

DIVREI TORAH FROM INTERNET
ON PURIM - 5756

B'S'D' months, begins in Nissan which is the Hachodesh hazeh lochem month and represents the creation of klal Yisroel as a mamleches Kohanim veGoi kodosh. The second is measured by the sun and is a continuum which is 365 days in length. This calendrical cycle begins in Tishrei and relates to the entire world as creation of HaShem. It is in the context of this cycle that the entire world and all its inhabitants are judged.

We note another distinction. The Tishrei focus is on the yochid in his relation to HaShem; the Nissan focus is on the tzibbur, on klal Yisroel.

Although we have three regalim, these three are actually two. The three regalim are really two periods of the year because the Nissan period includes not only Pesach but also Shevu'os. This is, of course, because of the special relationship of mattan Torah to yetzi'as Mitzrayim. Thus, if we look at all the mo'adim together, we find that the Tishrei focus includes the mo'adim from Rosh Hashanah through Simchas Torah, and the Nissan focus includes Pesach through Shvu'os.

Just as the Tishrei focus requires a period of preparation, chodesh Elul, so too the Nissan focus requires its preparation, chodesh Adar. It is fascinating to note that we must pass through an Adar, and appreciate the presence of HaShem in hester panim, before we can relate to HaShem as revealed in nissim geluyim. So too we must relate on a personal level to HaShem distant from the sinner before we can relate to the ultimate lifnei HaShem of Yom Kippur and simchas hachag.

Elul and Adar are also periods of greater tzedakah. This is stressed in the acronym of ELUL. In this sense, both Adar and Elul are: ish lere'ehu umatonos lo'evyonim. Tzedakah is one of the ways to petition HaShem, and the giving of tzedakah is part of the teshuvah process. The ways of teshuvah include the constant petition of the shov to HaShem and doing tzedakah to the fullest capacity.... This is one of the reasons why the quintessential perek of tzedakah (Yashayahu 58) is read as Yom Kippur's haftorah.

Adar's emphasis on tzedakah is twofold. These are days of achdus and of ge'ulah and tzedakah is crucial for both.

Am Echod. Tzedakah is the acid test; there is no better measure of achdus than tzedakah. Beginning with the announcement of parshas shekolim and continuing through machtzis hashekel, matonos lo'evyonim and mo'os chitim, the Adar-Nissan period is a time to identify with the totality of Israel, to declare one's self to be part of klal Yisroel. This is achieved in great part by my identification with another's needs and concerns as if they were my own needs and concerns. If we show that we are brothers, we show that we

have one Father. Here the words of the Rambam (Hilchos Matnos Aniyim, 10)

strike a compelling chord: For all Yisroel and the geirim who join them are brothers as is written: You are children to HaShem Elokeichem. And if a brother does not have compassion for a brother, who will have compassion for him? And to whom are the eyes of the poor raised? Are they raised up to the goyim who hate them and pursue them? Of course, the poor raise up their eyes only to their brethren.

Moreover, Ain Yisroel nig'olim elo bishvil hatzedakah. These months, beginning with Adar, are the months of redemption. Mishenichnas Adar marbim besimchah. Rashi comments: these were days of miracles for Yisroel-Purim and Pesach. It is clear that Rashi includes Nissan in the marbim besimchah period. But this is not merely a joy for blessings past. We had the miracles of Purim and Pesach and we will enjoy future miracles in the very same season. It is a season for miracles. We sense the harbinger of redemption, and we rejoice in its promise. It is once again the springtime of klal Yisroel, with all the potential for ge'ulah.

The season of ge'ulah brings with it a responsibility for one another and a

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Matonos Lo'evyonim and Mo'os Chitim
Ho Lachmo Anyo and Shir HaShirim:

by Rav Aharon Kahn

I: Tzedakah: For Personal and National Redemption

Tzedakah and ge'ulah always go hand in hand. Wherever we find ge'ulah we find an increased emphasis on tzedakah. We live through a ge'ulah process each year. Actually, there are two periods of ge'ulah in the year. The Elul- Tishrei period is a time for personal ge'ulah. The Adar-Nissan period is a time of national-historical ge'ulah. Both periods of ge'ulah require a special emphasis on tzedakah. It is most interesting that where the ge'ulah is personal, as in the teshuvah process, the emphasis on tzedakah is personal and individual. Where the ge'ulah is of klal Yisroel, the stress on tzedakah reflects that public, klal Yisroel focus. Thus the months of Adar-Nissan include specific public expressions concerning tzedakah, beginning with mashmi'im al hashekolim at the beginning of Adar and including matonos lo'evyonim, machtzis hashekel and mo'os chitim. All these have specific structures and have public and communal natures. The tzedakah of the ba'al teshuvah is a personal, private affair.

There are two focal points which divide the calendar year precisely in half and which divide the mo'adei HaShem as well. These two points reflect two very different calendar perspectives. The first, measured by the moon's 12

requirement to do specific mitzvos of tzedakah.

II: Matonos Lo'evyonim

Are matonos lo'evyonim a kiyyum of mitzvas tzedakah? Of course. If one gives matonos lo'evyonim one has definitely achieved a d'oraysa of tzedakah. Nevertheless, the question remains as to what is the nature of this mitzvah on the derabonon level.

Is the mitzvah of matonos lo'evyonim a miderabonon which was instituted as a distinct form of tzedakah which is connected to Purim and to the mitzvah of se'udas Purim, or is the derabonon of matonos lo'evyonim not instituted as a derabonon mitzvas tzedakah altogether? This question has bearing upon many halachos. We will mention several.

Does an oni have an obligation to give matonos lo'evyonim? The Taz (Orach Chayim #694) in the name of the Bach, says: yes. Does this prove that matonos lo'evyonim is, on the derabonon level, not a tzedakah mitzvah? It does not. The specific mitzvah of pe'ah is also incumbent upon the oni who happens to have a field.

Can matonos lo'evyonim be something other than food or money? Perhaps not. But, if it is a mitzvas tzedakah miderabonon, why not any gift?

What kavonoh should one have when giving matonos lo'evyonim? If it is not a mitzvas tzedakah miderabonon, then a kavonoh of tzedakah seems to be out of place. It is interesting to note that in Siddur Bais Ya'akov, the kavonoh for the mitzvos tzedakah of poso'ach tiftach and nosson titayn are mentioned.

Can one fulfill with the same gift both mitzvos (mishlo'ach monos and matonos lo'evyonim) simultaneously? This issue has been discussed at length. Does this have bearing upon our question? It may. If the mitzvah of matonos lo'evyonim is a separate mitzvas tzedakah we might imagine that the same items might be used to fulfill two mitzvos simultaneously. But there is no conclusive proof here.

We mention only the opinion of the Ran who argues that the distinction in the number of gifts given, two for an oshir and one for an oni, is understandable. An oni doesn't expect much and even one gift is a big thing; an oshir requires a more substantial expression. From the fact that the Ran connects the two, mishlo'ach monos and matonos lo'evyonim, and from the explanation he gives as to the varying amounts, it seems clear that the Ran considered these two mitzvas as essentially the same. The mitzvah, for the Ran, is giving gifts to others, to anyim in one form, to ashirim, in another. If so, it is not a mitzvas tzedakah derabonon but rather a mitzvas matonos Purim.

So it would appear from the words of the Rambam (Hilchos Megillah, 2:17) that it is better to increase the gifts to the poor on Purim than to increase mishlo'ach monos and se'udah. If matonos lo'evyonim would be a mitzvas tzedakah, how does the Rambam compare these mitzvos?! Obviously, these three mitzvos of Purim are of one piece, a mitzvas ribbuy simchah for one's self and for others.

The Ritva in his chidushim to Megillah, 7a, seems to say the same. Matonos lo'evyonim is a mitzvas simchah, not a mitzvas tzedakah. Therefore, the meticulous concern present with respect to tzedakah, that the monies fall into the hands of anyim davka, does not exist on Purim, and whoever asks is given.

On the other hand, the targum seems to call matonos lo'evyonim monies of tzedakah. Moreover, Rav Amram Gaon [in Siddur, Purim, 95b], seems to say

that there is no upper limit to matonos lo'evyonim because it is tzedakah, and tzedakah is given by each person according to his heartfelt desire (ayin yafah).

III: Mo'os Chitim

Let us now explore the institution of mo'os chitim as a specific tzedakah for the season of redemption.

Mo'os chitim is mentioned in the Rema, Orach Chayim, #429:1 who writes:

There is a minhag to buy wheat to distribute to anyim for Pesach and whoever has lived in a town for twelve months must give towards this purpose. The source for this is Yerushalmi, Baba Basra, 1:4 where mo'os chitim is called: chiti d'pischa. (Apparently, wheat, rather than flour or matzos, was distributed. The phrase: kimcha d'pischa implies that flour was given. Mo'os chitim does not imply that money was given, because it may well refer to the money that is collected, not to the medium that is distributed.)

The question is: If the oni does not have food for Pesach, isn't providing for him part of the basic mitzvah of tzedakah. After all, matzoh on Pesach is the equivalent of bread throughout the year. We are hard pressed to understand why mo'os chitim was instituted as a distinct minhag.

In answer to this question, the Avodas Hagefen (cited by Machzik Brachah, #429) explains that the mo'os chitim minhag segregated this form of tzedakah from all the others, encouraging even talmidei chachomim who were anyim to accept mo'os chitim though they did not take any other tzedakah throughout the year.

R. Shlomo Kluger, in Chochmas Shlomo to Orach Chayim #429:1 reasons that the minhag of mo'os chitim was instituted to prevent a potential prevarication. After we give mo'os chitim, even if we fail to invite anyim to share the matzoh at our table, we can say ho lachmo anyo...kol dichfin... and it will not be a falsehood. We have accomplished, through mo'os chitim, that kol dichfin will have for Pesach.

Can we view mo'os chitim as an obligation to provide anyim with matzos mitzvah to enable the anyim to fulfill the mitzvah of achilas matzoh? Off hand, we must ask first whether there is an obligation to give tzedakah so that anyim should be able to do mitzvos. There is much discussion on this subject. However, perhaps mo'os chitim is a special case.

We might suggest an additional source for the minhag of mo'os chitim. The Avudraham (in his Seder Hagadah, on the section of ho lachmo anyo) cites the following in the name of the Gaon R. Mattisyah: "The custom to recite kol dichfin (all who are hungry, let them come and eat), [derives as follows]: Such was the custom of [our] fathers that they raised their tables and they did not close their doors and they recited thus [i.e., kol dichfin] so that the Jewish poor amongst them should come and eat....But now that there are more gentile neighbors than Jewish neighbors, they [the Jewish poor] are provided for earlier [i.e., before Pesach begins] so that they do not have to beg from door to door, and then the table is raised and he recites what was always recited...." In other words, the recitation of an invitation to the poor was retained at the seder even after the procedure of providing had changed.

It seems possible, therefore, that the institution of mo'os chitim was introduced when it became impossible to invite the poor Jews directly to the seder.

According to the Gaon of Vilna, mo'os chitim is a minhag whose roots are in mitzvas matzoh itself. It is brought in the name of the Gaon of Vilna that

a remez to mo'os chitim is found in the posuk (Shemos 13:6) which has Matzos Ye'ochel in the passive, that is, that we should see that matzoh should be eaten by others, that is, by the aniyim. Also, the same posuk has: Seven days shall you eat matzos...matzos shall be eaten seven days. The first refers to the mitzvah that we should eat matzoh, the second that we should see to it that matzoh is eaten by others. In the former, the word matzos is choseyr, in the latter, it is molay. This indicates that the aniyim should be given enough for kday svi'ah as is written: (Devorim 26:12) they shall eat in your gates and be sated. It is interesting to note that the posuk speaks of eating matzoh seven days. The remez encourages us to provide matzoh for the aniyim for all of Pesach.

IV: Ho Lachmo Anyo

We now turn to the recitation of ho lachmo anyo at the outset of maggid, the central hagadah section. Why do we say the segment of ho lachmo anyo at this point?

Perhaps, we may view ho lachmo anyo as being at the beginning of maggid, perhaps we may view it as being after yachatz.

Ho lachmo anyo may be at the beginning of maggid because we wish to declare that now, on this night, is the time for the hagadah and not before. Now,

besho'oh sheyesh matzoh umoror munachim lefonecho.

Perhaps it is an explanation of yachatz. After all, if the matzoh represents cheirus and yetzi'as Mitzrayim, why do we break it in half in the manner of the oni who saves half for the next meal? Ho lachmo anyo teaches the lechem oni aspect of matzoh and informs us that matzoh must reveal the darko shel oni biprusoh.

As we are reminding ourselves that matzoh is lechem oni, we are required to invite those who are true aniyim. The ho lachmo anyo triggers this sensitivity.

We do not recite kol dichfin at any other yomtov meal, although the simchah of yomtov demands the invitation of aniyim to join with us at our table. Otherwise, says the Rambam, it is simchas kreiso. But now that we mentioned

lechem oni at the outset of maggid, we add kol dichfin, etc.

The Rov, zt"l, often mentioned that the kol ditzrich yeysi veyifsach invitation to korban Pesach is because lechatchilo it should not be eaten alone (Rambam, Hilchos Korban Pesach, 2:2)

The question is, if so, how can we say it at the seder, when Pesach requires minuyim. Moreover, in general, how can we say it with the door closed?

The invitation for aniyim to join was communicated by Rav Huna all the time. (Ta'anis 20b). He invited the poor by going out to them, by opening his door and calling out into the courtyard. How can we say this at our table, and when it is too late, and with the doors closed?

Indeed, we find in the Avudraham quoted above, (also brought in Otzar HaGe'onim Pesachim [p.112]), that one of the explanations for leaving our doors open on the night of the seder is this very invitation to the aniyim which we recite: ho lachmo anyo, etc. But what about us? The ge'onim explain that the minhag remained to say ho lachmo anyo, even though the doors were closed.

Perhaps we can illuminate the continued recitation of this defunct invitation with the following remarks. The doors are now closed; this clarion call to share will fall as silent as a vacuum's space. To whom do we speak? To the relatives and friends who belong? To those who have food and a home and a korban Pesach? Of course, not! We speak to the others, to

the homeless and the vagrants, the miserable and the helpless. Let them come and eat!

But this eager invitation beckons to strangers who are not there and addresses poor who will remain outside and hungry. It is too late. Kol dichfin recited at the seder is a mute cry, absurd and of no relevance!

Yes, we merely repeat, at night, what should have been declared in the marketplace earlier in the day. There was a chance then, an opportunity. The poor gathered; they had come to be invited into home and heart. They waited for the herald, their hopes riveted, their ears ready for kindness, for the good words of good Jews.

Why? Why do we repeat the morning's declaration of love of brother Jew?

I

believe we are being asked to do teshuvah. We are exhorted, before we can speak of our cheirus, to make a declaration of interdependence. We are all Jews, intertwined in the helical strands of hashgachah. Our collective destiny begins tonight in the retelling--reliving of yetzi'as Mitzrayim.

Have we cared enough? Do these words ring easily in our ears as we begin the seder story? If we have succeeded, then these words are themselves welcome friends, words that we remember from the morning. I can repeat them

now and feel that all is well, that I have cared and HaShem has provided. The poor are here with me, the miserable find a home, the gleaming table settings reflect the brightness of a eye that gleams tonight, not from the tears of yi'ush but from the joy of hope. Someone cared enough, these words say. So, instead of an osisi kechol asher tzivisoni we simply repeat this morning's call. But the words ring well.

Of course, there is, choliloh, the possibility that I did not care enough. Then these words at tonight's seder, words which I am commanded to utter, will be witnesses which I myself summon to testify against me.

In short, if, indeed, I failed, then the words of kol dichfin are recited at night in order to give me a guilty conscience. These words are summoned to reprimand me, to remind me that I did not care for all those others who needed me. They force me to admit that, as far as tonight's seder is concerned, it is now too late!

One final question. Why first kol dichfin and then kol ditzrich? We suggest two explanations. Since pesach is ne'echal al hasova it comes at the end of the other achilah. So pesach is mentioned afterwards. Also, by asking the oni first to eat and only afterwards mentioning the mitzvah of korban pesach, we show that we care about the human being first, and then about his chiyuv hamitzvos, and not in reverse order.

V: Shir HaShirim

We mentioned that the two halves of the calendar represent two perspectives. Adar-Nissan embody the klal Yisroel--HaShem connection; Elul-

Tishrei embody the individual's connection with HaShem. We find that these two distinct relationships, that of the klal and that of the yochid, are also depicted in Shir HaShirim.

In the Rambam's presentation of avodah me'ahavah he mentions that all of Shir HaShirim is a moshol of the preoccupation of the Oved Me'ahavah with HaShem. The metaphors of Shir HaShirim are those of a lovesick heart yearning and striving; a heart preoccupied, even obsessed.

According to the Rambam's interpretation the yochid in his relationship to HaShem is the focus of Shir HaShirim, not the tzibbur. It is a relationship of personal intimacy, of a neshomo striving towards HaShem.

Rashi, and most meforshim, on the other hand, see Shir HaShirim as a moshol of klal Yisroel and HaShem. It is a relationship of HaShem with His chosen people, a relationship of past history and future destiny.

We find that, in the cycle of the chomesh megillos, the place for Shir HaShirim is on Pesach. Pesach, the yom tov of history and of destiny, is the backdrop for the public rendition of Shir HaShirim. This seems to follow Rashi's approach to Shir HaShirim.

There is also a minhag to recite Shir HaShirim on the first night of pesach, after the seder. Here, I believe, both interpretations express themselves. This recitation on Pesach night, at the seder's end, declares the individual's commitment of love to HaShem, even as the history of yetzi'as Mitzrayim and the experiences of golus and ge'ulah are told.

Finally, it is a minhag to recite Shir HaShirim every Erev Shabbos. This is the individual Jew's declaration of total commitment. With Shir HaShirim upon his lips, he goes forth to greet the Shabbos, as one would greet a king. Here, the individual's hishtapchus hanefesh is manifest.

Both moments, Erev Shabbos and Seder night, are encounters with the Shechinah, a rendezvous with HaShem. As the midrash declares, in this respect Shir HaShirim's song is unique: no other song is a declaration of mutual love, of mirrored commitment.

Shir HaShirim is kodesh kodoshim. It is something of an irony, that we are capable of making the most grievous error of reduction and profanation davka with that Song which has been defined as exceedingly sacred, as kodesh kodoshim. Any corruption of Shir HaShirim's significance, purpose and place, results in utter defilement. Thus, Shir HaShirim see

traveled" (Devarim 25:18), and seemingly came to a random decision to smite us. Centuries later, Haman continued in this path of groundless antagonism. This is detected by the keen eyes of Chazal (Esther Rabba 8:5) who note that Mordekhai employed the same word in his message to Queen Esther: he wants her to know all that has happened to him (karahu). With this uncommon verb, he awakes her to the urgency of their situation: they who are characterized by capricious hatred have "happened upon" us again.

This arbitrariness, then, is the defining feature of Amalek and is the very cornerstone of their ideology. One might say, indeed, that Amalek is essentially anti-ideological. There is no rhyme or reason in the world, no historical progression, no guiding force. Everything simply "happens" to be.

With this denial, though, Amalek ironically forfeits his own right to exist. As long as one can perceive a broader picture, every detail has its place. The smallest cog serves a function within a vast mechanism - if one believes that there is a mechanism. Even bitter tastes are essential within the structure of the palate as a whole, as is shown by the inclusion of galbanum, an unpleasant smelling resin, among the spices of the Temple incense.

The Talmud teaches us that King Saul was punished for being merciful toward the cruel. This is difficult to understand, for is not the trait of mercy a commendable one? We learn from here that hard-heartedness, too, has its rightful place in the world. It is essential in wartime, for example, or when dealing with terrorists. All activities, all qualities, all elements, when combined properly, form a harmonious whole in God's plan for the world. One who denies this reality, however, can have no place within it.

In the words of the Maharal (Or Chadash p. 167):

"This is the bottom line: Amalek has so far removed himself from [true] reality as to be considered simply a thing apart. Therefore, as long as Amalek exists in the world, it cannot be said that "God is One and His Name is One"... For this reason, they are deserving of obliteration for the sake of the future, for God will be one only after Amalek has been evicted from the Oneness of God. That is, the downfall of Amalek. "This is why it says regarding his downfall, 'tomorrow.' Amalek resembles the morrow in that while the first day of creation was 'echad,' unity, the following day was 'sheni,' duality or otherness, and Amalek too is 'other,' as Moshe declared in the battle with Amalek, 'Tomorrow, I will stand at the top of the hill.' Similarly Esther said, 'And tomorrow I will do as the king commands.'"

II. "To the Sinner He Gives the Task of Collecting and Gathering"

It is written in Tractate Megilla 10b:

"Rabbi Abba the son of Cahana began his discourse with the following: 'To the man who is good before Him He gives wisdom, knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he gives the task of collecting and gathering, that he may give it to the one who is good before God...' (Kohelet 2:26). 'To the man who is good before Him' - refers to Mordekhai, 'but to the sinner He gives the task of collecting and gathering' - this refers to Haman, 'to give to the one who is good before God' - this

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PURIM PACKAGE #1

PURIM IN THE TEACHINGS OF THE MAHARAL

by HaRav Yehuda Amital

I. The Lord's Everlasting War With Amalek

The battle between Israel and Amalek is an eternal one. A divine oath has been sworn: "God shall be at war with Amalek for all generations" (Shemot 17:16). The enmity began during the Jews' forty-year journey through the desert, when Amalek attacked the feeble people marching in the rear. It climaxed with Haman the Agagite, of Amalekite descent, who plotted to destroy the whole Jewish nation.

Yet, despite God's directive to obliterate the memory of Amalek from under the heavens, we find an unexpected development in the Rambam (Hilkhot Melakhim 6:4; Ra'avand and Kesef Mishneh op cit). If an Amalekite were to accept upon himself the seven basic Noachide commandments, he immediately would cease to be considered an Amalekite and we must treat him as any other righteous Gentile! Even more surprising, we find a long-standing debate among our Sages and Rishonim regarding the permissibility of accepting an Amalekite convert. In either case, the possibility that an Amalekite can choose to relinquish his status as such clearly indicates that our goal is to annihilate the Amalekite mindset and culture and not the people per se.

What Amalekite trait is it that deserves our eternal enmity?

As we mentioned above, the struggle began after the Jews left Egypt, when they were in Refidim. There, Amalek's ambush was not provoked by fear of a nation whose God had performed miracles for them. That would have been understandable. Rather, Amalek simply "happened upon you (karekha) as you

refers to Mordekhai, about whom it is said, 'And Esther placed Mordekhai in charge of the house of Haman' (Esther 8:2)."

The Maharal (Or Chadash p. 64-5) comments:

"This homily comes to teach us that one can learn from the megilla God's ways of dealing with the righteous and the wicked. God, blessed be He, grants riches and success to the wicked man - in order that the righteous man come and take it from him. Why does God give to the righteous man in this indirect way, by means of the wicked? It is because the wicked man is marked by tremendous greed, continually eager to amass wealth. Righteous people, on the other hand, are content with their lot and do not pursue material prosperity as the wicked do. For this reason, the righteous man is not adapted to accumulate riches in the same way that the wicked people are."

God wished to give to Mordekhai the house of Haman, which means not only his estate but, more importantly, his power. As the Maharal explained, God sets before the wicked man the task of "collecting and gathering," exempting righteous people from this activity because they are purely occupied with the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge. Hence, the wicked man prepares an estate, thinking it is for himself, and when it is complete, God simply transfers it to a righteous man.

It is a well-known fact that in order to attain a senior government position, one must trample upon others; before one becomes a cabinet minister one must serve his time in the outlying branches, then transfer to party headquarters, and only much later, after a titanic struggle, can one achieve cabinet rank. So too it is in the megilla: God granted Haman the ability to fashion a power base from which he could control both the king's court and the land as a whole. Once this was achieved, the rulership is transferred to Mordekhai, who stepped into a ready-made position: "And Esther placed Mordekhai in charge of the house of Haman." Mordekhai, alone, could not have attained this position; his eyes were bent towards wisdom.

One might utilize this concept to help understand why according to Rav Kook the Land of Israel was built up by non-religious Jews. I do not mean to say, God forbid, that the builders of the State were Hamans; rather, they were more suited to the task than the humble, pious Jews. One who wishes to build an economically viable state must have experience and expertise in economic matters. One whose focus in life is solely intellectual and spiritual will be incapable of performing such a task. The Chafetz Chaim (or Rav Kook for that matter) could not have built a factory. This does not negate the importance of such an endeavor, but to do it properly, we need a man whose focus is on economic achievement.

Many of those who built up the land were specifically those who were interested in settlement and agriculture. Religious matters were not at the top of their list of priorities. These were practical people, and precisely because of this they were successful in laying down a sturdy industrial infrastructure. Were a pious, undemanding, scholarly type of individual to turn his hand to these practical matters, he would probably fail. Not only might he lack the skills, he would lack the drive. Being himself satisfied with a humble life, he would not feel the need to

develop a thriving economy. Ultimately, of course, the goal is for all to be pious, and for all to share and enjoy the fruits of this labor.

III. "Each One Would Swallow His Fellow Alive"

Tractate Megilla 11a:

"Rabbi Nachman the son of Yitzchak began his discourse with the following: 'A song of ascents, by David ... If not for God who was with us when men rose up against us ...' (Tehillim 124:1-2) - men, but not a king."

The Maharal (Or Chadash, p. 67) comments:

"This homily comes to teach us that the trouble with Haman was like no other which befell the Jews, for they were sold to be completely destroyed, killed, and annihilated without exception. The reason for this is that Haman was an ordinary man and not a king. A king, by the very nature of his dominion, seeks subjects to rule over, for that is what makes him a king. If his nation were to rebel, he would attempt to chastise them, not to destroy them. But Haman was different for he had no intention of rebuking people but only of destroying and killing. This is what is meant by the verse, 'If not for God who was with us when men rose up against us' - it is when a man rises up against us that we see the protecting stance of God, who does not permit the destruction of Israel."

This idea, the Maharal goes on to explain, finds a practical expression in Chazal's dictum (Pirkei Avot 3:2) that were it not for the fear of the government, each man would swallow his fellow alive. One could say that man is an egoistical creature, unable to share his world with another. In his words (p. 68),

"The first man was created alone. One can see from this that it is inherent in his nature to be alone. This is because man is king of the lower creatures who are beneath him, and just as two kings cannot share one crown, two men cannot share this position. The fact that man multiplied and became many, that is the doing of God who is King of Kings and desires multiplicity. From the point of view of God who is King of Kings, it is not fitting for man to be king; however, the natural state of affairs indicates that man should be alone in his role of king of the lower creatures."

Man was created singly because he is indeed king of the whole world. All other creatures are under his dominion. The possibility of the existence of other human beings points to the fact that there is a King above them - the Holy One, Blessed be He - for otherwise every person would forever be locked in a struggle with his fellow, attempting to rule and not to be ruled.

To be sure, this viewpoint is a pessimistic one, maintaining that man is a self-centered creature who could not co-exist with others in a just society were it not for the fear of the law. Indeed, human government presents only a partial solution to the problem, since it is bound to be tainted by personal interests and shifting morality. Only the fear of the kingship of heaven can guarantee a harmonious world in which one does not attempt to "swallow his fellow alive."

IV. "To Be Prepared for This Day"

In Megillat Esther (3:13-15) we read:
"And the letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews ... The copy of the writing, to be given out as a law in every province, was published to all the peoples, that they might be prepared for this day. The couriers went out in haste by the king's command, and the decree was given in Shushan the capital ... and the city of Shushan was perplexed."

The term "perplexed" seems inappropriate at this juncture. One would understand if Shushan was "sorrowed" or "mourned," but why "perplexed?"

An additional difficulty presents itself in the next verse (4:1), which reads, "And Mordekhai knew all that had taken place." What could this be referring to, for the decrees were by now public knowledge with messengers sent throughout the land?

Furthermore, after Esther is informed and submits her request to Achashverosh, he responds innocently, "Who is he, and where is he?" Is it conceivable that he is truly ignorant of the identity of the plotter? And when Esther petitions the king to cancel the decree, he tells her, "And you write [a second decree] ... for that which has already been written in the name of the king cannot be revoked." Where is the logic in a system which makes it impossible to reverse previous decisions, but permits them to be "bypassed?"

One is led to the conclusion, that Haman suspected that the Jews would find a way of influencing the monarch in their favor. Therefore, he sent a secret epistle to all the viceroys and colonial governors detailing his nefarious plan, and in addition published a separate leaflet, telling the citizenry to prepare itself for an unspecified event on the thirteenth of Adar. The common people, then, did not know what to expect, and this is what led to the perplexed state of Shushan. Mordekhai, though, did know of the plot against the Jews and took care to inform Esther. When she turned to the king, he decided to feign ignorance of the matter since the epistle was supposedly confidential. Upon being forced to confront the facts, he pointed out that he was unable to withdraw an official edict, but there was yet hope - since the previous epistles were kept hidden from the public eye, it is still possible to publish new ones, favorable to the Jews, and no one would be the wiser.

This lecture was delivered in Adar 5753.

Translated by Pnina Raanan.

THE MITZVA OF MEGILLA - TO READ, NOT TO WRITE

by Rav Elyakim Krumbein

The following two problems exist concerning the halakhot of megilla:

1) The whole megilla must be read, and if even one letter is left out, the obligation has not been fulfilled. On the other hand, though the reading must be done from a kosher megilla scroll, it is not necessary that the scroll contain the entire text of the book of Esther. It suffices that most of the text

be written. We hold that "the majority is considered equivalent to the whole thing" (so long as an entire subject or episode has not been omitted, etc.), and the remainder may be recited by heart.

This difference is difficult to understand: Since the reading has to be done from a text, it would appear that reading by heart is of no halakhic significance. On the other hand, since a complete text is not required, it would follow logically that it suffices to read most of the megilla, according to the principle that "the majority is equivalent to the whole." Yet we are obligated to disregard this principle and supply the unwritten parts "by heart." How are we to understand this inconsistency?

2) The Mechaber (siman 690) holds - like the Rosh - that one may learn the midrash on the megilla during the reading itself, for instance by reading one verse at a time and then orally reading the midrash on it. But in siman 68 he forbids the recitation of piyutim (liturgical poems) during the berakhot preceding Keri'at Shema, considering them a hefsek (interruption). Apparently the same would be the case concerning the discussion of Torah matters during the berakhot, as learned from Keri'at Shema and its berakhot, and it would seem to be a case of kal va-chomer since the Rema (ibid.) permits piyutim but forbids divrei Torah. This distinction requires our attention, particularly in light of the gemara in Berakhot (14a) which compares Keri'at Shema and the megilla from the point of view of hefsek.

Is the Megilla inferior to other Kitvei Ha-kodesh?

A possible direction for the solution of the problem lies in the opinion of Shmuel (Megilla 7a) that the megilla does not render one's hands tamei (impure), as opposed to the other kitvei ha-kodesh (holy writings). By saying this, Shmuel is conferring paradoxically, INFERIOR status on the megilla, as compared to the other scriptures. This is so because the "impurity" of scriptures is a rabbinic ordinance, designed to require people to keep their holy books apart from their food, for fear of defiling the food. The Rabbis were thus protecting the writings from desecration by animals who would be attracted to the food stores. Shmuel holds that the megilla does not merit being included in this injunction.

What is the reason for this inferiority? Despite the fact that the megilla was written with ru'ach ha-kodesh, like all Scripture, Shmuel explains that "it was given to be read, not to be written." The Rishonim found difficulty with this: How is it possible that we are not commanded to write it? Is it not the case that we do not fulfill our obligation by reciting it by heart?

The Ritva explains that Shmuel indeed holds that there is no mitzva to write the megilla; however, since there is a mitzva to read it (unlike the other kitvei kodesh, which are to be written but have no special accompanying mitzva that they be read), therefore it does not render the hands of the reader tamei, and its level of holiness is somewhat lower than the rest of Tanakh.

What is the basis and proof for Shmuel's opinion? We can explain by examining the Yerushalmi (1:5): "R. Shmuel bar Nachman in the name of R. Yonatan said, Eighty-five elders, and among them more than thirty prophets, despaired over this. They said, 'It is written, "These are the mitzvot which God

commanded Moshe" - THESE are the mitzvot that we were commanded by Moshe, but Moshe told us that no other prophet would later come along with any innovation. Now Mordekhai and Esther wish to innovate something! They would not budge from there, arguing over this matter until God enlightened them and they found proof for it in the Torah and in Nevi'im and in Ketuvim, as it is written, 'Write this as a remembrance in a book' - 'this' refers to the Torah, etc.; 'remembrance' refers to the Nevi'im, etc.; 'in a book' refers to the Ketuvim..."

What exactly troubled the Sages so deeply? If it was the WRITING of the megilla - the whole of Nakh (non-Pentateuchal biblical books) was written after the Torah, so what innovation is presented by the writing of the megilla? If it was the READING of the megilla that disturbed them - how would "Write this as a remembrance in a book" serve as a source for this? Indeed, the Bavli (7a) uses this analysis in response to Ester's request, "Write my book for future generations," as the basis for the agreement of Anshei Knesset Ha-gedola to WRITE the megilla.

However, it seems that the Bavli and the Yerushalmi are addressing one and the same issue, because the writing and the reading of the megilla are both part of one problem - the problem which made the Sages so reluctant to grant Esther's request to "write my book." In order to include a book in the Scriptures, it is not sufficient that it be written with ru'ach ha-kodesh, since only those texts that were NECESSARY for all generations were included in the kitvei kodesh (Megilla 14a). The war against Amalek receives extensive attention in Tanakh, and the Anshei Knesset Ha-gedola did not consider the megilla to be a significant addition on this subject (7a - "Send to her saying, have I not written you... etc."). Although this argument sounds convincing, its refutation is self-evident. Klal Yisrael invested the megilla with significance for posterity by taking upon themselves to read it every year, and this very custom lends the megilla the status of being "necessary for all generations"!

But it was this very point that distressed the Anshei Knesset Ha-gedola. Apart from Megillat Esther, the status of each of the books of Tanakh is based on its absolute significance and necessity - even if no one recognizes them. If a certain book is neglected by Klal Israel, this only serves as testimony to their apathy; the status and value of the book itself, as one of the kitvei ha-kodesh, is in no way diminished. So how do we arrive at the idea that one of the kitvei kodesh has a status that is not independent, but rather depends on its being read every year?

Ultimately the Sages learned from the above derivation that the megilla should be written for all generations, and it seems from this that the commitment to read the megilla on a regular basis suffices to justify its inclusion in the Nakh. This idea may be hinted to in the verse, "Write this as a remembrance in a book, and make Yehoshua hear it" - i.e. it is possible that a book can exist whose entire writing and fulfillment is dependent on its practical use ('remembrance'). In any event, it seems that this special characteristic of the megilla led Shmuel to lower the status of the megilla in relation to the rest of Tanakh. But even if we differ with Shmuel and hold that the megilla does render the hands of the reader tamei, we may still accept the basic premise - that the

status of the megilla as one of the kitvei kodesh is derived from its being read every year. It was Klal Yisrael who included Megillat Esther in the Tanakh, and continues to do so for all generations.

A Re-definition of the Mitzva of megilla

Now we may take another step and re-define the obligation of reading the megilla in light of what we have said above. It may be that awarding the status of kitvei kodesh to the megilla is not result of the reading, but rather the essence of the definition of the mitzva. This may be understood from the pasuk, "And Esther wrote... to fulfill this document of Purim." We should not understand that a scroll is required because reading "by heart" is halakhically invalid. Rather, the written book has a critical role to play in the fulfillment of the mitzva. The obligation is to take the book of Megillat Esther and, through reading it, to create and establish the status of this "Purim document" as one of the kitvei kodesh.

Accordingly, it is clear why we may learn the midrash on the megilla during its reading. Midrash is an attribute which is exclusive to kitvei ha-kodesh, and hence its reading together with the megilla serves to establish its status as one of the books of Tanakh. This is actually the idea of the whole reading, and therefore this is not considered a hefsek. (See Tzofnat P'aneach on the Rambam, perek 2 of Hilkhot Megilla, who writes that according to Shmuel, above, the megilla in fact should not be the subject of midrash.)

In the same way we can explain the halakha that it is not necessary to read the entire megilla from the written text. Apparently, the halakha distinguishes between the megilla itself as an object, and the act of reading. If the minority of the text is missing, the megilla is still considered a "sefer," because "the majority is equivalent to the whole" (see the Ran on the Rif, 5b). Regarding the act of reading, no omission is permitted. Our dilemma stemmed from the mistaken assumption that since a text is required, this means the reading by heart is invalid, hence our conclusion that the "majority" principle adheres to the act of reading. As we have seen, the written scroll is not required in order to validate the reading, and there is nothing wrong with reading by heart. On the contrary, it is the reading whose function it is to "validate" the scroll, and affirm its status as belonging to the kitvei ha-kodesh. The law is, therefore, that the status of the megilla is established through its being read, and parts that are missing may be supplemented by heart in order to complete it.

Finally, let us turn our attention to the words of the Rambam at the end of Hilkhot Megilla: "All the books of the Nevi'im and all the Ketuvim will eventually be done away with in the days of the Messiah, except for Megillat Esther which will exist like the Five Books of the Torah and like the laws of the Oral Torah, which will never fall away." What makes Megillat Esther different from the other books of Tanakh in this respect? We may answer that the difference lies in the mitzva to read the megilla - since a mitzva is never canceled, the megilla remains an essential part of our canon. However, based on what we have said above, we see that the whole essence of the mitzva of reading the megilla keeps the megilla from being forgotten and neglected. If Klal Yisrael ceased to

read the megilla each year, it would fall away long before the days of Mashiach. The force of Knesset Yisrael's commitment refreshes the megilla each year, and this force will keep it going forever.

(Translated by Kaeren Fish)

GOD'S WAR WITH AMALEK - THROUGH YOSEF, YEHOSHUA AND MORDEKHAI

by Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon

When the nation of Israel departed from Egypt and the sea split for them, drowning the Egyptians, all the nations of the world were afraid to go to war with Israel. They said, "How shall we stand up to them? Pharaoh, who stood against them, was drowned by God in the sea. How then shall we succeed?" (Mekhilta de-Rashbi on Shemot 17). Amalek, however, was not afraid: "And he did not fear God" (Devarim 25:18, according to Rashi). This seems strange, from where did Amalek derive such courage? How was it that he was not afraid of Israel?

An additional question arises from Moshe's reaction. When he hears that Amalek is going to wage war against Israel, rather than girding his loins and preparing for war, he sends Yehoshua: "And Moshe said to Yehoshua... go out and fight against Amalek" (Shemot 17:9). Why did he not go out himself to fight?

The midrash provides the following explanation: "It is impossible that Moshe was standing by passively, and commanding Yehoshua to wage war against Amalek. Rather, it is tradition that the children of Eisav are only defeated by the children of Rachel" (Mekhilta de-Rashbi, 71). This poses its own difficulty: Why is it specifically the children of Rachel who are victorious over Amalek?

There is a third difficulty in understanding the war with Amalek. The victory over Amalek is of vital significance. The eyes of all the other nations are turned towards Amalek; if they are victorious, it will be a sign to all the other nations that Israel is indeed a realistic target for war. Why is the war against Amalek a regular, physical war rather than a miraculous one? Why does God not rain down stones from the heavens as occurs under the leadership of Yehoshua decades later, in the war against the five Emori kings (Yehoshua 10:11)?

The answer to all of these questions lies in the nature and character of Amalek. Amalek does not believe in God's providence over what happens in the world. As Chazal point out, Amalek stands out in his ideology of "coincidence" ("mikreh"); "asher karekha ba-derekh" (Esther Rabba, parsha 8). Amalek sees miracles happening around the nation of Israel, but he explains all of them as natural phenomena. He sees the splitting of the sea, but insists that it is a coincidental instance of tides rising and falling. He believes that their victory over Egypt was coincidental, and cannot see any reason why that "good luck" should repeat itself. Hence he is not afraid, and goes out to war against Israel.

The children of Rachel represent precisely the opposite ideology: there is no "coincidence" in the world. Her eldest

son, Yosef, lives his life with a constant sense of standing before God, feeling God's presence and His providence over the whole world. There is no other figure to be found anywhere in Tanakh who mentions God as many times as Yosef does (19 times). The following examples of Yosef's speech demonstrate this ideology:

A) "And God sent me before you to preserve you a remnant in the earth..." (Bereishit 45:6).

B) Yosef tells Pharaoh, "It is not me - God shall give Pharaoh a favorable answer." (Ibid. 41:16).

(For further examples refer to Bereishit 40:8/41:26,32,51,52/45:4,9/48:9/50:20,25).

Yosef not only attempts, but succeeds in bringing about awareness of God's presence amongst the nations. Pharaoh declares, "Is there another man like this, one in whom the spirit of God rests?" (Bereishit 41:38).

Furthermore, the more a person believes in God's providence, the more that providence acts on him. Indeed, Yosef is rewarded for his unwavering faith in God: "And God was with Yosef and he became successful" (39:2); "And God blessed the house of the Egyptian because of Yosef" (39:5). (See also 39:3,21,23)

Clearly, then, Yosef (and therefore his descendant, Yehoshua) is the most suitable candidate to wage war against Amalek. Amalek aims to wipe out God's name, he wishes to negate God's rule of the world. Yosef, more than anyone else, represents God's rulership, and therefore it is he who is worthy of fighting against Amalek. He fights not only in defense of Am Yisrael, but also as a "war on behalf of God." This idea can be learned from the midrash (Shemot Rabba, perek 26): He who fears God is the best candidate for the war against someone who does not fear Him.

"Why (was the command to wage war given) to Yehoshua? He (Moshe) said to him (Yehoshua) - your forefather (Yosef) said, 'I fear God'. Let the son of he who said 'I fear God' come and punish the one about whom it was said, 'and he feared not God'."

The descendants of Binyamin, Rachel's second son, are involved in the fight as well. Sha'ul and Mordekhai both wage war against Amalek. Let's examine Mordekhai's fight against Amalek.

Mordekhai, too, is aware that he is fighting against someone who does not believe in God's existence and providence. The midrash teaches, "'And Mordekhai told Hatakh all that had happened to him' ('karahu') (Esther 4:1). He (Mordekhai) said to Hatakh, 'Go and say to her, the descendant of 'karahu' has come upon you' (referring to the Torah's description of Amalek - "asher karekha ba-derekh")" (Esther Rabba, parsha 8).

According to the midrash, Mordekhai calls Haman "karahu", a name which denotes coincidence. Even on the literal level of the story itself, we see how Haman plans each step based on luck and lots. Even the planned date of the murder of the Jews is chosen by means of a lot - "they cast the lot before Haman" (Esther 3:7). Mordekhai stands ready to oppose this ideology. He knows that there is no such thing as chance, the world has a ruler and a governor - the capital has owners!

The Rambam (Hilkhot Ta'anit 1:3) warns against seeing events as being coincidental: "If they do not cry out and do

not shout, but rather say 'this thing happened to us through the natural course of events; this trouble came about by chance,' this is the way of cruelty." Mordekhai lives according to the Rambam's perspective; no sooner does he find out about the impending disaster for Am Yisrael than he turns to the Ruler of the world: "And he cried out a great and bitter cry" (Esther 4:1). Mordekhai also knows that Am Yisrael is not led by chance. Even if they are not saved through Esther, "relief and deliverance shall arise for the Jews from elsewhere." (4:14)

The question still remains as to why the war with Amalek is a natural, non miraculous one. In general, when open miracles take place, even simple people believe that the hand of God was somehow involved. The Egyptian magicians themselves admitted, "it is the finger of God" (Shemot 8:15). Amalek, on the other hand, is not impressed by even the most obvious miracles, and sees them as occurring in the natural course of events. In doing so Amalek diminishes God's name, "As it were, so long as descendants of Amalek exist in the world, neither God's name nor His throne are complete" (Pesikta Rabbati, 12). The war against Amalek repairs this diminishing of God's name: "'To you, O God, is the Kingship' - this refers to the war against Amalek" (Berakhot 58b). "In other words, by waging war for Hashem against Amalek, His throne is exalted." (Rashi, ibid.)

The war against Amalek takes place specifically in a natural way, in order that all should know that even those phenomena which appear altogether natural are brought about by God's hand. The first natural victory brings proof, so that there can be no doubt: "And it was that when Moshe raised his hand Israel prevailed, and when he lowered his hand Amalek prevailed." (Shemot 17:11). Chazal expand on this: "'And it was that when Moshe raised his hand Israel prevailed' - surely it cannot be the case that Moshe's hands brought about victory or destruction in the war! Rather, this comes to teach us that so long as the eyes of Israel are directed upwards and they submit themselves to their Father in heaven, they will be successful. If not, they will fall" (Rosh Hashana 29b).

Megillat Esther, too, recounts an altogether natural story. The name of God is not mentioned even once in the megilla. Mordekhai commands that the days of Purim be commemorated, and it is through this that the nation comes to the realization that even those things that appear natural are in fact directed by God. Indeed, in the megilla itself the victory over Amalek leads to the reinstatement of God's name:

"In place of the thorn-bush a cypress will rise, and in place of the nettle, a myrtle..." (Yesha'yahu 55:13)

"In place of the thorn-bush" - in place of Haman

"a cypress will rise" - this refers to Mordekhai.

"In place of the nettle" - in place of Vashti

"a myrtle" - this is Esther the righteous one, who is called Hadassa.

"And it shall be for Hashem for a name" - this refers to the reading of the megilla.' (Megilla 10b)

There is yet another connection between the fighters of Amalek; Yehoshua (Yosef) and Mordekhai. Those cities that were surrounded by a wall in the days of Yehoshua read Megillat Esther on the 15th of Adar, according to the opinion of the Tanna quoted in the first mishna of massekhet Megilla.

R. Yehoshua bar Karcha, on the other hand (Ta'anit 2b), holds that the determining date is not "the days of Yehoshua ben-Nun," but rather "the days of Achashverosh." At first glance the Tanna of the mishna seems difficult to understand: What is the connection between Yehoshua and Megillat Esther?

Indeed, this question was posed by the Yerushalmi and several Rishonim, and a number of possible explanations were provided. According to what we have explained above, the problem is easily solved. Yehoshua and Mordekhai both fought against Amalek. In both cases God's providence was masked by seemingly natural occurrences. However, in the case of Yehoshua there was also visible proof: "And it was that when Moshe raised his hand, Israel prevailed, and when he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed" (Shemot 17:11; as explained above). Yehoshua is the one who taught a lesson to all generations: that even a seemingly "natural" victory is dependent on God's will and His involvement. The "natural" victory of Mordekhai and Esther takes on a new perspective in light of Yehoshua's war. The latter comes to interpret the former: just as Yehoshua's war was an example of God's wonders, so was the story of the megilla. Mordekhai hints at this himself when he makes the reading of the megilla dependent on "the days of Yehoshua ben-Nun".

This idea may also be contained in the words of the Ritva (Megilla 2a): "Chazal asked: Why did the Anshei Knesset Hagedola (Men of the Great Assembly) choose to refer this matter back to Yehoshua ben-Nun? The Rishonim z"l explained that it was because Yehoshua was the first to fight against Amalek, and Haman was a descendant of Amalek."

Amalek excels in his ideology of chance and coincidence, and therefore he has no fear of waging war against Am Yisrael since he sees their victories as pure luck. Yosef is the antithesis of Amalek, he feels the presence of God everywhere. His descendants and those of his brother (Binyamin), too, continue this line and fight against Amalek (Yehoshua and Mordekhai). Their wars are natural wars, demonstrating that not only were all the miracles of Egypt from God, but even those events and phenomena which appear altogether natural are brought about by God.

Today, too, there are those who believe in "luck", people who see all of God's miracles as luck and chance. Such people refer to our victory in the Six-Day War and the astonishing lack of casualties during the Gulf War as "luck." We call this "siyata di-shemaya" (assistance from heaven).

"These by the chariot and those by horses; while we call on the name of God." (Tehillim 20:9).

Translated by Kaeren Fish

"Mordecai Kornfeld <kornfeld@netmedia.co.il>" " Intriguing glimpses into the weekly T... Purim 5756 - "If the evildoer deserves to be hit"

The Weekly Internet
P * A * R * A * S * H * A - P * A * G * E

by Mordecai Kornfeld
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This week's issue has been dedicated by Charles and Medinah Popper to the memory their father/father-in-law, Rabbi Samuel Blinder, who passed away on 7 Adar Aleph.

Purim 5756

"IF THE EVILDOER DESERVES TO BE HIT"

I heard that the Vilna Gaon (Rav Eliyahu Kremer of Vilna, c. 1750), was asked, "Where is it hinted in the Torah that we should make noise when the name of Haman is mentioned during the reading of the Megillat Ester on Purim?" He answered, "It says in the Torah, 'Vehaya Im Bin Hakot Harasha' [if the evildoer deserves to be hit] (Devarim 25:2)." Said the Gaon, "The last letters of the first three Hebrew words in this verse spell out the name 'Haman.' The following two Hebrew words read as, 'hit the evildoer!' (This hints that when Haman is mentioned, we hit or bang on the nearest object in order to demonstrate our distaste for hearing the mention of his name.)"

(Rav Tzvi Shlez, in "Nifloat Mitorat Hashem,"

Warsaw 1879)

Banging and the noise-making when Haman's name is mentioned has become one of the highlights of reading Megillat Ester on Purim. The beautiful hint for this practice in the words of the Torah that we have mentioned above, actually predates the Vilna Gaon. It is mentioned by the Levush (O.C. 690:17) and by the Mateh Moshe (section on Purim, #1006), which were printed in 1590 and 1591 respectively. It is interesting to note that if we take a look at the broader context of the above verse, we find that it is more than merely a clever hint for our noisy reaction to hearing Haman's name. As we shall see, this verse contains within it a hint of the entire story of Purim.

II

When there will be a quarrel between men, they shall approach the justice, who will judge them. They will prove the righteousness of the one who is righteous and the evil of the one who is evil. And *if the evildoer deserves to be hit*, the judge shall throw him down and flog him as befits his wickedness. He shall be flogged forty times... .

(Devarim 25:1-3)

A. "When there will be a quarrel between men..."

The first verse of the above passage can clearly be seen as a reference to the quarrel between Mordechai and Haman -- which was at the root of the entire Purim story (see Megillat Ester 3:6). In fact, the Gemara (Megillah 12a) points out that both Mordechai and Haman are referred to as "a man" ("Ish") in Megillat Ester. If so, the "men" of the verse in Devarim may very well be the ones referred to as "men" in Megillat Ester, or Mordechai and Haman.

B. "...They will prove the righteousness of the one who is righteous and the evil of the one who is evil..."

As the story of Ester and Mordechai opens, the Jews had sinned before God and were deserving of the punishment that Haman had decreed upon them (Megillah 12a). During the story, however, the Jews returned to Hashem and mended their ways. As a result, Hashem once again accepted the Jews as his righteous people. Hashem decreed the punishment upon Haman rather than

upon the Jews.

Originally, Haman could not be considered "evil" for destroying the Jews, since Hashem had decreed for them to be killed. Mordechai -- as the representative of the Jewish people -- could be called the "guilty" party, that was to be punished. But when Mordechai led the Jews to repent, the righteous Mordecai was proven righteous, and the wicked Haman was proven wicked. (It is interesting to note that still today, we refer to Mordechai as "Mordechai the Righteous," and to Haman as "Haman the Wicked." This is, in fact, the way they are referred to in the Talmudic literature -- see Targum beginning of Chapter 6; Gemara Megillah 10b, etc.)

C. "...And the judge shall *throw him down* (root: 'Nofel')... ."

This verse suggests Haman's eventual punishment. In the Purim story, Haman's final downfall came when Ester the Queen revealed to Achashverosh the King that Haman was out to destroy her and her nation the Jews. While the King left the palace to consider the matter, Haman fell on Ester's couch and begged her for mercy. When the King returned, he found Haman fallen on the couch at Ester's feet. The King turned to Haman and said "You even want to take away my Queen!" Haman was immediately sentenced

to death (Megillat Ester 7:6-9). The Gemara tells us that Haman had meant to stand up when he saw the King returning, but Hashem did not allow him to stand up (Megilla 16a). Hashem sent an angel to come and push him down, and

he remained fallen ("Nofel") on the couch of Ester where the King found him. The verse in Devarim suggests to us this episode. The judge -- meaning Hashem -- threw Haman down.

D. "He shall be struck according to his wickedness."

This certainly applies to Haman, who was punished exactly according to his wickedness, measure for measure. In the Purim story, Haman, who had meant to kill Mordechai and his people, was himself killed along with his sons. In fact, Haman and his sons were hanged from the very tree upon which Haman had planned to hang Mordechai, measure for measure (Megillat Ester 9:7-10).

E. "He shall be struck forty times"

The Torah prescribes a punishment of forty lashes for the evildoer. This can be understood to refer to the punishment that Haman received in several ways. Haman was hung along with his sons from a fifty cubit tree that he himself had prepared. According to the Targum (9:14), Haman and his sons, hung one after the other, took up *forty* cubits of the fifty cubit tree. Thus, Haman was "struck" by the "forty" cubits. Secondly, according to the Targum Sheni (2:5 -- Targum Sheni is an Aramaic Midrash on Megillat Ester) Mordechai was exactly the *fortieth* generation after Yaakov. Thus Mordechai and his generation were the "forty" that struck Haman. Thirdly, Rabbenu Bachye (Bereishit 36:12) tells us openly that these very words, "he shall be struck forty," hint to us that there is a name of G-d which has forty letters. This name is the one Hashem uses to punish Esav and his descendants. Haman, of course, was a descendant of Esav. Thus, it was the *forty* letter name of Hashem that struck Haman.

III

One might ask, why is it that a verse hinting at Haman's destruction should be hidden at the end of Parashat Ki-Tetze? Why should we look there for references to Purim? Perhaps we may answer that this is an appropriate place indeed for the reference to Purim, as we shall see.

At the conclusion of Parashat Ki-Tetze we are told that the nation of Amalek -- Esav's grandchildren -- attacked the Jews as they were leaving Egypt. The Megillat Ester tells us that Haman was a descendant of that very

Amalek (Megillat Ester 3:1). The last verse in the parasha discusses our command to erase the name of Amalek forever, to fight against Amalek in every generation throughout the ages.

The verse that we have been discussing ("...if the evildoer deserves to be hit...") that spells out Haman's name, is exactly the eighteenth verse from the command to destroy Amalek at the end of the parasha, counting backwards. According to the Targum in Megillat Ester, Haman was exactly the eighteenth generation after Amalek (Targum 5:1; Targum Sheni 3:1). Perhaps this verse is hinting that after eighteen generations, Hashem will cause Amalek's plans to wipe out the Jewish people to be *reversed* (i.e. to backfire). As it says in Megillat Ester, "It was *reversed*, so that the Jews were the ones who had power over their enemies" (Megillat Ester 9:1). In the Purim story the plans of Haman, Amalek's descendant, were reversed. The day that Haman had set aside for the destruction of the Jews became instead the day the Jews saw victory against Haman. This is why the Torah hints at the downfall of Haman eighteen verses back from the verse that tells us to destroy Amalek!

IV

There is another place in the Torah where the war between Amalek and the Jews who left Egypt is discussed. This passage is earlier in the Torah, in Parashat Beshalach (Shemot 18:16). Is there any hint to the destruction of Haman eighteen verses before the mention of the destruction of Amalek, there? Let us examine the verse that is exactly eighteen verses before that:

And the Jews ate "HaMan" [= the Manna] forty years, until they reached settled land. They ate "HaMan" forty years, until they reached the edge of the land of Canaan."

(Shemot 16:35)

The verse not only hints to Haman, but it mentions his name twice in the verse itself! The verse suggests that Haman was "eaten" by the Jews. Being "eaten" is, of course, a metaphor for being consumed, or destroyed, as in Devarim 7:16, "You will *eat* all the nations [of Canaan] that Hashem delivers into your hands." Similarly, the verse that discusses the Manna that the Jews ate in the wilderness, hints at the destruction (= eating) of Haman. The Jews devoured Haman, destroying him totally!

V

Rashi makes an interesting comment on the above verse in Shemot. He writes that there are two dates that are mentioned in the verse as marking the day upon which the Jews finished eating the Manna. These two dates, says Rashi, are the seventh day of Adar and the sixteenth day of Nisan. According to our new interpretation -- that the verse hints at the destruction of Haman -- the two dates are especially appropriate. As we shall see, it was Hashem's reversal of Haman's fortune on those very two dates, that turned Purim into a victory for the Jews.

Haman drew lots in order to decide which month would be best for his decree to kill the Jews (Megillat Ester 3:7). We learn from the Gemara (Megillah 13b, Ester Rabba 7:14) that when Haman saw that the lots chose the month of Adar he was tremendously happy. "He felt that since Adar was the month in which Moshe died (Moshe passed away on the seventh of Adar), Adar would be a successful month in which to exterminate the Jewish people. However, concludes the Gemara, Haman didn't realize that although Moshe passed away on the seventh of Adar, that was also the date on which Moshe was born. (Therefore, instead of being a day of loss for the Jews, it was a month reserved for redemption and salvation.) The seventh of Adar was the day that originally encouraged Haman to bring about the destruction the Jews. But Hashem *reversed* the outcome of that day and made it into the opposite, into a sign of the triumph of the Jewish people over their enemies!

The second date referred to in the verse was the sixteenth of Nisan. According to the Gemara (Megillah 16a, see Rashi s.v.), the day that Haman built his gallows and came to tell the King to hang Mordechai (in Megillat Ester 6:4), was the sixteenth day of Nisan. Of course, at the end of that day it was not Mordechai who was hanged, but rather Haman himself was hanged from that very tree. The sixteenth of Nisan, too, marks the *reversal* of Haman's evil plans.

As we learned above, that verse in Shemot 16:35, which is eighteen verses before the story of Amalek, hints at the reversal of Amalek's fortune after eighteen generations (in the time of Mordechai and Haman). Now we see that the verse in Shemot not only hints at the destruction of Haman. It also refers to the two days that saw the reversal of his fortune!

May Hashem redeem us from all our enemies, and allow us to see his Divine Hand, soon in our days!

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YomTov - Megillas Esther: An Introduction YomTov, vol. I # 66
Topic: Megillas Esther - An Introduction

Purim, the holiday which occurs on the 14th day of the month of Adar (for most people), falls out on the 5th day of March this year. As we will discuss in later posts, there are many observances unique to Purim. One of these is the reading of Megillas Esther, the book in Scriptures which tells of the story of Purim. In order to get a good understanding of what the holiday of Purim is all about, the next few posts will deal with the Megilla of Esther. The explanation of the Megilla that will be seen here comes primarily from the commentary of the great commentator, Rav Eliyahu from Vilna (a.k.a. the Vilna Ga'on).

The Vilna Ga'on, at the beginning of his commentary on the Megilla, offers a parable to illustrate how we are to view the story about to be told.

There was a king who had only one child, a son who he treasured more than anything imaginable. The love that the king showed to this child was so great that officers of the king, who devoted their life to the king's service, began to feel jealous of the attention and affection that the young boy received from the king. While the young boy grew older, he did not always treat his father in a reciprocal fashion. Finally, the boy did something that angered his father so greatly that the king had no choice but to banish him from the castle and forced him to wander in a forest. The son, while in the forest, was sure that his father had forgotten him. In reality, just the opposite was true. The king realized that his son would be faced with countless dangers in the forest, and he wanted to assure that no harm would befall his son. He therefore appointed a select group of servants who were to keep a watchful eye on his son, albeit from a distance. These servants were under instructions to never reveal that they were there on order of the king, in order for the son to reflect on what he had done and his current situation, and possibly repent.

One day, while the son was walking through the forest, he heard sounds, a grumbling from behind him. He turned to see a large bear that appeared poised for an attack. He started to flee from the bear. While running, he heard a commotion behind him. He saw some of his father's officers trying to hunt down the bear. They were successful in killing the bear and the son was saved. The son never got the opportunity to ask the servants what they were doing in the forest, and he assumed that their presence at the time he most needed help was mere coincidence. Not long after this incident, those

officers who were jealous of the son got together and decided that now was the opportune time to rid themselves of the person who they despised - the son. A group of these officers went into the forest, looking for the son. They soon found him, and started attacking him. The son tried fighting back, but he was clearly outnumbered. However, moments after these officers started their attack, another group of the king's servants arrived on the scene and began fighting off the son's attackers. This group was victorious and again the son's life was saved. Now, the son realized that there was no way that the appearance of these officers was mere coincidence. To be saved by the same group of people twice while wandering through a forest could not be a stroke of luck. It had to be that his father was watching out for him, even while he was banished to this exile. The son, after realizing this, felt great remorse for his evil acts against his father, and felt a deep love for him. He truly regretted his actions, and repented from his evil ways. When his father heard about the change that came over his son, he happily welcomed him back to the palace.

The story of Purim occurred during the period of time when the Jewish nation was exiled after the destruction of the First Temple. Although G-d had to punish us for our evil ways, He still loved us greatly and wanted to assure that we would not be harmed. He therefore sent messengers to protect our nation - Mordechai and Esther - and performed miracles through them. Since G-d wanted the nation to repent, no "supernatural" miracles, which would have "revealed" G-d's watchful eye, occurred. His protection of us had to be undetectable to the undiscerning eye, so that we would think that He, in his displeasure with us, had abandoned us. Therefore, the miracles that occurred which led to our salvation occurred in a clandestine fashion. However, the series of events that led to our being saved from the hands of the evil Haman were too great and numerous to be relegated to the realm of coincidence. They, as Mordechai and Esther knew all along, were clearly the workings of Hashem. As we will see when we study the Megilla, the Jews eventually realized that G-d, not Mordechai, Esther or King Achashverosh, was their true savior, and therefore the nation of Israel repented and accepted G-d's words and commandments with a complete heart.

When studying the Megilla, we have the benefit of hindsight to aid us in our appreciation of G-d's workings. We will be able to appreciate how each piece in the story of Purim fell into place, sometimes against all odds. If we keep ourselves focused on the fact that there are no coincidences here, and that the whole story is a series of "miracles," we will find that the Megilla is much more than a good story - it is a source of inspiration for all times.

<http://www.jer1.co.il/orgs/ohr/special/purim/drnklink.htm>

Drink is the Link
By Rav Mendel Weinbach

A man is obligated to imbibe on Purim until he can no longer distinguish between "Cursed is Haman" and "Blessed is Mordechai."

Purim is a veritable cornucopia of paradoxes which ignite the imagination of both scholar and layman. But perhaps the greatest challenge

of all is posed by this requirement to indulge in drink to the point of losing the faculty of discernment. How, ask the commentaries throughout the generations, can we be commanded to invite that very intoxication which is so roundly reviled in both Scripture and Talmud? And why such a puzzling standard of non-discernment?

Just to set the record straight as regards the halacha, it is the consensus of the authorities that literal fulfillment of this requirement is limited only to those who are capable of doing so without impairing their ability to fulfill all of the mitzvos connected with the festive Purim meal, (washing hands, blessings before and after, etc.) or inciting them to improper conduct. For most people it is sufficient to drink more than is their custom and to achieve the level of fuzziness suggested by the Talmud through a drink-induced nap.

But our original problem still remains. Why encourage excess drinking altogether and why set a goal of such enigmatic nature?

The answers, of course, lie in an analysis of the Purim story as recorded in Megillas Esther. The events chronicled in this divinely inspired document cover a decade of history, from the grand banquet in which Queen Vashti meets her downfall until the miraculous turnabout of a Jewish nation threatened with genocide overcoming its enemies thanks to the intervention of Queen Esther. From the perspective of historians and political analysts it is virtually impossible to see any link between the events separated by so many years and so many political developments.

What connection can possibly be surmised between the drunken domestic quarrel between Achashverosh and Vashti in the third year of his reign and the same king's submitting to Esther's entreaties in his twelfth year? Chapters, if not volumes, could probably be written about how Haman's meteoric rise to power and the geopolitical upheavals of a mighty Persian Empire on the threshold of a challenge from the ascendant Macedonians affected the fickle monarch's decision-making process in first sanctioning genocide and then rejecting it.

But historians are capable of dealing only with tangible links. The Divine Author of history, however, reveals to His chosen people in Megillas Esther that there is a powerful connection between events separated by so much time - that the Divine Healer prepared the cure before the illness by removing Vashti in favor of Esther even before He sent the plague of Haman's genocidal decree to alarm His sinful people into repentance. The clue to this linkage is wine - the wine which brought a king to a drunken rage against a rebellious queen and the wine which another queen, concealing her Jewish identity, served both husband and enemy at the climactic banquet where she successfully pleaded for her people's salvation.

If the link is wine then it is wine which we must indulge in beyond our habit in order to remember and reflect upon this invisible thread which weaves such disparate events into a miraculous tapestry of divine intervention. And the level of our indulgence must be one that rejects the normal approaches of discernment, that abandons the logic of social and political analysts and seeks the divine hand in the workings of history.

Until he can no longer distinguish between "Cursed is Haman" and "Blessed is Mordechai." Many interpretations have been offered as to why this particular criterion has been chosen for determining the desired level of inebriation. On the simplest level it is a reference to a song of praise we sing after the reading of the Megillah and which we repeat in our festive meals, and it is a challenge to the drinker to keep the lyrics in order when his spirits are so high.

In a deeper sense, however, we may suggest that there are two levels of thanksgiving when a man is saved from disaster by divine intervention.

One is hodaah - thanks - and the other is hallel - praise. The visceral reaction of the survivor is to thank Heaven. But if asked whether he would have preferred to never have been exposed to the danger, his response would invariably be "Yes!" He would prefer to completely forget that it ever existed. Only after serious reflection does he realize that the danger he faced was a gift from Heaven to wake him up and redirect him. It is then that he sings the praises of Hashem for having provided him with such an educational experience.

On Chanukah we offer both hodaah in the form of the Al Hanissim prayer and hallel in the recital of Hallel for eight days. On Purim the reading of the Megillah is our hallel, for it teaches us to appreciate the value of the danger as well as the salvation.

"Cursed is Haman" refers to the danger, "Blessed is Mordechai" to the salvation. When one drinks enough wine to link all the events in the hallel of our Megillah he no longer discerns between the values of the two.

"Jeffrey Gross <75310.3454@compuserve.com>" "Halachic Topics Related to the Weekl...

SELECTED HALACHOS RELATING TO PARSHAS TETZAVEH

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

Remember what Amalek did to you... (Deut. 25:17)

Women's obligation in Parshas Zachor

QUESTION: Are women obligated to go to Shul to hear the Torah reading of Parshas Zachor?

DISCUSSION: There is a biblical Mitzva to read Parshas Zachor from a Sefer Torah once a year. Although the Rabbis have instituted that Zachor be read in public on the Shabbos before Purim, the Mitzva can be fulfilled by performing it at any time during the year. Most Poskim, therefore consider the reading of Parshas Zachor to be a Mitzva which is not time-bound, thus making it obligatory upon women(1).

There is, however, a view that holds that women are not obligated to hear Parshas Zachor(2). Making mention of the evil perpetrated on us by Amalek is a Mitzva that is limited to those who can and will fight against Amalek. Since women do not go out to war, they are exempt from the Mitzvah of mentioning the treachery of Amalek.

There are conflicting views among the Poskim as to what the Halacha L'masse should be. Some rule that women are obligated in Parshas Zachor(3) while other Poskim note that it is commonly accepted that women do not go to Shul to hear Parshas Zachor(4). Since there is no clear-cut ruling(5), it is commendable for women to make the effort to go to Shul to hear the public reading of the Parsha(6). Indeed, in many congregations it is the accepted practice for women to do so.

Men or women who are unable to go to Shul should read Parshas Zachor aloud for themselves from a Chumash, since according to some Poskim, one can fulfill the Mitzvah in this fashion(7).

It is questionable if a Sefer Torah may be taken out of the Aron Hakodesh specifically to read Parshas Zachor for women. Harav Moshe Feinstein is quoted(8) as strictly prohibiting this practice(9).

SELECTED PURIM HALACHOS

One should not refer to the Tzedaka coins which are given before Purim as "Macatzis Hashekel," since then they may be considered Hekdesh and may not be used. They should rather be referred to as "Zeicher L'machatzis Hashekel(10)."

One can fulfill the Mitzva of Matanos La'evyonim with the money given for Zeicher L'machatzis Hashekel, provided that the money is given to bona-fide Aniyim (poor) on Purim day(11).

Matanos La'evyonim may not be given from Maaser money(12). Some Poskim hold that Zeicher L'machatzis Hashekel may not be given from Maaser money either(13).

Even one who is not fasting may not eat anything from a half hour before nightfall until after the reading of the Megillah(14). On Purim morning, too, one may not eat breakfast before he or she hears the reading of the Megillah(15).

One who is fasting, or one who is not feeling well, may eat or drink before the Megillah an amount no greater than the volume of 2 fl. oz(16). A frail or sickly person, for whom this small amount is not sufficient, may eat more, provided that he appoints someone to remind him to hear the Megillah(17).

If a word of the Megillah was misread so that its meaning was distorted, the word should be reread. If it was not reread, some Poskim hold that the reading is valid regardless and no rereading is required(18). Other Poskim rule that if the misread word was not corrected on the spot, the Megillah should be reread without a Bracha from the point where the mistake was made(19).

Sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Avrohom Henfield

***L'zecher Nishmas his mother

***Rachel bas R' Avraham

FOOTNOTES:

1 Minchas Chinuch 603.

2 Sefer Hachinuch 603.

3 Binyan Tzion (8) quoting Harav Nosson Adler; Yeshuos Malko (3); Mahril Diskin (5:101); Minchas Elazer (2:1-5).

4 Toras Chesed (37). See also Avnei Nezer (OC 509) who exempts women from this Mitzva. Harav Chaim Kanievsky (Taama D'kra) quotes the Chazon Ish as having exempted women.

5 Many major Poskim - Chayei Adam, Kitzur S.A., Mishna Berura and Aruch Hashulchan - do not address this issue.

6 See Yechave Daas 1:84. Oral ruling of Harav Moshe Feinstein (Halichos Bas Yisroel pg. 297).

7 See Nitei Gavriel 4:9-10.

8 Moadei Yeshurun (Purim pg. 47).

9 See also Mikroei Kodesh (Purim 5) who prohibits reading from the Sefer Torah expressly for women. Harav S.Y. Elyashiv is quoted (Halichos Bas Yisroel pg. 296) as ruling that a minimum of 10 men must be present for such a reading to take place.

10 Harav Y.M. Tikotinsky in Luach Eretz Yisroel. A similar Halacha concerning Pesach meat is recorded in OC 469.

11 Biur Halacha 694.

12 Mishnah Berurah 694:3.

13 Be'er Haitev 694:2 quoting the Shallah.

14 Mishnah Berurah 692:14.

15 Mishnah Berurah 692:15.

16 Mishnah Berurah 692:14. The Shiur is based on the measurements of Harav M. Feinstein. One who usually follows the measurements of the Chazon Ish may eat up to 3.5 fl oz.

17 Mishnah Berurah 692:16.

18 Aruch Hashulchan 690:20. This is similar to the view of the Eliyahu Rabba and Derech Hachayim quoted and rejected by the Biur Halacha 142:1.
19 Biur Halacha 290:14.

"kollel@mcs.com" " haftorah@torah.org" Haftorah: Zachor
MESSAGE FROM THE HAFTORAH PARSHAS T'ZAVEH - ZACHOR
Shmuel I 15:2

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Parshas Zachor, deals with Hashem's command to King Shaul regarding the destruction of the entire nation of Amalek. This old archenemy of the Jewish people was finally being repaid for the torture and indignation he brought unto the Jews. Shaul Hamelech fulfilled this command and successfully annihilated the entire nation of Amalek leaving behind only one living soul, the Amalekite King Agag. He

destroyed all of their animals but acquiesced in the Jewish nation's request and spared choice sheep for sacrificial purposes. The prophet Shmuel was sent

to reprimand Shaul and to inform him of the severity of his failings. Shmuel

told him that this offense would cost him the kingdom and that his successor had already been chosen.

Shmuel immediately proceeded to summon Agag and executed him in a most gruesome way. But Shmuel's response came after Agag had been taken captive and as the Talmud teaches us (Megilla 13A), the Amalekite king managed to take full advantage of Shaul's error. In a most peculiar turn of events Agag sought to utilize his last hours of life to preserve the nation of Amalek. His attempt proved quite successful and against all odds the entire nation of Amalek was reborn. This seems to suggest that it was the master plan of Hashem for Amalek to remain. Although a few moments earlier Hashem decreed Amalek's destruction this privilege could no longer be granted to the Jewish people. Their recent error warranted that Amalek, the father of anti-Semitism, must continue to exist.

To properly appreciate this thought let us attempt to discover Hashem's purpose for the nation of Amalek and what benefit, if any, it brings to mankind. For this, we refer to the first time the Jewish people encountered Amalek and to the strategy used in defeating him. The Torah states (Shmos 17:11), "And when Moshe raised his hand the Jewish people overpowered Amalek and when Moshe lowered his hand Amalek overpowered the Jews. ~~From these words it would seem that the success and defeat of the Jewish~~ people depended heavily on the position of Moshe Rabbeinu's hand?! The Mishna in Tractate Rosh Hashana (chapter 3) raises this problem and answers that Moshe Rabbeinu's hand served as a vehicle and gauge for the Jewish people. In actuality it wasn't the hand of Moshe that affected the war but rather the total devotion and dedication of the Jewish people to Hashem. As long as their hearts were focused on Hashem's salvation Hashem was there for them. But the moment the Jewish people lost that focus, Hashem's assistance was no longer rendered to them. Apparently, in order to defeat Amalek, total subjugation to Hashem was necessary and even the slightest deviation from this could prove fatal. Moshe Rabbeinu's hand served as an accurate gauge for this subjugation. If his hand began lowering it was an indication that the Jewish people were losing focus on Hashem, but if Moshe's hand remained raised it was indicative of their total subjugation to Hashem.

This introduction reveals to us the function of Amalek and from here we

can

even learn the heavenly purpose for Amalek to attack the Jewish people. Our

Chazal (see Rashi 17:8) address this point and explain that Amalek's early attack was, in fact, caused by the Jewish people's laxity in focusing upon Hashem. They cite the incident immediately preceding Amalek's attack for your testing Hashem and questioning does Hashem dwell in our midst or not? Our Chazal explain that the Jewish people had grown accustomed to their way of life. All of their needs were miraculously provided to them by Hashem. This lifestyle became so natural that they weakened in their focus on Hashem and began questioning if Hashem truly remained amongst them. This demonstrated their lack of subjugation to Hashem and their lack of recognition of Hashem's constant assistance. This unacceptable behavior demanded immediate rectification and Hashem sent Amalek to shock the Jewish people into reality. Amalek was notoriously infamous for his unwillingness to recognize Hashem and subjugate himself to any supreme power. Amalek therefore reflected in very extreme dimensions the subtle deviation of the Jewish people. The Jewish people learned their lesson properly and focused

completely upon Hashem's salvation, thus rectifying their earlier shortcomings. Hashem responded to their teshuva and delivered them from the hands of Amalek.

In view of this insight we now return to Shaul's subtle but serious deviation from Hashem's command. The Talmud in Mesichta Yoma (22B) explains that Shaul Hamelech found it difficult to accept this command. He reasoned with compassion, "If the Amalekite men are sinful why must the children perish, why must their cattle be destroyed?" These concerns demonstrated a lack of acceptance of Hashem's will and a faint unwillingness to subjugate himself to Hashem. This error reinstated the earlier problem of the Jewish people and set the stage for the Amalekite nation to reappear on the scene. The Jewish people still needed a reminder to keep them in check. Amalek and anti-Semitism would have to remain and the Jewish people would be constantly reminded of Hashem and assisted in totally subjugating themselves to their Creator. This similar pattern reoccurred in the days of Purim. The Jewish people became acclimated to their lifestyle in the diaspora, and ceased to focus on Hashem. Once again a descendent of Amalek, Haman appeared and decreed his merciless decree. The Jewish people responded with three days of fasting and subjugation to Hashem and Amalek was defeated once again.

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel, Rosh Kollel (Dean) Kollel Toras Chesed of Skokie

"Ohr Somayach <ohr@jer1.co.il>" " Highlights of the Torah weekly port...
Torah Weekly -Shabbos Zachor

Haftorah Parshas Zachor: Shmuel I , 15:1-34

THE LAST OF THE AMALEKI

The second of the Four Parshios that we read in the months of Adar and Nissan is Parshas Zachor. Zachor means "Remember." The Torah tells us "Remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you came out of Egypt."

On Shabbos Zachor we fulfill the mitzvah to "destroy the remembrance of Amalek from under the heaven" by reading this section from the Torah. Parshas Zachor is always read the week before Purim, because on Purim we celebrate our deliverance from Amalek's most notorious descendent -- Haman.

The Haftorah of Parshas Zachor depicts another encounter with the

descendants of Amalek: King Shaul was commanded to annihilate Amalek, but he failed to kill their king Agag. While in captivity, the last of the Amaleki, Agag, managed to sire a child, and it was from this child that Haman was descended.

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Date: 3/3/96 3:25am
Subject: Purim

Rabbi Shimon Ben Lakish 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 Mishna, Tannaic Passage says: "On the First day of Adar we make the announcements about the giving of the yearly Shekolim/ coins to pay for the communal sacrifices in the Bais Hamikdosh (Holy Temple) (Talmud, Tractate Meggilah 13b).

Tosefos (one of the early commentators) 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/Tabernacle which the Jews erected in the desert. (Meggilah 16a)

It seems that Haman's action of offering 10,000 Kikar of silver to King Acashverosh had an spiritual effect that "demanded" an action by the Jews to counteract. It required a donation of the Jews, Hundreds of year earlier, in the desert. to merit not being annihilated. (As Tosefos points out) It also required the yearly donation to the Bais Hamikdosh to counteract that action. The question is: Why is G-d worried about Haman giving this money to Achashverosh? What difference does this make?

Reb Sholom Schwadron said the following answer, in the name of his Rebbe, his teacher. 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 Satan (the adversary, a spiritual entity) himself approaches G-d and says "Haman is willing to give up EVERYTHING" to destroy the Jews. What are the Jews willing to give up for G-D?" G-d must answer the demand of the Satan and he

says, "My Children are willing to give up for me. In fact they have given me back in the desert, the silver sockets for Mishkon, the Tabernacle. They give me one half Shekel every single Adar" That is what G-d answers the Satan.

There are several questions concerning this thought. First of all, what difference does it make that Haman was dedicated? Why does that have an effect in heaven? The second problem is Why did G-d choose the commandment of the Machatzis hashekel, the giving of one half a shekel per person, to counteract Haman? Why not point out the donations to build the *entire* Mishkon which was certainly a greater amount donated than one half a shekel per person? Let us just 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, a 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 G-d?

To understand the answer to the first question we should preface that the rules of nature apply in the spiritual realm. Just as what goes up must come down, every action has an equal reaction etc., so too there are rules in the spiritual realm. One of these rules is: When one is totally dedicated to a cause, he AUTOMATICALLY receives Seyata Dishmaya or heavenly assistance to succeed. That is why once Haman showed his commitment and his zeal with the willingness to do ANYTHING to destroy Jews, G-d HAD to answer the Satan 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. (As we will explain G-d Willing very soon).

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz ZT"L used this same line of reasoning to explain a Posuk (passage) in Parshas Balak. The Posuk says, "Bilaam awoke early in the morning and he saddled his donkey." Rashi quotes the Medrash that says; "G-d says: "You got up early to destroy the Jews. You will not succeed because their Father Abraham has already done this before you." As the posuk states; "And Abraham got up early in the morning and he saddled his donkey" (This was the story of the Akeidah, when Abraham was going to offer his son Yitzchok up as a sacrifice). Reb Chaim asks the same question we asked earlier; Why does the action of Billaam waking up early to saddle his donkey require G-d to respond with "Abraham their father has done this already"? What is so special with Billaam saddling his donkey? The answer he gives is because Bilaam 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 heavenly assistance and success. Therefore G-d said, Abraham 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.

It is interesting to note that Rabbi Shimon Schwab in his Sefer (book) uses a very similar explanation. In the same story about Billaam, Bilaam in a dream asks G-d permission to go with the second group of messengers of Balak. G-d 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 Z"L asks why did G-d give him permission only if he would get paid? The answer is says Rabbi 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 heavenly assistance. He is doomed to failure. If he wants to go, no harm will befall the Jews, and G-d Himself is willing to allow him to go.

This answered 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 tabernacle, and how can the giving of one half a shekel show a dedication equivalent or better than the giving of 10,000 kikar of silver.

We can understand the answer using the following rule. The Talmud in Tractate Kiddushin tells us that one who is commanded to do a Mitzvah, a commandment from G-d is 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 G-d by doing the Mitzvah than one who is obligated to perform the Mitzvah. The Talmud is telling us that this is not so. Tosefos explains the reason for this. When a person is obligated to do something,

the Yetzer Horah, the evil inclination, 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. (Remember back to when you were a child and you were tired? As soon as your parents said "Time for bed" You suddenly had a burst of energy and had no desire at all to go to sleep.)

Knowing this, the answer is simple. Haman was dedicated to his cause. He was willing to give up everything to get what *he* wanted. To counteract this action G-d needed to show that the Jews could also perform an act that was equally meaningful and equally "powerful". That act was the giving of one half a shekel. The act of being told, "You must give one half a shekel. No more and no less" This action was one that showed dedication to G-d 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 the Talmud in Tractate Shabbos. The Mishna (Shabbos 9b) lists many activities that one may not do prior to Mincha time, the time for the afternoon prayers. One of the forbidden activities is to sit down to a meal. Nevertheless, the Talmud 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 Talmud asks what act determines the beginning of the meal? The Talmud 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 Talmud responds by asking, What is the big deal to put the belt back on? Besides, let him pray without a belt. The Talmud answers, He can not pray without a belt since the Posuk says, "Prepare yourself to greet your G-d." Tosefos (10a) Says that the Talmud 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 Talmud explained and proved that one was not allowed to pray 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, G-d in his mercy gave us the Mitzvah of Machatzis Hashekel, from the times of the Mishkon in the desert. This allowed us to demonstrate OUR dedication to him by giving the half a shekel to the Miskon. By serving G-d, we show our dedication. By overcoming our own natural instincts, and accepting G-d's will upon ourselves we show the greatest Mesirras nefesh, the greatest dedication to G-D and his will.

Hatzlocho, Yosey

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"Menachem Leibtag <ml@etzion.org.il>" Chumash shiur...
MEGILLAT ESTHER

Note: The following shiur is an edited version of the shiur sent out last year for Purim. I got up from "shiva" today, and had time only for a quick edit. There are many more important points that need to be discussed and clarified, iy"h in the near future.

Thank you for the many kind messages of condolence. Unfortunately, I sat "shiva" this week "btoch shaar avlei Tzion V'Yerushalayim". No words can describe the pain and anguish felt by the entire Jewish nation due to these terrible acts of terror. As I am writing these lines, I have been informed of another terrible bombing in Tel Aviv. It will be difficult for all of Klal Yisrael to celebrate Purim this year. May God give us strength to find its proper message this year.

MEGILLAT ESTHER, ITS 'HIDDEN' MESSAGE

"Ish YEHUDI haya be-SHUSHAN Ha-BIRA - u-shmo MORDECHAI"

This famous pasuk, chanted proudly by the entire congregation as we read the megilla, is actually one of the most provocative psukim in the entire Tanakh! Most people do not notice this but an ear tuned to the prophecies of Zekharya and familiar with Tanakh immediately catches the irony. "Ish Yehudi" does NOT imply simply someone who is "Jewish;" "ha-bira" does NOT mean "the capital city" and "Mordechai" is NOT a Jewish name!

Only one other time in Tanakh is "ish Yehudi" mentioned (Zechayra 8:23). There it describes a Jew leading tens of non-Jewish followers seeking to find God's Temple in Jerusalem. "Ha-bira" in Tanakh is used to describe the "Bet Ha'Mikdash" (the Temple) which King David has prepared for his son Shlomo to build (see Divrei Ha-yamim I 29:1 & 29:19). Prior to the time period of Megillat Esther, the word "bira" finds no other mention. But perhaps the most unbelievable word in the megilla is the name Mordechai - it is none less than the name of the Babylonian deity - Marduk. No Jew prior to the Babylonian exile would have dared giving his son such a name. [Today, it would be comparable to naming a Jewish son: Christopher.]

The above pasuk is not the only one in the megilla filled with irony and satire. The style of the entire megilla is satirical. Its plot is entirely ironic ("ve-nahafokh hu"). Nonetheless, the megilla is part of the Tanakh, and as such, it must contain a prophetic message. To appreciate the unique style of the megilla, to find its message (to uncover its 'mask'), we must take the following steps:

- 1) Base our assumption that it should contain a prophetic message.
- 2) Review the history and prophetic setting of that time period.
- 3) Thematically relate this setting to the events of the megilla.
- 4) Look for key phrases and elements to back this theme.
- 5) Support this theme from midrashic sources.
- 6) Explain the need for the megilla's unique style.
- 7) Explain how the celebration of Purim relates to this theme.

PROPHETIC HISTORY

The fate of Am Yisrael is a function of their deeds and their devotion to their Divine purpose. When this tenet of the Bible is stated prior to "Shirat Ha'azinu" in Sefer Dvarim, we find an allusion to the very name of Megillat ESTHER:

"...and they will leave me and break my covenant...And my anger will be kindled against them on that day and I will forsake them, [v'HISTARTI panai"] and I will HIDE my face from them... and many evils and troubles shall befall them - so that they will say on that day, are not these evils among us, because God is not among us.

V'anochi HASTER ASTEIR pa'nai ba'yom ha'hu" (Dvarim 31:16-18)

In a Midrash, Chazal note this connection:

"Esther min ha-Torah minayin?"

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

"v'Anochi haster asteir panai ba-yom ha-hu"

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

Although it is commonly understood the name Esther relates to nature of Am Yisrael's salvation from Haman, i.e. by God's hidden ways ("nes nistar"), the Midrash seems to imply that the name "Esther" does NOT relate to the manner of Am Yisrael's redemption, but rather to the REASON for their punishment.

Shirat Ha'azinu tells us where to look (see 31:19) when searching for that reason:

"Z'chor yemot olam, binu shnot dor va-dor..." (Devarim 32:7)

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

God speaks to man through historical events. Prophecy helps man interpret that message.

Although, the megilla offers no explicit reason for Am Yisrael's potential destruction during this time period, that reason must be implicit. Therefore, we must study the megilla in search of its prophetic message by considering its historical setting.

[See Massekhet Megilla 12a, where this very assumption is made: "What was Yisrael guilty of, that they deserved to be destroyed.."]
HISTORIC AND PROPHETIC BACKDROP

To locate the time period of the megilla, we return to the very same provocative pasuk mentioned above:

"Ish yehudi haya be-Shushan...u-shmo Mordechai ben...ish yemini, "ASHER HOGLA MI-YERUSHALAYIM, im ha-gola asher hogleta im YECHONYA melekh Yehuda, asher hogla Nevuchadnetzar melekh Bavel" (2:5-6).

[Note the use of the shresh g.l.h. four times in this pasuk!]

Besides setting our time frame to the Babylonian Exile ("galut Bavel"), this pasuk, by its textual similarities, also points us to a significant passage in Sefer Yirmiyahu:

"Now these are the words of the book that Yirmiyahu sent from Jerusalem to the elders of the Exile, to the priests, and to the prophets and to all the people "ASHER HOGLA Nevuchadnetzar mi-YERUSHALAYIM Bavelah, acharei tzeit YEHOYACHIN... [whom were exiled by Nevuchadnetzar from Jerusalem to Bavel, after Yehoyachin the King surrendered]" (Yr. 29:1-2)

[Note: If you are not familiar with this time period, it is highly recommended that you read Yirmiyahu 29:1-15 in its entirety before continuing. See also Kings II 23:31-25:12.]

Yirmiyahu's 'official letter' (29:1-15) to the Exile relates to their expected lengthy stay in Bavel. Yirmiyahu implores the people to set up homes and families in Bavel, as they will be staying there for some seventy years. (The false prophets at that time were claiming that within a year or two, the exile would be returning to Jerusalem - see perek 28.)

We must note Yirmiyahu's description of his expectations from the Exile at the conclusion of this seventy year period:

"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)

It is clear from Yirmiyahu, that the return from exile after

the fall of Bavel would not be automatic. It was God's hope that their return would be catalyzed by sincere teshuva and a YEARNING to return.

The Babylonian Exile, as the word "exile" implies, was intended to be temporary. People don't stay in 'exile' unless forced to. Exile implies that one CANNOT return to his own land. (Otherwise "galut" should be translated - 'diaspora' / hey, not a bad idea!)

The purpose of the Jewish nation, in its Biblical context, is to be a "mamlechet kohanim ve-goy kadosh" (Shmot 19:5). Through living by God's laws in the Promised Land, Am Yisrael is destined to become a vehicle through which all nations would come to recognize God (see Devarim 4:5-8).

The 'Bet Ha'Mikdash', God's Temple in Jerusalem, was to be the symbol of that goal. [Note that it is referred to as: "ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem le-shakhen SHMO sham / see Devarim 12:5-14.]

Therefore, according to Yirmiyahu, at the conclusion of the Babylonian Exile - time period of the megilla, the Jewish people should have been anxious to return to their homeland - to build their ideal nation with its symbolic shrine, the Temple, in Jerusalem. Reality, however, fell short of these hopes.

The historical opportunity to return occurred exactly as Yirmiyahu's had predicted (see Yr. 25:11-12), immediately after the fall of Bavel to Persia. Koresh (Cyrus the Great), the first king of the Persian Empire, issued his famous proclamation, allowing and encouraging the Jews of the Persian empire to return to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. This event, as understood by Sefer Ezra, was the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecy (see Ezra 1:1).

The response of the Exile to this historic opportunity was less than enthusiastic. A large group of approximately forty thousand did return, however, the majority remained behind. For an insight into the tragedy of the missed opportunity we need only quote the explanation given by Rav Yehuda Ha-Levi in the Sefer Ha-Kuzari:

"Had the entire nation enthusiastically answered the divine call to return to the Land, the idyllic prophecies of "shivat tzion" would have been fulfilled and the shchina would have returned. In reality, however, only a small portion returned. The majority remained in Bavel (Persia), willfully accepting the exile, as they did not wish to leave their homes and businesses etc. ..." (Sefer Kuzari, II.24)

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

Megillat Esther opens during the Persian time period (1:1-3) and therefore definitely finds its historical setting AFTER the Jews were given the opportunity to return to Yerushalayim, to build the Temple and to re-settle their land!

In light of this, it is reasonable to suggest that Yisrael's impending destruction by Haman was a result of their apathy to the Divine call. The Jews preferred Shushan over Yerushalayim, they preferred to subjugate themselves to Achashverosh rather than respond to God calling them to return to their land and Temple!

It should therefore not surprise us to find, at least, an allusion to this in the megilla.

[Note: Before continuing 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 a true one. However its prophetic message is conveyed through the use of literary tools, such as satire and irony. Often, criticism is better appreciated when delivered implicitly rather than explicitly.]

THE THEME OF THE MEGILLA AND ITS SATIRE

As Chazal point out in numerous midrashim, many similarities exist between the description of Achashverosh's palace and the Bet Mikdash. We shall list just a few:

A) The use of "chatzer ha-pnimit and chatzer ha-chitzona" describing Achashverosh's palace and Yechezkel's description of Temple area (Esther 5:1; 6:4 / Yech. 40:18-19).

An inner chamber where entry is forbidden upon death parallels the kodesh ha-kodashim (Purim - ki-purim!).

B) The use of the word "bira" to describe Shushan (whereas bira usually refers to Yerushalayim). (see DH I 29:1,19)

C) The use of key words such as "yekar ve-tiferet" (1:4); "tekhelet, butz, ve-argaman" (1:6) - in describing his party.

Based on these psukim, the gemara (Megilla 12a) claims that Achashverosh donned the "bigdei Kohen Gadol" at his party!

D) The 6-month party followed by a seven day special celebration parallels the six months that it took the dor ha-midbar to build the mishkan (from Yom Kippur till Rosh Chodesh Nisan) followed by the seven day 'miluim' ceremony.

E) Chazal explain, "ve-keilim mi-keilim shonim" (1:7), as referring to the vessels of the Bet Ha-Mikdash. (For this reason we chant this pasuk to the nigun of "Eikha).

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

Perhaps one could suggest that the megilla may be alluding to the fact that Am Yisrael had replaced:

God with Achashverosh;

God's Temple with Achashverosh's palace; and thus:

Yerushalayim ha-BIRA with Shushan ha-BIRA! ["v'nahafokh hu"]

This parallelism is borne out in other elements of the story:

Achashverosh's request that Vashti come and show her beauty to all the nations (1:11) parallels God's desire that His nation return to His land to fulfill their divine purpose and sanctify His Name? 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?

Achashverosh's anger in response to Vashti's refusal to come was understandable. So too, "le-havdil," Hashem's disappointment that His people were unwilling to return.

Even Haman's petition to Achashverosh to destroy this "scattered nation that does not listen to the laws of the king" (3:8), echoes a similar complaint that Hashem may have of His own nation.

After all, who is the real 'King' in the megilla? Is this not the question developed throughout the megilla's satire?

[Chazal even suggest the possibility that "ha-melekh" in the megilla may be "kodesh", as it may be referring to God and not to Achashverosh.]

70 DAYS / 70 YEARS

A seemingly unimportant detail in the megilla seems to serve

as one of the most striking allusions to the prophetic backdrop of Yirmiyahu. Note the date that the 'second letters' i.e. the letters repealing Haman's decree, were sent out:

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 over two months later (8:9)! What took so long?

Examining these two dates carefully, 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 the Jews throughout the Persian empire were under the tremendous peril of impending destruction.

The concept of suffering for a sin, a day for a year (and vice versa) is found twice in Tanakh in related circumstances. After the sin of the 'meraglim,' 'the forty days' were 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 over 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!)]

To strengthen our claim, we quote a midrash in which Chazal relate the story in the megilla to the 70 years of Yirmiyahu. The midrash suggests that Achashverosh threw his 180 day party in celebration of the fact that even though Yirmiyahu's seventy years were over 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? At the level of drash, however, this explanation is enlightening. Chazal, in the spirit of the megilla - "ve-nahafokh 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, that Am Yisrael should have expressed.

PESACH AND PURIM

Taking this line of thought, it now makes perfect sense that Israel's salvation from Haman's decree comes only after Am Yisrael agrees to fast for three days of proper teshuva. 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' on the first days of Pesach, a powerful reminder of our divine purpose and the relationship between exile and the Land of Israel. WHY SATIRE?

We have shown that the megilla is laced with allusions to the fact that Am Yisrael do not answer their divine call during the Persian time period. 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 a 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 neviim of Tanakh had not been very successful ("gedola hasarat ha-taba'at shel Haman yoter mi-48 neviim...!"). It seems that Anshei Knesset Ha-gdola, in their decision to canonize Megillat Esther, had hoped that a satirical message would be more powerful than a direct one. ["le-havdil" - like Animal Farm and the Russian revolution.]

However, the obvious question still remains. If our assumption is correct, why don't we find a mass aliya movement immediately after the miracle of Purim? [Jews of the twentieth century should ask themselves a similar question!]

According to Chazal's opinion that Achashverosh was succeeded two years later by Esther's son Daryavesh, we find that the events actually did have a major effect on the rebuilding of the Temple and "shivat tzion". According to the opinion of the historians that the story of the megilla took place after the time period of Daryavesh, a decade or so pass before Ezra and Nechemya bring another wave of olim and help rebuild Yerushalayim.

One would expect nonetheless, that the yearly celebration of Purim, and the minhagim of "mishloach manot" and "matanot le-eyyonim," should also reflect the above theme. Our original question also remains. Why is it necessary to celebrate Purim for all generations? Chazal go one step further, claiming that Purim will be the only holiday kept at the time of the final redemption! (see Esther 9:28 and commentaries).

THE MEGILLA AND SEFER ZECHARYA

To answer these questions we must render a careful reading of the final ten psukim of the megilla. We must also remember the words "ish yehudi," and we must take note that the only other mention of the above nomination is found in Zekharya 8:23.

Furthermore, as opposed to basing our prophetic prospective on Yirmiyahu alone; let us look at Zekharya perakim 7-8. Some seventy years after Yirmiyahu sends his letter to the exiles, as construction of the Second Temple begins, Zekharya delivers a similar message:

In the first six perakim of Zekharya, the navi focuses on one primary theme - the return of the "shchina" (the Divine Presence) to Yerushalayim. Its return, however, will be a function of Am Yisrael's covenantal commitment (see 7:15). Zekharya encourages the nation by declaring that the redemption is almost complete. He insists however, as Yirmiyahu did, that both a spiritual and physical return is necessary:

"shuvu eilai.. ve-ashuva aleikhem" (1:3).

[It is highly suggested to read at least the first two perakim of Zekharya and then perakim 7-8 before continuing.]

Construction of the Temple begins in the second year of Daryavesh. Two years later, 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 (the fast of Tisha b'Av)? (see 7:3)

The question appears to be quite legitimate. After all, now that the Temple is being rebuilt, there is no reason to fast on Tisha be-Av anymore! However, Zekharya's lengthy and official reply (7:4-8:23) to this question, his prophetic answer to the Babylonian exile, contains an eternal message that relates to the nature of the ideal redemption process. By analyzing Zecharya's answer, we will find the basis for certain "minhagim" (customs) of Purim.

It appears from Zekharya 7:4-7 that Hashem is slightly disturbed by their question. The Jews in Bavel should have been excited about the rebuilding of the Temple. They should have considered aliya and returned to their Promised Land. Instead, their primary interest focuses on whether or not they have to fast. Their question reflects a general attitude to the entire redemptive process that unfolds in Jerusalem.

The fast of Tisha Be-av was 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. Thus, Hashem explains, feasting or fasting is man's decision (7:6). Hashem is interested in something much more basic: to keep the mitzvot. All the earlier prophets had repeatedly reminded Bnei Yisrael of their duties and had begged them not to return to the ways of their forefathers that caused the churban.

Zekharya continues in this vein. In his two chapters of 'musar' (rebuke), he emphasizes the most basic mitzvot which must be kept in order for the shchina to return (7:8-10): truth, social justice, helping the poor and needy, and thinking kindly of one's neighbor:

"EMET u-mishpat SHALOM shiftu be-sha'areikhem, ve-chesed ve-rachamim asu ISH et ACHIV. Almana, ve-yatom ve-ANI al ta'ashoku..." (7:8-10)

Zecharya continues claiming that Hashem is anxious to return His shchina to Tzion. He wants to ensure that Yerushalayim becomes the city of truth (8:1-3). Hashem hopes to return the exiles from lands in the east and west and with their return to Yerushalayim, and God and His nation will become once again covenantal partners, through "EMET & TZDKA" (8:7-8). The prophet instills the people with encouragement as he predicts also foresees increased economic prosperity (8:9-13).

Finally, after words of encouragement and repeated 'musar' (see 8:11-17), Hashem answers the original question. If Am Yisrael return to Israel and keep "EMET ve-SHALOM, the four fast days commemorating the destruction of Yerushalayim will become holidays!" (8:18-19)

Only then will redemption be complete, and numerous people from many great nations will 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)

There can be no doubt that this answer reflects God's attitude towards the entire redemption process. Had the Jews heeded this prophetic call in the time of Koresh and Daryavesh, they would not have been scattered among 127 provinces during the time of Achashverosh. While the Persians were celebrating in Shushan, the Jews should have been celebrating in Yerushalayim.

Let us summarize. Zekharya's prophecy tells Bnei Yisrael that if they show their devotion to Hashem, if they practice "EMET u-mishpat SHALOM"; the fast days, the days of crying for Jerusalem, will turn into holidays. Thus yearly celebration of Purim, marking the turn around of "yagon le-simcha, evel le-yom tov" (Esther 9:22) symbolizes the future celebration of current fast days as holidays.

The special mitzvot that we keep on Purim reflect Zekharya's repeated message of helping the needy (matanot le-eyyonim) and thinking nicely of your neighbors (mishloach manot ISH LE-RE'EIHU). Once a year we will remind ourselves of the most basic mitzvot that need to be kept in order that we become worthy of returning to Yerushalayim and the mikdash.

Chazal even instituted halakhot that emphasize this message: they replaced Shushan Purim with Yerushalayim Purim; the halakhot of walled cities from the time of Yehoshua bin Nun! [see Yehoshua 21:42 and its context, compare to Esther 9:2] SHALOM V'EMET

The above explanation seems to be accurate. Its clincher can be found toward the end of the megilla (9:29-32 / read it carefully!). Mordechai and Esther need to send out a second 'igeret' explaining and giving authority ("tokef") to the minhagim

of Purim explained in the first 'igeret'. What was the content of this special second 'igeret'?

"Divrei SHALOM ve-EMET"!

These two key words point us right back to Zekharya perakim 7-8. The two words explain when and why the fast days will become holidays (Zech/ 8:19)! The second 'igeret' is a full explanation of the purpose of the minhagim of Purim - a yearly reminder of the prophecies of Zekharya left unfulfilled.

Under what authority ("tokef") can Mordechai institute these halakhot?

"ka'asher kiymu al nafsham divrei ha-TZOMOT ve-za'akatom" (9:31) [Compare these psukim carefully to Zekharya 8:18-19.]

Recall, Hashem told Zekharya that fast days and feast days are up to man to decide. Chazal decided to remember Yerushalayim by instituting the four fast days. In the same manner, Mordechai now institutes a 'feast day' to remember Yerushalayim, symbolic of what will happen when the fast days turn into holidays. (This also explains why the celebration of Purim will remain even after our redemption is complete.)

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 manot". It may have been lost within our ignorance of Tanakh. Its message however is eternal, just as our aspirations for Yerushalayim are eternal.

purim sameach
menachem

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Drasha Purim 5756- The Good, the Bad, & the G-dly

Preparing for Purim, I noticed two conflicting holiday themes. The story of Purim reads like a contemporary novel. It has plots, sub-plots, and twists of fate. And like every great read, it has a fantastic ending. Of course, unlike a novel, it's amazingly all true. In the story, Mordechai reveals a plot to assassinate King Achashverosh. Queen Esther informs her husband of the plot and includes the source -- Mordechai -- noted in the official record. That bit of information, the fact that Mordechai was the one who deserved credit, played an integral role in the salvation of the Jewish people. Thus the Talmud points out the importance of giving proper due with the famous expression, "whoever quotes something and names the source, brings salvation to the world. As it states (Esther 2:22), "And Esther told the king [the plot] in Mordechai's name."

Yet in its charge to celebrate Purim, the Talmud tells us that one should rejoice until he not differentiate between "blessed be Mordechai and cursed be Haman." I am bothered. If a major theme of the Purim holiday is giving credit where it is due, how can we neglect the clear recognition of heroes and villains?

vvvMy Rebbe, Rav Mendel Kaplan, was a very unique individual. As an elder Rosh Yeshiva in his seventies he still drove his old car from his home in Brooklyn to the Philadelphia Yeshiva. The car was fueled by miracles, and often passengers would share some of the amazing journeys with his students. I heard the following story from a classmate.

Rav Mendel was driving near Cherry Hill, New Jersey when another motorist gestured wildly toward the bottom of his car. Rav Mendel pulled into the nearest service station and the student who had accompanied him went out to

look for the problem. Meanwhile, a burly service attendant came running toward the car. He had noticed a strange smoke emanating from the hood. "Rabbi," he ordered. "Get out of the car fast!" The mechanic opened the hood

and quickly extinguished a small fire that had begun in the worn wiring. "Wow," he exclaimed. "You sure are lucky that your tire was low and you came in here!"

Rav Mendel smiled and just said in his sweetly accented English, "Thanks Gott!"

"Yeah, Rabbi, thanks G-d that you were lucky to have a low tire and come on in here!"

Rav Mendel looked at the man, shook his hand and smiled. "No, I wasn't lucky about the tire, just, thanks Gott!"

I never truly understood the incident and what Rav Mendel meant until, perhaps, today.

In celebrating an event of miraculous proportions, our Sages want us to view miracles in a deeper light. There are no heroes to cheer or villains to boo. Everything is controlled by the One Above. There is no concept of lucky and no particular person or item on which to hang blame or praise. There is no hurray for the Mordechais and no bronx cheers for Haman. There is just, as Rav Mendel would say, "Thanks Gott."

Of course, in the real world we can never forget to work the proper channels. As we read the Megillah, and the events unfold, we cheer Mordechai

and Esther and pound at the mention of the evil Haman and his wicked wife Zeresh. But on Purim day, in buoyant revelry, we have to think on a higher plane. There is no Mordechai, there is no Haman; there are no good guys and no bad guys. There is only the One Above who pulls the strings and is total control. Don't thank Mordechai or curse Haman, just, "Thanks Gott!" Happy Purim!!

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