



ניצחון
NITZACHON

Adas Torah Journal of Torah Ideas

Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Dovid Landesman zt"l
הרב דוד בן אריה זצ"ל

VOLUME 3:2 • SPRING - SUMMER 5776 • LOS ANGELES

Nitzachon

Adas Torah Journal of Torah Ideas
Volume 3:2 Spring-Summer 5776

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Editors' Preface

We are dedicating this issue of *Nitzachon* in honor of Rabbi Dovid Landesman, *zt"l*, the beloved former principal of YULA who returned to Israel several years ago and passed away suddenly this past year. Rabbi Landesman was a great *Rebbe* and mentor to many of the members of our *kehilla* and he had a profound positive impact on so many of our lives.

This issue's *Sifsei Y'sheinim* section features two articles previously published by Rabbi Landesman, prefaced by a biography authored by his close *talmid*, Rabbi Aaron Katz. Rabbi Nachum Sauer and Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom, close colleagues of Rabbi Landesman for many years at YULA, have contributed articles and dedications in his honor, which we have included in the *Rosh V'rishon* section. We have also included articles and dedications that we have received from his students both here and in Israel. We would like to express *hakaras hatov* to Rabbi Katz for his vital help in selecting the articles by Rabbi Landesman and coordinating the dedications.

Rabbi Landesman spent his entire career encouraging and inspiring his *talmidim* to learn and live lives of Torah. May this journal be an *aliya* for his *neshama* and a source of *nechama* to his family.

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Tisha B'Av: The Beginning of the Redemption

RABBI DOVID REVAH



Most of us experience Tisha B'Av, when we focus on mourning the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, as the lowest point of the Jewish calendar. At the same time, Tisha B'Av is more than just a day of mourning. *Megillas Eicha* refers to Tisha B'Av as a *moed* and because of that, we do not say *tachanun*. Within the sadness, there is also a message of hope. The following elucidation of a *gemara* by the *Chasam Sofer* highlights these two dimensions of Tisha B'Av.

The *mishna* in *Maseches Ta'anis* (27b) says that on the Seventeenth of Tamuz the armies besieging Yerushalayim breached the walls of the city. On the Ninth of Av, after three weeks of street fighting, they destroyed the *Beis HaMikdash*. In *Sefer Yirmiyahu*, a different date is given for the breaching of the walls – the ninth of Tamuz. Both the *Talmud Bavli* and the *Talmud Yerushalmi* discuss this question. The *Bavli* in *Maseches Ta'anis* (28b) asks

הובקעה העיר בשבעה עשר הוה? והכתיב בחדש הרביעי בתשעה לחדש ויחזק הרעב בעיר, וכתיב בתריה ותבקע העיר וגו'! - אמר רבא: לא קשיא; כאן - בראשונה, כאן - בשניה. דתניא: בראשונה הובקעה העיר בתשעה בתמוז, בשניה בשבעה עשר בו.
How can the mishna say the city was breached on the Seventeenth of Tamuz while the pasuk in Sefer Yirmiyahu (Perek 52) says that it occurred on the ninth of Tamuz? Rava answers that the Navi is referring to the first Beis HaMikdash while the mishna is referring to the second Beis HaMikdash.

The Ramban explains that today we are directly affected by the destruction of the second *Beis HaMikdash* and should therefore fast on the day of the breaching of the wall of the second *Beis HaMikdash*, not the first.¹

¹ There is an obvious difficulty. The fast of Shiva Assar B'Tamuz was mandated by the *Navi Zecharia* (*Zecharia* Ch. 8) after the destruction of the first *Beis HaMikdash* and was observed on the Ninth of Tamuz. How can *Chazal*, hundreds of years later, change the date that was already mandated by a *takanas neviim*? Rav Chaim

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and *Mara D'Asra* of Adas Torah since 2005.

Tosafos in *Rosh Hashana* 18b quotes the approach of the *Talmud Yerushalmi*:

ואע"ג דכתיב בקרא בתשעה לחודש? קלקול חשבונות היו שם.
Doesn't the Navi say that the breaching of the walls was on the Ninth of Tamuz? After living through three years of war and starvation during the siege of Yerushalayim, apparently the people lost track of the correct date. The accurate date was the seventeenth, but in their confusion the people thought it was the ninth.

Tosafos adds that although it stands to reason that Yirmiya, when writing the *Navi*, was aware of the correct date, he deliberately wrote the ninth of Tamuz, because that is the date that people believed the city fell.²

The *Yerushalmi* (*Ta'anis* 4:5) brings an additional proof from a *pasuk* in *Yechezkel* (26:1), that there must have been some confusion in the calendar during the siege.

ויהי בעשתי עשרה שנה באחד לחדש היה דבר ה' אלי לאמר. בן אדם יען אשר אמרה
 צר על ירושלם האח.

It was on the eleventh year on the first of the month that the word of Hashem came to me saying, "Son of man! Tyre has said of Yerushalayim - Hurrah!"

The *Navi* is describing Tyre celebrating the news of the fall of Yerushalayim. Although the *pasuk* does not say exactly what the people of Tyre heard, the *Yerushalmi* assumes that they were rejoicing in the news of the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* and that their celebration took place on the first of the month. However, the *pasuk* does not clarify the first of which month. It could not have been the month of Elul, since Tyre is close to Yerushalayim and it would not have taken three weeks for the news of the destruction to reach them. The *Yerushalmi* concludes that the *pasuk* must be referring to the first of Av. This would mean that the first *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed on the first of Av; this would contradict the tradition recorded in the *Mishna* in *Ta'anis* that both the first and second *Basei Mikdash* were destroyed on the Ninth of Av.

The *Yerushalmi* answers that both the date of the breaching of the walls given in *Sefer Yirmiyahu*, and the date of the *Churban* given in *Sefer Yechezkel* were mistaken

Soloveichik explains that the *Navi* only refers to the fast as *Tzom Harivii*, the fast in the fourth month (Tamuz), but does not dictate a specific day of the month. As long as the fast was still in Tamuz, it would be a fulfillment of the *takanas neviim*.

2. *Korban Ha'Edah*, in his commentary on the *Yerushalmi*, adds a slightly different reason explaining why the *Navi* deliberately recorded the wrong date. He explains that it was a demonstration of *imo anochi b'tzara*, the *Shechina* partakes in our pain. Since the nation was going through a period of terrible turmoil and confusion, the *Shechina*, as represented by the words of the *Navi*, acted also as is experiencing confusion.

due to the confusion experienced during the siege. The *Yerushalmi* further notes that the mistakes were consistent. There were 21 days from the breaching of the wall until the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*. If they thought that the breaching of the wall took place on the ninth, eight days before the actual date on the seventeenth, it would follow that they would record the *Churban* as taking place on the first of Av, eight days before the actual date on the ninth.

The *gemara* proceeds to question this premise.³ The *Navi Yirmiya* was living in *Eretz Yisrael* at the time of the *churban habayis*. It makes sense that he would record the date that the people in *Yerushalyim* believed it to be, although it was incorrect. However, *Yechezkel HaNavi* was living in *Bavel*, having been exiled eleven years before. *Yechezkel* received a prophecy about the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* and would have no reason not to record the correct date. How is it possible to say that *Yechezkel* dated his prophecy on the first of Av when he really received it on the ninth?

The *Yerushalmi* then gives a *mashal* to explain the *pasuk* in *Yechezkel*.

למלך שהיה יושב ומחשב חשבונות, באו ואמרו לו נשבה בנך ונתקלקלו חשבונותי,
אמר יעשה זה ראש לחשבונות.

It can be compared to a King who was calculating his calendar. He received a report that his son was taken captive. He said – I will no longer use my existing dating system, rather I will start counting all my dates from today.

The *Yerushalmi* seems to be giving an alternate explanation to the *pasuk* in *Yechezkel*. The first of the month is not to be understood literally. It means that when *Klal Yisrael*- Hashem's children - were captured, Hashem reset his dating system. The Ninth of Av was the first day of the year in the new calendar.

It would seem that the *Yerushalmi* is rejecting the explanation that there was a confusion of the dates. The *Chasam Sofer*, in his commentary on the *Yerushalmi*, writes that really the *Yerushalmi* is still maintaining that the dates were confused, and this idea is being brought to answer the previous difficulty.

The *gemara* in *Yoma* tells us that the Jews living at the time of the *Churban* did not believe that Hashem would ever destroy the *Beis HaMikdash*.⁴ Although they recognized that they were not fulfilling their role as the *mamleches kohanim v'goy kadosh*, they were certain that Hashem would never let his abode in the world, the

3 The words of the *gemara* are unclear. This is the explanation of the *Shayarei Korban*.

4 This is how the Vilna Gaon explains the *gemara* in *Yoma* - 'רשעים יהיה אלא שתלה בשחונם בה'.

Beis HaMikdash, be destroyed. When the *Beis HaMikdash* was actually destroyed, *Klal Yisrael* concluded that Hashem had severed His relationship with them and had rejected them as His nation.⁵ In truth, the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* was not a rejection of *Klal Yisrael* at all, rather it was a necessary act to preserve them. As long as the *Beis HaMikdash* was standing, they would never realize the need to change and improve. By destroying the *Beis HaMikdash*, Hashem began the rehabilitation and regrowth of *Klal Yisrael*.⁶

This was the true meaning of the date given in Yechezkel's prophecy. As long as the *Beis HaMikdash* was standing, *Klal Yisrael* were deteriorating and nearly beyond redemption. The destruction was the tipping point which set them on the long path to rehabilitation. The Ninth of Av was the first day of the new era – in which they were headed in the right direction towards the ultimate redemption.

However, *Klal Yisrael* at that time did not perceive the *Churban* as a beginning, only as an end. They could not grasp the true meaning of Yechezkel's *nevua*. They understood the prophecy literally - that the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed on the first of Av.

As reports of the *Churban* began to reach *Bavel*, and they heard more details of the tragedy, they were told that the walls were breached three weeks before the *Churban*.⁷ Having already assumed months before, based on the *Navi Yechezkel*, that the *Churban* took place on the first of Av, they dated the breaching of the walls to the ninth of Tamuz – three weeks before.

Eventually the writings of Yirmiya were brought to *Bavel*. The *Chasam Sofer* suggests that the *Sefer Yirmaya* originally had the correct date for the breaching of the walls – the seventeenth of Tamuz. However, in *Bavel* they were sure that the true date was the ninth of Tamuz. They attributed the “wrong date” in the *sefer Yirmiya* to an understandable confusion which probably took place during the terrible siege and

5 The Vilna Gaon explains that the significance of the miracle of Purim was that *Klal Yisrael* realized that Hashem's relationship with them did not end with the *Churban* and that He was still protecting them in *galus*. This awareness allowed them to restore their connection to Hashem and begin rebuilding the *Beis HaMikdash*.

6 The Vilna Gaon explains that this is the reason we minimize some of the *aveilus* in the afternoon of Tisha B'av at the time that the *Bais Hamikdash* was set aflame. It is because that act was the beginning of the process of becoming again the *mamleches kohanim*. This is the meaning of what *Chazal* say that the *Keruvim* were seen to be embracing at the time of the destruction. The *keruvim* represented the relationship between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*. One would have thought that at the time of the *Churban* the relationship was at its worst. But the opposite was true. The destruction was an act of love.

7 The actual news of the *Churban* did not reach *Bavel* until five months later on the fifth of Teves, as the *pasuk* says in *Yechezkel* 33:21 יהיה בשתי עשרה שנה בעשרי בחמשה לחדש לגלותנו בא אלי הפליט מירושלם לאמר הכתה העיר.

they therefore amended the date to what they believed to be the correct date - the ninth of Tamuz.

This was all based on their misunderstanding of the words of Yechezkel. Eventually we understood the true meaning of the *Navi* – that the *Churban* was not an end, but a beginning, and the first of the month was not meant to be understood literally. We now know that the original date in *Sefer Yermiya* was correct, and during the period of both the *Bayis Rishon* and *Sheini* the walls of Yerushalayim were breached on the Seventeenth of Tamuz.

Tisha B'av is a depressing day, but in light of the words of the *Chasam Sofer* we can recognize that the destruction was not an end, but served to turn us in the right direction.

The *gemara* in *Ta'anis* (30b) says

כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה בנחמתה.

Whoever mourns over Yerushalayim merits to witness her joy.

The *Chasam Sofer* notes that the *gemara* does not use the future tense (you will merit) but the present tense. By recognizing Tisha B'Av for what it truly is – the beginning of the redemption- we can already perceive the seeds of the *Geula* which we will hopefully merit to see this year in its final form.

Purim and the *Techeiles* of Mordechai

RABBI NACHUM SAUER



The Rambam in *Hilchos Megilla Perek 2* writes:

The Rambam in *Hilchos Megilla Perek 2* writes: כל ספרי הנביאים וכל הכתובים עתידיים ליבטל לימות המשיח חוץ ממגילת אסתר והרי היא קיימת כחמשה חומשי תורה וכהלכות של תורה שבעל פה שאינם בטלים לעולם ואף על פי שכל זכרון הצרות יבטל שנאמר כי נשכחו הצרות הראשונות וכי נסתרו מעיני ימי הפורים לא יבטלו שנאמר וימי הפורים האלה לא יעברו מתוך היהודים וזכרם לא יסוף מזרעם.

The Rambam states that among all the *sefarim* of *Neviim* and *Kesuvim* that will no longer be read in the days of *Mashiach*, *Megillas Esther* will be the exception and it will still be read like the five *Chumashim* of the Torah and the *Halachos* of *Torah She'baal Pe* because *Megillas Esther* will never become null and void. So, too, the holiday of Purim will never be voided or forgotten.

What is so special about Purim and *Megillas Esther* that the Rambam points out that they will never be cancelled or forgotten by the Jewish people throughout the generations?

Another fundamental question to ask about Purim concerns the mitzva of *ad d'lo yada*, the commandment to drink wine until one is so intoxicated that they cannot recognize the difference between *arur Haman u'baruch Mordechai*, the cursedness of Haman and the blessedness of Mordechai. What is the meaning and purpose of

In memory of a dear friend and colleague, Rabbi Dovid Landesman z"l, whom I knew for over forty years. He was the ultimate Mechanech, a Rebbe par excellence, who loved his students and made a real impact on their lives. Reb Dovid was a very unique individual, very talented in many areas. He was comfortable with every Jew, from whatever camp, yet firmly maintaining his total commitment to Torah and halacha. He left a strong legacy of ahavas haTorah and ahavas Yisrael for his family, friends and for thousands of talmidim. Yehi zichro baruch.

A highly respected Posek and Mechanech, Rabbi Sauer has been a Rebbe at YULA for over thirty-five years. Rabbi Sauer also serves as a Dayan on the RCC Beis Din and a Rabbinic Consultant to Chai Lifeline on the West Coast.

this *mitzva*, especially since we find that *Chazal* generally discourage a person from becoming intoxicated?

A third basic question concerns a strange *Maamar Chazal* in *Chullin* 139b:

המן מן התורה מנין? המן העץ אשר צייתך לבלתי אכל ממנו אכלת.

The reference to Haman in the Torah is from the sin of eating from the Etz HaDaas in which Hashem asks Chava "did you eat from the tree from which I had told you it is forbidden to eat?"

Chazal find a hint to Haman from the word "*Hamin*" simply because the words have the same Hebrew letters. What is the deeper connection that *Chazal* are teaching us through these seemingly unrelated *inyanim*?

All three questions can be answered with an insight brought down in the *Sifrei Machashava* explaining the essence of both Purim and Amalek, from whom Haman descended. When the Torah first describes Amalek's attack on *Bnei Yisrael* when they left *Mitzrayim*, it uses the phrase *asher karcha ba'derech*, "they happened to chance upon you on the road." The Torah uses the *lashon* of *mikre*, which means by chance. The Torah here is apparently hinting to us that the philosophy of Amalek is that everything happens by chance, and is random. There is no such thing as *hashgacha pratis*, Divine Providence, that determines what will happen. Immediately before Amalek attacked in *Refidim*, *Bnei Yisrael* raised a question, *hayesh Hashem b'kirbeinu im ayin*, "Is Hashem in our midst or not?" The *Netziv* asks the obvious question; how could *Bnei Yisrael* have such a doubt after just having witnessed the miracle of *Krias Yam Suf*? He answers that they had no doubts that Hashem performs supernatural miracles to save *Klal Yisrael* when necessary, but they had a *safek* whether there is a constant *hashgacha pratis* even *b'derech hateva*, for all matters even on a natural level. It is due to their doubts and the weakening of their *emuna* (hinted at in the word *Refidim*) that Amalek had the ability to come and attack.

The *gematria*, numerical value, of Amalek is 240, which is the same as the numerical value of *safek*, doubt. The power of Amalek is to create *sfeikos*, doubts, in *emuna* in *Hashgacha Pratis*. Amalek espouses the philosophy that everything happens by chance. Hashem does not run the world. When *Klal Yisrael* show a weakness in their faith of *Hashgachas Hashem*, Amalek has an opening to attack them. The original source of creating doubts in *emuna* came from the *Nachash*, the Snake, in the *chet* of eating from the *Etz HaDaas*. When Hashem confronted Chava and asked her why she transgressed and ate from the *Etz HaDaas*, she responded *hanachash hishiani va'ochel*, the Snake seduced me and I ate. The letters of *השיאני* can be divided into two words, *hayesh* and *ayin*, which means is there or is there not. The *Nachash* confused Chava and

created a doubt in her mind whether the fruit of the *Etz HaDaas* was really forbidden; this is how she came to sin and eat the fruit. This type of trickery and seizing of the moment is the basic strategy of the *yetzer hara* and of Amalek, the Satan's physical agent in this world. Amalek uses the strategy of the *Nachash/Yetzer Hara* to create doubts in people's *emuna* in Hashem. Accordingly, Haman is a descendent of Amalek and denied the principle of *Hashgacha Pratis* just like his forbearer. Everything that happens is *mikre*, by chance. For this reason, when Haman relates the story of what happened to him with Achashveirosh and Mordechai to his wife Zeresh and his admirers, the *Megilla* uses the phrase *es kol asher karahu*, which means everything that happened to him. *Chazal* explain, *ben bno shel karahu ba alaeinu*, a descendent of Amalek, who represents *mikre*, chance, is trying to destroy us. Based on this we can understand the connection that *Chazal* make between Haman and the *Etz HaDaas*. As explained, the strategy of Haman and Amalek to create doubts in *emuna*, stems from the *chet* of the *Etz HaDaas*; the *Nachash/Yetzer Hara* created a doubt in the mind of Chava. Thus the *remez* to Haman is from the word "*Hamin*."

The miracle of Purim was a *nes nistar*, a hidden miracle. Purim teaches us that there is no *mikre* in the world. Everything that happens is the result of the Divine Providence of Hashem. Even those events that seem to be random are, in reality, *hashgachas Hashem*, as we see from the story of Purim in the *Megilla*. Nothing happened by chance, but every step of the way events were guided by Hashem behind the scenes. *Klal Yisrael* of that generation recognized the *Hashgacha Pratis* of Hashem. Perhaps this is the meaning of the phrase in *Shoshanas Yaakov* that we recite after the *Megilla*, "*bir'osam yachad t'cheiles Mordechai*"- when they all saw together the *techeiles* of Mordechai. Perhaps this refers not only to the royal blue garment that Mordechai wore, but also to the blue string of *techeiles* on his *tzitzis*. Rashi in *Chumash* explains that the blue color of *techeiles* resembles the sea, which resembles the sky, which resembles the *kisei hakavod*, the Heavenly Throne. When a Jew looks at *techeiles*, he is immediately reminded of the *kisei hakavod*, that Hashem is looking down on us and guiding everything that happens in the world. All of *Klal Yisrael* recognized the *Hashgacha Pratis* in the *nes nistar* of Purim. This was quite a feat, as everything that happened could have been interpreted as happening naturally, *b'derech hateva*. For this reason, the *meforshim* explain that Purim was called by that name *al shem hapur*, based on the lots, which are considered to be the ultimate example of chance. *Klal Yisrael* recognized that even the lots were part of the *Hashgacha Pratis* of the miracle of Purim.

Emuna in *Hashgacha Pratis* requires a certain degree of *bitul hadaas*, suspension of understanding; a willingness to recognize that we often do not understand the

ways of Hashem as events unfold. Very often what we see appears to be random and does not make much sense to us. Someone who has *emuna* in *Hashgacha Pratis* has to be willing to be *mevatel daato*, to suspend his understanding of events, with the knowledge that Hashem is running every detail behind the scenes. This is the basis of the *mitzva* of *ad d'lo yada* on Purim, a *bitul hadaas* and an acknowledgement that we do not understand the ways of Hashem, but recognize that Hashem is orchestrating everything in the world. *Chazal* thus instituted the *mitzva* of drinking to the point where one loses his understanding and the ability to discern something as simple as the difference between *Haman HaRasha* and *Mordechai HaTzaddik*.

As a result of this *bitul hadaas*, Purim also has a dimension of *Kabbalas HaTorah*, acceptance of the *Torah She'baal Peh*, the Oral Law, as explained in the *Midrash Tanchuma Parshas Noach*. *Chazal* learn this from the *pasuk* in the *Megilla*:

קיימו וקבלו עליהם היהודים - קיימו מה שקבלו כבר

Klal Yisrael recommitted themselves to the Torah they had already received at Har Sinai.

It is appropriate for Purim to be a day of *Kabbalas HaTorah* because the prerequisite for receiving the Torah is *bitul hadaas*; just as *Klal Yisrael* had expressed *bitul hadaas* and total submission to the Will of Hashem at Har Sinai when they said *naase v'nishma*, so too Purim was a day of *Kabbalas HaTorah* because of their total *bitul hadaas* to Hashem and His plans. Perhaps this is one explanation for the famous statement of the Ariz"l, "*Yom Kippurim - Yom K'Purim*," that Yom Kippur should be like Purim. What is the connection between these two days that seem to be such opposites? In reality, Yom Kippur and Purim do have something in common: both Yom Kippur and Purim are days of *Kabbalas HaTorah*; on Yom Kippur *Klal Yisrael* received the second *luchos*, and on Purim they were *mekabel* the *Torah She'baal Peh*.

We can now understand the importance of Purim, and why it will never cease to be celebrated or forgotten, even during the days of *Mashiach*. The Rambam emphasizes that Purim is the foundation of *emuna*. Everything that happens, even that which we refer to as *teva*, is in reality *Hashgacha Pratis* of Hashem. The other *Yomim Tovim* were crowned with *nisim niglaim*, supernatural miracles. Purim, the *Yom Tov* of *nes nistar*, teaches us that things do not happen by chance or randomly, but are the result of *Hashgacha Pratis*. This lesson is as necessary during the Days of *Mashiach* as at any other time. The *Megilla* thus states,

ימי הפורים האלה לא יעברו מתוך היהודים וזכרם לא יסוף מזרעם.

These days of Purim will continue forever, impacting the Emuna of every Jew in every generation.

Mordechai Would not Bow nor Prostrate Himself

RABBI YITZCHAK ETSHALOM



The Problem

Mordechai's refusal to bow to Haman forms the essential cause of the entire narrative of the Purim story; without it, there is no decree, no miracle and no holiday (nor a story to tell). Mordechai's deliberate, obstinate and consistent non-prostration is the catalyst for the grand vizier's hatred of Mordechai "and the nation of Mordechai".¹ The proximate result of this hatred is the decree to obliterate "the nation of Mordechai".²

Understanding Mordechai's behavior and the search for a motivation for his refusal must take into account the terrible potential consequences of his actions—namely the genocide of our entire people. Whatever caused him to remain standing in the presence of Haman must have been a consideration of such profound significance that he would risk the lives of all of his people to do so. And thus the inquiry after his motivation begins.

1 I have deliberately included this literal translation of *Am Mordechai*, which appears both in the decision as well as decree to destroy the Jews, since the simple read of the text does not portray Haman as an anti-semitic (to use an anachronism) but rather as someone who has intense hatred for Mordechai and his vengeance against the latter includes destroying all of Mordechai's people.

2 3:6 – all Biblical references are to *Esther* unless otherwise indicated.

This essay was lovingly written and submitted in honor of our dear friend and teacher, Rabbi Dovid Landesman z"l, who left an indelible imprint on the lives of all who knew him. His total commitment to educating every Jew – indeed, every person – that he met was contagious and the warmth, love and spirit that he imparted to us by his daily hugs, shmussen and humor made our lives all the richer. We are poorer for his passing. Yehi Zichro Baruch.

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It is tempting to argue that Mordechai was unaware of the severe potential “blowback” from his behavior and, had he known, he might have bowed. This temptation is quickly subdued when we read of his continued “in your face” stance against—and before—Haman when the vizier leaves the palace grounds after the first banquet. “Haman left on that day happy and glad of heart, but when Haman espied Mordechai at the king’s gate, and he would not stand nor move on his account, Haman became filled with rage against Mordechai”. (5:9) Mordechai’s position was deliberate and one to which he held in spite of the grave and terrifying decree.

Biblical Behavior: Descriptive or Prescriptive?

Before surveying the approaches to this problem that have been proposed over the past 1500 years, note that the challenge is premised on a presumption commonly made about many characters in Tanach, but that must both be spelled out and assayed. Even Samson, a character whose actions fall short of our “virtue threshold” (cf. *Mishna Sota* 1:8), has his marriage to a Philistine girl (*Shoftim* 14) “normalized,” by assuming a conversion on her part (cf. *Mishne Torah Issurei Bia* 13:14). The inclination to “sanitize” questionable behavior of those we deem to be protagonists is a tendency that was long ago cast in a dubious light. Rabbi Yehuda haNassi, a self-identified descendant of David, interpreted an awkward phrase in II *Shmuel* 12 to mean that David had not actually sinned in his relationship with Batsheva nor in his order to have Uriah killed. Rav, his young student, noted that “Rebbi, who comes from the seed of David, turns (texts) over and finds merit for (David).” (*Shabbos* 56a). Four methodological questions must be addressed whenever facing a Biblical character whose behavior, *prima facie*, appears to be non-*halachic*.

First of all, is the character in question truly a sympathetic one, whose behavior we would expect to be virtuous and guided by “the right and good?” Whereas characters like the Patriarchs and the prophets are presumed to be beyond reproach, there are many actors in the great dramas of Tanach regarding whom we could legitimately ask this question. How are we to regard Yaakov’s sons (specifically in regard to their treatment of Yosef)? How about Nadav and Avihu?

Second, we need to assess whether the character, at this point in his or her development, is at a sufficient stage of virtue. For instance, no lesser a person than *Moshe Rabbeinu* is called to task by *Chazal* for his response to his early failures (cf. *inter alia Tanhuma Beshalach* par. 24). If we wish to read noble nuances into a character’s actions, we need to first establish that he or she is currently of the moral stature that requires such an assumption. It is prudent to note that some *Midrashic*

traditions take Mordechai to task for his refusal and its catastrophic implications.³ These are, to be sure, the minority voice and our inquiry is following the mainstream approach that Mordechai's actions were both heroic and virtuous; nonetheless, such voices echo and shake our confidence in the rectitude of our protagonist's actions.

Third, even if we have determined that the character whose actions are under our moral microscope is a "full protagonist" at the time, we must assay (to the best of our ability) whether there are any exigent circumstances warranting a less-than-ideal mode of behavior. Was Avraham's prevarication regarding Sarah's identity (*Bereishis* 12 and 20) warranted due to considerations of *pikuach nefesh*? Was his descent to Egypt justified on grounds of the considerations in *Tosefta Avoda Zara* 4:4 (lack of available food at a reasonable price).

Finally, and this is key to any discussion of the *halachic* rectitude of characters in Tanach, we must clarify by which *halachic* standards we are judging them. To deny that *halacha* evolved during the *Tannaitic* period (and since then) is to ignore complete *mishnayos* (and more) in the corpus. The *takkanos* recorded in the 4th-5th chapters of *Maseches Gittin* should be sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the *halacha* continued to evolve throughout the (first part, at least) of the *Midrashic* era. As such, when rabbinic literature shines a light on, for instance, Boaz's marriage to Ruth, it does so from the perspective of the lenient ruling "*Moavi ve-lo Moavis*" (compare the formulation of *Ruth Rabba* 7:7 with the surprising one in *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* par. 16).

Although a valuable digression, these considerations do little to inform us in our inquiry regarding Mordechai's defiant behavior. After all, it isn't his personal religious/spiritual status that is in danger here; it is his personal welfare as well as that of the Jews throughout the empire (in other words, the world Jewish community). Unless there is some *halachic* consideration of which we are unaware, we are fairly safe assuming that Mordechai's continued defiance was a deliberate stance taken due to some principled motive; a principle that justified (evidently) endangering the lives of all Jews.

Traditions of Parshanus

Mordechai's behavior, as noted above, was so brazen and such a vital pivot in our story that it has attracted much attention. The explanations provided throughout the history of exegetic and homiletic interpretation of *Esther* break down, broadly speaking, into three interpretive streams:⁴ the religious, the national and the personal.

3 Cf. *Megilla* 12b-13a

4 R. Yaakov Medan, among others, provides a concise summary of the approaches in his article *uMordechai Lo Yikhra veLo Yishtahaveh: Madua?* in *Hadassah Hi Esther: Memorial Volume for Dasi Rabinowitz z"l*, Alon Shevut 1997, pp. 151-170

The defense on personal grounds begins with a tradition that Mordechai and Haman had a history of soured relations, including the *aggada* about Haman selling himself to Mordechai as a slave due to his need to procure rations for his soldiers. The *aggada* goes so far as to provide a detailed wording of the deed of sale that was inscribed (for lack of any other available material on which to write) on Mordechai's leggings. Continuing the theme, the Midrash tells that every time that Haman would pass through the gates of the fortress, Mordechai would brandish his leggings, further infuriating his nemesis.⁵ The notion that the master would bow to his own slaves was so unthinkable to Mordechai that he refused to get up or show any form of obeisance to the former. There are various threads of this theme, including a reversal in which the original animosity is Haman's towards Mordechai based on the notion that Haman had an interest in the success of Bigthan and Theresh's plot to kill the king and that Mordechai's foiling of that plot enraged Haman.⁶ Unlike the "personal pride" version, this does nothing to explain Mordechai's defiant behavior. As much as it highlights the personal animosity between protagonist and antagonist, as well as adds to the satirical nature of the text, this general direction is difficult to accept as a reasonable defense of Mordechai's actions. Even within the realm of personal security, the dictates of common sense (and certainly the mandate of *halacha*) would recommend that he overlook his personal pride and former status as owner of Haman and not risk his life (or even his status in the court) by disobeying the king's command. All the more so, when his behavior endangered others (i.e. every Jew!) – any personal consideration pales next to the catastrophic implications of his angering Haman; besides which, as a member of the court, he was duty-bound to follow the king's command in spite of his personal misgivings.

The "nationalist" (or, more accurately "ethnicist") explanation pits Mordechai, representing the Jews (and, more specifically, Benjamin) against Haman the Agagite, descendant of Amalek. The *midrashim* which see the confrontation between the Jew and the Agagite in the streets of Shushan as the completion of a circle begun when Saul spared Agag,⁷ or as the continuation of that age-old battle begun in Refidim,⁸ highlight the meta-historic nature of the battle. Although both Rabbi

5 Grossfeld *The First Targum to Esther* New York, 1983, p 15 (translation pp. 50-51)

6 LXX has 6 additions to the text; in the opening one, verse A:17 (or 1r) makes note of Haman's anger at Mordechai for discovering the plot and reporting it, leading to the impalement of the two eunuchs.

7 Cf. *Megilla* 13a, *Esther Rabba* 7:13

8 See, inter alia, Ritba's comments at *Megilla* 2a s.v. *uVa'u Rabanan z'l*

Medan⁹ and Rabbi Grossman¹⁰ favor this approach, these explanations do little to justify Mordechai's refusal to bow and subsequent endangering of the entire Jewish people. There is no prohibition against showing deference to an enemy (one who currently has the upper hand) and, much as it may sicken us to imagine a scion of the Benjaminites showing honor to a child of the reviled progeny of Esav, prudence ought to have won out.¹¹ Again, all the more so in light of the potentially horrific consequences that evolved from Mordechai's tactic.

The most commonly held position (although rejected by some in both traditional as well as secular schools of interpretation) is to see Mordechai's actions as anchored in religious priorities. To wit, his bowing would constitute some form of confirmation of – or, worse yet, allegiance to – *avoda zara*, and that is forbidden even upon pain of death, per *Sanhedrin* 74a.

The various *midrashim* that portray Haman as wearing an idol,¹² having an idolatrous image woven into his garments¹³ or declaring himself to be a god¹⁴ are all part of the same general interpretive tradition, seeing Mordechai's refusal as grounded in the laws of martyrdom (*Kiddush Hahem*) and thus, if we can demonstrate that bowing to Haman was in some fashion an idolatrous act, we could justify and laud Mordechai's behavior.

The Requirements and Parameters of Martyrdom

The core passage, *Sanhedrin* 74a, records a dispute as to whether one is obligated to give up his life rather than worship idols. R. Yishmael, relying on the verse “And you shall live by them (the statutes – *Vayikra* 18:5), rules that a person should worship idols rather than lose his life. His caveat is that this does not apply to public acts of worship, where the consideration of “you shall not defile My Name and I shall be sanctified in the midst of *B'nei Yisrael*” (ibid. 22:32) trumps the former value and obligates a Jew to martyr himself. The dissenting position is explicated by R. Eliezer. His interpretation of “(You shall love Hashem, your God, with all of your heart and) with all of your life (*b'kol nafshecha*) and all of your possessions (*b'kol m'odecha*)”

⁹ *Ibidem* pp. 167-170

¹⁰ *Esther: Scroll of Secrets* Alon Shevut 2013, p. 93

¹¹ This besides the difficulties in treating the historic Haman as a true descendant of Agag; cf. particularly I Chr. 4:43 which attests to the utter destruction of the last Amalekite during Hezekiah's reign

¹² *Esther Rabba* 6:2, *Targum Rishon* at 3:2

¹³ *Esther Rabba* 7:5, cited by ibn Ezra at 3:2

¹⁴ *Megilla* 10b, cited by Rashi 3:2

(*Devarim* 4:7) is that a person must be willing to give up that which is dearest to him – whether his life or his possessions – as a demonstration of his love for God. In other words, he must be willing to show that he would not betray his love for God (i.e. engage in foreign worship) at the cost of his life – even privately. The decree in Beis Nitza and the flow of the *sugya*, as well as the rulings rendered by the *Rishonim*, all point to R. Eliezer’s position as being the accepted one. That being the case, it emerges that martyrdom is not solely an act of absolute refusal to worship idols, but also (and perhaps chiefly) a demonstration of a values priority. To wit, “my love for God is greater than my love for my life and I will sacrifice the latter to ensure the purity of the former.”

Based on this rather straightforward analysis, the parameters of martyrdom become clear – a person must choose to prioritize his love for God over his own life. This says nothing about what he should value if others’ lives are at stake. If, for instance, A is told that unless he engages in foreign worship, B will be killed, it is not at all clear that A has the right to avoid engaging in foreign worship; what gives A the right to decide that his love for God is a greater value than B’s life? That is a choice that only B has the right to make!^{15 16}

As such, it is hard to fathom how Mordechai’s behavior can be justified on grounds of martyrdom. Even if we grant that Haman would have idolatry in mind when he ordered the prostration (something we will explore below), once Mordechai became aware of the decree that affected all Jews, he ought to have begged Haman’s forgiveness and bowed to him seven times! Keep in mind that in 5:9, Mordechai maintains his obstinate behavior, well after Haman’s decree has become a matter of public record and Mordechai has already donned sackcloth and ashes.

Without all of this, there is another flaw in the martyrdom argument.

Mordechai, as a member of the court, had an obligation (per the decree) to bow and prostrate himself before Haman. If he were no longer a member of the court, that obligation would either be lifted or become irrelevant. It would be lifted if we read the decree in 3:2 as applying solely to members of the court while in the royal offices.

15 The principle that we violate the law to save another’s life is a given; A would certainly violate Shabbos to do whatever possible to save B.

16 Some might counter that we always advise passivity/inaction in such cases, based on R. Hayyim Soloveitchik’s analysis in *Hiddushei Rabbeinu Hayyim haLevi al haRambam* at *Yesodei haTorah* 5:1; this, however, only works within the reasoning argued for murder (and, by extension, sexual immorality), but not for idolatry. The obligation to give one’s life rather than murder an innocent stems from the argument that “who is to say whose life is worth more?” in which case passivity allows the actor to remove himself from moral agency; this is not the case in our scenario where the calculus is one’s devotion to the Almighty against his own love of life.

This is the most straightforward read of the text. If, on the other hand, we assume that the decree applied to all (via a *fortiori* reasoning), then Mordechai could just avoid Haman's presence, rendering the issue moot.

Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra (at 3:4) sensed this difficulty and suggested that if he were to quit his job and leave the court, his life might be in danger. If so – and we can hardly imagine a more drastic consequence – wouldn't this have been the recommended course of action rather than risk the lives of all Jews in the Empire?

There is yet another difficulty with the martyrdom argument. Even if we grant that one is allowed and even obligated to martyr others (a highly suspect assumption), and that leaving the court would not have solved the problem, the entire premise that Haman's decree was associated with idolatry is one we need to reexamine.

As Dr. Joshua Berman points out,¹⁷ the *Midrashic* world of interpretation of *Megillas Esther* is rife with anachronisms, chiefly anchored in the world of Rome and Byzantium (but, in the later eras, reflecting European anti-Semitism and the like). The common canards of the day are put in Haman's mouth; indeed, Haman is usually described in terms which echo the current Jew haters.

As is well attested in numerous *Talmudic* and *Midrashic* sources, a common ploy of Roman governors was to induce Jews (especially the leadership) to show obeisance to the idol situated near the ruler as a means of insuring the willing subjugation of the populace, following their leader's example.¹⁸ The idea that Haman would use his decree as a means of getting Jews to worship idols is a meaningful description (with variations) of Roman policies, but has little to do with the court in Shushan. The policy of the Persian Empire was to allow and encourage religious pluralism and freedom among its constituents. It would have been a severe reversal of policy for a Persian vizier to attempt to coerce others into worshipping his gods via this decree.

If we unravel this approach a bit more, we can see how very difficult it is as a *p'shat* read of Mordechai's behavior and of Haman's intent. It is clear from the *Megilla* that Haman is power-hungry (more about this later) and that even one relatively insignificant member of the court refusing to show him the "proper" deference enrages him to a near insane pitch (see 5:10-13). If Haman was so concerned with personal power, how would it benefit him to have an idol around his neck or on his clothes? Even to declare himself a god means that the people are bowing to his deity, not to his self – and this does little to improve his ego-centric need for approval and obeisance.

17 *Aggadah and Anti-Semitism: The midrashim to Esther 3:8*, Judaism, 38, 2 (Spring 1989), pp. 185-196

18 Cf. *inter alia*, *Gittin 57b*, *She'iltos d'Rav Ahai Ga'on*, #42 and *Yerushalmi Sheviis 4:2*

We are, essentially, back at square one. Having exhausted the various explanations for Mordechai's dangerous and maverick inaction, we will try another approach to see if we can understand his motives and the story taking place between the lines of the text.

The Jew in the Foreign Court

One of the common literary tools evident throughout Tanach is allusion; there are innumerable associations between otherwise unrelated narratives via common words and phrases. This phenomenon is known, in the world of *Midrash Halacha*, as *Gezeira Shava*; yet the *Midrashic* literature and, in its heels, the classic and modern commentators, have employed it to create instructive and illuminating connections between seemingly disconnected passages.

As Rabbi Grossman points out,¹⁹ this is a tool liberally used in *Megillas Esther*. The *Midrashic* tradition made much of the many allusions to earlier books in Tanach found in the *Megilla*, identifying the vessels of the *Beis HaMikdash* and the priestly vestments as playing a role in Achashveirosh's banquet via just such allusions.²⁰ The *Midrash* contrasts the assumed reaction of mothers everywhere to the news that Achashveirosh sought a new queen to the response when mothers throughout Israel heard that David was looking for a consort (1 *Melachim* 1).²¹ And the list goes on and on.

One key story which is frequently referenced in *Esther* via these allusions is the story of Joseph in Pharaoh's court. The ring, the title *Mishne laMelech*, the changed name – all of these are clear “templates” of the “Jew in the foreign court,” (*Nechemia* and *Daniel* also follow this model, at least in part) which helps define the style and nuance of the description of Esther in Achashveirosh's court.

The *Midrash* identifies this allusion when it compares the challenge facing Mordechai with that facing Joseph. In the case of Joseph, Potiphar's wife spoke to him “day after day, and he did not heed her...” (*Bereishis* 39:10), just as Mordechai's co-workers spoke to him “day after day, and he did not heed them... (3:4).

This *Midrashic Gezeira Shava* holds the key to the solution to our problem. Indeed, I contend that the author of *Megillas Esther* (Mordechai/Esther/the Men of the Great Assembly) deliberately used this otherwise unmatched wording (“*vay'hi k'omram eilav/k'dab'rah el Yosef yom vayom, velo shama'...*” – shows up nowhere else in the canon) to inform us as to Mordechai's motivation for refusing to bow.

19 Ibid p. 89

20 *Esther Rabba* 2:1

21 *Megilla* 12b

What was Yosef's stated reason for refusing Potiphar's wife's advances?

"My master knows nothing of what I do in his house and he has entrusted all that he has into my hands. He is no greater than I in this house and has withheld nothing from me save you, for you are his wife. How could I do this great evil and sin to God?" (Bereishis 39: 8-9)

The simplest reading of Yosef's statement is that his giving in to her seduction would be an act of betrayal against their common master – Potiphar. Breaching the great trust given to him by Potiphar would be a terrible sin, and he refused to cave in.²²

One important note about the text of *Megillas Esther* and its description of the palace and its inhabitants is in order. Although the historic Xerxes I (the most common identification of the biblical Achashveirosh) was quite the successful warrior and a brilliant tactician, the picture that the *Megilla* deliberately draws is one of a secluded monarch, unaware of the goings-on in his own palace, much less in the streets of Shushan. He relies on his courtiers for the most basic information. Indeed, the "fortress" (*Bira*) of Shushan is painted as an iron curtain, with no one on either side having any awareness of what happens on the other side. The only "inside-outside" man in the story is Haman, and he uses this to his advantage.

Building on the comparison between Mordechai and Yosef and their refusal to cave in to the demands of a superior, we can infer from Yosef what lay behind Mordechai's stance.

Just as Yosef explicated, Mordechai stated to his co-workers that he would not bow to Haman because that constituted a breach of allegiance to their common superior - the king, Achashveirosh. His claim was that Achashveirosh never issued such an edict and that Haman (knowing that Achashveirosh was ignorant of the goings-on outside of the palace) had made up the decree, claiming it was *ka'asher tziva lo hamelech* – as the king had commanded concerning him.

This also serves to explain several other oddities in the narrative. The first, most obvious one, is why Achashveirosh would be so foolish as to issue an edict of this sort in the first place. Why would a king order his courtiers to bow to an underling? In addition, this explains the behavior of Mordechai's co-workers, who are the ones to point out to Haman that Mordechai was not bowing (3:5). Why would they be so

²² The phrase "*hatati l'Elokim*" fits the wording that we find in several other interactions with Egyptians and seems to represent an allegiance to a general morality as opposed to a specific religious code. Cf. e.g. *Shemos* 1:17 following Abravanel's approach. It is also the name Yosef uses in his interactions with Egyptians, as he does with the butler and baker and with Pharaoh.

interested in telling Haman? It is tempting to think that they were “anti-Semites” (to use an anachronism) and once Mordechai identified himself as a Judean, they wanted to get him in trouble with Haman. This is hard to accept within the text, as there is no evidence of anti-Jewish feeling in the court itself. Indeed, Haman has to hide the name of his targets when convincing Achashveirosh to approve of the decree.

Instead, I propose that the “order” to bow to Haman was something the courtiers resented²³ but were too afraid to contest. When they found one of their own who “called Haman’s bluff,” they brought it to Haman’s attention in the hopes (later realized) that this confrontation would lead to the downfall of their new overlord.

In sum, Mordechai made the claim that Haman was a traitor to the king, hoping to ultimately oust him and take over the throne. Haman’s true intentions were slyly pried out of him by the king in the middle of the night when the king deviously asked him “what should be done for the man that the king favors”, (instead of saying “How should I honor Mordechai the Jew?”), knowing that Haman would assume that he was the intended honoree and he would reveal what he really wanted. When he described what amounts to a coronation, his ambition was clear and the rest of the story is simply a brilliant and elegant unraveling of his disguise until the essential treachery of the man is exposed – and he is impaled as a traitor.

This is why Mordechai insisted on remaining in the court and steadfastly refused to bow, pushing Haman to the impetuous steps that led to his undoing. As to why Mordechai was willing to endanger himself and his people for this stand – the answer is quite clear. If Haman were to achieve his aims, the new Emperor would be someone whose hatred for Mordechai and his people was palpable (if only because they had been loyalists to Achashveirosh) and their fate would be threatened.

With this explanation, the entire description of the events of the 13th (and 14th – in Shushan) of Adar take on a clearer hue. It wasn’t a battle between Jews and Jew-haters; rather, it was a fight between the loyalists to the Crown against those who opposed it; the Jews led the battle as they had been identified as true friends of the king. Their battle had the full backing of the government and their victory was, therefore, enshrined in the annals of the kings of Persia and Medea.

On the much deeper level on which everything in Jewish history operates, the great miracle of the victory was made into a perennial celebration which would outlive the Persian Empire - *veLo Ya’avor* – never to be repealed.

23 It stands to reason that Achashveirosh’s closest advisors resented the new prime minister, as his seat was placed “above all of the ministers,” considering that he wasn’t listed among the fourteen closest advisors of the king at the banquet.

שפתי ישנים



Rabbi Dovid Landesman *zt"l*

RABBI DOVID LANDESMAN ZT"l

Born in 1949, Rabbi Dovid Landesman was raised in McKeesport, PA, a town located near Pittsburgh. Rabbi Landesman spent his high-school years at the Talmudical Yeshiva of Philadelphia and Yeshiva Torah Vodaas in Brooklyn. He received his *smicha* from Torah Vodaas, where he was a close disciple of Rav Gedalia Schorr, and also studied history and educational psychology at Queens College and Long Island University. In 1971, Rabbi Landesman married Nechamah Chinn, daughter of Rav Yitzchok Chinn, the Rav of McKeesport and a noted alumnus of Torah Vodaas. One year later, the young couple made *aliyah*, and Rabbi Landesman studied in Beis HaTalmud in Yerushalayim under Rav Dov Schwartzman and Rav Moshe Shapiro. The Landesman family then moved to Rechasim, a town near Haifa, where Rabbi Landesman was involved in numerous northern-Israel-based educational institutions. The Landesmans were blessed with eight children, all of whom live in Israel today.

During his years living in Rechasim, Rabbi Landesman was also involved in many literary and publishing pursuits. Always an excellent writer and translator, he served as the first editor of the Artscroll Mishna series and translated Artscroll's popular English *Megilos* series into Hebrew, expanding the material to be accessible to the Israeli audience. Rabbi Landesman co-authored a biography of Rabbi Joseph Breuer, translated the *mussar* work *Cheshbon Hanefesh*, updated and reworked the famous translation of The Book of Our Heritage, and obtained access to and translated the long out-of-print edition of the Netziv's commentary on *Shir HaShirim*, among his many works. In addition, he developed innovative educational software for the Weizmann Institute for use in elementary schools. His introduction of the early Apple computers into *Ohr Chadash*, an educational institution in the Galil, earned the school an award for Excellence in Innovative Instruction.

In 1998, Rabbi Landesman was hired to be the assistant principal of the YULA Boys School. He quickly advanced to the position of principal, after distinguishing himself as much more than an ordinary *mechanech*. He would use his many talents at YULA until 2007, mentoring and teaching countless students in both the Boys and Girls Schools during his tenure. Rabbi Landesman was a firm believer in both formal and informal education, and many of his students fondly remember the moments of guidance given outside of the classroom setting. During his early tenure at YULA, one group of students was found to be "unteachable;" that was, of course, until Rabbi Landesman adopted this group and proceeded to teach them *gemara* on the picnic benches for the remainder of the year. A huge proponent of school spirit, Rabbi Landesman enjoyed interacting with *talmidim* at YULA basketball games, *shabbatons* and on class trips. In addition, the Landesman home was always open to all members of the YULA family (irrespective of any particular student's level

of Torah observance), and both current students and alumni would spend many a Friday night and *shalosh seudos* there.

The Landesman family ultimately returned to Israel in 2009, and Rabbi Landesman continued to teach in a number of settings, including Yeshivas Tiferet Jerusalem (TJ). During these years, Rabbi Landesman also began to make a name for himself in the blogosphere, and wrote a number of articles for the well-known Cross-currents blog. Rabbi Landesman was always someone who transcended labels. Although he had attended *Charedi yeshivos*, and his primary mentors were from the *Charedi* world, Rabbi Landesman had a tremendous appreciation for the State of Israel – he himself had served as a chaplain in the IDF in his earlier years. He published a number of his articles in two books, *There are No Basketball Courts in Heaven* and *No Hechsher Required*, both of which demonstrate his refreshing take on contemporary issues facing the Jewish world.

In the summer of 2015, Rabbi Landesman suddenly passed away, leaving his family and countless students sorely missing and longing for his beneficent and wise presence. Locally, YULA hosted a memorable *shloshim* event, and Rav Nachum Sauer and Rav Shalom Tendler both delivered heartfelt *hespedim* in memory of their beloved former colleague.

Perhaps there is no better way to sum up Rabbi Landesman's career than by using his own words. In his introduction to *There are No Basketball Courts in Heaven*, Rabbi Landesman notes that while he himself was not the most motivated or inspired student, he was blessed to have a 12th-grade *Rebbe* who genuinely inspired him to enter the world of serious Torah study. Reflecting on his own path as an educator, Rabbi Landesman noted that "I have also had a few successes on many levels with students from across the spectrum. I cherish letters that I have received from students expressing *hakarat hatov*...I think back to the bear hugs at graduation, the notes penned into yearbooks, the requests to learn privately on Shabbos, in my office or during the summer, the visits to my home to introduce a *kalla* or *chasan*. Most of all, I think of the inner warmth that comes over me whenever a *talmid* approached with a smile accompanying an outstretched hand, and calls me 'rebbe.'"

Yehei Zichro Baruch.

Author: Rabbi Aaron Katz, YULA Class of 2002, close *talmid* and *chavrusa* of Rabbi Landesman

A.Y. Karelitz, M.D.

RABBI DOVID LANDESMAN



I have an acquaintance in Los Angeles, a urologist who is also a well respected *talmid chacham*. To establish his credentials, let me say that he has completed three cycles as the *maggid shiur*¹ in a local *daf yomi*.² He recently received a call from a young man in Bnei Brak who was writing a *sefer* on *Hilchos K'rus Shafcha*³ and wanted to come to Los Angeles to consult with him on the medical aspects of the condition. The doctor agreed and when the author arrived, they spent a week reviewing the material. One of the sources which they perused was the *Chazon Ish*⁴ on *Yoreh Deah*.

My medical friend told me that he was absolutely astounded by the *Chazon Ish's* mastery of anatomy as evidenced in the *sefer* and speculated as to the source of the *Chazon Ish's* knowledge. Clearly the Rav did not sleep with a copy of *Gray's Anatomy* under the pillow. I raised the question to another friend, one of the local *Rabbonim*, who showed me a *teshuva*⁵ from Rav Wozner *shlit"a* maintaining that the *Chazon Ish* had *ruach hakodesh*.⁶ One of my more skeptical friends conjectures that given that the *Chazon Ish* as a young man lived in close proximity to the medical library of the university in Vilna, it is not unlikely that he may have spent some time in the reading rooms learning anatomy. Whatever the case, and it doesn't really matter which version is the truth, most people will agree that the *Chazon Ish* was one of the outstanding Jewish minds of the past century.

As a means of reinforcing this, let me relate another story. I once took a class

1 Lecturer

2 Study group of one folio of the Talmud per day.

3 The *halachos* in *Yoreh Deah* pertaining to one who has injuries to his genitals.

4 Pen name of Rabbi Avrohom Yeshayahu Karelitz zt"l, a renowned *halachic* and Talmudic scholar who died in 1953 in Bnei Brak.

5 Responsum

6 Divine inspiration

This article is reprinted from *There are No Basketball Courts in Heaven*.

of Russian students for a day trip to Yerushalayim. I arranged a meeting with Professor William (Ze'ev) Lev z"l, an Israel Prize recipient in Science, chairman of the Department of Physics at Hebrew University, and founder and director of the Institute of Science and *Halacha* as well as the Jerusalem College of Technology, better known as *Machon Lev*. I introduced him to my students by pointing out that Professor Lev had studied with Einstein at Princeton as well as with the *Chazon Ish*. Professor Lev spoke to the boys about Torah and science and when he finished, asked them if they had any questions. One boy raised his hand and asked: "In your opinion, who was a greater mind, Einstein or the *Chazon Ish*?"

Professor Lev reflected for a moment and then responded, "I would say that in terms of asking questions they could have been equal. But in terms of providing answers, the *Chazon Ish* was head and shoulders above Einstein. The *Chazon Ish*, by virtue of his Torah knowledge, had a more profound ability to discern truth."

Let me explain what this has to do with the chapter heading. In the course of teaching Jewish philosophy to a class of seniors, I brought an example once from the *Iggros Chazon Ish* and was somewhat astounded to discover that none of my students had ever heard of the author. I digressed and told them the story of Professor Lev and what he had said. I then described the impact that the *Chazon Ish* had on *halacha* in our generation, especially in *mitzvos hatluyos ba'aretz*.⁷ This led into a general discussion about great Rabbis.

One hand in the back of the room shot up. "Rebbi? Based on what you're saying about the *Chazon Ish* and the way you describe him, isn't it possible that if he had devoted his time to medical research rather than full time Torah study, he might have discovered a cure for cancer?"

"That's a possibility, although there is no guarantee that it would have happened," I answered.

"Well, let's assume for a moment that he did discover the cure for cancer. Would that not have had a greater impact on the world than his contributions to learning?"

"Quantitatively I think you might say that given that more people might have benefited. Qualitatively, I'm not sure, because none of us knows precisely how important Torah learning is to the preservation of natural order. When the Talmud tells us '*ein haolam miskayem ella al hevel pihem shel tinokot shel beit rabban*,' the world only exists because of the study of the children – they were telling us that Torah study is the energy that fuels nature. Remove Torah study, and natural order collapses. Had

⁷ The Torah laws concerning agriculture; e.g., separating tithes.

the *Chazon Ish* gone into medical research – had he become A. Y. Karelitz M.D. – who knows how much quality Torah learning would be missing in this world.”

“You always tell us, *Rebbi*, that a primary mission that man has in this world is to be *m'kadesh shem shamayim* –to sanctify God’s name.”

“The exact formulation is *she'y'heh shem shamayim mitahev al yadecha* which means pretty much the same thing.”

“Wouldn’ t you say that it would be a greater *kiddush Hashem* if the *Chazon Ish* had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine than if he wrote a number of *sefarim*? How many people, Jewish and non-Jewish, have heard of the *Chazon Ish*, understand what his contribution was or are impacted by his Talmudic knowledge? But if he had discovered the cure for cancer ...?”

I put my interlocutor off by telling him that I needed to think about his question and research my response. I did not want to say something that might not be true. What follows is the results of my research and the answer that I eventually presented.

The classic example of *kiddush Hashem* is literal *mesiras nefesh*; i.e., willingly sacrificing one’s life instead of violating one of the three cardinal sins [*gilui arayos* (forbidden relationships,) *shefichas damim* (murder,) and *avoah zarah* (idol worship)] under normal circumstances, and any *mitzva b'sha'as hashmad* – at times of religious persecution. This is the *halachic* ruling of the Rambam in both his *Sefer haMitzvos* and in the *Yad*, as well as that of the *Sefer haChinuch*. There is an auxiliary *mitzva*, mentioned in the Talmud, of *shem shamayim misahev al yadecha* –the name of Heaven is loved through you–which is derived from a completely different source; the *pasuk* of *v'ahavta*. This latter *mitzva*–and it doesn’t matter whether or not it is counted as one of the 613 – is more applicable to our times. Let’s examine how one goes about fulfilling this *mitzva*, and whether there is any requirement to seek a venue to perform it, or rather if the obligation is only when one has the opportunity.

One is not bound to put oneself in danger so as to fulfill the *mitzva* of *kiddush Hashem* in its classic form. Obviously, if there is a country where Jews are being persecuted, no one would contend that I am obligated to move there so as to be killed *al kiddush Hashem*. Similarly, if I was being taken out to be killed and had an opportunity to escape, I would be wrong in allowing myself to be killed so that I could fulfill the *mitzva*. It would thus seem that there is a strong element of passivity in this *mitzva*; one is not actively required to fulfill it. If this is true of the essence of the *mitzva*–*mesiras nefesh*– it is also probably true of the auxiliary part of the *mitzva* – *shem shamayim misahev*; i.e., I am obligated to act in a manner in which this will happen but I am not necessarily obligated to seek opportunities. According to this

formulation, if I am at a baseball game and I act in a particularly decorous fashion and those sitting next to me comment favorably about my behavior, then I have made a *kiddush Hashem*. However, this clearly does not obligate me to attend every single baseball game.

Next, let's see whether there is a correlation between the number of people impacted by an act that we might label as *kiddush Hashem* and the *mitzva*. That is, does the *kiddush Hashem* become greater if more people witness it or are aware of it? We raised the possibility that since more people would have known about the *Chazon Ish* had he had won the Noble Prize for Medicine than know about him now, that might make the *kiddush Hashem* greater. Is this necessarily true? I could contend that if it is a question of pure numbers, then Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin, the two Jews responsible for the polio vaccine, should be credited with an enormous *kiddush Hashem* based on the number of people impacted by their work. Similarly, Sandy Koufax could be credited with a greater *kiddush Hashem* than the *Chazon Ish* given the number of people who heard about his refusal to pitch in a 1965 World Series game on Yom Kippur! Parenthetically, one could even contend that Don Drysdale, who pitched in Koufax's place, might have made a *kiddush Hashem* equal to that of his Jewish teammate. If my memory serves me correctly, Drysdale was knocked out of the game in an early inning and when Walter Alston, the Dodger manager, came to the mound, he flipped him the baseball and said: "Walt, bet you wish that I was also Jewish!"

Was *shem shamayim* really *miskadesh* because Koufax refused to pitch? Did more people fast that Yom Kippur because he removed himself from the game? Did gentiles say, "I want to be like the Jews" as a result of what Koufax had done? Had these been the results, perhaps one could contend that refusing to pitch on Yom Kippur would be a true *kiddush Hashem*. In the absence of those results, I am not sure. Feeling good about being Jewish or even being proud that someone is not embarrassed to do something identifiably Jewish is not necessarily a *kiddush Hashem*. Let me offer you another example to reinforce the point.

A few years ago, Professor Robert Aumann of the Hebrew University was awarded the Noble Prize in Economics. Auman is clearly identifiable as an observant Jew and when he went to Oslo for the award ceremony, it was widely reported in the press that he purchased a new set of robes because he discovered that the robes provided by the Royal Norwegian Noble Committee had *sha'atnez*⁸ in them. Many observant

⁸ A forbidden mixture of wool and linen.

Jews *kvelled* because of his strictness in observing the *mitzva*. But does *kveling* or feeling good equal *kiddush Hashem*? Or is it possible that the true *kiddush Hashem* in Professor Auman's case would only apply if someone followed his example and was more careful in observing the laws of *sha'atnez*?

Let's return to our conjectures about the *Chazon Ish*, –A. Y. Karelitz M. D.

Assuming that he had made a major medical discovery, would that constitute a real *kiddush Hashem*? It would seem that it would be contingent upon people ascribing his research abilities to the fact that he was observant or that his incredible intelligence was a result of Torah study. Any other reaction, while making Jews feel good, simply doesn't make the grade for *kiddush Hashem*. Let's reduce it to the absurd. If Rav Soloveitchik zt"l had beaten Wilt Chamberlain in a one-on-one match, would you really consider that a *kiddush Hashem*?

Rav Hutner zt"l makes an interesting observation. If one saw Sir Isaac Newton, Galileo or Copernicus on the street, one would be obligated to make the bracha of *shenasan michachmaso l'basar vedam*, He gave of His wisdom to flesh and blood. However, if one saw Einstein, one would not recite a *bracha*. Why? Was Einstein any less brilliant than the other three? The answer is that one only recites a *bracha* on a Jew when he is outstandingly learned in Torah. When he has devoted his efforts to another field, he has not reached the pinnacle that would obligate us to see him as being the recipient of God's wisdom, for he –unlike the non-Jew –could have made himself the receptacle for even greater wisdom, Torah. Rav Hutner zt"l illustrated this concept as follows: when you walk into your garden and smell the aroma of the flowers, you recite a *bracha*. But if you walk into the kitchen and smell the chicken soup, or if you drive past a bakery and the aromas of the freshly baked bread spread through your car, you recite no *bracha*. Why? Is the aroma any less pleasing? No! The reason is that we don't make chicken soup or bake bread for the smell!

Although some of your *Rabbeim* might disagree, I can accept the argument that people have the right to choose the manner through which they earn their livelihood. Moreover, to a certain extent, I can also accept that each of us can determine the direction in which we see ourselves developing our potentials. The *Chazon Ish* writes that Torah is measured qualitatively and not quantitatively; i.e., it is not necessarily the amount of time that one devotes to Torah as much as it is the quality or intensity of one's Torah study. Zevulun was no less worthy of the praise of his father than was his brother Yissachar even though the latter learned far more Torah. That said, however, it is clear that just as it would have been wrong for Zevulun to have sat in the *beis medrash* all day instead of sailing the seas and bringing *parnasa* to both him

and his brother's tribe, it would have been equally wrong for Yissachar to have left the study hall to engage in commerce on his own.

I'll leave it for another occasion to try to determine how we create objective criteria for measuring potential. In the meantime, let's remove the suffix from the *Chazon Ish's* name and replace it with the prefix Rav.

The Cowboy and the Beemer

RABBI DOVID LANDESMAN



A cowboy was tending his herd in a remote mountain pasture when suddenly a brand new BMW advanced out of a dust cloud. The driver, a young man wearing an Armani suit, Gucci shoes, Ray Ban sunglasses and Hermes tie, leaned out the window and asked the cowboy, "If I tell you precisely how many cows you have in your herd, will you give me a calf?"

The cowboy looked at the man, glanced over at his peacefully grazing livestock and calmly answered, "Young fella, you want to make a fool of yourself, go right ahead."

The yuppie whipped out his Dell notebook computer, connected it to his iPhone, and surfed to a NASA page on the Internet; there he called up a GPS satellite navigation system to get an exact fix on his location which he then fed to another NASA satellite that scanned the area in an ultrahigh resolution photo. He then transferred the digital image in Adobe Photoshop and exported it to a processing facility in Hamburg, Germany.

Within seconds, he received an e-mail on his Palm Pilot that the image had been processed and the data stored. He accessed a MS – SQL database through an ODBC connected Excel Spreadsheet with e-mail on his Blackberry and, after a second or two, received a response. He then printed out a report on his state of the art, miniaturized HP LaserJet printer, turned to the cowboy and said, "You have exactly 1,586 animals."

"Impressive," the cowboy replied. "I guess you outsmarted me. Take any one you want." He watched the young man select one of the animals and place it into the back seat. Just as the yuppie was about to pull away, the cowboy said, "Hey, if I can tell you exactly what your business is, will you give me back my animal?"

The young man thought about it for a second and then said, "Sure, why not?"

"You, my friend, are a member of Congress."

"Wow! Incredible!" said the astonished yuppie, "How did you know that?"

"Easy enough," the cowboy replied. "You showed up here even though no one invited you; you want to get paid for an answer I already know, to a question that I

This article, reprinted from *There are No Basketball Courts in Heaven*, was originally given as a commencement speech at a graduation of YULA high school.

never asked. You tried to show me how much smarter you are than I am, and it turns out that you don't know a thing about cows ... this is a herd of sheep. Now, open your back door and give me back my dog.”

In *Sefer Bamidbar*, the Torah recounts the attempt that Korach made to challenge the leadership of *Moshe Rabbeinu*. Together with a group of disgruntled fellow travellers, Korach attacked Moshe, claiming that he acted in his own self-interest rather than at the behest of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

The *Midrash* tells us that Korach invited his 250 followers to a pre-revolt barbeque, celebrating his impending showdown with Moshe. As the meat was being served, Aharon and his sons approached and asked for the *chaze v'shok*, the portions of meat that the Torah allots to the *kohanim*. Korach refused, claiming that this was but another example of a *halacha* created by Moshe to benefit his own family and had not been heard *m'pi ha-Gevurah*.¹

Now, Korach was no fool. He had seen the miracles that Moshe brought forth in Egypt. He had witnessed the splitting of the sea and was present at the revelation at Sinai. You might contend that Korach was overcome with personal animosity towards Moshe, but even the most insanely ambitious person has to realize when he's outclassed. Korach and his cohorts were well aware of Moshe's leadership qualities. They knew that it was his prayers that stopped the deaths of those who had worshipped the golden calf, that it was Moshe's constant intervention with God that was protecting the nation whenever they were out of line. Much as one might be jealous, there is a limit to the audacity one can have. Talented as you might consider yourself at basketball, you don't go one on one against Kobe Bryant and expect to win! You've got to be crazy to challenge someone with Moshe's track record. And if we conclude that Korach and his band were deluded and abnormal, why would the Torah tell us their story at such great length?

The *Meshech Chachma* explains the argument that Korach had with Moshe regarding the portions of meat to be given to the *kohanim*. Moshe taught that when the Jews were in the desert, those who were uncircumcised were permitted to eat any type of meat, while those who were circumcised could only eat meat that had been offered as a *korban*. The law of giving the *kohen* the *chaze v'shok*² only applied to this second type. Korach claimed that this *p'sak*³ was irrational, proof positive that this

1 Literally, from on high; i.e., from God.

2 Breast and shank –the portions of meat given to the *kohen*.

3 *Halachic* decision.

law must have been the product of Moshe's own thought processes. God, Korach reasoned, could never have commanded something so illogical.

In Korach's view, it made more sense that those who had fulfilled the *mitzva* of *mila* should be released from the obligation to support the *kohanim*. The way he saw it, the gift of the *chaze v'shok* should only be incumbent upon someone who was deficient — i.e. one who was not circumcised. Korach offered similar arguments regarding *mezuzah* and *tzitzis*. Why should a home filled with *sefarim* need a *mezuzah*? Why should an article of clothing made of *t'cheles*⁴ require *tzitzis*? In this case, why should someone who was circumcised be obligated to present a gift to the *kohen*? In all these cases, Korach's conclusions contradicted those of Moshe and he therefore decided that Moshe must have made these laws up on his own.

Note that Korach's arguments with Moshe revolve around one fundamental issue — Moshe's interpretation of *halacha*. Korach never challenges Moshe's judicial or military decisions; one does not argue with a man who clearly receives his instructions from God and has proven it time after time. But when it comes to religion ... well, then everyone is an expert, everyone has the right to an opinion and everyone is qualified to interpret God's will. Who cares if the person with whom you are arguing is far better versed; don't we have a Constitutional right to determine our own beliefs? Perhaps this is the reason why the *parsha* of *Korach* is delineated at great length in the Torah; the behavior and claims of Korach repeat itself in every generation.

How many times do we delude ourselves that a certain prohibition was either made up by the Rabbis or is, at best, a voluntary *chumra*? We hardly know the names of the four books of *Shulchan Aruch*, yet that rarely prevents us from voicing an opinion about *halacha*. Our Rabbis teach us unequivocal *halachic* rulings, yet we ignore them while professing to be observant. Instead of admitting that we are weak or prisoners of habit, we justify and argue as if we were learned enough to have our opinions considered. I am reminded of the story about a meeting of rabbis who wanted to build an *eruv*⁵ in Flatbush. One of the assembled mentioned that Rav Moshe Feinstein held that it was halachically impossible to construct such an *eruv*. When this comment failed to make an impression on the assembled, one of the older Rabbis present told those discussing the issue, "I don't know whether or not there are *halachic* considerations that would prevent one from constructing an *eruv* in Flatbush. But before you go on, can any of you tell me how many times Rav and Shmuel's opinions are cited in *maseches Eruvin*?"

4 The blue dyed wool woven into the strings of the *tzitzis*.

5 A *halachic* fence around a community that renders all of the enclosed area a private domain in which one can carry on Shabbos.

There was dead silence in the room. The elderly Rav then continued: “You can’t, but believe me, Reb Moshe can!”

One of the primary reasons why we teach *Torah She’baal Peh* is to train students to think on their own, to ask intelligent and relevant questions. If you don’t ask, you’ll never learn and surely never comprehend. But as I have said on numerous occasions, a question that begins with the words “that’s absurd” or “that’s ridiculous” is a statement that reveals a personal agenda rather than an honest effort to understand. Torah is a field of learning unlike any other: it is broader than the sea, deeper than the oceans. Mastery demands a lifetime, and even then, one will have only scratched the surface.

When you leave high school you have completed twelve years of Torah study, but how much do you really know? As you go on to professional schools and broaden your perspectives, how much more Torah will you be able to absorb? Don’t be misled and discount the teachings of the Rabbis when they don’t jive with your analysis. Accept that you have a limited amount of information and are unqualified to make a decision. Question, do your utmost to understand, but in the end accept your limitations. Rav Rivkin, *zt”l*, tested students for *smicha* — rabbinical ordination — in Mesivta Torah Vodaas. As he handed out the certificates, he would tell us: “On this side I have signed that you passed the tests, on the other side I have written down Reb Moshe’s telephone number. Please, use the other side!”

I am enormously proud of what you have accomplished. Your learning, your *midos*, your enthusiasm and your love for your people are the exemplary traits that set us apart as an *am segula*. But as I watch you prepare to leave school, I ask that you be honest with yourselves. You are at the beginning of a long life, God willing, of experiences, of learning and of understanding. Don’t follow Korach’s example and allow your personal agenda to blind you to the truth. Recognize your shortcomings and compensate for them by remaining close to your *rabbanim* and teachers. The *Mishna* exhorts us: *asei licha Rav*— find a Rav — a learned person with whom you can consult, with whom you can study, with whom you can share the trials that life throws your way.

Many fall into the trap of thinking that academic or financial success translates into expertise in every subject. Others feel that proficiency in one field of learning means competency in unrelated fields. Always remember: the cowboy may not drive a BMW, he may not have an iPhone and he might not be able to access NASA’s satellites. But he knows a lot more about cows, sheep and dogs than the yuppie.

Purim



Rabbi Yaakov Siegel

Rabbi Aaron Katz

Rabbi Raphael Stohl

Dovid Levine

Rachel Margolies

Avigail Manheim

Daniel Margolies

Donny Wiesel

Je Suis Esther – The Story Shared by Esther and Every Person’s Neshama

RABBI YAAKOV SIEGEL



I would like to present a new approach to the life and story of Queen Esther. But first, a few words about drinking on Purim:

The *Shulchan Aruch* (695:3) quotes as *halacha* the obligation to get very drunk on Purim. The Rema, however, comments:

וי"א דא"צ להשתכר כל כך, אלא שישתה יותר מלימודו וישן, ומתוך שישן אינו יודע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי. ואחד המרבה ואחד הממעט, ובלבד שיכוין לבו לשמים.
 ... and some say that he does not need to get that drunk, rather he should drink more than is usual for him and then go to sleep, and since he is sleeping he does not know the difference between “cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai.” And both the one who does [i.e. drinks] more and the one who does less [satisfies his obligation] as long as his heart is committed to heaven.

This last comment of the Rema is highly unusual. True, it is a fundamental of Judaism that one should always try to be *mechavein libo lishamayim*, to be thinking of Hashem and strengthening his or her relationship with Him. Good intentions do not replace *p’sak halacha* or legal decisions, though. The question of whether or not one should get drunk on Purim (as described by the Rema himself in the *Darchei Moshe*) is a straightforward *machlokes Rishonim* – in this case between the *Tur*, who says to get drunk and Maha”ri Bruna, who says to go to sleep. Since when is a *machlokes Rishonim* resolved by everyone choosing whatever they would like as long as their heart is in the right place and their *kavana* is *lishem shamayim*? For example, there is a *machlokes Rishonim* (quoted in *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch O”H 291:5*) as to what one must eat for *seudas shlishis* on Shabbos – bread, cake, meat, or fruit. The Rema (and *Shulchan Aruch*) says that in almost all cases, one must eat bread. He does not

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say that each person should pick whatever they'd like, as long as their heart is *lishem shamayim*.¹ Why specifically for determining the amount of wine to drink on Purim is it that *kavana lishem shamayim* plays such an important role?

Ribeye for the Soul

To begin answering this question, let us analyze a famous yet cryptic *gemara* (*Beitza* 16a) in which *kavana lishem shamayim*, intention for the sake of heaven, plays an important albeit puzzling role:

אמרו עליו על שמאי הזקן: כל ימיו היה אוכל לכבוד שבת. מצא בהמה נאה אומר
זו לשבת, מצא אחרת נאה הימנה מניח את השניה ואוכל את הראשונה. אבל הלל
הזקן מדה אחרת היתה לו שכל מעשיו לשם שמים שנאמר (תהלים סח, כ) "ברוך
ה' יום יום"

They said about Shammai the elder: Every day, he would eat to honor Shabbos. If he found a nice-looking animal, he would say "this is to be eaten on Shabbos." If he then found a nicer one, he would set aside the second [for Shabbos] and then eat the first. Hillel the elder, however, had a different approach in that all of his actions were for the sake of heaven, as it says, "bless Hashem day by day."

This *gemara* is a complete non-sequitor. We admire Shammai because he used considerable creativity to bring the honor of Shabbos into his everyday routine. Even in his weekday meals he honored Shabbos, since he would purposely eat the less nice meat, leaving the higher quality meat for Shabbos. On the other hand, we also admire Hillel because he always acted for the sake of heaven. What do these have to do with each other? This question is especially difficult because the *gemara* is not simply listing nice things that they did, it is actually contrasting their behavior: Shammai would honor Shabbos all week, *aval* – but – Hillel had a *mida acheres*, a different approach, in that he would always act for the sake of heaven. What is the debate here?²

1 To be sure, the Rema did not make up this expression. It is in fact used multiple times in the *gemara*. It is never, however, used in the context of resolving a *machlokes* by allowing people to choose whichever opinion they want to follow. Rather, the *Mishna* and *gemara* use the phrase to mean that if two people achieve different levels of accomplishment, Hashem judges them by their intentions, and not just their accomplishments. For example, the *Mishna* in *Menachos* 110a notes that the Torah says that there is *reiaich nichoach*, a pleasing "aroma" to Hashem from either an animal sacrifice, a bird sacrifice, or a meal offering, even though the costs are very different. This is to teach us, says the *Mishna*, that "both the one who does more and the one who does less [creates the pleasing 'aroma'] as long as his heart is committed to heaven.

2 A classic approach to explain this *gemara* is that Shammai felt that an important idea to teach his students was

I believe that these few cryptic lines represent a profound, wide-reaching philosophical debate between Shammai and Hillel – perhaps their most important in the entire Talmud. I would like to suggest that Shammai and Hillel are arguing over whether one can find *kedusha*, holiness, in seemingly mundane material pursuits. More precisely, they are arguing whether one can create holiness, out of ordinary material pursuits. Let's take weeknights at the steakhouse as an example. Shammai, I would suggest, says that holiness cannot be found in eating a ribeye steak on a weeknight. Delicacies and culinary indulgence have no *kedusha* when they are enjoyed in *olam ha'ze*, our material world. Using his creativity, however, Shammai figured out a way to turn the week into Shabbos, and thus *olam ha'ze* into *me'ein olam haba* – a little piece of the spiritual world to come.

Hillel, however, had a *mida acheres*, a different approach. He believed that one needn't transform *olam ha'ze* into *olam haba* to find *kedusha*. One can create *kedusha* out of ordinary physical pleasures if – and this is an important if – he is *michavien lishem shamayim*, if he is thinking about how his partaking in these physical pleasures can bring him closer to Hashem. Hillel's approach is effectively described in one of the most famous passages of the Rambam (*Hil. Deos* 3:3):

המהלך בדרך זו כל ימיו עובד את ה' תמיד, אפילו בשעה שנושא ונותן ואפילו בשעה שבוועל, מפני שמחשבתו בכל כדי שימצא צרכיו עד שיהיה גופו שלם לעבוד את ה'. ואפילו בשעה שהוא ישן אם ישן לדעת כדי שתנוח דעתו עליו וינוח גופו כדי שלא יחלה ולא יוכל לעבוד את ה' והוא חולה, נמצאת שינה שלו עבודה למקום ברוך הוא. ועל ענין זה צוו חכמים ואמרו וכל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים. והוא שאמר שלמה בחכמתו בכל דרכיך דעהו והוא יישר אורחותיך.

One who follows in this path (i.e. always seeks to do the will of Hashem), all of his days will be serving Hashem – always. Even when he is negotiating while conducting business, and even when he is engaging in marital intimacy. If and because his intentions for all these are that his physical needs should be fulfilled and his body should be complete to serve Hashem. And even while he is sleeping, if the sleeping is for his mind to relax and body to rest, so that sickness will not come and prevent the service of Hashem, you will find that his sleep is service of God. And about this, the Sages commanded and said, “and all of your actions shall be for the sake of heaven (Avos

the importance of honoring Shabbos, whereas Hillel felt it was more important to teach pure faith and trust in Hashem (see *Ben Yehoyada* on this *gemara*). This explanation does not answer how this is a *machlokes*. *Kavod Shabbos* and *bitachon* are not conflicting values, and surely both Shammai and Hillel believed in both. So it is hard to understand why the *gemara* would phrase this as “however Hillel the elder had a different approach.”

2:12).” *And this is what Solomon said in his wisdom (Mishlei 3:6) “in all of your ways you shall know Him, and He will straighten your paths.”*

Nonetheless, a life in *olam ha’ze* of fulfilling our physical desires is very risky. If at any time our goal is indulgence, we move farther from Hashem and the pure spirituality of our *neshamos* can become stained. Knowing the frailty of man, this is bound to happen. The potential gain however, say the Rambam and Hillel, is far greater. If we do succeed at being *mechavein lishem shamayim*, if we partake in this world not to please ourselves but to get closer to Hashem, then we can accomplish “*b’chol dirachecha da’eihu*,” in all of your ways you shall know Him. We can serve Hashem not just in the shul and the *beis medrash*, but also in the dining room, the boardroom, and the bedroom.

In summary, Shammai encourages creating *kedusha* by escaping from *olam ha’ze*, while Hillel encourages creating *kedusha* by embracing *olam ha’ze*, as long as that embrace is genuinely *lishem shamayim*.

This explanation helps us understand why Hillel and his students are usually *mekil* – rule leniently, while Shammai and his students are *machmir* – rule strictly (see *Eduyos* 4:1). The terms *mekil* and *machmir* are actually subjective in that they are from the perspective of the body, not the soul. When we have a doubt about an obligation or a prohibition, being *mekil* means doing what the body wants, even if it carries the risk of harming the soul. Being *machmir* means erring on the side of safety for the soul, even though it will make things a little more difficult for the body. In most of their debates, Shammai and his students hold that we should strain the body to protect the soul, whereas Hillel and his students believe in straining the soul to relax the body. These divergent attitudes make a lot of sense when viewed in respect to their attitudes toward the physical world and *olam ha’ze*. Since Shammai creates *kedusha* by escaping *olam ha’ze*, he is *machmir* against the body. Hillel creates *kedusha* by embracing *olam ha’ze*, and is therefore *meikil* for the body.

This approach also helps explain one of *Beis Shammai* and *Beis Hillel’s* more famous theoretical debates (*Eruvin* 13b):

תנו רבנן: שתי שנים ומחצה נחלקו בית שמאי ובית הלל. הללו אומרים: נוה לו לאדם שלא נברא יותר משנברא, והללו אומרים: נוה לו לאדם שנברא יותר משלא נברא.
*Our Rabbis taught: For two and a half years Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel argued. These [Beis Shammai] say, it is better for man to not be created than to be created. These [Beis Hillel] say, it is better for man to be created than to not be created.*³

³ It is true that the *gemara* does not explicitly say which opinion is held by *Beis Shammai* and which by *Beis Hillel*. My translation, assuming that it is *Beis Shammai* that said it is better not to be created, follows the *Chasam*

Because Shammai believes that *kedusha* is created by escaping *olam ha'ze*, it makes all the sense in the world that his students believe that it is better to have never been created at all. Surely it is a simpler path to *kedusha* for a *neshama* to avoid exposure to the alluring physical materialism of life in this world altogether, and never be created. But according to Hillel, the physical materialism of life in this world is not the obstacle to *kedusha*, it's the opportunity. Sure, *olam ha'ze* is filled with impure temptations and mundane distractions that can – and almost surely will – irreparably stain the purity of a person's *neshama*. Nonetheless, this person's *neshama* has more access to *kedusha* in *olam ha'ze* than even in *Gan Eden*, provided that – and this is critical – he or she has *kavana lishem shamayim*. If a person can be thinking of Hashem while eating, sleeping, or fulfilling any of his or her physical needs, then yes, *noach lo l'adam shenivra*, it is better for this man or woman to have been created.

I'm fairly certain that all those reading this article were in fact created, and do in fact live in *olam ha'ze*. It should be no surprise, therefore, that the *gemara* (*Beitza* 11b) says, *Beis Shammai bimakom Beis Hillel aino Mishna*, meaning that in general Hashem so wants us to follow the approach of *Beis Hillel* that it is almost not worth mentioning *Beis Shammai's* opinions.⁴ It is also easily understood, however, why *l'asid lavo*, after the arrival of *Mashiach*, the *halacha* will follow *Beis Shammai*.⁵ *L'asid lavo*, when man will be living in a perfected and fixed physical world similar to that of Adam and Eve before their sin (see *Derech Hashem* 1:3), there will be no need to embrace and elevate *olam ha'ze* to create holiness. Everything in the world will exist to serve Hashem, and it will be a *yom shekulo Shabbos*, a day that is entirely *Shabbos*. In the world of *l'asid lavo*, *Beis Hillel* will surely admit to *Beis Shammai* that the primary servant of Hashem is the soul – as the body's main work has been completed – and therefore *Beis Shammai* and his *chumros* shall be the *halacha*. But for now, we must

Sofer (*Beitza* 16b). The *Chasam Sofer* brings as a proof the fact that in the text of this *braisa*, *Beis Shammai's* opinion is quoted first, and that a few lines above in the *gemara* in *Eruvin* it says that *Beis Shammai's* opinion is almost always mentioned first.

4 It is, however, ironic that with the simplest reading, the *gemara* in *Eruvin* seems to conclude that the "*p'sak*" in this case does follow *Beis Shammai*, that we would have been better off not having been created. Most commentaries, however, do not understand this line according to its simplest reading. See for example *Chasam Sofer* (*ibid.*) and *Panim Yafos* (*Vayikra* 19:32) who offer explanations that are consistent with our approach.

5 This idea appears to come from the Ariz"l with no source in *Chazal*. Of its earliest quotations are from a 17th century Kabbalistic commentary on the Ariz"l called *Vayakhel Moshe*, written by Rabbi Moshe ben Menachem Graff of Prague. It is also quoted by the *Ba'al Hatanya* in *Likutei Torah* (*Korach* 54c). The most recent Lubavitcher Rebbe cites this idea as coming from *Medrash Shmuel*, a commentary on *Pirkei Avos* (5:19) written by one of the Ariz"l's close students – Rabbi Shmuel di Uzida, however, it is not clear (to me, at least) that this is Rabbi di Uzida's meaning.

follow the approach of *Beis Hillel*.⁶

So what does this have to do with the story of Esther? Everything.

Esther's Story is Our Neshama's Story

When we think of the story of Esther, we typically think about Esther the book and not the person. Esther the book is a story about the Jewish People – how Hashem's hidden providence replaced sure annihilation with unprecedented peace and prosperity. It is a story from thousands of years ago and thousands of miles away. If we instead think about the story of Esther the person in light of what we have just learned, we will see that her story is our story – here and now.

I believe that the story of Queen Esther is a *mashal*, a parable, for the story of every person's *neshama*.⁷

We are all familiar with the story of each *neshama's* journey as told by *Medrash Tanchuma* (*Pikudei* 3 – and dramatized by Abie Rottenberg's song “*Neshomele*”).⁸

6 In fact, the *Michilta D'Rashbi* (quoted by Ramban *Shemos* 20:8 *d"h zachor*) cites almost verbatim the *gemara* in *Beitza* 16a which describes Shammai and Hillel's different approaches to reserving food for Shabbos, and ends with the words, “*vahalcha hi kidivrei Beis Hillel*”, the *halacha* follows *Beis Hillel*.

7 The most similar approach to this that I have seen is the Rema's commentary on *Megillas Esther*, *Mechir Yayin*, in which he explains the story-line of *Megillas Esther* as a *mashal* for the travels of a person's *neshama*. In the Rema's *mashal*, however, many of the story's characters (e.g. Achashveirosh, Vashti, and Esther) serve as aspects of a person's character and *neshama*. In my approach, the story of the *neshama* is encompassed in Esther's story alone. Neither approach, however, challenges the historicity of *Megillas Esther*.

8 This *medrash* is exquisitely beautiful, and a summary or translation cannot come close to seeing the complete original *medrash*. Nonetheless, here is my translation of the relevant sections in their entirety:

“These are the great wonders that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* does at the time of the formation of a child ... He motions to the angel appointed to the souls and says to him, bring to me such-and-such soul from the Garden of Eden whose name is such-and-such and has these characteristics. Because all of the souls that will ever be created were already created from the day the world was created, and until they will all be used, they are prepared to be certain people, as it says (*Koheles* 6:10) ‘that which happened, had already had its name called.’ Immediately the angel goes and brings the soul to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. When the soul comes, it immediately bows before the King of Kings, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. At that time, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* says, ‘go into this drop.’ The soul opens its mouth and says, ‘I am satisfied in the world where I've been living since the day You have created me. Why do you want to put me into this filthy drop, whereas I am holy and pure – a slice of Your own honor?’ Immediately, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* responds to the soul, ‘the world into which I am placing you is more beautiful than the world in which you are living. And when you were created, you were only created [to be placed] in this drop.’ Immediately, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* places [the soul] there against its will.

Then the angel settles the soul in its mother's womb. They prepare for it two angels who guard it so that it doesn't leave and isn't miscarried... The angel then takes the soul and brings it to the Garden of Eden and shows it the *tzadikim* sitting with honor with crowns on their heads. The angel asks the soul, ‘do you know who they are?’ and the soul answers, ‘no, sir.’ The angel then informs it, ‘these that you see were originally formed just like you in their mothers' wombs, and they went out into the world and kept the Torah and *mitzvos*. Therefore, they merited the goodness that you are seeing. You should know, that you too will go out into the world, and if you merit and keep *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* Torah, you will merit this reward and join them in their place. And if not, know and see that

Each *neshama* starts in *Gan Eden* close to Hashem Himself, as it were. When it's time for a *neshama* to be sent down to earth, an angel brings it in front of Hashem. Hashem lovingly tells the *neshama* of its mission on earth, and the reward it will receive when it completes its mission. But the *neshama* loudly protests:

די לי העולם שהייתי דר מיום שבראתני. למה רצונך להחייטני בטיפה זו סרוכה, שאני
קדושה וטהורה, ואני גזורה מגזרת קדושך?

I am satisfied in the world that I have been living since the day You created me. Why do you want to put me into this filthy drop, when I am holy and pure – a slice of Your own honor?"

To which Hashem responds:

עולם שאני מכניסך בו יפה יהיה לך ממה שהיית דרה בו, ובשעה שיצרתך, לא יצרתך
אלא לטיפה זו.

The world into which I am placing you will be more beautiful for you than the one in which you were living. And when I created you, I only created you for this [purpose].

Nonetheless, when it's time for the child's birth, the *neshama* again protests. So the angel forces this *neshama* – now a child – out of its comfortable home, and into our world, kicking and screaming. It's not until years later that the angel revisits this *neshama* – now an old man – this time to return it to *Gan Eden*. Again, the *neshama* cries and protests, but once again the angel forces it to leave what has become its comfortable home to return to heaven and accept its eternal reward.

This is Esther's story. Like the *neshama* in *Gan Eden*, her life began in the pure spiritual comfort of Mordechai's home. Mordechai was a great *tzadik*, a member of the *Sanhedrin*, and one of the forty-eight great prophets of Jewish history (see Rashi

you will go to a different place... [The *medrash* then describes the tour the *neshama* is given of *gehennom*, hell.] After [nine months of pregnancy], its time comes to go into the world. Immediately the same angel comes and says, 'your time has come to go into the world.' It responds, 'why do you want to send me out into the world?' The angel responds (quoting *Avos* 4:22), 'my child, know that against your will you were formed, and now know that against your will you will be born, against your will you will die, and against your will give an accounting of your life before the King of Kings, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.' And [the soul, now the child] does not want to leave there until the angel hits it, extinguishes its light, and forces it into the fresh air of the world against its will ... At the end, when its time comes, the same angel comes to it and says, 'do you recognize me?' and [the soul] responds, 'yes. Why have you come to me today of all days?' The angel responds, 'I have come to remove you from the world, because your time has come to die.' Immediately he begins to cry... and says to the angel, 'but you have already removed me from two worlds and put me in this world.' And the angel says, 'but I have already told you that against your will you were formed, against your will you were born, against your will you live, and against your will you die, and against your will you will give an accounting of your life before *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.'"

to *Megilla* 14a). Esther too, with Mordechai's loving care and cultivation, grew into a true *tzadekes*, and became one of the seven great prophetesses of Jewish history (*Megilla* *ibid.*). It is no surprise that Esther preferred Mordechai's warm *frum* home – whether as his adopted daughter or his wife – to the hedonistic palace of Achashveirosh, the ultimate exaggeration of the materialism of *olam ha'ze*.

Like the *neshama*, Esther refused to go to the *tipa sirucha*, to Achashveirosh's palace; like the *neshama*, Esther was forcibly taken, kicking and screaming.⁹ Esther's first months in the palace of waiting and preparing for the king, were much like the baby during pregnancy – months of waiting and preparation for its trip to *olam ha'ze*. But like the *neshama*, Esther had no interest in the destination, and arrived once again kicking and screaming.

There is a significant gap in the *medrash's* story of the *neshama*, however. The angel and *neshama* part at birth and don't meet again until it is time to finally return to *Gan Eden*. You would think that after all those years when they finally meet again, the *neshama* would be excited to see the angel and return with it back home to *Gan Eden*. But this is not at all what happens. With the same vigor that the *neshama* fought against coming into this world, it fights against leaving – in the words of the *Mishna* (*Avos* 4:22), “*b'al korchach atah chai v'al korchach atah mes,*” it lived against its will and now it will die against its will.

But why isn't the *neshama* happy to return to heaven? What happened over the course of this person's eighty or ninety years, that it now fights to stay in this world and refuses to return to *Gan Eden*?

Returning to our *mashal*, Esther's marrying Achashveirosh is an exaggerated version of the culture shock that hits each *neshama* when it is born as a child. Esther, *kidosha u'tehora, gizura migizras kidosha*, holy and pure, a slice of Hashem's holiness, was now forced to live in a completely foreign world of total materialism and perverse debauchery. How can it be possible for Esther to think that the new world in which Hashem placed her is in fact more beautiful than the old one in which she was living? But that is in fact the challenge of her lifetime. Would she be able to recognize that when Hashem created her, He created her precisely for this purpose – to enter the king's palace and serve Hashem from there?

For the next few years, Esther could not. She did not look at her historic opportunity to be a Jewish queen to the most powerful leader in the world and see what she could do to help her people. Instead, she constantly looked for an escape.

⁹ *Targum Yonasan* translates “*vatilakach Esther*” Esther was taken, as “*bi'onsa*” forceably.

The *gemara* tells us (*Megilla* 13b and 15a) that Esther refused to submit willfully to Achashveirosh, and whenever she was forced to join him she would immediately afterwards go to the *mikva* and return to Mordechai to be his wife. Each time Esther returned to Mordechai it was like she was pretending her unholy life as queen never existed. And so too, each time she returned to Achashveirosh, “*ein Esther magedes molad'ta*” it was like she was pretending that her holy life as *tzadekes* never existed. Esther would have made Shammai proud.

Esther's – and our *Neshama's* – Moment of Truth

But her Shammai fantasy could only last for so long. In response to Haman's decree to annihilate the Jews, Mordechai, echoing Hashem's words to the *neshama*, tells Esther, “*mi yodea im li'es kazos hingat lamalchus* – who knows if this is the reason you became queen.” The whole reason for your entire existence is for this very moment – to embrace your relationship with Achashveirosh and use it *lishem shamayim*, to save the Jewish people. Esther, of course, realizes that “*ka'asher avad'ti avad'ti*.” If she chooses to embrace her mission in *olam ha'ze*, her purity will likely be irreparably stained. Esther's soul will forever be tainted with the *tuma* of Achashveirosh, and she will no longer be able to wash herself in the *mikva* and return to being Mordechai's wife. Her willful embrace of *olam ha'ze* will cause her *neshama* to cry when it leaves this world. It will be scared of the accounting it will be forced to give to Hashem, and it will be frightened by its return to its home in *Gan Eden*, not knowing if it will look at all like the *Gan Eden* from which it left.

But that's life – at least according to Hillel. Each of our *neshamos* are sent here with a mission, and each of our missions will require a heaping dose – perhaps even an unhealthy dose – of *olam ha'ze*, of fulfilling and even chasing our material needs. Our lifelong challenge then, is to recognize that *b'chol derachecha da'eihu*, everything we do can and should be *lishem shamayim*. Even in our most physical moments where our *neshama* might feel completely out of place, we must remember that we can transform every bit of *gashmiyus* into genuine *ruchniyus*, and every bit of physical pleasure into spiritual closeness to Hashem. *U'mi yodeia im li'es kazos hingat lamalchos*. And we know – having learned the story of Esther – that we were created for precisely these opportunities.

So How Much Wine Should We Drink?

Perhaps we can now understand why of all *halachos*, it is about the indulgence in wine on Purim that the *halacha* is resolved with *v'echad hamarbe, v'echad hamam'it, ubilvad sheyechavein libo lishamayim*, both the one who drinks more and the one who drinks

less satisfies his obligation as long as his heart is committed to heaven. The salvation of the Jews came precisely because Esther was willing to embrace her mission in *olam ha'ze* and recognized that what she could accomplish *lishem shamayim* was far greater in Achashveirosh's home than in Mordechai's.¹⁰ We too must learn the lesson that whether we indulge in *olam ha'ze* a little bit or a lot, it can always bring us closer to Hashem, if that is genuinely our goal. So for one night a year, we give *olam ha'ze* a full-on hug. By the end of the night we might be stumbling through our *divrei Torah* and slurring our *bentsching*, but if our hearts are genuinely committed to heaven, we will surely have fulfilled our obligation.

10 There is another fascinating way in which *mechavein lishem shamayim*, thinking about strengthening one's relationship with Hashem while indulging in *olam ha'ze*, saved the Jews in the Purim story. If you trace the salvation of Purim back to its very beginning, it starts with Achashveirosh's not-so-brilliant idea of bringing Vashti to his party, which ultimately laid the groundwork for Esther to become queen. The *gemara* (*Megilla* 12b) tells us how Achashveirosh got that idea:

ביום השביעי כטוב לב המלך ביין. אטו עד השתא לא טב לביה בחמרא אמר רבא יום השביעי שבת היה שישראל אוכלין ושותין מתחילין בד"ת ובדברי תשבחות אבל עובדי כוכבים שאוכלין ושותין אין מתחילין אלא בדברי תיפלות וכן בסעודתו של אותו רשע וכו'

"On the seventh day, when the king's heart was gladdened with wine." Was it not until then that his heart was gladdened with wine? Rava says that the seventh day was Shabbos that when the Jews eat and drink they begin with words of Torah and songs and praises [to Hashem]. But the idolaters, when they eat and drink, they begin with words of immorality. This too was the case at the feast of Achashveirosh...

The *gemara* continues that the "words of immorality" on the Shabbos of that feast were a competition between the Medean and Persian men about whose women were more beautiful. Achashveirosh interjects (using a vulgar description of Vashti) that his wife – a Chaldean – was most beautiful and offered to show her off. The men demanded that she come naked, to which Achashveirosh tried to comply.

The *gemara* does not explain, however, how the Jews' *zemiros Shabbos* and *divrei Torah* had any impact on Achashveirosh's invitation to Vashti. To me, it appears to be clear that the *gemara* is saying that, while Achashveirosh was surely drunk and off saying foolish things during the first six days, nothing became of it. When Achashveirosh got drunk on Shabbos, that's when the miraculous Purim story began. And it was all because of what the Jews at Achashveirosh's feast were doing. Remembering that it was Shabbos, they began to sing *zemiros* – in the middle of Achashveirosh's feast! The idolaters, seeing the Jews doing what Jews do when they eat and drink, began doing what idolaters do when they eat and drink – they began a vulgar discussion, which ultimately led to Vashti's removal.

In *Hilchos Chanuka* (*Orach Chaim* 670:2) the Rema says that even though there is not a full *mitzva* of feasting on Chanuka, one should at least make a festive meal and sing songs of praise to Hashem, "*v'az havi se'udas mitzva* – then it will become a feast for a *mitzva*." The *Magen Avraham* (*ibid.* 670:4) says that this is also true when the daughter of a *talmid chacham* marries an *am ha'aretz*, if they sing songs of praise to Hashem, it becomes a *se'udas mitzva*.

Thus, the few moments of *zemiros Shabbos* that the Jews sang at Achashveirosh's feast transformed their partaking in a materialistic party into a *se'udas mitzva*! Their *kavana lishem shamayim* even at the absolute greatest depths of *olam ha'ze* transformed the worst possible *se'uda* into a *se'udas mitzva*. This merit started the entire salvation of the Purim story.

In Search of the Greater *Mitzva*

RABBI AARON KATZ



If you were asked to choose any specific *mitzva* to perform, which *mitzva* would it be? For instance, imagine a prisoner who is granted one day of reprieve in which he can fulfill any *mitzva* of his choice. Should he choose Rosh Hashana in order to have a chance to hear the sound of the shofar? Or perhaps he should choose Yom Kippur, commonly seen as the holiest day of the year? What about performing the very first available *mitzva* at the first moment of opportunity? This seemingly hypothetical conundrum was the scenario presented to a 16th century *posek*, and has led to discussions of the topic that continue until this very day.

Opinion of the Radvaz

One of the most prolific authors in the history of responsa literature (*sheilos u'tshuvos*) is Rabbi David ben Zimra, known as the Radvaz.¹ The Radvaz authored thousands

¹ The Radvaz, was born in Spain in 1479 and settled in Jerusalem before journeying to Egypt, where he led Egyptian Jewry for over forty years. The Radvaz ultimately moved to Tzfat, where he passed away in 1573.

In memory of my dear Rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Dovid Landesman zt"l, from whom I was privileged to learn for 17 years, both in a formal classroom setting and as his chavrusa. In writing this piece, I kept imagining how the exploration of this topic would have gone if I could have discussed it with "Rav," as we so fondly referred to Rabbi Landesman. He would have first asked me if I understood what a mitzva is, and then, after quoting pasuk after pasuk that uses the word (and berating our generation for our utter ignorance of Tanach) and telling an amazing story that he had witnessed firsthand with a gadol from yesteryear, we would settle into an hours-long discussion of whether a good deed can be a mitzva if it is not strictly one of the 613 mitzvos or the rabbinically ordained mitzvos. The dialogue would then continue over the Internet, as we would email each other back and forth on the topic. In this scenario, I'd likely send Rav Aharon Lichtenstein's excellent article, "Does Judaism Recognize an Ethic Independent of Halakhah?" and our conversation would continue for weeks on end. In fact, it would never really end, as I have countless memories of topics that I discussed with Rav to which we would always return. Indeed, this is one fascinating legacy that he has left us: that of a lifelong pursuit of the study of Torah, coupled with an uncompromising commitment to both mitzvos bein adam l'makom and bein adam l'chaveiro.

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of *tshuvos* and is also well-known for his commentary on the Rambam's *Mishne Torah*. In a short but profound *tshuva* (4:13), the Radvaz addresses the following question: Reuven was incarcerated in prison and was not able to join a *minyan* of ten people or perform *mitzvos*. Reuven begged to be let out of prison; however, he was only granted leave for one day of the year – a day which Reuven would have the ability to choose. The question posed to the Radvaz was which day Reuven should choose to leave the prison. The Radvaz writes that he has seen a *tshuva* written by a contemporary who first wrote that Reuven should attend shul on Yom Kippur, but then subsequently changed his mind and suggested that he attend shul on Purim in order to fulfill the *mitzva* of reading the *Megilla* and the *pirsumei nisa* (publicizing of the miracle) involved in doing so in public. The Radvaz argues with this anonymous opinion and noted that, pursuant to the Talmudic principle of “*ein ma'avirin al hamitzvos*,”² a person should perform the first *mitzva* that is available to him at that time. Thus, Reuven should immediately leave prison on the first day available, and it does not matter whether the *mitzva* that Reuven will perform that day will be more or less severe than *mitzvos* performed on any other day, since we do not know the ultimate reward of the *mitzvos*.³ The Radvaz concludes that he has no doubts about the correctness of his opinion.

Opinion of the *Chacham Zvi*

The opinion of the Radvaz was disputed by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch ben Yaakov Ashkenazi, famously known by his collection of *tshuvos* titled *Chacham Zvi*.⁴ The *Chacham Zvi* quotes the Radvaz and refutes his opinion based on a *gemara* in *Menachos* 49a. The

2 This principle appears in numerous *gemaras*. One famous usage appears on *Yoma* 38a where Reish Lakish quotes the principle as an explanation of the reason for why the *Kohen* who performs the daily *avoda* first separates the ash from the inner *Mizbeach* and only then cleans the lamps of the *Menora*. According to Reish Lakish, since the *Kohen* first encounters the *mitzva* of separating the ashes of the *Mizbeach*, he must perform that action first. It is important to note that this principle of *ein ma'avirin al hamitzvos* has a number of corollaries throughout *Shas*. In *Minchas Asher, Bereishis, Siman 22*, Rav Asher Weiss comments that there are three other Talmudic principles that seem to share many similarities with *ein ma'avirin al hamitzvos*: (i) *zrizin makdimin lemiztvos* (we are eager to perform a *mitzva* at the earliest time) ; (ii) *shihuy mitzvah lo mashhinan* (we do not delay the performance of the *mitzva*) ; and (iii) *chaviva mitzva be'shaasa* (precious is a *mitzva* that is performed in its proper time). Rabbi Weiss categorizes each of these principles and explains the proper usage of each of these similar terms, yet he notes that many earlier *rishonim* and *poskim* at times use these terms interchangeably.

3 The Radvaz is alluding to the *mishna* in *Avos* 2:1; “Be as cautious in performing a minor *mitzva* as in performing a major *mitzva*, for you do not know the reward given for respective *mitzvos*.” See the commentaries of Rabbeinu Yona and the Rambam on this *mishna* for further discussions of this topic.

4 The *Chacham Zvi* lived between 1656 and 1718. He served as a rabbi in Altona, Amsterdam and in Lemberg. His son, Rabbi Yaakov Emden, was one of the most prominent European rabbis in the 18th century.

gemara discusses an instance of a Shabbos in which the Jewish nation does not have enough animals to offer both the daily *Korban Tamid* and the *Korban Musaf*. The specific question is: what should occur if the *Korban Tamid* of that day had already been brought? Should the remaining animals be saved for the *Korban Tamid* of the next day, as the *Korban Tamid* is more commonly brought (and thus is considered *tadir*), or should the *Korban Musaf* of that day be offered, since this *Korban* is holier as it will be brought on Shabbos? The *Chacham Zvi* points out that if the Radvaz was indeed correct in his reasoning, then the *gemara* should not have been bothered by this question at all, as of course the *Korban Musaf* should be brought first, since *ein ma'avirin al hamitzvos*, and that is the *korban* that can still be brought today! Rather, says the *Chacham Zvi*, the principle of *ein ma'avirin al hamitzvos* is only invoked when there is an opportunity to perform two *mitzvos* of equal value; it does not apply when there are *mitzvos* of varying levels of value. Thus, in this instance the *gemara* is indeed unsure of whether the concept of *tadir* will require the animals to be brought on the following day, as its *tadir* status may take precedence over the *musaf* that would be brought on the previous day.⁵ According to the *Chacham Zvi*, we are indeed tasked at times with ranking the *mitzvos* that we are presented with, and it is not always the case that we rush to observe the earliest *mitzva*.

Subsequent Applications of the Debate

Interestingly, this debate between the Radvaz and the *Chacham Zvi* is applied by many later authorities in a variety of different contexts. For example, the *Ohel Moshe*, a collection of *tshuvos* written by the 19th century *posek* Rabbi Moshe Katzenellenbogen from Mezeritch, discusses the question of whether a person should fast on Tzom Gedalya if he is certain that doing so will make him sick and might force him to break his fast on Yom Kippur the following week due to concerns of *pikuach nefesh* (life or death scenario).⁶ The *Ohel Moshe* proposes that the opinions of the Radvaz and the *Chacham Zvi* could shed light on this issue. According to the Radvaz, the person should certainly fast, due to the principle of *ein ma'avirin al hamitzvos*; the fact that

5 Rabbi Avraham Danzig, in his work *Chayei Adam* (68:1), also rejects the Radvaz's argument, but for a different reason than the *Chacham Zvi*. The *Chayei Adam* holds that when a person can perform only one *mitzva* and has to decide which one to perform, then the principle of *ein ma'avirin al hamitzvos* does not apply, as that rule is only invoked when both *mitzvos* will eventually be performed and it is merely a question of which takes precedence at this time.

6 *Tshuva* 15. Originally published in Warsaw in 1889, the *Ohel Moshe* received letters of approbation from numerous leading 19th century rabbis, including Rabbi Yitzchok Elchonon Spektor, Chief Rabbi of Kovno.

Tzom Gedalya is only *midivrei kabbala*,⁷ while Yom Kippur is from the Torah, does not enter into the equation. However, according to the *Chacham Zvi*, the person should not fast on Tzom Gedalya, as clearly proper observance of Yom Kippur will take precedence over the observance of Tzom Gedalya.⁸

However, according to the *Sdei Chemed*,⁹ the Radvaz would never have advanced his principle in the instance of a clash between *divrei kabbala* and *divrei Torah*, and thus in the Tzom Gedalya vs. Yom Kippur case, both opinions would agree that the person should forgo the fast of Tzom Gedalya. Interestingly, while the *Ohel Moshe* uses the reasoning of *ein ma'avirin al hamitzvos* as a support for his position within the Radvaz, the *Sdei Chemed* focuses on the other source in the Radvaz, which weighs the *mitzvos* against each other. Thus, according to the *Sdei Chemed*, the only time it is improper to weigh the rewards of *mitzvos* against each other is when the *mitzvos* are on equal footing, but when one is from the Torah and the other is from *divrei kabbala*, then of course the one from the Torah will trump.

In a similar vein, Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, the contemporary author and *Av Beis Din* of the Ramat Elchanan neighborhood in Bnei Brak, in his work *Chashukei Chemed* (*Yoma* 38a), answers a question that was previously asked on the *Be'er Hetev*.¹⁰ The scenario involves a groom who has a new suit and is getting married the day after Shavuot – should he make a *shehecheyanu* on the suit on Shavuot or on the day of his wedding? The *Be'er Hetev* (EH 65:2) holds that the groom should make it at the wedding, and thus bypass making it beforehand on Shavuot, due to the importance of the *mitzva* of honoring the groom and bride. The *Pischei Tshuva*¹¹ asks why the

7 Commonly translated as “the words of the Prophets” (see, e.g., *Bava Kama* 2b). Tzom Gedalya is referred to as “the fast of the seventh month” in *Zecharya* 8:19.

8 The *Ohel Moshe* ultimately concludes that the person should in fact eat on Tzom Gedalya. See also Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg, in *Tzitz Eliezer*, 10:25, who discusses this passage in *Ohel Moshe*. Interestingly, a story is told that Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, the Brisker Rav, was asked this precise question, and he responded that any person who is so weak that if he will fast on Tzom Gedalya it will still negatively impact him a week later – such a person is certainly considered a *chole* and need not fast on Tzom Gedalya!

9 *Maareches Yom HaKippurim Siman* 1; The *Sdei Chemed* is an encyclopedic work written by Rabbi Chaim Chizkiya Medini, who lived from 1834 to 1905. Born in Jerusalem, he moved to Constantinople and then to the Crimea. He ultimately returned to *Eretz Yisrael* and served as Chief Rabbi in Chevron.

10 A commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch's* sections of *Orach Chaim* and *Even HaEzer* written by Rabbi Yehuda ben Shimon Ashkenazi of Tiktin (1730-1770). (The sections on *Yoreh Deah* and *Choshen Mishpat* were written by Rabbi Zecharia Mendel ben Aryeh Leib of Krakow.)

11 An index of *tshuvos* and *pesakim* on the subjects discussed in the *Shulchan Aruch*. The *Pischei Tshuva* was written by Rabbi Abraham Hirsch Eisenstadt (1812-1868).

Be'er Hetev seemingly argues with the opinion of the Radvaz in this context, when he himself had quoted the opinion of the Radvaz approvingly in OC 90:11. Rabbi Zilberstein answers that perhaps the *Be'er Hetev* is of the opinion that the honor due to the groom at his wedding is from the Torah, while *simchas haregel* nowadays (in the absence of the *Beis HaMikdash*) is only of Rabbinic nature. Thus, similarly to the *Sdei Chemed*, the *Be'er Hetev* holds that even the Radvaz would admit that in a clash of *mitzvos* of unequal standing, the principle of *ein ma'avirin al hamitzvos* is inapplicable.

Conclusion

Much ink has been spilled on the topic of ranking the performance of various *mitzvos*, and I have merely attempted to scratch the surface to further understand one famous and oft-quoted debate between the Radvaz and the *Chacham Zvi*.¹² As we have seen, even the precise parameters of the opinion of the Radvaz, which at first glance appears clear-cut and easily understood, is subject to the debate of later *poskim*.

In addition to the *halachic* underpinnings of the position of the Radvaz, the tremendous *hashkafic* implications of his opinion must also be appreciated. Indeed, there seems to be ample reason to sympathize with the rejected opinion with which the Radvaz opens his *tshuva*. From a purely quantitative standpoint, there is no doubt that Yom Kippur or Purim has more *mitzvos* than a random day of the year and should, therefore, take precedence. Yet, the Radvaz reminds us that there is no such thing as an “ordinary day” and that any given day can be elevated even to the level of the holiest days of our calendar.

12 For additional information on the topic of *ein ma'avirin al hamitzvos*, see the entry in the *Encyclopedia Talmudit*. In addition, a *sefer* titled *Toras Hamitzva*, authored by Rabbi Aharon Rubinfeld, was recently published and it contains a compendium of all the various factors involved in the performance of a *mitzva*, including a lengthy discussion on the proper order of performing competing *mitzvos*.

The Jewish Politician – Are We to Scoff at Evil or Work with it?

RABBI RAPHAEL STOHL



Jewish leaders from time immemorial have had to grapple with the proper way to deal with evil and evildoers: should they stand staunchly against them, fighting defiantly for what is right, or should they dance with the devil, playing the political scene with pragmatic finesse? Indeed, we have seen various great leaders of *Klal Yisrael* take different stances on this issue (due largely to varying situations determined by time and place), and our Rabbis offer essential guidelines that can help us navigate various scenarios.

With the fondest of memories and most broken of hearts, I dedicate this article to my Rebbe, my mentor, Rav Dovid Landesman zt”l. I don’t know if I ever will become someone that Rabbi Landesman should be proud of, but one thing is clear: whatever I do become is due to this great man. He was a brilliant mechanech; he coached me to yeshiva, to marriage, and to find the path in life that suited my personal disposition and capabilities. But even more, and what made him almost super-human is that he did this with every student... but not to the same yeshiva or on even remotely similar paths! He saw deep inside each one of his talmidim and led each individual to the place where that particular student was destined to go. Although I surely come up extremely short, I try to follow his lead in all of my dealings with people, for he is not just my guide in life, but he is my guide in how to guide others – my children, my students, anyone whom I merit to assist. Yet, I already see that it is exceedingly difficult to truly follow his path: he was a genius at reading people; he always knew the right question to ask a talmid in order to get him to think; he knew how to prod with gentleness and superb care; he had such tremendous patience and such a loving demeanor. I and all of my peers try to the best of our abilities to follow his lead. We are proud to be his students, and we know that the greatest honor that we could ever afford our Rebbe is to act in the manner that he taught us. Our Rebbe lives on in thousands of people throughout the world – through his talmidim, through his talmidim’s families, and through his talmidim’s talmidim. I thank Hashem from the depths of my heart for granting me the blessing of being one of Rabbi Landesman’s students, and I see it as one of my life’s tasks to follow his example.

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On the one hand, our Rabbis warn against openly antagonizing evildoers.¹ The *gemara*² sometimes permits even flattering evildoers for various political reasons. On the most basic level, these sources teach us that antagonizing our opponents will only make matters worse. The Torah instructs us to act with *sechel*, conscientiousness and wisdom, and it would be most unwise to provoke the enemy. On a deeper level, battling head-on against evil may indicate an indignant rejection of a Heavenly warning to repent. In our current imperfect (pre-Messianic) world, Hashem sometimes allows evil to prosper in order to punish or test us.³ We may not disregard and ignore the punishment; we must accept the challenges thrust upon us and work with them to better ourselves. In a similar vein, the Rabbis⁴ explain that *Moshe Rabbeinu* afforded honor even to the evil Pharaoh. He recognized that kings and leaders, as evil as some may be, are mere pawns of God.⁵ “Kingship is given directly by Hashem... and it is an honor to Hashem to afford His kings honor.”⁶

Nevertheless, our Rabbis⁷ inform us that there are some situations in which battling evil head-on is in fact permitted and even correct. One such instance involves a completely righteous person (*tzadik gamur*), who is permitted to antagonize evil. A *tzadik gamur* merits extra help from Above. Such a great individual is allowed to stand up fearlessly for truth, not needing to take the precautions required of most other leaders. On a deeper level, Rav Yitzchak Hutner⁸ *zt”l* explains that a regular person merely knows (cerebrally) that “success” afforded evildoers is only temporary and that they will eventually suffer severe consequences. But a completely righteous person lives (experientially) with this outlook. And more, a *tzadik gamur* views the evildoer’s current “success” as nothing more than a façade. He understands that, in truth, every act of evil only buries the evildoer deeper and deeper in eternal damnation. Since

1 See *Berachos* 7b and *Megilla* 6b: “*Im ra’isa rasha shehasha’a mesachekes lo, al tisgara bo*” (if you see an evildoer prospering, do not antagonize him).

2 *Sota* 41b

3 See commentaries on *Berachos* 7a regarding the famous question why good things happen to bad people etc. (See a list of sources in Artscroll edition *ibid.* note 50.) This discussion also relates to *Berachos* 5a which tells us that the proper response to affliction and hardship is *teshuva*; see commentaries on that *gemara*.

4 *Shemos Rabba* 5:15. See also *Nachalas Shimon* (*Melachim* 1 vol. 2 ch. 51).

5 It should be noted that Hashem only “utilizes” these evil kings as “pawns” if the kings themselves choose on their own free will to act in this evil manner. See Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuva* 6:3,5).

6 *Eitz Yosef* on *Shemos Rabba* *ibid.*

7 See *Berachos* and *Megilla* *ibid.* See also *Einayim L’Mishpat* on *Berachos* *ibid.* along with other commentaries.

8 *Pachad Yitzchak* Purim 9:2. See also R. Mattisyahu Solomon *Shlit”a’s Matnas Chaim* (*Moadim*; Purim #11, pg. 202) for further elaboration. A similar idea is offered by *Chidushei HaGr”a* and *Meromei Sadeh* on *Berachos* *ibid.*

the *tzadik gamur* lives with such an outlook, his bold stance against evil is not cavalier grandstanding or reckless bravado, but a natural response based on his exalted view of the world around him. We can add that the *tzadik gamur's* blatant confrontation with evil cannot be perceived as a lowly man trying to take control of a situation against the strong hand of Hashem, for the *tzadik gamur* does not at all identify the evil as prevailing! That is, for most people, in order for the Heavenly sign (sent in the form of an evildoer) to affect them, they need to acknowledge the existence of the evil and accept Hashem's punishment. By doing so, they enable themselves to focus on their own repentance while handling the success of the evildoer with caution, stealth, and wisdom. The *tzadik gamur*, on the other hand, peers above the smokescreen and sees nothing of which to be scared. The *tzadik gamur* certainly responds with *teshuva* as well, but he does not feel any fear of the evil while doing so.

Mordechai HaTzadik was one such completely righteous person. R. Eliyahu Dessler⁹ ז"ל explains (based on the Maharal) that Mordechai shunned evil and would never allow himself to grant evil any honor or success. As a descendant of Binyamin who never bowed to Esav, Mordechai refused to bow to Haman (and even went out of his way to openly display his rejection of Haman).¹⁰ And it was this very boldness that ultimately brought the Jewish nation to repentance and Haman to his demise.

Yet the Jewish nation initially resented Mordechai for his insolence, for putting them in grave danger and acting in a manner they perceived as irresponsible.¹¹ And, in fact, Mordechai's defiance is not the prescribed approach for most people.¹² Indeed, *Yaakov Avinu*, whose attitude toward life's assorted challenges serves as a paradigm for his descendants to follow,¹³ did not choose Mordechai's approach, but

9 *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* (vol. 2 pg. 130); see also *Pachad Yitchak* ibid. 9:3.

10 See Maharal and *midrash* quoted in *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* ibid. who derive this point from the wording of the *Megilla* itself.

11 See *Megilla* bottom of 12b and *midrash* quoted in *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* ibid.

12 See Rabbeinu Yona (*Shaarei Teshuva* 3:199) who codifies the Talmudic sources cited above that permit affording honor to and even flattering evildoers in order to protect oneself.

13 The Jewish nation is referred to as *Bnei Yisrael* and *Kehillas Yaakov*, i.e. the sons and congregation of Yaakov. The *gemara* (*Taanis* 5b) states, "Yaakov Avinu did not die"; Yaakov Avinu lives on forever through his nation (see *Gur Arye* end of *Parashas Vayechi*). Yaakov represents the characteristic of everlasting truth (as the *pasuk* in *Micha* 7:20 states, "titein emes l'Yaakov") and the "middle road" that guides us throughout history; see *Z'ev Yitrof* (*Succos*) at length along with numerous other commentators.

rather bowed to Esav.¹⁴ R. Aryeh Leib Malin¹⁵ *zt"l* draws upon various *midrashim*¹⁶ to prove that Yaakov's submission to Esav was a terrible compromise of ideals (for which *Klal Yisrael* suffered at the hands of the Romans), but, somewhat paradoxically, also a precedent that directs us throughout our exile. On the one hand, Yaakov was forced to create the appearance of evil triumphing over good, which is itself a horrific disgrace of Hashem and His holy Torah. But on the other hand, *Yaakov Avinu's* spiritual and physical preparation for his meeting with Esav empowered *Klal Yisrael* throughout history to bow to evil when circumstances demanded, as tragic as this necessity may be.¹⁷

R. Aryeh Leib adds the following essential point:

כל מה ששלח לו 'עבדך יעקב' לא היה אלא הנהגה בחיצוניות, שכך צריך להתנהג, אבל בודאי בפנימיותו לא היה ליעקב שום הכנעה, אלא שהיה מוכרח לעשות כן... אבל בפנימיות ודאי שאסור שיהיה שום הרגשה של השפלה.

*That which Yaakov referred to himself (when speaking to Esav) as 'Yaakov, your servant' was only a front, and he acted this way only out of necessity. But certainly Yaakov did not feel this way inside; he was merely forced to act this way... It is surely forbidden to harbor any feeling of abasement (towards evildoers).*¹⁸

R. Hutner¹⁹ *zt"l* beautifully articulates this same idea. He explains that the outward flattery that we afford the enemy is, in its essence, simply an outward expression of an inner mockery of that individual: *Chanifa mibachutz v'la'ag mibifnim*.

There are some rare occasions and some unique individuals who may follow Mordechai's open and bold example, but in most situations, we need to handle the political scene with caution and discretion. Yet even as we cooperate with those who oppose our values and principles, we must take care to never lose sight of the idea that the primary response to evil has nothing to do with physically battling the evil. We must focus on fixing the personal and communal sins that stand as the root cause

14 Even though *Yaakov Avinu* was also an exceedingly righteous man, the Rabbis explain that he was afraid that perhaps he nonetheless was not great enough to merit escape from Esav; see *Berachos* bottom of 4a "*shema yigrom ha'chet*".

15 *Mi'Toraso shel HaGaon Rebbe Aryeh Leib, Maamar #2*

16 *Bereishis Rabba* 75:5,11

17 Ramban, beginning of *Parashas Vayishlach*

18 *Mi'Toraso shel HaGaon Rebbe Aryeh Leib* pg. 149

19 *Pachad Yitzchak* *ibid*. See also *Matnos Chaim* *ibid*.

for the “success” of evil. And more, even as we play the political game, R. Aryeh Leib’s words must serve as a crucial directive: while we may sometimes be required to flatter the evildoers, our inner chamber can never change. The Jewish politician is constantly aware that God calls the shots, that the Torah reigns, and that the success of evil is a mere façade. Such an outlook will steer our minds and souls toward bettering ourselves and our relationship with God and hopefully bring us to a point in history when we do not need to toy with politics at all.

PURIM

Let Us All Drink and be Merry

DOVID LEVINE



The *Mishna* in *Maseches Megilla* 19b states “*Hakol keshayrin lekros es hamegilla chutz mecheresh shoteh vekatan*”, everyone is fit to read the *Megilla* except for a deaf mute, imbecile, and a minor. R’ Nissim ben Reuven (the Ran) in his commentary on this *Mishna* (6b *b’dapei haRif* s.v. *Hakol kesharin*), cites a relevant *gemara* from *Maseches Erichin* 2b-3a to define the phrase of “*hakol*”. The *gemara* states that according to R’ Yehoshua ben Levi, the word “*hakol*” comes to include women in the obligation of reading the *Megilla*. R’ Yehoshua ben Levi explains that the reason women are included in the obligation to read the *Megilla* is because, “*af hein hayu b’oso haneis*”, for they too were part of the greater Purim miracle. As the result of women being directly involved in the miracle, Jewish women are obligated in the positive time-bound commandment of *mikra Megilla*. The Ran continues by inquiring whether women can be counted in a *minyan* to read the *Megilla*. The Ran suggests that since women are obligated to read the *Megilla*, they should be able to be counted in a *minyan* for *mikra Megilla*. To prove his hypothesis, the Ran cites a *gemara* in *Brachos* 45b, which states that in regards to *benching*, women are not to be counted for a *zimun*. The Ran explains that this is so because including women in a *zimun* will lead to *pritzus*, immodesty, because forming a *zimun* fundamentally changes the nature of the *brachos* being recited, namely, through *rabosie nevareich*. As a result of this change, if a woman were to be included in a *zimun*, it would be immediately recognizable that she was the cause of a mixed gender religious ritual, thereby transforming the act to one of immodesty. The Ran suggests that this ruling stands in contrast to our scenario of *mikra Megilla*. In regards to *mikra Megilla*, if a woman was counted in a *minyan* for the reading of the *Megilla*, no change would occur in the *brachos* on the reading of the *Megilla*. Because the *brachos* would remain static, it would not be recognizable that the woman created the mixed gender religious ritual and therefore, the situation would not be deemed immodest. The Ran concludes

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from his analyses that not only are women able to fulfill the obligation for a man of reading the *Megilla*, but they may also be counted in a *minyán* for reading the *Megilla*.

Similarly, Rashi (*Erechin* 3a s.v. *La'asuyai nashim*) comments that women are obligated to read the *Megilla* and further adds that women are able to read the *Megilla* for men, in order to discharge their obligation of *mikra Megilla*.

Despite the comments of Rashi and the Ran, when these *halachos* are codified in *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 689:2), there is no mention of women being included in a *minyán*. Further, the *Shulchan Aruch* states (ad loc) that a woman may not fulfill the obligation of a man to read the *Megilla*. The Rema there comments that if a woman were to read the *Megilla*, she would recite the *bracha* of “*lishmoa Megilla*”, to hear the *Megilla*, because women are not obligated in reading the *Megilla*.

R' Samuel ben Nathan Ha-Levi Kelin in his commentary on *Shulchan Aruch* titled *Machatzis Hashekel* (OC 689:7 s.v. *Shainah chiyeves*), asks why the *Shulchan Aruch* and Rema rule against the opinion of R' Yehoshua ben Levi, Rashi, and the Ran. In an attempt to answer his question, *Machatzis Hashekel* quotes the opinion of the *Bal Halachos Gedolos* (BHG) who disagrees with Rashi and the Ran and ruled that not only may a woman not fulfill the obligation of a man to read *Megilla*, but that women are not obligated to read the *Megilla* at all. The *Machatzis Hashekel* suggests that the rulings of the *Shulchan Aruch* and Rema might be based on the opinion of BHG. The *Machatzis Hashekel* asks what the basis is for BHG's opinion, and suggests a *Tosefta* in *Megilla* (2:4) as a possible source. The *Tosefta* states that women are not obligated in the reading of the *Megilla* and that the actual opinion of R' Yehoshua ben Levi was not that women are obligated in reading the *Megilla*, rather only in hearing the reading of the *Megilla*. *Machatzis Hashekel* suggests that Rashi might have had a variant version of the *Tosefta*, but that the correct text is the text quoted by BHG. Assuming the text of the *Tosefta* as quoted by BHG is correct, a woman would not be able to fulfill the obligation of a man to read the *Megilla*, because the woman herself is not obligated to do so. Further, if a woman were to read the *Megilla* for herself, she would have to make the *bracha* of “*lishmoa Megilla*”, as that is the extent of her obligation.

R' Yisrael Meir Kagan, in *Mishna Berura* 689:7, offers a similar analysis to the *Machatzis Hashekel* and adds that although women cannot fulfill the obligation of men to read the *Megilla*, a woman would be able to fulfill the obligation for another woman. The *Mishna Berura* (689:8) quotes the opinion of R' Avraham Danzig, the *Chayei Adam*, who rules, similar to the Rema, that if a woman were to read the *Megilla* on her own she would make the *bracha* of *lishmoa Megilla*.

Despite the analysis and explanation of the *Machatzis Hashekel*, one may still ask about the original ruling of R' Yehoshua ben Levi from the *gemara* in *Erichin*. Further, one can observe that the principle of “*af hein hayu b'oso ha'neis*” has been used in other instances to obligate women in time bound *mitzvos*, specifically those pertaining to Pesach and Chanuka.

To address these concerns, the Sukachuver Rebbe in his work *Avnei Nezer* (OC 511), suggests that one fulfills two distinct *mitzvos* through *mikra Megilla*, one when reading the *Megilla* and one when hearing the *Megilla* being read. The reader of the *Megilla* fulfills the Biblical commandment of *zechiras Amalek*, remembering Amalek, and also the commandment of *pirsumei nisa*, publicizing the Purim miracle. The listener to the *Megilla*, however, only fulfills the *mitzva* of *pirsumei nisa*. As a result, since women are not obligated in the *mitzva* of *zechiras Amalek*, but are obligated in the *mitzva* of *pirsumei nisa*, women would be obligated only to hear the *Megilla*, but not to actually read it. Therefore, a woman would not be able to read the *Megilla* for a man, because men are obligated in both the non-*persumei nisa* aspects of *Megilla*, the reading, and the *persumei nisa* aspects, the hearing.

This distinction is evident in other *mitzvos* of Purim as well. For instance, *Mishna Berura* 694:1 comments that women are obligated in *matanos la'evyonim*, gifts for the poor. Further, *Mishna Berura* 795:25 rules that women are obligated in *mishloach manos*, gifts to friends. *Mishna Berura* explains that “*af hein hayu b'oso haneis*” obligates women in the aforementioned *mitzvos*. I would suggest that the reason for a woman's obligation in the specific *mitzvos* of *matanos la'evyonim* and *mishloach manos* is that, in addition to the concept of “*af hein hayu b'oso haneis*,” the nature of these *mitzvos* are to help others celebrate the miracle of Purim. These *mitzvos* are in essence an extension of *persumei nisa*, which is the type of *mitzva* to which “*af hein hayu b'oso haneis*” obligates women.

A similar example of the concept of “*af hein hayu b'oso haneis*” only obligating women in the *persumei nisa* aspects of a *mitzva* is observed in *Hilchos Pesach*. During Pesach, women are obligated in the *mitzvos* of *matza*, *Haggada*, the four cups, and other seder rituals. I would suggest that the reason for this obligation is that these activities fulfill the commandment of “*higgadita l'vincha*,” teaching the events of the Exodus to the next generation. *Higgadita l'vincha* is ultimately a manifestation of *persumei nisa*, publicizing the Exodus miracle. Therefore, since the Jewish women were involved in the Exodus miracle, “*af hein hayu b'oso haneis*,” they would be obligated in the time-bound *mitzvos* of Pesach. However, the level of obligation would be limited to the *persumei nisa* aspects of Pesach.

The *Halachos* of Chanuka reflect a comparable distinction. *Mishna Berura* 675:3 quotes Responsa *Olas Shmuel* who rules that while women are not obligated to light the *Menora* on Chanuka, they are obligated in *re'ias haner*, seeing the candles. I believe this distinction can be explained through applying “*af hein hayu b'oso haneis*” to *perumei nisa*-based *mitzvos*. The *perumei nisa* of Chanuka is the light released by the Chanuka candles. As a result, women are obligated to experience lit candles, but not the time-bound commandment of actually lighting the candles.

If the above analysis is correct, I believe we can apply this distinction to the *mitzva* of *Seudas Purim*. In regards to *Seudas Purim*, *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 795:1-4) depicts two aspects of the Purim meal, the details of the time and types of food eaten at the meal, and the drinking of wine at the meal. *Shulchan Aruch* (795:2) states “*chayav inish levesumei bepuryah ad d'lo yadah bein arur Haman l'baruch Mordechai*”, one is obligated to drink wine until he cannot distinguish between the cursed Haman and the blessed Mordechai. *Biur Halacha* (ad loc s.v. *Chayav inish*) comments that the reason why there is an obligation to drink wine is because the main miracles of Purim took place through wine. Therefore, to be *mifarseim* the Purim miracles that happened through wine, we drink. As a result, one can conclude that drinking wine at the *Purim seuda* is a manifestation of *perumei nisa*. As such, while women would not be obligated in the specific details of the meal delineated in *Shulchan Aruch*, women would be obligated to drink wine.

The Haman Complex

RACHEL MARGOLIES



We've all witnessed or had the following experience: an amazing trip is planned, full of first class adventures and picturesque moments. Treats in hand, everyone is ready for the smooth and scenic drive heading home. A fun time was had by all. But wait, did the soda just spill all over his lap?? Did she just say the word she knows she's not supposed to say? Suddenly you hear, "**Mommyyyyyyyyyyyy this is the worst trip ever!!**" How does one tiny, insignificant detail have the power to become the only thing we remember of an experience, and ruin the happiness of our memory? Further, if everyone loves our idea, outfit, or class except for one critical person in the group, why is their voice the loudest in our minds?

Towards the middle of *Megillas Esther*, we find a very interesting group of *pesukim* that are the key to understanding Haman and his downfall. In 5:9-14 we read:

ויצא המן ביום ההוא שמח וטוב לב וכראות המן את מרדכי בשער המלך ולא קם ולא זע ממנו וימלא המן על מרדכי חמה. ויתאפק המן ויבוא אל ביתו וישלח ויבא את אהביו ואת זרש אשתו. ויספר להם המן את כבוד עשרו ורב בניו ואת כל אשר גדלו המלך ואת אשר נשאו על השרים ועבדי המלך. ויאמר המן אף לא הביאה אסתר המלכה עם המלך אל המשתה אשר עשתה כי אם אותי וגם למחר אני קרוא לה עם המלך. וכל זה איננו שוה לי בכל עת אשר אני ראה את מרדכי היהודי יושב בשער המלך. ותאמר לו זרש אשתו וכל אהביו יעשו עץ גבה חמשים אמה ובבקר אמר למלך ויתלו את מרדכי עליו ובא עם המלך אל המשתה שמח וייטב הדבר לפני המן ויעש העץ.

And Haman went out on that day, happy and with a cheerful heart, but when Haman saw Mordechai in the king's gate, and he neither rose nor stirred because of him, Haman was filled with wrath against Mordechai. But Haman restrained himself, and he came home, and he sent and brought his friends and Zeresh his wife. And Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches and the multitude of his sons, and all [the ways] that the king had

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promoted him and that he had exalted him over the princes and the king's servants. And Haman said, "Esther did not even bring [anyone] to the party that she made, except me, and tomorrow, too, I am invited to her with the king. But all this is worth nothing to me, every time I see Mordechai the Jew sitting in the king's gate." And Zeresh his wife and all his friends said, "Let them make a gallows fifty cubits high, and in the morning say to the king that they should hang Mordechai on it, and go to the king to the banquet joyfully." The matter pleased Haman, and he made the gallows.

Didn't we almost have it all

Here is Haman, at the height of his glory: second in command to the king, invited to multiple private parties with the king and his new queen, wealthy, and powerful. He leaves the first gala "*sameach v'tov lev*," happy. Yet, as he leaves the palace, he sees that Mordechai, the sad sackcloth-wearing Jew, will not bow down to him. In fact, according to the Ibn Ezra, he thinks Mordechai is sitting by the gate and refraining from bowing down specifically to bother and annoy him. He returns to his family full of anger at Mordechai, and begins recounting all of his wealth, honor and power. He concludes, though, that everything he has is worthless if he does not have Mordechai's subservience. In verse 3:2 we also see that all of the king's servants and those who were among the palace gates would recognize and bow down to Haman **except** for Mordechai. After seeing her husband so angry, Zeresh then devises a plan to hang Mordechai, and Haman is once again able to go to the next party with *simcha*.

If one could imagine the vast wealth that Haman possessed, this whole story would seem incredulous! The *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni* 284 on the *pasuk* from *Yirmiyahu* 9:22 points out that Hashem blessed Jews and non-Jews alike with the gifts of wisdom, wealth, and strength. For wealth, Haman is named as the one among the gentiles who was endowed with riches and yet was lost from this world. Not only was he financially wealthy, but the Ibn Ezra comments that the words "*rov banav*" in *pasuk* 5:11 are not referring to the many children that Haman had, but also to the greatness and achievements of his sons.¹

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz in his *sefer Sichos Mussar* poses the many questions that really jump out in these *pesukim*. He asks, what is unique about the pursuit of honor that makes it so elusive that Haman is not able to enjoy his successes unless

¹ He understands this from the fact that Haman is telling this fact over to his wife who obviously knows how many children they have, but may not know the extent of their prestige and honor.

all aspects of his life are perfect? Further, why would this small glitch invalidate all of the other honor and good that Haman has? Rav Shmuelevitz answers by explaining the nature of desiring honor as opposed to other desires. He says that with all other desires, there is a satisfaction and pleasure that is gained from acquiring what you seek. With honor, the sought-after is false and subjective, and can therefore never be truly fulfilled. There is nothing about being honored that can satisfy a person's desire to be honored because there is always more to be had. R' Shmuelevitz continues to explain why this experience also negates all previous gifts and honor. He uses the example of one who indulges in a large feast. Of course there may be delicacies missing, but that does not negate all that he has eaten! With honor, however, the entire goal of the desire is a figment of a person's imagination. It is not the honor itself that drives a person's desire, rather his or her imagination of how much more he or she can have. In that case, if the desire for honor is not filled beyond one's wildest dreams, it is worthless.²

Haman chose to focus on the one thing he didn't have and this led to his downfall.

C'mon... Just ONE more!!

The *gemara* in *Chulin* 139b asks: where do we see a sign of Haman in the Torah? The *gemara* answers³ that we see a hint in the words of Hashem to Adam in *Bereishis* when He says "**But from this** tree, you shall not eat." Adam was placed in the most beautiful and perfect world, a land of physical beauty and spiritual perfection. Adam had it all, but he did not have one tree. The same *mida* expressed by Haman, his inability to overlook the one thing he did not have, was present from day one (or day six, to be more precise).

We see this *mida* once again when Yaakov meets up with Eisav after years in the house of Lavan. At this point, each is wealthy in his own right. Yaakov attempts to appease Eisav with the many gifts he offers him.

ויאמר עשו יש לי רב אחי יהי לך אשר לך. ויאמר יעקב אל נא אם נא מצאתי חן
בעיניך ולקחת מנחתי מידי כי על כן ראיתי פניך כראת פני אלהים ותרצני. קח נא את
ברכתי אשר הבאת לך כי חנני אלהים וכי יש לי כל ויפצר בו ויקח.
And Esau said: 'I have a lot; my brother, let that which thou hast be thine.'

2 Rav Shlomo Wolbe in *Alei Shur* section 4 quotes the *Alter* of Slobodka explaining the importance and value of honor. Honor/*kavod* is essential to a human being's survival. The problem with honor arises when we depend on it from other people, instead of finding it within ourselves. When we don't know our own value and worth, we are completely dependent on how others define us.

המן מן התורה מנין? המן העץ 3

And Jacob said: 'Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found favour in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand; forasmuch as I have seen thy face, as one seeth the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me. Take, I pray thee, my gift that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.' And he urged him, and he took it. (Bereishis 33:9-11)

Eisav says “No thanks. I have a lot.”⁴ The *Kli Yakar* on the words “*yesh li rav*” explains that the attitude of a *rasha* towards their money and possessions is that they are always lacking something. They have **a lot** but not everything. The righteous are the opposite. They answer like Yaakov- “*yesh li kol*,” I have everything.⁵ I’m happy with what I have because I know that Hashem gave it to me; it must therefore be that I have everything I need to fulfill His will.⁶ In essence Yaakov was saying, “My possessions serve me; they enable me to do what I have to do. I do not serve them.”

When we look at what we have as enough to serve our purpose, and recognize who it is we are serving, we are rectifying the sin of *Adam HaRishon* and following in the ways of *Yaakov Avinu*.

If you wanna be happy for the rest of your life...

In his book *Happier: Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment*, Tal Ben Shahar explains this very concept.⁷

If we wanted to assess the worth of a business, we would use money as our means of measurement. We would calculate the dollar value of its assets and liabilities, profits and losses. Anything that could not be translated into monetary terms would not increase or decrease the value of the company. In this case—in measuring a company’s worth—money is the ultimate currency.

A human being, like a business, makes profits and suffers losses. For a human being, however, the ultimate currency is not money, nor is it any external

4 Rav Moshe Feinstein points out, in his *sefer Darash Moshe*, that Eisav’s attitude was that he was free to do as he pleased with all the money he had; he had ‘more than enough’ to waste away. There was no recognition of where the money came from or its purpose in what he said to Yaakov.

5 When Yaakov acknowledges that he has been given everything, he uses the word “*chanani*.” This word is used when we are given something for free, although we are undeserving, as a complete *chesed* from Hashem.

6 This does not mean one should not pray and even put in effort to achieve more or ask for more. However, whether you acquire what you are asking/working towards should not determine if you are happy with what you have.

7 Tal Ben-Shahar, born 1970, is a secular Israeli-American teacher and writer in the areas of positive psychology and leadership. As a lecturer at Harvard University, Ben-Shahar created the most popular course in Harvard’s history; Positive Psychology 1504.

measure, such as fame, fortune, or power. The ultimate currency for a human being is happiness.... In the same sense that assets are secondary to money in a business—in that their worth is evaluated in dollars and cents—fame and material wealth are secondary to happiness in our lives.

Money—beyond the bare minimum necessary for food and shelter (and I am not talking about caviar and castles)—is nothing more than a means to an end. Yet, so often we confuse means with ends and sacrifice happiness (end) for money (means).

He sums up his chapter on defining happiness and its purpose by asking if our focus is on accumulating money or appreciating money?

This idea brings us right back to where we started.

Haman was focused on accumulating more. If he couldn't have it all, he didn't have anything. Not only did he not acquire Mordechai's subservience, but he lost everything else he did have in his quest to get it.

During the month of *simcha*, we experience the peak on the day of Purim. The *Midrash in Mishlei 9* states that when *Mashiach* comes, the only *Yom Tov* that will be celebrated is Purim. Rabbi Abraham J. Twersky, in his book *Simcha: It's Not Just Happiness*, explains the true miracle of Purim and why it is even greater than the miracle of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. When Hashem took us out of *Mitzrayim*, all the miracles were supernatural and clearly by the Hand of God. On Purim, all the miracles were hidden and woven into a seemingly natural tapestry. The true miracle of Purim, he says, is the fact that even without seeing the Hand of Hashem clearly, we knew and acknowledged that He was the source of all that was being given to us. We appreciated what we were given and praised the Source that gave it to us. Out of this was born our national team name, the *Yehudim*, the appreciators. We are a people who appreciate everything we have and recognize that we do in fact have it all. We start our day with the morning blessings, appreciating each and every gift from our spine to our shoes. We appreciate and recognize God's Hand when we hear bad news just as we do when we hear good news. We do this because we know our worth and value. We do this because we know that we will not sacrifice our true happiness for the pursuit of one more person to honor us. We do this because we know, deep down that

ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר כן תהיה לנו.

*To the **Yehudim** there was light and **Happiness**, joy and honor. So will it be for us.*

Esther's Transformation

AVIGAIL MANHEIM



At the beginning of *Megillas Esther*, Esther docilely complies with whatever Mordechai tells her to do. By the end of the *Megilla*, however, Esther proactively hatches plans and instructs others to do certain actions. The obvious question one can ask is, what changed?

Many *meforshim* identify the turning point of Esther's development as her conversation with Mordechai when contemplating entering Achashveirosh's courtyard to plead on behalf of the Jews. The change in Esther's character is commonly attributed to her ability to listen to Mordechai's rebuke and internalize it. The outcome of the conversation, however, is not Esther simply complying with Mordechai's initial request to beg Achashveirosh to act, but rather her adopting a different strategy and inviting both Achashveirosh and Haman to a party. There is no later conversation between Mordechai and Esther in which he rebukes her for changing tactics. Seemingly, the initial conversation consisted of more than Mordechai simply offering Esther rebuke and her accepting it; it was instead a conversation that altered not only Esther's behavior, but Mordechai's perspective as well. What motivated these changes, and why are the changes so central to the *Megilla*?¹

The conversation between Mordechai and Esther opens with Mordechai telling Esther everything that has happened, and instructing her "... *lavo el hamelech l'hischanen lo ul'vakesh milfanav al ama*" (Esther 4:8), "to go to the king to entreat him and beseech him on behalf of her people." Her response is surprisingly out of character. Instead of her expected standard obedience, Esther sends back a message seemingly devoid of new information, repeating a fact that (as she states) everyone knows.

¹ This interpretation of the conversation between Mordechai and Esther is based on a series of shiurim about *Megillas Esther* given by Rav Matis Weinberg.

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כל עבדי המלך ועם מדינות המלך ידעים אשר כל איש ואשה אשר יבוא אל המלך אל החצר הפנימית אשר לא יקרא אחת דתו להמית לבד מאשר יושיט לו המלך את שרביט הזהב וחייה ואני לא נקראתי לבוא אל המלך זה שלושים יום.

“All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s states know, that any man or woman who comes to the king, to the inner courtyard, without being called, there is one law for him: to be put to death; only he to whom the king stretches out the golden scepter will live. And I have not been called to come to the king for the past thirty days.” (Esther 4:11)

What is the purpose of telling Mordechai this well-known fact? At closer inspection, it emerges that Esther is pointing out to Mordechai two essential points. First, she is explaining that what he is asking her to do is more than regular *hishtadlus*. *Hishtadlus* requires the action to be something that is reasonable, that under normal circumstances would be effective. Going to Achashveirosh without being called is unreasonable, and under normal circumstances would result in her being killed, depriving her of the opportunity to even present her case. Second, she is emphasizing a point of which Mordechai is well aware: the survival of the Jews cannot possibly be dependent on Achashveirosh deciding on a whim to extend his scepter! Mordechai’s request is not only dangerous and ineffective, but also unnecessary in light of Hashem’s promise to His nation.

It is not only the promises that Hashem made to his nation that makes relying on Achashveirosh seem unnecessary, though. When we say that “*Bereishis bara*” exists “*bishvil Yisrael shenikr’u reishis darko*,” (Rashi on *Bereishis* 1:1) we are stating that the existence of *Yisrael* is built into creation. In other words, Hashem created a world in which *Yisrael* will exist. That means that *Yisrael’s* existence does not depend on Hashem intervening in history to “course-correct,” but rather that regardless of which course history takes, *Yisrael* will survive. Amazingly, Hashem created a world open to self-expression, a world which Hashem purposely left unfinished, so as to allow it to continue developing with the limitation that, regardless of what would transpire over time, *Yisrael* would endure. Why, then, should Esther risk her life?

Mordechai’s response is harsh. Despite the rebuke in his words, however, he accedes to Esther’s point that regardless of her actions, the Jews will survive.

כי אם החרש תחרישי בעת הזאת רוח והצלה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר ואת ובית אביך תאבדו ומי יודע אם לעת כזאת הגעת למלכות.

For if you indeed keep silent at this time, relief and salvation will come to the Jews from another source, and you and your father’s household will perish.
(Esther 4:14)

Some *mefarshim* point to this *pasuk* as an example of a place in the *Megilla* where mentioning Hashem would have been natural, but is purposefully excluded. According to our understanding, however, Mordechai said relief and salvation will come from another source instead of saying from Hashem, because he was acknowledging that salvation is already pre-programmed into creation and does not require overt miraculous intervention.

Despite his overall agreement about the fact that her intervention was unneeded to save the Jewish people, Mordechai noted that it was not therefore meaningless. If Esther does not act, “*at u’beis avich tovaydu*,” “you and your father’s household will perish.” It is true that the Jews will survive—that is part of creation; in that case, though, Esther will have missed the opportunity to be the mechanism for their survival. Mordechai perceived in Esther’s initial response an implication that there might be a better opportunity to approach Achashveirosh sometime in the future. The 13th of Adar was almost a year away, so she logically planned to wait until the king called upon her. Mordechai rebuked Esther—there is no way to know that there will be a better opportunity in the future. It had been thirty days since Achashveirosh had last summoned Esther. In a year’s time, Esther may have lost favor with Achashveirosh altogether and no longer be queen. Mordechai was pointing out to Esther that opportunities must be capitalized upon while they exist.

In more general terms, Mordechai was pointing out a flaw in Esther’s perspective. By focusing on the ultimate outcome, Esther was implicitly diminishing the importance of her actions. This perspective was akin to Amalek’s philosophy that downplays the importance of personal choices, as they believe that everything in life is random. Mordechai took this philosophy and turned it on its head (*v’nahafoch hu*), by telling Esther that it is precisely because life is random that we are truly free to make our own decisions. It is not the situation that dictates our decisions, but rather our considerations. Thus, what we decide to do is our expression of self.

Esther recognized the necessity for all Jews to embrace the reality of personal free will, and internalize the fact that choices are a form of self-actualization that have implications in the immediate, while simultaneously linking one to the infinite. She therefore tells Mordechai to gather all the Jews “*v’tzumu alai*,” to “fast for me”. As we know from earlier in the *Megilla* (*Esther* 4:3), the Jews were already fasting and praying. Esther was asking them to shift their focus and pray not that they survive, but that she would be the mechanism to bring about their survival. Indeed, Esther makes going into Achashveirosh’s inner courtyard conditional on this fast. She wanted each and every Jew to recognize that although there are endless possibilities as to

how history will unfold, when presented with an opportunity to be part of the way *yichud Hashem* is expressed (i.e. be part of the plan for creation), the most personally meaningful thing someone can do is take that opportunity, connecting oneself to all of creation. Grasping opportunities is a personal choice of connecting to something meaningful.²

Once the Jews embraced this paradigm, it redefined their perspective on *Kaballas HaTorah*. When the Jews accepted the Torah at *Har Sinai*, the *gemara* (*Shabbos* 88a) states:

שכפה הקדוש ברוך הוא עליהם את ההר כגיגית, ואמר להם: אם אתם מקבלים
התורה – מוטב, ואם לאו – שם תהא קבורתכם.
*Hashem suspended the mountain over them like a vat, and said 'If you accept
the Torah – good, and if not - there will be your graves.'*³

At the time of *Matan Torah*, the centrality of the Torah to the existence of the world was so clear to the Jews that to not accept it was unthinkable. Simply presenting them with the opportunity to accept it was tantamount to coercion, since they understood that all of history up to that point was set up for the opportunity, and saw no alternative but to accept. Purim enabled the Jews to view receiving the Torah in a new light, allowing them to view the opportunity to fulfill the Torah as the greatest form of self-actualization, instead of compulsion. Torah and *mitzvos* were then able to be appreciated on a new level. “*La’yehudim haysa orah, v’simcha, v’sasson, viykar,*” “The Jews had light and happiness, and joy, and honor” (*Esther* 8:16). The *gemara* states that each noun in this *pasuk* is relating to an aspect of Torah and *mitzvos*. The *Sfas Emes* asks, if the verse refers to *mitzvos*, why does it not simply list them? He explains that each Jew’s perspective was redefined to the extent that they thought about and related to Torah as light, Yom Tov as happiness, *bris mila* as joy, and *tefilin* as honor.

2 Grasping opportunities should not be confused with acting rashly, however. Esther did not rush to make her plea immediately upon Achashveirosh extending his scepter, nor even at the first banquet. Once Esther took the initial step to act, she left herself and her plan open to adapt to the situation, as various possibilities of action and outcome existed. The *gemara* (*Megilla* 15b) asks, “What did Esther see that she invited Haman?” (i.e. What was Esther’s plan in inviting Achashveirosh and Haman to a party?) Twelve different answers are suggested. After this discussion one of the *Tana’im* meets *Eliyahu HaNavi* and asks, “Which opinion was correct? What was Esther thinking?” *Eliyahu HaNavi* answers, “All of them!” With the understanding that she was able to capitalize on her opportunity, Esther was able to utilize the uncertainty to her advantage, responding to the situation at hand as it developed, without attempting to force a quick resolution.

3 See Rabbi Yaakov Siegel’s article in *Nitzachon* volume 2:2 for a novel approach to understanding this *gemara*.

On Purim, in the spirit of *v'nahafoch hu*, we embrace the randomness that Amalek generally claims as its ally, and proclaim that it is precisely because life is random, and because our choices are not dictated by Hashem, that our personal decisions are meaningful. When faced with an opportunity, we should keep in mind Mordechai's words, "*u'mi yodea im la'es kazos higa'at lamalchus?*" Who knows if for a time like this you were put in your situation? By deciding to act, you are deciding to take part in creation; by molding creation, you connect yourself to eternity. May we all use Purim to re-prioritize, and appreciate that the choices we make are what create ourselves.



Mazel, Wealth, and the Power to Change it All

DANIEL MARGOLIES



Most Orthodox Jews grow up to the familiar chant of “*mishe mishe mishe mishe... ..mishenichnas Adar marbin b’simcha*” joyously heralding them into the month of Adar. As uplifting as this song may be, the question must be asked: why is Adar a happier month than any other month? Granted, the *neis* of Purim occurred in Adar, but Kislev and Nisan contain the *nissim* of Chanuka and *krias Yam Suf*, respectively, yet we don’t sing “*mishenichnas Kislev marbin b’simcha*.” In addition, the *gemara* states (*Taanis* 29a):

אמר רב יהודה בריה דרב שמואל בר שילת משמיה דרב: כשם שמשנכנס אב ממעטין בשמחה - כך משנכנס אדר מרבין בשמחה, אמר רב פפא: הלכך, בר ישראל דאית ליה דינא בהדי נכרי - לישתמיט מיניה באב דריע מזליה, ולימצו נפשיה באדר דבריא מזליה.
Rav Yehudah the son of Rav Shmuel bar Shilas said in the name of Rav: Just as when Av begins we curtail joy, so too when Adar begins we increase joy.¹ Rav Pappa said: therefore, a Jew who has a lawsuit with a gentile should avoid him during the month of Av when [a Jew’s] mazel is bad and should make himself available during the month of Adar when his mazel is good.²

At first glance, upon analyzing this *gemara*, it seems that Rav Pappa is teaching us a useful strategy: if you want to win your court case, make sure to conduct it in

1 Rashi states that the reason that joy increases in Adar is because Adar ushers in the time during which the miracles of Purim and Pesach (in the following month of Nissan) occurred to the Jewish people.

2 Regarding this, the Maharsha states even though the *gemara* (*Shabbos* 156a) says that Jews are not dominated by *mazel*, nevertheless the *gemara* (*Taanis* 29a) says that Hashem set up the world in such a way that good things are brought to pass on an auspicious day, and bad things on an ominous day. Since the whole month of Adar is an auspicious month, it is therefore a time when Hashem brings good to his people and therefore a time when a Jew should try and have his court case tried.

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Adar when your *mazel* is good. However, when analyzed more carefully, it becomes apparent that Rav Pappa is also teaching us a much deeper lesson. By using the word “therefore,” Rav Pappa is connecting the concepts of the increased *simcha* of Adar to the improved *mazel* that a specific person experiences during Adar. Furthermore, the word “therefore” is not simply implying a mere connection between these two concepts, but seems to be teaching us that a person’s improved *mazel* in Adar is actually dependent on *simcha*. In other words, Rav Pappa is teaching us that the reason why a person’s *mazel* improves in Adar is because his or her *simcha* has increased. The obvious question is, why does increased *simcha* improve a person’s *mazel*? To answer this question, let’s first try and understand from where true *simcha* stems.

To understand the cause of true *simcha*, one does not need to visit the self-help aisle of Barnes and Noble; rather, look to our own Torah. In his commentary on *Mishlei* (17:30), the *Metzudas Dovid* teaches us a beautiful lesson, “There is no joy greater than the resolution of doubts.” Every one of us can look back at our lives and remember a time when we were in a state of confusion or doubt, as well as the resulting joy we experienced once we attained clarity. Sometimes the doubt pertained to our material possessions, such as lack of clarity about which job to take or if we were overpaying for the purchase of a house. At other times, the doubt may have involved our health, such as not knowing the best course of treatment for an illness, *chas v’shalom*. It may even concern our children, such as not knowing the best yeshiva in which to enroll them. Regardless of the exact nature of the doubt, each causes us to suffer until we are granted the clarity to have the doubt resolved. When this clarity does arrive, the joy that is experienced is directly proportional to the suffering endured. In cases of extreme doubt, the joy of resolution can be overwhelming.

Possibly the single greatest doubt that we as humans have, one that could be termed the “*av*” of all doubts, is whether our lives are being guided by a higher Power, or whether the events that affect us are due to mere cause and effect (called *mikre*). This doubt constantly gnaws at us and leaves us with little peace, seemingly begging us to take steps towards its resolution. This doubt becomes further compounded when we see the wicked prosper and righteous suffer. We witness this injustice and question how any benevolent guiding force could let this happen. On the contrary, the more logical explanation seems to be that *mikre* (natural cause and effect) is the true governing force of the world. Further blackening the situation is that when facing our mortality, we succumb to the notion that it is not only regarding the governance of this world that our doubts hold sway, but also regarding our state of being in the hereafter. Upon exiting this world, are we going to simply evaporate into some consciousnessless void,

or is there another world waiting for us in which we can live on? And assuming there is another world, will our arrival there be marked by the loving embrace of our True Father, or rather the cruel clutches of some vengeful spirit? These doubts vex the spirit and are an essential aspect of what is coined “the human condition.”

However, Hashem, in His mercy, has bestowed upon His nation a tool with which to escape from the crushing burden of our doubts. This tool is called *emuna*, or faith. Where doubt says “Life is nothing more than meaningless suffering,” *emuna* says “Everything has meaning and purpose - including suffering.” Where doubt says “nothing awaits us after we leave this world except for the dark abyss,” *emuna* says “this world is merely a corridor to *olam haba* (*Pirkei Avos* 4:12).” Doubt arrogantly proclaims the truth to be impossible to discern, and the proper ways of conducting ourselves is beyond our grasp. *Emuna* teaches that Torah was given to us as a torch to cast light upon the murky corners of ethical living, while promising us true life as long as we cling to its teachings (“*Eitz chaim hi lamachazikim ba*”). *Emuna* is the antidote to the greatest doubt of all - the doubt of the Creator’s providence – and therefore has the potential to bring us to the highest level of joy, for there is no pleasure greater than the resolution of doubts.

The *Bnei Yissaschar* (*Maamrei Chodesh Adar, Aleph*) has a beautiful teaching in which he explains how the concept of *emuna* intimately relates to month of Adar. *Chazal* (*Beitza* 15b) state,

הרוצה שיתקיימו נכסיו יטע בהן אדר.

If someone wants his properties to last, he should plant in them an ‘eder’.

The simple explanation of this statement is that the word “*eder*” is referring to a type of tree called an “*eder*” tree.³ The teaching thus means that if a person wants his property to last, he should plant an *eder* tree in them. The *Bnei Yissaschar*, however, approaches this statement of *Chazal* metaphorically. He explains that since “*eder*” and “*Adar*” are spelled the same way in Hebrew (אדר), this teaching could also be read as referring to “*Adar*” and thus read as follows: “If someone wants his properties to last, he should implant in them an *Adar*.”⁴ But what exactly does this mean? How can the month *Adar* be implanted in someone’s properties?

3 See Rashi there for an explanation as to why an “*eder*” tree will ensure that his property will last.

4 The *Bnei Yissaschar* is of the viewpoint that some of *Chazal*’s statements can be interpreted on both a literal and non-literal level. The non-literal interpretation, or *drush*, can be extricated in a method similar to that employed by *Chazal* to interpret various *pesukim*. Apparently, the idea that *maamrei Chazal* can be interpreted in a non-literal manner is not confined to *Chassidic* thought, as the *Meiri* also gives a non-literal interpretation of this very same *maamar* (see *Meiri*).

The *Bnei Yissaschar* answers as follows: We know that in the month of Nisan, Hashem performed many open miracles, such as *makas bechoros* and the splitting of the sea. It was clear to anyone who witnessed these miracles that they could not have occurred if not for Hashem's direct intervention. More specifically, these open miracles revealed that Hashem can rearrange the order of the stars as He wishes, thereby changing the natural order of the world.⁵ However, while the world at that point believed that Hashem could occasionally intervene to perform miracles, it was still not apparent that Hashem chooses to actively guide even the daily natural occurrences, or what we call "nature." Many people still thought that Hashem gives the power to guide nature to the "*mazalos*" (constellations), and only occasionally intervenes by rearranging these *mazalos*, thereby resulting in the change of nature that we call an open *neis*. However, except for these rare occurrences, Hashem was out of the picture, letting the *mazalos*, or the "laws of nature," guide the world.

It was during the month of Adar that this common misbelief was dispelled. In Adar, the miracle of Purim occurred whereby the entire Jewish people was miraculously saved without any change in the laws of nature. Unlike in Nisan, the Purim saga contained no open miracles, yet because the magnitude of what had occurred was such that it defied all odds, mankind was compelled to admit that the Purim miracle was only possible due to Hashem's direct guidance. A good way to think about this is to picture someone who wins the Powerball a hundred times in a row. Technically speaking, it's perfectly within the realm of nature for this to occur since no laws of nature were broken. However, the odds of this occurring are so astronomically slim that people would have difficulty rationalizing it as a mere coincidence. Such is the case regarding the miracles that occurred in Adar. Even though everything that occurred was technically in accordance with the laws of nature, nevertheless, for the myriad circumstances to come together as they did in order to enable the Purim miracle to occur, it was obvious to everyone that the salvation stemmed directly from Hashem. This hidden miracle, cloaked in nature, shattered the common belief that Hashem only intervenes in the world to perform open miracles and otherwise leaves the world to run under the power of the *mazalos*. This time, the whole world saw that Hashem is the force behind all that happens, controlling every minute detail of the universe, even nature, on a constant basis.

The *Bnei Yissaschar* continues: When someone comes to this level of realization that Hashem is in control of every detail of nature, the next logical step is to conclude

⁵ See Ramchal, *Derech Hashem*, Chapter 7, for an explanation of how Hashem uses the stars to influence nature.

that surely a person's wealth and property is also under His influence and control. This person can no longer say *kochi v'otzem yadi asa li es hachayil ha'ze*, my power and the strength of my hand produced this wealth for me. Rather, they now know in their heart that Hashem is the one who gives them the power and ability to amass wealth, and without Hashem's help it would be impossible to achieve anything.⁶ The *Bnei Yissaschar* goes so far as to say that this person will even realize that since Hashem is in control of his or her *parnassa*; excessive efforts to achieve even more *parnassa* will not be effective at all.⁷

It can now be understood what *Chazal* meant when they stated that “someone who wants their properties to last should implant Adar in them.” *Chazal* is teaching us that the best way to ensure that our *parnassa* thrives is to implant the *emuna* that was achieved in Adar into it. In other words, we should recognize that Hashem fully controls every detail of our business, just like He controls every detail of nature. This recognition applies the high level of *emuna* that was initially obtained by our ancestors in Adar into our business affairs, thus “implanting Adar in them”. The *Bnei Yissaschar* further states that when a person engages in their business transactions with this high level of *emuna*, they will surely increase their chances of success.

Let us now take a deeper look at how the concept of *emuna* plays a pivotal role in a person's chances for success, beginning with a look at the *Chovos Halevavos*. The *Chovos Halevavos* states (*Shaar Habitachon*) that Hashem gives a person over to the forces that he puts his faith in. This means that when someone puts their faith in something other than Hashem to provide them with their *parnassa*, Hashem removes His providence from them and allows whatever or whoever they are putting their faith in rule over them. However, when someone places their faith in Hashem, then

6 When people realize that Hashem is in control of every minute detail in the universe, then they realize that not only is the ability to amass wealth (which takes tremendous strength, courage, and *mazel*) from Hashem, but also the initial business idea that brought them the wealth. Unfortunately, many wealthy people who have experienced tremendous *hashgacha* in their path to success take full credit for their own success, even when their success came in the face of astronomical odds.

7 See *Chovos Halevavos, Shaar Habitachon*, where the *mechaber* speaks about this idea at length. To quote one segment: “Other advantages (of having *bitachon* in Hashem) are emancipation of soul and body from wearying occupation, and from professions that exhaust the body; and avoidance of service of kings [enforcement of] their laws, and the oppression of their subjects. One who trusts in God chooses a source of livelihood that offers him leisure for reflection, is most conducive to fulfilling his religious duties, and is in harmony with his beliefs. For practical means will not in the slightest degree either increase one's portion or detract from it, unless it is by God's decree, as it says: ‘For not from the east or from the west, and not from the wilderness is one lifted up. But it is God Who judges, bringing down one and lifting another’ (ibid. 75:7-8); ‘He makes me lie down in green pastures, He guides me beside calm waters’ (ibid. 23:3).”

Hashem himself rules over them, and no other powers can touch even a hairsbreadth of what Hashem decreed they should have.⁸

The *Ohr Gedaliyahu* explains this idea beautifully:

Hakadosh Baruch Hu arranged the world so that it runs according to the rules of cause and effect, and it appears to man that the world is being guided solely through these causes; it is therefore possible to attribute everything that exists in the world to the laws of nature and these causes. Man (incorrectly) thinks that his main task is to guard himself from those causes which he thinks are going to harm him, and to attach himself to those causes which appear in his eyes to bring him good. (Furthermore), man can attach himself to this system of providence, so that if he thinks that everything is dependent on causes and that his primary task in life is to strive to ensure that the causes in his life are good, then everything (in his life) will be guided according to this system of providence, which is the system of cause and effect. (The reason Hashem lets this system of providence rule over this person is) because Hashem arranged His system of providence in such a way so that if a person believes that things happen on their own, (without His involvement), then that person will be subjugated to that system of providence (where things happen solely due to cause and effect without Hashem's guidance)... However, it's possible that this person can see the (true) inner essence, the nekuda hapenimis, which is that Hashem is the (root) cause of all the causes, and (therefore) everything that exists is (only) through the word of Hashem who gives life to everything. And when this person meditates upon everything that happens in the world and then understands that Hashem (is the One who is causing everything to happen), he is in turn guided by Hashem with a higher system of divine providence, which we call "individual providence" (hashgacha pratis). This unique and individualized providence (allows him to transcend) the laws of nature and the laws of cause and effect. (The reason for this is because) according the degree that a person believes that Hashem is guiding him, that is the degree that Hashem that will actually guide him. But if chas v'shalom a person believes that everything that

⁸ It is similarly stated in *sefer Rav Yeivi* (Tehillim 14) that *parnassa* comes to a person solely through the merit of that person's *bitachon*; therefore, a person can actually impede his own *parnassa chas v'shalom* if he fails to recognize that Hashem is in full control of it.

occurs in the world is due to happenstance, then (Hashem will remove His providence from that person, and everything that happens to that person) will be due to happenstance.

In Adar, a level of *emuna* was attained that was unparalleled to what had been achieved beforehand. It was a level where everyone recognized that Hashem was in constant control of every detail of creation, even the things that are described as “the laws of nature.” Since this *emuna* was achieved in Adar, Adar would forever be infused with this high level of *emuna* and would always be a time in which this level of *emuna* could be tapped into and from which it could be drawn from.⁹ In accordance with what was said above, wherever there is *emuna* there is *simcha* as well, because “there is no joy greater than the resolution of doubts.” The greatest doubt of all is whether Hashem really controls every detail of our lives. In Adar, because of the miracle of Purim, this doubt was removed through the power of *emuna*. The result was tremendous *simcha* which infuses Adar until today. This explains the uniquely high level of *simcha* that we see in Adar, to the degree that the *gemara* states: “When Adar begins, joy increases.”

Based on everything we have learned above, I would like to propose an answer to our original question regarding how *simcha* can improve a person’s *mazel*. If one wants to create a litmus test of whether a Jew has achieved the highest level of *emuna* whereby he sees Hashem guiding every detail of creation, the test would be very simple: Just look to see whether that Jew is *b’simcha*. If a Jew has truly achieved this high level of *emuna*, then he will perforce be *b’simcha*, in keeping with the principle of “There is no joy like the resolution of doubts.” Therefore, when the *gemara* implies that *simcha* causes an improvement of *mazel*, it doesn’t mean that the feeling of *simcha* per se is what causes improved *mazel*, rather it’s the underlying cause of that *simcha*.¹⁰ Therefore, the *gemara* is really teaching us the following lesson: When a person has achieved a high level of *emuna*, which is indicated by his being *b’simcha*, this perforce causes his *mazel* to improve. This is in accordance with what we saw above, that when people have complete *emuna* in Hashem, Hashem guides them with His own individual providence (*hashgacha pratis*), thereby raising that person above

⁹ This is in accordance with the teaching of Rav Aryeh Leib Shapiro in his *sefer Chazon Lamoed*. See there p.25.

¹⁰ As a soft proof for this, if we were to say that *simcha* itself always results in increased *mazel*, then would this also apply to the *simcha* felt for the wrong reasons, such as when doing an *aveira chas v’shalom*? Obviously, this would be hard to accept. Therefore, it is more likely that the *simcha* referred to here is not the feeling of *simcha* per se, but rather the cause of the *simcha*, which is the attainment of a high level of *emuna*.

the dominion of cause and effect.¹¹ Furthermore, it is in Adar that this level of *emuna* is most easily accessed, as evidenced by our ancestors' ability to access this level of *emuna* through the *nissim* of Adar.¹²

In a similar vein, *Tosafos* in *gemara Shabbos* 156a states that a person can change his or her *mazel* with a *zchus gadol*. In accordance with what we have said, the high level of *emuna* achieved during Adar, as evidenced by the feeling of *simcha*, could be the *zchus gadol* that improves a person's *mazel* during this month. *B'ezras Hashem*, through the *zchus gadol* of attaining a high level of *emuna*, to the point where we actually feel *simcha*, we will be *zoche* to a good *mazel* - not only in Adar, but throughout the whole year.

11 As stated above, Hashem gives a person over to the forces in which he puts his faith. If a person believes that his life is being guided only by the laws of nature, then Hashem removes His providence from that person and allows that person to be ruled over by the rules of nature. Conversely, when a person believes that Hashem is in control, Hashem Himself rules over that person, and he or she lives "above the laws of nature."

12 Judaism does not view the calendar as linear, but rather as a circle where the energy and *kedusha* of the *zman* repeats itself year after year, allowing us to tap into its unique energy on a yearly basis. (Some say that it's more accurately a spiral, whose longitudinal points overlap at the same latitude, but at continuously higher levels. Similarly, the *zmanim* repeat themselves, but at a higher level than than the previous year). However, the miracle of Purim did not cause that energy, rather it was an expression of that energy. Therefore, the miracle of Purim occurred because there was a special energy that was built into the calendar during that time. This energy is forever fixated in the month of Adar, and a Jew can tap into every year. See *Ben Yehoyada* (*Shabbos* 24) who states that *Chazal* had to wait until the next year to institute Purim to test whether that special energy was still there, and therefore a permanent fixture in the calendar.

Achashveirosh: Clueless Figurehead and Rash Actor, or Machiavellian Political Mastermind?

DANIEL WIESEL



The story of Purim as related in *Megillas Esther* is one of Machiavellian politics, back-room dealings, decisive action in the face of mortal danger, and a roller-coaster ride encompassing an unknown's rise to power and abrupt downfall. One individual stands at the center of this story, and yet seems separate and apart from the actual goings-on, at best a passive participant. In fact, although he is referenced more than 180 times in *Megillas Esther*, King Achashveirosh takes his own initiative only three times over the course of events described: he raises Haman to prime minister, gives Haman's estate to Esther, and institutes a tax on the land.

Achashveirosh is portrayed as a rash actor, killing Vashti for refusing to show up at his party. He cannot discern Esther's Jewish heritage even though she was taken from the house of Mordechai, the last remaining member of the *Anshei Kneses Hagedola* and leader of the Jewish people. His ignorance continues even though Mordechai spent an inordinate amount of time just outside the palace gates during the pageant to pick a successor to Vashti, and was in communication with Esther while sitting vigil wearing sackcloth over the impending decimation of the Jewish people. Achashveirosh is also rash in cheerfully relinquishing control of his signet ring – and with it essentially all legislative power – to Haman, only retrieving it when Haman is dispatched. Even then, King Achashveirosh immediately gives the ring and its legislative power to Esther and Mordechai!

Yet, the *gemara* in *Maseches Megilla* brings a *machlokes* between Rav and Shmuel whether King Achashveirosh was clever or foolish:

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רב ושמואל חד אמר מלך פיקח היה וחד אמר מלך טיפש היה. מאן דאמר מלך פיקח היה, שפיר עבד דקריב רחיקא ברישא, דבני מאתיה כל אימת דבעי מפייס להו. ומאן דאמר טיפש היה, יבעידא ליה לקרובי בני מאתיה ברישא דאי מרדו ביה הנך הני הוו קיימי בהדיה.

Rav and Shmuel [argued], one said [Achashveirosh] was clever and one said he was foolish. The one who said he was a clever king said that he did well in entertaining his distant subjects first, because he could win over the inhabitants of his own city any time he wished. The one who held that he was foolish says that he ought to have entertained the inhabitants of his city first, so that if the others rebelled against him, these would have supported him. (Megilla 12a)

According to the clearly legitimate position that Achashveirosh was actually a clever king, how can one explain his many shortcomings described throughout *Megillas Esther*?

Achashveirosh the Rash Actor

There are a two of examples of Achashveirosh acting in anger without stopping to think of the consequences of his actions.

ותמאן המלכה ושתי לבוא בדבר המלך אשר ביד הסריסים ויקצף המלך מאד וחמתו בערה בו. אחר הדברים האלה כשך חמת המלך אחשוורוש זכר את ושתי ואת אשר עשתה ואת אשר נגזר עליה.

But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by the chamberlains; therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him. After these things, when the wrath of King Achashveirosh was assuaged, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her. (Esther 1:12,2:1)

Although *Megillas Esther* does not explicitly describe what happened, it is understood that Vashti was killed as a direct result of the king's anger at her refusal to appear before him during the feast.

והמלך קם בחמתו ממשטה היין... ויתלו את המן על העץ אשר הכין למרדכי וחמת המלך שכבה.

And the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine... So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordechai. Then was the king's wrath assuaged. (Esther 7:7,10)

When Esther finally reveals her heritage and identifies Haman as her enemy, Achashveirosh flies out of the room in a rage. Esther originally begged for relief from Haman's decree. It was not necessary for Achashveirosh to kill Haman, but it is only Haman's death that calms the king's anger. It is only in the *pesukim* that follow, after Achashveirosh calms down, that Esther further begs for the ability to right Haman's wrong and reverse the decree against the Jewish people.

Achashveirosh Unaware and Incapable

Achashveirosh ruled over 127 provinces, yet he seems unaware of much of the basic political landscape in his capital Shushan. First, he did not know that Mordechai, the leader of the Jewish people in their exile, lived in Shushan, nor did he realize the relationship between Mordechai and Esther.

איש יהודי היה בשושן הבירה ושמׁו מרדכי בן יאיר בן שמעי בן קיש איש ימיני. אשר הגלה מירושלים עם הגלה אשר הגלתה עם יכניה מלך יהודה אשר הגלה נבוכדנאצר מלך בבל.

There was a certain Jew in Shushan the castle, whose name was Mordechai the son of Yair the son of Shimei the son of Kish, a Benjamite, who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives that had been carried away with Yechoniah king of Yehuda, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. (Esther 2:5-6)

ובכל יום ויום מרדכי מתהלך לפני חצר בית הנשים לדעת את שלום אסתר ומה יעשה בה.

And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what would become of her. (Esther 2:11)

ובהקבץ בתולות שנית ומרדכי ישב בשער המלך... בימים ההם ומרדכי ישב בשער המלך קצף בגתן ותרש שני סריסי המלך משמרי הסף ויבקשו לשלח יד במלך אחשורש. ויודע הדבר למרדכי ויגד לאסתר המלכה ותאמר אסתר למלך בשם מרדכי. ויבקש הדבר וימצא ויתלו שניהם על עץ ויכתב בספר דברי הימים לפני המלך.

And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, and Mordechai sat in the king's gate... in those days, while Mordechai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigsan and Seresh, of those that kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hands on the King Achashveirosh. And the thing became known to Mordechai, who told it unto Esther the queen; and Esther told the king thereof in Mordechai's name. And when inquisition was made of the matter, and it was found to

be so, they were both hanged on a tree; and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king. (Esther 2:19, 21-23)

Achashveirosh was married to Belshazzar's daughter Vashti, and according to some, the feast he threw was a celebratory feast commemorating the expiration of the prophecy of a seventy-year exile of the Jewish people. And yet, he does not know of Mordechai's stature. He is also not able to connect that Mordechai, the man who sits outside the palace gates in sackcloth, is the same man as he who has been looking out for his wife Esther since she was taken, nor the same man whom Esther credited with saving his life.

Similarly, Achashveirosh seems unaware of the goings-on in his own palace. Guards conspire against him, Mordechai and Esther are able to carry on a conversation through Hasach without his knowledge, and, aside from servants, he has few recorded interactions with other people. He speaks to Haman a few times and entirely ignores Esther until she enters his inner court without prior permission. Achashveirosh seems to be purposefully depicted as separate and apart from the day-to-day activities in the palace and the city of Shushan.

Finally, Achashveirosh seems entirely unable to act on his own volition, instead relying on the advice of others. Early in *Megillas Esther*, Achashveirosh relies on the advice of Memuchan to dispatch Vashti and enact a decree empowering the men of his kingdom with domain and control over their wives.

ויאמר המלך לחכמים ידעי העתים כי כן דבר המלך לפני כל ידעי דת ודין. והקרב אליו כרשנא שתר אדמתא תרשיש מרס מרסנא ממוכן שבעת שרי פרס ומדי ראי פני המלך הישבים ראשנה במלכות. כדת מה לעשות במלכה ושתי ... ויאמר מומכן [ממוכן] לפני המלך והשרים ... אם על המלך טוב יצא דבר מלכות מלפניו ויכתב בדתי פרס ומדי ולא יעבור ... וייטב הדבר בעיני המלך והשרים ויעש המלך כדבר ממוכן.

Then the king said to the wise men, who knew the times—for so was the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgment; and the next unto him was Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat the first in the kingdom: 'What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law?' And Memucan answered before the king and the princes: ... If it please the king, let there go forth a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, ... And the word pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan. (Esther 1:13-21)

In the same vein, Achashveirosh ceded legislative control entirely by giving Haman his signet ring. As is hinted earlier in *Megillas Esther* and later stated outright, the law of the land was that a king's decree could not be rescinded. Haman's legislative actions were permanent, and the only thing that even the king could do to counter a prior decree was to make a second decree allowing the Jews to defend themselves.

ואתם כתבו על היהודים כטוב בעיניכם בשם המלך וחמתו בטבעת המלך כי כתב
אשר נכתב בשם המלך ונחתום בטבעת המלך אין להשיב.

Write also concerning the Jews, as you like, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring; for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse. (Esther 8:8)

A careful reading of the *pesukim* describing Haman's decree makes it clear that Achashveirosh did not even know the contents of the letters sent in his name. Haman, using the legislative power of the king's signet ring, dictated the decree and signed and sealed it in the name of the king. Achashveirosh is nowhere to be found once he relinquishes control of the ring.

ויקראו ספרי המלך בחדש הראשון בשלושה עשר יום בו ויכתב ככל אשר צוה המן
אל אחשדרפני המלך ואל הפחות אשר על מדינה ומדינה ואל שרי עם ועם מדינה
ומדינה ככתבה ועם ועם כלשונו בשם המלך אחשורש נכתב ונחתם בטבעת המלך.
Then were the king's scribes called in the first month, on the thirteenth day thereof, and there was written, according to all that Haman commanded, unto the king's satraps, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the princes of every people; to every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of King Achashveirosh was it written, and it was sealed with the king's ring. (Esther 3:12)

Perhaps the most perplexing *pasuk* in *Megillas Esther* highlights the fact that Achashveirosh did not know what was happening in his own kingdom:

ויאמר המלך אחשורש ויאמר לאסתר המלכה מי הוא זה ואי זה הוא אשר מלאו
לבו לעשות כן.

Then spoke the king Ahasuerus and said unto Esther the queen: 'Who is he, and where is he, that does presume in his heart to do so? (Esther 7:5)

Everything is laid out clearly for Achashveirosh, yet he cannot put the pieces together on his own to identify Haman and his decree as the source of Esther's distress.

How could he not remember his conversation with Haman, the decree calling for the destruction of the Jews, Mordechai's nation? Either it was so outlandish a possibility that Esther was Jewish that it never even dawned on Achashveirosh, or he was grossly incapable and truly caught unaware of both Haman's decree and Esther's Jewish heritage. How else is it possible to explain why he flew into a rage upon hearing that Haman's decree applied to Esther and her people?

Achashveirosh as a Political Mastermind

The Malbim on Megillas Esther has an overarching explanation for Achashveirosh's actions that puts everything into a beautifully clear perspective. He explains that Achashveirosh was a usurper of the throne of Babylon attempting to consolidate power over the newly-unified kingdom of Persia and Media. Megillas Esther begins by describing Achashveirosh as the ruler over 127 provinces because his primary focus was attempting to consolidate power and rule over all 127 provinces. Achashveirosh married Vashti to gain the throne. However, to assert his own power and control, he needed to be seen as stronger and more powerful than the Babylonian dynasty of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. Additionally, he had to rule over a kingdom that stretched far beyond what a centralized government could control. It would have been impossible to rule both Hodu and Kush, provinces on opposite sides of the then-known world, from the capitol. Achashveirosh saw that the only way to effectively control such a vast area was to cede control to local authorities and to be seen as "above" the day-to-day governance of local issues.

Vashti's refusal to appear before Achashveirosh presented the opportunity to accomplish both of these goals at once. Removing Vashti allowed him to move beyond the Babylonian dynasty he had usurped to become king. Further, by calling for and embracing the advice of princes of Persia and Media, he allowed them to take responsibility while still pledging fealty to the king. The decree dispatched after the incident with Vashti was part of a greater plan to give control and power to the locals of each province.

In the same vein, Achashveirosh purposefully does not choose a wife of royal or even important lineage to replace Vashti. Instead of marrying someone with whom he could gain a strategic advantage – such as an alliance with Belshazzar's rivals or a woman of Median royalty – he chooses to hold a beauty pageant from among all of the women in the kingdom, and picks a girl who refuses to reveal anything about her past to be the new queen!

Achashveirosh was implementing his plan for political change when he gave

Haman his signet ring. By relinquishing control to Haman, Achashveirosh allowed Haman to take responsibility while still demanding fealty from Haman. Haman's decree was the extreme result of abdicating his own responsibility, but it fits within the narrative of what Achashveirosh was trying to accomplish. Achashveirosh never explicitly endorses Haman's desire to destroy the Jewish people; he simply "gives the people" to Haman to do with as he pleases while at the same time putting Haman in his debt by not demanding the silver Haman promised.

אם על המלך טוב יכתב לאבדם ... ויאמר המלך להמן הכסף נתון לך והעם לעשות
בו כטוב בעיניך.

If it please the king, let it be written that they be destroyed ... And the king said unto Haman: The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee. (Esther 3:9,11)

Looking at the story of *Megillas Esther* from the perspective of Achashveirosh is also important.¹ Hindsight allows us to connect the seemingly unrelated events that occurred over the course of nine years of Achashveirosh's rule to present the story of the salvation of the Jewish people. However, it is entirely plausible that Achashveirosh never knew about the connection between Mordechai and Esther. By analogy, there is no reason to assume that the President of the United States has detailed dossiers of the people squatting outside the White House. Furthermore, notwithstanding his interest in Esther's heritage during and immediately after the pageant, Achashveirosh moves on to other things and seems to lose interest in Esther entirely. When Mordechai asks Esther to intercede on behalf of the Jewish people, she tells him that she hasn't been called to the king in more than thirty days. Finally, Achashveirosh cannot be faulted for not knowing about secret messages passed between Esther and Mordechai by a servant administering to the queen.

There is one passage in *Megillas Esther* that, as explained by the *Malbim*, reads as a terrific insight into Achashveirosh and the possibility that he was far more clever than he is described:

ויבקש הדבר וימצא ויתלו שניהם על עץ ויכתב בספר דברי הימים לפני המלך.

¹ I want to thank Rabbi Berel Weisbord, *Mashiach* of Yeshivas Ner Yisrael, for providing the insight that connections and relationships that may seem obvious to one who reads *Megillas Esther* with the benefit of hindsight may not have been recognizable over the course of the actual events described. What follows is my own reading of certain of the events in *Megillas Esther* from this perspective and an attempt to show Achashveirosh as the clever king described in *Maseches Megilla*.

And when inquisition was made of the matter, and it was found to be so, they were both hanged on a tree; and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king. (Esther 2:23)

When Mordechai reveals the plot to kill the king, Achashveirosh recognizes an opportunity for political gain. Mordechai is not immediately rewarded, and the record of his deeds is not recorded in the general ledger of the kingdom. Rather, Achashveirosh takes care to make sure it was accurately recorded in his own personal diary. Mordechai's reward is saved for a later time when Achashveirosh can gain from a strategic show of gratitude to the leader of the Jewish people.

This may even put the turning point of *Megillas Esther* – Achashveirosh's sleepless night and Mordechai's ride through the streets in royal garb at the suggestion of Haman – in an entirely new light. The previous day, Achashveirosh saw Haman as the other person invited to Esther's banquet. When faced with Haman's status as a VIP on par with the king, perhaps Achashveirosh saw a personal gain in using Mordechai's reward as a way to put Haman in his place. Later, at the second banquet, when Esther reveals that Haman's decree was a personal attack on her and her people, Achashveirosh realizes the full extent of his loss of control over his kingdom to Haman and rushes out in a fit of rage. When he returns from the garden to find Haman sprawled out on Esther's bed with her, it all comes to a head. Achashveirosh recognizes that he let things go too far, and sees Haman as a threat not only to his rule over the kingdom but as a threat to his marriage. Achashveirosh isn't even recorded as giving the command: when he finally recognizes what has happened, Haman's face is covered and Haman is immediately hanged.

והמלך שב מגנת הביתן אל בית משתה היין והמן נפל על המטה אשר אסתר עליה ויאמר המלך הגם לכבוש את המלכה עמי בבית הדבר יצא מפי המלך ופני המן חפו.
Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the couch whereon Esther was. Then said the king: 'Will he even force the queen before me in the house?' As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.
 (Esther 7:8)

Achashveirosh only realized just how far he let control of the kingdom slip away after Haman is hanged.

ואתם כתבו על היהודים כטוב בעיניכם בשם המלך וחתמו בטבעת המלך כי כתב אשר נכתב בשם המלך ונחתום בטבעת המלך אין להשיב.

Write also concerning the Jews, as you like, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring; for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse. (Esther 8:8)

As mentioned earlier, decrees issued in the name of the king were irrevocable. When faced with the true extent of Haman's treachery, Achashveirosh is limited in his ability to respond. While he clearly wants to help Esther and the Jews, he cannot overturn the decree and is forced instead to issue a counter-decree allowing the Jews to defend themselves against the prior decree.

Much of the focus of the story of Purim is on Mordechai, Esther and Haman, and Achashveirosh is left as a secondary actor tangential to the main event. However, a careful reading of *Megillas Esther* presents Achashveirosh as a complex character whose actions and inactions can be read as either the vagaries of an ineffectual figurehead, or as the lesson of a political mastermind whose machinations ended in failure.

PURIM

Pesach



Rabbi Yisroel Gordon

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Firewater from Heaven: The Red Sea, the Ten Plagues, and World Peace

RABBI YISROEL GORDON



One of the great mysteries of the redemption from Egypt is the Splitting of the Red Sea. It may be the premier supernatural event of the Exodus, but it seems so unnecessary. With his country in ruins, Pharaoh had already surrendered. The Jews had begun their march to Mount Sinai, laden with the spoils from Egypt and savoring the thrill of freedom. Why ruin the party with more drama?

Make no mistake, Hashem deliberately instigated the pursuit of the Egyptian army.

Hashem spoke to Moshe, "Speak to the Children of Israel. They should go back and encamp... by the sea. Pharaoh will say the Children of Israel are wandering about the land; the desert has closed them off! I will strengthen Pharaoh's heart and he will pursue after them. I will then be honored through Pharaoh and his entire army, and Egypt will know that I am God. (Shemos 14:1-4)

Had Hashem not told the Jews to go back and camp by the sea, had Hashem not hardened Pharaoh's heart, he never would have taken chase. The Splitting of the Sea thus holds the strange distinction of being the greatest miracle we didn't need. Couldn't we just leave Egypt in peace? Why split the sea?¹

Right vs. Left

After the tenth plague, Moshe presents the *mitzva* of *tefillin* and repeatedly relates it to *Yetzias Mitzrayim*:

¹ Classical commentators have addressed this question. See, for example, *Ohr HaChaim* 3:18 (end).

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Moshe said to the nation, "Remember this day that you departed from Egypt, from the house of slaves. For with a strong hand (bechozek yad) Hashem took you out..."

"It will be for you a sign on your hand and a remembrance between your eyes... for with a strong hand (b'yad chazaka) Hashem took you out from Egypt..."

"It shall be a sign on your hand and totafos between your eyes, for with a strong hand (b'chozek yad) Hashem took you out of Egypt." (Shemos 13:3,9,16)

If *tefillin* is supposed to remind us that Hashem took us out with a "strong hand," why do we wear it on the left arm, typically the weaker of the two?² The surprising answer is that Hashem's "strong hand" is actually His left! The *Ohr HaChaim*, Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar (d. 1743), explains:

We need to understand why Hashem didn't choose the superior right hand for the performance of this mitzva. Our rabbis have said it is because the [left arm] is adjacent to the heart which is on the left side.³ What they said is true, but I believe I can [also] offer a good reason based on the Torah's own explanation, "for with a strong hand [Hashem took you out of Egypt]." You should know that the attributes of the Almighty, He should be blessed, have two dimensions; one is called yad hagedola, the "great hand," and the other is called yad hachazaka, the "strong hand." "The great hand" is the quality of chesed and goodness, and the "strong hand" is the gevura, the Divine Might, that makes evildoers pay for their crimes. Now, at the time of the Exodus, Hashem reached out with His "strong hand" and struck His enemies with ten plagues. This is why the Almighty ruled that tefillin... should be placed on our weaker hand which is symbolic of the "strong hand" that took us out of Egypt.

We can better understand this teaching of the *Ohr HaChaim* by quoting what he writes elsewhere:

Know that there is a divine attribute of chesed, kindness. To help humans understand it, it is called the "right hand"⁴ and the "great hand." The divine

2 The *halacha* that *tefillin* is worn on the left arm is derived from the Torah's use of the word ידכה (Shemos 13:16), a conjunction of כהה, די, the weaker hand, which is the left (Menachos 37a).

3 Menachos 37a; cf. Rambam, *Hilchos Tefillin* 4:2.

4 "Every turn you make should only be towards the right..." (Yoma 15a).

attribute of gevura and din, might and justice, is called the “left hand”⁵ and also the “strong hand.”⁶

To summarize: as an infinite being, Hashem obviously lacks a body and has no hands. The Torah’s references to divine body parts are just metaphors⁷ to help us understand how Hashem relates to people: His “strong hand” refers to His judgement, and His “great hand” refers to His kindness. Despite the fact that the strong hand is called “strong,” the great hand of kindness is actually the stronger of the two.⁸ The divine “great hand” is thus symbolized by our right and the divine “strong hand” corresponds to our left.⁹ This is consonant with the Kabbalistic tradition that “right” is *chesed* and “left” is *din*. It follows that since *tefillin* is meant to recall the judgement of Egypt by the (so-called) “strong hand,” we wear it on our left arm.

Strong vs. Great

On the one hand, the *Ohr HaChaim’s* contention that “*yad hagedola*” refers to *chesed* is consistent with the standard usage of the word *gadol*.¹⁰ On the other hand, it flies in the face of the single place in Tanach where the expression is actually used. The Torah tells us that after the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea, “the Jews saw

5 “Is there “left” above [in heaven]? Rather, there are those [angels] who “go right,” i.e., argue in favor [of the accused in the heavenly court] and there are those who “go left,” arguing to prosecute” (*Midrash Tanchuma, Shemos* 8). “A person should always push away with the left and draw in close with the right” (*Ruth Rabba* 2:16).

6 *Chefetz Hashem on Shabbos* 89a. Cited by the “*Yismach Moshe*” commentary on the *Ohr HaChaim* (Korngot, 2009).

7 Rambam, *Yesodei HaTorah* 1:8-9

8 “Which divine attribute is greater, the attribute of goodness or the attribute of punishment? It should be said that the attribute of goodness is greater than the attribute of punishment...” (*Yoma* 76a). “The attribute of goodness is five hundred times stronger than the attribute of punishment” (*Tosefta Sotah* 3:4).

9 Man was created “*b’tzelem Elokim*.” Although Hashem is infinite, incorporeal and unknowable to a physical being, man was designed in a way that enables him to have some insight into Divine Providence. For example, the statement that Hashem’s “eyes are always on the land of Israel” (*Devarim* 11:12) only has meaning to beings with eyes, and only someone who has experienced love can appreciate what it means when Hashem says, “I love you” (*Malachi* 1:2). The use of the left hand as a symbol of divine justice may thus allude to the fact that Hashem prefers not to use it. “I do not desire the death of the wicked one, but rather the return of the wicked one from his ways so that he will live!” (*Yechezkel* 33:11). Nonetheless, we would do well to remember that ultimately “the human mind is incapable of fathoming or investigating the true reality [of Hashem]” (Rambam, *Yesodei HaTorah* 1:9).

10 “*Ha’El hagadol*.” “*Ha’El* is the creator, and He is the *gadol* with *chesed*” (Rabbeinu Bechaya to *Devarim* 10:17). The Jewish Nation praying to “*Elohei Avraham*,” the God of the man of *chesed*, is thus a fulfilment of Hashem’s promise to make Avraham into a *gadol* (cf. *Pesachim* 117b). “לך ה’ הגדולה” (*Divrei HaYomim* 1 29:11) refers to the acts of creation (*Berachos* 58a). The Maharsha explains, “*gedula* is the attribute of *chesed*, and with this attribute the acts of creation came to be, as the verse states, “עולם חסד יבנה” (*Tehillin* 89:3).”

hayad hagedola, the great hand, Hashem used in Egypt and the Jews feared Hashem” (*Shemos* 14:31). The “great hand used in Egypt” is obviously a reference to the Ten Plagues and this is why it elicited a fearful response. The “great hand” of the verse is thus not divine kindness but rather divine judgement, which is exactly how both Rashi and the Ramban explain it.

“The great hand – the great *gevurah* performed by *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*” (Rashi ad loc.). “According to the teachings of Kabbala, the *yad hagedola* was revealed to them, namely *midas hadin*, the divine attribute of justice, which Hashem expressed in Egypt” (Ramban ad loc.).

If *p’shat* and Kabbala are in agreement that the “great hand” is *gevura* and *din*, how can the *Ohr HaChaim* claim that it is *chesed*?!

In all fairness, the *Ohr HaChaim* ends his exposition on *tefillin* with this caveat: “Although we do find that the “great hand” is often used [to refer to justice], this is just the attribute of compassion agreeing with the attribute of justice, but the primary term for justice is the strong hand [not the great hand].” To be frank, his defense is unsatisfying: if the “strong hand” is the primary term for justice, why does the Torah say the Jews saw Hashem’s “great hand” in Egypt? It should say we saw His “strong hand”!

The problem here is not only with the *Ohr HaChaim*. The fact is, Hashem did take us out with His “strong hand.” Moshe said to the nation, “Remember this day that you departed from Egypt... for with a strong hand Hashem took you out...” (*Shemos* 13:3). If Hashem used His “strong hand” for the Exodus, why didn’t we see it? Why did we see His “great hand”?

The Ambidextrous Redeemer

After the Sea crashes down on the Egyptian Army and the Jews are saved, they celebrate and express their thanks to Hashem by singing the Song by the Sea. Its lyrics include this anthropomorphism:

Your right hand is decorated with strength; Your right hand smashes the enemy. (*Shemos* 15:6)

Rashi explains:

“Your right hand... your right hand” – twice. When the Jews fulfill the Will of Hashem, the left becomes right.

“Your right hand is decorated with strength” – to save the Jews, and Your other right hand smashes the enemy (*midrash*). In my opinion, the very same right hand

[that saved the Jews also] smashed the enemy, doing something humanly impossible, performing two tasks with a single hand.

All of Rashi's comments are in agreement about the basic meaning of this verse: the two stanzas refer to two different acts, the salvation of the Jews and the destruction of the enemy, both of which were performed by Hashem's "right hand."

Now, the idea that Hashem saved the Jews with His right hand is understandable; after all, it was an act of *chesed* and *chesed* comes from the right. But how can we say that He destroyed the Egyptians with His right hand? Punishments are always performed by the left!

The *Midrash* tells us that the revelation at the sea was such that even the lowest Jew saw something that the prophet Yechezkel never saw.¹¹ In what way was splitting the sea a greater revelation than prophecy? How was it a bigger miracle than the Ten Plagues? The answer is that the plagues were indeed miraculous, but they had a single function: to punish the Egyptians. The splitting of the sea, however, had a dual function. At the sea, Hashem saved the Jews with *chesed* and decimated the enemy with *gevurah*, and He did both in the very same act. Retribution and redemption occurred simultaneously. This revelation of *achdus*, Hashem's unity, was unparalleled by the plagues. Ordinarily, Hashem keeps His unity hidden from man. Although we know it to be true, in our world diversity reigns and the infinite oneness of the Creator is unfathomable.¹² At the sea, however, Hashem revealed His *achdus* for all to see in a selfless act of love.¹³

Like Creation itself, splitting the sea was not something Hashem had to do – and that is precisely why it was so meaningful. By definition, an act of love is voluntary, and ideally it discloses something personal. Hashem wanted to forge an intimate relationship with the Jewish people and that required a revelation of His essence. This is why He split the sea.

11 *Yalkut Beshalach* 244; cf. Rashi to *Shemos* 15:2.

12 See *Nefesh HaChaim* 3:4-6.

13 *Chesed* and *din* working in unison appears to be the central theme of the Song by the Sea. Examples abound. "The strength and vengeance of our God was our salvation" (Rashi's translation of 15:2; see also *Kli Yakar* ad loc. and Ramban, s.v. *zeh eli v'anveihu*). "Hashem is a man of war; Hashem is His name" (15:3) – "The *midas harachamim* also waged war... at the very same time that Hashem waged war against the Egyptians He related to the Jews with *midas harachamim*" (*Ohr HaChaim*; cf. Seforno ad loc.). "With the wind of Your nostrils the waters piled up..." (15:8) – "This is the wonder: with the *midas hadin* He saved the Jews and with the *midas harachamim* He drowned the Egyptians!" (*Chasam Sofer al HaTorah*). "You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed [the enemy]. With Your kindness You guided us – You redeemed this nation!" (15:12-13). The unity of the event allows us to understand why Miriam only thanked Hashem for destroying the Egyptians (15:21) and did not even feel it necessary to mention the salvation of the Jews.

Hashem charged into battle like a man of war, ripping the sea in half and drowning the Egyptians, and He did it all as a gift for the Jewish People. When they saw how much Hashem loved them, they realized that He does not have two different hands at all. The *yad hachazaka* and the *yad hagedola* are one and the same; Hashem's left hand of justice is His right hand of kindness! "The Jews saw the great hand... and the nation feared Hashem and they believed in Hashem" (*Shemos* 14:31). They feared His justice, they believed in His love, they recognized His unity, and then they began to sing.

Your right hand is adorned with strength; Your right hand smashed the enemy!

Fire vs. Snow

המשל ופחד עמו, עשה שלום במרומו.

"Dominion and terror are with Him; He makes peace in His heights" (*Iyov* 25:2).

"Dominion" – this is [the angel] Michael. "Terror" – this is [the angel] Gavriel. "He makes peace in His heights" – [In His heights] fire and water mix together and the water does not extinguish the fire. (Rashi)

The two halves of this verse appear unrelated until you read the *Midrash*. "He makes peace in His heights" – Reish Lakish taught, "[The angel] Michael is entirely snow and [the angel] Gabriel is entirely fire,¹⁴ and they stand next to each other without harming each other" (*Devarim Rabba* 5:12).

Michael is snow? Gavriel is fire?! If not for the assistance of our trusted commentators, the meaning of these strange statements would be over our heads. The *Eitz Yosef* (Rabbi Chanoch Zundel ben Yosef, d. 1867) explains, "Michael is entirely snow – this means he represents the attribute of compassion, which 'cools off' the attribute of justice.¹⁵ Gabriel does the opposite." Citing multiple sources, The Maharzu (Rabbi Zev Wolf Einhorn, d. 1862) asserts, "Michael... is always *chesed* and Gavriel is *din*." The idea appears in the *Zohar*. "In every place, Michael is first from

14 Gavriel said... "I am the officer of fire" (*Pesachim* 118a). "There is a fire that overrides fire: [the fire] of Gavriel" (*Yoma* 21b).

15 "Originally, they tied the red string on the inside of the door of the [Temple] Hall. When the goat reached the desert, [the string] turned white, as the verse states, 'If your sins are red, they will be whitened like snow' (*Yeshaya* 1:18)" (*Yoma* 67a).

the side of *chesed*” and “Gavriel is from the side of *gevura*.”¹⁶ These characteristics fit neatly with what we say in the nighttime *Shema*, “On my right is Michael and on my left, Gavriel” (Maharzu ad loc.).

This may all sound like esoterica bordering on the mystical; nonetheless, it is in the *gemara*. When, due to the many sins of Israel, the time came to destroy Jerusalem, Hashem ordered Gavriel to “fill his cupped hands with burning coals from between the heavenly *keruvim* and throw them upon the city” (*Yechezkel* 10:2). Instead of taking the coals himself, Gavriel had Michael pick up the coals first (ibid 10:7).

Rabbi Shimon Chasida said, “Had the coals not cooled off [as they passed] from the hands of Michael¹⁷ to the hands of Gavriel, there would be no remnant nor survivor from the enemies of Israel.¹⁸ (Yoma 77a)

To the prophet Yechezkel, the tempering of Hashem’s justice appeared as a vision of the angel Michael cooling off the burning coals of the angel Gavriel. This is a not a vision of God Himself, but of the differentiation and interaction of His attributes, *chesed* and *din*, as they make their way down into our world. The roots of divine compassion, high above the angels, cannot be seen by Yechezkel. Unfathomable to the human mind and impossible to depict in a vision, the higher reality is the seamless *achdus* of Hashem. The unity of left and right may not be visible to the prophets, but it was experienced by all who stood by the Red Sea and they put the revelation to verse. “Your right hand is adorned with strength; Your right hand smashed the enemy!” At the sea, even the lowest Jew saw something Yechezkel never saw.

This is not a minor theological distinction, it is night and day. The *midrash* is explicit.

Rabbi Eliezer said, “At the sea, a maidservant saw something that Yechezkel and Yeshaya did not see... For the prophets only saw prophetic visions, as the verse states, “The heavens opened and I saw visions of Elokim” (Yechezkel 1:1). Since they saw seraphim and holy chayos on the right and on the left they therefore did not recognize the honor of their creator.¹⁹ However, when HaKadosh Baruch Hu was revealed by the sea, not angel,

16 *Zohar*, *Vayechi* 235b and *Tikkunei Zohar* 455, 89a. For a plethora of *Zoharic* sources about the competing natures of Gavriel and Michael, see Margolis, *Malachei Elyon*, 24-31; 116-121.

17 The Vilna Talmud has “*cheruv*,” following the verse in *Yechezkel*, but a shoulder note cites “Michael” as an alternative from the *Ein Yaakov*.

18 When saying something negative about the Jewish People, the sages commonly use the euphemism “enemies of Israel.”

19 לא היו מכירין כבוד יוצרם. [Sic!]

nor seraph, nor holy chayos appeared with Him, and as a result, the Jews recognized the honor of their creator with the sight of the neshama and the sight of the heart – and it seemed to them as if they saw it with their eyes! Even babes and the nursing young saw the honor of their Creator, pointed at Him with their fingers, and said, “This is my God!”²⁰

Kaddish

Some Kabbalistic secrets are not so secret. This one appears in the Halachic code of the *Tur*, in the Laws of *Kaddish*.

[Then you say] “oseh shalom bimromav,” He who makes peace in His heights. This is a reference to the angels which are fire and water, two opposites, and neither one extinguishes the other. (Tur, Ohr HaChaim 56)

Later in *Ohr HaChaim* (123), the *Tur* describes the well-known ritual at the end of *Kaddish*.

When saying “oseh shalom bimromav,” he turns his face toward the left, and when saying “hu yaaseh shalom” he turns to face toward the right.

This *halacha* is based on the *gemara* (*Yoma* 53b) which adds that since we are facing Hashem when we daven, our left is Hashem’s right and our right is Hashem’s left. After all we have learned, the Maharsha’s comments will not surprise us.

When he says “*oseh shalom bimromav*” (He who makes peace in His heights) i.e., above where compassion is found, he turns his face to Hashem’s right, and when he says, “*hu yaaseh shalom aleinu*” (He shall make peace for us) i.e., below, he turns to face towards Hashem’s left which indicates the attribute of justice.

At the end of *Kaddish*, in a powerful combination of words and movements, we make an appeal for *shalom*, for peace. We speak not of the ordinary peace between men, but of the peace and perfection of Heaven. It is a prayer for Hashem’s unity to flow into our world so that the flames of justice will be smothered by the cool waters of His infinite compassion.

Hailstorm

The plague of hail did more than knock down trees and kill the fools who remained outdoors. It also damaged the harvest. “The flax and barley were broken, for the barley was ripe and the flax had stalks. But the wheat and spelt were not broken because

²⁰ *Midrash Seichel Tov* (Buber), *Shemos* 15.

they were *afilos*” (ibid 9:31-32). What does *afilos* mean? It might mean “late.” Wheat and spelt grow later in the season and might have been more pliable at the time of the hail. This would explain why they did not crack when struck like the hardened flax and barley. Rashi offers another possibility. “In the *Midrash (Tanchuma)* there are sages who debate this and understand the word *afilos* to be a contraction of *pilai pilaos*.²¹ [Hashem] performed a wonder of wonders for them that [their wheat and spelt] were not destroyed.”

Every one of the Ten Plagues was a great miracle. Why does the survival of some grain stand out as a “wonder of wonders?” The reason is because it was an act of kindness in the midst of a plague. Here Hashem is hammering the Egyptians with a furious hailstorm and He makes a miracle so they will have food to eat. Judgement and kindness working in tandem is a truly wondrous thing, especially for polytheists who believe in competing gods. The hail was a sign of the Creator, the One God in whom justice and kindness live together in peace.

There is a second example of miraculous coexistence in the plague of hail.

Moshe stretched out his staff on the heavens and Hashem gave thunder and hail, and fire traveled towards the earth. Hashem rained down hail on the land of Egypt. There was hail and fire flashed inside the hail... (Shemos 9:23-24)

Hail is ice. How could fire burn inside hail? Rashi explains.

[It was] a miracle inside a miracle; fire and hail combined. Hail is water, but to fulfill the Will of their Master they made peace with each other.

Once again, we are faced with what appears to be a meaningless miracle. Fire and water made peace? What for? Why is Hashem wantonly violating the laws of nature? The answer is that the plague of hail came from a different place, a place beyond nature.

Hashem spoke to Moshe, “Stretch your hand on the heavens and there will be hail on the entire land of Egypt...” (Shemos 9:22)

“On the heavens” – According to the Midrash (Aggadah), HaKadosh Baruch Hu raised Moshe above the heavens.” (Rashi ad loc.)

“Above the heavens!” In our universe fire and water are incompatible, but the hail was not of our universe. It came from outside, from above the heavens, from a place of pure peace. “*Oseh shalom bimromav*” (Iyov 25:2). “In the heights there is nothing other than *Shalom*” (Ramban ad loc.).

21 אפילוֹת=פלאי פלאות

The Gift of Plagues

The plagues were not so much about punishment as they were about religious education. As the Ramban explains, the plagues addressed the old problem of paganism.

From the time paganism arose in society in the days of Enosh, man's faith in God began to falter. Some denied God's existence altogether, claiming the world always existed... others denied God's knowledge of the details [of human behavior]... others conceded His knowledge, but denied His providence, making man like the fish of the sea that are not supervised by God and for whom there is no punishment or reward...

However, when Hashem favors a community (i.e. Egypt) or an individual (i.e. Pharaoh) and performs a wonder for them, altering the world's ordinary course and its nature, the falsity of all those positions becomes clear to everyone, for the amazing wonder demonstrates that the world has a God who created it; He knows, He supervises and He is omnipotent. (Ramban to *Shemos* 13:16)

Hashem's agenda was to convert Pharaoh from a polytheist to a monotheist, and to that end, He signed Pharaoh up for an introductory course in Jewish theology, otherwise known as the Ten Plagues. For the seventh class, fire and ice are the instructors and the lesson is unity, a unity unlike anything in human experience.²² As Pharaoh was told explicitly, the hailstorm happened "so that you will know that there is none like Me in all the earth" (*Shemos* 9:14). On earth there is division and conflict; above there is only peace.

One thing is clear: Hashem wants Pharaoh and the Egyptians to know Him well, and according to the Ramban, it is because He favors them. They may not have received it as such, but the plagues were actually a gift.²³ There is nothing better for the condition of man and society than the knowledge of God.²⁴

22 "There is no other unity in the universe like the unity [of Hashem]" (Rambam, *Yesodei HaTorah* 1:70).

23 "We know the truth that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* only wants to bestow goodness. He loves His creations like a father loves his son, but because of this love it is appropriate that a father discipline his son for his own good in the end, as the verse states, 'Just like a man disciplines his son, so does Hashem your God discipline you' (*Devarim* 8:5)" (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, *Derech Hashem* 2:8:1).

24 According to the Rambam, when *Dovid HaMelech* said "Being close to Hashem is good for me" (*Tehillim* 73:28) the closeness he speaks of refers to "knowledge, i.e. the intellectual comprehension [of Hashem], not physical proximity" (*Moreh Nevuchim* 1:18). In short, knowledge of Hashem is good for mankind (cf. The Aryeh Kaplan Anthology, Vol. I, pg. 216). Further evidence of Hashem's interest in the fate of the Egyptians can be deduced from His dismay at their failure. After the Egyptian army is destroyed, the angels in heaven began to sing. Hashem rebuked them, "The creations of My hands are drowning in the sea and you are singing songs?!" (*Yalkut Beshalach* 233).

In light of what we know about the symbols of fire and snow, we can well understand how the wheat survived the hail. The hail was firewater from another world, a revelation of the wondrous coexistence of divine justice and compassion. It destroyed the barley, it protected the wheat, and it served as a sign that Hashem was moving forward with His plan to end paganism and bring peace to earth through the creation of His Chosen People. Of course, skeptics claimed it was meaningless. The wheat was soft and pliable and thus survived the hail naturally. They had a point, but such arguments could only be entertained until the Splitting of the Sea.

Viewing the plagues in retrospect from the revelation at the sea, “the Jews saw the *yad hagedola*, the great hand, that Hashem used in Egypt” (*Shemos* 14:31). Great hand? We were taken out of Egypt by the *yad chazaka*, the strong hand, not the great hand! This is true, but after they were saved, the Jews had an epiphany. The *yad hachazaka* of Egypt and the *yad hagedola* of the sea are one and the same! There was miraculous *chesed* concealed within the terrible plagues – concern and caring for the welfare of both Jew and Egyptian. Hashem’s justice and compassion, punishment and kindness, destruction and creation, the left and the right, are all one. This is the greatest wonder of all.

May the One who makes peace in His heights make peace for us and for all of Israel, and say: *Amen!*

“Monuments of Unageing Intellect”¹

The Obligation to Visit One’s *Rebbe* During *Yom Tov*

RABBI ZVI SCHINDEL



As Pesach approaches, we begin to study and review the seemingly endless myriad of customs, *halachos*, and *mitzvos* relevant to the holiday.² Lost amidst this blistering flurry of information is the *gemara* in *Succa 27b*:³

והאמר ר' יצחק, מניין שחייב אדם להקביל פני רבו ברגל? שנא' (מלכים ב ד, כג) "מדוע את הולכת אליו היום לא חדש ולא שבת." מכלל דבחדש ושבת מיחייב איניש לאקבולי אפי רביה.

Rabbi Yitzchak said: From where do we know that a person is obligated to visit his teacher during the festival? For it is stated [II Melachim 4:23] "Why are you going to him (Elisha HaNavi) today? [It is] neither a New Moon nor a Sabbath!" This implies that on the New Moon and the Sabbath a person is obligated to visit his Rebbe.

From the above source the Rambam⁴ codifies the law to visit one’s *Rebbe* on *Yomim Tovim*:

וחייב לעמוד מפני רבו, משיראנו מרחוק מלוא עיניו, עד שיתכסה ממנו ולא יראה קומתו; ואחר כך יישב. וחייב אדם להקביל את פני רבו, ברגל.
A person is obligated to stand before his teacher from the time he sees him—

1 Yeats, W.B. “Sailing to Byzantium”

2 *Megilla* 32a

3 Also recorded in *Rosh Hashana* 16b

4 *Talmud Torah*, 5:7

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as far away as he can see—until [he passes beyond his field of vision] and is hidden: his figure no longer visible. Then, [the student] may sit. A person is obligated to visit his teacher during the festival.

This ostensibly straightforward *halacha* is curiously absent from the codices of the *Arba'a Turim* and *Shulchan Aruch*, without mention or reference.⁵ Questions abound.

The Source

In the fourth chapter of *Sefer Melachim Beis* we read of an *Isha Shunamis* who would offer food and lodging to *Elisha HaNavi* whenever he would pass through town. His servant Gchazi, desiring to repay her a favor, informs Elisha “she has no child, and her husband is old.” Elisha offers a blessing that she will birth a son the following year. The blessing was fulfilled, but the son suddenly died while still young. Distraught, the *Isha Shunamis* determines to travel to Elisha and implore the prophet for Divine Intervention.

When she asks her husband for an attendant and donkey to aid in her journey, he responds, “Why are you going to him [Elisha] today? It is neither a New Moon nor a Sabbath!” From her husband’s response, Rabbi Yitzchak infers these were occasions on which people visited their teachers, or *Rabbeim*. The implication from this verse creates the obligation of which we are speaking. Ironically, the codified *halacha* was restricted to *Yomim Tovim*, absent from the verse, with no mention of *Rosh Chodesh* and *Shabbos*, both of which were explicitly mentioned.⁶ Contextually, as well, the scenario is a woman [the *Isha Shunamis*] visiting her ‘*Rebbe*’ [*Elisha HaNavi*], yet we find little subsequent evidence of the *chiyuv* extending to women.⁷

5 Interestingly, the Rosh and Rif record this *halacha* in their commentary on the *gemara*. In his introduction to the *Beis Yosef*, Rav Yosef Caro informs us of his reliance on the three great *halachic* pillars from the *Rishonim* period—the Rif, Rambam, and Rosh—to determine the *psak halacha* in nearly all cases. When at variance, Rav Yosef Caro generally follows the majority, both in the *Beis Yosef* and the *Shulchan Aruch*. Any deviation from the norm, namely following a minority of one against the other two, sounds an alarm amongst the super-commentaries, and requires explanation. Here, all three mention the *halacha* to visit one’s *Rebbe* on *Yom Tov*!

6 The Ritva, in his commentary to both *Succa 27b* and *Rosh Hashana 16b* addresses this glaring issue. He posits that the obligation to visit on *Yom Tov* is a minimum requirement. He offers a three-tiered approach: if one’s *Rebbe* resides outside of one’s *techum Shabbos* (2,000 amos), one is required *l’hakbil pnei rabbo* only on the *Yomim Tovim* by travelling before *Yom Tov* [or on *Chol Hamoed*]. If one’s *Rebbe* lives within the *techum Shabbos*, but outside of one’s town, the obligation exists only on *Shabbos* and *Rosh Chodesh*. And if one lives within the same town as his *Rebbe*, the requirement exists every day!

7 We will briefly address a possible obligation for women in regard to this *halacha* later in the article.

The *Mechayev*: Nature and Scope

How we classify and characterize the obligation *l'hakbil pnei rabbo b'regel* will determine its parameters and relevance today. Broadly speaking, we encounter two possibilities:

1. The obligation stems from *Simchas HaRegel*, the *mitzva* to be happy on the *Shalosh Regalim*—Pesach, Shavuot, and Succos—whose primary manifestation is the offering of unique *korbanos* for each *Yom Tov* in the *Beis HaMikdash*. Based on this assessment, it follows, conceptually, that the obligation to visit one's *Rebbe* is an expression of the *Mitzvos HaYom*, the commandments inherent to the particular *chag*, and relates to the *mitzva* of *Aliyas HaRegel*.⁸
2. The motivating factor is *Kavod HaRav*, the honor and respect accorded to *talmidei chachamim* in general, and one's personal *Rebbe* in particular. Notwithstanding the ever-present responsibility to maintain a level of respect for one's *Rabbeim*, the *Shalosh Regalim* were designated as appropriate avenues to actualize and enhance the *mitzva*.⁹

Is there a specific mandate [or *kiyum*] to countenance one's *Rebbe* on *Yom Tov* proper—those days defined as “*Mikraei Kodesh*” in the Torah—or does the obligation extend to *Chol HaMoed*, the Intermediary Days of the Festivals, as well? How inflexible the *chiyuv*, and whether *Yom Tov* is preferred over *Chol HaMoed*, may serve as a *nafka mina* (practical ramification) to help define the nature of our *din*. If *kabbalas pnei rabbo* is an extension of *Simchas HaChag* and relates to the obligation to offer special *korbanos*, we expect the days of *Yom Tov* itself to enjoy a preferential seat. Indeed, this seems clear from Rashi's comment to *Succa* 27b.¹⁰ The *gemara* discusses a scenario where a *talmid* is unable to travel to his *Rebbe* and return home on the same day. His delayed absence from home may inadvertently prevent his family from maximally enjoying the *chag*. One could reasonably presuppose the *gemara's* case to be one where the distance between the *Rebbe's* and the *talmid's* homes is too great to come and go on the same day. Rashi assumes otherwise, claiming that travel was limited because of issues of *techum*, the *halachic* city limits. If the *Rebbe* lives within the *talmid's* *techum*, or the city is connected ‘*al yedei eruv*,’ the concern that the *talmid* won't return home on that day ceases to exist, and the *talmid* is obligated to visit his *Rebbe*. Clearly, Rashi assumes that the optimal time to discharge the *chiyuv* is on the

8 *Shemos*, 23:17; *Devarim* 27:7. See also the *Sefer HaChinuch's* presentation in *Mitzvos* 88, 488, and 489.

9 See Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, *The Conceptual Approach to Torah Learning: The Method and Its Prospects*, p. 10

10 s.v. “*Ha D'azil V'assi B'yomei*”

Yomim Tovim, not *Chol HaMoed* when the city limits are of no concern.¹¹

The Ritva,¹² on the other hand, understands the choice of *Yom Tov* as a day of visitation as practical and opportunistic. *Yom Tov* offers more leisure time than a busy workweek, and, precisely because of the adjoining *Chol HaMoed*, allows more time for the *talmid* to travel. The Ritva's approach is seemingly disinterested with the *Aliyas HaRegel* component, and entirely focused on the fulfillment of *Kavod HaRav*.

Whether the *chiyuv* applies to women may also serve as a determinant. At first blush, if the obligation is modeled after *Aliyas HaRegel*, women should be exempt based on the well-known principle of *mitzvos aseh she-hazman grama nashim peturos*; if it comes as an expression of *Kavod HaRav*, women should be equally obligated. The *Pnei Yehoshua*¹³ and *Kaf HaChaim*¹⁴ complicate matters. They both assume that the *chiyuv l'hakbil pnei rabbo b'regel* stems from the formal *mitzva* of *Limmud HaTorah*, and not *Kavod HaRav* in isolation. According to the *Kaf HaChaim*, one travels to his *Rebbe* specifically to learn Torah. Learning Torah from one's *Rebbe* is the greatest honor one can hope to display. Based on their analysis, women are exempt either way we slice it, whether subsumed under *Simchas HaChag* or *Kavod HaRav*.¹⁵

While the omission of the *halacha* to visit one's *Rebbe* from the *Arba'a Turim* and *Shulchan Aruch* created a dearth of secondary sources on our topic, those who chose to elucidate [or even reference] the *chiyuv l'hakbil pnei rabbo b'regel* did so within their sections dedicated to *Hilchos Yom Tov*. For example, the *Magen Avraham*, *Noda B'Yehuda*, *Chida*, and *Kaf HaChaim* all pen contributions within the framework of *Yom Tov*. The Rambam notably deviates from the norm, and places the *chiyuv* within *Hilchos Talmud Torah* (5:7), strongly implying an allegiance to the *Kavod HaRav* side of the equation. Moreover, if we focus our lens on the actual placement, the Rambam links the obligation to visit one's *Rebbe* on *Yom Tov* to the *chiyuv* incumbent upon a *talmid* to stand "*melo einav*" for his *Rebbe Muvhak*.¹⁶ Doubtless, the Rambam defines our *chiyuv* as a manifestation of *Kavod HaRav*.

11 The subject of *eruv* and their applicability on *Yomim Tovim* is well beyond the scope of our topic.

12 See footnote 6

13 Commenting on *Rosh Hashanah* 16b

14 See both 419:8 and 529:34

15 In truth, we can question our original premise that women are not obligated in *Aliyas HaRegel*. While the *Sefer HaChinuch* explicitly states women are exempt from the *mitzva* of *Chagiga B'Regalim* (no. 88), he includes women in the *mitzva Lismoach B'Regalim* (no. 488). We have used the terms *Aliyas HaRegel* and *Simchas HaRegel* interchangeably, but one can certainly distinguish between the two.

16 *Kiddushin* 33b

The *Noda B'Yehuda* (*Mahadura Tinyana, Siman 94*) emphatically champions the other side. After parsing the issue, he definitively concludes that the *chiyuv* is modeled after *Aliyas HaRegel*. In fact, the obligation to visit one's *Rebbe* on *Yom Tov* is dependent on the *mitzva* of *Aliyas HaRegel*, and both were discontinued with *Churban HaBayis*. He marshals proofs and sources to buttress his opinion. His main argument is based on *Kiddushin 33b*. There the *gemara* discusses the obligation to stand before one's *Rebbe*:

א"ר אייבו אמר ר' ינאי-אין תלמיד חכם רשאי לעמוד מפני רבו אלא שחרית וערבית
 כדי שלא יהיה כבודו מרובה מכבוד שמים
*Rabbi Ayvu said in the name of Rabbi Yanai: A Torah scholar is not permitted to stand before his teacher except [once] in the morning and [once] in the evening, so that the honor afforded to [a teacher] does not exceed the honor afforded to God.*¹⁷

Noting the thematic relation between the rulings to stand before one's *Rebbe* and visiting one's *Rebbe* on the *Shalosh Regalim*, the *Nodah B'Yehuda* infers the opposite conclusion of the previously quoted Rambam. His analogy unfolds as follows: just as standing before one's *Rebbe* more than twice daily is impermissible because “the honor afforded to a teacher does not exceed the honor afforded to God,” similarly the termination of formally offering *Korbanos* on the *Shalosh Regalim* renders visiting one's *Rebbe* obsolete from a legal standpoint. If one were obligated to visit their *Rebbe* on *Yom Tov* nowadays, when no *Korbanos* are offered, it would appear as if one is honoring his *Rebbe* more than the *Shechina*, the Divine Presence.

Interestingly, the *Chida*¹⁸ agrees with the *Nodah B'Yehuda's* diagnosis, but differs on the proper prescription. In his analysis, the *chiyuv* is indeed rooted in *Aliyas HaRegel*, but we should maintain the practice *l'hakbil pnei rabbo b'regel* specifically nowadays to commemorate the *mitzva* of *Aliya L'Regel*.

Bizman HaZeh: 'Mitzad HaMussar'

The *Noda B'Yehuda* attempts to account for our *halacha's* notable absence amongst many of the *poskim*. He offers an explanation as to why the Rambam chose to record the *chiyuv*, while the *Arba'a Turim* and *Shulchan Aruch* omitted it from their

17 If a student stands more than twice daily for his *Rebbe*, the display of honor appears greater than the two times the student stands *L'kvod Shamayim* for *Shacharis* and *Ma'ariv*. In practice, *Tosafos* strongly qualifies this ruling and reasons that there are circumstances where a *talmid* is obligated to stand for his *Rebbe* [or other *Rabbeim*] “*afilu meah pa'amim bayom*,” even 100 times in a given day.

18 In his *Simchas HaRegel* on *Succah 27b*

works. Simply stated, the Rambam in his *Mishne Torah* codifies all *halacha*, whether relevant nowadays [after the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*] or not. Rav Yaakov ben Asher and Rav Yosef Caro, in their respective works, discarded all *halacha* no longer applicable. To answer why the Rosh and the Rif mention the obligation, the *Noda B'Yehuda* assumes they recorded the *halacha* not as normatively binding, but ceremoniously significant. In his opinion, the practice is commendable nowadays, and “*rauy mitzad hamussar*,” proper for one’s ethical and spiritual development.¹⁹

Perhaps we may offer a compromise position where *Kavod HaRav* and the *mitzva* of *Simchas HaRegel* emerge as codependent benefactors. Fundamentally, the relationship between *Rebbe* and *talmid* is not merely *de facto*, but *de jure*, not only laudatory, but mandatory. The connection is bidirectional and mutually sustaining—from student to teacher, and *Rebbe* to *talmid*. Experientially, the act of teaching and learning Torah should mimic the majestic and awe-inspiring encounter of the *Beis HaMikdash* on the *Shalosh Regalim*.²⁰ *Berachos* 8a famously, though tragically, proclaims:

מיום שחרב בית המקדש אין לו להקדוש ברוך הוא בעולמו אלא ארבע אמות של
הלכה בלבד.

*Since the day the Temple was destroyed the Holy One, Blessed is He, has
nothing in His world but the four amos of halacha.*

Our teachers and *Rabbanim*, entrusted with the responsibility to convey and decode the four cubits of *halacha*, serve as our link to those days of yore.

Years after leaving *yeshiva*, worn down by the quotidian and demanding responsibilities of family, work, and reality, the brilliant memory of warmth and comfort experienced in the *koslei HaYeshiva* turn translucent, eventually transforming to a vague and dim image of accomplishment and fulfillment, almost unrecognizable. The student develops a deep spiritual malaise where their once vibrant Torah personality is limited in animation and sorely lacking in aspiration. The *Yomim Tovim*

19 A quick perusal of recently published biographies of contemporary *Gedolim* indicates this practice is well maintained nowadays, at least in certain communities. I recall reading that Rav Chaim Kanievsky, *shlit"l*, would visit his father-in-law, Rav Elyashiv *zt"l*, during *Chol HaMoed* as a *kiyum* of this *halacha*.

20 The common denominator between *Rosh Chodesh*, *Shabbos*, and *Yom Tov*, explains the *Noda B'Yehudah*, is the *Korban Mussaf* offered on those days. For reasons unclear, that element is more inviting for the *Shechina*, and thus these days are proper days to visit one’s *Rebbe* as representative of *kabbalas HaShechina*. The *Chida* explicitly mentions that nowadays visiting one’s *Rebbe* acts as a ‘stand-in’ for experiencing the Divine Presence once felt when beholding the *Beis HaMikdash* on the *Shalosh Regalim*.

offer a built-in opportunity to regain some of those losses.²¹

Consistent with this idea, the *Sefer HaChinuch*, in analyzing the *Shoresh HaMitzva*, the rationale or root behind the *mitzva Lismoach B'regel* (488), offers a remedy to our dilemma, perhaps both preventative and curative. He writes:

לפי שהאדם נכון על ענין שצריך טבעו לשמח לפרקים, כמו שהוא צריך אל המזון על כל פנים, ואל המנוחה ואל השנה, ורצה האל לזכותנו... וצונו לעשות השמחה לשמו, למען נזכה לפניו בכל מעשינו. והנה קבע לנו זמנים בשנה למועדים, לזכר בהם הנסים והטובות אשר גמלנו...

A person's natural inclination is to celebrate from time to time, to enjoy food, comfort, and rest. Hashem wanted to merit us, and commanded us to celebrate through the mitzva of Simcha in His name, in order that we will always remember Him in all of our actions. Therefore, He established fixed times throughout the year to commemorate the wondrous miracles and kindness we experienced; it is at these times where we celebrate...

In other words, we are all limited in energy and concentration. We eagerly anticipate our vacation time, designated for leisure and rest. Similarly, our spiritual personalities also yearn for rejuvenation. Visiting one's *Rebbe* on *Yom Tov*, sharing memories and speaking Torah, remains one of the primary avenues to accomplish that goal.

21 Rabbi Yitzchak, the author of the statement in discussion, may allude to the idea of *kabbalas rabbo* as a substitute for *kabbalas HaShechina* on *Yomim Tovim* in his subsequent statement found in *Roshi Hashana* 16b: "And Rabbi Yitzchak said, 'A person is obligated to purify himself for the festival...'" The juxtaposition of the demand to purify oneself in anticipation of the *Yom Tov* and the obligation to visit one's *Rebbe* may serve the same function, at least *bizman ha'ze*.

There Will Be Blood: *Dam Pesach & Dam Bris Mila*

DR. DANIEL WOHLGELERNTER



In *Parshas Bo*, *Bnei Yisrael* are given the *mitzva* of *Korban Pesach*, including the application of blood to their doorposts, in preparation for *Makas Bechoros* and the subsequent *Yetzias Mitzrayim*:

ולקחו מן הדם ונתנו על שתי המזוזות ועל המשקוף על הבתים אשר יאכלו אתו בהם. ועברתי בארץ מצרים בלילה הזה והכיתי כל בכור בארץ מצרים מאדם ועד בהמה ובכל אלהי מצרים אעשה שפטים אני ה'. והיה הדם לכם לאת על הבתים אשר אתם שם וראיתי את הדם ופסחתי עלכם ולא יהיה בכם נגף למשחית בהכתי בארץ מצרים.
They shall take from the blood and put it on the two side-posts and on the lintel on the houses within which they will eat it... I will pass through the land of Egypt on this night, and I will smite all firstborns in the land of Egypt... The blood shall be for you as a sign on the houses which you are in; I will see the blood and I will pass over you, and there will not be upon you any plague of destruction when I smite the land of Egypt. (Shemos 12:7,12-13)

After Moshe transmits this commandment and prophecy to *Bnei Yisrael*, there is additional discussion of the significance of the blood application:

ועבר ה' לנגף את מצרים וראה את הדם על המשקוף ועל שתי המזוזות ופסח ה' על הפתח ולא יתן המשחית לבא אל בתיכם לנגף. ושמרתם את הדבר הזה לחק לך ולבניך עד עולם.
Hashem will pass through to plague the land of Egypt; he will see the blood on the lintel and on the two side-posts and Hashem will pass over the entrance and will not allow the destruction to enter your houses to plague.

This Torah article was adapted, in part, from a shiur given by Rav Pinchas Friedman, which was published in Korei Oneg, Parshas Bo, תש"ע.

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You should observe this thing as a law for you and your children forever.
(Shemos 12:23-24)

The *Ohr HaChaim* (12:24) is puzzled by this reference to an eternal obligation, as there is no documented continued observance of the blood application:

ושמרתם את הדבר הזה. הנה פשט הכתוב יגיד כי גם לדורות יצו דברים האמורים בענין ולא ראינו שעשו כן קדמונינו, גם רבותינו לא צוו לעשות כן.

You should observe this thing - The straightforward meaning of the verse tells us that these commandments as discussed are obligatory even for future generations. But we do not find that our ancestors [after Egypt] ever did so, nor did the Rabbis ever instruct us to do so.

The *Ibn Ezra* discusses the “*ledoros*” - eternal obligation- problem, and concludes that this refers only to the *Korban Pesach*, and not to the blood ceremony:

ושמרתם. רבים חשבו כי נתינת הדם על המשקוף ועל שתי המזוזות חיוב לדורות. בעבור כי הדבר הזה סמוך אל לקיחת האזוב וטבילתו. ועוד כי כתוב אחר כן אשר פסח על בתי בני ישראל. ובדרך הסברא נכון היה. לולי קבלת האמת הנגמרת. הנה הנכון שמלת הדבר הזה שב אל ושחטו הפסח.

You shall observe - Many have thought that the placement of blood on the lintel and two side-posts are an eternal obligation for future generations as well, since this statement follows the taking of the hyssop branch and its dipping in blood. And also since this statement is followed itself by [the reasoning for the eternal laws given to the future generations] “who passed over the homes of Bnei Yisrael.” And this is proper reasoning, without our tradition of the truth of the matter. In fact, the proper reading is that this statement refers back to the slaughtering of the Pesach sacrifice.

Nevertheless, we are left with the textual difficulty as to why Moshe delayed discussion of the “*ledoros*” requirement until after the elaboration of the blood application. Might this be a hint that the blood ceremony indeed has continued significance for all future generations?

Rashi reminds us of the *Mechilta* on *Parshas Bo* (*Masechta de-Pischa* 5) where R. Masya ben Charash infers from a verse in *Yechezkel* that when the time for redemption came, we had no merits to deserve it. To help us, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave us the commandments of circumcision—the Jews had apparently been forced to abandon the practice, and now had to circumcise themselves in order to partake in the *Pesach*—and the blood of the *Pesach*. In Rashi’s version of the *Midrash*, replicated

in *Yalkut Shimoni*, Hashem commanded *Bnei Yisrael* to take the sacrifice four days early, to give them time to leave the idolatry in which they were soaked.

והיה לכם למשמרת. זה לשון בקור שטעון בקור ממום ארבעה ימים קדם שחיטה, ומפני מה הקדים לקחתו לשחיטתו ארבעה ימים מה שלא צוה כן בפסח דורות, היה ר' מתיא בן חרש אומר הרי הוא אומר (יחזקאל טז ח) ואעבור עליך ואראך והנה עתך עת דדים, הגיעה שבועה שנשבעתי לאברהם שאגאל את בניו ולא היו בידם מצוות להתעסק בהם כדי שיגאלו, שנאמר (שם ז) ואת ערום ועריה, ונתן להם שתי מצוות דם פסח ודם מילה, שמלו באותו הלילה, שנאמר (שם ו) מתבוססת בדמך, בשני דמים.

This is an expression of inspection, that it [the animal] requires an inspection for a blemish four days before its slaughter. Now why was it [the designated animal] to be taken four days before its slaughter, something not required in the Passover sacrifice of later generations? Rabbi Mathia the son of Charash used to say [in response]: Behold He [God] says: "And I passed by you and saw you, and behold your time was the time of love" (Ezek. 16:8). The [time for the fulfillment of the] oath that I swore to Abraham that I would redeem his children has arrived. But they [the Children of Israel] had no commandments in their hands with which to occupy themselves in order that they be redeemed, as it is said: "but you were naked and bare" (Ezek. 16:7). So He gave them two mitzvos, the blood of the Passover and the blood of the circumcision. They circumcised themselves on that night, as it is said: "downtrodden with your blood (בדמך)" (ibid., verse 6), with the two [types of] blood. (Rashi 12:6)

We were not, in *Chazal's* portrayal, a generally observant people; we did not merit being taken out, and only Hashem's promise to *Avraham Avinu* granted us this salvation. *Bris Mila* and *Korban Pesach* were Hashem's way of carving out a path forward, enabling us to escape the idolatry in which we were steeped.

When we speak of the blood on the doorposts, by the way, we should remember that it was meant for us, not the Egyptians. As Rashi points out, the Torah's words are that the blood is a sign for us, from which we learn that it was on the inside of the doors. If so, the Jews were being asked to show their obedience to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, their willingness to sign onto the program as it were, not necessarily to demonstrate anything to the outside world.

There is a powerful *chidush*, an innovative idea, presented by the *Targum Yonasan* on the topic of the blood applications:

ויהי דם נכסת פסחא וגזרת מהולתא מערב לכוון למעבד מניה את על בתיא דאתון שרין תמן ואחמי ית זכות דמא ואיחוס עליכון.

The blood of the Pesach and of the mitzva of mila should be mixed together to use on the houses in which you live, and the merit of the blood will protect you. (Shemos 12:13)

Targum Yonasan explains that the blood applied to the doorposts and lintel consisted of a mixture of the blood of the *Korban Pesach* and the blood of *Bris Mila*, thereby providing a physical link to these two supremely important *mitzvos*, and producing a unity of theme.

Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (Chapter 28) corroborates the *Targum Yonasan's* assertion that the blood application consisted of the mixture of bloods from *Pesach* and *Milah*, and adds another remarkable insight: Not only were the Jews redeemed from *Mitzrayim* because of the merits of *Dam Pesach* and *Dam Mila*, but even the future, ultimate redemption will occur because of the *zechusim* of these two *mitzvos*.

מכאן אתה למד שבני יעקב נמולין היו בני יעקב מלו את בניהם ואת בני בניהם והנחילם לחק עולם עד שעמד פרעה הרשע וגזר גזירות קשות ומנע להם ברית מילה וביום שיצאו ישראל ממצרים נמולו כל העם מקטון ועד גדול שנ' כי מולים היו והיו ישראל לוקחין דם ברית מילה ונותנין על משקוף בתייהם דם ברית מילה ודם פסח ונתמלא רחמים על ישראל שנ' ואעבור עליך ואראך מתבוססת בדמיך בדמך לא כתיב אלא בדמיך בשני דמים דם ברית מילה ודם פסח ואומר לך בדמיך חיי ר' אליעזר אומ' וכי מה ראה הכתוב שני פעמים בדמיך חיי אלא אמ' הב"ה בזכות דם ברית מילה ובזכות דם פסח נגאלו ממצרים ובזכות דם ברית מילה ובזכות דם פסח אתם עתידים להגאל בסוף מלכות רביעי לכך נאמ' ואומר לך בדמיך חיי

From here we learn that Yaakov's children were circumcised and that they did so to their children and grandchildren until the wicked Pharaoh decreed against it. On the day that they left Egypt, all the population were circumcised, young and old, as it says "as they were circumcised." The Jews would take the blood from the mila and put it on the lintel, blood of mila and of Pesach together, and that brought mercy upon them, as it is written, "and I passed by you and saw you downtrodden in your bloods". It is not written "blood" ["damech"], rather "bloods" ["damayich"] - two bloods, milah and Pesach, "and I said to you 'through your blood shall you live...'" Rabbi Eliezer says, why does the verse repeat twice "in your blood shall you live?" Hashem said that in the merit of the blood of mila and the blood of Pesach they were redeemed from Egypt, and in the merit of those two

bloods will they be redeemed in the future after the reign of the fourth kingdom (of subjugation in exile). Therefore it says, "And I said to you, 'In your blood shall you live.'"

It behooves us to understand why *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* chose these two mitzvos, *Dam Pesach* and *Dam Mila*, as the vehicles to facilitate the liberation of *Bnei Yisrael* from their bondage in *Mitzrayim*. These two mitzvos *aseh* are the only ones of the 248 laws of Positive Action, whose non-performance is punished by *kares*, spiritual excision. How do we explain that it is precisely and exclusively these two mitzvos *aseh* that are designated for the penalty of *kares*? Having studied and understood the revelation of the *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* rescued us from *Mitzrayim* because of the *zechusim* of *Dam Pesach* and *Dam Mila*, and that the future *geula* will be granted because of the merits of these two commandments, we can understand that a Jew who fails to perform *Pesach* or *Mila* reveals himself to be one who has no interest in being a member of the Jewish nation and has no allegiance to Jewish destiny; *kares* (spiritual extirpation) is therefore a most appropriate punishment.

To get more insight into this connection between *Pesach* and *Mila*, we shall review the explication of the *Chiddushei HaRim* (C'H) on the underlying reason for Hashem's demand that *Bnei Yisrael* apply the bloods of *Pesach* and *Milah* to their doorposts. The C'H cites the *Mishna* in *Berachos* (13a) which discusses the significance of *Parshas Shema* as our acceptance of the yoke of Hashem's sovereignty, and *Parshas V'haya Im Shamo* as our acceptance of the yoke of mitzvos:

אמר ר' יהושע בן קרחה למה קדמה פרשת שמע לוויה אם שמוע כדי שיקבל עליו
 עול מלכות שמים תחלה ואחר כך מקבל עליו עול מצות
Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karcha said: Why does the paragraph of "Shema"
precede the paragraph of "V'haya Im Shamo?" So that one will accept
the yoke of heavenly sovereignty first, and only afterwards accept the yoke
of the mitzvos.

והנה במכת בכורות על המצרים נתהווה האומה הישראלית שנקראו (שמות ד:כב)
 בני בכורי ישראל. על כן נצטוו ישראל לתת על פתחיהם דם פסח ודם מילה, כי דם
 מילה הוא קבלת עול מלכות שמים, שנתן בבשרו את חותם המלך העליון הקב"ה,
 ואילו דם פסח ששחטו את העבודה זרה של המצרים לשם ה' הוא קבלת עול מצוות,
 וזהו הענין שנצטוינו לדורות עולם לכתוב מזוזה על פתח הבית, שיש בהם שתי
 פרשיות של קריאת שמע קבלת עול מלכות שמים וקבלת עול מצוות.

In Makas Bechoros, the nation of Israel came into existence, who were called, “my son, my firstborn.” Therefore, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to put on their entrances the blood of mila and the blood of the Pesach. Since the blood of mila is the acceptance of Hashem’s sovereignty by placing on one’s flesh the seal of Hashem, and the blood of the Pesach, attained by slaughtering the idols of the Egyptians in the name of Hashem, is the acceptance of the mitzvos. This is the issue which was commanded for the generations to write a mezuzah on the entrance to the home, which has the two parshiyos of Shema which correspond to the acceptance of Hashem’s sovereignty and of the mitzvos.

The C’H explains that our commitment to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* must be expressed in two ways: by accepting the yoke of Hashem’s sovereignty and the yoke of *mitzvos*. Our adoption of the yoke of *Malchus Shamayim* is fulfilled by the *Bris Mila*, in which we allow the symbol of Hashem’s Kingship to be engraved on our flesh; our willing receipt of the yoke of *mitzvos* is initiated by the partaking of the paschal lamb as we identify with the act that began our formation as a people, and the elimination of the idolatry that was practiced in *Mitzrayim*. The C’H continues with the correlation of the *mitzva* of *mezuzah* to the two *mitzvos* of *Bris Mila* and *Korban Pesach*, as the two *parshiyos* on the *mezuzah* scroll are the first two *parshiyos* of *Shema*, which represent *Kabalas Ol Malchus Shamayim* (i.e., *Bris Mila*) and *Kabalas Ol Mitzvos* (*Korban Pesach*).

This brilliant insight from the C’H provides us with an answer to the *Ohr HaChaim’s* question about the validity of the “*ledoros*,” eternal obligation, of the blood application and our concerns with the textual difficulty as to why Moshe delayed discussion of the “*ledoros*” requirement until after the elaboration of the blood application. The statement about ongoing generational obligation, “And you shall observe this thing as a law for you and your children forever,” is now understood to refer to the *mitzva* of *mezuzah* which is a substitution for and representation of the two *mitzvos* of *Dam Mila* and *Dam Pesach*, by virtue of the *mezuzah* containing the biblical references to *Kabalas Ol Malchus Shamayim* and *Kabalas Ol Mitzvos*. *Mezuzah* is, indeed, an eternal obligation for the Jewish people.

“And I saw you downtrodden in your blood and I said to you. Through your blood you shall live and I said to you through your blood you shall live.” The prophet *Yechezkel* (16:6) teaches that in the merit of the great *mitzvos* of *mila* and *Pesach* we were redeemed from Egypt. Through the merit of our dedication to *Kabalas Ol Malchus Shamayim* and our personal *mitzva* observance may we soon merit the coming of *Mashiach* and the complete and ultimate *Geula*.

Bnei Yisrael were Slaves in Egypt – True or False?

ZOE MENDELSON



Learning the story of *Mitzrayim*, from the earliest days of grade school, we were taught that we were *avadim* to Pharaoh. Our teachers and parents would stress upon us just how difficult our lives were when we were slaves in *Mitzrayim*. The actual word “*avadim*” seems to be everywhere: in the Haggada, in the *Midrash*, in the *meforshim*. Most amazingly, though, throughout the story of *Mitzrayim* in the Torah, this most important word is absent. When *Bnei Yisrael* were enslaved in Egypt, we worked like slaves, we were treated like slaves, but we were never actually called slaves. Throughout the *parshiyos* of *Shemos*, *Va’era* and *Bo*, the Hebrew word “*avadim*” is absent.

There are allusions to the term *avadim* in these *parshiyos*, though. For example, in *Parshas Shemos* (1:13) the Torah writes “*vaya’avidu Mitzrayim es Bnei Yisrael*,” “the Egyptians enslaved the Children of Israel.” While the verb of enslavement is used, *Bnei Yisrael* are not called slaves.

Even more so, there are many places where the absence of the word *avadim* is striking. For instance, in *Parshas Va’eira*, (9:13) Hashem says to Moshe, “*Shalach es ami viya’avduni*,” “Send out My people so that they may serve Me.” Hashem uses the words, “My people,” not “Pharaoh’s slaves.” In *Parshas Shemos*, (2:11): “*Vayar ish Mitzri mak’e ish Ivri me’echav*,” the *pasuk* says that Moshe saw an Egyptian striking a “Hebrew man,” not a “slave.” Later on in *Parshas Shemos* (5:2), Pharaoh says, “*v’gam es Yisrael lo ashale’ach*,” “...nor will I send out Israel!” He calls the Jews “Israel,” not “slaves”. Similarly, a few *pesukim* later, Pharaoh orders the taskmasters to “not continue giving straw to the people...” again he says the word “people” rather than “slaves”.

Bnei Yisrael were forced to work and the *Midrash* says no payment was given. Doesn’t that qualify as a slave? The *parshiyos* specifically state that the Jews were

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“enslaved”. Why then are the Jews never referred to as “slaves?” The incredible finding that the word *avadim* is avoided throughout the entirety of the saga must be purposeful, but if so, what is the purpose?

To carry this dilemma further, as we read the Haggada each year, we sing out “*avadim hayinu...*” As we just saw, though, we were never “*avadim!*” The Haggada continues to point out that there is a *mitzva* upon all of us to see ourselves as if we are being freed each year during our *Seder*. It says that we have to see ourselves throwing off the burden of the slavery of *Mitzrayim*. We do not see that there is a *mitzva* that we should see ourselves as slaves, though!

To explain our question, we should look at the important nuance of the Haggada. As we sing “*avadim hayinu*” we say that we were slaves, in the past tense. Similarly, in the Torah, while the actual enslavement is described, and the physical demands of the enslavement are told, *Bnei Yisrael* are never labeled as slaves. All of this is done to teach us the importance of labeling.

When we apply a label to someone, for example calling your friend “shy” or making “shy” part of his or her nickname, we define that person as shy. Being shy and timid becomes who they are, and grows on them until their attribute of being shy becomes a lasting component of their nature. The importance of labeling is seen here with the term “*avadim*”. If the Torah even once labeled the *Bnei Yisrael* as “slaves,” then that could have become their core and essence, and could ultimately have become our core as well. As we would have retold the story throughout the generations, we could have never broken free, have never defined ourselves as the *Bnei Yisrael* that we came to be at Har Sinai.

What did the Jews do to earn the label of “*Bnei Yisrael?*” What virtue did they have that prevented them from having the label “slaves” installed upon them? The basic requirements of speaking Hebrew, taking Jewish spouses, dressing *b'tznius*, and maintaining their Hebrew names kept their core nature from becoming one of enslavement. Since they stayed as close to Hashem as they could, the label “slaves” could never be applied to them. Because of the loyalty to Hashem, we earned the label of “*Bnei Yisrael.*”

New Clothes for Passover

ROBERT MILLMAN



Pesach will soon be here. Jewish families across the world will sit at exquisite tables with fine china, silver utensils and food galore. We will recline on pillows, act as royalty, and open the door for Elijah without fear or trepidation.

It is our obligation on Passover night to read the Haggada and retell the story of our Exodus from Egypt. In fact, throughout the Seder night we are meant to imagine that we ourselves were slaves in Egypt, escaping from slavery to become free men.

We should reflect on this idea for a moment; it was not always so. Throughout Jewish history, Jews have celebrated the Passover holiday under frightening and horrific circumstances. The Passover holiday is celebrated during the Easter holiday time of year. For centuries, Jews were accused of blood libels and subject to extraordinary anti-semitism. In short, fear and apprehension were often associated with Passover. Our eating the bread of affliction was often accompanied by actual affliction that the non-Jewish world subjected our Jewish brethren to year after year.

The story¹ that follows should serve as an inspiration to all of us. Today, the expression “less is more” is constantly in vogue. During World War II, under extreme circumstances, less was more and Lady Amelie Jacobovits shared this story – a Passover story of Holocaust survival demonstrating how the powerful life force of a Jewish woman connects all of us to our past, present and future:

One Passover, my three-year-old grandchild looked up at me from his chair at the Seder table. I don't even know what he said, because the rush of Passover 1941 blocked everything else. I was a young girl hidden in a dark cellar in central France. I was without other family—alone with four other children, all of us strangers.

¹ Originally published in *The Jewish Women's Journal of the Jewish Renaissance Center*, Summer 1993

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Today and in recent years, as I celebrate Passover surrounded by the comforts and luxury of our London flat and the security of more than a dozen relatives and friends, I realize that for all their splendor, these holidays cannot compare in my heart to that unique event so many years ago. 1941 was the most extraordinary Passover of my life. But before I describe it, let me explain how I got to that cellar.

I was born in the years preceding World War II and lived content and well-loved by my family in Nurnberg. By 1933, however, my world was getting darker till, one day, Nazi storm troopers marched into Nurnberg ordering that all major buildings must fly the swastika flag by evening. In 1936, my parents took us to Paris, as my father had been appointed rabbi of the prominent Rue Cadet synagogue. Within a few years, as the political situation deteriorated, my father was conscripted into the army and had to leave us. In 1940, when the Nazis began bombing Paris, my mother fled with us—her four children—on the last train before the main onslaught. It was the eve of the Jewish holiday of Shavuot.

The mass of people on that train—a tornado of humanity—repeatedly wrenched us from one another. Months later, on another leg of our desperate journey I lost track of my family altogether and began to wander from village to village. Lone children all over were doing the same.

One night just before dawn, I could go no further. I knocked on the farmhouse door of what turned out to be a kind, courageous gentile farmer. He took me to his cellar where I found another little girl. Eventually two boys and another girl joined us. None of us admitted we were Jewish for several days.

It was a dire winter. Each morning, a few rays of light would poke their way into the cellar through two windows high on the wall—our only eyes to the world outside. The farmer had lowered us into the cellar through those windows and every day through one of them he lowered a net with five morsels of food and a bucket for our natural needs. Strange as it sounds, we were very lucky. In that difficult winter, five homeless children developed values so different from those today—as well as a bond of lifelong friendship.

One day, peering from the cellar up through the windows one of us noticed a streak of sunlight in blue sky. A few days later, another saw blades of grass penetrating the frozen terrain. We had no calendar or sense of time, but we concluded that, if the weather was indeed changing with spring on its way, maybe we were nearing Passover. Each of us children came from a different range of Jewish commitment, yet we shared a strong desire to do something to celebrate what we sensed was the upcoming Passover holiday.

When the farmer appeared with our food the next morning, we asked if he would lower in tomorrow's basket a small amount of flour, a bottle of water, a newspaper and a match. Two days later we received a small bottle of water, but we had to wait several days for the flour. The entire region was drained of provisions, with everything being transported north to Germany. Our host the farmer had himself barely anything to eat.

A day later, a newspaper came through—and then a match. We waited a few more days. We saw a full day of sunshine and blue skies, and we decided that, in order to cultivate a festive spirit, we would switch clothing with one another and wear them as if new. So we changed clothes; the two boys trading and the girls exchanging dresses. Before evening we baked our matza, though we hadn't a clue how to do so. We poured water into the flour and held the dough in our bare hands over the burning newspaper on the floor. We produced something which resembled matza, and whatever it was provided enough for the five of us.

That night we celebrated Passover. One of us recalled by heart the *kiddush*, the blessing that sanctifies the Passover night. Another remembered the Four Questions - the part of the Seder the young children recite. We told a few stories of the Exodus that we remembered having heard from our parents. Finally, we managed to reconstruct "*Chad Gadya*," the song which typically ends the evening.

We had a Passover to remember. With no festive food, no silver candlesticks and no wine - with only our simple desire to connect with God—we had a holiday more profound than any we have known since. I thank God for allowing me to live to be able to tell my children and grandchildren about it. Even more, I feel obligated to the younger generations of my family, who never experienced what I did, to pass on the clarity it gave me—the vivid appreciation of God's presence in my life, of His constant blessings, wonders and teachings... and of His commitment to the survival of the Jewish people.

A chag kasher v'sameach to all. We are blessed to celebrate the Passover holiday as free men and women. Next year may we all celebrate in Jerusalem.

Slavery and Freedom: Pesach Highlights¹

HENRY MANOUCHERI



The Iron Crucible

ויעבדו מצרים את בני ישראל בפרך. וימררו את חייהם בעבדה קשה בחמר ובלבנים
ובכל עבדה בשדה את כל עבדתם אשר עבדו בהם בפרך.
*And Egypt enslaved the children of Israel with backbreaking labor. And
they embittered their lives with hard labor, with mortar and with bricks and
with all the labor of the field, all their work which they worked for them with
backbreaking labor. (Shemos 1:13-14)*

The Torah clearly outlines that our ancestors' exile in Egypt was bitter and bleak. And yet, the outcome of their great suffering was more spectacular than one could have ever imagined. A show of divine glory and prowess enabled Jews to leave Egypt as slaves. Hashem lavishly showered *Am Yisrael* with "fabulous wealth," exactly as he had promised our forefather Avraham.

For our ancestors, the Egyptian slavery served as an iron crucible where gold is melted down and refined separately from the dross. The servitude in Egypt prepared our people to become subservient to Hashem and obedient to His Torah and *mitzvos* perfectly.

Elevated by Exile

Let us begin with the words of the Passover Hagada:

*"Blessed is He Who keeps His promise to Israel, blessed is He.
For the Holy One, blessed be He, calculated the End, to do as He*

¹ This article is based on *shiurim* from R Yaakov Hillel.

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told our Father Avraham in the Covenant between the Parts, as it says, 'And He said to Avraham, know surely that your descendants will be strangers in a land which is not theirs, and they will enslave them and afflict them for four hundred years. And also the nation which they serve I will judge, and afterwards they will go out with great wealth (Bereishis 15:13-14).' And it is (that promise) which stood by our ancestors and for us. For not only one alone rose up against us to destroy us. But rather, in every generation they rise up against us to destroy us, and the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hands."

This means that Hashem in his infinite wisdom ordained that *Am Yisrael* undergo a series of exiles like that of Egypt. Ironically, the suffering of exile has generally been to our people's ultimate benefit. The misery of exile and being mistreated in the hands of many cruel *goyim* constantly remind us of who we are. Without this truth, we would comfortably blend into non-Jewish societies as exhibited by the current *galus* in Edom (North America and Europe). When we are persecuted, we quickly realize that assimilation is no longer an option.

The Statue

Following the destruction of the Temple, the Jews underwent four successive exiles: Babylon, Persia and Media; Greece; and Edom and Yismael. Nevuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was shown a vision of these four exiles in a dream interpreted for him by Daniel (*Daniel* 2:31-45). In his dream, the Babylonian king saw a huge statue. Its head was made of gold, its chest and arms of silver, its stomach and thighs of copper, and its feet partly of iron, partly of clay. Before Nevuchadnezzar's eyes, a stone hit the statue and it crumbled.

Daniel told him that the statue represented four kingdoms which would dominate the world scene. Babylon, the golden head, was first. It would be followed by Persia and Media, the silver chest and arms. Next would be the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great, represented by copper. The iron symbolized the Roman Empire and its successors, the powerful Christian ruling dynasties. The clay represents the Islamic countries.

The Arizal explains a number of fundamental concepts which help explain the profound significance of this prophetic vision.

All the six hundred thousand souls of the Jewish nation were included in the great soul of Adam, the first man. These six hundred thousand souls were further subdivided into innumerable particles or sparks. Every soul had its own specific connection to

Adam. The higher souls were located in Adam's head, while the lower ones were in lower parts of his body, all the way down to the very humblest of souls, located in his heels.

King Shlomo wrote, "God has made the one corresponding to the other." This means that in all levels of Creation, He created two opposing forces which parallel one another. As the opposing forces paralleling these holy souls, Hashem created corresponding levels of evil forces, which are the source of the souls of the evil nations.

When Adam sinned, these souls or sparks of holiness were scattered throughout the world, where they wait to be retrieved through the Torah and *mitzvos* of the Jewish people in exile.

Each of the metals in the statue represented one of the exiles which the Jewish nation would undergo. They would have to pass through many empires retrieving and rectifying the lost sparks of holiness in these locations through the sanctity of their Torah and *mitzvos*. These empires, which correspond to the various levels of the forces of evil, derive their life force from the sparks of holiness contained within them. When Jews commit transgressions or refrain from doing *mitzvos*, these "sparks" are not retrieved and uplifted; they remain in their place and the forces of evil thrive undisturbed. This is why the forces of evil are so eager to entrap the Jewish people in sin – it is the only way they can stay alive.

In their many centuries of exile, the Jews have wandered – or fled – from one country to the next. In each succeeding location, they retrieved and rectified the *nitzotzos*, emptying the land of its sanctity by gathering the sparks. They would then move on, leaving behind a land devoid of all holiness – an empty broken shell, as symbolized by the crumbling of the statue. With the demise of each exile, the corresponding forces of evil were decimated, like the various parts of Nevuchadnezzar's statue.

In Nevuchadnezzar's dream, the statue fell apart in sections, symbolizing the downfall of empire after empire throughout history. In the future, when *Mashiach* comes, the statue will be reassembled, to be destroyed once again, this time as a single complete entity. This will be accomplished with one mighty blow struck by *Mashiach* represented in Nevuchadnezzar's dream by the stone thrown at the statue (*Tomer Devora* *ibid*).

When Hashem told Avraham that his children would be enslaved in Egypt for four hundred years, he promised him that "afterwards they will go out with great wealth." This does not refer only to the spoils of Egypt and the even more abundant spoils at the Red Sea. Those were material goods – gold, silver, jewels and clothing. The Torah also tells us that they emptied out Egypt. Our Sages teach that they left

it “like a net without fish, and like a stone house without grain.” The Arizal explains that they emptied the country in a spiritual sense by retrieving and rectifying all the sparks of sanctity scattered in Egypt, and carrying them away upon their departure.

Certainly the Haggada’s words are true in their literal sense. When each exile comes to its end, Hashem in His mercy destroys the nation that persecuted us, redeeming us from their hands. But the “great wealth” with which we leave their lands is not only material affluence. It is the spiritual rectification and perfection gained from the suffering of slavery and exile and the holy sparks which we retrieve.

At Pharaoh’s Service

Our Sages’ beautiful analogy only intensified the question. Instead of adorning the bride to be and showering her with gifts before the greatest of all “weddings” in the history of the world, she was cast into the terrible iron crucible of Egypt, where she sank to the lowest of the depths. Our Sages tell us that the Jews in Egypt descended to the forty-ninth “level of impurity,” only one final step away from the fiftieth, lowest level, from which there could be no return. They were in such a poor spiritual state that at the splitting of the sea the angels protested that the Jews were unworthy of great miracles. What made them any better than their former Egyptian masters? These are idol worshippers and those others are idol worshippers. Why did Hashem treat His beloved nation this way before their wedding ceremony at Mount Sinai?

We can find the answer in the words of the Torah. In the *parshiyos* that recount our people’s slavery and subsequent miraculous Exodus from Egypt, the Torah clearly states the purpose of the nation’s liberation:

ויאמר כי אהיה עמך וזה לך האות כי אנכי שלחתיך בהוציאך את העם ממצרים
תעבדון את האלהים על ההר הזה.

For I will be with you, and this will be a sign that I have sent you, when you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve God on this mountain.
(Shemos 3:12)

This mountain where Hashem revealed Himself to Moshe in the Burning Bush, was Mount Sinai, where the Torah would be given to the Jewish people after they left Egypt.

ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם והייתי לכם לאלהים וידעתם כי אני ה' אלהיכם המוציא אתכם
מתחת סבלות מצרים.

I will take you to Me as a nation, and I will be a God for you. And you will know that I am Hashem your God who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt. (Shemos 6:7)

The yoke of Torah is not a simple one to bear; it calls for great dedication and self-sacrifice. Our Sages teach us that Torah is not easily acquired, “How do we know that words of Torah are only preserved in one who kills himself over them? As it says, ‘This is the Torah, if a person dies in the tent.’ They go on to explain the verse, ‘For the juice of milk will produce butter.’ In whom do you find the butter of Torah? In one who spits up the milk he sucked from his mother over it.” Success in Torah demands that we exert ourselves to the utmost, reaching down to our very essence, described by our Sages as our mother’s milk.

From the very beginning, Israel’s relationship with the Almighty was defined as one of bondage. As slaves in Egypt the nation discovered the meaning of utter subjugation to a demanding master. They learned to give their all, day and night without letting up, no matter how difficult the conditions – because they had no choice.

There is an important lesson here. Hashem has endowed us with enormous physical and intellectual capacities. How much of them do we actually use and, more to the point, how much of them do we use in the service of Hashem? We allow the vast majority of our potential to go untapped. What if we were to adjust our viewpoint of life and its demands?

May God spare our people always, but in living memory, the Jewish nation was subjected to inhuman slavery at the hands of sadistic tyrants in Nazi concentration camps and Siberian labor compounds. They lacked sufficient food, minimal living conditions, medical care, and even basic sanitary facilities. At the same time, they were expected to work long and hard around the clock, under impossible stress and in constant fear of brutal punishment and death. How could anyone have survived these nightmarish circumstances for even the shortest period of time? And yet, the eyewitness accounts preserved of those terrible years tell of superhuman spiritual and physical achievements, far beyond what we would consider normal capacities. It is frightening to realize of just how very much we are, in fact, capable.

Our Sages compare toiling in Torah to strenuous physical labor. “Man was born to labor;” come what may and like it or not, in this world we are going to work, and work hard. However, our Sages tell us there is an element of choice. We can slave all our lives digging ditches and heaving stones for harsh masters in exile, God forbid. Or, we can labor over Torah, sweating over the word of God. Which would we prefer?

May we never experience such trials, but do tragedy and disaster not bring out our true capacities? If we can be slaves to a master like Pharaoh, we can certainly serve Hashem with at least equal devotion and self-sacrifice. Pharaoh and his successors

demanded every ounce of strength, and received it. Does Hashem deserve any less?

We can put all our energies, and they are considerable, into serving Him, without waiting for the prodding of a vicious taskmaster.

Liberated Slaves

Servants of “current times,” whether they reside on Madison Avenue, Rodeo Drive, in Hollywood or Paris or Milan, are swept along by the unending flood of novel ideas and inventions, contrived by corrupt individuals to further demean our Godly image. At every new year and season we see new fashions in shoes, clothes, fast cars, past times and more.

These companies pour billions of dollars and countless hours into researching ways to convince us that we must “possess” the very latest of everything. Look at how frequently iPhones change, and car companies put out more technologically advanced cars. Once snared we forget to check if the clothing is modest and dignified, the interior decorating tasteful and peaceful, and the “entertainment” worthy of our holy Jewish souls.

In contemporary Hebrew terminology, secular Jews are called “*chofshi'im*,” literally “free,” and Torah observant Jews are called “*dati'im*,” literally “religious.” These terms suggest that the *chofshi* is a free bird, unrestricted by the manifold obligations of *halacha* and Jewish ethics. His behavior is dictated solely by his own whims and choices. He is no one’s servant or slave, certainly not God’s. In contrast, one who is “religious” is confined by the limitations of *halacha*. He cannot do as he pleases – he is subservient to the Almighty, constantly fenced in by the requirements of the Torah as outlined in the *Shulchan Aruch*. On a superficial level, these definitions may seem quite accurate. Who, then, really is free?

A more profound appreciation of the concepts of servitude and freedom will help us understand that our Sages’ teaching is true; only those who serve Hashem are free, and those who are detached from Torah and *mitzvos* are, in fact, total slaves. Let us see why this is so.

Hashem created man as a combination of body and soul. The body is physicality. It comes from the “dust of the earth” and by nature is irresistibly drawn to material, worldly pleasures and desires. The soul is entirely spiritual – it is *chelek Eloka mima'al*, a Godly entity which descends from the Higher Worlds. As such, it is drawn to spirituality, and longs only to cleave to the Almighty. Clearly this places man squarely in the middle of a battlefield, with each combatant struggling to pull him in the direction of its desires.

This world is a material entity. Its utter physicality erects barriers which block out spirituality and Divine revelation, causing extreme *hester panim*, as we learn from our Sages' interpretation of the verse, "This is My Name forever." (*Shemos* 3:15). In this verse the word "*l'olam*" ("forever," or literally, "as long as the world exists") is spelled without a *vav* so that it can also read as *l'alem*, "to conceal." This teaches us that the world (*olam*) itself acts as a cover, concealing Hashem's name and with it, all other revelations of spirituality.

The world is like a prison for the soul. When we cling to its physicality, we drag the soul down to the depths of gross materialism. If we loosen its bond of physical desire and cleave to the Almighty, the soul is free to connect to its higher root, where there are no material restraints.

The spiritual world, on the other hand, has no limitations and restrictions, because the root of spirituality is the Creator. The Almighty is infinite (*Ein Sof*), unlimited by time, place, or power. When we attach ourselves to spirituality by serving Him, we refine and purify the body as well as the soul. By separating from the restrictions of the limited material world and its desires, we can achieve the exalted spiritual state known as *hispahtus hagashmiyus* (see Rabbeinu Behayye, *Shemos* 3:5)

Only a servant of Hashem is free because he lives a spiritual life guided by Torah. Torah connects him to the Creator, allowing him to rise above physical restraints and cravings. As Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi says, we can ask for nothing greater. "Therefore when every person requests his lot, my soul requests Hashem as my lot."

Chofshi'im are not free; they are slaves to a tyrannical ever-present master of their own making. Accepting the yoke of Torah at Sinai delivered us from the prison of worldly desires. It is this precious freedom that our people continue to celebrate every year anew.

Why Pharaoh Needed an Eye Doctor Instead of a Cardiologist

DR. MICHAEL KLEINMAN



One of the most well-known exchanges in the Torah is that of *Moshe Rabbeinu* and Pharaoh. Over the course of three *parshiyos*,¹ the leaders go back and forth, with Moshe demanding the release of *Klal Yisrael* and Pharaoh repeatedly refusing. From an early age, we are taught that Pharaoh was wrong for refusing to let the Jewish people leave and that he should have agreed from the beginning. However, if we take a step back to reflect, the situation becomes murkier. Put yourself in Pharaoh's shoes as a leader of the world's strongest country: a man suddenly appears from Midyan² stating to be on a mission from a God in whom you do not believe, and demands that you let your entire labor force leave the country for a three day journey into the desert. What would a normal king do? At the very least he would have them expelled from his presence. Pharaoh, however, does not throw Moshe and Aharon out. Instead, he asks for a *mofes*, a wonder. What is Pharaoh asking for? Let us take a closer look at the *pesukim* that deal with Moshe's signs and wonders.

1 *Shemos, Vaaira, Bo*

2 Some *meforshim* say this may have been the same Pharaoh who raised Moshe, making it even harder for him to take Moshe's request seriously.

I started YULA the same year as Rabbi Dovid Landesman and was fortunate to be his talmid. He made an important roshem on all of his talmidim at YULA as well as on the greater Los Angeles Jewish community. He always encouraged his students to engage with the world with eyes wide open to the messages of Hashem and truly was the embodiment of the lessons this article espouses.

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Os vs. Mofes

וילך משה ואהרן ויאספו את כל זקני בני ישראל. וידבר אהרן את כל הדברים אשר דבר ה' אל משה ויעש האתת לעיני העם: ויאמן העם וישמעו כי פקד ה' את בני ישראל וכי ראה את ענים ויקדו וישתחוּ.

Moshe and Aharon went and gathered all the elders of the Children of Yisrael. Aharon spoke all the words that Hashem had spoken to Moshe; and he performed the signs (osos) in the sight of the people. And the people believed, and they heard that Hashem had remembered the children of Yisrael and that He saw their affliction, and they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves. (Shemos 4:29-31)

ויאמר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן לאמה. כי ידבר אלכם פרעה לאמר תנו לכם מופת ואמרת אל אהרן קח את מטך והשלך לפני פרעה יהי לתנין. ויבא משה ואהרן אל פרעה ויעשו כן כאשר צוה ה' וישלך אהרן את מטהו לפני פרעה ולפני עבדיו ויהי לתנין.

Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon, saying: "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Provide a wonder (mofes) for yourselves,' you shall say to Aharon, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh – it will become a snake!'" Moshe came down with Aharon to Pharaoh and they did so, as Hashem had commanded; Aharon cast down his staff before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a snake. (Shemos 7:8-10)

The same action of turning a staff into a snake³ and back is described differently in these two stories. The Torah uses the language of *os* when referring to *Bnei Yisrael* and *mofes* regarding Pharaoh. The Sforno⁴ explains that *Bnei Yisrael* believed in Hashem and were eagerly awaiting the arrival of His representative to deliver them from bondage. The *os* of Moshe was to convince them that he in fact was the true agent of Hashem. Pharaoh, however, did not know Hashem, as he states: "Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know Hashem, nor will I send out Israel" (*Shemos* 5:2). A sign that Moshe was the true messenger of God would not have an effect on Pharaoh. He needed a *mofes*, a wonder that would prove the existence of Hashem and by default the truth of Moshe as His agent. This, explains

3 The Torah also calls the snake a *nachash* in relation to *Bnei Yisrael* and *tanin* in relation to Pharaoh. I've translated them both as snake as the difference between these creatures is beyond the scope of this article. Rabbi Slifkin writes about this at <http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/731022/rabbi-nosson-slifkin/ behold-the-predator/>

4 *Shemos* 7:9

the Sferno, is the reason for these two different words. Pharaoh does not know about Hashem, and is asking Moshe to provide proof that he should follow the instructions of God. When Moshe offers proof, Pharaoh instructs his sorcerers to perform the same sign. He has not been sufficiently convinced to start listening to Hashem. Aharon's staff then swallows the staffs of the sorcerers, seemingly demonstrating God's power. Pharaoh was not convinced, and shrugged it off to better "magic." This is the "hardening of his heart" described by the Torah. He had a choice whether to believe in Hashem in light of the *mofes* or make excuses, and he decided not to believe in Hashem. We now start to see clues as to what Pharaoh was doing wrong. The story continues with the first *makka*, blood, but Hashem turns it up a notch. Even though the *chartumim* could turn water into blood, they were not able to turn the blood back into water. Pharaoh is getting a lifeline but again chooses to dismiss Moshe as a magician. The same scenario ensues with the *tzfardea*, the second plague, but with an even starker message. *Tzfardea* was unique amongst the *makkos* in one way. With all the other plagues, after they finished, the offenders left Egypt without a trace. For example, all the blood turned back into water. *Tzfardea* was different because all of the carcasses remained across *Mitzrayim*. The Sferno⁵ explains that this was Hashem's way of giving Pharaoh a big reminder that he was making a mistake. We know that he did not take heed. *Kinim*, the third plague, represents an additional level because this was the first *makka* which the sorcerers could not replicate. "The sorcerers said to Pharaoh, 'It is a finger of God!' But Pharaoh's heart was strong and he did not heed them, as Hashem had spoken" (*Shemos* 8:15). Pharaoh has received the clearest message yet, but he still actively decides not to believe in Hashem. This continues until Hashem eventually removes the freedom of choice from Pharaoh so as to complete the sequence of *makkos*.

A three-day journey

While one might explain that Pharaoh deserved such extreme punishment because he subjugated and tortured the Jewish people, the above explanation and simple reading of the *Chumash* do not seem to fit that explanation. If that were the case, why would Moshe keep asking Pharaoh to let the Jews leave? It would have made more sense to just tell Pharaoh that he should not have enslaved the Jews and then commence the punishments. It seems, rather, that Pharaoh's sin was in not recognizing when to stop the enslavement and his failure to realize that Hashem was pulling all the strings. To understand this on a deeper level, let us take a step back and ask a different and pressing

⁵ *Shemos* 8:11

question. What was the purpose of asking to let *Bnei Yisrael* leave for a three-day journey to worship Hashem, and then return to Egypt? More to the point, what would have happened if Pharaoh had said yes? Most commentators assume that Hashem had no intention of having *Bnei Yisrael* return to Egypt and that the request was merely a means of negotiating with Pharaoh and implementing the *makkos*.⁶ The *Emes L'Yaakov*,⁷ Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, has a novel approach to this problem. He explains that the enslavement in *Mitzrayim* was a pre-ordained and necessary experience in the development of *Klal Yisrael*. They had lived through many years with more still to come. However, the toll of living in the depraved culture of Egypt had hurt them spiritually to the point where they soon would lose their potential to come back to holiness. Moshe was really asking for a three-day *Yom Tov* to recharge their spiritual batteries and prepare them for the rest of the *avdus*. If Pharaoh would have said yes, then *Klal Yisrael* would have come back to Egypt and completed their servitude without any *makkos*. This did not happen, however. Pharaoh refused and through the process of the revelation of Hashem in this world, *Bnei Yisrael* had a faster spiritual ascendance. This made the remaining years of *avdus* unnecessary and they left Egypt with no need or intention to return.

Throughout history, we have witnessed divinely ordained subjugation of the Jewish people through various agents. Pharaoh's case was no different. *Bnei Yisrael* were destined to be slaves in Egypt, thereby making Pharaoh the messenger. Pharaoh's major shortcoming was that he did not see the *yad Hashem* in any of this, even after being given the *mofes*, i.e. the proof that he requested. He could have opened his eyes and heart to realize that Hashem is the true master. He could have freed the Jews and avoided all punishment and plagues. Instead, he actively (and in hindsight foolishly) ignored the message, and changed from being an evil agent to an agent of evil.

One final question still remains; why did Hashem think that Pharaoh had the capability to see the Truth?

The Truth is out There

A novel approach to understanding the concept of *tinok shenishba* can help us see what Hashem expected from Pharaoh. The term *tinok shenishba*, literally a "captured baby," refers to a Jew who did not receive an education in Torah and *mitzvos*. *Halacha*⁸

⁶ See Ramban *Shemos* 13:16 "*u'ltotafos bein einecha*." He explains that all of these proceedings were part of Hashem's elaborate pre-ordained plan to teach the world and *Klal Yisrael* an important lesson.

⁷ *Parshas Shemos*

⁸ See *gemara Shabbos 68b* and Rambam *Mishne Torah Hilchos Mamrim 3:3*.

looks favorably on a *tinok shenishba* in many different applications and clearly does not view them in the same light as a learned person who knowingly violates the Torah. A fascinating explanation of *tinok shenishba* is taught by the *Nimukei Yosef*, quoted by the *Beis Yosef*.⁹ He rules that the concept of *tinok shenishba* only applies to those that never had any exposure to *shomrei Torah u'mitzvos*. It is generally understood that according to the *Nimukei Yosef*, all people are imbued with the ability to recognize truth when they see it. If one sees people who are dedicated to serving Hashem or *kal vachomer* actual wonders from Hashem as in the case of Pharaoh, they are expected to internalize them. This opinion may be somewhat extreme under normal circumstances, but Pharaoh was living in a different situation. Hashem would not have punished him so severely if Pharaoh did not have the ability to react properly to the test he was given. Despite the cruelty Pharaoh exhibited during the servitude, he should have recognized his true part in world events and acted with grace when Hashem showed himself. He failed and the rest is history.

The Torah is teaching us a valuable lesson. As *Bnei Torah*, we must constantly evaluate our circumstances and analyze our actions to see if they are in accordance with *ratzon Hashem*. Hardening our hearts and turning a blind eye is not the correct response for anyone, let alone an *eved Hashem*. May we all take the lesson of Pharaoh to heart and through that see the culmination of Hashem's plans with the coming of *Mashiach b'meheira b'yameinu*.

⁹ *Tur Yore Dea* 159:2

Shavuos



Rabbi David Mahler

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Remembering the Sinai Experience and its Profound *Chinuch* Lessons

RABBI DAVID MAHLER



Memory is a necessary part of a meaningful life. Additionally, it is an integral part of many *mitzvos*. It is the backbone of many of our commandments and a necessary component in many of their fulfillment. Webster's Dictionary defines memory as "the power or process of reproducing or recalling what has been learned and retained especially through associative mechanisms." Although this seems like an accurate definition, Rav Soloveitchik explains that, truthfully, there are two types of memory: intellectual and experiential.

We will focus on experiential memory. The Rav writes:

In order to understand what experiential memory is, we must recognize that there are two kinds of memory. The first is an intellectual memory which mechanically recalls and assembles factual data. The other memory recalls experiences by evoking the feelings of the past event. Judaism insisted that Jews recall not only the factual events of the past, but that in addition the experiences of the past retain their vigor undiminished despite the passage of time. Whatever was horrible and frightening should be remembered as horrible and frightening, no matter how much time has elapsed since the event transpired. The memory of what once was therapeutic and redemptive should forever possess those qualities. In short, when remembering the past, the Jew relives the event as if it were a present reality. (Shiurei HaRav, p. 127)

The *Magen Avraham* (OC 60) writes that there are six specific historic events or concepts that a Jew must recall each day. These six events are listed after *Shacharis* in many of our *siddurim*. It is not enough to simply recall the event but rather the memory of the event must be a catalyst for experiencing them.

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Included in the *Shesh Zechiros* is the requirement to remember *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, our receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. The basis for this memory can be found in the *pesukim* in *Sefer Devarim*, “Only beware and guard yourself carefully lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, lest they stray from your heart all the days of your life, and you are to make them known to your children and to your children’s children – the day you stood before Hashem, your God, at Sinai” (4:9-10).

The Rambam does not count remembering the Sinai experience as a *mitzva* but rather gives it a more broad implication. He explains that this *pasuk* does not refer exclusively to standing at Mount Sinai, but has a general connotation that we should never forget the Torah. (*Megillas Esther*, *mitzva* 2 of the *mitzvos* that the Rambam left out – *Lo Sa'aseh*)

On the other hand, the Ramban (*Devarim* 4:9) feels that remembering *Har Sinai* qualifies as a Biblical commandment, one that forms the backbone of our belief in Hashem and His Torah. This *pasuk* substantiates the credibility of the Torah, and of *Moshe Rabbeinu* as our greatest prophet. The Ramban eloquently explains that Moshe exhorted the nation to remember not only the commandments, but also the entire spectacle of the Revelation at Sinai – the thunder and lightning, the glory and greatness – that was visible not merely to a select elite, but to millions of people. This aspect of the experience was crucial, for if anyone were to cast doubt upon the source of the Torah, the entire nation could stand and testify to what they had seen with their own eyes. This was an experience *Am Yisrael* was bound to share for posterity, *midor l'dor*.

There are myriad approaches as to the rationale of remembering the scene at Sinai and the Matan Torah experience. More acutely, there are a few which, when applied appropriately, can serve as tremendous lessons in *chinuch*.

Kedushas Levi

The *Kedushas Levi* (*Sefer Zichronos*) writes that the purpose of this *mitzva* is to make us constantly aware of the abundant love Hashem has for the Jewish people. He gave the Torah to *Klal Yisrael* alone and it is exclusively ours. Even though the angels fought for it to be kept in heaven and not given to anyone else for fear of its desecration, Hashem insisted that it should be given to us.

This idea can help in understanding why Hashem waited generations for the Torah to be given. According to the *Semak*, Hashem deliberately waited for other civilizations to develop, other nations and systems of belief to be actualized, so that the Torah could be given to *Klal Yisrael*, as their exclusive heritage.

It is crucial that our children feel that we have been given something precious. The Torah is truly a gift, and that idea must permeate our homes. We are fortunate and lucky to have received the love and attention of Hashem. Our children, and we ourselves, need to hear the message that Hashem loves every Jew, and because He loves you, He wants you to learn Torah and perform *mitzvos*.

Pachad Yitzchak

Rav Hutner (Shavuot, *Ma'amar* 8) quotes both the opinion of the Ramban, which as stated above views the *pasuk* in *Devarim* as a mandate to literally never forget the scene of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, as well as the *Mishna* in *Pirkei Avos* which seems to learn from the *pasuk* that there is a prohibition to never forget one's Torah. He argues that the Ramban and the *Tanna* are not arguing, but are hammering home the same idea. Essentially, Rav Hutner writes, the idea behind remembering *Har Sinai* is the acknowledgement that Torah is one's top priority and must be the most important part of one's life. Torah is the most vital part of our lives and people never forget those things that are most important to them. Generally, when we do not place value on something, we forget about it. The opposite should be true with Torah. For this reason, *Zechiras Ma'amad Har Sinai* and the *issur* of forgetting one's learning stress the same idea, that of the eminence of Torah in our lives.

Our children will imbibe the level of *Chashivas HaTorah* we create in our homes. If the school has one level and our homes a different one, our children might be off kilter. Learning Torah, valuing people who learn and live Torah are things that are not preached, but practiced. Our children must hear us engage in Torah conversations, must be made aware when we leave the house to learn, and must hear us speak with reverence about people who make Torah their highest priority.

Rav Yaakov Emden

In his *siddur*, Rav Yaakov Emden writes that the purpose of *Zechiras Ma'amad Har Sinai* is to recall the feeling of complete unity *Klal Yisrael* experienced as they stood ready to accept the Torah. At the end of *davening* each morning, before we begin our day, mingling and interacting with all different types of people, we remind ourselves and request from Hashem to rekindle in our hearts that special experience of love which each Jew felt for his fellow Jew at the foot of the mountain. We hope and pray that we will be able to regain that unity. This was a unique and profound type of *achdus* that other nations and groups rarely, if ever, experience.

We are told of this unique *achdus* because the Torah employs the singular "*Vayichan*" (*Shemos* 19:2), as opposed to the plural "*Vayachanu*" formulation

when describing *Bnei Yisrael's* encampment at the mountain. The *Midrash* uses this formation to teach us that we were “*k'ish echad b'lev echad*,” as one man with one heart.

However, Rashi makes a very similar comment a bit earlier in *Sefer Shemos*. After Pharaoh allowed *Bnei Yisrael* to leave Egypt, he had a change of heart and decided to bring them back. When describing the Egyptian army, the *pasuk* (14:10) uses the singular word “*noseia*” (traveling), as opposed to “*nos'im*.” On that phrase, Rashi quotes the strange singular usage of the verb and writes that the Egyptian army was “*b'lev echad k'ish echad*”. It seems that the Egyptian army shared the same exalted level of unity as we did standing on *Har Sinai*. Rashi's comment sounds eerily similar to his comment about *Bnei Yisrael's* unity at *Har Sinai*, yet a subtle shift in his wording highlights the crucial difference. With respect to the Jewish people, we were united as one person with a shared heart, whereas the Egyptians' united heart precedes the mention of them being united as one person. The Egyptians were not inherently united, but rather only shared a common goal – to capture and bring the Jews back to serve them. With respect to other areas of life, however, they were not united. The Egyptians shared a common goal: their common objective was their unifier but once that was lost, all their *achdus* was lost; *batla davar batla achdus*.

On the other hand, the Jewish people were first and foremost one organic unit, *k'ish echad*. We were unified because of our deep love and admiration for each other. At this moment in history, we also happened to share the same goal, *b'lev echad*, to receive Hashem's Torah.

The importance of the unity of the Jewish people is a vital lesson for our families. Too often we enjoy retelling the cynical joke of two Jews and three opinions or three shuls. The idea that all of *Am Yisrael* is one singular unit must be stressed. Our joining together is the only thing that will make us strong, by fighting the discord and rampant biases and name-calling within our community. We are so quick to find ideas and opinions with which we disagree, that we drive a wedge within our not-so-large community. Our *achdus* will help us overcome these judgments, and become one nation.

May we be *zoche* to raise families where each child is able to internalize that he or she is uniquely cherished by Hashem, where the valued currency is *menschlichkeit* and Torah knowledge, and where harmony and solidarity among *Klal Yisrael* is cherished and preserved.

Chag Sameach!

Shavuos – The Ultimate Marriage

YAAKOV ZUBER



The *Shalosh Regalim*, the three major festivals that we celebrate every year, is an opportunity for us to recognize our connection to Hashem. In the *Amida* that we say during the *Yomim Tovim*, we describe in various ways how Hashem has chosen and exalted us to be on a higher level than the rest of the nations of the world.

According to *Chazal*, Hashem did not simply separate us from the rest of the world. We became One with Hashem, as the *Zohar* (111, 73) states, “*Yisrael*, the Torah, and Hashem are all one.” *Chazal* explain that our bond with Hashem is the greatest type of bond known to mankind, namely the bond that exists between a husband and wife. This concept, that we are “married” to Hashem, runs throughout the *Shalosh Regalim*, in order that those times of the year remind us of that greatest of connections that we have with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Shalosh Regalim - Union

The *Tur*¹ writes that the *Shalosh Regalim* correspond to the three *Avos*. Pesach corresponds to *Avraham Avinu*, Shavuos is connected to *Yitzchak Avinu*, and Succos is compared to *Yaakov Avinu*. The *Sfas Emes* extends the idea that a marriage took place between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael* at *Har Sinai* in explaining that the *Yamim Tovim* correspond to the multiple stages of that marriage:²

1. Pesach corresponds to *eirusin*, the first stage of marriage, as, when the Torah describes Hashem taking us out of Egypt, it uses the term “*ULikachtem... Li*,” the same expression used by the Torah to describe *eirusin*. This term, *kicha*, is also the *gezeira shava* mentioned by the sale of the *Ma'aras HaMachpeila* from Efron to Avraham.

1 *Tur Orach Chaim*, end of *siman* 417

2 See Rabbi Norman Lamm’s Sermon delivered at the Jewish Center in Manhattan’s Upper West Side on the 7th of Pesach 5735; <http://brussels.mc.yu.edu/gsd/collect/lammserm/index/assoc/HASHfcae.dir/doc.pdf>

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2. Shavuot corresponds to the next stage in marriage, the *kesuva*; the Torah, which was given on *Har Sinai*, contains the terms of the relationship between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*.

3. The holiday of Succos symbolizes the stage of *nisuin*, which takes place under a *chuppa*; similarly, we sit in the *Succa* under the covering of the *schach*.

The ultimate marriage is the union of Hashem and His people. What can we learn from this marriage, and how can it help elevate our understanding of the *Yamim Tovim*?

Wedding Customs

In *Parshas VaEschanan*, the *Chumash* describes the giving of the Torah on *Har Sinai*. *Chazal* teach us that *maamad Har Sinai* was the *chuppa* between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*. This idea is found in the last *Mishna* in *Maseches Ta'anis*, in which the *Mishna* explains the following *pasuk* in the third *perek* of *Shir HaShirim*:

צאינה וראינה בנות ציון במלך שלמה בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו ביום חתונתו וביום שמחת לבו.

Daughters of Zion, go out and see King Shlomo in the glory in which his mother adorned him, on the day of his wedding and on the day of the gladness of his heart.

According to the *Mishna*, “ביום חתונתו זה מתן תורה”, the ultimate *chasuna* occurred on *Har Sinai*. In fact, the *Sefer Tashbetz*,³ a *Rishon*, writes that many of the customs practiced at weddings are done in order to mirror different elements that were found at *Har Sinai*. For example, the parents hold candles while escorting the Groom and the Bride to the *chuppa*, symbolizing the many lights and fires that were seen at *matan Torah*.

Rav Soloveitchik⁴ offers an additional insight into the connection between *matan Torah* and a wedding. The common understanding as to why we break a glass at the end of the *chuppa* is that by doing so we remind ourselves of *Churban HaBayis*. However, the breaking of the glass can be explained in terms of symbolizing an aspect of *matan Torah* as well. The *Midrash* teaches us that as a result of the first *luchos* being presented in too public of a manner, an *ayin hara* was created, resulting in the first *luchos* being broken. The second set of *luchos* were presented in a private fashion, and

3 Responsa of *Tashbetz* 465

4 See Rabbi Herschel Schachter, *The Breaking of the Glass*:
http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2005/parsha/rsch_yisro.html

himself I will make for him a partner”; man becomes *tov* as a result of a person finding his *ezer k'negdo*, his lifelong partner. Tu B'Av is the union between man and woman, while Yom Kippur is the union between man and God.

The ultimate lesson we can learn from *Har Sinai*, the greatest wedding there ever was, is that marriage requires exclusivity, a oneness between man and his wife just as there is a oneness between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*. The *Yamim Tovim*, especially the *Yom Tov* of Shavuos, should be celebrated knowing that we are commemorating the ultimate marriage, the union between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael* that occurred on *Har Sinai*.

Dairy, to the Contrary

ELI SNYDER



While the holiday of Shavuos is indeed soaked in significance to the Jewish people and the world as a whole, one can still, perhaps paradoxically, assert that the defining characteristic of Shavuos is its lack of defining characteristics. While the other holidays and events over the course of the year are replete with associated *mitzvos* and strong *minhagim*, Shavuos is rather sparse with regards to actions associated with the holiday. In context of the *Shalosh Regalim*, Shavuos is bookended by two holidays, Pesach and Succos, both of which brim with physical manifestations of the time they represent. Another interesting point to note is the sequence of the *Shalosh Regalim*. While one might think the (chrono)logical order should be Pesach, the holiday reliving the exodus from Egypt, followed by Succos, the holiday commemorating the temporary shelters that protected us on our journey, culminating with Shavuos, the holiday on which we received the Torah, Succos and Shavuos are actually switched.¹ By understanding the flow of these three holidays in terms of what they and their associated *halachos* represent, the *minhagim* and timing of Shavuos can be more easily explained.

In his series *Talelei Chayim*, HaRav Chaim Cohen, the “*Chalban*” (lit. translation, the “Milkman”) describes the opposing natures of Pesach and Succos. The *halachos* that represent each *chag* are in fact mirror images of each other. The *halachos* of Pesach are decidedly negative – *balyera’e* (don’t see [*chametz*]), *balyimatzei* (don’t find [*chametz*]), *lo yochal chametz* (don’t eat *chametz*). Even the positive commandments of eating *matza* and giving the *Korban Pesach* are only applicable to the first day of the holiday. The *mitzvos* of Succos, in contrast, are primarily *mitzvos asei*, positive commandments i.e. sitting in the *succa*, taking the *lulav* and *esrog*, the water and wine libations, *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*, unique *korbanos* for each day, etc. The difference between the nature

¹ Although from the perspective of Rosh Hashana, Succos is considered the first holiday of the *Shalosh Regalim*, we consider the month of Nisan, not Tishrei, as the first month of the year regarding the sequence of holidays, and therefore Pesach is first.

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of the *halachos* of Pesach and Succos is indeed quite apparent. The *Chalban* goes even further to point out that the prohibitions associated with Pesach primarily revolve around *chametz*, a foodstuff that is ordinarily permitted all year round. *Chametz* represents the physicality of this world, something that we take special care to avoid on Pesach. As such, Pesach can be categorized as a holiday of *prishus*, self-restraint. On the flipside, Succos involves engagement with the physicality of the world, using objects that grew from the earth to perform *mitzvos*. The *Chalban* explains that Pesach represents the birth of the Jewish people as a nation; as such, as with a newborn baby, cautiousness of the world is required, for fear of any accidental harm. Pesach therefore drives us away from the potentially precarious elements of nature, since we do not yet know how to engage with them. Succos, the endpoint of the *Shalosh Regalim*, finds the Jewish People at a point of development where physicality no longer needs to be feared; with the proper maturity and knowledge, it can instead be harnessed and used for *mitzvos*. This explains the abundance of positive commandments that necessitate participation with the physical world. Indeed, Judaism does not advocate modes of religious “service” such as celibacy, self-flagellation or asceticism. The ideal is to know how to properly involve oneself with physicality and, by doing so, elevate the physical to spiritual heights.²

Where then does this leave Shavuos? Sitting between Pesach and Succos, Shavuos serves as the transition point between the newborn and adult phase of the Jewish people. It is, of course, only through the instruction imbued in the Torah that we learn how to religiously engage in the world, and Shavuos is the day on which we received it. Unlike its seven day long counterparts, Shavuos is by design just one day; it is an inflection point, and can therefore last only a momentary blink of the eye. This also sheds light on why there are no specific *mitzvos* related to Shavuos. Unlike Pesach or Succos, the *chag* is neither negative nor positive commandment-based. It is *nisht ahir un nisht aher*, neither here nor there. Even the *minhagim* associated with Shavuos lend to this idea. Learning Torah through the night demonstrates how different we are as people, now ready to learn how to properly perform Hashem’s will; we have separated from the ascetic mentality but are not yet ready for the material one. The custom to eat dairy might echo this sentiment as well. The prohibition of eating dairy and meat together extends past consumption in the same dish, including eating them in close

2 This dichotomy is also readily apparent by the complimentary holidays of Purim and Yom Kippur. While the initial impression is that Yom Kippur and its ascetic themes are elevated above the seemingly boisterous and frivolous Purim, close study reveals that it is truly the latter, when successfully utilized, that can elevate a Jew to the greatest spiritual elevations. We can only hope that the Day of Repentance is a *Yom KiPurim*, like Purim in its loftiness.

succession. There is a limitation on this prohibition, though: while one needs to wait a significant amount of time to eat dairy after meat, the reverse is not true; regardless of the opinion by which one holds, meat can be eaten in close succession to eating dairy. Meat has a lingering flavor which takes significant time to dissipate since it is rooted deeper into physicality. The *halachic* implication is that the taste of dairy does not last as long. Both Pesach and Succos are highly concerned with the physical nature of the world, although they take different approaches to it. Shavuot meanwhile is focused purely on Torah, and therefore physical actions are almost an afterthought.

A keen observer may have already noticed that Shavuot is not actually the only Torah-centric, one-day *chag* on the Jewish calendar. There is also Shemini Atzeres. While in the diaspora Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah are celebrated as two separate days, in principal, like Shavuot, they are really designed to be celebrated together on one day. However, the approach to Torah on Shavuot and Shemini Atzeres is quite different. While the former is focused on spending additional hours learning and acquainting oneself with Torah knowledge, the latter celebrates the Torah itself, namely having completed the cycle of weekly Torah readings. The timing of this completion is not coincidental.³ Following along the theme we have discussed, it is highly appropriate. Beginning with Pesach, we do not know how to correctly engage with the world and so we take extra care not to fully engage. Then comes Shavuot which introduces the Torah, the guidebook that instructs us how to correctly utilize the world and all that it gives us. Succos is the demonstration that we are now armed with that knowledge and can partake in and use physicality in a profound new way. Immediately after Succos, then, what do we do? We celebrate the Torah that taught us how to correctly live our lives! Of course, right then and there we start again with *Bereishis*. While we appreciate the growth the past year has (hopefully) provided, we begin the cycle again, but now from a more elevated platform.⁴ The themes of the holidays become more nuanced and we engage with the world in even more ways at each juncture. And so it goes, year after year, cyclically revisiting and re-experiencing each holiday and each *parsha* of the Torah, all while appreciating each one in a new and beautiful ways.

3 See my article, "The *Klipa* of a *Kippa*: Addressing our Dress through the Custom of Costumes," in *Nitzachon* Volume 2:2 for another example of the alignment between the Torah reading cycle and the Jewish holiday cycle.

4 An explanation I once heard for why there is no *Daf* "Aleph" in the *gemara* (at least in the predominantly used Vilna print) is that one can only "begin" learning *gemara* after having learned the entire *gemara*. In other words, the complexities of the Talmud can only be appreciated after having trained your mind by working through all of *Shas*. Of course this goes on ad infinitum and is reminiscent of the cycle of the year: each holiday can only truly be experienced by one who has already experienced all the holidays.

The Mothers of Kings¹

AVI AZIZI



There are infinite insights and angles to be gained in Tanach, and in *Megillas Rus* particularly we can learn how easy it is to go “off the *derech*.” Elimelech’s leaving *Eretz Yisrael* and the intermarriage of his children is described in only a few short *pesukim*, whereas the description of his wife and daughters-in-law returning is far more complex, dramatic, and time-consuming.

Of the eighty-five *pesukim* that comprise the body of this *Megilla*, most deal with the obstacles that stood in the path of Naomi and Ruth. Seventy-seven of them begin with a *vav*, emphasizing the travails they withstood. We can easily understand this by looking at our own lives and realizing how easy it is to become distracted and slip, and how difficult it is to focus on regrowth.

Ruth, unlike her sister-in-law, was able to choose the right path. She converted, and Naomi became her mentor, her teacher of the ways of the Torah. She got tested rather quickly when they returned to Beis Lechem. Upon their arrival, the women of the community, not necessarily out maliciousness, spoke their minds. Ruth did not care about the embarrassment or take their words to heart; she had already made up her mind to cling to Naomi and to Hashem. She was dedicated, and so she decided to glean in the fields for grain for both of them. Thus begins the story of *Megillas Rus*.

Two integral qualities of a *bas Yisrael* are that of modesty and the decision to be a mother. Ruth showed great modesty in her “workplace,” in the fields where she was gathering grain. The *pasuk* says

ותלך ותבוא ותלקט בשדה.

She went, and she came, and she gleaned in the field.

The described order of her trip is very odd. It sounds like she went, then returned, then gleaned; shouldn’t the gleaning be between her trip there and her return?

¹ This article is based on a *shiur* on the subject by Rabbi Shlomo Brevda *zt”l*.

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Rav Brevda explains that she was concerned about her modesty. She went to the fields, but would not begin gathering as soon as she got there. She first planned her return trip, since she knew she might be getting back rather late in unknown locations. Only after planning her return did she begin to gather grain. Yes, she lost out on some bushels, but her being *tzenua* was far more important. Another possibility to explain the *pasuk* is that she was very selective of the people with whom she would be gleaning. She did not want to associate with a group who would be speaking *lashon hara*, discussing the latest gossip or fashions, or other unwanted speech.

Tznius can be defined as the pushing aside of superficiality. It is listening to one's *neshama* - one's spirituality. Therefore, the opposite of modesty in Rabbinic texts is not immodesty - but rather "foolishness." Lack of modesty is looking solely for superficial things. Ruth thus epitomized modesty, going out to sustain her household only in the modest fashion possible. It is this quality of Ruth that earned her the status of matriarch of kings.

The other vital quality, of choosing to be a mother, can be seen in several of the women who acted as precursors to the Davidic dynasty, who were often very proactive in choosing their husbands. Some of the stories of these women may appear - *chalila* - to be scandalous in nature, but they are in actuality very holy. Leah, the mother of Yehuda, literally cried her eyes red to Hashem in prayer for a righteous husband. She was willing to be humiliated by her appearance just to marry a *tzadik*. Tamar was so *tzenua* that she always covered her face in her father-in-law's house (alluded to in *Bereishis* 38:15 and 38:19). Her *mesiras nefesh* to have children also earned her a share in *malchus*. According to Rashi (*Ruth* 2:5 and *Shabbos* 113a), Miriam, who later on went to marry Nachson Ben Aminadav, David's ancestor, cared very much for children. She not only followed her infant brother down the Nile to check on his welfare, but also endangered her life by talking to Egyptian authorities and offering child-weaning services.

Lot's daughter, Ruth's ancestor, truly felt the world had ended and needed procreation. A story is told² that Rav Moshe Feinstein once went to visit a man who was very ill with a rare disease that caused his tongue to swell. The man made everyone else in the room leave and told Rav Moshe that the reason for his illness was that on the Shabbos of *Parshas Vayera*, he had questioned why Lot's daughters merited to have the Mashiach among their descendants, since they were not embarrassed of their relationship with their father and in fact publicized the fact with the names of their children, and

2 Introduction to *Igros Moshe* Vol. 8

he spoke of them in a negative way. Afterwards, he had had a dream in which Lot's daughters appeared to him and defended themselves. They could have claimed, they said, that being from Avraham's family and given the fact that they were saved miraculously from Sedom, they easily could have claimed that their pregnancies were supernatural or even conceived by God (possibly leading to a new religion similar to Christianity), and nobody would have questioned it. By identifying their sons' true origins, they were making a statement that children are always the product of a human father, [to refute any possible future claims to the contrary,] and that is why they merited to have the real *Mashiach* descend from them. They told him that he had done a terrible sin by speaking about them disrespectfully, and that God would punish him *midda k'neged midda* by contracting him with a fatal disease that would swell his tongue, similar to the punishment of the *meraglim* in the desert who spoke slanderously about the land of Israel. Immediately after telling Rav Moshe this story, the man passed away.

All these women were granted *malchus* because of their sacrifices and their quality of motherhood. We can learn from the examples set by these women in Tanach that a *bas Yisrael* who is meticulous in her observance of modesty and in her quality of motherhood will not suffer qualitatively, but will only gain positive things in her life. By striving to be a future matriarch, only success will fall her way, and Hashem's miracles will be provided for her. May we soon be *zoche* to see the *mashiach* and to understand the many travails his proud ancestors went through to be worthy of such a descendant.

Supernal Debate: Did Moshe Unilaterally Change the Date of *Matan Torah*?

DAVID R. SCHWARCZ



The giving of the Torah has occupied the imagination of all people for millennia. Buried below the surface of this epic event is a historic dialogue between Moshe and Hashem regarding the most propitious day for *Matan Torah*. This supernal debate has significant theological ramifications. This article endeavors to highlight this issue, both its *halachic* and theological implications.

The debate¹ centers around whether the Torah was given on the sixth or seventh of the third month, Sivan.

The difference of opinion between the *Chachamim* and Rav Yossi is expressed in a lengthy *gemara* passage. All agree that the Torah was given on Shabbos and that *Bnei Yisrael* arrived at the Sinai desert on *Rosh Chodesh Sivan*.² The argument centers around the number of days of preparation and separation (“*perisha*”) required to receive the Torah, as it is stated in *Shemos* 19:10 “and you shall be sanctified today and tomorrow.”

Indeed the *Chachamim* assert that the *perisha* was for two days, while Rav Yossi says three days. The basis of this disagreement is the question of how long sperm remain viable in the womb. The issue of *perisha* at Sinai forms the basis in *halacha* for the family purity waiting period prior to the resumption of marital relations. This matter has *halachic* consequences for our time, as evidenced in the Code of Jewish

1 *Gemara Shabbos* 86b - 88a

2 *Shabbos* 86b - based on the verses “Remember **the day** of Shabbos” (Exodus 13:3) and the verse “Moshe told the Bnei Yisrael remember **the day**...”

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Law *Yore Dea* which follows Rav Yossi's opinion who requires a three day waiting period.³

It is interesting to note that modern science supports both the *Chachamim* and Rav Yossi's positions, depending on which time in the woman's cycle the sperm entered the womb.⁴ The *Shulchan Aruch* favors Rav Yossi's opinion, which is also the generally accepted medical position.

Based on the *Shulchan Aruch's* holding that the *perisha* lasted for three days, the *Magen Avraham* raises the following illuminating question: If we celebrate Shavuos on the sixth of Sivan, why do we recite in our festival prayers "the time of giving the Torah," when we actually received the Torah according to Rav Yossi on the seventh of Sivan?⁵ To further compound matters, all agree that we celebrate Shavuos on the fiftieth day of the *Omer* count, but in actuality *Matan Torah* occurred on the fifty-first day of the *Omer* count based on the fact that *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt on a Thursday and received the Torah on Shabbos. Accordingly, since the Exodus began on Thursday and the *Omer* count commenced on that Friday, seven full weeks of the count ended on a Thursday, leaving two additional days leading up to Shabbos which was the fifty-first day, not the fiftieth day!

Many prominent sages have debated the solutions to the foregoing problems.⁶ The *Magen Avraham* posits the most logical resolution to the first question as to why we recite on the sixth of Sivan "*Z'man Matan Toraseinu*" in our Shavuos prayer by explaining that Rav Yossi's stringent opinion of the three-day waiting period relates only to the issue of the laws of purity, but in terms of basic *halacha*, like laws of festival prayer, we rely on the *Chachamim's* more lenient two-day waiting period.

Concerning the second question, that if *Matan Torah* actually occurred on Shabbos then Shavuos was celebrated on the 51st of the *Omer* and not the fiftieth, the

3 This dispute, which is decided in favor of Rav Yossi, has practical applications concerning the laws of family purity. (See *Shulchan Aruch siman* 196.) It affects the length of time which must pass before a woman can begin counting the "seven days of purity" which precede immersion in the *mikva*. In practice, the custom endorsed by the *Shulchan Aruch* is to wait five days after menstruation and then, if the flow has ceased, to commence counting the additional "seven days of purity."

4 "Sperm can survive for 3-5 days inside a woman's body if the environment is favorable (meaning the woman is producing "fertile" mucous that the sperm prefer). If it's not during the woman's fertile time and the mucous is thicker or more acidic, the survival time is much less." WebMD 2016 – Fertility section.

5 See *Magen Avraham, Shulchan Aruch siman* 494 wherein the *Magen Avraham* says that we follow the Rambam's opinion that we only wait three time periods (*onos*) unlike Rav Yossi's opinion concerning family purity but we apply the more lenient opinion of a two-day waiting period for the Shavuos prayers.

6 See *Chok Yaakov*, 494; *Ba'er Heitev* 494; *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, 474; *responso Oneg Yom-Tov*, sec, 42; et al.

Shulchan Aruch Harav proffers that the Torah did not designate the specific date and exact day of the month on which the Torah was given. Instead we are told to observe the festival on the fiftieth day of the *Omer*. At the time of the Exodus, the months of Nisan and Iyar consisted of thirty days, while in accordance with the modern calendar, Iyar only consists of twenty-nine days. As such, *Matan Torah* actually occurred on the sixth of Sivan which was the fifty-first day of the *Omer*, but in modern times, based on a twenty-nine-day month of Iyar, the sixth of Sivan occurs on the fiftieth day of the *Omer*. This distinction supports the reference to the sixth of Sivan as “the time of giving of the Torah.”

The author of *Oneg Yom-Tov* provides an alternative solution to the above question by combining an unconventional interpretation of the pertinent verses. The Torah mentions two counts: seven weeks and fifty days. Both counts are to be interpreted literally – seven weeks from the offering of the *Omer* (on the sixteenth of Nisan) and fifty days from the second day of Passover. The fifty days cited in Scripture means fifty complete days. Given that *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt midday on the fifteenth of Nisan,⁷ that specific day is not considered a complete one, but rather one half-day and thus not part of and included in the fifty-day *Omer* count. Hence, at the time of the Exodus the Jewish people celebrated Shavuot on the fifty-first day of the *Omer*, in order to fulfill the requirement of fifty complete days commencing from the second day of Passover.

Indeed, the addition of an extra day does not contravene the requirement of counting seven weeks from the sixteenth of Nisan, since at the time of the Exodus we counted fifty days from the seventeenth of Nisan, the first full day. Accordingly, the following declaration is accurate that “now as then, the day of the giving of the Torah is after fifty days from the first *Yom Tov* of Pesach.”⁸

Yet the following question remains: was the Torah given on the sixth or seventh of Sivan?

The *gemara* in Shabbos 86b-87a records a dispute between the Rabbis and Rav Yossi wherein the Rabbis maintain that the Torah was given on the sixth of Sivan and Rav Yossi holds that the Torah was given on the seventh of Sivan. Based on the verse in *Shemos* (19:10) “...go to the nation and sanctify them today and

⁷ Exodus 12:17 – “*Be’etzem Hayom Haze*”

⁸ *Oneg Yom-Tov*, sec, 42; et al. Note that the *Oneg Yom Tov’s* explanation and calculation of the fifty-day count verily refutes the Sadducees’ claim that we count the *Omer* from first Sunday in the Passover festival which would lead to observing Shavuot on the 51st-56th day from the commencement of the count. (*Talmud Bavli, Menachos* 65-66)

tomorrow...” Rav Yossi’s opinion that there were three days of abstinence prior to *Kabbalas HaTorah* is refuted, as the verse only provides for two days of abstinence. Rav Yossi responds that Moshe added an extra day of abstinence based on his own understanding of the situation. The *gemara* adds that Hashem approved of Moshe’s decision, as evidenced by the fact that the *Shechina* rested on *Har Sinai* on Shabbos subsequent to the three days of abstinence.⁹

Why did Moshe add a third day of abstinence contrary to the plain meaning of God’s word? As stated previously, Moshe was concerned, among other things, that a waiting period of three days was necessary to avoid seminal emission impurity. Since Moshe did not have the benefit of the same foreknowledge as God and had to rely on his limited understanding of the possibility of impurity, he added one day of abstinence.

The *Nesivos Shalom*,¹⁰ based on the *Pnei Yeshoshua* (PY),¹¹ presents a novel approach to this supernal debate; originally God desired to give the Torah on a Friday. Moshe, on his own accord, postponed this event to the Sabbath. PY proves this point by emphasizing that God intended that the *luchos* only contain the phrase “*Shamor es Yom HaShabbos*” – “Guard the Sabbath,” not “Remember the Sabbath.” When Moshe decided to add one more day of abstinence, the Torah was given on the Sabbath and thus the term “*Zachor, Remember*” was introduced, to demonstrate that the Torah was actually given on the Sabbath.

Nesivos Shalom further elucidates Moshe’s inner desire to cause the Torah to be received on the Sabbath as follows: since the sanctity of the Sabbath is akin to spiritual communion with God, Moshe’s intention was that the holiness and purity of the Sabbath would elevate the Jewish nation to spiritual heights, thus safeguarding the eternal observance of the Torah with full purity and devotion to Hashem. In contrast, Hashem in his infinite wisdom divined that *Bnei Yisrael* should not passively rely on the purity of the Sabbath to prepare them for receipt of the Torah, but rather assiduously purify themselves through sheer efforts. In this way they would reach

⁹ *Shabbos* 86a. See the Ritva who maintains that God left the matter vague allowing Moshe to interpret the verse according to his judgment. It is only because the plain meaning of the verse implies two days that the decision to add a third day is attributed to Moshe. The Ran on the other hand states that in fact Hashem intended all along to require three days of abstinence. This approach is borne out by the *Avos DeRebbi Nosson* (ch. 2) that explains that Moshe caused his opinion to accord with that of the Almighty. However, since God did not explicitly express three days, it is referred to as Moshe’s decision.

¹⁰ *Nesivos Shalom Parshas Yisro* page 148.

¹¹ *Pnei Yeshoshua, Shevuos* 20b.

these heights on their own accord. Indeed, *Bnei Yisrael's* hard work would fortify their belief in Hashem and elevate their respective level of purity. Hashem foresaw that this effort would prevent any fall from grace and fortify their avoidance of sin, including the inevitable sin of the Golden Calf.

How did Moshe prevail in this supernal debate?

Moshe subordinated his will to Hashem's Will, thereby securing access to the true "*Ratzon Hashem*." Through this process of self-negation ("*bitul hayesh*"), Moshe experienced complete connection to Hashem and his over-flowing creative energy. This direct connection to the sanctity of Hashem allowed Moshe, who embodied all 600,000 root souls of Israel who experienced the revelation at Sinai, to act as medium to connect *Bnei Yisrael* to God's Holiness. Moshe understood through this awesome communion that the true *Ratzon Hashem* was to give the Torah on Shabbos, allowing *Bnei Yisrael* to experience true *dveikus* through the holiness of Shabbos. On the other hand, Hashem desires to work within man's nature and not supernaturally, and thus preferred that *Bnei Yisrael* receive the Torah on Friday to suffuse the work week with the holiness that *Bnei Yisrael* achieved through the preparation for and receipt of the Torah.

In sum, I would like to dedicate this article to my late father Theodore T. Schwarcz, DDS *z"l*, who passed away on December 2, 2015 - the 20th of Kislev. My father was a Holocaust survivor who survived five death camps. Throughout my early years, my father never really spoke about his experience in the camps but harbored those frightful experiences inside. Like the story of Pesach and Shavous, my father's personal exile in the camps muted his speech and his emotional expression. Like a slave in Egypt, he could not express his inner pain and yearnings for many years after his liberation in 1945 from Dachau.

My father slowly liberated himself through service to his community in Far Rockaway, NY as president of the burgeoning White Shul. He later supported many of the *yeshivos* in Far Rockaway and the Five Towns and used his artistic hands to become one of the prominent dentists in the community.

Like the Jews in Egypt, my father's self-expression was regained through his genuine dedication to his family, wife, profession, community and to the Jewish People. Through his personal journey of liberation he gained the understanding and appreciation of Hashem's providence in this world and the true joy of being part of the Jewish People.

Bein Hamitzarim



Rabbi Pinchas Gelb

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Chazon: Shabbos of Vision

RABBI PINCHAS GELB



While most national origin stories center upon human strength, heroism and fortitude, the Jewish national origin story of the Exodus from Egypt tells, not of human prowess, but rather of Hashem's fulfilling a promise made to Avraham, thus introducing the legal-ethical category of the "trust relationship" between Hashem and the nation into the center of Jewish society.¹ Yet, the centrality of this fiduciary relationship, at times, is obscured by events in history, as characterized by the three-week period between the 17th of Tammuz and Tisha B'av. During these times, our experience of the covenant is maintained by our faith in its fulfillment beyond the immediate circumstances—and this requires vision. Perhaps for this reason, based on its *haftara's* opening words, the Shabbos before Tisha B'av has become known as "*Shabbos Chazon*," which means "Shabbos of Vision."

First Use of the Word *Chazon* or *Machaze*

A word's first use in Tanach often reflects the nuance of its meaning. The word *chazon*, in its variant form *machaze*, first appears in Tanach regarding the *Bris Bein HaBesarim* between Hashem and Avraham.

The Torah records seven times that Hashem spoke with Avraham. The first and seventh times are marked by the words "*lech lecha*," "go for yourself" (Gen. 12:1, 22:2). The second, third, fifth and sixth times discuss Avraham's "seeing" Hashem (Gen. 12:7, 17:1, 18:1) and the land (Gen. 13:14). And the fourth time—the middle one—involves Hashem's speaking to Avraham in a *machaze*, a vision, as Bereishis 15:1 states:

אחר הדברים האלה היה דבר ה' אל אברם במחזה לאמר אל תירא אברם אנכי מגן
לך שכרך הרבה מאד.

¹ This article is dedicated to the memory of my father-in-law, Rabbi Levi Meier zt"l, who lived with vision and loved Rashi's approach to *Bereishis* 15:5.

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After these events, the word of Hashem was to Avram in a vision (machaze) saying: “Fear not Avram—I am a shield for you; your reward is very great.”

The meaning and implication of the word *machaze* is suggested by the subsequent description of the *Bris Bein HaBesarim*, which states in its initial section (Gen. 15:4-5):

והנה דבר ה' אליו לאמר לא יירשך זה כי אם אשר יצא ממעיך הוא יירשך. ויוצא אתו החוצא ויאמר הבט נא השמימה וספר הכוכבים אם תוכל לספר אתם ויאמר לו כה יהיה זרעך.

And behold, the word of Hashem came to him saying: “[Your servant Eliezer] will not be your heir; instead, one that will come forth from within you will be your heir.” And He took him outside, and He said: “Gaze, please, toward the heavens and count the stars if you are able to count them;” and He said to him: “So will be your children.”

The Torah does not generally involve itself with “stage direction,” so it is unclear why this verse specifies the location—whether outside or inside—where Hashem spoke to Avraham during each part of this discussion. Rashi, who as a rule emphasizes the textual significance of each word in the Torah, provides three explanations for the verse’s inclusion of the phrase (Gen. 15:5): “And He took him outside.”

Rashi’s first approach “*lefi peshuto*” (i.e., the most evident interpretation) is simply that Avraham had to walk outside of his tent and view the stars in order for Hashem to underscore the promise of descendants to him by comparing the number and steadfastness of his descendants to the stars.² This is the verse’s most straightforward meaning. Yet, it does not explain why the phrase “and He took him outside” is included at all, given that no meaning would have been lost had this phrase been omitted completely. We would just have thought that Avraham was standing outside the entire time. Also, this approach does not account for the overt symbolism in this

2 The end of the verse “so will be your descendants” does not specify whether this comparison to the stars refers only to the large number or also to the intrinsic nature of these descendants. Indeed, the *gemara* in *Shabbos* 156a and *Nedarim* 32a appears to apply the phrase at the end of the verse “so will be your descendants” to the entire verse, and implies that this comparison to the stars speaks, not only to quantity of, but also to the inherent quality of these descendants. Yet, in *Bereishis* 26:4, Hashem tells Yitzchak that his descendants will be like the stars, and there the simile is about the large number of these descendants. In *Devarim* 1:10, Moshe likewise tells the Jewish people: “Hashem, your God, has multiplied you and, behold, you are like the stars of heaven regarding great number,” which indicates that this simile refers to the large number of these descendants (see also *Shemos* 32:13). However, Rashi comments on extraneous words in *Devarim* 1:10, and he notes that the census population after the Exodus, to which Moshe references, was only 600,000 which is far fewer than the myriads of stars. Therefore, Rashi on *Devarim* 1:10 additionally emphasizes the steadfastness of the stars as an aspect of this simile.

verse, especially considering that Avraham already had been told in the preceding verse that he was going to have children who would inherit from him.

Accordingly, Rashi's second approach "*lefi midrasho*" (i.e., an interpretation based on the contextual implication, rather than the localized simple translation) emphasizes that Hashem's taking Avraham outside of his tent, itself, was intended to serve as a metaphor to him. Rashi (based on *Bereishis Rabba* 44:10) explains that Hashem was telling Avraham not only to leave his physical tent and view the stars, but also, more broadly, to "leave [his] astrology." Avraham had concluded that he and his wife would not have children. But the reality was that his destiny was still unfolding and, after his name would be changed from Avram to Avraham and his wife's name would be changed from Sarai to Sarah, they would have children. Thus, Hashem told Avraham that He would give him a degree of independence from systems of causality—from *gezeiros* that are ostensibly inalterable—which, at that time, were characterized by the "signs in the stars." Avraham no longer would be subject to these astrological "signs." His destiny would take a new turn.

But this approach still does not account for the Torah's description of the *Bris Bein HaBesarim* as a whole. In particular, the Rashbam (quoted in *Tosafos* on *Brachos* 7b) emphasizes a striking incongruity in the verses. The middle part of the *Bris Bein HaBesarim* is described as occurring just as it was starting to get dark (Gen. 15:12): "And it happened as the sun was going to set, a deep sleep fell upon Avram; and behold—a dread; great darkness fell upon him." This is followed by a famous passage that is recited in the Haggada, and then the final part of the *Bris Bein HaBesarim* states (Gen. 15:17): "And it happened when the sun set and it was very dark. And behold, there was a smoky furnace and a pillar of fire that passed between these pieces." So during the middle section of the *Bris Bein HaBesarim* (Gen. 15:12) the sun was just starting to set, but during the first part (Gen. 15:5), when the verse says that Hashem took Avraham outside and told him to count the stars, it was still day. The implication of *Bereishis* 15:5 in context, therefore, is that Hashem took Avraham outside and instructed him to look toward the stars during the day!³

Accounting for this, Rashi's third interpretation of the phrase "and He took him outside" (based on *Bereishis Rabba* 44:12) states that Hashem took Avraham out, not just from his tent, but "from the space of the world" entirely, and raised him "above

3 Because of this, the Rashbam quoted by *Tosafos* on *Brachos* 7b applies the concept that there is no chronological order to the verses (*ein mukdam u-me'uchar baTorah*), and that this part, as well, occurred at night. But this still raises the question of why the Torah presents the *Bris Bein HaBesarim* in this manner which, taken as a whole, conveys the incongruity of Hashem telling Avraham to count the stars during the day.

the stars.” As Rashi explains: “This is the language of [the word] ‘*habata*,’ [which is to gaze] from on high toward something lower.” Indeed, the fiduciary covenant between Hashem and Avraham in the *Bris Bein HaBesarim* was outside of, and completely above, nature. It was *sui generis*. The patterns and precedents of cosmology, politics, sociology and history would hold no sway over it at all. This is what Rashi describes in his third explanation of the verse’s phrase “and He took him outside” as Hashem’s having lifted Avraham “above the stars.”

Thus, Rashi interprets the phrase “and He took him outside” on three distinct levels—the regular (“*lefi peshuto*”), the exceptional (“*lefi midrasho*”), and the transcendent (“*davar acher*”). Rashi’s first approach is that Avraham simply stepped outside of his tent to view the stars. His second approach is that Hashem was going to change Avraham’s name and personal direction, but the systems of causality as a general matter would remain fixed as a constant. And Rashi’s third approach is that Hashem raised Avraham “above the stars” so that he not only circumvented, but transcended these systems entirely, gaining perspective over and above the regular order of things.

These three approaches to *Bereishis* 15:5 are necessitated by the verse’s immediate and wider contexts. It is as if Rashi is focusing a lens, first zooming in and then broadening the contextual scope. As Rashi emphasizes in his remark to *Bereishis* 3:8: “There are many *aggadic midrashim* and our Rabbis have already arranged them in their proper setting in *Bereishis Rabba* and in other *midrashim*, and I have come [in writing this commentary] only for the simple meaning of Scripture and for *aggadah* that resolves the words of Scripture with each word stated in its proper place and with its correct meaning.”

The Enduring Effect of Sustained Inner Vision

It is not obvious from the verses, and Rashi does not comment on, whether the entire section—including the phrase “and He took him outside” (Gen. 15:5)—was part of the *machaze* that the opening verse in *Bereishis* 15:1 references. Indeed, considering that the phrase “behold, the word of Hashem came to him saying” (Gen. 15:4) is repeated in the middle of the section, the beginning of the section might have taken place in a vision and the events described afterward might have happened at a separate time.⁴ Yet, the Radak cites the apparent anomaly stated in the verses of Hashem telling Avraham to “go outside” to count the stars during the day (Gen. 15:5), and he concludes based on this that the entire *Bris Bein HaBesarim* must have been part of the *machaze* that *Bereishis* 15:1 references.

⁴ This textual uncertainty is compounded by Rashi’s comment to *Shemos* 12:40.

The Rambam takes a similar approach and includes the phrase “and He took him outside” (Gen. 15:5) as an example of events in Tanach that occurred as part of an inner vision (*Moreh Nevuchim* 2:46):

כמו שנאמר באברהם “ויוצא אותו החוצה” והיה זה במחזה ... נאמר באברהם “היה דבר ה' אל אברם במחזה לאמר” ונאמר באותו מראה הנבואה “ויוצא אותו החוצה ויאמר הבט נא השמימה וספר הכוכבים” והנה זה ברור שהוא במראה הנבואה שהיה רואה שהוא הוצא מן המקום שהיה בו עד שראה את השמים ואחר כך נאמר לו “וספר הכוכבים” ונאמר תאור הדבר כפי שאתה רואה.

[W]hen it is said of Avraham: “And He took him outside” (Gen. 15:5), this occurred in a vision (*machaze*)... [I]t is said of Avraham: “The word of Hashem was to Avram in a vision (*machaze*), saying” (Gen. 15:1). And it is stated in this same vision of prophesy: “And He took him outside, and He said: Gaze, please, toward the heavens and count the stars.” (Gen. 15:5). It is clear that it was in a vision of prophesy that he saw that he was brought out from the place he was in until he could see the heavens, and that afterwards it was said to him “and count the stars” (Gen. 15:5), and it was said [to him] describe it as you see.

Thus, the Rambam emphasizes that the vantage that was provided to Avraham from “above the stars” does not mean that he was physically brought through the expanse of the universe. Rather, this happened as part of an inner vision (*machaze*), as referenced in the introductory verse to the *Bris Bein HaBesarim*.⁵

The *Bris Bein HaBesarim* is a central event in *Sefer Bereishis* and it is the elemental precursor of Hashem’s redemption of the Jewish people from *Mitzrayim*. That it took place as part of a vision demonstrates the extent to which an inner vision—specifically, one that contains and expresses the “*dvar Hashem*” (Gen. 15:1)—can have essential impact, and endure.

Conclusion

Uniquely among the weeks of the year, the Shabbos before Tisha B’av has been given a significant title: “*Shabbos Chazon*,” thus highlighting the requirement, especially during the period *bein hametzarim*, to have inner vision. The task and focus during this time period is not only and simply to mourn, but also to strengthen our capacity

⁵ Although the Ramban (Commentary on Gen. 18:1) disagrees with the Rambam’s interpretation in *Moreh Nevuchim* 2:42 regarding the visit by the angels in *Parashas Vayera*, he does not disagree here, perhaps because this section begins with a statement that this occurred in a *machaze*. The Ramban specifies that this *machaze* was comparable to the ability of the Jewish people to see sound during *Ma’amad Har Sinai*.

for inner vision that, as in the *Bris Bein HaBesarim*, is reflective and expressive of the *dvar Hashem* through *Toras Hashem*. It is a time, in other words, of inner motion and *teshuva*.⁶

Moreover, the Shabbos after Tisha B'av has been given the title "*Shabbos Nachamu*" in appreciation of the fact that, even while the *Beis HaMikdash* has not yet been rebuilt, this capacity for inner vision, once cultivated, sustains.⁷ It does not quickly abate like a flash in the pan. Instead, throughout the *shiva denechemta*, it continues to unfold toward the *Yomim Noraim* and the entire year, and to develop, *be"H*, into actualized redemption.

6 See Rav Mayer Twersky, "Avenues of *Teshuva*" (TorahWeb.org, 2011).

7 See Rav Twersky, "The Consolation of *Shabbos Nachamu*" (TorahWeb.org, 2003).

The *Moed* of Tisha B'av

ADIV PACHTER



The *Ben Ish Chai* quoted in the *Pninei HaMoadim* questions the *pesukim* in *Eicha* that refer to Tisha B'Av as a *Yom Moed*. Tisha B'Av is the day on which we mourn the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* and the state of exile of the Jewish nation. Why, then, would we entitle it as a joyous day? The *Ben Ish Chai* explains that we need to be grateful that Hashem did not take out His wrath on the Jewish people; rather the inanimate stones of the *Beis HaMikdash* were the recipients of His anger.

Rav David Pinto, in his *sefer Pachad David*, also discusses Tisha B'Av being referred to as a *Yom Moed*. On Tisha B'Av we adopt the *halachos* of *aveilus* (mourning.) Rav Pinto makes an interesting caveat on this point. The mourning is not a complete mourning because in the depths of our minds and hearts, we know that in an instant Hashem can turn this dark day into the day of shining salvation. When a person loses a loved one, God forbid, it is truly a day of mourning as the *niftar* will not be returning. However, on Tisha B'Av, our fate can be reversed!

The *pasuk* in *Eicha* says (3:40)

נחפשה דרכינו ונחקרה ונשובה עד ה'.

Let us examine our ways and inspect them, and return to Hashem.

Once we are inspired to examine our ways, do *teshuva* and return to Hashem, we will bring the *geula* and the day will become a *Yom Moed*.

He goes on to analyze the *pasuk* in the opening chapter of *Eicha* (1:15),

קרא עלי מועד.

He has called a solemn assembly against me.

The last three letters equal the numerical value of 15, *Yud-Hay*, which represents the *sefira* of *Hod*, which also has the numerical value of 15. He quotes the Arizal who explains that from the day that the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed, the *sefira* of *Hod*

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was exiled and was taken “captive” by the external forces, the *chitzonim*. The *pasuk* in *Eicha* 1:13 alludes to this in saying, “*kol hayom dava*;” *dava*, rearranged, spells *hod*.

Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz quotes the Arizal’s discussion of each *mida* corresponding to a different *Yom Tov*. Interestingly, the *mida* of *Hod* relates to Chanuka. He states “*Hod* relates to the *mida* that defines the ability of a Jew to allow Divine light to shine through him, submitting to a higher calling. His own essence is but a vehicle to bring honor to his Maker. The Hebrew word *hoda’a* has two definitions, admission and gratitude. The definitions are related to each other. A *Yehudi* admits that *HaKadosh Boruch Hu* created and watches over him, and for that he is always grateful... *Hod* is the *mida* of Chanuka, a *Yom Tov* of *hallel vehoda’a* when we ponder and appreciate the myriad of *chassadim* of the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, as we contemplate the lights of the *menora*.”

This helps provide some insight into the concept of the *sefira* of *Hod* being taken captive with the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*. *Hod* relates to the *mida* that defines the ability of a Jew to allow Divine light to shine through him. In the times of the *Beis HaMikdash*, access to Divine light was more readily available and accessible. Once the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed, the direct channel to this light was broken.

Despite this, Hashem calls Tisha B’Av a *Yom Moed*. In essence, Hashem is saying to us that despite the fact that the *sefira* of *Hod* has been exiled since the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, I will not let them rejoice in that fact, in their seeming victory. When the *chitzonim* see that Hashem referred to this day as a *Yom Moed*, their strength will be weakened; they will realize that the Day of Redemption is near and that once again the *sefira* of *Hod* will be restored.

This is all on the outside... Hashem does not want to give the *chitzonim* any sense of victory or accomplishment. So, superficially, He does not mind calling it a day of *Moed*. However, as the *pasuk* in *Yirmiya* says (13:17)

וּאִם לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּהָ בַּמִּסְתָּרִים תִּבְכֶּה נַפְשִׁי מִפְּנֵי גֹהַ וּדְמַעַתְּ תִּדְמַעַת וְתִרְדַּע עֵינַי דְּמִעָה כִּי
נִשְׁבָּה עֵדֶר ה'.

But if you will not hear it, My soul shall weep in secret for your pride; and My eyes shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because Hashem’s flock is carried away captive.

In His private chambers, Hashem is mourning the fact that the *sefira* of *Hod* fell to the external forces.

We have to realize this *chessed* of Hashem, that He was willing to call Tisha B’Av a day of *Moed* despite His inner sadness, simply to confuse the evil forces so as not to

encourage them to further destroy the Jewish people.

The *Sfas Emes* of Bra'zan explains the opening *pasuk* of *Eicha* in a way from which we can take away an important lesson to be implemented into our daily lives.

איכה ישבה בדד העיר רבתי עם היתה כאלמנה רבתי בגוים שרתי במדינות היתה
למס.

Alas, she sits in solitude, the city that was full of people! She has become as a widow! She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, has become subservient!

He quotes and explains a *pasuk* in *Mishlei* 3:6 that states, “*b’chol derachecha da’eihu*,” In all of your ways, you should know Hashem. This means that even in a mundane, physical act, a Jew has the directive, but more importantly the ability, to imbue holiness into this act. By doing so, we can elevate our entire day to a high level of spirituality, even while it seems that we are only involved in a worldly action. The *pasuk* in *Eicha* is explaining that this is the root cause of the downfall; we did not internalize the lesson of *badad*; we did not infuse spirituality into physicality.

May we have the ability to infuse sparks of holiness into **all** that we do so that this Tisha B’Av will be the day that turns into a true *Yom Moed* with the ultimate *geula*, *b’miheirah b’yameinu*.

The Comfort of Destruction

DANIEL NAGEL



The severity of the *aveilus* of the Three Weeks leading up to Tisha B'Av is the reverse of the typical *aveilus* customs which are observed when a close relative passes away. During *aveilus*, the most restrictive time of mourning, known as *aninus*, is observed prior to the burial of the dead and the severity of *aveilus* diminishes as the days and months pass by. The customs of *shiva* are less severe than *aninus*, and those of *shloshim* are less severe than *shiva*. In contrast, at the beginning of the Three Weeks, the customs of *aveilus* are limited and gradually begin to build, becoming more severe, as *Rosh Chodesh Av* passes into *shavua sh'chal bo* and eventually Tisha B'Av. Why is the order reversed between the Three Weeks and the typical *aveilus*?

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik noted that *Chazal* categorized the mourning of a relative as *aveilus chadasha* and the mourning of the *Beis HaMikdash* as *aveilus yeshana*. While *aveilus chadasha* is part of the natural order of the world, *aveilus yeshana* is not. Human mortality exists within the natural framework of the world. The world, however, was meant to have a *Beis HaMikdash* and without one, the world is in a flawed state. Therefore *Chazal* called the mourning of the *Beis HaMikdash* *aveilus yeshana* because there is never a real comfort for an unnatural event. It is an *aveilus* that never goes away.

The natural reaction to death is to withdraw, and so *halacha* creates a framework for the mourner to withdraw within a structure that eventually encourages him to rejoin society and life. Regarding mourning the *mikdash*, the mourning is foreign and unnatural. We must engage in a process to teach ourselves to feel that we are missing something. The purpose of the Three Weeks, with the gradual increase of *aveilus* customs, is to establish within us the mindset to mourn on Tisha B'Av.

With this background in mind, the following custom which we observe on Tisha B'Av poses a challenging question: At *chatzos hayom* on Tisha B'Av day, the *aveilus* lightens. We begin to sit on chairs instead of cross legged on the floor. At *mincha* we don

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tefilin on our arm and head, a ritual deemed inappropriate during *shacharis* because we are engaged in the reciting of mournful *kinnos*. Why after *chatzos hayom*, which is when the fire was lit to burn the *Beis HaMikdash*, does the *aveilus* recede?¹ The theme of the prior Three Weeks is the intensifying of *aveilus* from week to week to bring us into the moment. **And yet, when we finally reach the pinnacle, the moment the destruction commences, the *aveilus* begins to fall away and we seem to find comfort.**

Perhaps the following *mashal* can explain the seeming inconsistency:

A king was so excited for his son's upcoming wedding that he decided to personally build the wedding canopy. Fitted with beautiful decorations and flowers, the wedding canopy was a masterpiece. A few days before the wedding, the prince angered the king and the king, in his anger, destroyed the beautiful wedding canopy he built for the wedding. At that moment, the prince's teacher took out an instrument and started to play an upbeat song. People approached the teacher and questioned why he would play happy music at a time the king was angry and tearing down his son's wedding canopy. The teacher responded, "I am playing the music because the king is venting his anger on the wedding canopy and not on his son."

Tosafos (*Kiddushin* 31b) questions why chapter 79 in *Tehillim* starts with the introduction "*Mizmor l'Asaf*," "A song of praise from Asaf," when the chapter describes in great detail the disgrace that the *goyim* brought to Hashem's house through its destruction. The more appropriate introduction would be "*Kina L'Asaf*," "A lamentation from Asaf." *Tosafos* brilliantly explains that at that moment, Hashem decided to allow his House to be destroyed in lieu of destroying *Bnei Yisrael*. Hashem took out his anger on the sticks and stones of His own House and spared His children from His anger.

The message is clear. The comfort that comes to us at noon on Tisha B'Av is the comfort of knowing that we are Hashem's nation *l'netzach*, for eternity. Therefore, the very moment the fire started to burn the *Beis HaMikdash* (*chatzos* on Tisha B'Av according to the *gemara* in *Ta'anis*) is the very moment that comfort appears.

With this message, we can understand a puzzling *gemara* (*Yoma* 54). The *gemara* describes the reaction of the Romans when they entered the *Kodesh Hakodashim* to set it on fire and found the *keruvim* embracing each other. The Romans dragged the *keruvim* into the street and proudly announced that the Jews maintained illicit statues inside their Holy of Holies.

¹ The *gemara* in *Taanis* 29a states that the fire started towards the end of the ninth day and the *Mikdash* burned mostly on the tenth of Av.

The *keruvim* served to represent the relationship between *Yisrael* and Hashem. During times of tremendous anger, the *keruvim* would not face each other while during times of love between Hashem and *Yisrael*, the *keruvim* would embrace. Why during this moment of destruction would the *keruvim* reflect *ahava*?

As we said above, the moment of destruction was actually a moment of love. Leading up to the destruction there was tension between *Yisrael* and Hashem. Once the destruction commenced, it was only love. It became clear that Hashem would rather destroy His own House than destroy His children.

The word *nechama* is typically translated as comfort. But when studying the context surrounding the word *nechama* as it appears in *Tanach*, a more appropriate translation would be “reconsider.” The *pasuk* in *Bereishis* 6:6 says: “*vayenachem hashem ki asa es ha’adam ba’aretz, vayisatzev el li’bo.*” Rashi explains “*Vayenachem*” to mean that Hashem switched (reconsidered) his prior thought process and changed from his initial approach of *middos ha’din* to *middos ha’rachamim*. Rashi ends his explanation with the following: “And similarly the word *nachem* in all of *mikra* means to change from a prior position.”

The essence of *nechama* is gaining a new perspective. This allows the mourner to put the event into context. The facts remain the same, the data unchanged; but the context and the new perspective foster comfort. The *Beis HaMikdash* was still destroyed, but when *Yisrael* observed the *keruvim* embracing, they realized the love between *Yisrael* and Hashem was eternal and will never be severed. *Chazal* understood this and so, after *chatzos hayom*, which is when the fire started to burn the *Mikdash*, the customs of *aveilus* on Tisha B’av lighten.

Rabbi Dovid Landesman (*a”h*) was an unbelievable educator. For me personally, he was the *mechanech* that introduced me to critical thinking and applying its methodology to world events and Jewish philosophy. Rov (as we would affectionately call him) started at YULA when I entered 9th grade. During my formative years of high school and beyond (Rov and I maintained a very close relationship even after graduation. When I got married, Rov and Rebbetzin Landesman hosted a *sheva brachos* in their home on Crest Drive.) Rov taught me to approach issues with an open mind and willingness to consider other perspectives.

Rov’s goal was not to persuade you to agree with his position, but encourage you to recognize other perspectives worthy of consideration. And he did all of this with a completely non-judgemental demeanor. It was the essence of his educational philosophy. No topic was taboo or forbidden. If you were sincere, everything was fair game. This is what endeared him to so many of his students: his willingness to

probe and discuss the myriad topics with which the teenage mind grapples, in a non-judgemental environment. I miss Rov. His friendship, warmth, and fresh perspectives. *Hamakom Yenachem.*

Remembering the Plight of the Jews in the Great War

YAAKOV RICH



Today, the Jewish populations in the United States and Israel make up a majority of World Jewry, but less than one hundred years ago, this was not the case. Europe was home to most of the world's Jews, and it had been that way for as long as anyone could remember. After centuries of progress and development, Europe was the stage of the most powerful empires, the highest forms of culture, the greatest bastions of thought, science, and artistic expression. But over the course of thirty years, it tore itself apart in wars that shook the world to its core and brought a halt to civilization as it was known. Europe was never to be the same again. And neither were the Jewish people.

The Holocaust, carried out during the Second World War, is rightly remembered as the greatest catastrophe in Jewish history; the tragic culmination of over a thousand years of Jewish life in Europe. Hitler's war can count among its casualties almost six million Jewish souls. But if we rewind to the years before this disaster, to the years of the twenties and thirties, the greatest disaster to befall Europe had a different name: the Great War.

The First World War is sometimes forgotten, overlooked by collective memory. It is overshadowed by its bigger, uglier, more terrible younger brother. But it is important to remember that the atrocities of this war were the worst the world had ever known. The number of casualties – unfathomable; the suffering of countless communities – immeasurable. And the Jews, quite often, were the hardest hit by the sufferings that came with war.

In 1916, as it became clearer that the soldiers were settling into their trenches for the long-haul, the American Jewish Committee across the Atlantic published a report. "Of all the people," it began, "that have suffered deeply from the present war,

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none have borne a greater burden than the Jews – in physical and economic loss, in moral and spiritual torment.”¹ In Jewish memory, the Great War that caused them so much suffering began, appropriately, on Tisha B’Av. “And like many another Ninth of Ab,” wrote historian Ismar Elbogen, “that day was the beginning of woe ineffable for the Jewish people.”²

Today, as we pass through the centenaries of the terrible events that marked those four tragic years in which the world derailed into insanity, it is worthwhile – at least on Tisha B’Av – to remember the hardships that those years placed upon the Jews of the world.

The Worst of the Worst: The Eastern Front

The first declaration of war among the great powers was of Germany upon Russia, thus joining Austria-Hungary (together known as the “Central Powers”) in its fight against Serbia, which was being backed by the Tsarist Empire. In doing so, it condemned the regions of western Russia – areas densely populated with Jews – to several years of acting as the battle grounds for armies that flowed back and forth through the cities and villages with a fluidity that was unknown in the conflicts ongoing elsewhere.

Antisemitism had long been infused in European society; since 1096 Jews had been dying for their faith on European soil. Even in the elite ruling classes, the longstanding guardians of the military, anti-Jewish sentiment was taken for granted. Kaiser Wilhelm II, ruler of Germany since 1888, famously described the Jews as the “curse” of his country. The French people had only resolved the “Dreyfus Affair” in which a Jewish military officer was so obviously framed by the military establishment, that had split the popular opinion in the country, as recently as 1906. But there was no doubt that nowhere was it worse than in Russia, where antisemitism was practically a state-sponsored activity. The Western world had been shocked when in 1903, pogroms broke out in Kishinev. Jews were brutally murdered and tortured, and hundreds of houses were destroyed. In Russian Poland, where many of the Jewish population existed, the strategy of the government for about a century had been to pit the Polish and Jewish sentiments against each other rather than against their Russian overlords, a policy that worked remarkably well and resulted in a fierce level of mutual hatred between the Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors in the region.

When war broke out in 1914, it is not difficult to see why the Russians might have

1 AJC, p. 7

2 Elbogen, p. 454

viewed the thick settlements of Jewish communities that clustered near the enemy borders as a threat to their imminent victory. Surely the Jews would collaborate with the enemy forces, and perhaps even join them in undermining the success of their host country. One right-wing Russian newspaper announced: "It was Germany who declared war, but the Jews who chose Germany as an instrument of their designs."³ In many Jewish border towns where enemy attack was suspected, the Russian solution to this problem was simply to remove the Jews from the region entirely, deporting them into central Russia, often with no particular destination. Being that the rail system was now reserved exclusively for military use (and even for that purpose the infrastructure did not suffice) there was no chance that the evacuated Jews would be able to travel by any method other than by foot. This in itself was cause for thousands of deaths, as people began to perish from hunger, thirst, disease, and over-exhaustion, not to mention those who fell victim to the cruelty of the Russian officers acting as evacuation marshals who, in many cases, did not hesitate to shoot their subjects at the slightest offence. Those who survived the journey to "safer" regions found that once they arrived at their destination, no thought had been given as to what would happen to them, where they would reside, or what they should do; these Jews would have to endure the cold, filth, and disease while the government debated what should be done. Many more died in the process, their long arduous journey for naught.

When, in 1915, the Central Powers began to advance into Russian territory, the Tsarist army destroyed as much as they could as they retreated backwards into their homeland, so nothing could be of use to the feared Germans. Entire Jewish communities were burned to the ground, reduced to barely more than rubble. Many evacuated; those who did not stayed without a home, at the mercy of lice, spreading illness, and the increasingly terrible weather. When Brest-Litovsk, known as "Brisk" in Yiddish, was captured by the German army in August 1915 (around the same time as Kovno, Bialystok, Vilna, and Grodno), this utter destruction was captured by Rabbi Aron Tänzer, a chaplain in the German army:

I will always be haunted by the terrible experience of entering this immense burning and smoking heap of rubble which, only a few days earlier, had been the great, rich, thriving city of Brest-Litovsk. Paralyzing horror struck me. Everything that had happened before paled into the background before this act of incomparable destruction... Hundreds upon hundreds of human homesteads pulverized to their foundations or mutilated into a senseless ruin

³ Levene, p. 92

harboring nothing but rubbish and ashes, with at the most one staircase rising into the air. And this was not even the effect of the gradual, nagging fury of a long siege. No: a Russian city was, from yesterday to today, ruined on command and by the hand of its own provincial government. Only about one-quarter of the city remained completely or partially habitable.

The destruction of the city had no purpose: neither in the case of eventual surrender, nor to limit enemy operations: The destruction of peaceful possessions only deprives innocent civilians, in this case, for the most part Jews who, since the founding of the city, had comprised easily three-quarters of the population. And precisely this fact was, given notorious hatred of Jews by the wild Russian gang of soldiers, of decisive importance, urging them on in their destructive work.

*On 15 August 1915 the Russian City Commandant announced that the entire civilian population had to leave the city during the three days of 17-19 August... At the time the city had about 40,000 inhabitants, amongst them 30,000 Jews. At the same time, it was announced that trains would stand ready at the railway station, to take the population into the Russian interior. But only a small number of trucks were at the station and very few passenger cars, in which one could obtain a place only with a large bakshish [bribe]... Because of this, many inhabitants had obtained small farm wagons at exorbitant prices, but the great majority went into exile, and unknown misery, on foot. Many weeks later one could see these unhappy victims of their own heartless government wandering ragged and starving on country roads and in the forest surrounding the city. Images of horror, inextinguishably imprinted on the memory.*⁴

Later, Rabbi Tänzer, in trying to find a place suitable for Rosh Hashana services, describes entering one of the three shuls that remained standing, out of about fifty that had existed before the Russians retreated. All the *sifrei torah* and *seforim* which the fleeing Jews had left behind were torn and strewn across the floor; none of the windows remained unbroken.

This “forced expulsion policy” that was enforced in Brisk was standard in many of the cities that the Russians were destroying in the face of German advances, lest the population be of any use to the enemy. It is estimated that over half a million Jews

⁴ Appelbaum, p. 188

were forced to leave their homes during this period. The policy of the Russian army at this point had become to treat the Jews as spies and collaborators for the Germans, and General Nikolai Yanushkevich, a deeply anti-Semitic man who was the Chief of Staff of General Headquarters during this period of retreat, was intent on removing this “Jewish threat” by whatever means necessary. Not very many of his colleagues disagreed.

The rapid deportation of Jews from the regions near the front lines brought a spectacle too tempting for their non-Jewish neighbors to bear. Looting and takeovers of Jewish property quickly became rampant, and in many cases escalated to full-scale anti-Jewish pogroms. The only difference with the pogroms of old, which Jews had been experiencing already for centuries, was the active participation of the Russian army. Historian Eric Lohr describes the situation in Shadovo in the Kovno region:

This town had a population of five thousand, half of whom were Jews. The other half was mostly Polish and Lithuanian, with some Russian civil servants and railroad workers. In late April 1915 the Germans took the town for a week, retreating on 2 May. After their departure, Russian scouts and Cossack units entered the town and, according to the testimony of a Jewish resident, immediately began assaulting local Jews and looting their homes and stores. Several women were raped. One Jewish man's eyes were gouged out when he could not pay what a group of Cossacks demanded. Cossacks turned over part of the loot to the local peasants and encouraged their participation in the pogrom. On the next day the entire Jewish population abandoned Shadovo and made its way to the town of Boik. There, another group of Cossacks arrived and began another round of violence. The entire population was driven out of the town and forced to leave the few belongings it had been able to cart out of Shadovo. The next day, 5 May, the group, already driven from their homes and their first place of refuge, received notice that within six hours they were all to be expelled further from the front. As no trains were provided, most went by foot to Ponevezh.⁵

When or where it was not possible to deport Jews, a policy of “hostage-taking” was often adopted, in which a handful of Jews from each area that were judged to be leaders of the community – often rabbis or wealthy members of the community – were taken as hostages, and the community was informed that these people would be killed if anyone assisted the incoming German authorities in any way. Altogether

⁵ Lohr, pp. 415-416

during these few months of Russian retreat, over four thousand hostages were taken, and even those that were returned to the community were tracked by the Russian authorities and continued to live under the threat of execution.

If anyone was suspected of feeding information to the German army, Russian officials did not hesitate to execute them. Rav Ezriel Zelig Kushelevski, a *Rav* in Augustów, found himself giving eulogy after eulogy for the people of his community that were being murdered or dying of starvation or cholera (a common outbreak among civilian victims). After the war, when he decided to publish a selection of these eulogies for posterity, he prefaced:

There was no end to the tragedies that occurred to us over the course of this period. Our city, which was a city of scholars, was transformed into a den of lions, into a lair of ravaging beasts. God rained fire and brimstone upon us, and the verse “your lives will be in doubt before you” (Devarim 28:66) was fulfilled through us – in its simple meaning. Only the kindness of God that was with us saved us from the hand of those who came upon us.⁶

In Adar of 5675 [February 1915], Rav Kushelevshi relates, German forces fell back from the nearby town where they had created a stronghold in order to fortify the line further back. When the Russian authorities re-entered the city, they accused seven Jews of spying for the Germans, took them to the adjacent forest, and hanged them. Their families, many of whom the Russians had incarcerated, had no idea what had happened to them, and only almost a year later were their bodies found and brought to burial.

So many children have died from the terror of war! So many men have died on the road, fleeing from the battle fields in horror, or because the myriad hardships have overcome them and they could no longer take the burden of this exile; their hearts melted and their souls escaped. So many have fallen victim to the sword or to hunger, or worst of all – taken as hostage... There is no Jewish family from which blood has not been drawn!⁷

It was a familiar pattern: Russians retreating and the Germans entering, followed by the Germans falling back, then the Russians returning. In many towns, this occurred more times than they cared to count, giving the Russian soldiers plenty of opportunity to blame Jews for colluding with the enemy.

⁶ Kushelevski, p. 4

⁷ Ibid. p. 17

Some Jewish communities that were deported or massacred – the inhabitants fleeing for their lives – were never reconstituted. Others rebuilt themselves, although never to their prewar heights. No community in the region survived the war unscathed. For the Jews of Russia, the war did not end in 1918 like it did in the West. The Tsarist government ceased to exist in 1917, and the following years consisted of revolution and civil war; the pogroms were far from over. Many Jewish-populated cities found themselves after 1919 in new countries that hadn't existed previously, like Poland, Lithuania, or Czechoslovakia, but for those left in Russia, what would become of them once the vacuum that was left by the Tsar was filled? Only time would tell, but precedent was most certainly not on their side.

The lid had been placed on the coffin of the Jewish Pale of Settlement in Eastern Europe. It would be nearly thirty years before it was nailed shut.

Hope Diminished: Palestine

If there was any major power that the Kaiser's government had not alienated by the time war broke out in 1914, it was the Ottoman Empire, which covered practically the entire Middle East, creeping ever so slightly into the Balkans in the north. Its European holdings used to be larger, but the wars in the Balkans in the previous few years had pushed back its borders closer and closer to Constantinople. Calling the Ottomans “a major power” was steadily becoming anachronistic; the empire was only a shadow of what it had once been. Diminishing in power and prestige since the sixteenth century, it was held together at this point merely by its will to exist and the other powers' disinterest in fighting over its remains. Only a spark would cause it to collapse at this point, and fate was now sending it a conflagration.

When the war came, the top ministers of the government were convinced that they would have to join one of the European powers (even though the sultan wished to remain neutral), and Germany was the only one who showed any enthusiasm in such an alliance. And so it was that the Ottomans joined the Central Powers in the war to end all wars, which they entered officially in the end of October, 1914.

Palestine, as it was commonly called in the West, was a province in the vast Ottoman Empire ever since its conquest from the Mamluk Sultanate in 1516. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Jewish immigrants began to trickle in from Eastern Europe, from other Ottoman lands, and even from Western countries like Germany, England, and America. By 1914, there were around eighty-five thousand Jews living in Palestine, with more than half of those in Jerusalem. Many of the Jewish communities in Palestine at the time, especially the European ones, were supported to a large

extent by money from overseas. Immediately with the entrance of the Ottomans into the war, the flow of money from outside lands ceased; the hand that was feeding a majority of Palestine's Jews was withdrawn. At the same time, the Ottoman economy grinded to a halt; the government had announced that it was deferring the repayments of its loans and instituting additional wartime taxes. Everyone rushed to withdraw their money from the banks if they could while the cost of basic necessities and food skyrocketed. Hunger quickly grew rampant.

If people at that point thought that it could not get worse, they were terribly wrong. The spring of 1915 brought with it a plague of locusts that completely demolished the produce of the land. In addition to scavenging for food and desperately trying to survive, the government imposed on everyone in the region the obligation to collect a certain number of locust eggs per day in a primitive attempt to stop them from spreading further. Those who could not collect the required amount were forced to purchase them from those who had collected more so that they could present their allotment to the Ottoman authorities in exchange for their certificates.

Zvi Hershfeld, an immigrant in the Second *Aliyah*, describes the heart-wrenching scene in Jerusalem:

In the streets lay those literally swollen from hunger. The elderly, women, children and infants were sprawled on the sides of the road day and night, howling with hunger. The passers-by had to seal their ears so as not to hear these terrifying sounds. Hearts were stiffened. Men became cruel simply because they had nothing to give. People of Jerusalem sold all they had to Circassians for pennies in order to quench their hunger. Even sacred items passed into the possession of strangers; pages of Gemaras and other holy books were sold to shopkeepers to wrap halva or salted fish. Jewish possessions were carted off daily to be sold east of the Jordan. Entire families perished. Next to the "Warsaw neighborhood" there lived a woman with three children who would say: "For two months we've lived off wolves; now even that is gone. There is nothing to buy; everything is gone." When I came back a week later past her home, not even one of them was still alive. They had all died. The "Beis Yisrael" neighborhood was almost completely emptied.⁸

In addition to the terrible hunger, and resultant spectrum of diseases that ensued, Ottoman nationals – who belonged mostly to the Sephardic community – of military-suited age were immediately drafted to serve in the Ottoman forces, a sentence which

⁸ Mann, p. 19

meant almost certain death – if not in battle, then certainly at the hands of disease in the filthy conditions of the military camps. Djemal Pasha, head of the military in the region that included Palestine, was a name that invoked terror in the hearts of all the Jews of the Holy Land. Zionism, a spreading ideology among the inhabitants of the yishuv, to Pasha was synonymous with anti-Ottoman activism, and the Jews were to be viewed with enmity. Originally, one could escape the draft by paying a huge sum to the government; people would sell anything that they could find to make these payments. Thousands who couldn't pay were forced to flee, often hiding in the homes of friends and acquaintances in Jerusalem. Those who did manage to pay the fees found that several months later, when the Ottomans felt they needed more men, a new draft was instituted, and they would be charged another exorbitant fee to escape it. Community funds devoted to charity were soon emptied in paying these fees for those who couldn't, but many were forced nonetheless to join the armed forces.

Most of the Ashkenazic community encountered different problems. Those who were Russian citizens (around forty thousand Jews), or citizens of other enemy countries like France or Britain (another several thousand), were declared to be enemies of the state and ordered to immigrate to Egypt immediately, leaving women and children behind. This decree created mass panic and a rush to adopt Ottoman citizenship, which became near impossible. It was only thanks to the extreme effort and diplomacy of the leaders of Jerusalem that saved the majority of the Jewish community from being deported. But those who now held Ottoman citizenship were subjected to the mercy of the draft as a condition of their citizenship. Thousands of Jewish men entered the armed forces as soldiers or as workers in various divisions. Pinchas Grayevsky recounts in his biography of Rabbi Betzalel Lapin:

Fate chose me as a witness to the events that occurred in the South of our land under the military reign of Djemal Pasha, which stretched across the expanse of the desert, from Be'er Sheva practically until the Suez Canal. Among the various divisions of the army were dispersed, of course, not a small amount of our Jewish brethren... Many of them were from the "precious of Jerusalem" – those that studied in the yeshivos and frequented the batei midrash... Their death was preferable to them than living.

The central military camp was then in Be'er Sheva, and that is where a large portion of our brethren were stationed – in particular the workers and those who assisted the armed forces [rather than the soldiers]. There too the situation was no better. Various illnesses (cholera, typhus, etc.) were prevalent

*in the city and in surrounding areas, and those who fell to the sword were better off than those who fell to these diseases.*⁹

When in 1917 the British began to advance into Palestine, nine thousand Jews from the coastal regions (including Tel Aviv) were “evacuated” inland. Their request to return home once the hopelessness of the Ottoman defense became clear, was rejected. When Greece and America entered the war on the side of the Allies, their citizens living in Palestine – more than one thousand altogether – were forced to leave.

By the time the war was over, the Jewish population was reduced to between forty-five and fifty thousand. Around twenty-five thousand Jews, constituting almost a third of the 1914 population, perished in the Holy Land in the course of the war. In December of 1917, General Allenby and his forces entered Jerusalem. (Famously, he disembarked from his horse as a symbol of respect for the holy city.) He was welcomed as a savior by the inhabitants, but it would be many months before the conditions in Palestine returned to normal.

Seven hundred and thirty years of Muslim rule over the Holy Land had come to an end. The Ottoman Empire itself would soon disintegrate, leaving the victorious allies to decide what was to be done with the provinces of the vast Middle East that it left behind. The Jewish communities, especially in Jerusalem, were crippled from the war, but a new opportunity for growth emerged simultaneously with their struggle. Dr. Chaim Weizmann, a leader of the Zionist Congress from England had managed to befriend former Prime Minister – then Foreign Minister – Arthur Balfour. Foreseeing an imminent collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and Britain’s subsequent say in Palestine’s destiny, he made his case to the Foreign Minister for a “national home” for the Jewish people, a case which Balfour became strangely attached to, and which Weizmann would present to the Peace Conference in 1919 when they were to decide on the borders to be drawn on the new world map. Already in 1917, Balfour declared British “support” for the idea of a national Jewish homeland in Palestine. The road was soon to be opened for European Jews to immigrate to the land of their forefathers, but the Zionist cause still had a far way to go, and in which direction they should proceed was not unanimously viewed. Should the Jews attempt to govern themselves, to create a “Jewish State?” Was it possible? Was it even a good idea? Strong opinions were prevalent on either side of the issue even among Zionists, but everyone was certain that even given the possibility, it would be a long time before it could be achieved.

⁹ Grayevsky, p. 25

Meanwhile in Germany...

When the Germans declared war, there was excitement all throughout the country. A patriotic fervor gripped the people of Germany. The Jews were no exception, embracing the war cause with a passion, rushing to enlist in the military. Finally, they had a chance to prove their patriotism to their German neighbors, who could no longer have any excuse to dislike them after serving together in the war effort. The Kaiser announced a new era of cooperation and equality among all German citizens regardless of origin (*Burgfrieden*); they would fight together to achieve victory against the enemy. Jews could now be appointed officers, a privilege which had always been withheld from them in the past. Certainly the scene was much more promising than it was in Russia where many of the Jews looked forward to German occupation almost as a liberation.

Although there may have been an increase in camaraderie between Jewish Germans and their Christian friends and fellow soldiers as they together embraced the war, this short-lived era could not uproot the anti-Semitic sentiments that had been so long subtly entrenched in the German culture. As things began to go wrong for the Germans, the old prejudices returned, and Jewish soldiers began to find that they were looked down upon by their fellows, insulted and denigrated at any opportunity. Jews were blamed by the public media for the failings of the German military, or they were accused of shirking their duties and not doing their part in the war effort.

In October of 1916, the Prussian War Minister ordered a census of the Jews, known as the *Judenzählung*, so the war office could determine if the Jews were serving in proportion with their numbers. Regardless of whether the census order was well-intentioned or not, the result was that the Jews were seen as being singled out, as requiring special attention. Many officers who received the orders understood that they were to investigate their Jewish subjects for shirking. The Jews of Germany were outraged as a result, and disillusioned as to the possibility of ever being accepted by society as equals. Some went so far as to become Zionists, convinced that there was no future for them in Europe. Others, though, disappointed as they were, were determined to keep trying to integrate, to fight for their recognition as equal Germans. "A war after the war stands before us," wrote one main German Jewish newspaper, "When the weapons are laid to rest, the war's storm will not have ended for us..."¹⁰

¹⁰ Hoffman, p. 100; cited also in Meyer, p. 434

Conclusion

There are no *kinos* to be found for the Jewish victims of the Great War. There is no day of commemoration devoted to them. Although the Holocaust that followed a generation later was a greater tragedy in scale, those Jews that died on account of their faith are no less martyrs, and are no less deserving of remembrance. One hundred years have passed, and while the cities of Europe commemorate the hundredth anniversaries of the battles that were waged on their soil, it is appropriate that we too commemorate those hundreds of thousands of Jewish souls that perished from this world during that terrible chapter of our exile.

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