

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary  
Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future

THE BENJAMIN AND ROSE BERGER  
**TORAH TO-GO®**

Established by Rabbi Hyman and Ann Arbesfeld

*February 2021 • Purim 5781*

Dedicated in memory of our beloved

Mr. Willy Apfel a”h

לעילוי נשמת רב זאב בן עזריאל

Sheila and Ronny Apfel and family

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

Fasman Yeshiva High School (Skokie, IL) • Ida Crown Jewish Academy (Chicago, IL)

Maimonides School (Brookline, MA)

Margolin Hebrew Academy - Feinstone Yeshiva of the South (Memphis, TN)

North Shore Hebrew Academy High School (Great Neck, NY)

SAR High School (Bronx, NY) • Stella K. Abraham High School (Hewlett, NY)

YU High School for Girls (Hollis, NY) • YULA Boys High School (Los Angeles, CA)



# We thank the following synagogues which have pledged to be 5781 Pillars of the Torah To-Go® project

**Beth Jacob Congregation**  
Beverly Hills, CA

**Bnai Israel – Ohev Zedek**  
Philadelphia, PA

**Boca Raton Synagogue**  
Boca Raton, FL

**Cong. Ahavas Achim**  
Highland Park, NJ

**Cong. Ahavath Torah**  
Englewood, NJ

**Cong. Beth Sholom**  
Lawrence, NY

**Cong. Beth Sholom**  
Providence, RI

**Cong. Bnai Yeshurun**  
Teaneck, NJ

**Cong. Ohr HaTorah**  
Atlanta, GA

**Cong. Shaarei Tefillah**  
Newton Centre, MA

**Darchei Noam Glenbrook**  
Northbrook, IL

**Green Road Synagogue**  
Beachwood, OH

**The Jewish Center**  
New York, NY

**Riverdale Jewish Center**  
Riverdale, NY

**United Orthodox  
Synagogues**  
Houston, TX

**Young Israel of  
Century City**  
Los Angeles, CA

**Young Israel of  
Hollywood-Ft Lauderdale**  
Hollywood, FL

**Young Israel of  
Lawrence-Cedarhurst**  
Cedarhurst, NY

**Young Israel of  
New Hyde Park**  
New Hyde Park, NY

**Young Israel of  
New Rochelle**  
New Rochelle, NY

**Young Israel of  
Scarsdale**  
Scarsdale, NY

**Young Israel of  
West Hartford**  
West Hartford, CT

**Young Israel of  
West Hempstead**  
West Hempstead, NY

**Young Israel of  
Woodmere**  
Woodmere, NY

Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, President, Yeshiva University  
Rabbi Yaakov Glasser, David Mitzner Dean, Center for the Jewish Future  
Rabbi Menachem Penner, Max and Marion Grill Dean, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

Rabbi Robert Shur, Series Editor      Rabbi Joshua Flug, General Editor  
Rabbi Michael Dubitsky, Content Editor      Andrea Kahn, Copy Editor

Copyright © 2021 All rights reserved by Yeshiva University  
Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future  
500 West 185th Street, Suite 419, New York, NY 10033 • office@yutorah.org • 212.960.0074

This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with appropriate respect.  
For sponsorship opportunities, please contact Rabbi Robert Shur at shur@yu.edu

# Table of Contents

Purim 2021/5781

Dedicated in memory of our beloved  
Mr. Willy Apfel A”H  
לעילוי נשמת רב זאב בן עזריאל  
Sheila and Ronny Apfel and family

## **The Dual Nature of the Purim Miracle**

*Mrs. Rivka Alter* ..... Page 4

## **The Secret Sauce of a Tzaddik**

*Mrs. Rikki Ash* ..... Page 7

## **The Nature of the Mitzvah to Read the Megillah**

*Rabbi Yonasan Gersten* ..... Page 10

## **Amalek, the Kingship of Saul and the Kingship of God**

*Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot* ..... Page 13

## **Why Would Mordechai Recite the Psalm for Chanukah?**

*Rabbi Yaakov Jaffe* ..... Page 16

## **Purim with the Slonimer Rebbe: A Path to Perfection**

*Rabbi Josh Maslow* ..... Page 19

## **Celebrating Partial Triumph**

*Rabbi Elliot Schrier* ..... Page 23

## **Education Through Inspiration, Not Intimidation**

*Rabbi Mayer Simcha Stromer* ..... Page 25

## **Achashveirosh's Beauty Paegant: What is True Beauty?**

*Rabbi Zvi Zimmerman* ..... Page 28



## THE DUAL NATURE OF THE PURIM MIRACLE

The old joke about Jewish holiday celebrations is, “they tried to kill us, we survived, let’s eat.” Purim, at first glance, fits neatly into this framework. From a young age, we are taught about Haman, the villain of the Megillah, and his evil plot against the Jewish nation. We learn to admire the heroic efforts of Esther and Mordechai in foiling Haman’s evil plan. Although the miraculous sequence of events is clearly attributed to Hashem, the miracle is considered a *nes nistar* (hidden miracle), and Hashem’s name, despite the fact that He is the orchestrator of events, does not appear throughout the Megillah. The Purim story described in the Megillah is multifaceted and holds many layers of meaning. Let us examine the interplay between the role of the Divine and human interventions in



the Purim story and the nature of the miracles involved.

Rav Mordechai Breuer, in *Pirkei Moadot*, writes of the dual nature of the miracles of the Megillah and how they are reflected in the bracha we recite at its conclusion. The Gemara, *Megillah* 21b teaches:

לאחריה מאי מברך ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו

מלך העולם (האל) הרב את ריבנו והדן את דיננו והנוקם את נקמתנו והנפרע לנו מצרינו והמשלם גמול לכל אויבי נפשנו ברוך אתה ה' הנפרע לישראל מכל צריהם רבא אמר האל המושיע אמר רב פפא הלכך נימרינהו לתרויהו ברוך אתה ה' הנפרע לישראל מכל צריהם האל המושיע.

*What blessing is recited after the reading of the Megillah in places where it is customary to recite such a blessing? The following blessing is recited: “Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, the God Who pleads our cause, and Who judges our claim, and Who avenges our vengeance, and Who punishes our foes, and Who brings retribution to our enemies. Blessed are You, Lord, Who, on behalf of Israel, exacts punishment from all of their foes.” Rava said: The conclusion of the blessing is as follows: “Blessed are you, Lord, the God who brings salvation.” Rav Pappa said:*



Therefore, since there are two opinions on the matter, we should say both of them: "Blessed are you, Lord, Who, on behalf of Israel, exacts punishment from all their foes; the God Who brings salvation."

Both proposals are accepted by Rav Pappa and merged into the one bracha that we are familiar with. Rav Breuer explains that this *machloket* among the Amoraim is related to properly classifying the miracle of Purim. Is the focus on the salvation of the Jewish nation itself or is the focus on the fact that the Jewish nation was able to avenge their enemies? The solution suggested by Rav Pappa incorporates both these elements into the concluding bracha, indicating that there were two distinct causes for celebration by the nation at that time. This message is expressed in the Megillah (9:1):

אֲשֶׁר שָׁבְרוּ אֹיְבֵי הַיְּהוּדִים לְשָׁלוֹם בָּהֶם וְנִהְפְּדוּ  
הוּא אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלְטוּ הַיְּהוּדִים הַמָּה בְּשִׁנְאֵיהֶם:  
*The very day on which the enemies of the Jews had expected to dominate them, the opposite happened, and the Jews dominated their enemies.*

Two parallel salvations develop in the storyline of the Megillah, creating two distinct trajectories. The events leading to the selection of Esther as Achashverosh's replacement of Vashti forms one storyline, and the traitorous plot of Bigtan and Teresh, exposed by Mordechai and recorded in the king's chronicle, forms the second storyline. Both storylines describe events that transpire before Haman arrives on the scene to take steps to annihilate the Jewish nation, illustrating the concept referenced in Megillah 13b that Hashem provides the *refuah* before the *makkah*:

אחר הדברים האלה (אחר מאי) אמר רבא  
אחר שברא הקב"ה רפואה למכה דאמר ר"ל  
אין הקב"ה מכה את ישראל אלא כבורא להם

רפואה תחילה.

"After these events did King Ahasuerus promote Haman" (Esther 3:1). After what particular events? Rava said: Only after the Holy One, Blessed be He, created a remedy for the blow and set in place the chain of events that would lead to the miraculous salvation was Haman appointed, setting the stage for the decree against the Jews to be issued. Rava explains: As Reish Lakish said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, does not strike at the Jewish people unless He has already created a remedy for them beforehand.

Were both of these "*refuot*" really necessary for the miracle of Purim? We could argue that Esther's position as queen was all that was needed to eliminate the threat and reverse the future decree against her nation. The honor given by the king to Mordechai in perek 6, as repayment for the earlier story of saving his life, does not appear to be a necessary step in the overall salvation and reversal of the threat to the Jewish nation. If so, what is its purpose? The answer is that Mordechai's honor satisfies the other side of the coin on the dual nature of the Purim miracle reflected in the bracha of *harav et riveinu* mentioned above. While Esther uses her position of power to petition Achashverosh to reverse Haman's decree throughout the kingdom, she does not cause Haman's actual death. It is the honor given to Mordechai that creates the downward spiral for Haman, which leads to his death on his own tree and to the salvation of the Jews of Shushan. Haman's individual death lays the groundwork for his decree to also be terminated. The termination of the decree is far more consequential than Haman's death. Nevertheless, the Megillah focuses on both the termination of

the decree and the death of Haman. As such, we acknowledge the smaller scale salvation in Shushan created by Haman's death, as well as the larger scale victory of the Jews against their enemies in the kingdom at large with the reversal of Haman's decree.

These two separate elements of Hashem's salvation in the Megillah are represented by the horse and signet ring, which were both bestowed upon Mordechai. Despite Haman's contempt of Mordechai, Haman is commanded by the king to honor him by leading him publicly on the king's horse around the city. This suggestion was proposed to Achashverosh by Haman himself, when he mistakenly assumed the honor was meant for him. This event, in turn, leads to Haman's public humiliation and the building of the gallows to hang Mordechai. Ultimately, Haman is hung on the gallows he himself had willed into existence. Interwoven within this story is the tale of Esther's accusations against Haman at her second party. When Haman is deposed, it is Mordechai who is offered his position. It is because of Mordechai's relationship to Esther that he is able to influence kingdom policies, and he is handed the king's signet ring that had been relegated previously to Haman. This change in authority, brought about by the individual demise of Haman himself, allows for the advancement of new legislation to counteract the decrees previously sent out by Haman against the Jews, thereby granting the Jews permission to avenge their enemies.

The focus on individuals enhances the miracles. Haman's issue with Mordechai should have remained a personal issue. However, Haman exaggerates the dishonor and targets

not only Mordechai but his entire nation. Despite this larger focus, Haman also goes to great lengths to punish Mordechai individually, and this hatred consumes him more than the plans for the nation Mordechai represents. This is verbalized in Haman's exchange with Zeresh and his loved ones in 5:11-13:

וַיִּסְפֹּר לָהֶם הָמָן אֶת כְּבוֹד עֲשָׂרוֹ וְרֹב בָּנָיו  
וְאֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר גָּדְלוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂאוֹ  
עַל הַשָּׂרִים וְעַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ. וַיֹּאמֶר הָמָן אִף לֹא  
הִבִּיאה אֶסְתֵּר הַמֶּלֶכָה עִם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל הַמִּשְׁתָּה  
אֲשֶׁר עֲשֵׂתָהּ כִּי אִם אוֹתִי וְגַם לְמַחֵר אֲנִי קְרוֹא  
לָהּ עִם הַמֶּלֶךְ. וְכָל זֶה אֵינְנוּ שׁוֹהֵה לִי בְכָל יֵת  
אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי רֹאֶה אֶת מֶרְדֵּכָי הַיְּהוּדִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר  
הַמֶּלֶךְ.

*And Haman told them about his great wealth and his many sons, and all about how the king had promoted him and advanced him above the officials and the king's courtiers. "What is more," said Haman, "Queen Esther gave a feast, and besides the king she did not have anyone but me. And tomorrow too I am invited by her along with the king. Yet all this means nothing to me every time I see that Jew Mordecai sitting in the palace gate."*

In contrast, Esther accuses Haman as an individual who is a threat to her people, but her focus remains on saving the Jewish nation. She only singles out Haman after an extensive introduction about the distress of her nation. When she speaks to Achashverosh at her second party, she says (7:3-4):

וַתַּעַן אֶסְתֵּר הַמֶּלֶכָה וַתֹּאמֶר אִם מִצָּאתִי חַן  
בְּעֵינֶיךָ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאִם עַל הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב תִּתֶּנּוּ לִי נִפְשִׁי  
בְּשִׂאלָתִי וְעַמִּי בְּבִקְשָׁתִי כִּי נִמְכְּרָנוּ אֲנִי וְעַמִּי  
לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהָרוֹג וּלְאַבֵּד וְאֵלּוּ לְעַבְדִּים וְלִשְׁפָחוֹת  
נִמְכְּרָנוּ הַחֲרָשְׁתִּי כִּי אֵין הִצֵּר שׁוֹהֵה בְּגִזְק הַמֶּלֶךְ.  
*Queen Esther replies: "If Your Majesty will do me the favor, and if it pleases*

*Your Majesty, let my life be granted me as my wish, and my people as my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, massacred, and exterminated. Had we only been sold as bondmen and bondwomen, I would have kept silent; for the adversary is not worthy of the king's trouble."*

Looking back at the joke we started with in this article, we can ask whether it is true that on Purim they first tried to kill us and then we survived? From the outset, Hashem was orchestrating a salvation, using the personal decisions made by individuals based on their own motivations, to conduct the story from behind the scenes. We could say that the model employed here is that the measures to survive and be saved came before the "tried to kill us" stage. The Purim miracle is put into effect before any challenges manifested. Haman's efforts against the Jews were for naught because Esther was already a prominent figure in the palace from perek 2. Mordechai's heroic act is recorded in the king's chronicle even before Haman rose to power in perek 3, and before he targeted Mordechai. This prevents Haman from claiming more honor for himself than Mordechai. When it was most needed, Hashem ensures that Achashverosh has a sleepless night and reads the account of Bigtan and Teresh's assassination attempt. The framework for *geulah* is built in proactively from the beginning.

There is one exception to this principle. When Mordechai instructs Esther to go to the king on behalf of the Jewish nation, she hesitates because she had not been called upon

by the king for 30 days, a distinct unit of time. She senses a distancing from Achashverosh and is worried that at this time he may not look upon her favorably if she were to approach him. This situation causes Esther's hesitation and had the potential to undermine all the steps Hashem had prepared behind the scenes. At that moment, Hashem created a predicament that challenged Esther. The large-scale *geulah* about to be rolled out to the Jewish nation is predicated on a moral decision that she has to make. Esther's desire to live is pitted against a moral obligation to save her nation. Because Hashem endows humans with *bechira chafshit*, Esther is the only one able to effectuate the *geulah*, despite all the preparatory steps Hashem had taken. This powerful message — of humans ultimately being the deciders of their own salvation — is seen in a poignant fashion at this climax in the story described in the Megillah. The personal sacrifice that Esther is required to make is significant, and brings about the salvation we celebrate.

Although Hashem is the mastermind behind the Megillah, His name is not mentioned explicitly. Perhaps one reason for this absence is to reinforce the message about the power of bringing the *geulah*. The demands of self-sacrifice and the initiative required of us, notwithstanding the behind-the-scenes support from Hashem, are daunting. Yet it is incumbent upon us to recognize the key role we play in jump-starting our own salvation, and how rewarding it can be when we rise to the challenge.





## THE SECRET SAUCE OF A TZADDIK

**P**arshat Teztaveh often coincides with the holiday of Purim in some way (in a non-leap year), whether it is tied together with *Shabbat Zachor* (the Shabbat immediately before Purim), or, as is the case this year, it immediately follows the *chag* (holiday). As we may remember from our elementary school days, Moshe Rabbeinu's name is noticeably absent from *Parshat Teztaveh*, which also often coincides with his own *Yahrzeit* week.

To solve this incongruence, I would like to explore two important episodes of Moshe's life and hopefully gain a better understanding of what true righteousness is, how it applies to this



time of year, and what we can do with this information.

Let's begin with the episode of the *cheit ha'egel* (the golden calf). The Jewish people sinned terribly, and Moshe Rabbeinu wanted nothing

more than to seek forgiveness on their behalf. Famously, he asserted:

וְעַתָּה אִם תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם וְאִם אֵין מַחְנִי נָא  
מִסִּפְרֶךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ.

*Now, if You will forgive their sin [well and good]; but if not, erase me from the book which You have written.*

**Shemot 32:32**

Here, Moshe Rabbeinu is giving G-d an ultimatum: If You don't forgive the Jewish people, erase me from your Torah, I want no part of it! It is clear from this episode that Moshe Rabbeinu was willing to sacrifice his own life for the Jewish people.

Now let's enter a later episode. The setting is the *midbar* (desert), and

Moshe Rabbeinu is told that his lifelong dream will never come to fruition; he can never enter the land flowing with milk and honey, the land of Israel. In typical *tzaddik* fashion, Moshe pleads with HaShem to overturn this decree. *Va'etchanan el Hashem be'eit hahi leimor* — and I begged Hashem at the time, saying ... (Deuteronomy 3:23). If you look carefully at this verse, you will notice the *aleph* in the word *ואתחנן*. Moshe prayed to HaShem, singularly. In other words, Moshe prayed alone.

The same Moshe who was willing to give up his place in the Torah for the sake of the Jewish people had nobody come to his aid when

this exercise myself, I discovered that I am part of chats that pray for *cholim* (those suffering from illness), for *shidduchim* (marriage matches), and for fertility. I even sometimes see *segulot* (remedies) for *parnassah* (livelihood) on my WhatsApp chats, but there is one thing I realized that is notably absent: prayers for *tzaddikim*.

If a *tzaddik* falls under the category of a *choleh*, then I very likely will have a WhatsApp group dedicated to his *refuah*. But just *stam* (for no apparent purpose), a group dedicated to prayers for our *tzaddikim*? That, I have yet to witness. For the most part, though unfortunate, we hear about the

The same Moshe who was willing to give up his place in the Torah for the sake of the Jewish people had nobody come to his aid when it came time to daven for the one thing he wanted most in the world.

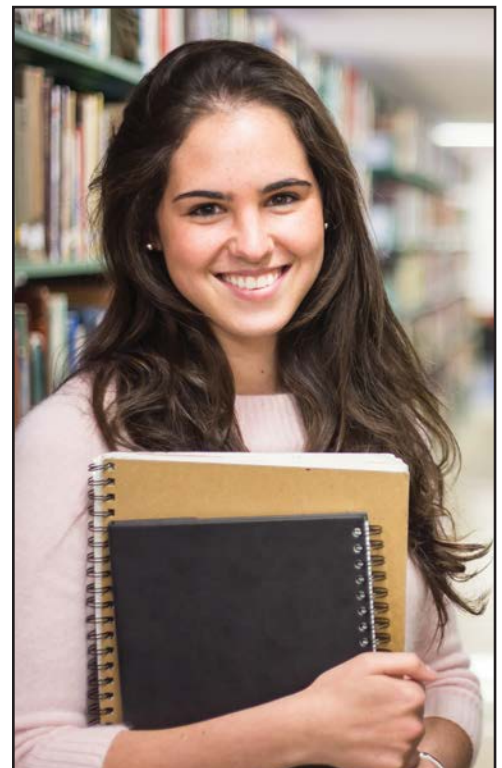
it came time to daven for the one thing he wanted most in the world. We would imagine that a person of Moshe's caliber would be joined in prayer by thousands, considering all he had done for the Jewish people. Perhaps this is why his name is omitted from *Parshat Tetzaveh*, because *tzaddikim*, the heroes of our people, are behind the scenes, often standing alone.

If you need further proof, I challenge you to look through your group chats on WhatsApp (if you are a WhatsApp user) and inspect the purpose of some of your communal groups. After performing

struggles and triumphs of our *tzaddikim* posthumously when their stories are transformed into biographies.

The same is true of Mordechai. Before the Purim story, Mordechai was a key player on the *Sanhedrin* (Tribunal of Judges). Upon involving himself in royal matters and getting himself mixed up in the politics of Shushan, he no longer was able to serve in the same capacity. In fact, the Megillah itself writes:

כִּי מֵרִדְכַּי הִיְהוּדִי מִשְׁנָה לְמֶלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרֹשׁ  
וְגָדוֹל לַיְהוּדִים וְרָצוּי לְרַב אֶחָיו דָּרֵשׁ טוֹב  
לְעִמּוּ וְדָבָר שְׁלוֹם לְכָל יִרְעֵוֹ.



## ENTRY-LEVEL DOCTORATE IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Occupational therapists  
help their clients gain  
independence in  
performing the tasks of  
everyday living

Your Journey Starts at:  
[yu.edu/katz/ot](http://yu.edu/katz/ot)



**Katz**  
Katz School  
of Science and Health



For Mordechai the Jew ranked next to King Achashverosh and was highly regarded by the Jews and popular **with most of his brothers**; he sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of all his kindred.

**Esther 10:3**

On this *passuk*, Rashi comments that the reason Mordechai was only popular among “most of his brothers” is to indicate that the Sanhedrin had started to separate itself from him because of his involvement in politics, and because they felt he wasn’t as invested in his Torah studies. Mordechai, like Moshe, held the burden of Klal Yisrael at his own expense.

Now we have a better understanding and appreciation for the burden that our *tzaddikim* carry. But the goal here is twofold: appreciating our *tzaddikim* and striving to become *tzaddikim*. Having discussed the former, let us address the latter: how to become a *tzaddik*.

Our fate might be determined by God, but we are given the power of choice, the power to choose righteousness. We are a conglomeration of the choices we make; and each time we choose righteousness, we bring ourselves closer to the “*tzaddik*” status. We know that in Esther 4:14, Mordechai utters these famous words in response to Esther’s refusal to go to Achashverosh:

כִּי אִם הַחֲרֹשׁ תִּחְרָשִׁי בְּעֵת הַזֹּאת רָחוּץ  
וְהִצָּלָה יַעֲמוּד לַיהוּדִים מִמָּקוֹם אֲחֵר וְאַתָּה וּבֵית  
אָבִיךָ תֵּאבְדוּ וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אֵם לָעַת כְּזֹאת הַנֶּעֱתָ  
לְמַלְכוּת.

*On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to*

*royal position for just such a crisis.*

Esther was the *tzaddeket* that almost wasn’t. Had she not gone to Achashverosh after Mordechai’s plea, we may not have even known her name. So it behooves us to ask ourselves: what prevents us from making the right choice or living out the best version of ourselves? Amalek.

The first time we are introduced to Amalek, they have journeyed many miles just to “greet” the Jewish people after their exodus from Egypt. At this point, Bnei Yisrael is on a spiritual high. They literally just experienced the splitting of the Sea, and it’s almost as though nothing can bring them down from this incredible level of inspiration.

Enter Amalek. Amalek attacks at the most vulnerable moments in a person’s life. Though it may seem counterintuitive, we are most vulnerable during times of inspiration. Inspiration requires a subsequent call to action if we want to channel that inspiration into something tangible. Either we will harness the inspiring moments we are given for good, or we will become cynical about them. Amalek roots for cynicism.

We are told to both wipe out Amalek, and at the same time, to remember them. In order to resolve this tension, perhaps we must remember what Amalek did to us, and at the same time erase the Amalek inside of us — namely the part of us that is antithetical to the *tzaddik*, the part of us that would rather resort to cynicism than to making the difficult choices that will lead us toward righteousness.

Righteousness, as we have seen, is both something to be appreciated and something we strive to achieve.

## Moshe's Hidden and Revealed Name

While Moshe’s name does not appear in Parashat Tetzaveh, the Vilna Gaon notes that there is a hidden reference to his name. The total number of verses in Tetzaveh is 101. The name Moshe is spelled משה. Those are the letters that we see when we write his name. In reality, if one spells out each letter, it is מ"ם ש"ן ה"א and the other letters are the hidden part of his name. The numeric value of the hidden part of his name — the letters that are not part of the actual spelling (the ם in מ"ם, the ן"י from ש"ן and the ך from ה"א) totals 101.

***Kohelet Yitzchak to Tetzaveh***

Moshe Rabbeinu, Esther Ha’Malka, and Mordechai HaTzadik have taught us that righteousness can be a lonely path, and it is a choice that must be consciously maintained. Perhaps we will take it upon ourselves to create WhatsApp groups that focus on our *tzaddikim*, or pray with more fervor when we reach the entreaty for the righteous in our daily Amidah (silent prayers). At the same time, let us strive to make choices that further us along the path of the righteous, harness inspiration for the good, and crush any cynicism that enters our minds. A *freilichen Purim*, one that is *tzaddik*-ful and Amalek-free.



## THE NATURE OF THE MITZVAH TO READ THE MEGILLAH

In his *Shulchan Aruch* (687:2), Rav Yosef Karo teaches a law that reveals the somewhat surprising preeminence of the mitzvah of reading the Megillah:

מבטלים תלמוד תורה לשמוע מקרא מגילה  
קל וחומר לשאר מצות של תורה שכולם  
נדחים מפני מקרא מגילה שאין לך דבר  
שנדחה מקרא מגילה מפניו חוץ ממת מצוה.  
*The study of Torah is stopped for the purpose of fulfilling the mitzvah of reading Megillas Esther; all the more so, other commandments of the Torah are overridden by the reading of Megillas Esther — with the exception of the burial of the dead.*

The Rema, Rav Moshe Isserles, qualifies this ruling and writes:

וכל זה לא מיירי אלא בדאיכא שהות לעשות  
שתיהן אבל אם אי אפשר לעשות שתיהן  
אין שום מצוה דאורייתא נדחה מפני מקרא  
מגילה.



*This ruling relates solely to an instance when there is sufficient time to perform both mitzvos. However, if it is impossible to perform both mitzvos, there is no Torah commandment that is pushed off to fulfill the Rabbinic commandment of reading the Megillah.*

To summarize, the Rema rules that if there is sufficient time left in the day to perform both *kerias HaMegillah* and a Biblical commandment, the mitzvah of *kerias HaMegillah* should be done first and the Biblical commandment should be done second. However, if

there is not enough time in the day to perform both mitzvos, the Biblical commandment should be done and *kerias HaMegillah*, which is only a Rabbinic commandment, should be set aside.

Since these two rulings appear to lead to inconsistent conclusions, the position of the Rema deserves further scrutiny. The first ruling, that *kerias HaMegillah* should be done **first**, implies that the mitzvah of *kerias HaMegillah* is of higher rank than Torah commandments. However, the second ruling, that a Torah commandment should be the **one** mitzvah performed when there is insufficient time to do both, implies that Torah commandments are of a higher rank than *kerias HaMegillah*. These two implications conflict! Which mitzvah ranks higher: *kerias HaMegillah* or Torah

commandments? Why, when there is sufficient time to perform both the Torah commandment and *kerias HaMegillah*, does the mitzvah of Megillah take precedence, and when only one of the mitzvos can be performed, the Torah commandment take precedence?

Torah commandments are given priority throughout halacha; so the second ruling — that they should be performed over the Rabbinic commandment of *kerias HaMegillah* when only one can be done — requires no defense. The first ruling however, that *kerias HaMegillah* should be performed prior to a Torah commandment, requires explanation.

The key to understanding this inconsistency may lie in a famous *aggadeta* found in *Tractate Shabbos* (88a). Describing events shortly before the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the Torah writes, “...and Moshe brought the nation out from the camp to greet G-d and they stood in the underneath of the mountain” (Shemos 19:17). Rav Avdimi explains that G-d held Mount Sinai over the heads of the Jews and told them that if they did not accept the Torah, they would be buried under the mountain. The Gemara continues by noting that this explanation would seem to be a *moda’ah rabbah le’oraysa*, a great protest against the Jews needing to be accountable for the performance of mitzvos, since they only accepted the Torah out of fear and coercion. Rava addresses this challenge and responds that the Jews nevertheless accepted the Torah again in the days of Achashverosh. Rava teaches that in response to the experience of the events of Purim, the Jews renewed their acceptance of the Torah — this second time out of *ahava*, love.

Given the grandeur and magnificence of the revelation of G-d in the deliverance from Egypt — as opposed to the more concealed role that G-d plays in the Purim story — the Jewish People’s passionate acceptance of the Torah during Purim, in comparison to Sinai, calls for explanation.

Commenting on Megillas Esther (9:26), Rashi informs us that the holiday of Purim was adopted as a result of the lessons learned by the Jewish people when they analyzed the main characters of the Purim story. These realizations paved the way for *kiymu vikiblu Hayehudim*, the Jewish People’s renewed acceptance of the Torah from love. The Jews recognized that Achashverosh was a materialistic individual who believed that the greatest good in life was the acquisition of wealth and luxury. His sense of self was tied to riches and fortune, as described when Achashverosh hosts the party of the millennium. During this party, his wife becomes just one more showpiece to be exhibited to the public and admired. When the Jews observed how Achashverosh’s philistinism had corrupted his family values and led him to kill his wife, they saw firsthand the folly of a life centered on material goods, fame, and fortune. At the same time, Haman considered the attainment of power and position to be the good in life. His ego was invested in gaining respect as a powerful leader who must be honored and obeyed. Haman rose to the upper echelons of the government and wielded great influence and power. However, he achieved no contentment on account of just one man, Mordechai the Jew. Witnessing the power of just one man to destroy the state of mind of this tyrant, the Jews saw through the illusion

of human grandeur and power, discovering the inner emptiness of such a life.

On the flip side, the Jews observed Mordechai stand up for his ideals, refusing to bow down to Haman. The *Midrash Aggadas Esther* (3:2) explains that initially the Jews were quite upset with Mordechai, fearing correctly that Mordechai’s disrespect would lead Haman to seek retribution against all of them. Mordechai, the *talmid chacham* and Torah leader, showed the people that the essential principles of Torah cannot be compromised, and are indeed indispensable if life is to have any value. When the Jews saw that Mordechai achieved success and his enemies fell by the wayside, they understood that when Jews stand steadfast and committed to core values and to a Torah life, G-d’s providence assists them and good defeats evil.

In another example, Esther’s courage and shrewdness in discrediting Haman and securing the support of Achashverosh also impacted the Jewish people. Esther astutely does not immediately accuse Haman. By inviting Haman and concealing her motivation, Esther plants seeds of doubt in Achashverosh’s mind, causing him to question Haman’s intentions and loyalty to the king. He begins to worry that perhaps something is going on between Haman and Esther, and starts to wonder if Haman has ulterior motives in arming the populace and seeking the destruction of the man who had saved Achashverosh’s life. When Esther finally exposes Haman, Achashverosh is relieved to learn that Esther is loyal to him, and he is ready to act quickly to execute Haman. Esther’s use of tremendous cunning to bring about Haman’s downfall showed that a person living a life guided by



Torah is quite capable of acting and succeeding in the general culture.

Overt miracles like those that G-d performed when He took the Jews out of Egypt promote *yiras Hashem*, fear of G-d, a sense that we are indebted to Him and have no choice but to keep His mitzvos. *Ahavas Hashem*, love of G-d, comes from appreciating the beauty of Torah and how following its ideals leads to the most fulfilling life. It is only when G-d is in the background — His name not even mentioned in the text — that the superiority of the Torah way of life can become manifest to the people and excite and inspire them to undergo a *kabala me'ahava*, an acceptance of Torah from love.

The notion that the theme of Purim is *kabalas HaTorah meahava* enables us to resolve our question as to why *kerias HaMegillah* is given precedence in the order of performance, even to a Biblical commandment. A mitzvah can be broken into two components: the *chiyuv hamitzvah* — the obligation of the mitzvah — and the *kiyum hamitzvah* — the fulfillment of the mitzvah. In many situations, the obligation and the fulfillment are one and the same. However, sometimes there is a divergence between the two. To illustrate this, if a student receives detention on a Tuesday and spends 15 minutes at a desk in the classroom, the obligation is to do detention, and the fulfillment was doing the detention. However, if a student receives detention on a Friday and serves detention by helping prepare the cholent for kiddush, the obligation is to serve detention, but the fulfillment also includes honoring Shabbos. A similar situation exists regarding the mitzvah of *kerias HaMegillah*. The obligation — the *chiyuv hamitzvah* — is a Rabbinic

obligation of *kerias HaMegillah*. However, the fulfillment — the *kiyum hamitzvah* — is a fulfillment of a Biblical commandment and a primary objective of the entire Torah:

ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך  
ובכל מאדך.

*You shall love your G-d with all your heart and all your soul and all your might.*

The rulings of the Rema can now be understood. When we confront a situation in which we can fulfill only one of two mitzvos and one of the obligations will have to go unmet, prioritization is determined by the level of the **obligation** of the *mitzvah*. A Biblical obligation outranks a Rabbinic obligation and the mitzvah of *kerias HaMegillah* is set aside. However, when there is sufficient time for both obligations to be met and the issue is which mitzvah to do first, prioritization is determined by the level of the **fulfillment** of the mitzvah. Since the mitzvah of *kerias HaMegillah*

is a fulfillment of *ahavas Hashem* at the highest level, it is performed before other mitzvos, even those that are Biblical obligations.

In summary, when it comes to determining the order of performance, the *chashivus* — (significance) of the *kiyum hamitzvah* is the determinant, and when only one of two mitzvos can be performed, the relative *madrega* (level) of the *chiyuv hamitzvah* is the determinant.

The notion that individual obligations and tasks participate in a larger framework of greater importance is instructive for those who are involved in the education of our youth. While our individual subjects and classes are of significance and merit attention and respect, we should not lose sight of how they fit into the overarching goal of developing our students into young men and women committed to the love and service of G-d through an allegiance to Torah and mitzvos.



The notion that the theme of Purim is *kabalas HaTorah meahava* enables us to resolve our question as to why *kerias HaMegillah* is given precedence in the order of performance, even to a Biblical commandment.



## AMALEK, THE KINGSHIP OF SAUL AND THE KINGSHIP OF GOD\*

The Haftarah read in synagogue on Shabbat Zahor, prior to Purim, Shmuel 1: Ch. 15 details the Divine command to King Shaul to wage total war against the Amalekites in the area, with the explicit command to eradicate them all, from young to old,<sup>1</sup> as well as destroy all the cattle and spoils of war. To emphasize the point, God (through Shmuel) commands him **lo tahmol alav** — *Do not show any mercy on (Amalek)* (verse 3). Shaul engages in battle and defeats the Amalekites decisively. However, in violation of the Divine command, he spares the life of Agag, King of the Amalekites, and both he and the people spare a portion of the cattle:



*“Va-Yahmol Shaul ve-ha-Am al Agag ve-al meitav ha-tzon ve-habakar . . . ve-Al kol ha-tov, ve-khol ha-Melakha ha-nimveza ve-nameis otah heherimu — Shaul and the people showed mercy upon Agag and on the best of the sheep and cattle . . . and on all the*

*best animals, but they destroyed the weak and bad quality livestock”* (verse 9). God decides to strip Shaul of the kingship and sends the prophet Shmuel to inform him of this decision. Shmuel is told that Shaul had gone to the Carmel region and had built a monument to himself — *“ve-henei matziv lo yad”* (verse 12) and has now returned to Gilgal. Shmuel goes down to Gilgal and informs him of the Divine decision, and the rest of the chapter presents the unfolding of the dialogue between Shmuel and Shaul concluding with the rupture between them that would never be repaired, as well as the loss of the kingship by Shaul.

As many have noted, this narrative



It makes perfect sense that in Parashat Beshalah the war against Amalek is seen as a unique cosmic battle between God and the Amalekites, and not simply another battle.

plays off the previous stories relating to Amalek in the Torah. For example, the text in Sefer Shmuel Ch. 14 *just prior* to the command to destroy Amalek in Ch. 15, summarizes Shaul's reign by stating:

*"Ve-Shaul lakhad et ha-melukha, va-yilahem saviv be-khol oyvav be-Moav, be-Amon — Shaul consolidated the kingship under his control and fought against all of the surrounding enemies."*

This verse is an echo of the verse in the Torah (read as part of Parshat Zakhor):

*"Ve-Haya be-haniah lekha Hashem Eloekha mikol oyvekha . . . timheh et zeikher Amalek — When the Lord Your God will give you peace from all your surrounding enemies . . . you shall blot out Amalek."* Shaul and the Israelites have reached the historical point that the fulfillment of God's command to destroy Amalek can now be put into action.

Let us briefly examine the reasons the Torah hints at to explain why Amalek is treated in this unique manner, and not like all other enemies of Israel. Through this we will gain a better understanding of Shaul's fateful errors. If we look at the passage in Parshat Beshalah in Sefer Shmot Ch. 17, the timing of the attack and its framing is critically important.

The Israelites have just left Egypt and crossed Yam Suf. As the Song at the Sea makes clear, the rest of the world was profoundly shaken by the events of the Exodus. The entire world was overcome with awe and the nations in the Land of Israel were gripped with fear. Into this reality comes Amalek, with no territorial ax to grind, nor political or religious grievance against Israel, and he engages in an unprovoked attack. It is literally an attack on God's people for no human, rational reason. Moreover, it undermined the aura around Israel and God's plan. Hazal, in their vivid fashion, captured it in a famous midrash (cited by Rashi in Parashat Ki Tetzei Ch. 25:18):

לשון קר וחם, ציננך והפשירך מרתיחתך, שהיו כל האומות יריאים להלחם בכם, ובא זה והתחיל והראה מקום לאחרים. משל לאמבטי רותחת שאין כל בריאה יכולה לירד לתוכה, בא בן בליעל אחד קפץ וירד לתוכה, ואף על פי שנכווה, הקרהו בפני אחרים.

*For all the nations were afraid to war against you and this one came and began to point out the way to others. A parable! It may be compared to a boiling hot bath into which no living creature could descend. A good-for-nothing came, and sprang down into it; although he scalded himself, he made it appear cold to others.*

In light of this, it makes perfect sense that in Parashat Beshalah the war against Amalek is seen as



## MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR SUMMER

## בין הזמנים

### Earn a Master's in Social Work

- Flexible Schedule
- Classes Live Online
- Limited Scholarships Available

To Learn More Contact:  
[esti.coates@yu.edu](mailto:esti.coates@yu.edu)



**Wurzweiler**  
Wurzweiler School  
of Social Work



a unique cosmic battle between God and the Amalekites, and not simply another battle. This is made explicit by Moshe, who upon conclusion of the battle is told by God that God will “blot out Amalek.” Moshe then builds an altar called “God is my banner,” which he explains to mean: “*Ki yad al keis Y-ah milhama LaHashem mi-dor dor — For God’s hand is upon God’s Throne, The Lord will wage war against Amalek from generation to generation.*” The Torah hints at this idea of war against Amalek being a *milhemet Hashem* earlier in this section, informing us that when Moshe would raise his hands, “*yadav*,” the Israelites would be successful in battle. As the rabbis noted, in Moshe raising his hands, the people would turn heavenward and recognize God as the real author of their success.

In our chapter in Shmuel, part of Shaul’s mistake in leaving King Agag and parts of the cattle alive, is that it shows that he is treating the battle as a standard one. He has not internalized it as a fulfillment of a unique Divine struggle — a *milhama la-Hashem*. It is only in the context of such a unique war that a command to kill everyone could ever be justified. Instead, Shaul leaves Agag alive, possibly reflecting some real-politik approach of professional courtesy or some plan to use Agag for some other purpose. Similarly, in leaving alive the best cattle, he has treated the battle as a regular war in which booty is captured, given out to curry favor or to keep the people satisfied.

I believe this is also hinted at in the curious piece of information that the text shares with us, which is that when Shaul was returning from the battle, he erected a monument — a *yad* — to himself (15:12). Shaul transformed a battle that was supposed to represent a Divine conflict against absolute evil into another notch in his belt as a regular king fighting off his enemies. In place of *yad al keis Y-ah* it is replaced by a *yad* to himself!

In Devarim Ch. 25 the Torah focuses on a different element of the unique evil of Amalek:

זָכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְךָ מִמִּצְרָיִם.  
אֲשֶׁר קָרָךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיִּזְנֹב בְּךָ כָּל  
הַנְּחָשִׁים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַתָּה עָיִף וְיָגַע וְלֹא יָרָא  
אֱלֹקִים.

*“Remember what Amalek did to you . . . how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear.”* Amalek must be destroyed because they are a foe who attacks the weak and the hungry, those most vulnerable and at risk. They represent the exploitation of the most fragile members of society, the opposite of the compassionate and merciful message of God to the world, of *derekh Hashem la’asot tzedakah u-mishpat*.

In fighting against Amalek, Shaul spares Agag, the king, the highest and most powerful member of the society, while killing out the simple people, the Amalekite peasants and citizens. Moreover, the text emphasizes that Shaul spared the “best of the flock

— *meitav hatzon*” while destroying the lower quality animals. Shaul, in fighting the battle has, in effect, adopted an Amalekite ethos. He has become, to an extent, the very thing he was supposed to fight and eradicate.

## Endnotes

\*Some of the ideas in this essay are based on ideas I have heard from my dear friend and teacher, Rabbi David Silber, one of the master scholars and teachers of Tanakh in our generation.

1. It is worthwhile to note that in the *peshat* reading of the Torah itself there is no explicit command to destroy every last one of the Amalekite people. The Torah in Shmot Ch. 17 speaks of God’s unending battle against Amalek from generation to generation where he will “erase” the Amalekites, while the passage in Devarim Ch. 25 speaks of a human obligation to “erase” Amalek. It is only in the book of Samuel that there appears an explicit command to kill each and every member of the Amalekites, from young to old. The weighty moral and ethical challenges that this issue posed (and continues to pose) to rabbinic thinkers throughout the ages is beyond the scope of our essay. For some contemporary treatments of the issue see: R. Yaacov Medan, “Amalek” in *Al Derekh Ha-Avot* (Michlelet Herzog, 2001), pp. 319-397; R. Shalom Carmy, “The Origin of the Nations and the Shadow of Violence: Theological Perspectives on Canaan and Amalek” in *War and Peace in the Jewish Tradition* (Ktav/Yeshiva University, 2007) pp. 163-200; R. Norman Lamm z”l, “Amalek and the Seven Nations: A Case of Law vs. Morality,” *ibid*, pp. 201-238; R. Nathaniel Helfgot, “Amalek, Ethics and Halakhic Development” in *The YCT Rabbinical School Companion to the Book of Samuel* (Ben Yehuda Press, 2006) pp. 79-96.



Find shiurim and articles on Parshat Zachor at  
[www.yutorah.org/parsha/zachor](http://www.yutorah.org/parsha/zachor)



## WHY WOULD MORDECHAI RECITE THE PSALM FOR CHANUKAH?

### “MIZMOR SHIR CHANUKAT HABAYIT” AND THE SUDDEN REVERSAL OF FORTUNE

As with most mitzvot, the primary obligation of reading the Megilah occurs during the daytime of the holiday.<sup>1</sup> Still, though the Mishnah does not mention a nighttime reading, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi teaches (*Megilah* 4a) that there is also an obligation to pre-read the Megilah on the night of Purim as well. The Talmud explains a possible basis for this teaching from the familiar verse in Mizmor Shir, Psalm 30, recited daily: “So that he will sing to You — honor — and not be silent; Hashem is my G-d, forever I will praise you!” Rashi explains: “Sing to You honor — by day,” and “not be silent — by night”; thus the verse proves that the Megilah is also read the night before, as we both sing its praises to G-d in the daytime, and are also not silent of praise the night before.

This derivation is shocking for two reasons. First, the verse only spoke about a doubled praise — singing G-d’s praises and not being silent



— but mentioned nothing about daytime and nighttime! Second, the verse comes from Tehilim 30, a psalm disconnected entirely from the holiday of Purim!<sup>2</sup> This essay will unpack the connection between this verse, the holiday, and the times of night and day, and in the process deepen our understanding both about an important prayer that we recite every day and also about our reading of the Megilah and our celebration of Purim.<sup>3</sup>

When seeking to explain different scriptural derivations for laws in the Talmud, we should take the approach that the drasha of the Talmud does, indeed, reflect a simple reading of the text, the *pshuto shel mikra*, or

something close to it, even if we do not yet appreciate or understand the connection between the verse and the law in question. In this case, we have reason to further suspect that there is more to the link between Purim and this chapter of Tehilim, as *Esther Rabba* 10:5 argues that the characters of the Megilah, from Mordechai to Esther to Haman, all recited parts of this chapter of Tehilim while Mordechai was paraded through the city of Shushan on the king’s horse. We are clearly missing something if the Talmud and Midrash both connect this chapter to the Purim holiday, yet we cannot see the slightest connection.

Maimonides students study *Bei’urei Ha-tefilah*, the meanings of the prayers, and have done so since the school’s founding under Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav z”l, decades ago. They learn to inspect the morning psalm, Mizmor Shir, and realize that its central message is not about the Temple mentioned in its introductory

verse, but rather about G-d's ability to save those in need — and thus bears much greater closeness to the holiday of Purim than we first imagined.

Mizmor Shir contains many elements that are typical of other chapters of Tehilim: a prayer uttered in difficult moments (30:9), a depiction of Hashem's salvation (30:3-4, in this case healing from potential death), praise of Hashem because of the salvation (30:2, 5, 13), and even a section explaining why David was confident that he would be saved (30:6, because Hashem is angry for only a short time, 30:10, because the living praise G-d and not the dead). What makes it stand unique from the other psalms is how it describes four reversals that accompany G-d's sudden redemption.

"At night, tears sleep — but in the morning are songs of praise" captures two reversals: At night, David went to sleep crying, worried and suspecting that because of his illness he might not wake up the next morning — but in an instant felt healed the following morning, so much so that he turned to praise! Night turns to morning and tears to happy song, as the speaker's situation is reversed overnight! The penultimate passuk adds two more reversals, "you have opened my sackcloth," a sign of mourning (Esther 4:1-3), and "You tied upon me a belt<sup>4</sup> of happiness"; and also that eulogy turns to a happy dance! This chapter uniquely captures a sense that G-d's salvation can come almost in an instant, and totally reverse our fortunes in the blink of an eye.

This dimension of sudden reversal is captured by the first word of the penultimate passuk, a word familiar to anyone come Purim time: "*hafachta*" — You have reversed it, which is echoed by a key word of Megilat Esther (9:1, 22): "*ve-nahapoch hu.*" We start to see a greater connection between this psalm and the holiday of Purim now that we realize that they are each about the idea of G-d's wondrous and sudden reversal of our fortunes. Indeed, if we were to ask which Biblical figure went to sleep one night wearing sackcloth and woke up the next morning wearing a belt of joy the clear answer would be Mordechai in the Megilah.

To return to our initial questions, though the short quote of Psalm 30 quoted by the Gemara does

**The Talmud teaches that the Megilah must be read twice, in order to ensure we have ample time and space to highlight both the sorrowful feelings of tragedy and also the joyous feelings of salvation. It is too much to read the Megilah once and expect to feel both aspects at the same time, so better to read it twice.**

not reference either Purim or the daytime and nighttime readings, we can now understand that the Gemara actually used a shorthand to show that the *entire* chapter is really about reversals like Purim, and how so often, those reversals come with sorrow at nighttime and salvation in the morning.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Jews have had the practice of reciting this psalm both at night as a way to plea for protection in worrisome times,<sup>6</sup> and in the morning in appreciation of the salvation of the new day.<sup>7</sup> The prayer and the praise are two sides of the same coin, as the difficult situation of the past becomes the salvation of the new morning.

The Megilah is read first at night to highlight the urgent mourning, tears, sackcloth (4:3) and even eulogy of the Jews of Shushan when the king first made his decree against the Jews. The reader of the Megilah is fasting, and the tune of Eicha brings the congregation to tears when the words capture the dread felt by the Jews at the time. And then the same words are read in the morning — but this time highlighting the praise, song, dance, and happiness after salvation. Thus the Talmud really teaches that the Megilah must be read twice, in order to ensure we have ample time and space to highlight both the sorrowful feelings of tragedy and also the joyous feelings of salvation. It is too much to read the Megilah once and expect to feel both aspects at the same time, so better to read it twice, and capture both the feelings of night (not being silent) and the feelings of day (singing praise).

The holiday of Purim is the holiday of reversals, and Megilat Esther is the scroll that tells the story of instantaneous reversals. We experience this ourselves each year as we go through the holiday, feeling



Find shiurim and articles on Tehillim at [www.yutorah.org/nach/tehillim](http://www.yutorah.org/nach/tehillim)



at first the sad feelings of sorrow, and then turn to the happy feelings of joy when the text is re-read the next morning.

May we all feel these complex emotions at this year's Purim as well; and may the one-year anniversary of the sorrow for many in our communities reverse itself and turn into feelings of, "the month that turned for them from agony to happiness and from mourning into holiday."

## Endnotes

1. See Tosafot Ha-Rosh *Megilah* 4a, and stated less strongly in the Tosafot on the page to *Megilah* 4a. This carries implications for those who will only attend one of the two readings of the *Megilah* — that it is preferable to attend the daytime reading and not the nighttime one. This also explains why the She-hechyanu is repeated during the day, though it was already recited the night before, since the daytime reading is more crucial. [Some misunderstand *Magen Avraham* 692:1 as arguing that the daytime She-hechyanu exists primarily to apply to the mitzvot of the day, but careful inspection of his language reveals the bracha primarily applies to the main *Megilah* reading, the one of the daytime.] A third proof that the major reading is in the daytime is the fact that our status for Purim of the 14th and 15th is set based on our location in the morning of Purim not the evening (Rashi, *Megilah* 19a). Finally, some note that the reading of the *Megilah* early on the *yom ha-kenisah* may have been limited to the morning reading only (*Or Zarua* 2:369), because it is the primary mitzvah.

2. The psalm is more connected to Chanukah than it is to Purim, and it is the supplementary psalm recited on each day of Chanukah, according to *Mesechet Sofrim* (18). Commentaries struggle to determine the larger connection between the heading of the psalm "A song on the occasion of 'Chanukat Ha-bayit,'" its subject that involves death and healing, and its author David. The best interpretation may be the one offered by

Rabbi Reuven Margoliot in *Ha-Mikra Ve-Ha-Mesorah* (16–20), who says the song is "On the occasion of the groundbreaking of the temple," and includes David's reflections on the groundbreaking of the temple in the final chapter of Shmuel Bet, after the nation was healed from a tremendous plague.

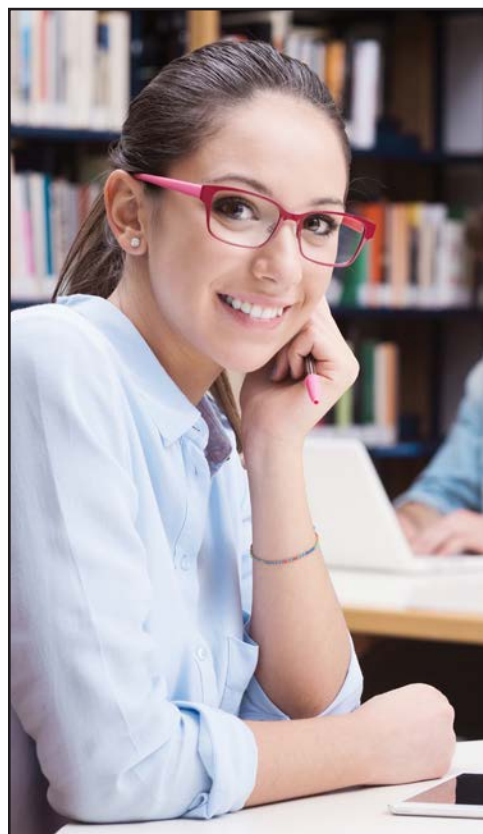
3. A second derivation comes from Psalm 22. This psalm begins with a description of day and night (22:3), so it is easier to see its connection to *Megilat Esther*. It is also titled "*Al Ayelet Ha-Shachar*," or morning star (Radak), which is the Hebrew translation of Esther's name according to Targum Sheini to Esther 2:7 (from Persian "*Setareh*," etymologically related to the Greek word "*Aster*," the Latin "*Stella*," and ultimately the English word "*Star*"). It is also one of the only Tehilim to feature the word *kelev*, or dog, (17, 21), which may allude to the Persian kings, see *Rosh Hashanah* 4a, and my observation in Frame et al. *A Common Cultural Heritage* (2011), 192. Psalm 22 is connected to *Megilat Esther* across Rabbinic literature (*Midrash Tehilim* 22, *Yoma* 29a, *Megilah* 15b).

4. "*Vate'azreini*" coming from the root a.z.r, meaning to tie a belt as in the morning blessing "*Ozer Yisrael Be-Gevurah*." It is often misunderstood as coming from 'z.r., to aid or assist.

5. I would even go so far as to suggest that if this psalm is recited on Chanukah, it is because then, too, the Jews went to sleep in sorrow thinking that the oil had been used up, and awoke to joy when it was still left; it is not recited just because of the word "chanukah" in the title of the Psalm.

6. *Semag*, end of Positive Commandment 18, based on what appears to be a different version of *Shavuot* 15b. Our siddurim include the other psalms of *Shavuot* 15b — Psalm 3 and Psalm 91 — in the nighttime Shema service, but not Psalm 30.

7. Mizmor Shir was only added to the morning tefilah in the 17th century, but it is now standard in most siddurim. However, it is incorrectly dubbed part of Psukei Dezimrah. Since it appears before Baruch She-amar and since it is a Psalm of petition more than praise, it should be understood as a Psalm recited upon rising, parallel to its recitation before sleep (see previous note), not as the "introductory Psalm to Psukei Dezimrah."



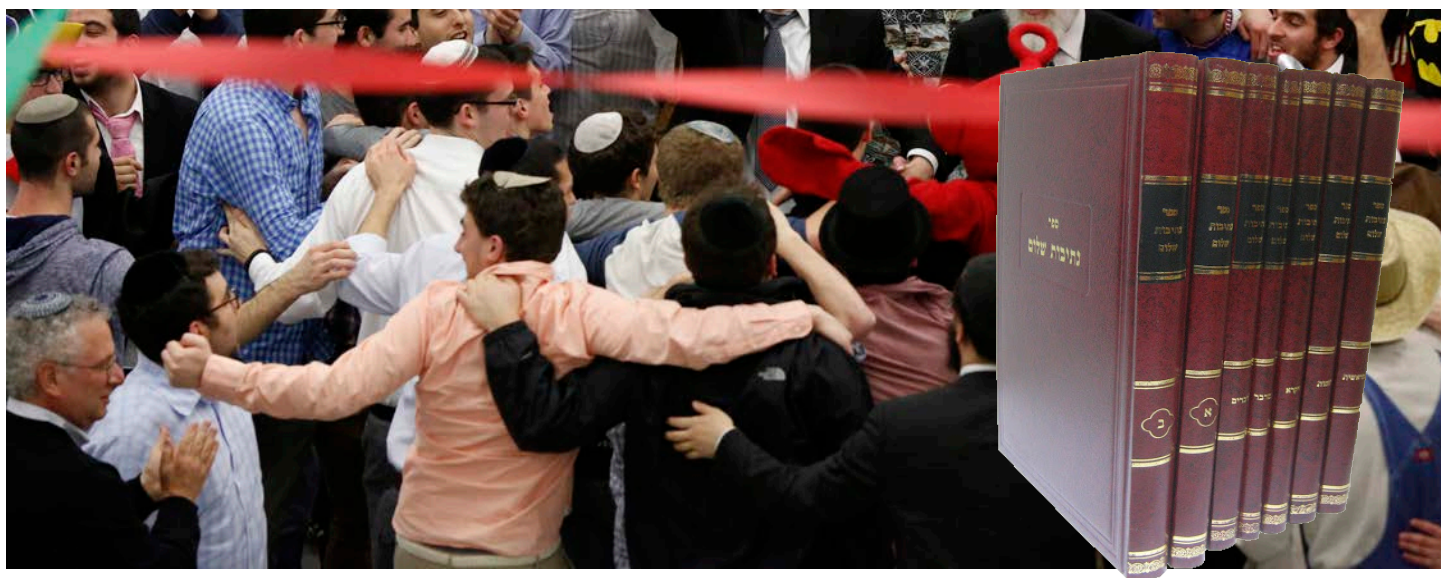
## NEW MS IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY

Prepare to Create Positive Change in the Lives of Others

Your Journey Starts at:  
[yu.edu/ferkauf](http://yu.edu/ferkauf)



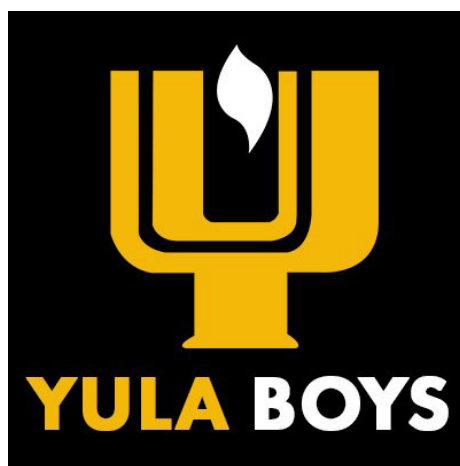
**Ferkauf**  
Ferkauf Graduate School  
of Psychology



## **PURIM WITH THE SLONIMER REBBE: A PATH TO PERFECTION**

**R**abbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky, better known as the Slonimer Rebbe (1911–2000), has a magnificent approach to the day of Purim. In a stunning piece,<sup>1</sup> he manages to encapsulate the day in its entirety, weaving together the mitzvos (commandments) of the day into a single entity. According to the Slonimer Rebbe, Purim is a “path to perfection,” a day where we can reach a sense of *shleimus* (completeness) in our *avodas Hashem* (service of Hashem).

He bases his approach on a fascinating interpretation of a challenging and cryptic passage in Chazal. The Gemara (*Megillah 7b*) quotes Rava who states, “*Chayav inish l’besumei b’Puraya ad d’lo yada ben arur*



*Haman l’baruch Mordechai*,” which means, “One is obligated to become inebriated on Purim until he does not know the difference between blessed be Mordechai and cursed be Haman.” Troubled by this statement, the Slonimer Rebbe wonders how we can

make sense of it. After all, Purim is a day where we can attain great heights. It is a day of *kabbalos haTorah b’ratzon*, a day when we willingly accept the Torah, and so much more. One that requires our complete consciousness and full use of our faculties!

He suggests that if read carefully, Rava could be telling us that the object we are supposed to become inebriated with is **the day of Purim itself, not wine**. “*Chayav inish l’besumei b’Puraya*,” a person is obligated to become intoxicated “**with Purim**.” Meaning to say, the medium through which we become intoxicated is the day of Purim itself, with all its incredible revelations and opportunities. The obligation of the day is to allow ourselves to be swept



away by the experience of awesome holiness and closeness to Hashem.

With this he interprets the end of the phrase, “*ad d’lo yada ben arur Haman l’baruch Mordechai*,” to directly relate to the mitzvot of the day, namely reading the Megillah, *mishloach manos* (sending gifts), and *kabbalos haTorah b’ratzon*.

The Maharal (Rabbi Yehuda Loew, 1512–1609) notes<sup>2</sup> that there are three critical dimensions of our *avodas Hashem* that we must perfect. We must be complete in our relationship with Hashem, complete in our relationship with others, and complete in our relationship with ourselves. The mitzvos of Purim correspond to these three: 1) Reading the Megillah corresponds to our relationship with Hashem. 2) *Mishloach manos* corresponds to our relationship with others. 3) *Kabbalas haTorah b’ratzon* corresponds to our relationship with ourselves. In each of these, suggests the Slonimer Rebbe, there is a concept of *arur Haman* and *baruch Mordechai*.

### **Complete in our Relationship with Hashem**

There are times in life when we feel close to Hashem, when we keenly feel His help and guidance. In these moments, we feel our lives infused with meaning and joy. These times can be described as those of “*baruch Mordechai*.” But there are also times when we feel distant from Hashem, when He seems hidden and uninvolved. These are times of “*arur Haman*.”

On Purim, Megillas Esther allows us to realize that Hashem loves us always, regardless of our shortcomings. The Chassam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer, 1762–1839) writes<sup>3</sup> that of all the miracles in the Megillah, the greatest was the execution of Vashti. Her overthrow was essential for Esther’s rise to power and the eventual salvation she brought. Achashverosh loved Vashti deeply; she had transformed him from a stable boy to a king. His acquiescence to her execution, then, was nothing short of

a miracle. At the time of this miracle though, Bnei Yisrael were participants in Achashverosh’s debaucheries. Nonetheless, Hashem miraculously orchestrated the series of events leading up to her death. We learn from this that even when we are doing the wrong thing, we are still beloved unto Hashem, and we recognize that our connection to Hashem is not severed by our sins. We reach a state of “*ad d’lo yada ben arur Haman l’baruch Mordechai*,” when we realize “*bein kach u’bein atem keruyim banim*,”<sup>4</sup> regardless of what we have done or how far we have strayed we are always Hashem’s children.

### **Complete in our Relationship with Others**

Each and every one of us has people we feel close to, who we love and can count on. These people are the “*baruch Mordechais*” of our lives. There are also people we encounter who we don’t view in such a positive light, our “*arur Hamans*.”<sup>5</sup> On Purim, we

There are times in life when we feel close to Hashem, when we keenly feel His help and guidance. In these moments, we feel our lives infused with meaning and joy. These times can be described as those of “*baruch Mordechai*.”

But there are also times when we feel distant from Hashem, when He seems hidden and uninvolved. These are times of “*arur Haman*.”





fulfill the mitzvah of *mishloach manos*, sending gifts of food to one another to engender friendship. Some suggest that it is a greater mitzvah to send *mishloach manos* specifically to an enemy.<sup>6</sup> Through *mishloach manos*, we reopen lines of communication and make amends. Through this mitzvah then, we achieve “*ad d’lo yada ben arur Haman l’baruch Mordechai*,” a sense of unity where every Jew becomes cherished and loved.

### Complete in our Relationship with Ourselves

When we examine our relationship with ourselves, we also find dimensions of “*baruch Mordechai*” and “*arur Haman*.” When we engage in spiritual pursuits such as tefillah or Talmud Torah, we feel in tune with ourselves. We focus on Hashem, and we feel self-actualized. This is a time of “*baruch Mordechai*.” When we deal with the mundane, however, we may feel a disconnect between our *neschama* (soul) and *guf* (physical body). When doing business or eating, our mind is not focused on *avodas Hashem*, and we may feel as if we are not fulfilling our potential. This is a time of “*arur Haman*.” On Purim we reach a point of “*ad d’lo yada*.” We recognize that regardless of whether we are involved in the majestic or the mundane, both are *avodas Hashem* and should be conducted as such. As Rav Yitzchak Hutner (1906–1980) writes,<sup>7</sup> we must learn to live a “broad life,” a life where everything we do is seen through the perspective of *avodas Hashem*, not a “double life,” one in which we compartmentalize the parts of our day. Through *kabbalos haTorah b’ratzon* on Purim, we are not just reaccepting the commandments we need to perform, we are reaccepting

## Another Take on Arur Haman and Baruch Mordechai

יש מפרשים כי ארור המן עולה למנין ברוך מרדכי ... ובעל המנהגות כתב ונראה בעיני שפיוט היה שעל הבית האחד עונין ארור המן ועל הבית האחר עונין ברוך מרדכי וצריך צילותא שפעמים שאין אדם מתכוין וטועה.

אבודרהם, פורים

[What does it mean that one doesn’t know the difference between the blessing of Mordechai and curse of Haman?] Some explain that “*arur Haman*” is the same value (in gematria) as “*baruch Mordechai*.” The “*Ba’al HaMinhagot*” suggested that they used to sing a song and the refrain of one stanza was “*arur Haman*” and the refrain from the next stanza was “*baruch Mordechai*.” Reciting the proper refrain without making a mistake requires a sharp mind.

*Avudraham, Purim*

a whole new way of life. In the words of the Maggid of Mezeritch, we come to the recognition of “*m’lo kol ha’aretz kinyanecha*,”<sup>8</sup> that the entire world is full of “*kinyanecha*,” ways of acquiring and accessing You, Hashem.

### Conclusion

In life, we often find ourselves vacillating between times of confusion and times of clarity. Regarding all three dimensions, we at times feel a sense of distance and disconnect. We can feel isolated from Hashem, from our colleagues and friends, and even from our true selves. On Purim, these lines between darkness and light, between *arur Haman* and *baruch Mordechai* become blurred. It is a day where we come to the realization that we are always closely connected to Hashem, where every Jew is a beloved friend, and that every situation we encounter is one in which we can fulfill the *ratzon* (will) of the *Borei Olam* (Creator of the World). May we all merit to achieve the Slonimer Rebbe’s vision of Purim, attaining great heights and true *shleimus* in our

*avodas Hashem!*

### Endnotes

1. *Nesivos Shalom, Maamarei Purim, Maamer Chayav Inish L’besumei B’Puraya Ad D’lo Yada.*
2. *Derech Chaim chapter 1 mishna 2.*
3. *Toras Moshe, Megillat Esther pg. 373.*
4. *Gemara, Kidushin 36a.*
5. The Slonimer Rebbe offers an important psychological insight as he notes that we can view others in this manner for one of two reasons: 1) Certain people in truth are not such good people, 2) When we are in a state of depression or despair, we tend to view others as being imperfect and focus on their flaws.
6. *Kovetz Halachot Purim chapter 15 halacha 33.* See also footnote 41.
7. *Pachad Yitzchak, Igros U’ksavim pg. 184-185.*
8. *Tehillim 104:24.*

# WORLD-CLASS GRADUATE EDUCATION

**Your Journey to Success Starts at YU**

**Learn More at: [yu.edu/graduate](https://yu.edu/graduate)**



BUILDING TOMORROW, **TODAY**  
YESHIVA UNIVERSITY



## CELEBRATING PARTIAL TRIUMPH

Imagine for a moment you were tasked with reconstructing, from memory, the *tefillot* we recite on Purim night. Some components of the prayer service are easy to conjure up and quickly come to mind: the recitation of Maariv, filled with eager anticipation for the Megillah reading to follow; the reading of the Megillah itself; the singing (and, in a pre-COVID world, dancing) of *Shoshanat Yaakov*. But, for most of us, other parts of the *tefillah* do not leave the same impression. Once *Shoshanat Yaakov* has ended, the excitement has faded, and the hunger of *Taanit Esther* sets in, we recite a host of additional prayers that we all-too-often mutter as we are halfway out the door, rushing to our break-fast meals. And while it is difficult to label those additional prayers a highlight of the Purim liturgy, in truth, in their own subtle way they communicate a central theme of our Purim celebration.



At the beginning of a discussion of the Purim *tefillot*, the *Tur* (O"CH 693) records a debate regarding whether or not we should recite *U-Va Le-Tzion Goel* — a brief paragraph that we say daily toward the end of Shacharit — after the Purim-night reading of the Megillah. While Rav Amram Gaon would recite the paragraph immediately following Megillah reading, others, the *Tur* notes, felt the prayers should not be said at night. The *Tur* explains that the paragraph of *U-va Le-Tzion* primarily discusses themes of salvation and redemption. Because the Purim redemption was only completed during the daytime

— in the words of the *Tur*: *Ein ikar ha-geula ba-layla* — the essence of the redemption did not primarily occur at night — the paragraph should only be recited during daytime prayers.

The debate is reminiscent of a similar *machloket* that appears in *Masekhet Berakhot* (4B). The Gemara there discusses the principle of *semikhut geulah le-tefillah*, the halakhic obligation to ensure that the *berakha* of *Ga'al Yisrael*, which we recite immediately before Shemoneh Esrei, proceeds directly into the Shemoneh Esrei without any intervening interruption. While all agree that this principle applies during Shacharit, we encounter debate as to whether the principle should apply to Maariv as well. On the one hand, Rabbi Yochanan tells us that *semikhut geulah le-tefillah* should apply to Maariv as well as Shacharit, and one who is scrupulous in observing this attains the exalted status of "*ben*



*Olam Ha-ba*.” On the other hand, the Gemara records the opinion of Rabbi Yeshoshua Ben Levi, who maintains that *semikhut geulah le-tefillah* is unnecessary in the evening prayers.

The Gemara offers several explanations for the *machloket*, but in one, Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi’s reasoning is nearly identical to the second opinion quoted by the *Tur*: *semikhut geulah le-tefillah* is all about the redemption from Egypt, and that *geulah* was only completed during the daytime. Hence, the practice of *semikhut geulah le-tefillah* should be reserved for the daytime prayer of Shacharit, and should not be observed at the nighttime prayer of Maariv.

At the heart of each dispute appears to be a question pertaining to how we view partial or incomplete *geulah*. For one school of thought, partial or incomplete redemption is hardly worthy of recognition, let alone celebration. If daytime is the primary time of *geulah*, then liturgically, the theme of *geulah* becomes the exclusive province of the daytime prayers, and we will not highlight the theme at all when we pray at night.

According to the second school of thought, however, redemption need not be complete to be worthy of liturgical inclusion. We say *U-va Le-tzion Goel* and we emphasize the berakha of *Ga’al Yisrael* at Maariv, despite the fact that neither the Purim redemption story nor the Exodus from Egypt was complete at night. Even partial steps toward redemption, and perhaps even anticipation of impending redemption, are part of the process of *geulah* and warrant recognition and appreciation.

While in practice, the *Shulchan Arukh* rules in accordance with the

*Tur*’s second opinion, the underlying premise of Rav Amram Gaon’s stance is central to the holiday of Purim. The Gemara, *Megillah* 14A, offers several reasons why we do not recite Hallel on Purim. According to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karcha, we do not recite Hallel because the miracle of Purim occurred outside of Eretz Yisrael, and we do not recite Hallel over miracles that occurred in Chutz La-aretz. In another approach, Rava tells us that the Exodus from Egypt warranted the recitation of Hallel because we went from being slaves to Pharaoh to serving Hashem exclusively; citing Tehillim 113:1, Rava interprets: *Hallelu Avdei Hashem ve-lo avdei Paroh* — praise those who serve Hashem and don’t serve Pharaoh. By contrast, in the Purim story, there was no such complete redemption; we started as *avdei Achashverosh* and ended *avdei Achashverosh*. Even though the immediate existential threat of Haman and his plot to destroy the Jewish people was miraculously averted, at the end of Megillat Esther, the Jews were still the subjects of Achashverosh. Both approaches highlight the incomplete character of the Purim redemption story.

Yet, even as we omit Hallel on Purim, we still celebrate. Purim, and in certain ways, the halakhically similar holiday of Chanukah, stand as models of our ability to celebrate and appreciate even partial and incomplete redemption stories.

Often, we tend to think of *geulah* in the kind of binary terms espoused by the first school of thought outlined above: *geulah* is by its very nature complete, and, when incomplete, it cannot truly be considered *geulah* at all. When we use the term *geulah*, and particularly when we use it in

reference to the *Geulah Sheleimah*, the Final and Complete Redemption, we at times deliberately and at times subconsciously connote a redemption that is whole. “Redemption” has a ring of finality to it.

And yet, if we attempt to translate that perception of *geulah* to our day-to-day lived experiences, we are all-too-often left with nothing to celebrate at all. Moments of complete redemption are difficult to come by, while life is filled with half-victories and partial triumphs. Frequently, the victories we do achieve open up their own set of new concerns and anxieties. A close family friend recently entered remission from cancer after months of grueling treatment. He noted that, now that he had finally achieved the coveted “clean scan” that he had aspired to since diagnosis, he now spends his days divided between inexpressible gratitude and paralyzing fear over the possibility of relapse. On his better days, he succeeds in focusing on the former.

And while, for most of us, that tension is far less acute, to some degree it is present for us all. We all have moments when we figuratively contemplate whether the partial *geulot* of our lives are truly worthy of celebration. And in those moments, the holiday of Purim stands as a model. When we recite the *Al ha-Nissim* prayer on Purim and thank Hashem for the great-but-incomplete miracles that He did for our ancestors, we remember to also thank Him for the *nissim she-bekhol yom imanu* — the daily miracles wrought for us every day — that we mention in the very same prayer of *Modim*. Purim inspires us to appreciate those incomplete miracles that fill and animate our lives.



## EDUCATION THROUGH INSPIRATION, NOT INTIMIDATION

An oft-cited yet troubling Gemara (*Shabbos* 88a) regarding kabbalas HaTorah relates to the pasuk, “they stood at the foot of the mountain” (*Shemos* 19:17). Rav Avdimi bar Chama explains that we learn from here that Hashem held the mountain over the Jewish people like a barrel. He says: if you accept the Torah, good, but if not, there will be your burial place. Rav **Acha** bar Yaakov says that this gives rise to a defense against the enforceability of the Torah. Rashi explains that upon reaching the *beis din shel maalah* (heavenly court), the Jews could claim that because we were coerced into accepting the Torah



altogether, we are not accountable for violating it! Rava responds that this is no longer a concern because we reaccepted the Torah in the days of Achashveirosh, as it says “*kiymu vikiblu*,” *kiymu ma sh’kiblu kvar*

(they fulfilled that which they had previously accepted).

This passage poses several striking questions: (1) If we already said “*naasseh v’nishma*,” why was any coercion necessary? (2) What’s the significance of the imagery employed: a barrel hanging over our heads? (3) Shouldn’t the Gemara state, “here will be your burial place” not “there?” (4) Why does Rava refer to the days of Achashveirosh and not the days of Esther or Mordechai? While these questions are valid, most relevant to Purim is: How were we forced to accept the Torah? How did we reaccept the Torah? And what does this mean for us?

To understand, let us take a look at a seemingly benign Rashi. The Torah (Bereishis 2:15) says that “Hashem placed man in the garden, to work it and guard it.” Rashi (ibid.) notes that when the pasuk says “Hashem took man,” it means Hashem persuaded Adam to enter Gan Eden.

Why would Rashi abandon the simple *pshat* of the pasuk? He could have said that Hashem simply took — or placed — Adam there. Why the need for persuasion? After all, *vayikach* means to take, not to persuade. Moreover, Hashem does as He pleases. He doesn’t need to convince anyone of anything — He can create and place man wherever He wants! Perhaps most challenging, if you look a few psukim prior, the Torah (2:8) tells us that “Hashem planted a Garden and placed man there!”

**If a teacher educates through intimidation or pressure, a child might sit quietly in class, but that method will not be the most effective in cultivating a life of dedicated and inspired *avodas Hashem*.**

The Maharal (*Gur Aryeh*, Bereishis 2:32) says Rashi is compelled to interpret *vayikach* to mean persuade, since the Torah already told us that Adam was placed in Gan Eden. The Maharal expands and explains that “*l’adam lo shayach lekicha*,” you can never take a person, because the essence of a person is his intellect and his ability to be a deliberating, thinking being. You may be able to physically move a person from one place to another, but by doing so, you have not necessarily moved his will, or his attitude. A relocation of

the body does not generally cause a relocation of the mind. You cannot “take” a person’s intellect, reasoning, or predilections. You may succeed in forcing a person to do something, but because of that person’s free will, you can’t force him or her to think something. That’s why, says the Maharal, Rashi teaches that Hashem took Adam with words, that is, He persuaded him.<sup>1</sup>

Based on Rashi’s explanation, the Maharal develops the idea that even though you can force people to be physically present, you cannot expect them to be engaged or captivated unless you motivate them. A person’s mind is not subject to your coercion. If this is true regarding God and Adam, it is certainly true for any human in a position of authority — employer and employee, parent and

child, teacher and student. If a teacher educates through intimidation or pressure, a child might sit quietly in class, but that method will not be the most effective in cultivating a life of dedicated and inspired *avodas Hashem*. On the other hand, if the child’s *chinuch* is developed in a pleasant and constructive way, it has a much greater chance of having a lasting impact. Years before Rashi and Maharal, Shlomo HaMelech taught this lesson: (Mishlei 22:6) “Educate a child according to his way, so that he will not go astray in his later years.”

When our educational methods consist not of imposition of will or intimidation, but of motivation, inspiration, and encouragement, they are more likely to have a lasting impact.

This distinction relates to the halachic sanctity of Eretz Yisrael. The Rambam<sup>2</sup> discusses why the Land of Israel needed to be sanctified twice. He writes that although we sanctified the land in the days of Yehoshua, it lost its *kedusha* upon our expulsion. The Rambam explains that because the land achieved its *kedusha* through conquest, the sanctification was temporary. Once the *Olei Bavel* (the who came from Babylonia) arrived in Eretz Yisrael, however, they acquired, and thereby sanctified the Land of Israel through *chazaka*. R. Ahron Soloveichik *zt”l*<sup>3</sup> describes this sanctification as a slow, consistent, constructive development of the land. A methodical sanctification like this would last eternally. The difference between the sanctifications was that the first was accomplished through conquest and force while the second was achieved through organic, orderly growth.

Perhaps this distinction of accomplishing through intimidation and conquest as opposed to accomplishing through inspiration and motivation will help us understand the Gemara in Shabbos. Despite the fanfare with which the Torah was given, we were not quite willing participants. The Gemara paints a frightening picture of the nature of Matan Torah. We had very little choice in the matter. R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (*Meshech Chochma*, Shemos 19:17) goes as far as saying that Hashem’s Glory was so powerful and His Presence so acute that we had



no choice in the matter. Such clarity effectively removed our *bechira* (free will). He observes that even though we didn't have free will, it was still a wholehearted acceptance, a *kabbalah b'lev shaleim*.<sup>4</sup> Either way we look at it, coercion or compulsion, we didn't choose to accept the Torah at Har Sinai.

The kabbalas HaTorah at the end of the Megillah, however, was fundamentally different. Purim was a time of *hester panim*; that is, Hashem's Divine Providence was not abundantly clear to us. We were scattered and fragmented, intimidated and broken. We were on the brink of annihilation. And yet, when it seemed like there was no hope for the Jewish people, we realized Hashem had been subtly orchestrating our salvation through Vashti's execution, the selection of Esther, Mordechai's overhearing Bigson and Seresh, Achashveirosh not being able to sleep, Haman's "falling" on top of Esther. Hashem was in the background, quietly setting the stage for our salvation. On the 14th of Adar when we celebrated throughout the kingdom, we saw Hashem in a different light than at Har Sinai. This time, we internalized that Hashem was not an intimidating, frightening God but one who unconditionally loves and cares for the Jewish people. Motivated by this realization, we reaccepted the Torah and reaffirmed our commitment to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

## Internalizing Redemption

איתא בגמרא אורה זו תורה. שמחה יום טוב. ששון מילה. ויקר תפילין. וצריך ביאור. ומה שינה הכתוב את טעמו ולא פירש ליהודים ה' תורה וי"ט ומילה ותפילין. אבל הענין הוא שזה עצמו היה הגאולה והישועה שהרגישו בנ"י זאת בנפשותם. כי התורה היא האורה. והמילה ששון. כי בוודאי אותו הדור שזכו לנסים בכח התשובה. בוודאי נתעלו נפשותם. ובאו לאמונת התורה. ונתמלאו אורה בכח התורה. וששון בכח המילה כו' וזה עצמו מה שדרשו חז"ל הדר קבלוה בימי אחשורוש. פרש"י מאהבת הנס. שמקודם היו בבחי' אמונה כמ"ש כפה עליהם ההר כו'. ועתה הבינו בעצמם חובת התורה ומצות. וז"ש קיימו מה שקבלו כבר שמקודם ה' בחי' קבלה ואמונה ועתה נתגלה להם בפועל בנפשותם.

**שפת אמת פורים תרמ"ח**

The Gemara [commenting on the verse "The Jews had light, happiness, joy and honor"] states light (*orah*) refers to Torah, happiness (*simcha*) refers to festival, joy (*sason*) refers to circumcision and honor (*yekar*) refers to tefillin. This requires explanation. Why did the verse change the wording? Why not simply state "The Jews had Torah, festival, circumcision and tefillin? The idea is that that the verse is describing how the Jewish people internalized their redemption and salvation. They saw the Torah as light and circumcision as joy, because that generation merited miracles as a result of their repentance. They elevated themselves and came to believe in the Torah and they were filled with the light of the Torah. They were filled with joy as a result of circumcision etc. This is what our rabbis taught "they accepted the Torah again in the time of Achashverosh." Rashi adds "from the love of the miracle." Beforehand, everything was a result of faith, as our rabbis taught, "He placed the mountain over them like a barrel." Now, they realized on their own a love for Torah and mitzvot. That is what our rabbis said "they fulfilled what they already accepted." Beforehand, their acceptance was based on faith. Now, something internal was revealed.

**Sefat Emet, Purim 5648**

### Endnotes

1. See also *Gur Aryeh*, Tzav 8:2, *Korach* 16:2, *Chukas* 20:18.
2. *Hilchos Beis HaBechirah* 6:16, *Hilchos Terumah* 1:6. The sanctity of the Land of Israel gives rise to the ability to perform the mitzvos dependent on the land.

3. *Logic of the Heart, Logic of the Mind*, pg. 167–8.

4. See inside for further elaboration. See also responsa *Kanfei Yonah*, #29.



Find shiurim and articles on Jewish Education at  
[www.yutorah.org/machshava/jewish-thought/chinuch](http://www.yutorah.org/machshava/jewish-thought/chinuch)



## ACHASHVEIROSH'S BEAUTY PAGEANT: WHAT IS TRUE BEAUTY?

The Gemara, in *Megillah* 12b, tells us that Achashveirosh became very drunk on the 187<sup>th</sup> day of his party along with many of his officers. Their discussion devolved into an argument about the most beautiful women in the world, with some claiming they were found in Medes while others claiming that they were from Persia. The king himself got into the fray by saying that his wife was from Bavel and was more beautiful than anyone else's. If his officers wanted to see her, he could prove it. They agreed, but added a request that was truly shocking: they did not want her to wear her queenly clothing, which would set her apart from everyone else. Achashveirosh drunkenly agreed, but Vashti



herself refused and embarrassed Achashveirosh publicly, which led to her demise.

Why would the officers have said such a thing to the king? Who would do that and expect to live?

Maharsha (Rav Shlomo Eidels) says this suggestion came from the king himself, not the people. Achashveirosh told them that it was not the clothing and jewelry that made Vashti look beautiful; she had an amazing natural beauty. To prove it, he offered for her to appear without those clothes, and they all agreed. But this answer is hard to understand in the context of our Gemara.

*Ben Yehoyada* (Rav Yosef Chaim of Baghdad) says this discussion took place away from the king, but he overheard it. Once Achashveirosh suggested a beauty pageant, everyone knew they were in trouble. If he asked them to bring their wives in and he found someone he liked, he

would have her husband killed and take her for himself. They had to stop the conversation before it got out of hand, so they suggested the following: “Your majesty, this will be impossible to judge! Because the queen has access to the best clothes and the best makeup and jewelry, she will appear more beautiful than all our wives combined, but of course that would be impossible.” But lo and behold — Achashveirosh thought that was a great idea — level the playing field and we will judge them all at the same time!

The Vilna Gaon and the sefer *Yosef Lekach* (Rav Eliezer Ashkenazi) both say Achashveirosh wanted to make a parade, embarrassing the queen tremendously by making her walk through the crowd of partygoers at the front gate all the way to the throne room. Perhaps the king was upset at her for something she had done, and this was her punishment.

Was Vashti really a good person when she refused to participate in this beauty pageant? Was she a true *tzanua* (modest person) who would not even consider doing such a thing? Ibn Ezra says that these kinds of parades were common in the lands of Edom even in his time, and in fact, *Torah Shlaimah* (Rav Menachem Kasher) says this was done at all parties at that time. Vashti, however, was from a nation that did not do this, and she considered herself to be above such requests. She might have done such a thing on her own, but not at the request of others, even if the request came from the king.

So, what happened? Why would she not accede to the king’s request? Rambam says in his explanation to the Megillah that really, Vashti was excited and happy to participate in this beauty pageant, but at the moment she got

herself ready to go to the king she saw either a tail sticking out of her forehead (which was probably a huge pimple) or a form of skin disease on her forehead, and she was very upset that she would not prove herself the most beautiful of the land. He says Vashti was the only one who saw this “tail” or “leprosy.” Her friends saw nothing at all.

Malbim points out that there is a story behind this story. Everyone

## Beauty is a gift Hashem gives us to utilize in our service to the Creator in the best way possible, never to be used to “prove” our superiority or to cause others to sin.

thought Achashveirosh’s claim to the throne was through his wife. She was the daughter of Belshazzar, the previous king of Babylonia who had been defeated by Achashveirosh’s father Cyrus I. The consolidation of the Persian, Mede, and Babylonian kingdoms was through his marriage to the princess of Babylonia. People considered Achashveirosh to be a usurper who simply married the right person. Perhaps people even said that aloud at the party behind the king’s back! He wanted to show that he became king by his own power, and that Vashti meant absolutely nothing to him — she was simply part of his harem and nothing more! She was Vashti Hamalka — first Vashti, and

only then the queen because she is married to me, not the other way around! When the opportunity to shame her before the whole kingdom presented itself, he took advantage of it immediately.

*Meam Loez* says it is possible Achashveirosh had the Jews in mind here. He knew they were sitting by themselves at his party, and he wanted them to sin. He had been trying this whole time to wear down their resistance and make them do things they should not be doing, but because of Mordechai’s influence, he had been unsuccessful. If he could get Vashti and some of the other pretty women to flaunt themselves, perhaps that would cause all the Jews to sin! His mistake was that he did so in an unflattering manner, which was clearly *hashgacha pratis* (Divine providence), so the Jews would continue to stay to themselves.

Of course, such things as beauty pageants and embarrassing people publicly are anathema to the Jewish soul. We hear the details of this story and we should feel disgust toward such a terrible husband and king. Beauty is a gift Hashem gives us to utilize in our service to the Creator in the best way possible, never to be used to “prove” our superiority or to cause others to sin. May we all understand the true beauty Hashem has granted us, so we merit seeing the true beauty of G-d in the World to Come.





**UNDERSTANDING MIRACLES • WHY DO WE EAT HAMENTASHIN  
THE MEANING OF NAHAFOCHU • HEARING THE MEGILLA ONLINE**

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COSTUMES • FORGETTING AL HANISIM**

**THE PROPER TIME FOR THE SEUDA • REMEMBERING AMALEK**

**WHY PURIM IS TWO DAYS • DRINKING PROPERLY • MISHLOACH MANOT**

**RABBINIC HOLIDAYS • THE STORY OF ESTHER • PARSHAT ZACHOR**

**PURIM AND PESACH • APPRECIATING JEWISH HISTORY • MATANOT L'EVYONIM**

**PREPARE FOR PURIM WITH THOUSANDS OF SHIURIM ON**

**THE MARCOS AND ADINA KATZ  
YUTORAH.ORG**

**ALSO AVAILABLE FOR IOS AND ANDROID MOBILE DEVICES!**



ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

An Affiliate of Yeshiva University

CENTER FOR THE JEWISH FUTURE