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In My Opinion **PURIM**

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The Purim story is a collection of unlikely events and almost irrational decisions by all parties involved in this drama. There is ample evidence of the mercurial instability of Achashveirosh and of the diabolical wickedness of Haman. What is however the most perplexing, of all of the behavior of the major participants in the story, is that of Mordecai. What impels him to publicly disobey Haman's orders and provoke and insult him? And did he have halachic and moral justification to so endanger the Jewish community by his behavior? There is opinion in the Talmud that showing homage to Haman was not necessarily forbidden by Jewish law. And Mordecai had other practical options such as hiding and not appearing publicly when Haman appeared. Yet Mordecai emerges in Jewish history and tradition as a hero and an exemplary role model for his courageous defiance of Haman. He is viewed as being the one whose behavior saved the Jewish people and not as one whose behavior was an endangerment. Rarely do we find potentially foolhardy and bravado behavior universally judged as being heroic, necessary and most praiseworthy. We do find him being mildly criticized by some of his colleagues on the Sanhedrin for deserting them to enter public governmental life. Yet on the main issue – the central theme of the story of Purim itself – Mordecai is essentially the hero of Purim. The Torah in all of its books gives no one a free pass. Everyone's faults and mistakes are referred to and commented upon. Yet Mordecai, in the Book of Esther, appears to us to be without blemish or error. Perhaps the main, practical reason for this is that ultimate success and triumph are sufficient to erase all doubts as to the wisdom of past decisions and behavior. Mordecai's persistence, fortitude and stubbornness eventually topple Haman (actually hangs him high) and destroys him. Mordecai's actions strengthen and enhance the status and position of the Jewish people as a minority in the polyglot Persian Empire. Success always brings its own rewards. Heaven has a vote in all human activities, even if unseen and unrecognized. And there is no doubt that Heaven, so to speak, sided with Mordecai in his public stance against Haman and the idolatry and tyranny that he represented. That is the only possible explanation for the otherwise unbelievable series of events that make up the Purim story. The traditional view of Purim is that it was a miraculous event, even though the miracles were hidden, incremental

and cumulative and not of the purely supernatural kind, as those of the Exodus from Egypt. And, Mordecai's behavior is part of this hidden miraculous story. Heaven apparently responds favorably to sincere acts of courage and loyalty. And those were the qualities that Mordecai exhibited throughout the Purim story. Mordecai's behavior was perhaps inscrutable and not understandable to the average onlooker. But, so was and apparently is Heaven's reaction and behavior to his actions. There is an interesting and highly volatile concept in Jewish tradition that countenances behavior which somehow contradicts accepted halachic practice. Based upon the verse that appears in Psalms: "It is a time to take action for the sake of G-d; they have violated Your Torah." The Talmud allowed for a reinterpretation of the verse to state: "When it is time to act for the sake of G-d and save the Torah and Israel then in such extreme circumstances, the Torah itself can apparently be violated." This rare exception to traditional norms was invoked by Mattisyahu in rebelling against the Syrian Greek oppressors and their Jewish Hellenist allies. Based on this principle, the great Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi allowed the Oral Law to be written down and disseminated as a book though the Torah itself counseled that the Oral Law should forever remain in its oral state. However, this concept is very dangerous in its application, as all of Jewish history has shown us. Those who consistently violate or ignore halacha and tradition doom themselves to eventual assimilation and extinction. In all instances in Jewish history there have been very few times when this principle has actually been used. Only rare and holy people have successfully behaved in such circumstances and I believe that Mordecai must be counted in that group. Mordecai saw that it was a time to do something for G-d, to save the Jewish people and to alter the course of history. As pointed out above, Heaven agreed with his decision and hence our joy in commemorating the Purim holiday. Shabbat shalom Berel Wein

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PURIM – II

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The story of Purim takes place about 2500 years ago in the, long ago, almost forgotten, Persian Empire. Yet this ancient tale remains instructive to this very day. The details of the plot of the story, as recorded for us in the book of Esther, are well known to all. However, the implications and eternal lessons of those details and the overall story itself must be relearned in every generation. The names, the localities and the circumstances of the Purim story change and differ from generation to generation but the basic social and historical lessons of Purim remain cogent for the Jewish people for all time. We are being taught basic lessons of Jewish existence in this Purim story. By ignoring or perverting these lessons, the Jewish people over the centuries have been exposed, both nationally and individually, to mortal dangers. The Jews of ancient Persia had pretty much despaired of rebuilding national sovereignty in their homeland. They had to adjust to being a particular ethnic and religious minority in a polyglot, the Persian Empire, which was overwhelmingly pagan. They had to learn how to sagely remain different from all others while somehow being part of the whole. And this remained the challenge for all of Jewish society – again nationally and individually – for almost two thousand years of exile. The wicked Haman described us correctly when he said that the Jews are dispersed, disunited, and have and observe different values and laws than the general population. In short, the crime of the Jews is that they are different and the world has difficulty accommodating those who insist on being different. In ancient Persia a large section of the Jewish people chose the path of complete assimilation into the dominant culture and society. They gleefully participated in the king's banquet and excesses and willingly bowed down to Haman and to his pagan ways. German Reform in the nineteenth century called itself and its adherents "Germans of the Mosaic persuasion." I imagine that the Purim Jews thought of themselves similarly as "Persians of the Mosaic persuasion." The complete abandonment of Judaism in Persian

society did not spare the Jews of Persia the trauma of Haman and his decrees. And we are all only too painfully aware how the German assimilation of the nineteenth century turned out in the actions and events of the twentieth century. In the long run of history, assimilation does not work, not for the Jewish people as a whole or for individual Jews. This fundamental lesson of the Purim story remains a challenge in every generation of Jewish life. In our time, it has become perhaps the greatest danger to Jewish survival. However we can avert the pitfalls of assimilation willingly and voluntarily through increased Jewish education and at least minimal adherence to Torah commandments and Jewish tradition. Otherwise, our history shows us that there are far more painful methods available to remind even the most assimilated among us of being Jewish. Another underlying lesson of the Purim story is that of the power of Jewish pride and self-worth. Mordecai's intransigence and Esther's courage in a moment of fateful decision and dangerous choice are the ingredients that make them the immortal heroes of the Purim story. Pride in one's personal and national heritage is instilled at home by parents to children. The most effective tool that I remember in raising our children – and a rabbi's children often face many severe peer challenges - was to simply say that this is the way our family behaves, talks and acts. A strong sense of family and of continuity will almost automatically engender Jewish self-pride in a child. It is more powerful than pure book knowledge in creating a Mordecai and Esther. And the great sage Hillel stated: "If I am not for myself than who will be for me?" If Jews themselves are not for Judaism and the Jewish people and the State of Israel, than who shall be for us? Mordecai warned Esther that if she remained silent now she and her family were doomed to extinction, Jewishly speaking. Being a Jew always presents one with making hard choices and difficult decisions. The Purim story comes to reinforce for us this important truism of Jewish life. That Purim would remain the eternal holiday of the Jewish people corroborates the importance the Rabbis placed on the messages of this wonderful Yom Tov.

Shabbat shalom Purim sameach Berel Wein

<http://www.aish.com/h/pur/f/249296211.html>

**Megillah Torah Teasers
by Moshe Erlbaum**

1. Aside from Achashverosh, which other kings appear in the Megillah?
 2. Which two people in the Megillah have names that begin with the letter Vav?
 3. Aside from wine, what other item mentioned in the Megillah is served at the Passover seder?
 4. The gallows that Haman intended to hang Mordechai on were 50 cubits long (Esther 5:14). Where in the book of Genesis do we find wood measuring 50 cubits?
 5. What golden item appears in the Megillah four times, but nowhere else in the Bible?
 6. Aside from the month of Adar, what other months are mentioned in the Megillah?
 7. "I killed my wife because of my friend, and killed my friend because of my wife." Who am I?
 8. What is the connection between the first verse of the Megillah and the first verse of parshas Chayei Sarah?
 9. About whom and about what does it state, "And the matter pleased [him]"? (3 answers)
- [Answers later]

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org date: Thu, Mar 17, 2016 at 4:24 PM

The Inside Story of the Megillah

Excerpted from **Rabbi Lamm's 'The Megillah: Majesty & Mystery,'** co-published by OU Press and Yeshiva University Press Majesty Mystery

Who is the real hero of the Megillah? Of course, if we refer the question to the folk-consciousness of our people, there is no doubt that the answer is either Esther or Mordecai. Remarkably, however, if we refer to the Megillah itself, we discover that the name mentioned most frequently throughout the entire book is that of King Achashverosh. One nineteenth-century Jewish scholar went to the trouble of counting the number of times that the term *melekh*, king, appears in this little book. His study showed that the name appears no less than one hundred eight-seven times. King Achashverosh is a central figure, the axis of the whole plot. All revolves about him, nothing occurs without him. At almost every point we are apprised of the feelings and emotions of Achashverosh: the king is happy, the king is angry; the king is restless, the king is upset; the king is fuming, the king is drunk; the king commands, the king consents. Even the greatness of Mordecai is tied to the king. At the very end of the book, we read that "Mordecai the Jew was next unto King Achashverosh."

Yet, despite the fact that nothing seems to happen in this book without the ubiquitous king, he appears as a man who is feeble, spineless, unimaginative, and powerless. In the ten chapters of Megillat Esther, not one single act of importance is initiated by Achashverosh — except, of course, his merry-making at parties and his romantic adventures. Even in these he shows no originality. He is angry at Vashti — but it is Memukhan who suggests that she be punished. He looks for a new queen — but only after the young men of his court have recommended it. He makes the decision to commit genocide against the Jewish people only because Haman has proposed it. Soon he gives his royal ring to Haman, thus making him, for all practical purposes, the ruler of the realm. Later he will give the same ring to Mordecai, thus gearing the whole apparatus of government to a new policy. And when he is fuming against Haman, he hangs him only because the idea is planted in his mind by one of his ministers. The Book of Esther shows a remarkable paradox: On the one hand, the king is an essential figure; on the other hand, he is a mere follower, a weakling, a king who reigns but does not rule. He is, in the words of our rabbinic tradition, a *melekh tipesh* — a foolish and ineffectual sovereign. He is a royal puppet; others hold the strings.

How does one account for this paradox? If Achashverosh is really a nonentity, why does everything seem to revolve about him? The answer is that the Megillah, as a document promulgated by Mordecai and Esther, was, of necessity, addressed to two separate audiences. Primarily, it was written to and for their fellow Jews both of that age and all ages. But secondarily, it was a document which had to satisfy, or at least not offend, Achashverosh, his royal court, and especially the official religion of the empire. The Jews of Persia triumphed, they were victorious, but they could not afford to assert their independence as openly as were the Maccabees able to do in a later era. They were still in *galut*. Hence, the tale must be subdued. It must be written on two levels: revealed and concealed, open and hidden, an outer and an inner story. And hence, in the words of Mordecai himself, the Megillah was sent to the Jewish communities of one hundred and twenty-seven provinces as *divrei shalom ve-emet* — "words of peace and truth." To the Jews the story of the Megillah was *emet* — truth, the real story which they had to discover by a patient and careful perusal of the text. But the apparent story of the Megillah was not the same as the inner, true story for purposes of *shalom*, peacefulness and a desire not to offend the ruling circles and established religion. In other words, the Megillah is an unusually splendid example of a diplomatic document which tries to accommodate the competing demands of *shalom* and *emet*.

Let us try to analyze both levels, both stories. Look at the Megillah superficially, and you will notice that the royal court of Achashverosh and the king himself are glorified, while the distinctively Jewish religious elements — which must have been offensive to Persian paganism — are subdued and only hinted at vaguely. Achashverosh was probably proud of the praise of the

melekh in the Megillah. He probably regarded it as a public relations coup, as a propaganda victory, as a worthy chronicle for the sovereign of one hundred and twenty-seven lands from India to Ethiopia.

Of the thirty-four times that the word *mishteh* (party or banquet) appears in all of Scripture, seventeen of them are in the Book of Esther. There is good reason for the elaborate description in the Megillah of the king's court and his lavish banquets. The royal party was evidently a status symbol for Persian kings. The bigger the king, the bigger and the better his parties. The one described at the beginning of Megillat Esther lasted for no less than one hundred and eighty days. Vashti's downfall occurred at a *mishteh*. Esther plans the destruction of Haman and the frustration of the pogrom at a *mishteh*. And when Mordecai and Esther declare for all generations the holiday of Purim, it consists, primarily, of a *mishteh*. These constant references to lavish parties, to the riches of Ahashverosh, to the extent of his realm, and attributing all actions to him, these are part of the attempt to appease the absolute monarch of this ancient empire. These are the words of *shalom*.

For the same reason, whatever there is of Judaism and Jewish religion in the Megillah is only in disguise. Thus, we are told that Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman. Our tradition tells us the reason — it was because Haman wore, around his neck, the statue of an idol. The Megillah itself, however, makes no mention of these religious scruples of Mordecai. A three-day fast assembly is declared by Esther and Mordecai. The Megillah mentions nothing about prayer, and certainly nothing about Him to Whom the prayers are directed. At the end we are told of the declaration of Purim as a holiday — but, aside from more parties, gifts, and charity, is there no thanksgiving? The Megillah tells nothing of this, or of Him to Whom thanks are given. There is only the vaguest hint: *le-hiyot osim et shnei ha-yamin ha-elah* — to “do” the two days of Purim. Those who know Jewish tradition will recognize that this refers to certain religious practices. But it is only a hint. It is certainly not explicit.

In the same manner, Haman's accusations against the Jews were no doubt far more elaborate than they appear in the Megillah. The Megillah has toned them down, and recorded that Haman accused us only of being dispersed and “different.” In all probability, Haman told Ahashverosh that the Jews were dispersed and disunited — and that they were united only in their stubborn opposition to Persian paganism. Yet the Megillah does not mention this.

Finally, the clearest indication that we have here a “diplomatic” document with an inner story that is only hinted at, comes in the verses which describe Mordecai's message to Esther when he discovers the nefarious plans of Haman's program. Mordecai tells Esther that she must appear before the king to request his royal intervention lest succor come from another place (*makom aher*) and “who knows, *u-mi yode'a*,” whether you have not come to royal estate for such a time as this. these expressions — “another place” and “who knows” — are euphemisms for G-d. The Name of G-d does not appear at all in this book — strange for a Biblical book, is it not? So that G-d and Judaism are hinted at, but nowhere are they spelled out clearly.

Thus, insofar as the apparent story of the Megillah is concerned, Ahashverosh is at the center, whereas Judaism is deemphasized and peripheral. It is an apologetic document calculated to satisfy any third-rate Persian super-patriot. Still, the Jews knew the real meaning of the Megillah. They saw the *emet* despite the attempt at *shalom*. They did not need an interpreter. For the real story of the Megillah is the one that is concealed, not the superficial tale. And here there is no need to mention the Name of G-d, for the whole story is Godly, providential, and holy. The real story, the *emet* of the story of the Megillat Esther, is, as in all of the Torah — especially the story of Joseph — that every individual lives and acts on two levels. On the lower, conscious, human level, he makes free-will decisions for which he is fully responsible. But they appear out of context, seemingly as if man is the true sovereign of the universe and there is no G-d Who has larger designs. Yet on a higher level, all these free, single, individual decisions and acts fall into an overall pattern determined and predestined by G-d Himself. Here

man acts out the role already written by G-d. The true story, therefore, is that man is both puppet and puppeteer, master and servant of his fate, molder of and molded by his destiny.

This is the inner, real story of the Megillah. It tells us to look at the grandiose figure cut by Ahashverosh, the Persian potentate. In reality he is a weakling, a despicably ineffectual piece of putty in the hands of his underlings and especially the hands of his Creator. He thinks he directs the current of events when in fact he is swept along the mighty tides and swift streams of history like driftwood on a raging river.

Take each individual event of the Megillah's story and it may appear insignificant. But put them together, and you have the marvelous unfolding of the will of the Hashgahah — Divine Providence. No individual detail seems to make too much sense in and of itself. But when you finish the reading of the story, they all fit into their places and assume a meaning that surpasses what the individual actors could possibly have known at the time they were performing their normal deeds. And throughout the story, the king who might otherwise — insofar as *shalom* is concerned — appear as the Great Man, appears to us, in *emet*, as a pawn and a puppet. He plays only a minor role in which there are greater actors, and in which the director and producer is the Almighty.

No wonder that the Book of Esther is part of *Kitvei Kodesh*, Holy Scripture. And no wonder that the Rabbis, asking, “*Remez le-Esther min ha-Torah minayin*, where do we find a hint or reference to Esther in the Bible?” answer: With the verse “*ve-anokhi haster astir panai*, and I shall hide my face on that day” (*Hullin* 139b). The name of Esther is etymologically related to the word *hastir*, to hide or conceal. The story of Esther is a story that is concealed within the book. Behind the veil of mundane events, in which man arrogantly assumes that he is the sole master of his own destiny and that all that counts is power and might, G-d smilingly, but in His mysterious way, guides His universe and directs the flow of history. The Book of Esther is, indeed, the story of *hastir*.

Megillat Esther, the document of *divrei shalom ve-emet*, words of peace and truth, is most appropriate to our own day. For we, not only one day a year, but throughout the twelve months, live a life of Purim. We will recall that the derivation of the word “Purim” is from the *pur*, the lots that Haman threw. Purim therefore means “fateful days,” and in these fateful days, with the imminent threat of cosmic catastrophe, all human beings, but especially Jews, must learn the two lessons of the Book of Esther. They are, first, that we must seek to accommodate the principles of *shalom* and *emet*; that it is possible for them to co-exist, to maintain the integrity of *emet*, or truth, and at the same time live a life of *shalom*, or peacefulness, as we have explained.

But even more important is the story of *emet* as such, the real, inner, concealed story of the Megillah. It is that, despite all appearances, nothing we do is insignificant or inconsequential in the eyes of G-d. Despite occasional feelings of inferiority and flashes of meaninglessness, we are all actors in a great, divine drama. Not all is as it appears to be. What sometimes appears as great might and overwhelming power is often only a mirage in the desert of life. And in that desert, the real oasis is the will of G-d, and the human aspiration to reach out for the Almighty and follow His ways. This is what Mordecai and Esther have taught us. And that is why, in the words of the Megillah, “their memories shall not vanish from their children” — nor from our children and our children's children unto the end of time.

<http://www.aish.com/h/pur/f/249296211.html>

Megillah Torah Teasers

by Moshe Erlbaum

1. Aside from Ahashverosh, which other kings appear in the Megillah? Yechanya the king of Judah, and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Bavel (Esther 2:6).
2. Which two people in the Megillah have names that begin with the letter Vav?

Queen Vashti and Vayzasa, the tenth son of Haman (Esther 9:9).

3. Aside from wine, what other item mentioned in the Megillah is served at the Passover seder?

Karpas, the vegetable dipped in salt water, is mentioned in the Megillah, albeit with a different meaning (Esther 1:6).

4. The gallows that Haman intended to hang Mordechai on were 50 cubits long (Esther 5:14). Where in the book of Genesis do we find wood measuring 50 cubits?

In parshas Noach, the width of the ark was 50 cubits (Genesis 6:15).

5. What golden item appears in the Megillah four times, but nowhere else in the Bible?

A golden scepter is mentioned four times but nowhere else in the Bible (Esther 4:11, 5:2, 8:4).

6. Aside from the month of Adar, what other months are mentioned in the Megillah?

Esther was taken to the king in the month of Teves (Esther 2:16). Haman arranged the lottery in Nissan (Esther 3:7). Mordechai's letters allowing the Jews to destroy their enemies were sent in Sivan (Esther 8:9).

7. "I killed my wife because of my friend, and killed my friend because of my wife." Who am I?

Achashverosh killed his wife Vashti upon the advice of Memuchan (Haman), and later killed Haman upon the words of his wife Esther.

8. What is the connection between the first verse of the Megillah and the first verse of parshas Chayei Sarah?

The first verse of the Megillah states that Achashverosh ruled over 127 provinces. The first verse of parshas Chayei Sarah states that Sarah lived for 127 years (Genesis 23:1).

9. About whom and about what does it state, "And the matter pleased [him]"? (3 answers)

It pleased Achashverosh to execute Vashti and to send letters declaring that every man should dominate his household (Esther 1:21). Achashverosh was also pleased by the idea of choosing a new queen (Esther 2:4). Haman was pleased to make gallows to hang Mordechai (Esther 5:13).

from: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com>

date: Mon, Mar 21, 2016 at 12:19 PM

subject: Torah Musings Daily Digest for 3/21/2016

**Purim, the Invention of Anti-Semitism,
and the Celebration of Jewish Creativity**
By Yaakov Elman

The Book of Esther represents a turning point in Jewish history: the demonization of the Jews

Purim is the closest Judaism gets to carnival. We are enjoined to get bashed and boozed, tight and tipsy to the point that we cannot distinguish Haman from Mordecai. Or, as Rabbi Pinchas Stolper put it, "the 'goyish' character of the celebration of Purim must appear to any newcomer ... as uniquely alien to the Jewish spirit." In Pahad Yitzhak Purim, *Quntras ha-Reshimot* 5, Rav Yitzchok Hutner reports on a European Purim custom whereby "Purim players" would enter a house and sing: "Today is Purim, tomorrow is out; give us a drink and throw us out!" And he reported that a certain great scholar forbade that jingle to be sung before him.

Two months ago we turned to Rav Yitzchok Hutner's understanding of Hanukkah within the context of Jewish history; for Purim we would like to turn to the same source—his magnum opus, *Pahad Yitzhak*, but in this case, with the indirection appropriate to the occasion, to one of his discourses on Yom Kippur, since, as he reminds us (in the volume on Purim) "Yom Kippurim is ke-Purim," Yom Kippur is like Purim; that is, there are similarities between the two days that are worth exploring. As Rav Hutner explained, Hanukkah marks one watershed in human history: the rise of individualism, and the effect that had on the Jews and their understanding of the Torah, which became an increasingly human document—with G-d's

approval. According to Pahad Yitzhak, however, that process began earlier, with the return of the exiled Judeans and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple under Persian auspices and the direction of Ezra and Nehemiah—and under the influence of another watershed event, which we commemorate on Purim.

Rav Hutner points to a rabbinic source that interprets a puzzling statement in Nehemiah 8:17; the verse in question observes that the Jews celebrated Sukkot by building sukkot and living in them for the duration of the festival—something that had not been done since the times of Joshua bin Nun. How could that be, asks the Talmud (Arakin 32b)? Could it really be the case that David, King of Israel and progenitor of the Messiah, that King Solomon, builder of the Temple, had not celebrated Sukkot as the Torah mandates?

The Talmud reports:

He [Ezra] had prayed for mercy in regard to the passion for idolatry and he removed it, and his merit then shielded them even as the sukkah [shields its inhabitants, from a root meaning "to shield"].

As Rav Hutner goes on to explain in Pahad Yitzhak, *Yom Kippur* 7.2:

These words are difficult to parse, for we have often found that the merit of mitzvot and good deeds protect and save [their doers]—without comparisons and analogies! This [protection] is thus simple [to understand and requires no further explanation or analogy to the sukkah]. ... But a deeper analysis will teach us that this act of Ezra in abolishing the inclination for idolatry [which had led to the destruction of the Temple] was a unique event from the time of Creation onward to the End of Days and the salvation of humanity. For in all the unfolding of events of human history no analogue may be found to this abolition of an inclination so deeply rooted in the human psyche.

Indeed, this event is a foretaste of the End of Days, when, as the prophets foretell, our hearts of stone will be turned to flesh, the foreskin of our hearts will be circumcised, and so on.

In Pahad Yitzhak, *Yom Kippur* 10.4 Rav Hutner then connects this epochal event with another unusual event, the ceremony of the Rejoicing of the Water Drawing in the Temple on Sukkot, which, the sages inform us, represented the acme of joy. Rav Hutner explains this as a celebration of the end of idolatry. Moreover, this was a foretaste of another epochal event: the end of humanity's inclination to sin altogether, which will occur at that End of Days, when our bifurcated nature will be made whole in the service of G-d.

And as he explains in Pahad Yitzhak, *Yom Kippur* 15.4-5

4. And this is what we said [above], based on the principle of the Maharal that the sanctity of the First Temple issued from the Giver, while the sanctity of the Second Temple came from the recipient [(Israel)—YE], and this difference in the sanctity of the Temple was clearly recognizable in the building itself [since the Second Temple lacked the ark—YE], and so too this difference was revealed in the eras of the two Temples. For the governance of the Collectivity of Israel during the period of the First Temple was by the prophets, while its governance during the Second Temple period was by the Men of the Great Assembly and their disciples, as we have it in the Mishnah at the beginning of Avot, "the prophets handed it over to the Men of the Great Assembly." And the Men of the Great Assembly are the ones who said "erect fences to the Torah," and overwhelmingly the enactments, decrees and "words of the Scribes" are from the period of the Second Temple, and we hold that all the enactments continue in force because of their dissemination among all of Israel. And all of this shows clearly (lit., "shows with a finger") that even in regard to (the nature) of the period of the two temples, that of the First Temple was closer to the Giver, while that of the Second Temple was closer to the recipient.

5. And we continue to draw the line further, from the difference between the two temples in their building to the difference between the two temples in their destruction, for the Maharal taught us that the destruction of the two temples stands within the secret of zeh le'umat zeh (parallel developments)

in regard to their building. Since the sanctity of the First Temple was from the Giver, so too the breaches that caused its destruction were the sins and transgressions in relation to G-d, that is, the three most heinous transgressions [of idolatry, sexual crimes, and murder—YE]. However, in regard to the Second Temple, whose sanctity in its building was from the recipients, the breaches that caused its destruction were the failings in the actions of the recipients, that is, baseless hatred within the Collectivity of Israel itself.

As it happens, historians, following the German philosopher Karl Jaspers, have marked this period as an “Axial Age,” when many cultures of the Eurasian continent underwent a decisive change—from the Hebrew prophets to the Greek philosophers to Confucius—a change that turned them to a more inward but, at least for some, a more transcendental direction. One consequence was the end of idolatry. For the Jews, Purim marks that change.

This in turn may be connected to another event that the sages connected with Purim. In the Megillah it states that the Jews of Susa fulfilled and accepted this new holiday; but, notes the Talmud (in Shabbat 88a), should this not have been stated in the reverse? One fulfills what one accepts; what does it mean that they accepted after they fulfilled? Rather, says the Talmud, this expression refers to Jews’ acceptance of responsibility to cultivate the study of Torah, to apply human methods of analysis to the Torah’s commandments, a responsibility that would find its apogee only after the miracle of Hanukkah.

Hanukkah and Purim share their status as festivals established after the Sinaitic revelation; they were initiated by human beings responding to what they perceived as miraculous events, thus passing a human judgment on a hidden divine act. The rabbis contrast this voluntary acceptance of the Torah with the scene at Mount Sinai, when, as the Talmud puts it: “The Holy One, blessed be He, overturned the mountain upon them like an [inverted] cask, and said to them, ‘If you accept the Torah, ‘tis well; if not, there shall be your burial.’” In other words, Purim, when the Jews accepted the Torah willingly, is the completion of a process that began on that first Yom Kippur, when Moses descended the mountain bearing the second set of tablets containing the Decalogue.

In the light of all this, however, the paradox deepens: Why do we celebrate this by becoming drunk on Purim? And what does the Book of Esther, in which G-d is never mentioned explicitly, have to do with Torah study and explication? The key to understanding the puzzle of Purim lies in Haman’s charge against the Jews in Esther 3:8: “Their laws are different from every other nation, and they do not observe the King’s laws.” Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Temple because the Judeans had rebelled. Haman was proposing to destroy them only because they and their laws were “different”—a charge that would echo throughout history.

The Book of Esther represents a turning point in Jewish history: the invention of anti-Semitism and the demonization of the Jews, whose laws are different and who are scattered; Purim thus represents both a new acceptance of those laws and a strengthening of the communal bonds of a scattered people. It also represents a new dispensation of divine governance: The age of open supernatural intervention was over. As the rabbis put it: Esther is prefigured in the Torah by the verse “I will surely hide (haster astir) my face from them” (Deuteronomy 31:18, see Talmud Hulin 139b).

Purim thus represented a double watershed: the removal of direct divine intervention along with the decay of idolatry; the Persian monarchy was Zoroastrian, a religion that did not worship idols, but rather the fire as a symbol of the creator, whom they called Ahura Mazda, “Lord Wisdom.” Lord Wisdom had revealed himself to Zoroaster with detailed prescriptions for leading a religiously sanctioned life. The Babylonian gods did not do that; with the advent of Zoroastrianism, Haman could attempt to manipulate Ahasuerus by pointing out a vital religious difference between the Persians and the Jews: therefore, “it is not worth tolerating them,” as he goes on to say.

Persians and Jews both worshiped a benevolent creator who was intent on extirpating evil and gave his worshipers laws to guide them in strengthening the forces for good. In such a case, one might expect the sociologists’ “Law of the Martian” to apply, that is, the smaller the differences between two views, the more intense the struggle between them. But in this case it was not so: The Persian emperors ruled the largest empire known to that time, consisting of 127 multi-ethnic and multi-religious provinces. Taxes were more important than religion. The Purim plot was very much an exception to the position of the Jews under successive Persian dynasties. And so, ultimately, Haman—who was not a Persian—failed, the Temple was rebuilt under Persian auspices, and the Jews and Persians went on to over a millennium of peaceful co-existence. But Purim remains and will remain, because that charge still has force: “Their laws are different!”

But why the drink and song, carnival atmosphere, costumes, and other shenanigans? Exilic Judaism is a sober religion; mourning and reflection come more naturally to it than joy and celebration. As a persecuted minority Jews could not “let themselves go.” Purim is an anomaly, as is Simhat Torah, whose popular nature and origin are well-known; the Talmud is unaware of it. And so in *Pahad Yitzhak Purim*, *Quntras ha-Reshimot 2* we find the following:

From holy books and writers we know that the essential aspect of Purim is not that it reveals the sanctity of Jewish thought, not that it reveals the sanctity of Jewish character-traits, but rather—the sanctity of the Jewish body. For in the final analysis the miracle of Purim was the salvation of Jewish bodies. ... Hanukkah was the salvation of Jewish spirituality; but Purim was the salvation of Jewish bodies.

We may connect this with another aspect of Purim: drinking to the point of insensibility, to the point of not being able to distinguish “Blessed be Mordechai!” and “Cursed be Haman!”

Further on in *Quntras ha-Reshimot*, in no. 9, we find the following observation:

The sanctity of Purim is built entirely on impressions. Everyone understands that it is impossible to begin with [that state of] “that he not distinguish [blessing from curse].” That [state] of insensibility is built on a prior [state of] knowledge which is now gone. It is thus understandable that since Purim is built entirely on the law of impressions, it is most effective in strengthening the power of the sanctity of impressions.

Rabbi Stolper, in his adaptive translation of this passage identifies “impressions” (*roshem*) with the subconscious, a concept introduced into Jewish thought over a century ago by Rav Israel Salanter. As Rabbi Stolper put it:

I must first know and discern a great deal on the conscious level, all the while forming holy impressions on the subconscious. Only then can I trust myself to suspend conscious intelligence for a day, with the confidence that my inner compass will guide my drunken body away from misbehavior.

We may put it slightly differently. Torah study is consciously and unremittably intellectual; Purim allows for unconscious intuition as a means of furthering our understanding. And that intuition fosters creativity, one of Rav Hutner’s major goals.

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From: Shlomo Katz <skatz@torah.org> to: hamaayan@torah.org date: Thu, Mar 17, 2016 at 1:05 AM subject: **Hamaayan** - Parshas Vayikra

“The Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honor.” (Esther 8:16)

The Gemara (Megilah 16b) states: “Light” refers to Torah; “gladness,” to yom tov; “joy,” to brit milah; and “honor,” to tefilin.

R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (Maharal of Prague; died 1609) writes: The Gemara is teaching that, when the Jewish People defeated Haman, they attained very high spiritual levels. Even though we had the Torah before the Purim miracle, the existence of Amalek (the nation of Haman) is an impediment to the Jewish People's complete attachment to the Torah. Therefore, to the extent that Amalek was subdued, the Jewish People merited greater "light," i.e., Torah.

Maharal continues: The Gemara is describing a progression of levels of the body's involvement in the mitzvah. Torah study involves only the most spiritual part of the soul. The gladness of yom tov includes eating and drinking, which involves the animal soul. Brit milah involves permanently imprinting a mitzvah on one's body. Finally, tefilin involves carrying an actual Name of Hashem on one's body. Thus, wearing tefilin is the highest form of joining one's physical being to the spiritual. (Ohr Chadash)

From: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org> to: rav-kook-list@googlegroups.com date: Tue, Mar 22, 2016 at 6:50 AM subject:

[Rav Kook Torah]

The Joy of Purim

The following description of Purim festivities in Rav Kook's home in Jerusalem, celebrated together with students from his yeshiva, took place in the 1930s, under the shadow of the rise of Nazi Germany.

Rav Kook, who had studied in the famed Volozhin yeshiva in his youth, transplanted the Volozhiner Purim merriment to his own yeshiva in Jerusalem, Mercaz HaRav.

Just as he would completely immerse himself in the special holiness of the Sabbath and holidays, so too, the joy of Purim would radiate from his entire being. On Purim, his happiness was evident in his exuberant speech; in his eyes, lit up like two merry torches; in the quickness of his movements; and in the lively content of his 'Purim Torah.'

The joy began on Purim evening. The yeshiva students hastened to the Rav's house wearing a riot of masks and costumes. Some were clothed in the long black coats worn by rabbis and rabbinical judges; others dressed in the shtrreimels and colorful striped cloaks typical of the ultra-Orthodox of Jerusalem. A few arrived with exotic turbans and keffiyehs, while others wore the flat caps and short-sleeve shirts of manual laborers.

The Purim festivity was a mixed multitude of colors and hues, a cacophony of singing, cantorial renditions, Talmudic sing-song, and the melodious trope of Megillah reading. In addition to the yeshiva students, many prominent Jerusalemites showed up: Torah scholars and academics, political activists and writers, all of whom came to visit the Chief Rabbi in a time of exuberant happiness.

Rav Kook spoke of the simhah of the Jewish people, an inner joy that sings within the soul. This joy is not like the superficial delight of other nations, one that comes from transient pleasures and fades away in the blink of an eye. "O Israel, do not rejoice in joy like the nations" (Hosea 9:1). No, no, he emphasized. Our joy is fundamentally different.

Our custom is to wear costumes on Purim, the rabbi explained, because it is an auspicious time to frustrate the plans of the prosecuting angel. Temporarily, we adopt the customs of Amalek: we wear his clothes, become inebriated, and act frivolously. The prosecuting angel sees us as one of his own and forgets about us. In this way, the Sages' directive to drink on Purim enables us to abrogate the evil designs of Amalek.

In the middle of his speech, Rav Kook suddenly stood up and began to sing with great elation, "Do not fear, My servant Jacob! Do not fear, do not fear!" (Jeremiah 46:27) Then, to confuse the prosecuting angel, he sang the same tune, but translated the verse to Russian. In the following talks, he interjected Russian, German, and English words, thus adding to the general Purim spirit.

When the festivities reached their height, the Rav stood at the head of the table and began a lengthy Purim discourse. He examined every mitzvah in the Torah, interpreting each one as a source for the obligation to drink on

Purim. With a wonderful blend of erudition and ingenuity, he derived from every mitzvah a metaphorical, homiletic, mystical, or even literal proof that one is obligated to drink "until one is unable to distinguish between cursed Haman and blessed Mordechai" (Megillah 7b).

Waging War on Amalek

That was the year in which persecution and violence burst forth across Germany. Synagogues were ransacked and set on fire; Jewish books were burned on public pyres; and Jews were beaten, robbed, and deported. Rav Kook sensed the impending Holocaust.

Suddenly, he rose, slid his hat to the side of his head like a soldier, girded his belt, and barked out like a drill sergeant, "Come, my sons! Let us forge a battalion to wage war on Amalek!"

Everyone stood at attention, and the rabbi marched before them. Shouting commands in garbled Russian, he led his 'battalion' through the corridors of the house. He sang, and they repeated after him, "Blot out! Blot out! Blot out the memory of Amalek!" He passed among the columns of 'soldiers,' singing with a military tune, "Let the tribes of His nation sing His praise; for G-d will avenge His servants' blood, and bring vengeance upon His foes" (Deuteronomy 32:43). The rabbi's eyes blazed, his body shook with emotion, and all marched after him in song.

Rav Kook then discharged the 'troops' and they returned to the yeshiva, where he lectured on the special portion of the Jewish people.

Our lot may be one of troubles, but nonetheless, "Fortunate is the people for whom it is thus" (Psalms 144:15). Even if we are persecuted all over the world, we are still privileged, since "Fortunate is the people for whom the Eternal is their G-d" (ibid). Israel never truly sins. Even in the time of Haman, they only bowed to the idols to show their allegiance; they did not really worship them. Sometimes a Jew puts on a costume and pretends to be a sinner. But on the inside, he is as pure as crystal.

Amalek declared war on Israel. And precisely in times of war, we must engage in Torah study. In the terrifying abyss of the battle between purity and impurity, we make our home in the depths of Torah.

(Stories from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Mo'adei HaRe'iyah, pp. 263-264; Celebration of the Soul, pp. 125-126)