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JewishTimes

Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification
of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

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Boston	5:13	Moscow	5:45
Chicago	5:22	New York	5:28
Cleveland	5:59	Paris	6:14
Detroit	6:03	Philadelphia	5:33
Houston	6:02	Phoenix	6:06
Jerusalem	5:18	Pittsburgh	5:53
Johannesburg	6:20	Seattle	5:36
Los Angeles	5:30	Sydney	7:13
London	5:22	Tokyo	5:18
Miami	6:04	Toronto	5:48
Montreal	5:22	Washington DC	5:42

Weekly Parsha

Megilla

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And Mordechai told him all that had befallen him, and the full account of the silver that Haman had proposed to weigh out into the king's treasuries on the Jews' account, to cause them to perish. And the copy of the writ of the

(continued on next page)

PURIM

UNBRIDLED LOVE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

If you were told that three days before Passover you could fulfill the mitzvah to eat matza, you might find that difficult to accept. After all, matza forms part of Passover's mitzvos, and three day's earlier it is not yet Passover.

You now understand the problem regarding Rabbi Samuel ben Nachmani's permission for some people to read the Megilla a few days before Purim (Tal. Megilla; 2a). This permission is based on a sensitivity to not burden country people to travel too much. In their small towns, it was not common to find a professional Megilla reader.

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Esther's weakened state
after 3 days of fasting

(Megilla cont. from pg. I)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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decree that was given in Shushan he gave him, to show Esther and to tell her, and to order her to come before the king to beseech him and to beg him for her people." (Megillat Esther 4:7-8)

Megillat Esther narrates the efforts of Haman to destroy the Jewish people and the response of Mordechai and Esther to this threat. Haman slanders the Jewish people to the king, Achashverosh. He tells the king that the Jewish people adhere to their own standards and laws. They are not faithful to the king and do not obey his directives. He urges the king to decree the destruction of the Jewish people. He offers to deliver to the king's treasury ten-thousand silver talents in exchange for the king's acquiescence to his advice. Achashverosh accepts Haman's offer and advice. He authorizes Haman to write and promulgate an appropriate decree in his name regarding the Jews. Haman selects the thirteenth day of Adar as the day for the destruction of the Jewish people throughout the kingdom.

He writes the decree announcing this plan and distributes it throughout the kingdom.

Mordechai appeals to Esther to intercede with the king. He communicates with a messenger

sent by Esther. Our pesukim records Mordechai's message to Esther. Mordechai's description of the events leading to Haman's decree is interesting. Mordechai tells Esther that Haman has placed a sum of silver into the king's treasury in order to procure the right to destroy the Jews. But he makes no mention of Haman's slander of the Jews to Achashverosh. This is an odd omission. Mordechai is appealing to Esther to intercede with the king. In order to be successful, she will require the best possible intelligence regarding the king's motives for handing over to Haman the fate of the Jewish people. Haman's accusation of disloyalty was a fundamental element of the argument he made to Achashverosh. Why does Mordechai omit this information?

"Then Memuchan declared before the king and the princes, 'Not against the king alone has Vashti the queen done wrong, but against all the princes and all the peoples that are in all King Achashverosh's provinces. For the word of the

queen will spread to all the women, to make them despise their husbands in their eyes, when they say, 'King Achashverosh ordered to bring Vashti the queen before him, but she did not come.' And this day, the princesses of Persia and Media who heard the word of the queen will say [the like] to all the princes of the king, and [there will be] much contempt and wrath.

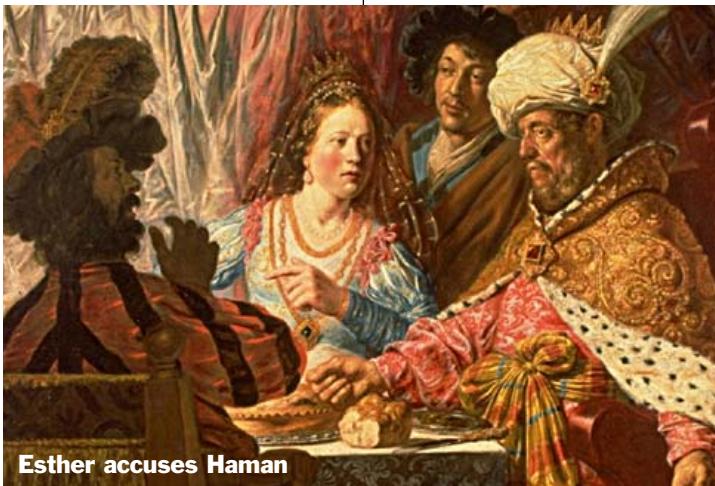
If it please the king, let a royal edict go forth from before him, and let it be inscribed in the laws of Persia and Media, and let it not be revoked, that Vashti did not come before King Achashverosh, and let the king give her royal position to her peer who is better than she. And let the verdict of the king be heard throughout his entire kingdom, although it is great, and all the women shall give honor to their husbands, both great and small." (Megillat Esther 1:16-20)

Achashverosh is the most mysterious character in the Megillah. We can easily grasp and appreciate the righteous motivations of Mordechai and Esther. Haman is the villain. He is motivated by a deep personal hatred of the Jewish people and their Torah. But what are Achashverosh's motivations?

Is he a fool – easily influenced by devious advisors? Does he share Haman's hatred for the Jews? In order to understand Mordechai's message to Esther, we must develop a firmer grasp of Achashverosh's personality and behaviors.

There are two enigmatic episodes in the Megillah that must be explored in order to better understand Achashverosh. Achashverosh made an elaborate celebration for his ministers and subjects. During the celebration, he directed his queen, Vashti, to appear before this audience. His intention was to demonstrate her remarkable beauty. Vashti refused to appear. Our Sages offer various explanations for Vashti's refusal. But the simple explanation is that Vashti recognized the king's motivations. She regarded his request as demeaning. She was not willing to compromise her dignity as queen by being paraded in front of an assembly of drunken ministers and subjects.

Achashverosh responded to this refusal with intense anger. But he could not identify the proper course of action to take against Vashti. He



Esther accuses Haman

(continued on next page)

(Megilla continued from page 2)**Weekly Parsha**

consulted with his advisors. One of his counselors – Memuchan – suggested a response. He told Achashverosh that he should not treat Vashti's refusal as a personal issue. Instead, he should deal with it as an affair of state. Vashti's rebuff should be regarded as the beginning of a social movement. Vashti's behavior will suggest to all women that they need not obey the wishes of their husbands. Vashti's expression of independence will be the catalyst for a liberation movement that will undermine structure of the family and the authority of all husbands. Vashti must be removed as queen and replaced by a more suitable role model. This action will send a message to all women that they must honor and obey their husbands. Achashverosh accepted this suggestion, designed and distributed the decree, and removed Vashti.

It seems that Memuchan's essential advice to Achashverosh was that Vashti should be deposed as queen. Obviously, this was an option that Achashverosh would have contemplated without Memuchan's help. But Memuchan added an innovation. He suggested that Achashverosh explain his decision to oust Vashti as a response to a subversive social movement. Why was this necessary? How did this suggestion suddenly resolve Achashverosh's quandary regarding the appropriate course of action?

Apparently, Achashverosh was reluctant to depose Vashti simply because she refused to comply with a command of questionable propriety. Achashverosh was eager to punish Vashti and depose her. But he was reluctant to add another display of unseemly behavior to his previous licentiousness. He needed some pretext behind which he could hide his true motive. Memuchan recognized the nature of Achashverosh's dilemma and provided the requisite pretext. In other words, Achashverosh's true motive for deposing Vashti was personal, juvenile anger. Achasheverosh recognized the shabby nature of these motives but did not abandon them. Instead, he sought some pretext behind which he could hide his true motivations.

"After these events, when King Achashverosh's fury subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done, and what had been decreed upon her. And the king's young men, his servants, said, "Let them seek for the king young maidens of comely appearance. And let the king appoint commissioners to all the provinces of his kingdom, and let them gather every young maiden of comely appearance to Shushan the capital, to the house of the women, to the custody of Heyge, the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, and let their ointments be given them. And let the maiden who pleases the king reign instead of Vashti." And the matter pleased the king, and he did so." (Megilat Esther 2:1-4)

There is a second incident – described in the above pesukim – that seems to confirm this interpretation of Achashverosh's behavior. Achashverosh's anger abates. He misses Vashti and regrets deposing her. The king's young servants suggest a solution to his problem. The king should collect all of the beautiful young women of the kingdom into a compound in Shushan, the capital. Each will be brought, in turn, to the king. The most worthy of these candidates he will select as his new queen.

This seems like a remarkably absurd suggestion. Achasheverosh was a powerful king. An appropriate queen for such a ruler would be a woman of royal lineage and prominence. Achasheverosh's servants suggested that he select a replacement for Vashti through a process that was essentially a beauty pageant! However, despite the absurdity of this suggestion, Achashverosh readily and immediately accepted the proposal.

The apparent conclusion is that Achashverosh accepted this suggestion because he was not seeking an appropriate woman to replace Vashti. Neither was he seeking a single woman to serve as his queen. He wanted a female companion with whom he could enjoy intimacy, not another queen. However, a king cannot compromise his dignity by inviting a series of women into brief intimate encounters. Again, Achashverosh needed a pretext under which he could pursue his licentious desires. His servants provided the required pretext. Achashverosh would announce an elaborate plan for finding a new queen. This pretext would provide him with the opportunity to enter into intimate relationships with a virtually endless series of beautiful women. In other words, Achashverosh understood that, if revealed, his true motive would be easily recognized as simple lust. But he was unwilling to reconsider this motive. Instead, he sought, found, and implemented a strategy for concealing his true motive. He would disguise it as an elaborate process by which he would select a new queen.

"And the king took his ring off his hand and gave it to Haman the son of Hammedata the Agagite, the adversary of the Jews. And the king said to Haman, "The silver is given to you, and the people to do to them as it pleases you." (Megillat Esther 3:10-11)

Before explaining Mordechai's message to Esther, one further observation will be helpful. The above pesukim describes Achashverosh's response to Haman's proposal to destroy the Jewish people. It is interesting that Achashverosh does not instruct Haman to carry out his plan. He accepts Haman's proposal to deposit a large sum of silver into the king's treasury. In exchange, he gives Haman the

authority to deal with the Jews as he pleases.

This is a strange response. Haman had argued that the Jews were unfaithful. They deserved to be destroyed as dangerous subversives. Yet, Achashverosh showed no enthusiasm for the destruction of his supposed enemies. He made no comment regarding his wishes for the treatment of these seditious traitors. He left their fate in Haman's hands.

It seems that Achashverosh was not convinced that the Jews were traitors. He was not concerned with their supposed sedition. He did not feel compelled to address this presumed threat. He recognized that Haman's accusation was not credible. But if Achashverosh recognized Haman's duplicity, why did he turn the Jews over to their enemy? The inescapable conclusion is that Achashverosh coveted the money Haman offered to pay into his treasury.

If this is the case, why did Haman feel it necessary to slander the Jews? Why did he not just offer the king the silver he craved and demand that in exchange he receive control over the fate of the Jews?

Haman understood Achashverosh's personality. He knew that Achashverosh could be motivated by his intense desire for even greater wealth. But also he knew that Achashverosh would not demean himself by responding to this offer of wealth. He would need some pretext in order to acquiesce to his offer. Haman provided the pretext. Haman recognized that in order to secure Achashverosh's support, he did not need to convince him of the justice of his accusations. He merely needed to provide some pretext.

We can now understand Mordechai's message to Esther. Mordechai understood Achashverosh's personality and behavior. He knew that Haman had accused the Jews of disloyalty. But he realized that this accusation had not motivated the king to hand over the Jews to Haman. He knew that this accusation was intended, and served, as a pretext. He did not tell Esther about Haman's slander against the Jews because this accusation was not the true reason for Achasheverosh's agreement to Haman's proposal. Esther need not develop a defense of the Jews. She did not need to prove their loyalty. Any effort to defend her people would be misguided and ineffectual. He revealed to Esther Achashverosh's true motivation – Haman's silver. His message to Esther was that she needed to counter Achashverosh's desire for silver with an even stronger desire. Mordechai hoped that Achashverosh's devotion to Esther and his need for her would serve as this opposing desire. Achashverosh would not risk losing Esther's love. Mordechai hoped that Achashverosh's deep need for Esther would motivate him to abandon Haman and rescind his decree. ■

(Purim continued from page 1)

Therefore, since Mondays and Thursdays were set times at which these country people visited the large cities for purposes of trying court cases (courts were found in larger cities) Rabbi Samuel allowed these country people to read the Megilla earlier, despite the fact that it was not yet Purim. But what source enabled Rabbi Samuel to make this allowance? Holidays – and all mitzvahs – have strict guidelines. And allowing a holiday-oriented mitzvah to be performed “before” the holiday...well...seems untimely!

Rabbi Samuel based his ruling on the second of these two Megilla verses (9:21,22):

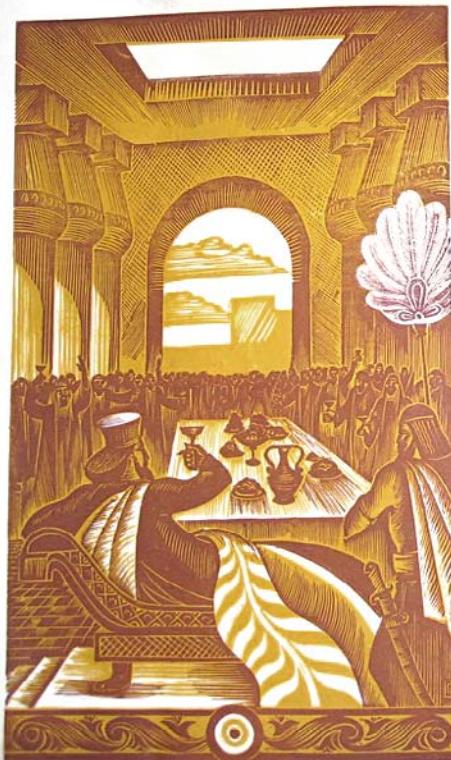
[21] To establish for them – that they shall make the 14th day of the month Adar and the 15th on it for every year. [22] As the days that the Jews rested on them from their enemies; and the month that was reversed for them from anguish to happiness, from mourning to a holiday, to make them days of drinking and happiness and to send portions [of food] each man to his friend, and gifts to the poor.”

Rashi explains (Ibid) from these words commencing verse 22 “As the days”, that Rabbi Samuel derived that there may be established two more days “As the days” that were already established. Now, since the days already established as Purim were the 14th and 15th of Adar, Rabbi Samuel concluded that another “pair” of days were hinted to here; days that will partake of Purim’s character. Thus, it is now possible to read the Megilla on these additionally sanctioned days, the 11th and 12th. But we must now ask why Purim – and no other holiday – deserved this additional-day design. What exists in Purim alone that additional days are warranted?

Furthermore, as we know that in all Torah verses, each item is related, what is the relationship between all the items in verse 22, which include the additional days of the holiday, a reversed month, drinking, gifting meals, happiness, and charity?

You may readily suggest that Passover and Succos too have multiple days. However, the mitzvahs of eating matza and dwelling in the Succah have special significance on only their first days. The remaining Chol HaMoed does not share the first day’s significance. And regarding Channukah, it has eight days due to the very nature of the miracle...none of those eight days are “extensions”, as is the case with Purim. But Purim celebrates our defeat of the enemy on the 14th and 15th alone. Why then does the Megilla give additional significance to the 11th and 12th, making it permissible to read the Megilla then? Why is Purim alone an “extended” holiday? And can those country people also have their Purim

Purim



המלך לטעו כל ידי עדי דת ודין והקרב אליו כרשווא שאר אדרמא תרישוי מושטנא גומזען שבעהן שער פרוס ומודה ראי צו המלך דישובן ראשינה במלוכה כרת מה קלישוואט במלכה ושתי על עלי אשיר לא עייניה את מבואר המלך אוזשראוש ביד הסריסים קלען המלך והשרם לא על המלך כבד עוגת השער הארכאה וכען כל הרשותם עיל כל העמים אשיר בכל מדינה מדין אוזשראוש כי צאן דבר המלכה על כל הדיניהם לדבביה בערך ידין בעיניהן באזירם פקץ אוזשראוש אכזר כהבא את ויטני העמלהה רצויין ורא באה וڌוות הוה תאכירנה שעירית פרס ומקיי אשיר שמיין את דבר המלון לככל שיר הנזכר וכדי בזין וקצת אם ייל המלך טוב צאן דבר מלכיות מרכזין וכדיבב בהדי פרס ומיידי ילא יעבזר אשיר לבא תבאי ישדי רפוי המלך אוזשראוש ומילכotta יאנז דיניכר עייניה התבה מזגה נישמע בתגdem המלך אשר עייניה בכל עילידין במנדיול ויעד קתן ויטוב דרבנן

feast that early? Rashi makes this clear that they must have their feasts on the 14th. This makes matter more difficult: what is the nature of the 11th and 12th, in that these country people may read the Megilla then, but not have their feasts?

The Megilla goes on to describe at length the nature of the lottery cast by Haman to select a day of genocide...even teaching us in verse 26 that we must call these days ‘Purim’ (meaning lottery). As a Rabbi once taught, Haman wished to denounce any Divine Providence over the Jews by exterminating us based on a lottery, a “pur”. Whichever month and day was selected randomly would be

the beginning of our end. “Random” is the key word here. As Haman wished to show that Jewish fate is random and not under any Divine Providence, he used a lottery to select the day. “We can die at anytime”. It then appears that the Megilla stresses the need to name Purim so as to highlight the opposite: we are in fact under God’s Providence. The holiday must embody the concept of Divine Providence. The Megilla then states that the Jews reaccepted the Torah out of love, having first accepted it out of fear at Sinai. Once the nation witnessed the wisdom, and salvation achieved by Mordechai and Esther’s cunning, they reaccepted the Torah out of a love. “Kumu vKiblu” – “They arose and accepted”. (9:27)

A Rabbi taught years ago that drinking brings about euphoria, and unbridled feelings of love and happiness. Drinking was therefore commanded on Purim so as to mimic the euphoric state of the Jews back then. I don’t have proof but wish to suggest that this might be part of a larger picture on Purim...

Perhaps the lesson in all the laws of Purim is one thing: we must have an unrestrained and complete expression of joy and love in connection with God and His Torah. Why is Purim the day selected to embody this idea? It is because Purim was an event where a true attachment to Torah was first realized on a national level. “Kumu vKiblu” – “They arose and accepted”. The Rabbis saw Purim’s nature as deserving eternal commemoration, even to the point that Maimonides states that in the future, the Megilla will outshine all other works. The Rabbis instituted Purim for all times for this reason: on Purim the nation reached the height of attachment to Torah. The Shema describes this very goal: “And you shall love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might”. The operative word here is “all”. Man is obligated to reach a state where he is completely bound up in his love for God, and in “all” possible expressions. It is our life’s objective to attain this attachment to the Creator. And with study, we will be continuously amazed at His wisdom, and His existence.

Why does verse 22 describe the Jews’ victory in ‘monthly’ terms: “and the month that was reversed for them from anguish to happiness”? Surely they were victorious on the 14th and 15th, precisely why these are the holidays. What does “month” have to do with this?

Perhaps this answers why additional days were appended: one or two days of a holiday curtail the magnitude of what we are capable of. Rabbi Samuels’ opinion is that Purim is a holiday of “adding”. Meaning, the very nature of the Jews state was unbridled love for God and Torah. And to express this, we immerse in alcohol to mimic

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(Purim continued from previous page)

those feelings. But we express this in the structure of the holiday as well...we keep adding days, as if to say; that which is unbridled seeks to be extended. The euphoria brought about by alcohol embodies an unbridled state "emotionally". But to truly express unbridled love, one must also not be limited in "time", and this is expressed by adding days to the holiday. The fact that the Megilla adds more days to Purim, in the very same verse as the law to drink, may very well be this lesson: both target the same, unrestrained love. We are also taught to share our food with close friend and give charity, to insure that all Jews achieve the happiness they require: each one on his own level. Therefore, we share meals with close friends, since nothing is more deeply moving than bonding with a dear old friend. And to the poor, we open our wallets and give them what is burning in their hearts.

"Meshenichnass Adar, marbim b'simcha" – "From when Adar enters, increase in happiness" also targets this goal. It is not from Purim, but two weeks earlier that we start rejoicing. Perhaps this principle too is to embody this very idea, that an unbridled love is not time bound. Mere days cannot contain the true state of one living in line with Torah.

Another lesson regarding "Meshenichnass Adar, marbim b'simcha" is that the wheels of Providence were in motion long before the events culminated in our salvation. The Talmud states that just as one minimizes happiness when the month of Av commences, we are to increase our happiness when Adar commences. A Rabbi once taught that in doing so, we recognize the concept of God's reward and punishment. By postponing court cases during Av, we attest to God's ability to punish us with poor verdicts. No one can deny the numerous tragedies which occurred on the 9th of Av: from the Jews who sinfully denied God's ability to enter them into Israel safely, to the yearly deaths of those Jews; through both Temple destructions...we learn that these are not coincidences. These tragedies are God's hand driving our history. In contrast, but embodying the same idea, we celebrate as Adar enters, as a testimony to God's Divine Providence. Adar is a time of happiness, when God worked wonders, and will do so for His loyal servants. This is truly a Divine lesson for all of us that despair in any part of life is no option. "Even if the sword is placed on your neck, God can save you from it". (Tal. Avoda Zara 18b)

May we all use this time to reattach ourselves to Torah and God out of a love, and abandon a life of fear. Of course, this is only accomplished if we too "arise and reaccept a Torah lifestyle", beginning with the greatest mitzvah of all...Torah study. ■

Letters



Letters from our READERS



Attraction

Reader: Editor, The Jewish Times:

Here's another take on the "law of attraction" that was discussed in the Jewish Times two weeks ago.

I've been to seminars given by people who follow the "law of attraction" mentality. It's possible that some of them believe that there is some "force" out there that causes things to be attracted to you if you focus on them enough. But I believe there is another, much more reasonable, interpretation of the attraction stories that they cite. Consider the following.

Suppose you become interested in a new car. Let's say, a Ford Mustang. You stop by the showroom, sit behind the driver's seat, take home the brochure, pin the glossy picture up on your refrigerator, and dream about having a new sleek Ford Mustang. Lo and behold, what do you start noticing on the highway? Ford Mustangs! They seem to be everywhere you turn. Now is that because you "attracted" them? Hardly. What happened is that you engaged a part of your brain called the Reticular Activating System, a mecha-

nism that brings relevant information to your attention. (Think of an airport, with all of its sights and sounds, and how your ears perk up when the announcement over the loudspeaker is about YOUR flight. Or think of a mother who can recognize the cry of her child over the cries of all the other children.) The Mustangs you started seeing on the highway were, of course, always there. But because they are now of special interest to you and you are really focused on them, you begin to notice them. You didn't notice them before because there was no reason for them to stand out over any other car on the road. We get bombarded by so many stimuli every second that we learn to tune out most of what we see and hear. I think researchers have studied this and concluded that we tune out over 90% of the stuff that comes past us. But the things we're interested in? Those we notice.

Now suppose that I'm interested in new business deals. I spend a lot of time reading and thinking about business deals. So, when a snippet of information comes my way about a new deal, my Reticular Activating System picks up on it. I "notice" that unusual ad in the newspaper, or accidentally pay more attention to a conversation that may present an opportunity. Did I attract it to myself? Well, no, not really. But I did in a way, because I became more attuned to something that was already there and started noticing it more and more.

I think this phenomenon is very real and is quite in keeping with Torah. The person whose mind is focused on Torah and the wonderful things that Hashem has provided for us will see the world in that light. The person who is negative and focused only on criticism will find plenty to criticize. So I think the law of attraction exists, except it isn't about attraction. It's about what we focus on. And we seem to get more of what we focus on; not because it magically comes to us, but because it was always there in the first place and we finally notice it. ■

Doug

"Jewish" Souls?

Aurora: You say gentiles and Jews are equal but just have different roles. Any time I go to other Jewish sites I get so upset because I find a different approach. How come you are the only one that talks in this way? At times you talk about some Judaic issues that are not easy for me to digest, but still, you always emphasize the fact that all

(continued on next page)

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Letters

humans are equal. I found what follows on the site www.----.org. Please tell me what do you think about it. I cannot understand how they can be so far away from your view. Can you tell me please if they are right? Here is what they wrote:

"If any nation would have then accepted the Torah, it would have elevated itself from its lower state. [...] The gate was permanently closed, never again to be opened. It still remained possible, however, for any individual to convert to Judaism [...] These nations still have the human aspect, blemished though it may be, and God desired that they should at least have a counterpart of what was actually appropriate for all mankind. He therefore granted them a Divine Soul (neshama) somewhat like that of the Jew, even though it is on a much lower level."

Thanks in advance,
Aurora

Mesora: Aurora, I wrote this letter to the author of your quote:

"Dear XXXX, One of your readers sent me - what I verified - are accurate quotes:

"These nations still have the human aspect, blemished though it may be, and God desired that they should at least have a counterpart of what was actually appropriate for all mankind. He therefore granted them a Divine Soul (neshama) somewhat like that of the Jew, even though it is on a much lower level."

'Blemished' you write? 'Somewhat like that of the Jew'?

This is not at all what the quoted Talmud states. It is only those who cleave to idolatry who lose out...not all gentiles. Gentiles have no "lower soul" than a Jew, and you have no grounds to say so.

You make these words "appear" as authentically Torah by placing numerous quotes from Talmud below them...but they are your own conclusions, and are false. The Talmud does not say this. I verified your quote from Sanhedrin 91b.

These sources indicate that if a gentile remains with a lesser life not following Torah, then his eternal life is affected. The same is true regarding a Jew who does not live in accord with Torah. So both gentile and Jew are the same in "design". The difference is whether the gentile lives according to the Torah philosophy, as Abraham did. In that case, Abraham - a gentile - inherited the next world...to a higher level than any Jew today! And Ruth the convert did as well. Adam, Eve, Noah,



Boaz realizes Ruth's perfection and marries her. Her gentile status did not indicate any less a perfection. Their union produced Kings David and Solomon.

Isaac, Rebecca, Rachel, Sarah, Jacob and all their tribes were also not Jews. Yet, since they perfected themselves, God loved them. Your website's claims are wrong, and are not what the quoted sources say. Your website misleads people to believe your ideas, since you don't openly write what the Talmudic sources say. So the reader is led to believe your site is accurate. You have made a foolish conclusion, which violates all of the Torah's words.

Kindly remove your conclusions, and replace them with the literal text of the sources.

I applaud your attempts to teach, but please teach accurately.

Thank you,
Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim"

I did receive this response:

"Dear Moshe, Nice to hear from you. Thanks for your comments. It was an old article. I did edit it. I welcome your input."

This Rabbi responded properly, and removed from his site what he realized were falsehoods. But one can study his words to reveal their false nature: "He therefore granted them a Divine Soul...". One wonders: how God could 'grant a soul' to living humans, are they not alive, thinking beings already? The lesson here is that even without confirming from the text that someone's words are false, the impossibilities they preach also teach this. In fact, if we perceive something to be true or false with absolute clarity, we must give that perception priority over mere words.

Aurora: I have read on some sites (written by rabbis) that a gentile who converts to Judaism had already a Jewish soul, (confirming the theory that Jewish souls are different from gentile ones) but the gentile soul had to pass through a kind of teaching or experience. This is what this site states:

"The Talmud, continuing this idea that converts already have a Jewish soul inside of them, uses a very interesting phrase when discussing Jewish laws of potential converts. It is written, 'a convert who comes to convert...' The phrase begs the question - why does it say "a CONVERT who comes to convert..."? Rather, it should say, "a GENTILE who comes to convert..."! The reason is because they already have a Jewish spark inside of them."

Mesora: I have also written the note below to this second Rabbi, but have yet to hear back:

"Dear Rabbi XXXXX, A person wrote me with a concern I share, over something you wrote in "Conversion to Judaism". You stated, "The Talmud, continuing this idea that converts already have a Jewish soul inside of them...". However, the Talmud did not say that. It said gentiles were at Sinai; itself a metaphor, and in no measure that a "Jewish soul is inside gentiles". There is not even support to differentiate between Jewish and gentile souls. So the Talmud cannot "continue" this notion of Jewish souls, since it never states it on Shavuos 39a to begin with. You then conclude with the "Jewish spark" theory...also not supported here.

You claim this is all quoted from Talmud. Please email me that exact Talmudic source.

Thank you,
Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim"

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Letters

It matters none whether we hear back, since these claims are not from the Torah, but from this Rabbi's arrogance. He forgets the Talmudic portion on Sanhedrin 59a "Rabbi Mayer said, any gentile who learns Torah is akin to the high priest". This teaches that there is no difference between a gentile and Jew: both individuals have the same potential. This Rabbi also forgets what he says three times daily in the Alenu prayer: "And all sons of flesh will call Your name." All mankind are equated. Jews are no better, and furthermore, we pray that all of mankind realize God's truth and Torah system, so that they may benefit, as do we.

Proponents of the "Superior Jewish Soul" theory are forced to make ridiculous claims: that converts contain a "spark" of a Jewish soul. What nonsense. This means that God selectively gives a "higher soul" to some gentiles, but not to others. This presents God as unfair, and therefore cannot be true. And as we said earlier, God selected gentiles like Abraham and Ruth due to their own merit, to be leaders and forerunners of others. Now what will these proponents say: that gentiles like Abraham and Ruth were not meritorious of their acts, but it was due to some extraneous "spark"? Why then shall Abraham and Ruth earn reward, while other gentiles lose out? And what about Jews who become wicked? Where is their "Jewish spark"? Why has not their Jewish spark shielded them? And regarding the era before any Jews existed, Abraham could not have a "Jewish soul".

We realize that the "Jewish soul" theory is foolish, and goes against all God says and does. In truth, one earns his or her reward due to engaging free will and intelligence, and not because God selectively apportioned some lucky few with "higher" souls.

To suggest "differences" in souls, one is obliged to prove that souls have levels, before suggesting who has the "new and improved" model. God's Torah reveals that He created man only once. Yet these Rabbis suggest that God at some point created a "Jewish soul". They are not loyal to God's words, and this is why they err.

In summary, since the notion of Jewish superiority does not emanate from reality, we learn that man fabricates it. This proves our very point: Jews are no different than others, as they too possess arrogance. In fact, the Jew who is disloyal to God's words, as in this case, is far beneath the righteous gentile who honestly seeks truth. ■

Noachides & Torah

Email: Would I be able to study in Chumash? Really, what could apply to Noachides? And if I were able to study, who would be the commentator to start with? I ask because a number of books are published by Artscroll that deal with a specific ones. Of course Rashi, Ramban...and some others that are from Feldheim. Any advice would be a great help to me.

Mesora: A Rabbi taught that a Noachide might study all areas addressing human perfection. This includes all commentaries as well. I cannot answer who you should start studying, since all commentators offer valuable insight. I would study as many as you could, including Maimonides' "Guide for the Perplexed", Rashi and Ramban on Chumash, "Sforno Commentary on the Torah" by Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz, and Ibn Ezra which I understand is now in English.

In addition to Noachide laws, you may study all other laws they wish to practice. What is forbidden regarding Torah study for Noachides is "theoretical study" of commands he/she does not intend to practice. But for all laws you wish to practice, you may, and actually, must study. There are only a few laws that a Noachide may not practice, which include Shabbos, holidays, and tefillin.

It should be understood that the reason for the prohibition of Torah study is not so much for the Noachide, as it is for the Jew. For if the Noachide studied Torah, since he is not obligated to follow it, his study will not be with the earnest of a Jew, and his teachings of Torah to others will corrupt the Torah system. Limiting Torah study to those (Jews) who are obligated in its practice, the Torah will be perpetuated as accurately as possible. ■

Questions

Reader: (i) In some of the articles, you mention that the Rambam said explicitly that believing God has parts is wrong, regarding the Rebbe saying that the soul is a "part of God". The idea that God cannot have parts is entirely logical and I am totally convinced of its truth; however, it would be useful to know where the Rambam says this. Where exactly is this?

Mesora: It is principle 3 of his 13 Principles, located in his *Peirush haMishnayos*: chapter 11, Talmud Sanhedrin. He also discusses this in his *Mishneh Torah*, *Yesodah haTorah* 1:7.

Reader: (ii) What are the arguments against the authenticity of the Zohar? Clearly it contains ideas that go against the philosophy of the Rambam and Saadia Gaon (reincarnation, parts of God), but it is disheartening that the Gr'a was such a staunch proponent of the Zohar. Why didn't he

see through it? According to R' Yaakov Emden, it contains misinterpretations of the Torah and Gemara. Why was the Gr'a tricked by de Leon's fabrication?

Mesora: I feel we can safely state that one like the Gr'a did not accept any foolish notion. Perhaps he quoted only that which made sense, and dismissed the rest. The Zohar is not "Torah from Sinai"; nor is the Tanya, which is what I rejected in part, not the Rebbe. We should always take issue with ideas, not transient humans.

Reader: (iii) Where does the Rambam say that we lost the tradition regarding ideas of kabbala (*not* the kabala of the Zohar; I mean the kabala of the Ramban). What sort of ideas were in the true kabbala?

Mesora: I believe in his intro to book three in the "Guide" you can find Maimonides' statement. Regarding what ideas are in kabbala...take a look.

Reader: (iv) What do you make of the Ramchal's discussions of his meetings with Moshe, Eliyahu, Shmuel, etc.? He doesn't seem to be the person to lie.

Mesora: I follow the Torah. It says not to consult the dead. We also know that prophecy has ended. Furthermore, Judaism is not about hero worship, and an attraction to personalities. I also don't believe that Moses talked to Abraham, Noah or Adam. He wished to approach God. And I would not readily accept any story that discredits a Torah scholar or Rabbi.

Reader: (v) What was the Rambam's understanding of angels? Had he lived today, given that science would contradict stars having souls and the idea of spheres, would the Rambam still have the same concept of angels?

Mesora: I cannot speak for Rambam.

Reader: (vi) If sacrifices aren't true service of God, only a medium, as the Rambam discusses in the Moreh, why are there going to be sacrifices in the future Temple? People today certainly aren't "softened" into that mode of service. Also, how would the Rambam respond to the fact that Cain and Abel brought sacrifices, even though they certainly weren't "accustomed" to that type of service?

Thank you! D. F.

Mesora: I don't recall Rambam saying sacrifice is not a "true service". It must be a true service if God commanded it. And the enduring need for sacrifice is based on the enduring design of man. As it perfected man's tendencies back then; since we share the same tendencies, we can benefit from sacrifice as well.

Regarding Cain and Abel, Rambam does not argue history. They sacrificed as a means to approach God. But subsequent to Egypt, sacrifice now took on a new objective. ■

Purim



the PURIM STORY

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

King Achashverosh ruled in Shushan, with his reign extending over 127 provinces. He created a lavish banquet lasting 180 days. Tapestries of white, turquoise and purple hung from pillars of marble. Variegated marble paved paths lined with beds of gold and silver. The king decreed that wine should be older than the guest who imbibed it. For this ploy, I give credit to the king. I wondered why he wished this to be. Certainly, any ruler's position is in constant jeopardy: on the one hand, you must placate your viceroys and ministers to remain popular and in power. On the other hand, a leader's firm hand must be displayed. Aged wine was a solution: The king treated his guests with honor by

providing wine older than themselves, a respectful drink, securing his popularity. But he also kept his officers humble - by implication the king said, "This wine was around long before you." Reminding one of a time when he was not yet around is quite humbling, and an affective maneuver to keep subjects in check.

The Celebration

The king was celebrating his faulty calculation that redemption would not occur for the Jews. His outright denial was seen in his use of the Temple's vessels for his haughty affair. Rabbi Yossi son of Chanina commented that the king dressed in the High Priest's clothing during this affair. (Talmud Megilla, 12a) This was a further extension of his denial, as if to say that the institution of the High Priest was nonsense, and that King Achashverosh better deserved this clothing. It is understood that one leader – Achashverosh – would be jealous of another, the High Priest. (The Rabbis teach that one tradesman is always jealous of another in his field.) Thus, the king jealously denied any honor due to the High Priest by donning his garments. The Talmud teaches that the king was equally anti-Semitic as was Haman. For when Haman later offered to pay for a war against the Jews, the king told Haman to keep his money – the king covered the war's expense. But this very feast celebrating the lack of truth to the Jews' salvation is itself openly anti-Semitic.

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

Exchanging Queens

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

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

Vashti was a friend to nudity. Why then did she refuse to come unclothed?

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

Man's ego will normally sway his decisions more than his instinctual need for gratification. But Vashti's self-image was less important to her, than was her desire to act lustfully. We understand Achashverosh's selection of her as a marriage partner. These two people both enjoyed the life of sensuality, and physical pleasures. The last few words on Megilla 12a state, "He with large pumpkins, and she with small pumpkins." Meaning, they both desired similar "currency", i.e., immoral behavior.

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

Salvation Already in Place

Along with killing Vashti, Haman advised that a letter be issued stating that unlike Vashti's opposition displayed, a man is to be the ruler of his house. When received by the townspeople, they disregarded the king's letter as they viewed it as foolish. The Talmud states that due to the absurdity of this first letter demanding domestic, male domination, the townspeople also disregarded the second letter calling for the destruction of the Jews: "Were it not for the first letter, not a remnant of the Jews would be left." (Megilla 12b) Rashi states that since the people dismissed the king as foolish based on the first letter, they did not attack the Jews until the day commanded. Had they never viewed the king as a fool, they would have preempted the verdict of annihilation, and killed the Jews sooner. We now realize something: Haman's second letter – his advice to annihilate the Jews – was actually countered by his first letter. This is consistent with the previous statement that God never intended to

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annihilate the Jews, only to scare them into repentance. That is, even before the second “deadly” letter, a prior letter conveying the king’s foolishness already set the groundwork to save the Jews. Thus, God’s salvation was part of the plan first, meaning, this salvation was primary. Only after the salvation was in place, did He allow the apparent threat to enter the stage.

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

Haman’s Ego – His Downfall

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

Mordechai’s Declaration

We learn that Mordechai joined the exiled Jews in Shushan of his own will – he was not forced to be there. This may explain his overt opposition to Haman. Mordechai’s refusal to prostrate to Haman was not only correct in its own right, but it also opposed the very flaw of the Jews. Mordechai made a public statement that bowing is idolatrous, as Haman made himself as an object of worship. (Megilla 19a) His refusal would awake the Jews to their flaw. It may very well be that Mordechai understood the flaw of that generation and therefore chose to move them to repentance with such an overt repudiation of idolatry.

We find more on this topic in the Talmud: The students of Rabbi Shimone bar Yochai asked him why the Jews deserved extermination. It could not be due to their participation in the feast of that wicked man Achashverosh. For if this were the reason, we would find no just reason why Jews who did not attend were also subject to death.

Purim

Rabbi Shimone bar Yochai concluded that the Jews deserved punishment because earlier, they had prostrated themselves before Nevuchadnetzar’s idol. However, the Talmud concludes that as the Jews only prostrated out of fear, and not based on any conviction in the idol, God too was not going to truly exterminate the Jews, but He desired merely to instill fear in them. (Megilla 12a) We thereby learn that it is a severe crime to recognize idolatry in this fashion, even outwardly. We also learn that Mordechai was correct to oppose idolatry, even though his act would result in such a threat.

Esther’s Intervention

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Esther's Plan

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

Divine Intervention

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



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

Purim

Esther executes her strategy, piquing the king's curiosity with her invitation of only he and Haman to her second banquet. Arousing the king's suspicion of Haman, Esther made Haman an easier target.

The Second Party

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

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

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

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

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Reaccepting the Torah

The Jews arose and reaccepted the Torah out of a love, whereas Sinai was acceptance with some coercion. Seeing an undeniable revelation of God at Sinai, Torah acceptance carried with it some fear and coercion. However, when these Jews saw the brilliance demonstrated by Esther and Mordechai, and how God worked within their plan to save the Jews, the Jews now appreciated the Torah with no coercion. They saw a prime example of how using wisdom is the one path to the proper life, and that God does in fact intervene when one operates in this manner.

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

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

Omission of God's Name

One final question: What is the significance of God's name being omitted from the Megilla? We all know that this era was where God intervened, but behind the scenes. What demanded such a covert method of Divine intervention? In all other events, God's miracles are quite apparent; from the Ten Plagues and the parting of the Red Sea, to the sun and moon standing still, to the oil burning eight days on Chanukah...miracles are purposefully and definitively apparent. Why not during the Purim story?

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

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

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

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

**A
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TO ALL!**

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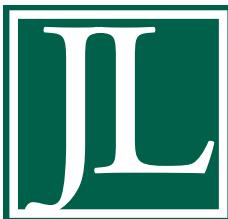
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