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Parsha Potpourri

Purim – Vol. 13, Issue 21

Compiled by **Rabbi Ozer Alport**

Vi'Es Sheva Hanearos Hareuyos Lases Lah (Esther 2:9)

When Esther was taken to Achashverosh's palace as one of the candidates to replace Vashti as queen, she found favor in the eyes of Hegai, who was in charge of guarding the women, and he arranged for her to have seven young attendants who were fit for her. In what way were Esther's assistants specifically suitable for her? The Nesivim HaMishpat explains that even though Esther refused to disclose her identity or nationality, she was miraculously provided with seven Jewish girls to serve her. This made her feel more comfortable, and it was a sign from Hashem that He had not forgotten about her even while she appeared to be abandoned and forlorn in the king's palace.

What did Esther's attendants do to take care of her? The Targum writes that they specifically made sure to bring her kosher food. Additionally, the Midrash (Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 50) teaches that the reason Mordechai walked around in front of the court of the women's house (2:11) was to try to ensure that Esther would not eat any non-kosher food. Why were Esther's helpers and Mordechai more concerned about the food she ate than about her observance of other mitzvos?

The Vilna Gaon explains that the Jewish people committed two sins for which they were threatened with destruction. They went to Achashverosh's party where they ate non-kosher food, and they bowed down to a statue in the times of Nevuchadnezzar. In order to rectify these two sins, they had to engage in both teshuvah (repentance) and fasting. The teshuvah corrected the sin of bowing down to the idol, while refraining from eating during the 3-day fast (4:16) rectified the sin of eating the food at Achashverosh's party. For this reason, there were two redeemers in the Megillah: Mordechai and Esther. Mordechai atoned for the sin of bowing down to the statue through his refusal to bow down to Haman (3:2), while Esther's mission was to correct the sin of eating at Achashverosh's party.

In light of this explanation, Rav Yitzchok Sorotzkin writes that we now appreciate why there was such a specific focus on Esther not eating non-kosher food while she was in the king's palace, for her role was specifically

to rectify this sin through her dedication to eating only kosher food. He adds that perhaps this was one of Mordechai's deeper intentions in commanding Esther not to reveal her identity (2:20), because if Achashverosh knew that she was an observant Jew, he would gladly give her kosher food, and she would lose the merits she created through her challenges and struggles.

Layehudim Hayisa Ora Visimcha Visason Viyikar (Esther 8:16)

After Haman was killed, Achashverosh bequeathed his estate to Mordechai and Esther and gave them permission to write a new decree in his name, and they issued a royal order permitting the Jewish people to gather together and kill their enemies. Mordechai then went out wearing royal garments, which caused the Jews in Shushan to rejoice, and they had light, gladness, joy, and honor.

On a literal level, the Megillah is informing us that after so much darkness and sadness, the Jews now felt redeemed and experienced happiness, and respect. However, the Gemora (Megillah 16b) interprets each of these four expressions as a reference to a mitzvah that the Jewish people were now able to keep. Orah (light) refers to Torah, simcha (happiness) describes Yom Tov, sasson (joy) corresponds to circumcision, and yekar (honor) represents tefillin, which is somewhat perplexing.

If the Megillah wanted to tell us that the Jews now had these four mitzvos, why did it do so using code words instead of explicitly writing, "The Jewish people had Torah, Yom Tov, bris milah, and tefillin?" Further, the Megillah's statement that they now had these mitzvos seems to imply that they were lacking them until now. As Haman never attempted to prevent them from observing mitzvos, why would that have been the case?

Rav Gedaliah Schorr explains that these were not new mitzvos that the Jewish people suddenly received at this time, and they performed them long before the events recorded in the Megillah. The problem was that they were performing the mitzvos half-heartedly, by rote. They were going through the motions, but their hearts and minds were elsewhere.

The Gemora (Megillah 13b) records that when Haman approached Achashverosh with his plan to annihilate the Jews, Achashverosh responded that he was scared that he would be punished like everybody else who had attempted to harm them in the past. Haman responded that this time was different, because the Jewish G-d had grown old and no longer had the strength to save them, an argument that Achashverosh accepted. This dialogue is difficult to understand. If Achashverosh acknowledged Hashem's power and believed in the miracles He had performed on our behalf previously, how could he be so naïve as to think that Hashem suddenly aged and no longer had the ability to protect us?

Rav Eliezer Ginsburg explains that Hashem kavayachol (so-to-speak) receives His strength from us, and to the extent that we are strong and committed to doing mitzvos with joy and alacrity, He displays might in protecting us, but when we perform mitzvos weakly and without vigor, His manifested power correspondingly diminishes. Therefore, when Haman observed that the Jews in his generation were doing mitzvos without energy, as if they had grown old and weak, he argued that Hashem would now conduct Himself as if He was also old and weak, and He would no longer allow Himself to come to their defense.

The Gemora (Megillah 16a) teaches that while Haman was busy plotting against the Jews and building the gallows, Mordechai was engaged in teaching Torah. The Midrash (Esther Rabbah 10:4) adds that he was learning Torah with children. Why was Mordechai specifically teaching Torah to children? Rav Ginsburg explains that although the adults were also studying Torah, they had lost their excitement and zeal. Mordechai recognized that everything children do, they do with enthusiasm, and the merit of their learning Torah with passion and fervor would kavayachol make Hashem young again and give Him energy to save the Jews.

With this introduction, we can now appreciate that at this point in the Megillah, the hidden miracles that the adults witnessed while living through these events inspired them to reaccept the Torah. In contrast to the initial

acceptance at Mount Sinai that took place under duress, this time they accepted it willingly and lovingly (Shabbos 88a). As a result, they no longer felt that they were doing mitzvos because they had to. They now learned Torah because they wanted to, as they recognized that Torah is the true and only light. They now kept Yom Tov not because of a fear of punishment for desecrating it, but because they understood that Yom Tov is the real source of simcha. They circumcised their sons not only because the Torah required them to do so, but because they realized that bris milah is synonymous with sasson, and they wore tefillin not just to fulfill the daily obligation to do so, but because they internalized that tefillin are the true source of Jewish honor.

Rav Dovid Feinstein suggests that for this reason, the Megillah refers to itself (9:26) not as a sefer (book), but as an iggeres (letter), which is unusual. The Megillah is one of the 24 books of Tanach; why should we call it a letter? The difference between a book and a letter is that after a person has read a book once, he knows the plot and isn't interested in reading it again. If somebody compels him to reread it, he will do so, but his heart won't be in it. A letter, on the other hand, is something that a person looks forward to receiving in the mail, and as soon as it arrives, he tears it open and reads it with excitement. The Megillah refers to itself as a letter to teach us that although we read it year after year, we should do so with excitement and enthusiasm, as if we are opening a newly-delivered letter that we have been anxiously awaiting.

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Intriguing Purim Questions

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Purim Damage

An inebriated Purim drop-in damaged some property in our house. May we collect damages?

Question #2: Hurt at a Wedding

At a wedding, two people collided, causing one of them to break a leg and lose work time. Is the person who hurt him liable?

Question #3: Purim Dress

Is it permitted for a man to wear a woman's dress on Purim?

Introduction:

In a previous article, we discussed whether someone who damaged property in the course of festivities is required to make compensation. We learned that there are sources on this topic dating back to the time of the Beis Hamikdash!

As we noted in the earlier article, early sources in the Mishnah and Gemara discuss whether one is required to pay for harm that occurred in the course of a celebration. According to Rashi's interpretation, after the completion of the hakafos in the Beis Hamikdash on Hoshanah Rabbah, the adults would grab the lulavim and esrogim from the children and eat the esrogim. Rashi explains that there was no prohibition involved, because this was part of the holiday festivities.

Most, but not all, authorities accept this approach. The Beis Yosef (Orach Chayim 695) quotes some of the sources that excuse the merryman from damages, but states that this immunity exists only in communities where this type of rowdy behavior is commonplace. He then notes that in the area in which he lives, this type of raucous celebrating does not exist. Therefore, we understand why he omits any discussion of exempting merryman from damages in the Shulchan Aruch. On the other hand, numerous other authorities, predominantly Ashkenazim, exempt a person from paying damages that occur as a result of mitzvah gaiety (e.g., Mordechai, Sukkah 743; Agudah, Sukkah; Terumas Hadeshen 2:210; Yam shel Shelomoh, Bava Kama 5:10). The Rema rules this way in three different places (Orach

Chayim 695:2; 696:8; Choshen Mishpat 378:9), and it is accepted subsequently as normative halacha.

Limitations

Notwithstanding the generally accepted approach that a merryman is exempt from paying damages, there are exceptions.

Physical injury

Does this exemption of liability apply, even when there is physical injury? The Magen Avraham raises this question and notes that it is the subject of a dispute among halachic authorities. He quotes the Keneses Hagedolah, who rules that one is obligated to pay for physical harm, whereas the Agudah rules that one is not. I noted in the first part of this article that the Terumas Hadeshen appears to agree with the Agudah that one is exempt, even when there is physical injury. His case was someone who used holiday festivities as an excuse to push another person very hard, causing major injury. The Terumas Hadeshen obligated him to pay, because the injury was intentional, but seemed to accept that if the damage had been a result of merryman, there would be no obligation to pay.

Why is he exempt?

Until now, we have been talking about whether a merryman is excused from financial compensation for damages, and we have discussed sources that exempt him, at least under certain circumstances, and other sources that do not. The next step in our discussion is to understand why he should be exempt. The halachic rule is that odom mu'ad le'olam, a person is always responsible to pay for damage that he causes (Mishnah, Bava Kama 26a). Why is there an exception for a merryman?

I have found three halachic approaches that suggest why the person responsible for causing damage is exempt from paying. As we will see, there are practical differences in halacha that result from the different approaches.

1. Implied mechilah

When people participate in an activity together, there is an implied mechilah that one will not collect damages.

2. Hefker beis din hefker

In order to not put a damper on people's celebrating, Chazal exercised their authority of hefker beis din hefker (Bach, Yoreh Deah 182).

3. Mitzvos are different

There is a special exemption for people participating in a mitzvah.

Not mutually exclusive

We should note that the three reasons we have mentioned are not mutually exclusive. A halachic authority might hold that two or three of the reasons apply. In other words, someone might contend that whenever damage occurs in the course of a simcha shel mitzvah, the party responsible is exempt for any of the reasons provided.

1. Implied mechilah

One possible reason to exempt the merryman from damages is because of a principle that when people participate in an activity together, there is an implied mechilah that one will not collect damages. Here is an early example of such a ruling:

Two people were wrestling. In the course of their bout, one of the combatants knocked the other to the floor and then pounced on him.

Unfortunately, his opponent suffered serious permanent injury as a result.

The question asked of the Rosh is whether there is an obligation to pay damages.

The Rosh ruled that two people who decide to wrestle agree implicitly that each is mocheil the other for damages that happen as a result of their activity. Therefore, one cannot afterward submit a financial claim for injury (Teshuvos HaRosh #101:6). The Rosh is teaching us a halachic principle that one cannot claim damages that result from an activity that he joined willfully. Similarly, if someone stomps inadvertently on another person's foot during dancing at a wedding or on Simchas Torah, there is no requirement to pay damages. Everyone knows that, in the course of the dancing in a crowded shul on Simchas Torah or at a wedding, occasionally someone is going to step on your foot. It is quite clear that everyone accepts

that this may happen and is mocheil the person responsible. If you want to be certain not to get hurt, don't participate in the dancing.

Minor damage

Notwithstanding that the logic asserted by the Rosh is undoubtedly true, it cannot be the only reason for the halacha exempting merrymakers from damage, for the following reason: According to Rashi's understanding of the Mishnah quoted above, adults took the lulavim and esrogim of children, and this was acceptable because it was part of the holiday celebration. Yet, children do not have the halachic ability to be mocheil. Thus, at least according to Rashi, the heter releasing a merryman from liability must be based on a different halachic principle.

2. Hefker beis din hefker

The principle of hefker beis din hefker allows a rabbinic court, or someone with equivalent authority, the halachic ability to forfeit a person's ownership or claims. In our instance, it means that they rescinded the claimant's rights to collect for damages that he incurred. The Bach assumes that the reason for exempting a merryman from paying damages is because Chazal exercised their authority of hefker beis din hefker in order not to put a damper on people celebrating (Bach, Yoreh Deah 182). In other words, someone may be reluctant to join the dancing at a wedding or on Simchas Torah out of concern that he may inadvertently hurt someone and be liable for damages. In order that people celebrate without reservation, Chazal exempted participants in certain semachos from paying damages.

This approach explains why adults were permitted to commandeer the property of children as part the Sukkos celebration, even though children cannot be mocheil. Although a child's statement that he forgives someone's liability to him has no legal status, Chazal have the ability to forfeit such a claim.

3. Mitzvos are different

Here is yet another explanation why a merryman is exempt from paying damages: This is because the merryman was performing a mitzvah whose proper fulfillment precludes being as careful about one's actions as one ordinarily must be. We find a similar idea in the following passage of Gemara (Bava Kama 32a): Someone running through a public area – an action that is otherwise considered unacceptable and liable – is exempt from paying damages if, in his rush to be ready for Shabbos, he collides with another person. Since he is racing for a mitzvah, he is not liable (see Piskei Rid ad locum).

The same approach can be applied to our merryman. He will be unable to entertain properly if he is constantly thinking of the legal responsibility that might result from his actions. Therefore, as long as his celebrating is within normally accepted limits, he is exempt from damages that result. Later in this article, I am going to suggest that an early halachic authority, Rav Yehudah Mintz, usually called the Mahari Mintz, held this way.

Hurt at a wedding

At this point, let us examine the second of our opening questions: At a wedding, two people collided, causing one of them to break a leg and lose work time. Is the person who hurt him liable?

According to the Terumas Hadeshen and the Agudah, there is no requirement in this instance to pay damages, since they rule that a merryman is exempt from damages even if there was physical injury. In this instance, the Bach would also agree that he is exempt since, although there is physical injury, it is likely to heal, and he rules that as long as no permanent damage resulted, a merryman is exempt from making compensation. However, it would seem that the Keneses Hagedolah, who rules that physical injury is not included in this exemption from compensation, would require our merryman to pay.

Purim Dress

At this point, we will examine the third question asked above: "Is it permitted for a man to wear a woman's dress on Purim?"

The Mahari Mintz was one of the greatest halachic authorities of 15th century Ashkenaz. Born in Germany, he was the rav of Padua, Italy, for 47 years, where he founded one of the most famous yeshivos of his era. (To play a bit of Jewish geography, the Maharam Padua, one of the Mahari Mintz's renowned disciples, who married the Mahari Mintz's granddaughter and also became his successor, was a cousin of the Rema.)

In a responsum, the Mahari Mintz addresses whether it is permitted for men to wear women's clothing as part of the Purim celebration and, vice versa, whether a woman may wear men's clothing. The Mahari Mintz quotes a mechutan of his, Rav Elyakim – whom the Mahari Mintz describes as knowing all areas of Torah and being the greatest halachic authority of his time – as having permitted this. The Mahari Mintz agrees with his mechutan, explaining that the prohibition against wearing other gender clothing is only when one's interest is to dress or act like the other gender, but not when one's goal is to celebrate. He quotes as proof an early ruling of the Riva, one of the baalei Tosafos, that all food grabbed by young men in the course of the Purim celebration is not considered stolen, provided that this happened sometime between the reading of the Megillah at night and the end of the Purim seudah (Shu"t Mahari Mintz, end of #16). Thus we see that celebrating Purim can sometimes exempt one from other obligations.

The Bach took great issue with the Mahari Mintz's ruling permitting the wearing of other gender clothing on Purim. Allow me to quote some of the Bach's discussion on the subject. "One should note that there is a practice on Purim that men wear women's clothing, and vice versa, without anyone protesting that this is a violation of halacha. According to what I explained above, wearing clothing of the opposite gender to appear like them is certainly forbidden. Rav Yehudah Mintz already discussed this issue in his responsum, saying that, since their intention is to celebrate Purim, there is no prohibition, similar to the ruling that a man may shave his underarm hair when it is uncomfortable (an act that is usually prohibited, because of the prohibition of men wearing women's clothing and performing activities that are considered feminine). However, it appears to me that what Rav Yehudah Mintz wrote is inaccurate, since Rabbi Eliezer of Metz [one of the baalei Tosafos, a disciple of Rabbeinu Tam, who lived in the 12th century] wrote explicitly that one may not wear clothing of the other gender in order to enhance the celebration of a choson and kallah... Without any question, had Rabbi Yehudah Mintz seen the words of Rabbi Eliezer of Metz, he would not have written what he did. Rabbi Yehudah Mintz also wrote that, since there is the established heter of grabbing food on Purim and it is not considered theft, similarly, changing clothing [to that of the other gender] is permitted. However, his logic here is erroneous, because in regard to money, there is a halachic rule of hefker beis din hefker... however, the city elders cannot permit something that is prohibited [such as wearing clothing of the other gender]" (Bach, Yoreh Deah 182).

Notwithstanding the Bach's disagreement, the Rema (Orach Chayim 696:8) rules that it is permitted to wear clothing of the other gender as part of the celebration of Purim, provided that one does so only on the day of Purim itself. (We should note that the Mishnah Berurah and many other late authorities frown on the practice.)

The question that we need to address is, what did Rabbi Yehudah Mintz hold is the reason to exempt a merryman from paying for damage that he caused? He could not have held either of the first two reasons we mentioned above, since neither reason would allow someone to celebrate by wearing clothing of the other gender, and Rabbi Yehudah Mintz compares the two practices. Apparently, he understood that the basis for exempting someone from payment is because he was involved in performing a mitzvah (celebrating Purim), and that wearing clothes of the opposite gender is prohibited only when one's motivation is to look somewhat like the other gender, but not when one is doing so to perform a mitzvah.

Conclusion

In general, we must realize that we should perform Hashem's mitzvos with much enthusiasm. Although this is an important value, we must also always

be careful that our enthusiastic observance of mitzvos does not cause harm. Nevertheless, we now know that there are instances when someone might be exempt from payment for damage he caused while he was performing a mitzvah, particularly when the mitzvah involved celebrating.

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The Trap of Wanting It All

Status-seeking underlies Haman's intense hatred of the Jews.

by **Rabbi Shraga Simmons**

Haman, the villain of the Purim story, lived a thousand years after the Torah was written. Yet with timeless vision, the Talmud (Chulin 139b) asks: Where is Haman's name hinted in the Torah?

The Sages cite Genesis 3:11, where God confronts Adam in the Garden: "Did you eat from this (hamin) forbidden tree?"

This is more than just clever wordplay. The deeper connection between Adam and Haman, explains Rabbi Shmuel Eidels (16th century Maharsha) is that both Adam and Haman lacked only one thing – and it drove them over the edge.

What was Adam's "one thing"?

Adam was given free reign in the Garden of Eden; the entire world was created for him alone. God designated only the Tree of Knowledge off limits – His way of drawing a line, of making clear to humanity: You are not God. There is only one God.

Adam obsessed about that "one thing." So when the Snake suggested that eating from the Tree would transform "human" into "deity," Adam challenged God and ate from the tree.

Fast forward to Haman, Prime Minister of a 127-country global empire, who fancied himself as a supreme being. Everyone bowed to Haman.

Except for one. Mordechai the Jew.

Haman had power, privilege and prestige – yet his ego required constant validation.

Haman had everything – power, privilege, and prestige. Yet upon seeing Mordechai refusing to kowtow, Haman became enraged. "None of this power means anything to me, as long as I see Mordechai the Jew sitting at the king's gate" (Esther 5:13).

Haman's ego was in need of constant validation and he could not bear such rejection. Tormented, he vowed to destroy the Jewish people – every man, woman and child.

What is the root of Haman's vicious reaction?

Ultimately, the single factor impeding every megalomaniac's quest for global domination is God. Mordechai, as leader of the Jewish people – representatives of monotheism – embodied the "one thing" that drove Haman crazy.

To silence this truth, Haman obsessively targeted Mordechai and the Jews. He built a gallows 80 feet high that could be seen throughout all of Shushan. More than simply hanging Mordechai, this was to be the ultimate statement of victory over the Jewish ideal. Then, everyone would acknowledge Haman's unparalleled superiority. His narcissistic ego could accept nothing less.

The Trap of Status-Seeking

Psychologists tell us that every person has a "realistic level" of importance and status – at home, at work, and in the community. Artificially raising that level with delusions of grandeur is unsustainable. Inevitably, reality hits, we fail to live up to that skewed level of importance and our self-esteem plummets.

As with Adam, the first step in emotional health is to know that every human is finite; only God is eternal. The closer relationship one has with God, the

more realistic we become about our own fallibility and mortality. Moses was called the "most humble" because when he stood before God he knew his place. The Talmud likens arrogance to idol worship; both push away the presence of God.

The first step in emotional health is to have our relationship with God in perspective

When a person knows his place and is realistic about his role in the greater scheme of things, his self-esteem is realistic, balanced and healthy.

One who places "self above God" is doomed to failure. It's no wonder that Haman the megalomaniac was hanged on the very gallows he'd prepared for Mordechai the Jew.

Status: The Currency of Today

The spirit of Amalek is hauntingly relevant for us today. The primary currency of Western society is status, and by our association with various people and things, our status is always rising or falling.

The pursuit of status raises an existential question: Is it better to look good or to be good? We confront this question every time we use social media. Are we sharing a genuine depiction of the reality of our lives, or do we post only those items that gain us status – i.e., an inflated version of "looking good" that we falsely project ourselves to be?

It's a vicious cycle. In order to constantly prop up an inflated ego, we seek adulation in the form of "likes," retweets, and endless stream of validation. Status-seeking removes a person from the world.

The Talmud (Avot 4:21) asserts that "status-seeking removes a person from the world." When self-esteem depends on adulation from others, linked to external circumstances beyond our control, it is a losing proposition.

Rebbetzin S. Feldbrand explains: When we worry about being accepted by others, we judge ourselves by the opinions of those whose moods, attitudes, and values are constantly changing. We place our happiness in the hands of people who themselves worry about how others judge them.

We constantly invest great amounts of energy into pleasing first one person, then another. We try to be one person in the morning, another during the day, and yet another at night. Sometimes, under pressure from others, we act in opposition to our true inner nature – leaving us empty and degraded. Inevitably, we can never win this game. Someone will always have more status than us. While physical desires have a saturation point, the desire for honor is based on falsehood and illusion. No amount will ever be fully satisfying. When an honor-seeker lacks the approval just one person, he feels bereft.

So despite all the status and power, as long as Mordechai the Jew refused to bow, Haman was unsatisfied. That is why Haman's wife Zeresh tells him (Esther 6:13): "If that's your attitude, you are destined to fail." You will never have everything, because when it comes to honor, appetite is insatiable.

The Jewish Mission Today

When the battle was finally over, the Jewish nation emerged victorious. It was a time of true Jewish unity, a dramatic reversal of the description Haman used to denounce the Jews as "a nation scattered and split" (Esther 3:8).

Jewish division and strife is what fueled Haman's confidence; thus prior to her risky unannounced visit to the king, Esther told Mordechai to "assemble all the Jews" (Esther 4:16) – i.e. we will succeed in counteracting Haman only if the Jews come together in unity.

This idea of a shared destiny was formalized in the Purim traditions (Esther 9:22). We send Mishloach Manot, gifts of food one to another, to engrain in us the message: To prevail, we must unite together.

The primary path to Jewish unity is Torah study, which facilitates the sharing of our unique inspirational message with the world.

Indeed, in wake of the Jewish victory over Haman, the Megillah reports that "the Jews had light" (Esther 8:16). This, the Talmud (Megilla 16b) explains, is the light of Torah, the guidepost for every generation of Jews.

Having witnessed the degradation of Haman – a genocidal madman bent on world domination – the Jews in Persia accepted the Torah anew. They

understood with renewed clarity that Torah stands as a bulwark against the corrupt drive for "status at all costs."

Haman's plan was thwarted because Mordechai the Jew would not budge from his stiff-necked loyalty to the monotheistic message. In the process, he saved humanity from barbarism. As it was true and relevant back then, we Jews believe, so it is today.

<http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/interviews-and-profiles/on-rav-soloveitchik-purim-and-pictures-of-women-an-interview-with-noted-posek-rav-hershel-schachter/2018/02/14/>

On Rav Soloveitchik, Purim, and Pictures Of Women: An Interview with Noted Posek Rav Hershel Schachter

By Elliot Resnick - 30 Shevat 5778 – February 14, 2018

Rav Hershel Schachter

Of all the students of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993), perhaps none is as famous as Rav Hershel Schachter. Rosh yeshiva and rosh kollel at Yeshiva University's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary for over half a century, Rav Schachter is an esteemed posek (he is senior posek for OU Kosher), a popular speaker, and the author of a number of sefarim, including three on Rav Soloveitchik, Nefesh HaRav, Mipninei HaRav, and Divrei HaRav.

A resident of Manhattan's Washington Heights neighborhood, Rav Schachter is the father of nine married children. His youngest son, Rabbi Shay Schachter, rosh beis medrash at the Young Israel of Woodmere, has recently become a popular Torah teacher in his own right.

The Jewish Press: What's your background?

Rav Schachter: I was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania, where my father had his first rabbinical position. He later became a rabbi in Philadelphia where I went to the local day school, which was called Beth Jacob; my wife says she's so frum because she married a boy from Bais Yaakov.

But Beth Jacob only went to the fifth grade, so after that my parents sent me to New York where my mother's parents lived. I went to [Yeshivas] Salanter in the Bronx and then to [Yeshiva University's] TA for high school. In my third year of high school, I had a rebbe who recommended that I be placed in Rav Soloveitchik's shiur; I stayed there for 10 years.

Rav Soloveitchik's 25th yearzeit is coming up on Chol HaMoed Pesach.

Many people speak of his shiurim with reverence. What made them so special?

Rav Soloveitchik had a tremendous power of oratory. He could take the most complicated Gemara and make it easy. He could talk for hours and you'd sit glued to your seat fascinated. He was unbelievable. When he had yearzeit for his father, he used to give a shiur for four hours. People flew in from out of town to hear it.

He was fantastic, and he had so many traditions from his father and both his grandfathers. His grandfather on his mother's side was Rav Eliyahu Feinstein, Rav Moshe Feinstein's uncle. I remember when I published my first sefer on Rabbi Soloveitchik, one of Rabbi Gifter's sons-in-law said to me, "Wow, Rabbi Soloveitchik had something to say on every page of the siddur and Chumash!" It's true.

Why is there so much controversy over the legacy of Rav Soloveitchik – with both religious conservatives and religious liberals claiming him as their own?

I used to mark the bechinos in Rabbi Soloveitchik's class for a couple of years – Rabbi Soloveitchik asked me to – and [I remember one test on which] one guy got an 8 and seven guys got 100. The guy who got the 8 – a big k'nocker – tells me what Rabbi Soloveitchik said. He doesn't know what he's talking about.

What would he say about the current movement to appoint women as rabbis in Orthodox shuls?

The first page in Yoreh De'ah says you can't appoint a woman as the shochet in town. Why? Rav Soloveitchik said because the shochet in Europe used to be like the assistant rabbi. Whenever the rabbi went on vacation, the shochet was the only one who knew Yoreh De'ah [and could fill in for him], so you can't have a woman as the town's shochet [because you can't have a woman filling in as rabbi].

Rav Soloveitchik said this clearly?

Yes, but they don't care what he said.

Some claim, however, that Rav Soloveitchik was understanding of modern movements and tried to give leeway sometimes.

He was very understanding, but he said, "You'll never satisfy the women's libniks, no matter how much you give in to them. They just want to change the whole Torah."

What's your opinion on publishing women's pictures in newspapers – an issue that people have been talking about recently?

I think it's a little silly, leaving out women as if women don't exist in this world.

People say it's done for reasons of tzinius – that it's not proper for men to see women's pictures.

If the women are half undressed, okay, don't print it. But we walk on the street and see women on the street. Some of the laws of tzinius are societal.

The Sefer Chassidim writes that we don't say "she'ha'simcha bimonon" at a Sheva Berachos if the crowd is mixed because the Shechinah won't be there. But the Levush (late 1500s, early 1600s) writes that it doesn't apply anymore because [seeing women] became normal.

We live in a mixed society. Maybe in the days of the Sefer Chassidim if they had newspapers, it wouldn't be appropriate to publish women's picture because women didn't walk on the streets. But we live in a different society.

Purim is approaching. What's your opinion on the current level of drunkenness one sees on this day?

It's scandalous. Purim is supposed to be a celebration of kabalas haTorah, accepting the Torah. In the days of the second Beis HaMikdash, there were many yamim tovim d'rabanon, all of which were batul after the churban habayis, except for Chanukah and Purim. Of all these yamim tovim, only one had a chiyuv seudah: Purim. The Gaonim had the girsa in the Gemara that the reason Purim is different is because it's yom kabalas haTorah.

The words "kimu v'kiblu" [which we read in the Megillah] mean that there was another kabalas hatorah, so l'kavod kabbalas haTorah you have to make an elaborate meal. Purim is supposed to be a serious holiday. We really should stay up all night learning Torah.

Isn't it also a happy day on which we celebrate our salvation?

Okay, so you drink a little until you become drowsy and take a nap as the Rema says in Shulchan Aruch, but it's not supposed to be the Jewish Halloween. It's scandalous.

Not long after Purim comes Pesach. Many people obsess over how much matzah they are supposed to eat at the Seder. Your definition of a kezayis, though, is rather smaller than what's currently popular.

I don't know what's popular. My father-in-law spent about two years by Rav Shimon Shkop rewriting the Shaarei Yosher. Rav Shkop asked the mashgiach from the Mir Yeshiva, Rav Yeruchom Levovitz, for a bachur who had a nice style of Hebrew, so he sent my father-in-law. He was there about two years, so he ate the Seder by Rav Shimon Shkop. He said five boys ate a kezayis from one matza. That's a pretty small kezayis.

Didn't you once say a kezayis is the size of the palm of one's hand?

Rav Chaim Volozhiner says that.

So why do people think a kezayis is much larger than that?

Exaggeration. They like to exaggerate about everything – l'hachmir and l'hakeil. Everybody exaggerates.

You are known as being in favor of wearing techeles nowadays. Why?

It says in the Chumash that we should wear techeles.

But people claim we don't know what authentic techeles is anymore.

Okay, but there's a very strong possibility that the [techeles produced by Ptil Tekhelet in Israel] may be the correct techeles, so if there is a possibility, safek d'Orasia l'chumra.

There is a growing movement in Israel of frum Jews ascending Har Habayit after going to the mikveh. What's your opinion on this movement?

The Rabbanut said you're not allowed to go on the Har Habayit. Now, the majority of the Jews in Eretz Yisrael are not shomrei mitzvos and are not really interested in what the Rabbanut says. In fact, they want to do away with the Rabbanut because it gives them problems – a kohen can't marry a grushah, he can't marry a mamzeres, he can't intermarry, etc. In Bnei Brak and Meah Shearim, they also couldn't care less what the Rabbanut says. So you're left only with the Modern Orthodox, the Dati Leumi, and now they too are ignoring the Rabbanut by going on the Har Habayit.

So the government will do away with the whole Rabbanut. What do you need it for? In Bnei Brak they don't hold from them, in Meah Shearim they don't hold from them, the overwhelming majority are secular, and the Dati Leumi are also not listening.

How do you go on the Har Habayis? We're going to be responsible for the demise of the Rabbanut. It will be a disaster. As bad as the situation is now, it's going to be worse if there's no Rabbanut.

Haven't you said in the past that one may, in theory, walk on certain parts of Har Habayis?

Yes, but if the Rabbanut said you shouldn't go, you have to listen to what they say. If they say a kula and you want to be machmir, gesunterheit. But to be meikel against them I think is not right.

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date: Wed, Feb 28, 2018 at 6:03 AM

subject: Rabbi Yakov Haber - The Two Day Holiday of Purim

Rabbi Yakov Haber

The Two Day Holiday of Purim

All Jewish holidays are universally celebrated on the same day. To be sure, in chutz la'aretz, the Biblically-mandated holidays are celebrated for two days, but all start on the same day. Furthermore, the whole purpose of keeping two days there is because of sefeika d'yoma - a doubt which used to exist in chutz la'aretz as to which day is the correct day based on the inability of the agents informing the residents of chutz la'aretz of the declared date of the previous Rosh Chodesh to get everywhere on time - but the goal is to keep the correct day everywhere. That is, all Jewish holidays except for Purim where different days are mandated for different types of cities. As the Talmud (Megila 2b) based on a careful reading of Megilas Esther indicates, unwalled cities celebrate Purim on the fourteenth of Adar, whereas walled cities celebrate on the fifteenth. Why the difference between Purim and all other holidays? The Talmud (ibid. 5b) additionally teaches that elements of festivity apply on both days known as yomei d'Puraya, the days of Purim, regardless of which day is kept as the primary holiday. [1] Why are there two days of Purim for all?

Ramban[2] (Chidushim, Megila 2a) presents a novel interpretation in answer to this question based on a detailed reading of Megilas Esther providing additional insights into the nature of the miraculous salvation of Purim and the need for a dual holiday. The return to Eretz Yisrael had already begun through Zerubavel and was later rejuvenated by Ezra and Nechemia before the Purim salvation (see book of Ezra-Nechemia). Ramban opines that the majority of the Jewish people already resided there at the time of the Purim miracle mostly or wholly in unwalled cities, the walls having been destroyed during the Babylonian conquest with the exception perhaps of Jerusalem. (See Nechemia Chapters 3-4; Ramban though seems to assume that Jerusalem at that time was also unwalled or perhaps not fully walled.) The Jews throughout the lands of their exile lived both in unwalled cities (arei

haperazim) and walled cities (mukafos choma): some of them exclusively Jewish; some of them mixed cities.

For apparent reasons, the residents of the unwalled cities felt the most vulnerable to Haman's decree, those in the walled cities less so as the wall would block the invaders from entering and allow battle against them from the wall. When the Purim miracle initially occurred, the Jewish residents of all cities outside Shushan celebrated on the day of their rest from battle, the 14th of Adar; the Jews of Shushan celebrated on their day of rest, the 15th. However, in subsequent years only the Jews of the unwalled cities (and presumably the Jewish residents of the mixed, walled cities who were also under threat from their non-Jewish co-residents) spontaneously continued to celebrate on the anniversary of their rest day after their deliverance, on the 14th of Adar. However, the residents of the walled cities, not feeling as vulnerable and not viewing the miracle as great, did not celebrate at all in subsequent years.

Mordechai and Esther, finding an allusion in the Torah to ordain Purim as a permanent holiday (see Megila 7a and 14a) promulgated a two-fold Rabbinic ordinance: they codified the practice already begun by the Jews of the unwalled cities to celebrate on the 14th (See Esther 9:19,23), and they further enacted a new holiday on the 15th for all walled cities following the model of the initial day of rest of Shushan, which was a walled city as well. They did so since they realized that the decree was indeed looming over the entire Jewish people and a wall alone did not provide guaranteed shelter without Divine intervention. They divided the holiday into different days of observance to commemorate the greater miracle of the salvation of the Jews of the unwalled cities and their initiative to establish a holiday on the anniversary of that date but insisted that all Jews celebrate since they were all in danger (see Esther 9:20,24,30). Since the miracle primarily affected the land of Israel where most Jews lived and those cities were all (or mostly) unwalled and would not in any way partake of the distinctive holiday for the more prominent walled cities, the definition of a walled city was extended to include any city which was walled as of the time of Yehoshua bin Nun even if the wall was currently in ruins. Even the walled cities with mixed populations who were under obvious grave threat initially from their non-Jewish co-residents were included in the 15th day observance so as not to distinguish between the fully Jewish "walled cities" of Israel (which had a wall during Yehoshua's time), the main center of the miracle, and other walled cities.

Ran (on Rif 1a ff.) challenges Ramban's thesis on several points including debating historically whether the majority of the Jewish people already resided in Eretz Yisrael then and prefers a different, simpler approach. Since the initial salvation was on the 14th for most cities and continued until the 15th for Shushan, the Sages of that generation wanted to commemorate the additional miracle for Shushan by having all walled cities - similar to Shushan - celebrate on Shushan's holiday. The definition of a walled city was backed up to Yehoshua's time in order to honor the land of Israel, not because that is where most of the Jewish population lived, but to have some cities of Eretz Yisrael, the central land of the Jewish people regardless of how many live there, also have the distinction of "walled" cities.[3] Rav Yitzchak Hutner (Pachad Yitzchak, Purim 15) explains the dual holiday on a hashkafic plane. As the Talmud (see Megila 7a) and many of the commentaries note, the miraculous salvation of the Jewish people also represented another step in the national battle against Amaleik, Haman and his cohorts being descendants of the first nation to battle against the Jews out of mere hatred of the sanctified life for which they stood. Some note that is for this reason that the Jewish victors did not partake of the booty (Esther 9:10) viewing it as assets of Amaleik from which it would be prohibited to benefit. However, the nature of the battle which took place on the 13th day of Adar, with the rest-day on the 14th, and the subsequent battle in Shushan on the 14th, with the rest-day on the 15th were fundamentally different. The initial battle was defensive, the Jews protecting themselves from the threat of Haman's willing agents; the second battle was offensive, after Queen Esther

requested of Achashveirosh another day on which to take vengeance against the Jewish people's enemies. Am Yisrael's battle against Amaleik and the evil that this nation represents[4]takes on two forms. Sometimes Amaleik attacks first - as happened in the days of Moshe and Yehoshua - and Bnei Yisrael must then rally to defend themselves nationally or individually both on the physical and the spiritual plane. At other times, the Jewish people must preemptively strike Amaleik as happened in the days of King Shaul. These two crucial models for the eternal battle against this evil nation and what it represents are both incorporated into the dual holiday of Purim.

Rav Shmuel Bornstein (Sheim MiShmuel, Shemos 1, Purim p. 169 ff.) presents a second hashkafic explanation also connecting the dual celebration with the battle against Amaleik. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 20b) teaches that the battle against Amaleik is only commanded after a Jewish king is appointed. This is why Shmuel states "Hashem has commanded me to anoint you as king over Israel ... now, go out and smite Ameleik!" (Shmuel I 15:1,3). Sheim MiShmuel quotes his father, Rav Avraham of Sochatchov, who commented cryptically that the main miracle of Purim was that the Jewish people were able to wage war against Amaleik without a king. Explaining his father's words, Rav Shmuel elucidates that there must be Jewish unity for this battle to succeed since Amaleik has the power to divide the Jewish people; a king is necessary in order to accomplish this unity. How then did the Jewish people war against Amaleik in the days of Mordechai and Esther absent a Jewish king? The requisite unity was created via other means: the enormous threat of destruction looming over the heads of the Jewish people caused of all them to return together and nullify themselves to their Father in Heaven. This transformation from a disparate, scattered people referred to by Haman as "a nation scattered and separate among the nations" (Esther 3:8) was catalyzed by Esther's charge to Mordechai for three days of national fasting, prayer and repentance - memorialized by our observance of Ta'anis Esther - "go gather all of the Jewish people!" (ibid. 4:16). Only then, unified once again as they were formerly under a Jewish king, were the Jewish people able to wage the battle against Amaleik. Although outwardly the Jewish people were separated geographically and perhaps culturally throughout the many countries of their exile, inwardly they were indeed one.[5] Similarly, the two days of Purim, although outwardly they appear as different days of celebration, inwardly are really one, and hence, aspects of celebration apply to all on both days.

Many important lessons emerge from these various interpretations. Ramban enlightens us that one should never think that without Divine mercy and protection they are safe from external physical or spiritual enemies. Ran teaches us to appreciate each aspect of Divine miracles. Rav Hutner's teaching informs us, in addition to the literal defensive-offensive duality against the nation of Amaleik, to constantly stand on the defensive against spiritual laxity and lapses and be ready to go on the offense to constantly grow in our Avodas Hashem. Finally, Rav Bornstein illuminates the central concept of Jewish unity irrespective of external differences. May we be able to accept the Torah anew as the Jewish people did in the days of Mordechai and Esther (ibid. Shabbos 88a) this Purim and apply all of these concepts in our daily lives.

[1] Eulogies and fasting are prohibited on both (Megila 5b). Rema (Orach Chaim 695:2) additionally rules that one should "increase feasting and joy a little" on the other day as well.

[2] Ramban's opinion needs significant analysis as to his assumptions and the logical flow of his presentation. I present it here according to my humble understanding which to some extent is not in accordance with the way Ran apparently understood it.

[3] A Rav noted that this distinction given to Eretz Yisrael is now exclusively reserved for the Holy land as no walled cities from the days of Yehoshua have been positively identified in chutz la'aretz, and no Jews live currently in Shushan.

[4] See Amaleik and Purim: Deception and Self-Deception for one presentation of these concepts. Many more have been explicated by the commentaries.

[5] I once heard from Rav Herschel Welcher shlita that this is one of the reasons of the unusual mitzvah to drink on Purim. Wine has the quality of releasing inhibitions and fostering friendship even when ill-will existed between people previously.

More divrei Torah from Rabbi Haber

More divrei Torah on Purim

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Simcha: The Essence of Purim

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

We know there is an obligation to be happy on every yom tov as it says, "V'samachata b'chagecha." But Purim is unique in that the simcha starts on Rosh Chodesh Adar and continues to grow throughout the month until it peaks on Purim. Why is Purim different? In order to understand this we need to examine the story of the megilah. The Torah hints to Purim in the verse "V'anochi hastir hastir et panai...- I will hide my face..." The word hastir hints to Esther. It depicts a difficult time where Hashem was not seen as he should have been in this world. We find this hidden in the words of Haman when he comes to convince Achashveirosh to destroy the Jews. "Yesh no am echad mefuzar um'efurad bein ha'amim...-there is one nation that is spread out among the nations." Yesh no comes from the root word yashen (asleep). Haman told Achashveirosh, the Jews are spiritually asleep. They are not careful or enthusiastic enough when performing mitzvot. Hashem has abandoned them and will not save them. On a superficial level it looked like the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people was no longer what it was. This reality was based on the behavior of Klal Yisrael when they attended the party of Achashveirosh where immorality and total physical indulgence abounded. It was a tremendous chilul Hashem (desecration of Hashem's name). Hashem was hidden from the picture when in fact our mission was to reveal Him.

Chilul Hashem brings punishment in its wake and that in itself is a desecration of His name. This should be most painful for us, galut ha'Shechina, the exile of the Divine Presence which cannot be with us due to our sins. It should hurt us to see the downward spiritual spiral of the Jewish people. When we cause Hashem to be hidden, other nations who look up to us don't see Him either, and that is chilul Hashem. How can we correct this? The answer lies in the blessing we say after reading the megilah, "Hadan et dinenu, hanokem et nikmateinu...- the one who judges our case and takes revenge for us." This is how Hashem helps us rectify chilul Hashem. Hashem is above pain or anger and no creature can affect him. The revenge is for us, to help us correct what went wrong and return to Him. In this way we can move from a situation of haster, where Hashem is hidden, to a situation where He is revealed. Megilah comes from the root word l'galot, to reveal. The miracle of Purim caused Hashem to be recognized by us and all the nations and this removed the desecration.

It says, "Kel nekamot Hashem." Nekamot appears between two names of Hashem which indicate mercy. Although at times we may sin and cause chilul Hashem, Hashem has compassion and allows us to return. He help us get closer to Him in a way that will be more revealed and open and this takes away the desecration of His name.

Simcha: The Essence of Purim Part II

In Megilat Esther we read how Achashveirosh elevated Haman above all of his ministers. The Midrash says this is compared to a man who had an older donkey, a younger donkey, and a pig. He limited the food he gave to the donkeys but to the pig he gave as much as he wanted. The young donkey

said to the older donkey, "We work for our master and he limits our food, but the pig doesn't do anything and he gets so much. The older donkey replied, "The time will come and you will see that it will all make sense." Before the holiday, the master took the pig and killed it in order to prepare food for his party. So too, Achashveirosh made Haman great. At first the situation appeared to be a desecration of Hashem's name. Klal Yisrael serve their master but they remain downtrodden, while the wicked Haman, a descendant from Amalek received everything. The wise men among the nation answered the young people, "Wait patiently, the time will come and you'll understand." Precisely because Haman was elevated to greatness, his downfall was that much more spectacular. Had Haman been just another anti-Semite, it would have been much less meaningful. Hashem eventually punishes those who are evil and He takes revenge, but if we look in hindsight we see that all along Hashem was with us. Haman's sudden downfall from the top to the very depths made a kiddush Hashem that was remarkable.

The story of the megillah took place over a time span of nine years. The kernel of salvation was already in process the moment Esther entered the palace, even before Haman devised the decree to annihilate the Jews. Hashem could have nullified the decree without the whole Purim story. He has endless quiet ways to do things. The fact that he did it in such a dramatic way served to overcome the chilul Hashem. When Hashem wants to help us correct the chilul Hashem we may have caused, He reveals His Divine intervention in a way that is so clear that we cannot ignore it. This corrects the state of Divine concealment we caused through our sinning. This is the unique message of the story of Purim. It is not just that Hashem saved us, that we experienced a great salvation, but the particular way in which it happened that revealed His constant presence.

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**Mordechai, Reincarnation & Jewish Pride
by Rabbi Benjamin Blech**

There is a remarkable mystical tradition about Mordechai, based on a belief accepted by the Masters of the Kabbalah, as well as many other rabbinic sages.

Judaism allows for differences of opinion concerning the concept of reincarnation. Granted, the idea that we may pass this way on earth more than once is not an unquestionable dogma. Yet it has a sufficient number of adherents within Jewish sources to lend it not only a great measure of credibility but also to allow us to glean powerful messages from some of its teachings.

Its essential insight is that what we see may not be the full story. What is left unresolved in Act I of our first life may very well be rectified in later scenes that follow. Kabbalah sees reincarnation as serving a powerful purpose: it permits us a second opportunity to face up to challenges that may have previously defeated us, to succeed in overcoming the flaws which marred our efforts to be worthy of finding a fitting place in God's presence.

It's somewhat like the story of the opera singer whose rather mediocre performance was greeted with loud shouts of "encore" from the audience. After repeating the aria again to the same response, he thanked the people but graciously declined. Yet once again he heard the same cry. This time, however, the crowd made clear the reason for their reaction. "Encore, encore!" they yelled. "Do it to till you'll get it right."

An example the rabbis offer to illustrate reincarnation in order to rectify a weakness of a previous lifetime is that of biblical Jacob. Jacob led an exemplary life, yet he failed in one way.

In Genesis 33: 1-3 we read:

And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau came and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two handmaids. And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindmost. And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times until he came near to his brother.

Seven times Jacob bowed to Esau. Seven times one of our patriarchs assumed a posture of subservience to a human being instead of reserving that gesture solely for the Almighty. Seven times Jacob kneeled before a divine creation instead of the creator.

A righteous man who puts his trust in God ought never to bow down to a fellow human being. That is why Jacob's bowing is considered sinful by some of the Rabbis. It was a defect which still required rectification in order for his soul to achieve perfection.

So many generations later, in the Book of Esther, we read the story of Mordechai. One characteristic is singled out as a sign of his greatness: And all the king's servants who were in the king's gate bowed and revered Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordechai did not bow, nor did him reverence (Megillat Esther 3:2). Everyone bowed to Haman. It was the required thing to do. It was the expected thing to do. But Mordechai did not. No matter what the consequences might be, Mordechai was the Jew who would not bow to another human being. Mordechai would not bend his knees nor prostrate himself in front of secular power. Because, according to this mystical tradition, that was the reason for his return to earth – to undo the sin of his long-ago past as Jacob and thereby complete his charge to perfection. As a reincarnation of the biblical Jacob, Mordechai's mission in life was to demonstrate this central teaching. And whether in fact Mordechai was a later version of Jacob, the emphasis in the story of Mordechai as the proud Jew who refused to be subservient is surely the key to the biblical book whose story takes place in the Diaspora and whose theme is Jewish survival in a foreign land.

Our generation faces a similar challenge. We live in a world where it is often difficult to identify oneself publicly as a Jew and as a lover of Zion, of Israel and of Jerusalem.

There are still those who quake with fear because the designation of Jerusalem as Israel's capital incites anti-Semitism and provokes threats of violence. Perhaps, say the Jews for whom bowing to the will of others has become not only second nature but even ideal Israeli national policy, we ought to be more subservient to public opinion, more worshipful of the views of those who hate us.

Menachem Begin, a former prime minister of Israel, had a magnificent phrase for the timid Zionists of his generation who saw bowing to the will of our enemies as our ideal policy for survival. He called them "Zionists with trembling knees." When confronted, during difficult days in Israel's early years, with an American threat to cut off aid unless Israel obediently followed the uncompromising dictates presented to it, Begin did not hesitate to respond:

"Don't threaten us with cutting off your aid. It will not work. I am not a Jew with trembling knees. I am a proud Jew with 3,700 years of civilized history. Nobody came to our aid when we were dying in the gas chambers and ovens. Nobody came to our aid when we were striving to create our country. We paid for it. We fought for it. We died for it. We will stand by our principles. We will defend them. And, when necessary, we will die for them again, with or without your aid. We are grateful for the assistance we have received, but we are not to be threatened. I am a proud Jew. Three thousand years of culture are behind me, and you will not frighten me with threats."

It is not simply a matter of American aid. It goes far beyond that. It is living at a time when the whole world believes they have the right to tell Israel how to deal with daily threats against their lives, the lives of their children, and the very existence of the state of Israel.

The response to a world filled with hate of our people, as well as the land to which we have returned after thousands of years of exile, dare never be submission. Mordechai is our model. If Jacob sinned by bowing, Mordechai and the message of Purim must remind us that Jews only bow to God – and that is the surest way to defeat all the Hamans of history.

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The Dangerous Achashveirosh—Then and Now by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Introduction

Chazal debate (Megillah 12a) as to whether Achashveirosh was evil and shrewd or simply a fool. In other words, a major question facing readers of Megillat Ester is whether Haman was manipulating Achashveirosh or vice versa. Unlike Ester and Mordechai who clearly are Tzaddikim, and Haman is undoubtedly a Rasha, we are unsure regarding Achashveirosh (Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik is quoted as suggesting a third possibility, namely, that Achashveirosh was both shrewd and a fool). In this essay, we will explore both possibilities which raise some vitally important contemporary ramifications.

Achashveirosh as a Fool

The Gemara (Megillah 13b) cites Rava, who states that, "No one was as skilled at Lashon Hara (slander) as was Haman," meaning that Haman was a master manipulator. Rava interprets Haman's speech to Achashveirosh (Ester 3:8) as convincing him to view the Jews as a threat to his kingdom who could be eliminated with no cost to his rule. This passage provides a fascinating behind the scenes look at the conspiracies and thought processes of our enemies. The conversation that Rava describes between Haman and Achashveirosh seems, regrettably, to have occurred on many occasions throughout our turbulent history.

Haman begins the conversation saying, "let's eliminate them (the Jews)." Achashveirosh responds, "I am afraid of their God," for he knew that the enemies of the Jews are severely punished. Haman, in turn, says, "They neglect the Mitzvot," and their God will not save them. Achashveirosh responds that their Rabbis, though, observe the Mitzvot faithfully. Haman responds, "They are one nation," and their Rabbis will not save them (this teaches that each Jew must assume spiritual responsibility and not assume that others will perform Mitzvot on his or her behalf). Haman then tells Achashveirosh (because, according to this view, Achashveirosh is too simple to perceive these threats) that he should not be concerned that eliminating the Jews will create a "bald spot" in his kingdom, meaning that a vacuum will not be created by eliminating the inhabitants of a portion of his kingdom, which would cause instability and a major disruption in the empire. Haman explains that since the Jews are scattered throughout the empire, their elimination will not create a vacuum.

Haman continues that Achashveirosh should not be concerned that the empire benefits from the Jews, because they are comparable to mules that do not produce any offspring. (We Jews have understood throughout the generations that we must benefit the national weal, in order for our presence to be tolerated; similarly, the State of Israel must contribute to the world economy lest its existence not be tolerated.) Haman then tells Achashveirosh not to be concerned about an entire area in which there is a large concentration of Jews (who could effectively resist an extermination plan), since they are spread out throughout the kingdom (this teaches us that Jews should live in close proximity to each other; see the Netziv's comments to Shemot 1:7).

Haman then tells Achashveirosh that the Jews' rules differ from everyone else's, as the Jews do not eat with the Persians nor intermarry with them (this teaches that Kashrut preserves our cultural identity; similarly, Chazal forbade us to consume non-Jews' wine and cheese as a bulwark against

intermarriage). Haman adds that the Jews do not honor the king's rules, as they always have some sort of excuse for why that they cannot work, such as by claiming that "today is Shabbat" or "today is Pesach." This is a typical technique of a slanderer; they make a claim that contains a minor resemblance to the truth, which is removed from its proper context and proportion (see Rashi to BeMidbar 13:27). This continues to be a tactic of current anti-Israel slanderers as well, who claim there were Israeli massacres in Jenin in 2002, Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in 2014.

Rashi here adds that Haman claimed that Jews did not pay their taxes. This teaches that paying taxes is not only Halachically required (see Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 369) but is also quite a threat to our safety if ignored.

Haman's concludes his speech to Achashveirosh in a most dramatic and effective manner (we must recognize that many of our enemies are effective speakers who have the ability to sway audiences with their words; Hitler, Yemach Shemo VeZichro, unfortunately, was a mesmerizing speaker). Haman told Achashveirosh that he should destroy the Jews because they eat, drink and disgrace the king. Haman explained, "If a fly falls into a Jew's wine, he removes the fly and drink the remaining liquid. If, however, the king would touch the wine of a Jew, the Jew would stamp the goblet into the ground and not drink the wine." This is yet another example of the deceptive exaggerations of the anti-Semite.

Rava presents for us a portrait of Achashveirosh as a fool who was manipulated by Haman to annihilate the Jews. A basis for this approach is that in the first chapter of Megillat Ester, Achashveirosh is manipulated by one of his advisors (whom Chazal, not surprisingly, identify as Haman; see Megillah 12b and Tosafot s.v. Memuchan for an alternate identification) to kill his own queen. We should note that even according to this approach, Achashveirosh is not an individual of strong moral character who was overtaken by Haman. In addition, he harbors negative feelings towards Jews and needed only a Haman to overcome his inhibitions to express them.

Achashveirosh as a Manipulator

The Gemara (Megillah 13b-14a) continues, citing Rabi Abba's alternative analysis of Achashveirosh. He presents a Mashal (analogy) that illuminates Achashveirosh's thinking and tactics. He tells a story of two field owners, one who had a big mound of dirt in his field and one who had a big ditch in his field (this Mashal is alluded to in the Selichot recited by Ashkenazim on Ta'anit Esther). The one who had the ditch admired the big mound of dirt and wished he could purchase the mound of dirt to fill his ditch. The one who had the mound of dirt wished to purchase the ditch in order to dispose of his dirt. One day the two field owners met and the ditch owner asked if he could purchase the mound of dirt. The individual who owned the mound, in turn, enthusiastically urged the ditch owner to take the mound free of charge. Haman is analogous to the ditch owner and Achashveirosh can be compared to the individual who owned the mound, as Haman was missing something and Achashveirosh had something he wanted to dispose. Haman wished to eliminate us, but he lacked the legislative authority that would permit him to do so. Achashveirosh, on the other hand, wished to do away with the Jews but was unwilling to do so himself. He feared profoundly negative consequences if his plan backfired. When Haman offered to annihilate the Jews, Achashveirosh was willing to give him the authority to execute his plan. If the plan backfired, Haman would take the blame and serve as the "scapegoat", and Achashveirosh could emerge, politically speaking, unscathed. A proof to this approach is Achashveirosh's decline of Haman's offer of 10,000 silver pieces as compensation for destroying the Jews (Ester 3:11), which demonstrates Achashveirosh's eagerness to destroy us. According to Rabi Abba, Achashveirosh is an evil individual who brilliantly manipulated Haman.

Practical Lessons

Both approaches to Achashveirosh teach very sobering lessons for today's less than ideal circumstances. The opinion that he was a fool is quite frightening, as it teaches that at times foolish individuals assume positions of

great responsibility. Such leaders can be easily manipulated by corrupt advisors who guide the leader solely with the aim of advancing their own personal agendas.

On the other hand, the opinion that Achashveirosh was shrewd presents an even more sobering message. The Megillah ends with Achashveirosh still in power. Thus, a powerful individual who desires to destroy us remains on the throne of the Persian Empire. Moreover, it teaches that we need be concerned for not only the Hamans of this world, but of the Achashveiroshes as well. Unfortunately, there are many Achashveiroshes in the world who wish for the Jews to be eliminated but do not want to assume the risk entailed in doing so. They do not actively seek to harm us, but if another assumes the risk in doing so, they support him and might even cooperate with him if they feel it is safe.

A poignant example of this phenomenon would be the many Germans, Poles, Lithuanians and other Europeans who quietly harbored their hatred of Bnei Yisrael for many years but did not act on that hatred due to fear of severe negative consequences. However, when Hitler, Yemach Shemo VeZichro, assumed power, many Europeans eagerly served as accomplices to the Nazis' crimes. Unfortunately, the ambiguity regarding the character of Achashveirosh is, much to our chagrin, quite relevant today.

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For the week ending 22 March 2008 / 15 Adar II 5768

by **Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair** – [Purimfest 1946]

On 1 October 1946, after 216 court sessions, the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg delivered its verdicts sentencing the leaders of the Nazi party to death by hanging. The author of the following account, Kingsbury Smith of the International News Service, was chosen by lot to represent the American press at the execution of ten of those leaders. NurembergGaol, Germany

16 October 1946

International News Service

...Julius Streicher made his melodramatic appearance at 2:12 a.m.

While his manacles were being removed and his bare hands bound, this ugly, dwarfish little man, wearing a threadbare suit and a well-worn bluish shirt buttoned to the neck but without a tie (he was notorious during his days of power for his flashy dress), glanced at the three wooden scaffolds rising menacingly in front of him. Then he glanced around the room, his eyes resting momentarily upon the small group of witnesses. By this time, his hands were tied securely behind his back. Two guards, one on each arm, directed him to Number One gallows on the left of the entrance. He walked steadily the six feet to the first wooden step but his face was twitching. As the guards stopped him at the bottom of the steps for identification formality he uttered his piercing scream: 'Heil Hitler!'

The shriek sent a shiver down my back.

As its echo died away an American colonel standing by the steps said sharply, 'Ask the man his name.' In response to the interpreter's query Streicher shouted, 'You know my name well.'

The interpreter repeated his request and the condemned man yelled, 'Julius Streicher.'

As he reached the platform Streicher cried out, 'Now it goes to G-d.' He was pushed the last two steps to the mortal spot beneath the hangman's rope. The rope was being held back against a wooden rail by the hangman.

Streicher was swung suddenly to face the witnesses and glared at them.

Suddenly he screamed, 'Purim Fest 1946.' [Purim is a Jewish holiday celebrated in the spring, commemorating the execution of Haman, ancient persecutor of the Jews described in the Old Testament]...

Streicher had been a Nazi since early in the movement's history. He was the editor and publisher of the anti-Semitic newspaper "Das Strummer." In May of 1924 Streicher wrote and published an article on Purim titled "Das

Purimfest" (The Festival of Purim). In order to publish his vitriolic attack Streicher must have had a good deal of knowledge about Jewish thought and practice. However we can only speculate to what extent he was aware of the remarkable parallels between Haman and his own execution. However, they are indeed striking:

"And the king said to Esther the queen, 'The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the capital, and the ten sons of Haman...Now whatever your petition, it shall be granted; whatever your request further, it shall be done.'

Then said Esther, 'If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews that are in Shushan to do tomorrow also as this day, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows.' " (Esther 9:12-14)

If Haman's ten sons had already been killed, how could they be hanged?

Our Sages comment on the word "tomorrow" in Esther's request: "There is a tomorrow that is now, and a tomorrow which is later." (Tanchuma, Bo 13 and Rashi, Shemot 13:14).

In the Megilla, the names of Haman's ten sons are written very large and in two columns. This is in distinct contrast to the style of the rest of the Megilla. The left-hand column contains the word v'et (and) ten times. According to our Sages the word v'et is used to denote replication. The inference is that another ten people were hanged in addition to Haman's ten sons.

If we examine the list of Haman's sons three letters are written smaller: the taf of Parshandata, the shin of Parmashta and the zayin of Vizata.

Those three letters together form taf-shin-zayin, the last three numbers of the Jewish year 5707, which corresponds to the secular year 1946, the year that those ten Nazi criminals were executed.

The Nuremberg trials were a military tribunal and thus the method of execution was usually by firing squad. The court, however, prescribed hanging. Esther's request "Let Haman's ten sons be hanged" echoes down the ages,

Equally uncanny is that the date of the execution (October 16, 1946) fell on "Hoshana Rabba" (21 Tishrei), the day on which G-d seals the verdicts of Rosh Hashana for the coming year.

As the Megilla recounts, a decree that the king has sealed cannot be rescinded, and thus Achashverosh had to promulgate a second decree to allow the Jewish People to defend themselves. In other words, that first decree was never nullified.

Our Sages teach us that eventually the Jewish People will return to G-d either voluntarily, or if not, G-d will raise up another despot whose decrees will be "as severe as Haman" (Sanhedrin 97b).

When we look toward the place of our original encounter with Haman and see the rise of a fanatic whose rhetoric rivals our most vicious enemies, we should remember that history most often repeats itself for those who fail to learn its lessons.