

JewishTimes

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by Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim, Founder Mesora.org

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REVIEWS



RABBI REUVEN MANN

Rabbi, Y. Israel of Phoenix; Founder, Masoret Institute; Menabel YBT

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has written extensively about the philosophy and Hashkafa of Judaism for many years. As the title of his book, "Judaism; Religion of Reason" indicates, his ideas are rooted in an uncompromisingly rational approach to Judaism. He follows the guidelines of the great rationalist philosophers such as Rambam and Saadia Gaon in his exploration into the values and ideals of Torah Judaism. He is convinced that all of the teachings of Judaism and the statements of the Sages make perfect sense and are amenable to the rational, inquiring mind.

He is absolutely opposed to all forms of "mysticism" and seeks to debunk all practices and beliefs which are rooted in superstition or are contrary to reason. This collection of writings covers a wide variety of topics that are of interest to contemporary Jews. It also contains insightful analyses of Biblical narratives as well as the underlying significance and relevance of many mitzvot.

Rabbi Ben-Chaim demonstrates that Judaism can be harmonized with human reason. Indeed he asserts that one can only understand and appreciate Judaism by analyzing it in a logical manner in order to elucidate its deeper ideas. He is not afraid to ask the most penetrating and challenging questions because he is absolutely convinced that Torah is the Word of God and thus based on the highest form of wisdom.

Jews who have a profound desire to make sense out of their religion will benefit greatly from reading this book. One need not agree with all of Rabbi Ben-Chaim's ideas, but his questions, analyses and original thoughts will open your mind to a new appreciation of the wisdom and logical consistency of Torah Judaism.

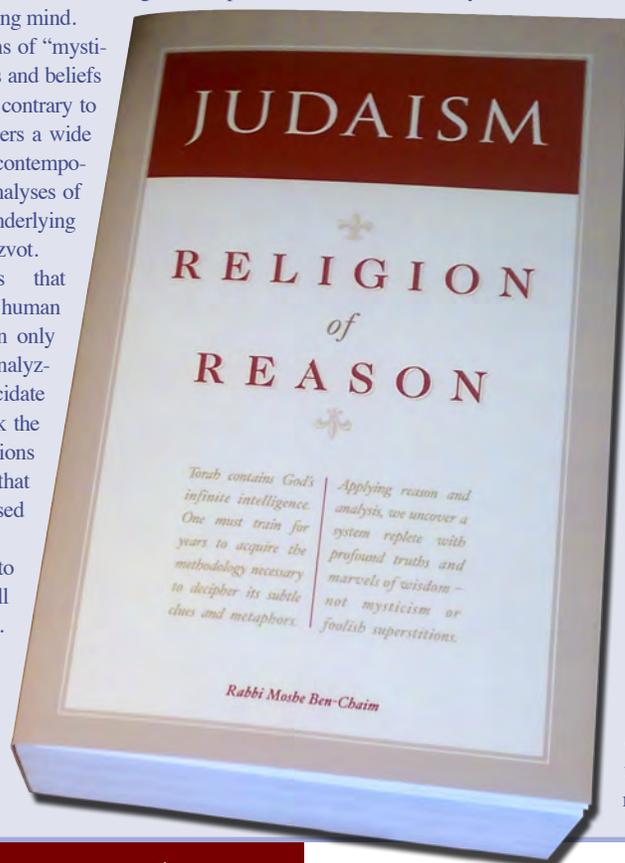


RABBI STEVEN WEIL

Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has followed in the footsteps of the great Medieval Rishonim (Rambam, R. Avraham ben HaRambam, etc.) in trying to explain, define and lay out the world outlook of Torah and the philosophy of Judaism in rational, logical terms. Rabbi Ben-Chaim asks critical, crucial and defining questions that any thinking Jew needs to ask. He is extremely critical of approaches to Judaism that superimpose external methodologies (such as mysticism, other religions) and project primitive emotions onto the

Almighty. Although one can disagree with some of the conclusions; his approach, his questions and method enable the reader to explore and engage our theology in a meaningful and serious way. When Chazal employ certain terms and convey certain images, the student is forced to conceptualize, extract and deduce profound psychological and philosophical principles. Unfortunately, many take Chazal at face value or project onto Chazal, motives and rationalizations they never meant. Rabbi Ben-Chaim following the method of the Rishonim, forces us to define, weigh and analyze each word and phrase of Chazal. Rabbi Ben-Chaim shows there is no contradiction between a serious investigation of Science and a serious investigation of Judaism. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written a work that addresses the thinking, seeking person of all faiths. This work speaks to the scholar and lay person alike. Once again, one may not agree with specifics within the book but at the same time will appreciate it and gain insight into how the great Rishonim define how we view the world. Rabbi Ben-Chaim's website, Mesora.org is a very serious tool and resource for thinking human beings who want to engage and explore the Almighty, the Almighty's universe and do so within the realm of wisdom, rationality and intellectual honesty.



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ANGELS AND TORAH

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Last week a Rabbi asked why the Torah repeats the command to place the Tablets in the Ark. Exodus 25:17 reads, "And place in the Ark the Testimony (Tablets) I gave to you." Verse 21 reads, "And place the Kaporess (the Ark's cover with the two angels) on the Ark above, and into the Ark place the testimony I gave you." The Rabbi cited Rashi who stated "I do not know the reason for this repetition." But this must not cripple us from thinking into the matter; no Rabbi holds a monopoly on the Torah's answers. And while I appreciate Rashi's position about the apparent repetition, there is a possibility I wish to suggest.

The second verse (25:21) contains two matters, the placement of the Kaporess and the placing of the Tablets. Based on this connection, we may suggest the following. Although already commanded to place the

Tablets in the Ark, this earlier verse (25:17) merely indicates the "purpose" of the Ark. That is, after God describes the Ark's design, He tells us its purpose: it is to house the Tablets. But the second verse is for another idea altogether...

The Ark's cover is one of the most astonishing elements of the Temple. The the gold angels are more than mere constructions like the other vessels. There is a most fundamental idea here. I quote below Maimonides from the Guide to the Perplexed (Book III chap. XLV):

"Naturally the fundamental belief in prophecy precedes the belief in the Law, for without the belief in prophecy there can be no belief in the Law. But a prophet only receives divine inspiration through the agency of an

angel. Compare, "The angel of the Lord called (Gen. xxii. 15)"; "The angel of the Lord said unto her (ibid. xvi. 11)" and other innumerable instances. Even Moses our Teacher received his first prophecy through an angel, "And an angel of the Lord appeared to him in the flame of fire (Exod. iii.)" It is therefore clear that the belief in the existence of angels precedes the belief in prophecy, and the latter precedes the belief in the Law. The Sabaeans, in their ignorance of the existence of God, believed that the spheres with their stars were beings without beginning and without end, that the images and certain trees, the Asherot, derived certain powers from the spheres, that they inspired the prophets, spoke to them in visions, and told them what was good and what bad. I have explained their theory when speaking of the prophets of the Ashera. But when the wise men discovered and proved that there was a Being, neither itself corporeal nor residing as a force in a corporeal body, viz., the true, one God, and that there existed besides [Him] other purely incorporeal beings which God endowed with His goodness and His light, namely, the angels, and that these beings are not included in the sphere and its stars, it became evident that it was these angels and not the images or Asherot that charged the prophets. From the preceding remarks it is clear that the belief in the existence of angels is connected with the belief in the Existence of God; and the belief in God and angels leads to the belief in Prophecy and in the truth of the Law. In order to firmly establish this creed,

(continued next page)

God commanded [the Israelites] to make over the ark the form of two angels. The belief in the existence of angels is thus inculcated into the minds of the people, and this belief is in importance next to the belief in God's Existence; it leads us to believe in Prophecy and in the Law, and opposes idolatry. If there had only been one figure of a cherub, the people would have been misled and would have mistaken it for God's image which was to be worshipped, in the fashion of the heathen; or they might have assumed that the angel [represented by the figure] was also a deity, and would thus have adopted a Dualism. By making two cherubim and distinctly declaring "the Lord is our God, the Lord is One," Moses dearly proclaimed the theory of the existence of a number of angels; he left no room for the error of considering those figures as deities, since [he declared that] God is one, and that He is the Creator of the angels, who are more than one."

Maimonides teaches that the angels are connected with the Law, the Tablets. They are the means through which man attains prophecy. And it's only through prophecy – God's communications with man – that we possess the Torah. Thus, the angels are integral to the Ark that houses the Torah. Not only are the Tablets evidence of that great event of Revelation at Sinai, as the writing on the Tablets was miraculous, but the two angels convey the concept of prophecy.

Interesting is their design. The two angels covered the Ark below with their wings, while also facing downwards, looking at the Ark. This expresses the sole function of angels. When one covers something, he expresses a concern to protect, or guard the object. Facing towards it expresses one's focus. Through this unique positioning of the angels' wings and their downward facial attention, we learn that angels are primarily occupied with God's wisdom.

It is for this reason, I believe, that the Torah again mentions that the Tablets must be placed in the Ark, in connection with the Kaporets that has the angel forms. Meaning, the Kaporets can only be placed on the

Ark if it contains the Tablets. Without the Tablets, the angels lose all meaning. So although already commanded in 25:17 to use the Ark as a container for the Tablets, we must also learn in 25:21 that the Kaporets can only find its true meaning if the Tablets – the Torah – are in the Ark. The prime lesson here is that angels function to relate God's Torah to man. Without the Torah, the angels have no relevance to us. Therefore, this second verse teaches that besides the Ark's function to "contain", the Kaporets has a different purpose, that can only be realized once the Tablets are inside. Thus, the angels and the Tablets together form one lesson, that the Law was received via prophecy, via the angels. But had it been permitted to allow the angels to exist apart from the law, and not looking downward at the Ark's contents and not covering the Ark with their wings, an onlooker might assume the angelic forms exist for themselves, like the Gold Calf.

Now we understand the peculiar posture of these two angels, why they are connected with the Tablets, why they are two, and why we are told a second time to place the Tablets in the Ark. The repetition is thereby explained. ■



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AMALEK: Never Again

Rabbi Reuven Mann

In addition to this week's Torah reading of Tetzaveh we also read Parshat Zachor, which commands us to "remember and not forget" what Amalek did to us. To properly fulfill this mitzvah we must ask, who is Amalek, what is his agenda and why is remembering him so vital?

Amalek is the nation that attacked the Jews on the "road when they left Egypt." The Torah does not cite the reasons for this assault. No conflict existed between the two peoples. Why did the Amalekites venture into the wilderness to initiate unprovoked combat? An insight can be gleaned from the strange manner in which Moshe conducted this war. After instructing Joshua to select men for battle he ascended a hill and raised his hands toward heaven. As long as his hands were aloft the Jews would be dominant but

when they were lowered the enemy prevailed. Finally, Aharon and Chur placed a stone beneath him, supporting his hands on both sides and Joshua defeated the foe.

The commentators ask what role did the hands of Moshe play in making war. Compelling explanations have been offered. One is that excessive fear of man is rooted in the overestimation of human strength. Genuine courage comes from recognition of the absolute power of Hashem who alone determines outcomes. At this point the Jews had not fully internalized the idea that "Hashem is a man of war" which they had witnessed at the Red Sea. When they viewed the upraised hands of Moshe they "subordinated themselves to their Father in Heaven" and obtained renewed strength. One who achieves a genuine awe of the Creator is liberated from his fear of man.

I would like to suggest another dimension to the "hands of Moshe." This was not an ordinary war undertaken for mundane political considerations. In fact, the real enemy of Amalek was Hashem, for whom the Jews served as a proxy. Amalek struck after the Exodus and the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. This was a unique moment of Divine Revelation in the history of mankind. The world trembled in awe of the G-d of Israel who had demonstrated His Supreme Might on behalf of His chosen people. Amalek sought to thwart the universal acceptance of Hashem by destroying the Jews. His aim was to replace belief in G-d with a philosophy that worshipped man as the highest being. Moshe raised his hands to demonstrate that the Jews were not fighting for personal reasons but for the sake of G-d's name. Our national mission is to courageously proclaim, "He is our God, there is no other."

Is Amalek merely a relic of the past or a constantly recurring phenomenon? The Rabbis teach that any people who fanatically hate the Jews and seek to destroy them in order to remove Judaism from the world has the status of Amalek. Haman who wanted to be worshipped as a god sought to kill the Jews because Mordechai "would not kneel or bow." In our time we have seen the worst catastrophes of Jewish history. Hitler's belief in the supremacy of the Aryan race was the underlying cause of his war against the Jews. Rabbi Soloveitchik said that the rabid anti-semitism of Soviet Russia was an intrinsic outgrowth of its communist ideology in which deification of the state supplanted G-d.

We can now appreciate the importance of remembering Amalek. During the Holocaust many refused to acknowledge the evidence of the extermination process because they couldn't believe that humans were capable of such brutal savagery. Today there are those who deny the Holocaust even while threatening a new one. They are perilously close to obtaining the weapons of mass destruction. Let us listen intently to Parshat Zachor and earnestly resolve, "NEVER AGAIN."

Shabbat Shalom. ■



Rabbi Bernie Fox

Tetzaveh

The Oil Required for the Menorah

And you should command Bnai Yisrael and they should bring to you pure olive oil, hand crushed for illumination to keep a lamp constantly burning. (Shemot 27:20)

1. Only the purest olive oil can be used in the Menorah

In Parshat Tetzaveh the instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle – the Mishkan continue. This parasha primarily deals with the garments of the Kohanim – the priests – and Kohen Gadol – the High Priest. However, the opening passage of the parasha deals with the oil used in the Menorah – the candelabra of the Mishkan.

Only the purest oil is used in the Menorah. The Mishne in Tractate Menachot describes the production of this oil. The olives are hand

crushed. The crushed olives are placed in the basket. The oil that drains from these olives is extremely pure. This is the only oil used in the Menorah.

2. Filtered oil is not acceptable

There is another means of producing pure oil. This is through filtering. This method is not acceptable. Even if the filtered oil is perfectly pure, it may not be used for the Menorah. Of course, this raises a question. The requirement to use in the Menorah only oil from hand-crushed olives is intended to assure the purity of the oil. A similar grade of purity could be assured through filtering. However, filtering is unacceptable! Why can filtering not be used?

In order to answer this question, we must further analyze the Torah's requirement for the oil of the Menorah. As our passage indicates, the oil must be pure. What is the

definition of pure? Apparently, pure means that the oil should not contain solids. However, the oil must also be complete or whole. None of its components can be missing.

We can now understand the reason filtered oil cannot be used. There is a significant difference between pure oil derived from hand crushed olives and filtered oil. Oil derived from hand-crushed olives is innately pure. Without removing any component from the oil it is pure. Oil that is purified by filtering is not pure innately. Instead, the filtering removes the solids, leaving a purer oil. This answers our question. The oil used for the Menorah must be pure. It must also contain all of its components. These two requirements can only be met through hand-crushing the olives. Hand-crushing the olives produces pure oil without the removing any components. These requirements cannot be met through filtering.

3. The oil used for the Minchah offering

A Minchah – a grain offering – is also accompanied by oil. What grade of oil is required for a Minchah? The Torah, in describing this oil, mentions the same grade as required for the Menorah. However, our Sages explain that the Minchah does not require this highest grade of oil. Even inferior grades are suitable. The passage merely indicates that the highest grade is not exclusively reserved for the Menorah. It can also be offered with the Minchah. Maimonides adds that, although various grades of oil can be brought with the Minchah, one should bring the highest grade available. He explains that in performing any mitzvah one should always use the best materials.

4. Fuels acceptable for Shabbat lights

Why is the highest grade of oil required for the Menorah but not absolutely required for the Minchah? The Midrash Tanchuma seems to answer this question. In order to understand the comments of the Midrash, an introduction is required. The Talmud discusses the types of fuels that may be used on Shabbat. There are two general considerations that determine the suitability of any fuel for the Shabbat lights. First, it must burn evenly. If the oil does not burn evenly, one might adjust the wick in order to improve the light. This adjustment is prohibited on Shabbat. Second, the fuel cannot burn with an unpleasant odor. The Shabbat lights are intended to provide useful light. If they produce an unpleasant odor, the members of the household will

(continued next page)

distance themselves from the Shabbat lights. These lights will not serve their intended purpose. The Mishne in Tractate Shabbat discusses various fuels that cannot be used for the Shabbat lights because of these two considerations. However, Rebbe Tarfon posits that it is not adequate for a fuel to burn well and not be unpleasant. He maintains that only olive oil may be used. Tiferet Yisrael explains that the reason for Rebbe Tarfon's position is that olive oil burns best.

Rebbe Tarfon's position is discussed at length in Midrash Tanchuma. There, the Sages argue with Rebbe Tarfon. They explain that olive oil is not readily available in all communities. Rebbe Tarfon's insistence on olive oil will pose a hardship in such communities! Rebbe Tarfon responds that the Torah insists on olive oil for the Menorah. This demonstrates the superiority of its flame. Rebbe Tarfon also seems to indicate that this is the reason for requiring the highest grade of oil. Extremely pure oil produces a better flame.

We can now answer our question. The highest grade of oil is superior in two ways. First, it is the choicest oil. As Maimonides explains, we should use the most choice materials in performing any mitzvah. However, this requirement is not absolute. If it is not satisfied the mitzvah is nonetheless fulfilled. This means that both for the Minchah and the Menorah the purest oil is preferred. However, this consideration alone does not disqualify oil of a lower grade. Indeed, a lower grade may be brought with a Minchah offering.

The highest grade oil is superior in a second way. As Rebbe Tarfon explains, it produces a better flame than any other grade. This aspect of superiority is irrelevant to the Minchah offering. That oil is not intended to fuel a light. However, it is relevant to the Menorah. The Menorah requires the best flame. This requirement is absolute and can only be achieved with the purest oil.

In short, the Menorah is designed to produce light. The highest grade olive oil produces the best light. Therefore, it is required for the Menorah. This consideration is irrelevant to the Minchah offering. Therefore, although choice materials are always best in performing a mitzvah, lower grades of oil are not disqualified.

The Design Specification for the Garments of the Kohen Gadol

And they shall be on Aharon and his sons when they enter the Ohel Moed or when they approach the altar to serve in sanctity. And they shall not be guilty of sin and die. It is an eternal law for him and his descendants after him. (Shemot 28:43)

1. The design specification for the garments of the Kohen Gadol and for the vessels of the Mishcan

Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik Zt"l explained that there is a crucial difference between the utensils of the Mishcan and the garments of the Kohen Gadol. The design of the garments was strictly governed by the law. If any garment was lost or damaged, it was replaced by an exact duplicate. The description of the garments was binding for all generations.

In contrast, the design of the utensils was not permanently binding in all of its details. The design described in the Chumash was intended for the Mishcan. These utensils were also essential components of the Bait HaMikdash. However, the utensils in the Holy Temple were not required to meet the description of the Chumash in every detail. Deviation was permitted.

2. The relationship of the vessels and garments to the Mishcan

Why is the law of the garments different from the law of the utensils? The Mizbeyach Menorah, Shulchan and other utensils were part of the institution of Mikdash – sanctuary. However, the specific design described in the Torah was adapted to the Mishcan. The Mishcan was the version of Mikdash designed to accompany Bnai Yisrael in the wilderness. The vessels as described in the Torah were as essential to the Mishcan as the tent itself. However, the Mishcan was only



one model of the institution of sanctuary. These utensils were designed specifically for this model. Other models could have utensils designed in a different manner. Shlomo's Bait HaMikdash represented a different interpretation of the institution of sanctuary. It would include all of these vessels. However, their design would be adapted to the Bait HaMikdash.

However, the garments were not a part of this institution of sanctuary. They were an expression of the sanctity of the Kohen Gadol. This sanctity did not change with the various forms of sanctuary. Therefore, the garments were not altered. The Kohen Gadol of the Mishcan had the same sanctify as the individual serving in Shlomo's Temple. The garments of both High Priests were therefore identical. ■

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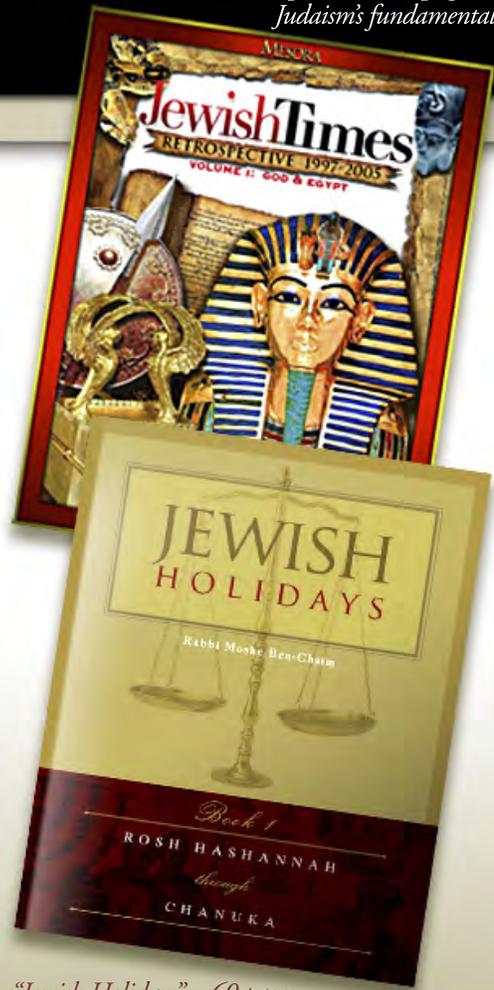
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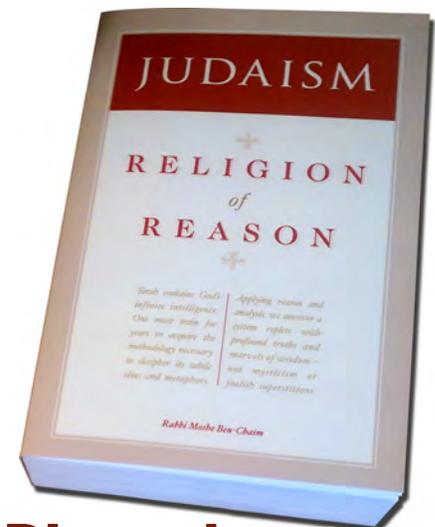
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Tetzaveh: **Tabernacle & its Vessels**

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Over the years we have offered explanations for the purpose of the Tabernacle and its vessels. There is no shortage of material as the Tabernacle's details are so numerous. While it is tempting to suggest new ideas explaining the intricacies of the Tabernacle and the vessels' designs, we must be carefully allegiant to the verses so our theories do not veer into mere suggestive territory. The verses must guide our every idea.

To review, we explained that the Tabernacle is primarily a two-room structure. The off-limits nature of the

Holy of Holies that houses the Ark teaches man's inability to understand what God is, and other metaphysical truths. Just as we cannot enter this room, we also cannot grasp certain ideas. Even when the High Priest enters on Yom Kippur, he must cloud the room with incense, again creating a veil. We also do not know what angels are, so they too are placed in the room. The very nature of this room, that certain matters are concealed from human thought, is represented in Moses' initial act of suspending the Tabernacle's covering, before creating the walls. This first act in building the Tabernacle

demonstrated that Tabernacle offered this primary lesson: a veil exist between man and the Creator. Apparently, this lesson is especially required when erecting a structure exclusively identified with God. One might assume God occupies a spatial relationship with this structure, meant for His "dwelling" as He put it (Exod. 25:8). Thus, this lesson was incorporated into the very process of erecting the Tabernacle, as it was the initial act, a creation of a "veil." The Jews thereby realized this veil between them and God. For the same reason, God commanded Moses to rope-off Sinai lest anyone ascend. There too, we must recognize our complete ignorance of what God is.

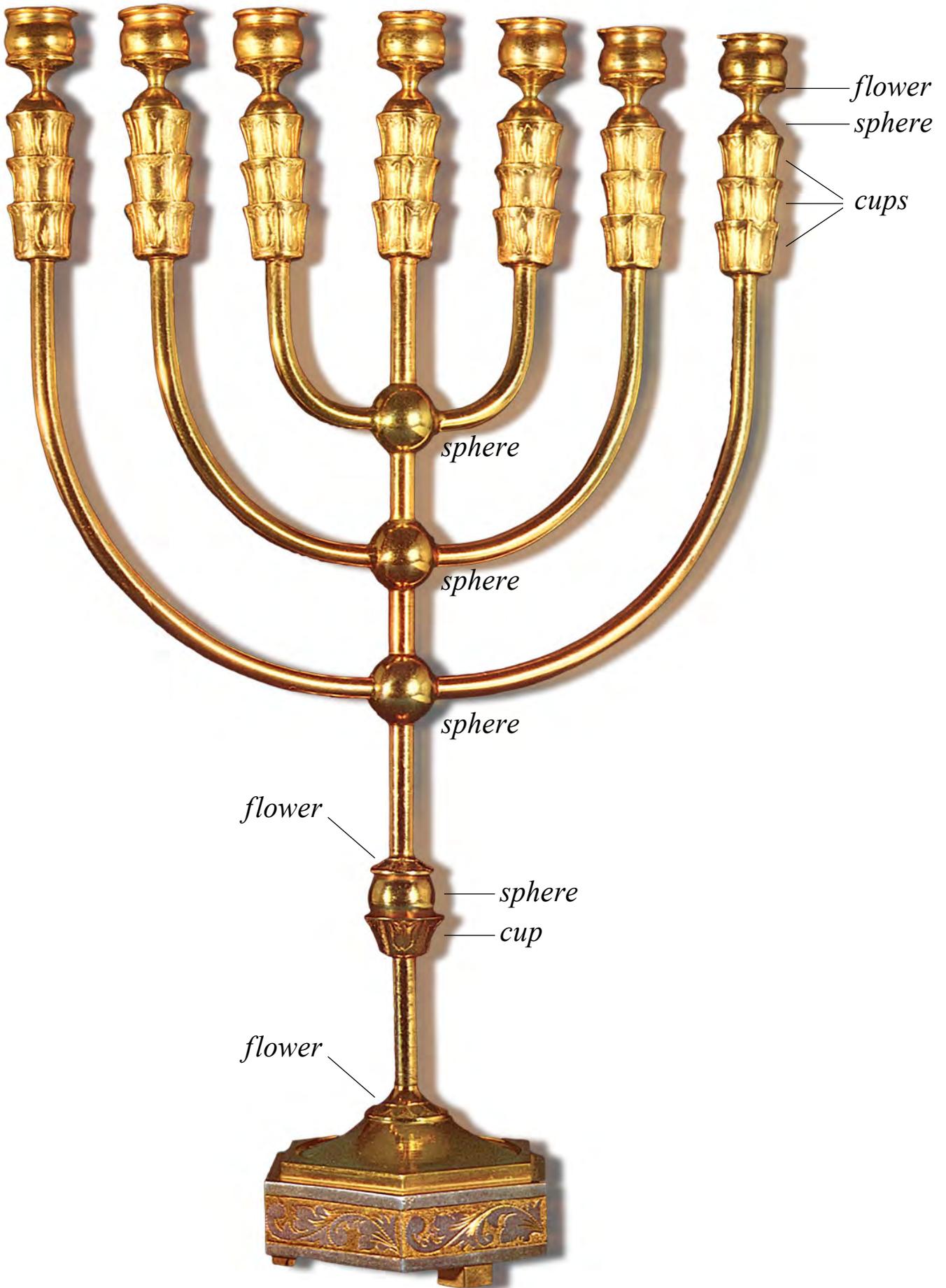
That being said, that the Holy of Holies represents what is alien to the human experience, the Holies that contains the Menorah, Table and Incense Altar must therefore contain lessons that are humanly attainable.

Let's step back for a moment. In religious life, what can we name as the focus of Judaism? Primarily, Jewish life revolves around Torah study and education as our greatest command, targeting a love of God. We also relate to God as our Provider so we call to Him alone in prayer for all our needs. And God's care for the nation is expressed in His providence, repeated in our holiday celebrations of His countless salvations. These three; wisdom, prayer, and recognizing God's providence, are each central themes. Now let's compare these to the vessels in the Holies...

The Incense Altar

Like the Animal Altar, this is synonymous with prayer: "Rabbi Joshua son of Levi said, 'Prayer was instituted corresponding the daily sacrifices' (Tal. Brachos 26b)." The Incense Altar thereby embodies man's approach to God, or prayer. By offering incense or sacrificing ourselves by proxy through an animal, we attempt to approach God. Sacrificing ourselves mimics Adam the First's initial act of animal sacrifice. Upon his creation, Adam immediately demonstrated that man

(continued on page 14)



flower

sphere

sphere

sphere

sphere

cup

flower

flower

sphere

cups

should not exist by nature. Nothing should. It was due to God's generosity that He created man. To express our dependence on God for life, we sacrifice an animal to show that this is the state we should truly be in, had God not created us. Prayer too is an expression of our reliance on God's kindness to grant our needs.

The Table

This was to hold the twelve loaves of bread, representing God's providence over the Twelve Tribes. So of the three above, we have addressed prayer and providence. The remaining vessel is the Menorah.

The Menorah

Essentially, the Menorah illuminates. Light is used to see, to examine, to "learn." Therefore light is a perfect metaphor for wisdom. King Solomon recognized this as well, "For a flame is Mitzvah, and Torah is light (Proverbs 6:23)."

Our study has an aim: knowledge of the Creator. But first, we must define God. As we just called Him, He is the "Creator." The six Menorah lights may convey the Six Days of Creation. These lights must each face inwards towards the center seventh branch. Meaning, all created matter – the Six Days/six branches – illuminate us with truths of God, the One who rested on the seventh day. Creation is meant to reflect God's wisdom. So the Menorah's most apparent design – seven branches – highlights the most central knowledge man must attain: there exists a Creator who created all in Six Days. Additionally, these creations all aim towards imbuing us with greater knowledge of God. The lights facing towards the seventh center branch indicate this second idea.

The Menorah's Decorative Icons

We suggested that the Menorah refers to the Six Days of Creation. All creations possess "substance", meaning the material they are made of. They possess "form" be they tall short, heavy

or light, colorful or opaque. And they possess "function" or a purpose. Perhaps the Menorah directs man towards those features shared by all created things. Analyzing the material, the form and the function of any created thing, we arrive at God's wisdom embedded in all of creation. Here is how...

What are the Menorah's three decorative elements: spheres, flowers and cups?

I wish to suggest that the spherical Menorah shapes refer to matter, or the "globe" from which all on Earth was created. The flowers refer to "form", or the beauty and design of creation. And the cups, a utilitarian object, refer to the purpose or "function" of creation. On all six Menorah branches we find these three elements. Thus, each creation of the six days shares these main categories. And when we study the substance, form and function of anything, we will arrive at greater knowledge of the Creator. Sometimes it is the size of something that is unique, or its material and texture, other times its weight or a unique function defines it. But it is the overall design of creation that is to lead man to appreciate God's wisdom that all things reveal. Maimonides teaches that love of God is attained through the study of creation. (Yesodei Hatorah 2:2) We might add that the reason these three designs are also located on the center branch (referencing not creation but the Creator[1]) is because all creation had an abstract design in God's plan that preceded its existence, and from which it was modeled in the physical world.

Now, unless one is a scientist or a philosopher, man views the world in a utilitarian light. An object's purpose is usually the primary link between man and the object. Man is not so preoccupied with the material that things are made of, or their form. Man has aspirations and a great need to accomplish and feel successful. Therefore, he relates to objects mostly as they function towards his success. We view wood as a great building tool. Water as that which quenches, irrigates and cools. Perhaps this explains why the

cups are in greater number than the flowers and spheres. The greater number of cups on each branch indicate that man's utility of all creation is intended. God told Adam to conquer the Earth (Gen. 1:28).

Another idea. All six branches flow out from the seventh. This might allude to the creation of all Six Days that emanate or branch-out from the One who rested on the seventh day, or seventh branch.

Secondly, at that point where each of the six branches depart from the center branch, there is a sphere representing "substance." But this can also allude to "existence." Meaning, although all was created, all creation – all six branches/days – require God's continued will that they endure. Nothing exists on its own, simply because God created it long ago. Without God's will, all matter would vanish. The spheres on the center branch (alluding to the Creator, not creation) might indicate this idea.

One final observation. Why were only the Menorah and the Arks' cover (the Kaporess) made of "pure" gold – not wood overlaid with gold like other vessels? Since both represent knowledge, God wishes knowledge to possess the most prized reputation. So He commands that these two objects alone are to be made of "pure gold", conveying their unparalleled worth.

Summary

The Tabernacle is an amazing structure revealing the most profound ideas. It embodies the core principles of life: what man can know, and what he cannot. It also teaches us the primary areas that must occupy our minds; study, prayer and realizing God's providence. ■

[1] In no way do we suggest that anything "represents" the Creator. The Torah merely uses the number seven in many cases as an abbreviated reference the Creator who rested on the seventh day.

From Bad Advice to Wise Insights

Rabbi Dr.
Darrell
Ginsberg

Haman's meteoric rise and equally rapid downfall is one of the main plots in Megillas Esther. Immediately after his promotion, we see Haman act with a certain confidence, if not arrogance, deciding the fate of the Jews in a quick and efficient manner. After Mordechai refuses to bow to him, he blithely decides to kill off the entire Jewish race – they are all an extension of Mordechai. We know of course that Haman was the personification of Amalek, unable to ideologically co-exist with the Jew, and that this was the driving force behind his plan to destroy us. Yet, in two fascinating “side-stories” in the megilla, we see a different side of Haman, and an inkling into how he related to his friends and family, and how his seeking advice was, in fact, so harmful to his fate.

By Chapter 5 in the megilla, Haman is on top of the world. He was a short period of time away from destroying the Jewish people. He was one small rung of the ladder away from ruling the entire world. He was adored and revered by so many, a master politician with a bright future. And to top it off, he received an exclusive invitation to a banquet offered by the King and Queen. He leaves the palace, no doubt brimming with exuberance – and then he sees Mordechai (5:9-14):

“Then went Haman forth that day joyful and glad of heart; but when Haman saw Mordechai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, Haman was filled with wrath against Mordechai.”

Yet Haman does not act. Strangely, this man of assurance runs home and seeks out advice:

“Nevertheless Haman refrained himself, and went home; and he sent and fetched his friends and Zeresh his wife. And Haman recounted unto them the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and everything as to how the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said moreover: 'Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to-morrow also am I invited by her together with the king. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordechai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.' Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him: 'Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and in the morning speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon; then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet.' And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made.”

His sheer joy at this “brilliant” plan led to the fateful and rash decision to disturb the king that specific night.

Why did Haman turn to his friends and wife this time? And why was their advice so endearing to him? There is one other subtle inconsistency here. At first, the megilla tells us that Haman seeks out his friends and Zeresh. Yet when offering advice, Zeresh is listed first, and then the friends. Why the change in order?

There is another time Haman seeks the solace of his wife and friends, only this time, his world has been turned upside down. After leading Mordechai around Shushan, Haman returns home (6:12-14):

“And Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman hastened to his house, mourning and having his head covered. And Haman recounted unto Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him: 'If Mordecai, before whom thou hast begun to fall, be of the seed of the Jews, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him.' While they were yet talking with him, came the king's chamberlains, and hastened to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared.”

In line with the last question above, we once again see a switch between the order of Zeresh and the friends. This time, Haman first addresses Zeresh and then the friends. And when they turn to offer him insight, more than the order is changed – the friends are not just first, but morph into “chachamav”, wise men. How exactly are they to be viewed as wise men? And what was Haman searching for in this encounter?

Answering these questions requires us to understand on a deeper level the mindset of Haman, as he was the paradigm of egomania. As we mentioned, Haman left the palace at the peak of confidence. He sees Mordechai (who no doubt sees him) and Mordechai does not move or budge – in effect, he does not acknowledge Haman's existence. This was different from Mordechai's refusal to bow down to Haman, which would have been a display of intrinsic importance in Haman. Haman had a high concept of self-import, viewing his achievements and invitations (as we see when he speaks to his wife and friend), along with public approval, as objective determinations of man's significance. And even more so, in this situation, he held Mordechai's life in his hands. Yet Mordechai is not affected whatsoever by the presence of Haman; he sees Haman as who he really was, just another person. This reality hit Haman, and it could only be described as a deflation of his ego. To go from the peak to the low in the framework of the egomaniac is extremely unsettling. It also acts as a barrier to be able to get to the root of the problem, to ponder a solution to his dilemma. In other words, Haman was bothered by the fact that he was so infuriated with Mordechai. And killing him was not the answer, as it would not give him back the greater sense of self, the inflated ego. So he turns to his friends and wife.

He seeks the advice of his friends – “ohavav” – and his wife. Haman is searching for people to prop him up, to

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help solve his problem and give him back his lost sense of importance. Yet, the word “ohavav” , which really means loved ones, reveals something more subtle. On one level he wanted objective advice, and going to his wife would not be the answer (as we will soon see). On a deeper level, though, his friends were “ohavav. He admired them because they were “yes men” ready to offer the sycophantic advice that could only be destructive. If he went directly to his wife, she would most likely be sympathetic, but not necessarily objective. So Haman reviewed what he accomplished in his life. He had achieved much (interesting how his children are another notch in his belt), culminating in the invitation to the big party. And then he notes how with all he has accomplished, his entire sense of self import meant nothing as long as Mordechai was there. At that point, the obvious advice should have been to just relax, take it easy, be patient – victory was not too far off in the distance. Instead, Zeresh steps forward, and we see from her comments both her personality and how her advice hit home. She leads, with the friends now second, suggesting Haman build a gallows that could be seen from anywhere in Shushan, and to hang Mordechai on it. This would be more than killing Mordechai. It would be the ultimate statement of accomplishment, true victory, and everyone would acknowledge it. His ego was now inflated once again, the conflict resolved. Zeresh appealed to his egomania because she identified with it. Naturally, her advice served to increase Haman’s inflated sense of importance. He loved this advice so much that he acts imprudently, committing the blunder that began his downfall--he runs to the palace at night to request from the king that the gallows be built.

After the drastic turn of events, where Haman leads Mordechai through Shushan, he returns home, dejected and depressed. How could it all have gone so wrong? He turns to the person who was the driving force behind building these gallows, Zeresh. Only this time, the friends step forward, morphing into “chachamav”. The Talmud (Megilla 16a) explains that we learn from their statement to Haman how even when a

non-Jew offers wisdom, he can be identified as a chacham, a wise man. This is strange, as we must ask what the assumption of the Talmud was. Why would we believe otherwise? One would think that a person’s perfection was intrinsically tied to being a chacham. Yet the Talmud tells us that we view wisdom as something in its own right. Truth is the ultimate objective; therefore the source becomes irrelevant if the idea is true. With this in mind, what are these friends, along with Zeresh, now pointing out to Haman? Instead of feeding his ego, they offer something completely different. They point out something critical about the Jewish people. When witnessing the events that took place, the extreme turnaround in Haman’s fortunes, they sensed something was different here. Natural order would not normally dictate such a turn of events. As Rashi on the verse points out, the friends noted that when the Jews fall, they fall to the dust, but when they rise, they rise to the stars. What they were commenting on was the pendulum of Jewish history, and how it was tied to something other than the natural order. For the Jews, their adherence to God’s directives and their devotion to His ways determine their (and our) fate. When they followed God, they were at the top. And when they strayed, they fell so low. Haman’s wife and friends noted this to him, resisting any attempt at dealing with his ego. In essence, the game was up. Before Haman could even reflect, let alone react, he was whisked away to the party and his own date with the gallows.

These two small side stories teach us some important lessons. We see how the megalomaniac Haman was driven to every decision purely by his ego. We also see how his being enslaved to his ego led him to accept bad advice. Finally, we see how his seeking solace the final time only brought out the truth – but too late for him to back away. In essence, we see in these episodes the power of the ego, and its ability to destroy man. A person who entire sense of self importance is built on a distorted view of the self is destined to fail. When a person is able to truly recognize his place in the universe, this powerful force takes a backseat, leaving open the road to true perfection. ■

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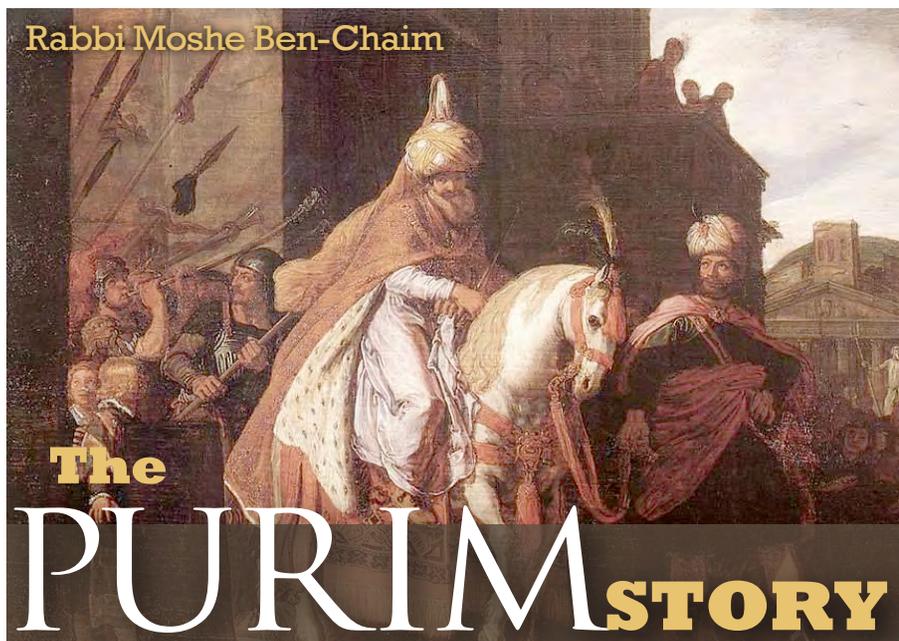
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Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



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

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

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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.

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. Mordechai 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 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

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owed 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

(continued next page)

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?

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 Channukah...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 an 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! ■

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