

Happy



Purim

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Volume VII, No. 21...Mar. 21, 2008

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Weekly Parsha

Tzav

RABBI BERNIE FOX

"Command Ahron and his children. This is the law of the Olah. The Olah should remain on the hearth of the altar the entire night, until the morning. And the

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Purim

the megilla

Torah's Fundamentals

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT
WRITTEN BY STUDENT

According to Tosfos, why do laws pertaining to mezuzah include the requirement of Sirtut – the horizontally scoring of the parchment at the baseline of the verses? The reason given is that

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(Tzav cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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fire of the altar should remain ignited upon it." (VaYikra 6:2)

The Olah sacrifice is completely burned upon the altar. The Kohanim and the owners do not receive a portion for their own consumption. The Olah is offered during the day. This requires that the slaughter and the performance of all other aspects of the service take place before nightfall. The same law applies to all other sacrifices. Our pasuk deals with this last requirement. Assume a sacrifice is brought to the Mishcan. All parts of the sacrificial service are performed up to the placement of the offering upon the altar. Suddenly, night falls. Our pasuk explains that if all other aspects of the service have been performed during the day, the offering may be placed upon the altar at night. According to this explanation, the pasuk does not consist of a command. It is permitting the placement of sacrifices upon the altar at night.

Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo offers an alternate explanation of the pasuk. He maintains that the pasuk is communicating an obligation. The Olah sacrifice must burn on the altar through the night. Probably, this is not obligatory for all Olah sacrifices. It is likely that this requirement applies to the last Olah of the day. This was the Olah offered as the daily afternoon Tamid offering. Why must an Olah burn upon the altar during the night? The answer requires an understanding of the purpose of the Olah. The commentaries differ on this issue. Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo maintains that the Olah was brought in order to atone for inappropriate thoughts. He further explains that these thoughts are more frequent during the night. The Olah burned during the night to atone for these contemplations. Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo seems to maintain that the night is associated with instinctual fantasy. It is easy to reject nighttime reveries as alien to our real personality. Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo suggests that through these thoughts we can view our inner self. We may not be able to completely control these thoughts. However, we must recognize that these fantasies stem from the material element of our nature. Our responsibility is to work toward uprooting these fantasies and to move towards a more spiritual existence.



"And the Kohen should wear linen vestments and linen pants he should wear upon his flesh. And he should lift the ashes of the Olah consumed by the fire from the altar and place them near the altar." (VaYikra 6:3)

Each morning a portion of the ashes was removed from the altar and placed near the altar. This is a positive command. It is an element of the service in the Mishcan and is only performed by a Kohen. The Kohanim wear special garments when performing the avodah the service in the Mishcan or Bait HaMikdash. These vestments consist of four garments. The Kohen is required to wear these garments when removing the ashes. Maimonides explains that the garments worn during this service are not exactly the same as

those worn during other elements of the avodah. The vestments worn for the removal of the ashes are of slightly lesser quality. Maimonides explains the reason for this requirement. It is inappropriate that garments used for the removal of the ashes be worn when performing the more elevated aspects of the service. He expresses this concept with a parable. A servant would not serve a meal in the same clothing worn when cooking the food. This explanation presents a problem. Based upon Maimonides reasoning, it is appropriate for the Kohen removing the ashes to put on fresh garments after this service. However, Maimonides does not seem to provide the

reason the garments worn for removal of the ashes must be of lesser quality! In order to answer this question we must more carefully consider the function of the garments worn by the Kohen.

These vestments are very carefully and beautifully designed. Maimonides explains that the Kohen is dressed in these garments and only then may he perform the service in the Temple. This seems to imply that these special vestments are required to glorify the avodah. Through wearing these special vestments, the Kohen demonstrates the sanctity of the service. Now it is possible to understand Maimonides' position. How do the garments glorify the avodah? They are reserved exclusively for the service. This exclusive designation is essential to their function. If these vestments are worn casually and at other times, their special status will be lost. They can no longer demonstrate honor for the avodah. Similarly, it is

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not be appropriate to allow these garments to be worn for the removal of the ashes. This detracts from the elevated status of the vestments. Nonetheless, the removal of the ashes is part of the daily service. The removal also requires that the Kohen wear his special garments. How can these two considerations be reconciled? Maimonides responds that the Kohen wears a set of the special vestments when removing the ashes. However, these are not of the same quality as the garments worn at other times. Now the problem has been solved. The Kohen wears the appropriate garments. Yet, the vestments worn at other times retain their exclusive designation.

"And if the flesh of the Shelamim sacrifice will be eaten on the third day, it will not be accepted. It will not be accounted for the one who offered it. It will be disgusting. And the one who eats from it will bear his sin." (VaYikra 7:18)

The Shelamim sacrifice is shared between three "parties." A portion is burned on the altar. A portion is given to the Kohanim. The rest is awarded to the person bringing the sacrifice.

The consumption of the sacrifice is a mitzvah. The Kohanim and the owner participate, through consumption of the sacrifice, in this mitzvah. No portion of the sacrifice may remain unused. Rabbeynu Avraham ibn Ezra offers an interesting explanation for this law. A portion of the sacrifice was offered on the altar. This portion was part of a larger whole – the entire animal. The offering of the "part" sanctifies the "whole" from which it is derived. Any failure to respect the sanctity of the remaining portion, is a failure to respect the portion offered. Therefore, all parts of the Shelamim must be consumed. No portion can be discarded.

Ibn Ezra applies this reasoning to another area of halacha. The Holy Temple and its altar may be constructed of stones. The Torah specifies that only whole stones may be used. Ibn Ezra explains that practical considerations underlie this law. The inclusion of a portion of a stone in the Temple would have sanctified the entire stone. Any portion not used in the Temple would have required special treatment. It would be impossible to assure that these fragments received this treatment. To avoid this problem, only whole stones were used. No leftover remained.

"And all blood you should not consume in all of you dwelling places, whether of an animal or a fowl." (VaYikra 7:26)

Rashi comments that this pasuk intends to teach an important lesson regarding the prohibition of consuming blood. This prohibition is not related to the land of Israel. The consumption of blood is prohibited both in the land of Israel and in exile. It is a personal prohibition. It applies regardless of location. Why does the Torah need to teach this law? Most commandments are not related to the land of Israel. Why might one connect and limit this prohibition to the land of Israel? The Talmud explains in Tractate Kiddushin that the prohibition of consuming blood is discussed by the Torah in the context of the obligation of offering sacrifices. Sacrifices cannot be offered in exile. Therefore, one might imagine that the prohibition of consuming blood is also limited to the land of Israel. What is the connection between the consumption of blood and sacrifices? As the Talmud recognized, the prohibition of consuming blood is mentioned in the section of the Torah that discusses sacrifices. The blood of the animal plays a central role in sacrificial process. It is sprinkled on the altar. This is integral to the atonement process. The Torah implies that the consumption of blood involves an inappropriate use of this element of the animal. The blood can only be "consumed" by the altar. It may not be consumed by the individual. Consuming blood is a misappropriation of this substance. The connection between this prohibition and sacrifices can now be appreciated. In exile sacrifices cannot be offered. Therefore one might conclude that consuming blood does not involve a misappropriation. The Torah needs to tell us that this is not the case. Even in a place that sacrifices cannot be offered the blood is prohibited. ■

Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Ma'aseh HaKurbanot, 4:1-2. Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo, Toldot Yitzchak, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 6:2. Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo, Toldot Yitzchak, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 6:2. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Temidim U'Musafim 2:10. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 33. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, 7:18. Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 7:26. Mesechet Kiddushin 37b.



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Purim

mezuzah is referred to as "the truth of Torah" ("Amikus shel Torah"). What does this mean?

Mezuzah teaches about Torah itself. It is a Torah component placed on the house. But the entire Torah is from Sinai. So what is the concept behind mezuzah, that we must isolate and highlight two Torah paragraphs?

Tosfos teaches a fundamental principle: all parts of the Torah are not of equal importance. Torah has an essence, primarily, the first two chapters of the Shema Yisrael. What is this essence? It is Unity of God. "Hear Israel; God is our God, God is one". The mitzvah of mezuzah is to highlight the primary Torah concepts. These concepts also include Knowledge of God, Love of God, Torah Study, and Reward and Punishment. The Chinuch says that if a person is missing the mitzvah of Unity of God¹, he has nothing (although keeping all other mitzvahs). In mitzvah 417, the Chinuch states, "If one transgresses Unity of God, and doesn't believe in His unity, blessed be He...he loses this command, and all other commands of the Torah. For all other commands depend on this one." So we see from Tosfos that all commands are not equal.

This is why mezuzah requires Sirtut. Mezuzah alone is the isolation of the essence of Torah. Sirtut is an emphasis of that text, of those fundamentals. When these two paragraphs are located in the Torah, they form part of a greater whole. But when separated in mezuzah, and thereby distinguished, those paragraphs must be scored, "underlining" as it were, the principles found therein. But what is the relationship between mezuzah and Megilla, that Megilla also requires scoring, Sirtut?

The answer is based on a Talmudic portion (Megilla 19a). The Talmud asks what Mordechai saw that he didn't bow to Haman. Mordechai sensed in the person of Haman that he deemed himself immortal and omniscient. Haman's whole inner evaluation was idolatrous. Had Mordechai bowed to Haman, he would have consented to Haman's idolatrous self image. The act of bowing per se is acceptable, as we see Jacob bowed to Esav. But in this bowing, Mordechai would philosophically defy God's unity. Mordechai therefore held that in Haman's case, one must sacrifice his own life. Once Haman represented himself as omniscient, bowing to Haman denied God's exclusive role, and must be avoided at all costs. So although halachikly Mordechai could have bowed to Haman, this bowing crossed the line of God's Unity. As such, halachik permission no longer mattered, and the philosophy dictated his need to reject Haman's decree. We thereby learn that Megilla embodies the concept of God's Unity. Mordechai understood this concept, and its philosophy, and demonstrated that violation is not option. One must sacrifice his life to endorse the gravity of sin in idolatry. One must give his life to uphold the truth of all truths: God alone is the cause of all. And this dedication clearly illustrates the next fundamental: Love of God.

Also in Megilla are examples of man using wisdom – chochma. It is insufficient that the Torah's wisdom is limited to man's act of study. But man must also extrapolate this wisdom and apply it to his Derech haChaim – his style of life. Mordechai and Esther both embodied the application of Torah wisdom.

And we also see in Megilla the principle of Reward and Punishment: Haman was punished.

However, this principle when found in the Torah is dealing with God delivering the punishments, unlike Megilla, when man seems to be the cause. The parallel is lacking. So where is the parallel...where are God's miracles of Reward and Punishment, so that Megilla parallels the Reward and Punishment of the Torah? The story of the Megilla appears to unveil the great cunning of Mordechai and Esther, but wherein are the miracles?

The answer is as follows. Mordechai and Esther used wisdom. However, many unexpected factors occur in our daily lives and derail the best laid plans. The miracle here, was that nothing interfered with Mordechai and Esther's plans. All the downfalls and successes in the Megilla occurred because God made certain that any potential human interference was held at bay. Nothing was allowed to interfere. Now the Megilla's rewards and punishments exactly parallel the reward and punishment of the Shema, of the Torah's "V'haya im shamoah" where God promises rain in a providential time.

The Megilla thereby mirrors the most primary Torah fundamentals. And just as mezuzah's laws require he underlining of the texts to indicate the primary nature of its content, Megilla too has this requirement, to convey that it too shares the character with mezuzah: a text of fundamentals.

The Megilla includes the words "Kimu v'kiblu", which means the Jews reaccepted the Torah once again. But this time – unlike at Sinai – there was no coercion of the event's "amazement". Here during Purim, the Jews reaccepted the Torah lifestyle out of a love of the fundamentals. They saw how two people using Torah wisdom were successful in averting catastrophe. They appreciated what Mordechai defended: God's Unity. They realized God's providence was essential in the unhampered success of Mordechai and Esther, as they engaged Torah wisdom in their daily lives. This highlight of "Kimu v'kiblu" attests again to the Megilla's core theme: embodying the Torah's fundamentals, just like mezuzah. The Jews were attracted to those Torah fundamentals expressed in the Purim story. Their reacceptance of Torah was due to those fundamentals. ■



After 3 days of fasting, the Talmud states 3 angels were prepared when Esther approached the king. One being that her appearance was sustained, (lit. "neck was lifted", which she was too weak to do.)

1. Unity of God refers to the conviction that there is One cause for all that exists.

Purim



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

King Achashverosh ruled in Shushan, with his reign extending over 127 provinces. He created a lavish banquet lasting 180 days. Tapestries of white, turquoise and purple hung from pillars of marble. Variegated marble paved paths lined with beds of gold and silver. The king decreed that wine should be older than the guest who imbibed it. For this ploy, I give credit to the king. I wondered why he wished this to be. Certainly, any ruler's position is in constant jeopardy: on the one hand, you must placate your viceroys and ministers to remain popular and in power. On the other hand, a leader's firm hand must be displayed. Aged wine was a solution: The king treated his guests with honor by providing wine older than themselves, a respectful drink, securing his popularity. But he also kept his officers humble - by implication the king said, "This wine was around long before you." Reminding one of a time when he was not yet around is quite humbling, and an affective maneuver to keep subjects in check.

The Celebration

The king was celebrating his faulty calculation that redemption would not occur for the Jews. His outright denial was seen in his use of the Temple's vessels for his haughty affair. Rabbi Yossi son of Chanina commented that the king dressed in the High Priest's clothing during this affair. (Talmud Megilla, 12a) This was a further extension of his denial, as if to say that the institution of the High Priest was nonsense, and that King Achashverosh better deserved this clothing. It is understood that one leader - Achashverosh - would be jealous of another, the High Priest. (The Rabbis teach that one tradesman is always jealous of another in his field.) Thus, the king jealously denied any honor due to the High Priest by donning his garments. The

Talmud teaches that the king was equally anti-Semitic as was Haman. For when Haman later offered to pay for a war against the Jews, the king told Haman to keep his money - the king covered the war's expense. But this very feast celebrating the lack of truth to the Jews' salvation is itself openly anti-Semitic.

Most people view Haman alone as the villain of the Purim story. However, we see clearly that the king was equally anti-Semitic. Keep this idea in mind, for it returns as a pivotal piece of information regarding another central character.

Exchanging Queens

During his feast, the king boasted that his Chaldean wife Vashti surpassed the beauty of other women. He demanded her to appear before him and other officials naked. She refused. Haman the wicked suggested she be killed for such an insult to the king, and this was so. An interesting metaphor is found in Talmud Megilla 12b explaining why Vashti refused, "Gabriel came and attached a tail to her."

A psychologically healthy individual does not desire to face his instinctual side; nudity exposes a purely animalistic aspect of man. We learn that Queen Vashti tormented the Jewish women by forcing them to work in the nude. (The Talmud says Vashti received payment, measure for measure; she abused others with nudity, so she too was afflicted in this measure.) So we learn that Vashti was a friend to nudity. Why then did she refuse to come unclothed?

Vashti desired to expose herself when summoned by Achashverosh. But the Talmud states she didn't, as "Gabriel came and attached a tail to her". What does this mean? What is a "tail"? Why this organ? A tail is the one organ possessed by animals and not man. A tail is definitively "animal", as opposed to any other organ. "Tail" symbolizes Vashti's own instincts. Vashti was normally inclined towards sensuality and nudity, as seen by her working of nude women. But Divine intervention strengthened her ego above her lusts in this one instance. Due to Divine intervention - Gabriel - Vashti did not wish to show her "tail", admitting her animalistic side. We learn that Vashti's ego - her dignity - won out this time, and did not surpass her lusts.

Man's ego will normally sway his decisions more than his instinctual need for gratification. But Vashti's self-image was less important to her, than was her desire to act lustfully. We understand Achashverosh's selection of her as a

marriage partner. These two people both enjoyed the life of sensuality, and physical pleasures. The last few words on Megilla 12a state, "He with large pumpkins, and she with small pumpkins." Meaning, they both desired similar "currency", i.e., immoral behavior.

The statement, "Gabriel came and attached a tail to her", indicates that Vashti's disappearance was essential to the Jews' salvation. Otherwise, a Divine act of God sending Gabriel to intervene would not be required.

Salvation Already in Place

Along with killing Vashti, Haman advised that a letter be issued stating that unlike Vashti's opposition displayed, a man is to be the ruler of his house. When received by the townspeople, they disregarded the king's letter as they viewed it as foolish. The Talmud states that due to the absurdity of this first letter demanding domestic, male domination, the townspeople also disregarded the second letter calling for the destruction of the Jews: "Were it not for the first letter, not a remnant of the Jews would be left." (Megilla 12b) Rashi states that since the people dismissed the king as foolish based on the first letter, they did not attack the Jews until the day commanded. Had they never viewed the king as a fool, they would have preempted the verdict of annihilation, and killed the Jews sooner. We now realize something: Haman's second letter - his advice to annihilate the Jews - was actually countered by his first letter. This is consistent with the previous statement that God never intended to annihilate the Jews, only to scare them into repentance. That is, even before the second "deadly" letter, a prior letter conveying the king's foolishness already set the groundwork to save the Jews. Thus, God's salvation was part of the plan first, meaning, this salvation was primary. Only after the salvation was in place, did He allow the apparent threat to enter the stage.

After the death sentence of Vashti, a new queen was sought. This now paved the way for Esther to be placed in the palace as queen, which occurred soon afterwards. Later, after Esther's appointment as queen, Mordechai overheard a discussion between two men plotting the king's assassination. They spoke in a foreign language, but as an adviser, Mordechai knew their language. Mordechai informed Esther to warn the king. The matter was investigated, and the would-be assassins were killed.

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Haman's Ego – His Downfall

Afterwards, Haman was elevated in position. He moved the king to agree to a decree that he be bowed to. When confronted with Haman's decree to prostrate before him, all obeyed, all but Mordechai the pious. Haman was filled with rage at Mordechai for his violation, and Haman conjured charges against Mordechai, then against the rabbis, and finally he planned to annihilate the Jews as a whole. Letters were sent throughout the kingdom to this effect. Mordechai responded by wearing sackcloth, mourning this fate, and praying for God's salvation.

Mordechai's Declaration

We learn that Mordechai joined the exiled Jews in Shushan of his own will – he was not forced to be there. This may explain his overt opposition to Haman. Mordechai's refusal to prostrate to Haman was not only correct in its own right, but it also opposed the very flaw of the Jews. Morde-

chai made a public statement that bowing is idolatrous, as Haman made himself as an object of worship. (Megilla 19a) His refusal would awake the Jews to their flaw. It may very well be that Mordechai understood the flaw of that generation and therefore chose to move them to repentance with such an overt repudiation of idolatry.

We find more on this topic in the Talmud: The students of Rabbi Shimone bar Yochai asked him why the Jews deserved extermination. It could not be due to their participation in the feast of that wicked man Achashverosh. For if this were the reason, we would find no just reason why Jews who did not attend were also subject to death. Rabbi Shimone bar Yochai concluded that the Jews deserved punishment because earlier, they had prostrated themselves before Nevuchadnetzar's idol. However, the Talmud concludes that as the Jews only prostrated out of fear, and not based on any conviction in the idol,

God too was not going to truly exterminate the Jews, but He desired merely to instill fear in them. (Megilla 12a) We thereby learn that it is a severe crime to recognize idolatry in this fashion, even outwardly. We also learn that Mordechai was correct to oppose idolatry, even though his act would result in such a threat.

Esther's Intervention

Haman succeeded at convincing the king to annihilate the Jews. Mordechai communicated to Esther that she must intervene, using her position to save the Jews. She was reluctant at first, as one who approaches the king uninvited faces death. Mordechai told her that if she did not act, salvation would come from another direction, and her house would not be saved. Esther agreed, but devised a cunning plan, in addition to her request that all Jews fast with her.

The Talmud says that on Esther's approach to the king, she encountered a house of idolatry, at which moment, the Divine Presence removed from her. Why was this so? Why could the Divine Presence no longer accompany her? It is not as though God's presence is "there" with her. God has no relationship to the physical world, and therefore does He exist in physical space. Why should Esther's proximity to a house of idols warrant God to remove His Shechina from her? Furthermore, if Esther deserved Divine Providence, and had no choice but to pass by this house of idols en route to the king, what fault is it of hers? There are no grounds to suggest any fault of Esther. In fact, God's removal of His presence at this time is not a punishment.

Maharsha suggests that Esther initially viewed Haman alone as the sole villain. She did not realize that the king was also against the Jews. Now, as she was approaching the king, passing the house of idols, God's Presence left. Perhaps God was teaching that, number one; the issue at hand is concerning idolatry, i.e., the sin of the Jews. That is why the Shechina – God's Presence – left at the precise point she neared the house of idols, and not because if any infringement an idol can impose on God's "whereabouts". God causes His Shechina to leave Esther, thereby teaching that His Shechina left the Jews for this reason, i.e., their approach to idolatry by bowing to Nevuchadnetzar's idol. God intended to alert Esther to information essential for her to calculate an intelligent plan.

As she was about to approach the king, if she was bereft of crucial information about who are

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Purim

her enemies, she could not effectuate a salvation...thus, lesson number two: God intended to indicate that the Jews' enemies included another party – the king himself. Knowing this, Esther could now devise a plan, which would address all factors at play. God wished that Esther be successful. The Talmud records that when Esther ultimately raised her finger to point to the culprit, she pointed at the king, but God caused her finger to move towards Haman. Esther saw that the king was the ultimate enemy, but salvation could not arise if she accuses the only man who can save the Jews. God assisted again to save the Jews.

We learn that as Esther approached the king, God indicated new information essential for her success: the removal of His Shechina was due to the Jews' idolatry, and their punishment was being directed by someone other than just Haman, i.e., the king. Now Esther was ready to devise a plan.

Esther enters to see the king, uncalled, risking her death. Rabbi Yochanan said three ministering angels were prepared for her at that moment: 1) her neck was lifted; 2) a thread of kindness was upon her, and 3) the king's scepter extended to her. Esther was in day three of her fast and praying, and was drained physically and emotionally. Either Esther transmitted these events, which transpired in the king's chambers, then they traveled down through the generations, or, the Rabbis concluded these events must have occurred. In either case, what do we learn?

By the mention of "ministering angels", we learn two things; 1) that God intervened, and 2) if He had not done so, disaster would strike. We learn that it was essential that Esther possess the physical strength to approach the king. Thus, her neck or head was lifted to address him. We may also add that it was essential that her composure was not lacking, as a king may not pay heed to one who is disheveled. One's head in a drooped state is not becoming, so the angels lifted her head high. Number two: It was essential that Esther find favor in the king's eyes, even though already his wife. It appears that marriage rights do not reserve the king's attention. His attention to his desires overshadowed his attention to Esther. Therefore, a renewed attraction was necessary at this point. Number three, when the king extended his scepter to be touched by those entering his chamber, Esther could not reach it, perhaps again out of weakness. So the angels assisted her here as well. God intervened in all three areas of need; Esther's composure, the

king's feelings towards her, and politics, i.e., touching the scepter. Esther placed her life on the line, and God stepped in, sustaining Esther with a polished presentation before the king. We learn that the greatest plans still require God's assistance, and also, that God assists those who work in line with the Torah's philosophy, i.e., risking life to save the nation.

Esther's Plan

How did Esther orchestrate her plan? Esther invited the king and Haman to a private party. Once there, the king asked what her request was, and up to half the kingdom would be awarded her. She responded by requesting that both the king and Haman attend yet another party. What was Esther doing? Why didn't she speak up now, informing the king that Haman planned to annihilate her people? A Rabbi taught that Esther used her honed psychological knowledge to devise her plan. She felt, that had she directly accused Haman, the king's appointed officer, she would not necessarily meet with success, or salvation for the Jews. She planned to create suspicion in the king's mind, as the Talmud states. The king thought, "perhaps Haman is invited to this private party of three, as Esther and Haman are plotting against me. Is there no one who loves me who would not be silent in this matter?" That night the king could not sleep, and for good reason - Esther successfully aroused the king's suspicion. The king called for the Book of Remembrance to be read, "Perhaps I have not properly rewarded those who love me, and they do not wish to inform me." It was found that Mordechai's previous favor of saving his life went without reward.

Divine Intervention

It was precisely at this moment, in the middle of the night, that Haman was in the king's courtyard. His approach in the middle of the night exposed his haste and desperation to hang Mordechai. The king just finished reading of Mordechai's kindness to him, and Haman wants to kill this loyal officer! Esther's plan is seen to be taking effect. She successfully drove the king to ponder Haman's business. While in this state of suspecting Haman, God orchestrates Haman's arrival. Be mindful too, that Mordechai only made it into the Book of Remembrance, as he was "fortunate" enough to be passing by, just when the two assassins were discussing their plot. We begin to appreciate that these events are not coincidences but God's hand at work. Since the king was still concerned if he never rewarded

someone, and now learned that Mordechai went unpaid for saving his life, he ordered Haman to parade Mordechai around town on the king's horse in royal garb.

The underlying message here is that the king is no longer thrilled with Haman. He questioned Haman on how one deserving of the king's honor should be treated. Haman, thinking the king referred to him, exposed his desire for the crown – literally – by suggesting such an individual be paraded around on the king's horse in royal garb, wearing the king's crown. Hearing this, the king observed Haman as simply out for himself, and not truly loyal. However, "loyalty" was the very issue the king was bothered by, meaning, who did he not recognize, and could possibly be withholding helpful information. This commanding of Haman to parade Mordechai through the streets is clearly the king's way of degrading Haman. Perhaps this is significance enough to make it into the Megilla, as it precipitates Haman's downfall. Here, the king first develops ill feelings towards Haman.

The Second Party

Now the king was bent on suspecting Haman - now was the time to accuse Haman. The Talmud states one reason Esther invited Haman to the second party was she knew the king to be fickle. She wished to have the king kill Haman while he was in that mindset. She therefore invited Haman to be on hand if she was successful at exposing Haman.

At the second party, the king again questioned Esther of her request. She finally accuses Haman. The king is angry, and storms out of the party. According to the Talmud, he gazes at trees being plucked out of the kingdom by ministering angels. The king demanded, "What are you doing?" The angels responded, "Haman ordered us to do this." This metaphor means that the king interpreted his kingdom – the trees – to be falling into Haman's hands. The king returns to the party, only to see Haman fallen onto Esther's bed. (Haman had been pleading for his life; he got up, and then fell down on her bed.) To the king, Haman's close proximity to Esther, on her bed, was a display of Haman seeking the throne. The king responded, "Will you conquer the queen while I am yet in the house?" The Talmud again says that ministering angels were at work, this time, forcing Haman onto the queen's bed. How do we understand this metaphor of these angels?

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It would appear that once Esther accused Haman, all the king had on his mind was the fear that all leaders have: a close supporter is really seeking the throne. Looking at “trees being plucked” means the king was now viewing his kingdom (trees) as being destroyed. The king began interpreting all events as Haman’s usurping of his throne. Once the king was this suspicious of Haman, and then that suspicion was confirmed by Haman’s desire to kill the loyal Mordechai, the king needed nothing else but his own paranoia to interpret matters against Haman. What would be conclusive? A clear demonstration. This was also afforded to the king in the form of Haman’s position, falling onto the queen’s bed! This too was generated by God’s intervention, i.e., the angels. In both cases, “angels” refer to some force, physical or psychological, which influenced the king.

At this point, Charvona, a Haman supporter, saw Haman’s impending doom and switched sides from Haman to Mordechai. He was an opportunist, also out to save his neck. Charvona suggested hanging Haman on the very gallows built by Haman for Mordechai. Haman was hung, and Mordechai was elevated in status. The Jews were then victorious over their enemies, and Purim was instituted as a holiday for generations.

Reaccepting the Torah

The Jews arose and reaccepted the Torah out of a love, whereas Sinai was acceptance with some coercion. Seeing an undeniable revelation of God at Sinai, Torah acceptance carried with it some

fear and coercion. However, when these Jews saw the brilliance demonstrated by Esther and Mordechai, and how God worked within their plan to save the Jews, the Jews now appreciated the Torah with no coercion. They saw a prime example of how using wisdom is the one path to the proper life, and that God does in

fact intervene when one operates in this manner.

It is interesting to note that the initial cause for the tragedy of Purim was Mordechai’s refusal to bow to Haman’s idol. (Rashi and Ibn Ezra state Haman carried an idol.) This was the precise sin the Jews committed overtly that deserved this punishment. (Inwardly they did not commit idolatry) The very same institution - idolatry - acted as both the obligation for punishment (the Jews’ prostration to idols) and the delivery of that punishment (Mordechai’s refusal to bow enraged Haman to annihilate the Jews). Perhaps the identical nature of these two events displays God’s hand in this matter.

In reviewing the personalities of the Megila, Haman taught us that self-aggrandizement is fatal. His initial intolerance that one, single person would not recognize him drove him to seek permission from the king to murder Mordechai, leading to his downfall. Mordechai taught us that certain principles are worth sacrificing for, and he therefore did not bow to idols or Haman. And Esther taught us that with wisdom, a well-devised plan has the greatest hope of success, and God may intervene.

Omission of God’s Name

One final question: What is the significance of God’s name being omitted from the Megilla? We all know that this era was where God intervened, but behind the scenes. What demanded such a covert method of Divine intervention? In all other events, God’s miracles are quite apparent; from the Ten Plagues and the parting of the Red Sea, to

the sun and moon standing still, to the oil burning eight days on Chanukah...miracles are purposefully and definitively apparent. Why not during the Purim story?

We already mentioned that the Jews arose and reaccepted the Torah again. This is based on Esther 9:27. This acceptance was bereft of any Sinaic coercion. They truly appreciated the Torah system. Since Sinai was apparently lacking this unbiased devotion, perhaps God’s purposeful covert methods during Purim were designed to allow such an appreciation to surface. The very words included in the Megilla that the Jews reaccepted the Torah are significant – they teach that this was essential. Therefore, we can suggest that to enable the Jews this opportunity, God minimized His presence, which allowed the Jews to focus instead on Esther and Mordechai, admiring how their lives, guided by Torah wisdom, yielded remarkable results.

A Rabbi once taught: Drinking brings a man to a happy, uninhibited state of mind. Just as when in love, man is completely happy and exclusively bound up in that happiness, so too when he is drinking. In order to mimic the state of the Jews who were saved, who were euphoric in their love of the Torah system and wisdom as exemplified by Mordechai and Esther, we drink more than our usual quantity to reach this blissful state of mind. Our drinking today enables that feeling when God rendered this great good upon us. We often hear the term “drunk with love”. This shows that man does equate these two emotional states.

So drink, not to engage in drinking, but to experience a gladness, which commemorates the Jews’ gladness of old, marveling at the benefit of a true Torah existence.

May our continued attachment to Torah and mitzvot bring us all to this state where we too arise and reaccept the Torah, not reminiscent of the coerced feelings we still carry from day school, but an acceptance based on understanding and appreciation. And the only way to obtain such appreciation is through study. Let Purim this year instill in us all a renewed commitment to minimizing our attention to distractions, entertainments, and wealth, redirecting our time to the one involvement God desires we focus on, over all else; Torah study and teaching. Unlike the false arguments presented to us by society in their 9-to-5 work ethic praising wealth and success over all else...Torah study will truly avail you to the most enjoyable life, the life outlined by God and the Rabbis. If the wisest of men followed this philosophy, they must know better.

A happy Purim to all. ■



Letters

from our

READERS



Letters

Mesora invites your questions, letters in response to articles, your own thoughts, or your suggestions for the JewishTimes.

"The only poor question is the one not asked."

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"Maintaining" Perfection

Kal: The Torah's events leading up to Mt. Sinai and the Golden Calf — the "reward and punishment" aspect of the symbolic "crowns" — to me, is the epitome of human nature and the powerful effect of the emotions. All the events leading up to Mt. Sinai set the stage and prepared the nation to rationally and emotionally come to the state of "we will do and we will hear" as we have discussed with the concept of the Jews recognition of Hashem as being the ultimate authority. It had to have been an extremely powerful event to witness.

Our emotions are like a double edged sword in the sense that the effect of time from a significant event, can desensitize us from the impact of that event. For example, healing from the death of a loved one is a 'positive' aspect of the impact of time, while the reverse is true in that the time from receiving punishment from a wrongdoing, can desensitize man from the impact of the punishment. Then, he may repeat the destructive behavior once again.

The effect of time from Revelation at Sinai coupled with the absence of Moshe when he climbed the mountain to receive the tablets, withdrawing his presence from the nation as a reminder of the nation's relationship to Hashem, was an ultimate test of each individual's commitment to that ultimate abstract Authority, when all of the physical connections/reminders were removed.

The powerful impact of the emotions (in this case "fear") roots man into the physical world. Thus, the Golden Calf represented mans need to attach his emotions to something physical to help remind man of his connection to the ultimate abstract, Hashem. I agree this to be a great danger because of the powerful nature of the emotions when their attachment is to the physical. Even the "crowns", the indication of this elevated state, cannot be automatically retained, reminding us that even though we have attained something great, we must "sustain" what got us there (the abstract) in order to keep the reward.

The abstract is the constant; the physical is temporary, yet our emotions when rooted in the physical can make us spend much time and energy in its feeble attempts to make the reverse true. Do you see any flaws in my thinking?

I have really enjoyed the in depth study of this section, especially the representation of the crowns. I think the one aspect that we didn't emphasize is the importance of review and

continually being involved in these ideas. Without that, man can lose this elevated status. It is not an achievement as much as it is a continued maintenance and involvement in the world of ideas.

Thank you again for your weekly infusion of these ideas. ■

—Kal Taylor

Delectable Things

Chaim: Has our generation become weary and tired of battling the instinctual desire to eat pig? Is this sin, the same sin our souls suffer, when we bow down to idols? How can idol worship be a delicious thing?

Isaiah XLIV

9. "They that fashion a graven image are all of them vanity, and their delectable things shall not profit." Eating pig products are a delectable thing, since it appeals to our palate. How does idol worship appeal to our palate?

During the Babylonian exile, idol worship was obvious. Isaiah 44:16 teaches that half of a tree would be used for firewood, while 17 teaches the remainder man would fashion into an idol from a tree, then fall down and worship and pray unto it and say "Save me for you are my god". 18 reads, "Their eyes are bedaubed, (blinded, confused, led astray), so as not to see."

Today, the untrained and weak members of our community also have their eyes bedaubed, when they put their confidence in the wrong objects.

There are two strong recipients of our misguided confidence. (Heard in lecture and tape, by Rabbi Avigdor Miller.) The first are "tangible" objects: putting misguided confidence in beautiful and high valued home, cash in bank, lines of credit, sales volume, and growing net worth. Then there are intangible objects: putting ones' misguided confidence in a college degree. (Medical, B.S. in business, Professional reputation, Intellectual Properties, etc.) Rabbi Miller has guided us to put our confidence and trust, only in Hashem. "Everything comes from him!"

Eating pig is not an accidental sin. It is a premeditated sin! The sinner has to consciously go down the isle in the supermarket to purchase the pork products, (bacon, sausage, ham,) let's also include shell fish and other non-kosher fish (no scales and/or no fins). The sinner has to reach into his push cart, place these foods onto

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Letters

the check out counter, and pay hard-earned cash for these spiritual destructive delectable things.

What went through their minds to bedaub their known Torah responsibilities?

Years ago, as a neophyte, I would question myself and rebukers, "Why I am not allowed to eat pork products? Don't tell me that I am going to miss out on the "Next World!" just because of this little transgression! Why not? Everyone else in my Jewish Fraternity at college ate bacon and eggs. Where does it say that pork is off limits, in our Holy Torah?"

ANSWER: Leviticus, chapter 11, sentence 7: "And the Lord spoke unto Moses and to Aaron, saying unto them: and the swine, because he parted the hoof, and is cloven-hoofed, but cheweth not the cud, it is forbidden unto you." It is interesting to note that our Torah doesn't always enumerate the individual species that are acceptable, but gives the general rule through which they could be determined. But in the case of the swine it doesn't leave any chance to error. It gives the qualifying conditions, and actually names the swine! And it is repeated again in Deuteronomy, chapter 14, sentence 8.1

Isaiah LXVI, 15: "For behold, the Lord will come in fire, and his chariots shall be like the whirlwind; to render His rebuke with flames of fire, 16. For with fire the Lord will contend, and by his sword with all flesh; and the slain of the Lord shall be many. 17. (Commentary) The Soncino Press, Pentateuch & Haftorah. "Eating swine's flesh is associated with the abominable cults who practiced idol-worship."

Question: "Can the predicted magnitude of punishment be the same for both transgressions? The transgression of Idol Worship, as compared to the transgression of Eating Pork?" The supreme motive; however of the Dietary Laws remains Holiness, not as an abstract idea, in the everyday lives of men, women, and children. The Dietary Laws train us in the mastery over our appetites.

One of my neighbors recently made a Bar Mitzvah party for his grandson, and was so proud to show-off his pictures of the simcha. I couldn't believe what I saw! A beautiful laid-out table, all the condiments...with an actual "pig" and apple stuffed in its mouth, squatting in the center. Astonished, I asked him, "What's this?" (Pointing to the pig?) Smiling and laughing, he said it was a turkey! When he perceived my disapproving reactions, he disappeared.

Today, we have thousands of fellow Jews who continue to eat Pork products. How can we

address this massive ill fated life style, of eating Delectable Things? Whenever I approach them with my rebuke, they cannot acknowledge that they have lived away from the Torah "Life-style", and will continue to do so, even with the many kosher substitutes, such as phony shrimp, phony vegetarian bacon, etc.

Thank you,
Chaim Ben Naphtaly
"The Monsey Maggid"

Mesora: Thank you for taking the time to write. To address your first question, Isaiah 44:9 refers to idolatry as "desirous" not "delectable". It does so to communicate to us what draw there is in idolatry. Raised in idolatrous cultures, those people gravitated towards what they heard in their youths. When we are accustomed to anything, it becomes more desirous. But the prophet intends on unveiling these sinners' contradiction. Thus, he states that the same tree is used for practical firewood, and is also carved into idols. As a wise Rabbi taught, the prophet's intent is to return a person to his senses, for how can one think that the same tree is both mundane, and a deity?

Caving to instinctual drives is common to both idolatry and eating prohibited foods. In both cases, one allows his base, animal drives full satisfaction. This explains your quote "Eating swine's flesh is associated with the abominable cults who practiced idol-worship."

But we cannot suggest that prohibited foods form an equal prohibition to idolatry. See Rabbi Israel Chait's article (cover of this issue) entitled "Megilla". In it, he explains – according to Tosfos – that the Torah is not all equal: some commands and concepts far outweigh others. Idolatry far outweighs eating pork. For the former destroys our idea of God, and uproots all other mitzvos, as if never performed. But the latter is man satisfying what might be a momentary lust for certain foods. Here, a correct concept of God may still be intact.

The best way to assist other Jews, is to first study the Torah and Prophets ourselves, delve into their words with a good teacher, grasp the underlying messages of the great Sages, and only then share some ideas with others. Merely addressing our peers' sinful acts, without offering insight into the hurtful nature of sin based on Torah insights, may unfortunately be a waste of time. ■

*Happy
Purim
to All!*

