazing reminder of Yirmiyahu's prophecy of the seventy years. Between the 13th of Nisan until the 23rd of Sivan - 70 days elapsed (17+30+23). During these seventy days, all of the Jews throughout the Persian empire were under the tremendous peril of impending destruction, thinking that their doom was inevitable. Could this be an ironic reminder to the Jewish people that they had not heeded Yirmiyahu's prophecy of what he expected from Bnei Yisrael once the seventy years had expired (see 29:10-14!)?

A similar concept of suffering for a sin, a day for a year (and vice versa), is found twice in Tanach in related circumstances. After the sin of the 'meraglim', the forty days are replaced by the punishment of forty years of wandering. Here, too, the nation opted not to fulfill their divine destiny, preferring a return to Egypt to the conquest of Eretz Yisrael. Yechezkel, too, is required to suffer 'a day for each year.'

[For 390 days followed by an additional 40 days, he must lie on his side and repent for the sins of Israel and Yehuda that led to the destruction of Yerushalayim (Yechezkel 4:1-14!).]

A similar claim is made by the Midrash which suggests that Achashverosh threw his 180 day party in celebration of the fact that Yirmiyahu's seventy years were over and the bet ha-mikdash was not rebuilt. In pshat, this explanation is unreasonable. Why should the most powerful king of civilization worry about the prophecies of Yirmiyahu, while the Jews themselves do not listen to him?

However, on the level of drash, this explanation is enlightening. Chazal, in the spirit of the Megilla - 've-nahafoch hu' - put into Achashverosh's mind what should have been in the mind of Am Yisrael, i.e. the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecy of seventy years and the desire to

return.

PESACH AND PURIM

Based on our understanding thus far, it is also understandable why Israel's salvation from Haman's decree comes only after Am Yisrael collectively accept a three day fast. This fast takes place on the 15,16, & 17th of Nisan. Interestingly enough, the events that led to the repeal of Haman's decree take place 'davka' during the holiday of Pesach - the holiday on which we celebrate our freedom from subjugation to a foreign nation and the beginning of our journey to the Promised Land.

PART IV - WHY SATIRE?

We have shown that the Megilla is laced with allusions to the fact that Am Yisrael does not answer its divine call during the Persian time period. But the question remains, why is this message only hinted at but not explicitly stated by Chazal? Most probably for the same reason that it is not explicit in the Megilla.

This is the power of satire. In order to strengthen the message, a powerful point is not explicitly stated, but only alluded to. The direct approach used by the other 48 nevi'im of Tanach had not been very successful.

[See Masechet Megilla 14a (top) - "gedola hasarat ha-taba'at shel Haman yoter mi-48 nevi'im...!"]

One could suggest that Anshei Knesset Ha-gdola, in their decision to write (see Bava Batra 15a) (and later canonize) Megillat Esther, had hoped that a satirical message would be more powerful than a direct one. Hence, Midrashim of Chazal that comment on the Megilla may follow a similar approach. [Note how the prophet Natan's message to David ha-melech in regard to his sin with Bat-sheva was much more powerful because he used the 'mashal' of kivsat ha-rash" (see II Shmuel 12:1-7!).]

PART V - THE MINHAGIM OF PURIM

Up until this point we have explained how the satire in the Megilla may reflect a prophetic censure of Am Yisrael in Bavel for not returning to Yerushalayim when the opportunity arose during the time of Koresh. However, if our assumptions are indeed correct, then we would expect the outcome of the Megilla, or at least the celebration of Purim for future generations to reflect this theme.

Instead, we don't find any 'mass aliya' movement after our salvation. Nor does the celebration of Purim (with 'mishteh' and sending 'mishloach manot') appear to reflect this theme in any manner.

However, with a 'little help' from the prophecies of Zecharya, we can suggest an answer for these questions as well. To do so, we must first identify who the specific Persian King Achashverosh was.

SOME MORE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The topic of the history of the Persian time period is very complicated and the subject of a major controversy between most Midrashei Chazal and the historians (& a minority opinion in Chazal). To explain this controversy is beyond the scope of this shiur, instead we will simply present the two conflicting opinions concerning when Achashverosh reigned.

According to Seder Olam (and hence the majority opinion in Chazal), Achashverosh was the Persian King immediately after Koresh, but before Daryavesh, and thus the story of the Megilla takes place after 'shivat tzion' (the return to Zion during the time of Koresh) but before the second bet ha-mikdash is actually built.

According to this opinion, the events of the Megilla had a tremendous affect on the situation in Yerushalayim. Only two years after the story of Megilla, King Darius, son of Esther gives the Jews permission to return and build the Second Temple. Construction began during the second year of Darius (= Daryavesh).

The events of the Megilla also appear to have catalyzed a major aliya movement. According to Chazal, Ezra's aliya from Bavel took place only a few years afterward, during the seventh year of his reign of Daryavesh (who Chazal identify with Artachshasta / see Ezra 7:1-9).

Thus, according to Seder Olam's opinion, the events of the Megilla indeed had a major effect on the rebuilding of the Temple and shivat tzion - the return to Zion.

According to most historians (and a minority opinion in Chazal / see Targum ha-shiv'im & Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer chapter 49), Achashverosh was the Persian king who succeeded Darius (486 - 465 BCE), and thus the story of the Megilla takes place some forty years after the second Temple was built, and thus after Chagai & Zecharya's plea to return and fulfill the potential of Bayit Sheni. [Its construction began in 521 BCE / in the second year of Darius the Great; hence the story in the Megilla takes place in 474 BCE.]

According to this opinion, no major event takes place immediately after the events in the Megilla. In fact, over two decades pass before a new wave of olim come with Ezra and Nechemya to help strengthen the city of Yerushalayim. [The historians identify Artachshasta with Artaxerxes, not the same king as Darius.]

If our assumption concerning the satire of the Megilla is correct, why don't we find a mass aliya movement immediately after the miracle of Purim. [Jews of the twentieth century could ask themselves a similar question!]

Furthermore, according to either opinion, shouldn't the manner by which we celebrate Purim relate to this theme and satire?

Finally, why is it necessary to celebrate Purim for all generations? Purim is not the only time in our history when Bnei Yisrael are saved from terrible enemies. Chazal go even one step further. They claim that Purim will be the only holiday kept at the time of the final redemption! (See Rambam Hilchot Megilla, Esther 9:28 and commentaries).

THE MEGILLA AND SEFER ZECHARYA

If we follow the opinion of the 'historians' in regard to the time period of Megillat Esther, then the prophecies of Zecharya concerning the potential of Bayit Sheni precede the story in the Megilla. If so, then we posit that numerous textual parallels between the Megilla and Sefer Zecharya are intentional. In other words, when 'anshei kneset ha-gedola' wrote Megillat Esther (most likely during the time period of Ezra / see Bava Batra 15a), they assumed that anyone reading the Megilla was familiar with Sefer Zecharya, and hence would understand the implicit meaning of these parallels.

We will now show how the Megilla may suggest that Am Yisrael's predicament during the time period of Achashverosh was caused because of Zecharya's prophecies (a generation earlier) were not taken seriously! To appreciate this message, we must study Zecharya chapters 7->8.

For a background, review the first six chapters of Sefer Zecharya, noting how they focus on one primary theme - the return of the Shchina to Yerushalayim. However, Zecharya warns numerous times that the Shchina's return will be a function of Am Yisrael's covenantal commitment (see 6:15).

Redemption is indeed possible; however, Zecharya insists that the 'spiritual' return of Am Yisrael was no less important than their physical return:

"Shuvu eilai.. ve-ashuva aleichem" (1:3, see also 8:7-8).

[It is highly suggested that you read at least the first two chapters of Zecharya (note 'hadassim' and 'ish rochev al sus' in chapter 1, and 'prazot teshev Yerushalayim' in chapter 2) and then chapters 7-8 before continuing.]

SHOULD WE FAST ON TISHA BE-AV?

According to Chagai 2:18, construction of the Temple began on this same year, i.e. during the second year of Daryavesh. Zecharya chapter seven opens two years later when an official delegation from Bavel arrives in Jerusalem to ask Zecharya a very fundamental question:

"Ha-evkeh be-chodesh ha-chamishi?" Should we continue to fast in the 5th month (i.e. the fast of Tisha Be-av)? (see 7:3)

The question appears to be quite legitimate. After all, now that the Temple is rebuilt, there no longer appears to be a need to fast. However, Zecharya's lengthy and official reply (7:4-8:23) to this question contains an eternal message that relates to the very nature of the ideal redemption process.

In Zecharya 7:4-7, God appears to be quite disturbed by the people's question regarding the need to fast. Instead of showing their interest in the greater picture of the redemption process, the people seem only to be interested in whether or not they have to fast. In the eyes of the prophet, their question reflected a general attitude problem in regard to the entire redemption process.

God's answer implies that the fast of Tisha Be-av is not a divine commandment - rather it was a 'minhag' instituted by Chazal to remember not only the Temple's destruction, but also the reason why the churban took place (see 7:5-6). Thus, God explains, feasting or fasting is man's decision, while God is interested in something much more basic - that Bnei Yisrael keep the mitzvot which they had neglected during the first Temple period (see 7:5-14).

Zecharya continues his answer with two chapters of 'musar' (rebuke) in which he emphasizes the most basic mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael must keep in order for the Shchina to return:

"EMET u-mishpat shalom shiftu be-sha'areichem, ve-chesed ve-rachamim asu ish et achiv. Almana, ve-yatom ve-ani al ta'ashoku..." (7:8-10).

- Truth, social justice, helping the poor and needy, and thinking kindly of one's neighbor, etc.

God is anxious for His Shchina to return, but in order for that to happen, Yerushalayim must first become a city characterized by truth (8:1-3). God foresees the return the exiles from lands in the east and west. With their return, God and His nation will become once again covenantal partners, through "emet & tzedaka" (see 8:7-8).

Finally, after many words of encouragement and repeated 'musar' (see 8:11-17), God finally answers the original question concerning the fast days. Should Am Yisrael return to Israel and keep "emet ve-shalom, the four fast days commemorating the destruction of Yerushalayim will become holidays:

"tzom ha-rvii, v'tzom ha'chamishi... [The four fast days] will be instead for Yehuda days of celebration... [on the condition that] they will love emet & shalom" (see 8:18-19 / note parallel to Megilla 9:30-31!)

After two chapters of rebuke, Zecharya finally answers the people's original question. Should Bnei Yisrael indeed show their devotion to God, i.e. if they practice 'emet u-mishpat shalom', then the fast days, the days of crying for Jerusalem, will become holidays instead.

Should Bnei Yisrael indeed love keeping emet & shalom (these two words simply summarize the primary points raised by Zecharya in this perek), then the redemption process will be complete.

ISH YEHUDI

Zecharya concludes this prophecy with his vision of numerous people from many great nations will one day come to Yerushalayim in search of God. They will gather around the ish yehudi, asking for his guidance, for they will have heard that God is with His people (8:20-23).

Had Am Yisrael heeded this prophetic call in the time of Koresh and Daryavesh, then they would not have been scattered among 127 provinces during the time of Achashverosh. One could suggest that instead of celebrating with the Persians at the party in Shushan, the Jews could (& should) have been celebrating with God at His bet ha-mikdash in Yerushalayim.

The ish yehudi would have been in the bira in Yerushalayim, making God's Name known to other nations; instead, the Megilla opens as an ish yehudi is found in the bira of Achashverosh in Shushan, ironically carrying the name of foreign god.

[One could also suggest that Mordechai's institution of the yearly celebration of Purim relates specifically to this prophecy. First of all, note how this day is described as one that turns around from 'yagon' to 'simcha', from 'mourning to holiday' (see Esther 9:22). Purim may symbolize the manner in which the fast days for Jerusalem will one day become holidays.]

This parallel to Zecharya could explain the reason for the special mitzvot that Mordechai instituted for Purim in his first letter (see 9:20-22). They reflect Zecharya's repeated message of helping the needy (matanot le-evyonim/ note 7:10) and thinking nicely of one's neighbors (mishloach manot ish le-re'eihu / note 8:16-17!). Once a year we must remind ourselves of the most basic mitzvot that we must keep in order that we become worthy of returning to Yerushalayim and rebuilding the Bet ha'mikdash.

Certain halachot instituted by Chazal may reflect this message. Interestingly, Shushan Purim is replaced with Yerushalayim Purim for the walled cities from the time of Yehoshua bin Nun replace the walled city of Shushan! [See Yehoshua 21:42 and its context, compare to Esther 9:2.]

SHALOM VE-EMET

Although this explanation for certain minhagim of Purim may seem a bit 'stretched', textual proof is found in the closing psukim of the Megilla (9:29-32 / read it carefully!).

Mordechai and Esther need to send out a second 'igeret' (letter) explaining and giving authority ('tokef') to the minhagim of Purim explained in the first igeret. What was the content of this special second letter? To our surprise, one short phrase:

"Divrei shalom ve-emet"! [See 9:30, read carefully.]

These two key words point us directly back to Zecharya's prophecy about the fast days becoming holidays (read Zecharya 8:18-19 again)! They explain not only when, but also why the fast days will become holidays - i.e. if Bnei Yisrael keep shalom and emet! The second igeret may simply be an explanation of the purpose of the minhagim of Purim -

Mordechai and Esther use this letter to explain to Am Yisrael why Purim has been established - a yearly reminder of the prophecies of Zecharya which remain unfulfilled.

The continuation of this igeret strengthens this interpretation. Under what authority (tokef) does Mordechai institute these halachot?

"Ka'asher kiymu al nafsham divrei ha-tzomot ve-za'akatam" (9:31) [Compare these psukim carefully to Zecharya 8:18-19.]

Recall, God had told Zecharya that fast days and feast days are up to man to decide. Now, according to the second igeret, just like ('ka'asher') the prophets instituted four fast days in order that we remember Yerushalayim, Mordechai institutes a 'feast day' to remember Yerushalayim.

[Note that this pasuk cannot be referring to our Ta'anit Esther, for if it refers to the three day fast, that fast was a one time event and was not "al nafsham ve-al zar'am". Likewise, it cannot be the fast of the 13th of Adar, as that custom only began during the time period of the Ge'onim. Therefore, it must refer to the four fast days on Jerusalem.]

So why didn't everyone return immediately afterward to Israel?

Most probably, after the events of the Megilla, a mass return to Yerushalayim was not realistic. Nonetheless, Mordechai wanted to institute a holiday that would remind Am Yisrael that should such an opportunity arise (once again), that they will know how to relate to it properly. Sefer Zecharya and its theme of shalom ve-emet serve as the spiritual guide.

[This interpretation may help explain why the celebration of Purim will remain even after our final redemption.]

Purim, therefore, has deep meaning for all generations. Its message may have been 'hiding' behind the costumes, the drinking ("ad de-lo yada"), the 'purim Torah', and 'shalach mannos'. It may have been lost within our ignorance of Tanach. Its message, however, remains eternal, just as our aspirations for Yerushalayim and the establishment therein of a just society - remain eternal.

purim sameiach,
menachem

From: office@etzion.org.il on behalf of Yeshivat Har Etzion
[office@etzion.org.il]

Sent: Monday, March 13, 2006 1:31 PM

To: yhe-holiday@etzion.org.il

Subject: Special Purim Package

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

YHE-HOLIDAY: SPECIAL PURIM 5766 PACKAGE

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Dedicated by the Freedman family

in memory of Benjamin Freedman z"l (Binyamin ben Menachem Mendel), whose yearzeit was 12 Adar.

Purim and the Sin of Amalek

Based on a sicha by Harav Yehuda Amital

Adapted by Matan Glidai

Translated by Kaeren Fish

The Rambam (Hilkhot Melakhim 6:4) writes that the commandment to wipe out Amalek applies only where Amalek refuses Israel's call to make peace. In his comments on the Rambam, Raavad notes that it is not sufficient for Amalek to make peace with Israel; they must accept upon themselves the seven Noachide laws. The Kesef Mishneh maintains that this is what Rambam meant:

Included in [the concept of] "making peace" is the acceptance of the seven [Noachide] laws. For if they accepted these seven laws, they would no longer be included in the category of the "seven [idolatrous] nations" [which Bnei Yisrael are commanded to annihilate when they enter the land], nor in the category of "Amalek"; they would be considered like [any other] fit Noachides.

From the above, we understand that the war against Amalek is not a national war, but rather a cultural one. Judaism has no problem with the people of Amalek, but rather with their culture and ideology. If Amalek would change their behavior and accept upon themselves the seven Noachide laws, there would no longer be any reason to wage war against them.

What exactly is the culture of Amalek, against which we are commanded to wage war? If we examine the sections in the Torah that speak about Amalek, we note certain recurring elements:

Remember that which Amalek did to you, ON THE WAY when you came out of Egypt. For they MET YOU (karekha) ON THE WAY... (Devarim 25:17-18)

I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, that they laid wait for them ON THE WAY when they came up from Egypt. (I Shemuel 15:20)

Mordekhai told him of all that had HAPPENED TO HIM (karahu)... (Esther 4:7)

The Midrash notes the connection between the first source and the third:

"Mordekhai told him of all that had happened to him (karahu)" – He said to Hatakh: Go and tell her (Esther), "The descendant of 'karahu' has come upon you" – as it is written, "They met you (karekha) on the way." (Esther Rabba 8:5)

We see here that what characterizes Amalek throughout the generations is the concept of "mikreh" – attributing everything to randomness and coincidence - while Am Yisrael is permanently "on the way" (ba-derekh), a concept denoting continuity. Amalek maintained an ideology of non-ideology: everything is permissible; there is no journey, no direction; everything is coincidental; there is no absolute value that must be held dear. Am Yisrael, in contrast is always "on the way" – they have a direction and an objective; they have clear values to which they cleave.

The word "machar" (tomorrow) also occurs twice in the sections about Amalek:

TOMORROW I shall stand atop the hill, with the staff of God in my hand. (Shemot 17:9)

TOMORROW I shall do as the king has said. (Esther 5:8)

Once again, Chazal connect these two verses:

"Tomorrow I shall do as the king has said" – why did Esther say "tomorrow"? Because all descendants of Amalek are destined to fall "on the morrow," as it is written, "Tomorrow I shall stand atop the hill." (Yalkut Shimoni Esther, 1056)

The Maharal explains that the word "tomorrow" expresses existential, moral duality: today we do that which is appropriate today, and tomorrow we do what is appropriate tomorrow. This expresses constant flux, a lack of fixed priorities and values: that which is good today will not necessarily be good tomorrow; everything changes depending on the circumstances. Esther understood that she faced an Amalekite worldview, and therefore she used the word "tomorrow."

In Judaism, by contrast, there are absolute ideals, and there is long-term planning. All events are part of a larger plan, as expressed in the following midrash:

The brothers were busy selling Yosef; Yosef was busy with sackcloth and fasting; Reuven was busy with sackcloth and fasting; Yaakov was busy with sackcloth and fasting; Yehuda was busy with finding a wife. And the Holy One was busy creating the light of the king Mashiach. (Bereishit Rabba 85:1)

Things do not happen coincidentally, simply according to whatever is going on right now. Am Yisrael has certain objectives, and the nation must act in the world in accordance with its aims and aspirations. In the story of Avraham, we encounter the expression "the way of God": he educated his children and household to know that there is a way, a direction, according to which one should behave.

Chazal point to the sin of Am Yisrael that caused Amalek to come and wage war against them:

Rabbi Levi said: To what could Israel be compared? To a person who had a son; he carried him upon his shoulders and led him through the marketplace. The son saw things that he liked, and he said to his father: "Buy it for me" – and he bought it for him, a first time and a second time and a third.

The son saw someone and said to him, "Have you seen my father?"

The father said to him: "Silly boy – you are riding on my shoulders, and everything that you ask for I give to you, and you ask this person, 'Have you seen my father?'"

What did the father do? He cast him off his shoulders – and a dog came and bit him.

So it was when Israel came out of Egypt: the Holy One surrounded them with seven clouds of glory...; they asked for manna and He gave to them. Once He had provided all of their needs, they began to wonder and ask, "Is God in our midst, or not?" (Shemot 17:7). The Holy One said to them, "You question My Presence? By your lives, I tell you that a dog will come and bite you" – and what did this refer to? This was Amalek. (Yalkut Shimoni, 261)

After all the Holy One had done for Israel, how was it possible for them to ask, "Is God in our midst, or not?" Such a question could only arise if the assumption was that nothing could be deduced from the past to the future. In the past, God indeed accompanied and assisted Am Yisrael, but who can guarantee that this is still the case? Every period is characterized by its own values and ideas; that which was appropriate yesterday is not necessarily relevant today. Everything is good in its own time, but is not necessarily applicable to every place and every time. This approach represented the worldview of Amalek, and therefore this sin led God to teach Israel a lesson through the attack of Amalek.

Another midrash has a different view of the sin of Israel:

[The name] "Refidim" implies that they were lax (rafu yedeihem) in Torah; therefore Amalek came upon them. (Tanchuma, Beshalach 25)

This sin, too, relates to the worldview of Amalek. One of the factors that leads to laxness or weakness (rifyon) in Torah learning is studying everything in a localized and limited way, without regard for the overall picture. Chazal say of certain people that "their Torah becomes many fragments" (Sanhedrin 71a). The Torah is a single system with fixed values and a clear objective; it is not a collection of ideas, each one of which stands alone.

The festival associated with the wiping out of Amalek is known to us as "Purim" – named after the "pur" (lot) cast by Haman. This would seem to be a peculiar choice of name: why emphasize specifically the issue of casting lots? Surely, the important message of the day is that Haman wanted to destroy Am Yisrael; why is it important how he chose the day to fulfill his evil plan? The answer is that the "lot" symbolizes the Amalekite ideology, according to which everything is based on chance, on luck, on coincidence; there is no absolute value.

The Torah commands us to wipe out the memory of Amalek, because Amalek has lost the right to exist. Every nation and ideology fulfills some role in the world. Within that system, there is room for every individual, even if he is a negative influence, just as we include

galbanum among the ingredients of the incense, even though its odor is unpleasant. But Amalek is not part of this whole, because according to their view there is no whole, nor any obligating value: everything is permissible and everything is coincidental. This is a most dangerous ideology, and the furthest removed from Judaism. Every type of idolatry has something in common with Judaism, since it includes an acknowledgment of and search for divinity. Amalek possesses no common denominator with Judaism, since they reject the very idea of seeking any sort of value.

Since Sancheriv mixed up the nations, there is no nation that is identified as Amalek – but the Amalekite world-view still exists. This view finds its contemporary expression in the trend known as postmodernism. Modern culture upholds progress and other values, but postmodern philosophy denies the existence of any absolute values at all. It posits that there is no need to aspire to progress; in fact, there is no need to aspire towards anything. There is no ideology, everything is permissible – just as Amalek maintained. Judaism is therefore completely opposed to this view.

On the individual level, Chassidism teaches that every person contains a small degree of "Amalekism," and each person must work on himself in order to wipe it out.

(This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat Zakhor 5756 [1996].)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand on the Parsha

Sanctifying Oneself Through The Physical

There is a very significant difference between Judaism and other religions. Many religions, particularly Catholicism, believe in a basic dichotomy between the physical and spiritual. That is why they believe that their holy people must remain celibate. They hold that if a person really wants to reach spirituality, he must separate himself from physical things. The more separate a person can become, the more holy he can become. Judaism teaches us just the opposite. Torah teaches that the highest form of holiness can come through material matters.

[This concept will be discussed further when we reach Parshas Vayikra; this shiur was given during a leap year, and Vayikra fell before Purim.]

It is perhaps appropriate to stress this idea as the holiday of Purim approaches. On Purim there is a mitzvah to eat and drink. These are, obviously, basic physical activities. But the mitzvah is to transform these activities into a higher form -- not just filling one's stomach or using drinking as an excuse to act inappropriately. These are concepts that someone following another religion would find very hard to understand. They see a dichotomy between the physical and spiritual, a divide that cannot be bridged. But a Jew is asked and is able to eat and drink and -- even in that state -- sanctify the name of Heaven. That is Purim! Chazal tell us that Yom Kippurim is a day like Purim, [k(mo) Purim]. The day before Yom Kippur we feast, and on Yom Kippur we fast. On Purim it is just the opposite. The day prior to Purim (Ta'anis Esther) we fast, and on Purim we feast.

Chazal phrased their statement in such a way that Yom Kippur -- which is being compared to Purim -- seems to be secondary, and Purim seems to be primary. The reason for this is that on Purim we can achieve a higher level of spirituality than on Yom Kippur! On Yom Kippur, we achieve a spirituality that comes through fasting and abstention. On Purim, the preparation comes through fasting but the goal is to sit at our Purim Seudah [Purim Feast], and achieve spirituality through feasting! Haman: The Perennial Malcontent

The Gemara [Talmud, Tractate Chulin 139b] asks, "From where do we see a Biblical allusion to Haman's name?" To which the enigmatic answer is given, "Hahmin ha'eytz hazeh..." ([Did you eat] from this

tree?) [Bereshis 3:11]. Without vowels, the Hebrew letters of the word Hahmin are the same as the Hebrew letters in the name Haman. This is a type of Gemara that cannot be understood on a superficial level. The Talmud 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 verse "[Did you eat] from this tree?" Rav Bergman explains that Haman was an individual who had everything. Our sages 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 - [Esther 3:2]), Haman said, "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. Haman represents the perennial malcontent. 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 the Garden of Eden. Adam had literally everything -- spirituality, physical luxury, angels to serve him -- everything! He lacked only one thing: access to the Tree of Knowledge. Adam was not satisfied, and he succumbed to the sin 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 most everything.

This is a particularly important lesson for us to learn before 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, that it is very difficult to be happy.

What is the 'key' to happiness? A person becomes happy by being a "sameach b'chelko" -- one who is happy with his portion. We must think about that which we have, rather than that which we lack. If a person -- thank G-d -- 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 Hamans of the world. We must get away from the attitude of "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 fulfill the Mitzvah of the day. "For the Jews there was light, happiness, joy, and honor" (La'yehudim Hoyso Ora Vsimcha Vsoisson Veykor) [Esther 8:16].

Happy Purim!

from: Aish.com newsletterserver@aish.com via madmimi.com
date: Tue, Mar 6, 2012 at 8:25 AM
subject: Aish.com: Purim's Wakeup Call, Charlie Harary on Purim, Blogs & More - March 6, 2012

**Purim's Wakeup Call
by Rabbi Efreim Goldberg**

Purim is unfolding again right before our very eyes. How can we go about business as usual?

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We are living in remarkable times. The approximately 60-year reprieve from anti-Semitism that the nations of the world have given our people out of pity and sympathy in the aftermath of the Holocaust seems to be coming to an end. Our default status in the world -- scapegoat, blame, hatred, anti-Semitism, de-legitimization -- is being restored as Israel is no longer the underdog and victim in the world's eyes, but rather somehow we have become the aggressor and the perpetrator.

We sing with great enthusiasm, "When the month of Adar begins, we intensify our sense of joy." But how can one be happy right now when we reflect on the Jewish condition in the world? What does Adar contain that would allow us to overlook and disregard the threats that Israel confronts, the isolation it experiences and the challenges our people face?

One year ago, the beautiful Fogel family was brutally murdered. Udi and Rut Fogel, together with their children Yoav, 11, Elad, 4, and 3-month-old Hadas had their throats slit while they slept in their beds. Their three surviving children, Tamar, Roi and 3-year-old Yishai, live today with their grandparents who have at an advanced age heroically taken on the role of parents to these young children.

As we mark the first yearzeit of this atrocity we can't help but ask, where is the simcha [joy] of Adar? How can one feel a sense of joy when incidents like this still happen to our people?

Today we are not safe even among the intellectual elite, even at the highest academic institution in America. Harvard's Kennedy School of Government is hosting a conference entitled: "Israel/Palestine and the One-State Solution," and you can be sure, that one state is not Israel. One featured speaker is Ali Abunimah, creator of the website Electronic Intifada, who opposes the existence of a "Jewish State." Also presenting is Harvard's own Stephen M. Walt, co-author of the anti-Israel book, The Israel Lobby.

Yes, some Harvard graduates have written to the university's president to protest their hosting this conference. But perhaps as appalling as the actual conference, is the relative silence of the Jewish community. Where is the outrage? Where are the rallies, letter writing campaigns, protests, sit-ins?

Where is the joy of Adar when a virulently anti-Israel group can freely present their hate-filled rhetoric and advance their one-state-free-of-Jews solution, on the most prestigious campus in America?

Today, even a candidate for public office is not afraid to reveal his blatant anti-Semitism.

Just this past week, Arthur Jones, a republican candidate for Congress in Chicago, said: "As far as I'm concerned, the Holocaust is nothing more than an international extortion racket by the Jews." Jones, who organizes neo-Nazi events in commemoration of Hitler's birthday, continued by calling the Holocaust "the blackest lie in history. Millions of dollars are being made by Jews telling this tale of woe and misfortune in books, movies, plays and TV."

Thankfully, Republicans have not put him on the ballot because of his views. But here is the scary thing. He has collected over 1,000 signatures on a petition to allow him to run. That means that there are more than 1,000 other people in Chicago that share his anti-Semitic views. His candidacy comes now, in the month of Adar, supposedly the most joyous of all months. Where is the simcha?

Related Article: Purim and Iran

A Sleeping Nation

When Haman targeted the Jews for annihilation, he said to Achashveirosh, "Let's destroy the Jews." Achashveirosh replied, "Not so fast. I am afraid of their God, lest He do to me what He did to my predecessors."

Haman relieved the King of that fear when he said "Yeshno am echad," which translates literally as "there is a certain nation." The Talmud

(Megillah 13b), using a play on words, explains that Haman was telling the King something much more strategic and insightful. Yashnu am echad - there is a sleeping nation. They have been negligent of mitzvot, they are divided, fighting with one another and divisive. They are asleep as to what is important and what threatens them, Haman pointed out to the King.

The Jewish people were vulnerable and on the brink of extinction because they were asleep. Their eyes were closed to what was happening around them. They didn't take the threats seriously. Haman, like so many of our shrewd enemies throughout Jewish history, understood that going about business as usual, living with our eyes closed and sleep walking through life makes us particularly vulnerable and susceptible to attack.

Haman recognized that "there is a nation that is sleeping." All he had to do was continue to lull the Jewish people into a false sense of security, to breed complacency and apathy, and he could accomplish his goal of ridding the world of our people.

So what spoiled his plan? The answer is simple: Mordechai and Esther stood up and, like an alarm, rang and rang until they woke up our people from their practically comatose sleep.

Mordechai understood that the antidote to "the nation that is sleeping" is as the Book of Esther states, "lech knos kol ha'yehudim - go and gather all the Jews together" and wake them up. He understood that the response to "they are scattered and dispersed" is to bring them together in fasting and praying. That wakeup call saved our people and ignited a response that provided not only the spark that led to military victory but attracted people of Shushan to want to join the Jewish people.

Purim Then and Now

I look around today and can't help but think our people have been lulled asleep into a false sense of security once again, making ourselves vulnerable. Our enemies are no less evil than Haman, their plans no less nefarious, and their goal no less threatening to our very existence. And yet, for so many, it is business as usual, eyes shut to what is happening and threatening us. Now is the time to wake up, now is the time for to come together in prayer, and in fasting, in letter writing, phone calls, advocacy, lobbying and any way that we can raise our voice on behalf of our people.

Do you think Israel is going to attack Iran? Or do you think no attack will take place and Iran will be allowed to go nuclear? Do you realize that either option is an absolute disaster, potentially devastating and earth-shattering? Do you truly understand the scenario and the casualties if Israel attacks Iran? Can you even imagine the rockets raining down throughout the country, terrorist attacks, condemnations from around the world seeking to isolate Israel, a possible embargo?

And if no attack happens, do you understand the threat and reality of a nuclear weapon held at Israel's head?

And if we do understand, how can we possibly remain asleep and go about business as usual?

Purim is unfolding again right before our very eyes. Iran is modern-day Persia and Ahmadinejad is modern-day Haman sharing the same, explicit goal - to wipe out, in minutes, 6 million Jews.

We must not allow that to happen.

We have an obligation to remember Amalek and what they sought to do to us. The Torah says it is not enough to "not forget." You can be asleep and yet not forget somewhere buried in your memory that these were once enemies. No, we must also "remember" - zachor. We must remember at all times what our enemies are capable of and never feel a false sense of security.

The time has come to wake up, to remember the Fogel family, and to hold accountable people who celebrate such a murder. The time has come to wake up and to raise our voices in protest of anti-Israel conferences at Harvard and at other universities in this country. The time has come to wake up and to vocally reject the candidacy of a man who

can deny the Holocaust. And the time has come to wake up and do everything that we can to make sure Iran does not go nuclear.

Perhaps the joy of Adar is the happiness of waking up, of rising from our sleep of recognizing what we confront and stepping up to make a difference. Real joy is being alive, responsive and alert, ready to face whatever challenges may come and to be confident that we will be triumphant, as we ultimately have been throughout our illustrious history.

When Adar begins, we remember enemies past like Amalek and Haman and we focus acutely on our present enemies and stopping them. When we wake up and confront them, that in itself is a source of joy.

This article can also be read at:

http://www.aish.com/h/pur/t/dt/Purims_Wakeup_Call.html