

Happy Purim



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Johannesburg	6:16	Seattle	5:42
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Miami	6:06	Toronto	5:54
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Weekly Parsha

Tetzaveh

RABBI BERNIE FOX

The Golden Garments of the Kohen Gadol

And these are the garments that they shall make: a breastplate, an apron, a jacket, a patterned tunic, a turban, and a belt. And they shall
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Thought

Unnatural vs. IMPOSSIBLE

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Daylight Savings
This Saturday night.
Spring ahead 1 hr.



Tehillim:
Can it solve
problems?

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(Tetzaveh cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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make sacred garments for Ahron your brother and for his sons so that they will serve as priests to me. (Shemot 28:4)

Parshat Tetzaveh discusses the garment worn by the Kohen Gadol—the High Priest. In total, the Kohen Gadol wore eight garments. Maimonides comments that the eight golden garments of the Kohen Gadol consisted of the four worn by the common priest, plus the jacket, apron, breastplate and headband.

The Kesef Mishne is troubled by this statement. In fact, only the four special garments included gold thread. The other garments worn by both the Kohen Gadol and the common kohen did not include gold thread. Why, then, does Maimonides refer to all eight of the Kohen Gadol's garments as "golden"?

Perhaps, Maimonides wishes to teach an important lesson. The eight garments of the Kohen Gadol are not individual, isolated items. Instead, they merge into a single vestment. The four common garments join with the four woven with gold to create a single, integrated entity. This integrated garment is the "golden vestments" of the Kohen Gadol. Therefore, it is not necessary for each individual garment to contain gold thread to be referred to as "golden". Instead, they are referred to as "golden" through inclusion in the overall entity of the "golden garments".



The Lettering on the Stones of the Choshen

The stones shall contain the names of Bnai Yisrael, one for each of the twelve stones. Each one shall be engraved as on a signet ring to represent the twelve tribes. (Shemot 28:21)

One of the special garments worn by the Kohen Gadol was the Choshen – the breastplate. Upon the Choshen were mounted twelve stones. The stones were arranged in four rows. Three stones were in each row. On these stones were engraved the names of the tribes of Bnai Yisrael. One name was featured on each stone.

Maimonides explains that the first and last stones contained additional words. The first stone in the series was engraved with the name Reuven.

Above the name were the names, "Avraham" and "Yitzchak VeYaakov" – the names of the forefathers. On the last stone in the series, the name "Binyamin" was engraved. Below the name were the words, "Shivtai Kah" – the tribes of G-d. Through the inclusion of these additional words, every letter of the Hebrew alphabet was contained within the engravings on the stones.[1]

This raises an interesting question. How did the first and last stones accommodate the additional words or names? Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam offers two possibilities. The first possibility is that these stones were larger than the others; the larger-sized stones accommodating the additional lettering. The second possibility is that all the stones were of uniform size; additional words and names were engraved in smaller letters. Through reducing the size of the lettering the stones could contain the larger text.[2]

Rabbaynu Avraham seems to acknowledge the legitimacy of both solutions. However, he favors the second solution. He explains that it seems appropriate for all of the stones of the Choshen to be uniform in size. It seems that Maimonides agrees that the size was uniform.[3]

Through analyzing the basis for these two solutions we can gain an important insight into the nature of the Choshen. We will also better understand

Rabbaynu Avraham's conclusion.

What was the function of the Choshen? The Choshen was one of the special garments of the Kohen Gadol. He was required to wear these garments when performing service in the Mishkan.

The Choshen had a second function. Through the letters on the Choshen, the Kohen Gadol received prophetic messages. A question was addressed to Hashem. Hashem provided a response to the Kohen Gadol through a prophetic vision. This vision utilized the letters engraved on the stones of the Choshen as the medium for communication. The response would be spelled out for the Kohen Gadol using these letters.[4] This second function was crucial in the design of the Choshen. The extra letters engraved at the top of the first stone and the bottom of the last completed the alphabet. This provided all letters needed to communicate the response. [5]

(continued on next page)

What was the relationship between these two functions? Let us consider two possibilities. The first possibility is that the Choshen was primarily an instrument designed to communicate prophecy. The Choshen's function as an essential garment of the Kohen Gadol was subsidiary. This means that the stones and the letters engraved upon them were the main element of the Choshen. The breastplate was fundamentally a garment designed to display the stones which featured these engravings. If this possibility is accepted, then it follows that the size of the stones and the lettering was dictated by the primary function – communicating prophecy. All letters were equally essential. All should have been the same size. This would require using larger stones for the first and last positions. In other words, this interpretation of the Choshen's design supports Rabbaynu Avraham's first solution.

The second possibility is that the primary function of the Choshen was to serve as an honorific garment of the Kohen Gadol. The Choshen's function as a vehicle in communicating prophecy was secondary. If we assume this interpretation, the overall beauty and appearance of the Choshen was a primary concern. This appearance would be enhanced through using stones of uniform size. The additional letters on the first and last stones would be reduced to accommodate the size of the stones. This is apparently the interpretation underlying Rabbaynu Avraham's second solution.

We can now understand Rabbaynu Avraham's reason for favoring this second solution. Rabbaynu Avraham preferred this solution because it is based upon a more reasonable interpretation of the Choshen. In other words, Rabbaynu Avraham was convinced that the Choshen primarily functioned as a garment glorifying the Kohen Gadol. What convinced Rabbaynu Avraham of the legitimacy of this interpretation?

In Parshat Terumah the Torah describes the items required for the construction of the Mishcan and its components. The stones of the Choshen are included in the list. The Torah describes these as "avnai miluim". Most commentaries translate this term as "stones meant to be set". This is a strange appellation for these stones. Why did the Torah not merely describe them as stones for adornment of the Kohen Gadol's garments? What message is the Torah communicating by referring to the stones as avnai miluim?

Gershonides responds to this question. He explains that the Choshen featured gold settings. The stones were required in order to fill these gold

settings.[6] This is an odd way to describe the relationship between the stones and the Choshen. The simpler, more straightforward description would be that the settings were required to accommodate the stones.

A simple example will illustrate this point. What is the relationship between the diamond in an engagement ring and its setting? It would be incorrect to describe the diamond as "required to fill", or complement, the setting (thus suggesting that the diamond is secondary to the setting). The setting is designed to hold the diamond! Why does Gershonides describe the stones as "required" to fill the gold settings?

Gershonides' point is that the stones were designated to adorn and complete the Choshen. According to Gershonides, the Torah describes the stones as "avnai miluim" in order to communicate that their essential function is to adorn the Choshen by filling its settings. This means that the Choshen was not merely a garment intended to carry the stones. This supports Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam's conclusion that the Choshen was primarily designed as a garment of the Kohen Gadol. The stones were chosen for, and part of, this garment. Therefore, uniformity in size was appropriate.



The Message of the Kohen Gadol's Head-Plate

And you should make a Head-plate of pure gold. And you should engrave upon it as the engraving of a signet ring, "Sanctified to Hashem". (Shemot 28:36)

One of the eight garments of the Kohen Gadol was the Tzitz – the golden head-plate. This band was worn on the forehead. Engraved upon the Tzitz were the words, "kodesh laHashem" – "sanctified to Hashem".

The message of the Tzitz seems difficult to unravel. The Tzitz is obviously declaring the

sanctity of some object or person. However, the specific entity to which the Tzitz refers is not clear. Furthermore, we would expect the message of the Tzitz to be self-evident. The Tzitz is making the overt assertion that it—or someone—is "sanctified to G-d." Such a message should be easy to grasp!

This issue can perhaps be resolved from the comments of the Sefer HaChinuch. Sefer HaChinuch explains the garments of the kohanim and the Kohen Gadol were designed to reinforce an important impression. The kohanim and the Kohen Gadol were charged with the duty of serving in the Temple on behalf of the nation. This was a weighty responsibility. These individuals were required to be completely devoted to their duties. In order to reinforce this message, they were given special garments. These vestments were to remind the priests of their responsibilities.

This suggests the phrase, "sanctified to Hashem" refers to the Kohen Gadol. He is sanctified to Hashem. The Tzitz reminds the High Priest of his position and his duties. He must conduct himself in accordance with his responsibilities.[7]

Rabbaynu Shemuel ben Meir – Rashbam – offers an alternative explanation of the message of the Tzitz. The High Priest was required to wear all eight of his garments when serving in the Mishcan. If any garment was absent during the performance of a service, the service was invalidated. As explained above, the vestments of the Kohen Gadol were connected through halachah and formed a single entity. Rashbam suggests that in order to understand the message of the Tzitz, it is essential to evaluate it as part of the entire set of vestments. The garments of the Kohen Gadol must be considered as a whole.

The Tzitz was not the only vestment featuring words. The Ephod – the apron – and the Choshen also featured words. On the stones of the Ephod and Choshen the names of the tribes were engraved. Rashbam suggests that the message of the Tzitz emerges when considered in relation to these other vestments and their engravings. Rashbam explains the Tzitz refers to the shevatim -- the tribes whose names were engraved on the stones of the Ephod and Choshen. The Tzitz refers to these shevatim as sanctified to Hashem.[8]

(continued on next page)

(Tetzaveh cont. from previous page)

Weekly Parsha



The Purpose of the Kohen Gadol's Vestments

And you shall make sacred garments for Ahron your brother for dignity and glory. (Shemot 27:2)

The garments of the Kohen Gadol were designed to create an impressive visual effect. Other aspects of the Kohen Gadol's appearance were also regulated by halachah. For example, he was required to trim his hair every week.[9] In the above passage, Moshe is command to instruct Bnai Yisrael in the creation of these garments. The pasuk says that these garments are designed for honor and glory. However, the pasuk is vague. Whom— or what— do these garments glorify?

The commentaries offer a number of responses to this question. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra suggests that these beautiful and impressive garments glorify Ahron or the Kohen Gadol who wears them.[10] In other words, the purpose of the Kohen Gadol's garments and the regulations

governing his grooming was to assure a positive physical appearance. Our pasuk indicates that this attention to appearance was intended to assure that the Kohen Gadol would be treated with dignity and respect.

This is surprising. Our Sages admonish us to “not look upon the container but at its contents.”[11] Their message is that we should not be impressed by superficial behaviors or appearances. Instead, we are to assess a person based upon the individual's inner-self. Why does the Torah stress superficial aspects of the Kohen Gadol?

More shocking than the Torah's emphasis on physical appearance is the prohibition against the Kohen Gadol's marriage to a widow. This prohibition is also designed to protect the public image of the High Priest.[12] The Torah admonishes us to treat the widow with compassion and justice. The Torah commands us: “You shall not oppress the any widow or orphan.”[13] Why does the Torah prohibit the Kohen Gadol's marriage to a widow and thereby accommodate a shallow prejudice against the widow? Would it not be preferable for the Torah to allow this marriage? Such a policy would counter any social stigma attached to the widow.

These laws demonstrate one of the unique qualities of the Torah. Torah takes human weakness seriously. The Torah was created to govern an actual society. In the real world, prejudice and superficiality exist. These prejudices will undermine respect for the Kohen Gadol if he is married to a widow. The Torah recognizes these faults as forces in society. It prohibits the marriage. But, at the same time, the Torah attempts to correct human behavior. The Torah's approach to confronting prejudice is balanced. It legislates commandments to protect the rights of those likely to be oppressed or subject to prejudice. But it also recognizes the tenacity of these prejudices. Both measures are essential. The Torah also attempts to improve upon these human limitations. However, failure to recognize human frailty would result in a system poorly equipped to deal with and accommodate actual human beings.

The garments of the Kohen Gadol are an excellent illustration of the Torah's method of dealing with this dilemma. The Torah requires that the Kohen Gadol wear beautiful garments. However, these garments are more than attractive vestments. Every detail of design is guided by an intricate system of halachah. The observer is

(continued on next page)

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attracted to the beauty of the garments, and hopefully, this initial interest leads to contemplation of the ingenious laws which govern their design and structure. The observer comes to recognize that the greatest beauty is not in the superficial material dimension. Instead, true beauty is found in the world of knowledge.

Nachmanides acknowledges Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the pasuk as a reasonable possibility. He also suggests an alternative explanation. He proposes that the garments honor and glorify Hashem.[14] Apparently, Nachmanides reasons that the Kohen Gadol serves Hashem. Performing his duties in these wondrous vestments glorifies the service and Hashem.

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno suggests that the garments serve both purposes. They honor Hashem and glorify the Kohen Gadol.[15]

This dispute regarding the function of the vestments of the Kohen Gadol, and presumably also the vestments of the Kohen, is the underlying basis for another disagreement.

There is another dispute among the Sages regarding the requirement that the kohanim wear special vestments. Maimonides, in his Sefer HaMitzvot, writes that our passage communicates a positive command. The kohen and the Kohen Gadol must wear their assigned vestments when serving in the sanctuary.[16] Halachot Gedolot disagrees with Maimonides. He does not derive a commandment from our passage. He maintains that there is no separate commandment directing the Kohen Gadol or the other kohanim to wear these garments.

Of course, this creates a problem. The Kohen Gadol and the kohanim are not permitted to perform service in the Temple without these garments. How can Halachot Gedolot contend that there is no specific commandment directing the Priests to wear these garments, and also acknowledge that the kohanim are not permitted to serve without their vestments?

Nachmanides responds to this question. He explains that Halachot Gedolot certainly acknowledges that a kohen cannot serve without the proper vestments. However, according to Halachot Gedolot, the vestments are a requirement for the proper performance of the service. They are a prerequisite for the performance of the mitzvah of service in the Temple. As a prerequisite for another command – the performance of the service—the requirement to wear the vestments does not merit to be classified as an independent commandment.[17]

Another example from halachah illustrates Nachmanides' argument. All males are required to wear tefillin. Wearing tefillin is a mitzvah. Now, in order to wear tefillin, one first must acquire them. Yet, the procurement of tefillin is not a separate mitzvah. It is merely a prerequisite for the fulfillment of the commandment to wear them. Nachmanides argues that similarly the garments worn by the kohen are a prerequisite for the proper performance of the Temple service. As a prerequisite, the wearing of these garments does not qualify as a separate mitzvah.

How would Maimonides respond to Nachmanides' position? Nachmanides is seemingly offering a compelling argument for not counting the wearing of the vestments as a separate mitzvah. Maimonides agrees that the procurement of tefillin is not a separate mitzvah. Why does he consider the requirement for the kohen to wear his special attire a separate mitzvah?

In order to answer this question, we must consider the order in which Maimonides organizes the various commandments concerning the kohanim. In his Sefer HaMitzvot, Maimonides states that the requirement of the kohanim to wear their garments is the thirty-third positive commandment of the Torah. According to Maimonides' enumeration of the commandments, the thirty-second positive commandment is to honor the kohanim – the descendants of Ahron. The close association of these two commandments suggests that they are related. What is this relationship?

Apparently, Maimonides adopts the position of Ibn Ezra: the garments are designed to honor and glorify the kohanim. He communicates his position by ordering this mitzvah directly after the commandment to honor the kohanim. These vestments distinguish the kohanim and assign to them special status. It is true that a kohen cannot serve in the Temple without his vestments. But according to Maimonides, this is not because the vestments are a prerequisite for the service. The garments are required in order to confer honor and glory upon the kohen. Only when wearing the vestments is he qualified for service. In other words, without the garments, the kohen is not the person permitted to perform the service.

The pivotal issue of contention between Maimonides and Nachmanides can now be identified. According to Nachmanides, the garments are a prerequisite for performance of the service. They are tied to, and enhance, the service. This interpretation reflects Nachmanides' interpretation of the above passage. The vestments glorify the Temple service and Hashem. Therefore,

wearing this special attire is a prerequisite for proper performance of the service but does not constitute a separate mitzvah. In contrast, Maimonides maintains that the garments glorify and honor the Kohanim. They confer full honor and status upon the kohen. As a result, the wearing of the garments is a separate mitzvah within Taryag – the 613 Commandments. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot K'lai Mikdash 9:7.

[2] Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam, Commentary on Sefer Shemot 28:21.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot K'lai Mikdash 9:7.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot K'lai Mikdash 10:11.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot K'lai Mikdash 9:7.

[6] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p. 339.

[7] Rav Ahron HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 99.

[8] Rabbaynu Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam) Commentary on Sefer Shemot 28:36.

[9] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot K'lai Mikdash 5:6.

[10] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 28:2.

[11] Mesechet Avot 4:20.

[12] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1997), pp. 353-4.

[13] Shemot 22:21.

[14] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 28:2.

[15] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot 28:2.

[16] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 33.

[17] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Critique on Maimonides' Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 33.

Why is this object impossible to build?



Unnatural vs. IMPOSSIBLE

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Appreciating
Talmud

Talmud Megilla 17a commences chapter two, opening with the prohibition to read the Megilla out of order. One cannot fulfill his command of hearing (reading) Megilla, if the reader does not read as the Megilla is written. That is, the exact sequence of words, sentences and paragraphs must be read, as is written. The Talmud continues to teach that the prohibition of corrupting the order of recited texts applies equally to the Hallel, Shema and prayer.

Hallel is addressed first. The Rabbis debate which verse in Hallel is used to teach the prohibition of reciting Hallel out of order. Rabah says the verse used is "From the shining of the sun until its setting, the name of God is to be blessed." According to Rashi, Rabah's derivation is this: just as sunrise is not exchanged with sunset (natural order) so too Hallel's recital must follow its written order.

Rav Yosef offers a different verse: "This is the 'day' God created..." Rashi explains Rav Yosef to mean that just as in a "day" one hour is subsequent to the previous and this cannot be changed, so too, the Hallel's order cannot be changed. We now have two Rabbis offering their own verses (from Hallel) as proof that Hallel cannot be recited out of order.

The question we have is why Rav Yosef did not accept Rabah's position. What is lacking in his verse? Here, we have a marvelous opportunity to appreciate that Talmudic discussions are not dry debates or arbitrary or personal views. Talmudic debate is rooted in deep concepts and beautiful theories.

Let's review Rabah's position. He refers to a verse describing sunrise and sunset...natural phenomena. But it seems Rav Yosef too uses a verse about a "day". Wherein lies the difference in theory, that one Rabbi could not use the other's verse?

I'll ask you: can sunrise occur at 11:00 pm? Can sunset occur at 7:00 am? Well, it's not impossible, and in the poles, sunlight lasts for many weeks. But what Rabah meant, was that there is a natural order, and that is sufficient to highlight the matter at hand: "order". Rabah's view is that Hallel contains a verse that refers to some order. It doesn't matter to him that in extreme cases, the order is not intact.

But Rav Yosef wished to use a verse that refers to an order that is "impossible" to be otherwise. This would be an ironclad proof that Hallel too may in no case be altered. Rabah therefore referred to a verse that does not only describe a natural phenomenon...that wasn't his objective. His objective was to refer to a case where order is impossible to be altered. The case he refers to is the hours of the day. His argument is that just as 9 pm

can "never" precede 8 pm, so too Hallel must be read in order. 9 pm arriving before 8 pm is not an issue concerning nature, but it concerns the realm of the possible. Just as it is impossible for a triangle to simultaneously be a circle, it is equally impossible for 9 pm to ever arrive before 8 pm. In other words, the future cannot precede the past.

To Rav Yosef, this is an example par excellence of proving the demand for order. He derived Hallel's demand for order from a verse in Hallel that describes "impossibilities". Sure, Rabah's verse suffices to indicate "order", but it doesn't indicate the element of what "must" be. Rav Yosef wished an absolute case that parallels the prohibition to never alter Hallel. And that strict nature, or "impossible allowance" is derived from the impossibility of altering time.

Extraordinary ideas. These Rabbis were not engaged in simple discussions. They were geniuses. They saw fundamental concepts underlying our Torah commands. But they spoke briefly. Our job as Torah students is to dig for the matters they deemed so precious, and deep. We are offered clues to their theories, and we must patiently analyze their words.

On this topic of the "impossible", I wish to make a side point, but a crucial one.

People often view God with a "superman" view. "He can do literally anything: He can make a square a circle at the same time" they say. Although their minds cannot comprehend what they say, they speak. But this is not the truth. What compels people to say such absurdities? It is their view that God's being "all-powerful" equates to being "unlimited". They feel that if God has any limits, then this detracts from His perfection. However, we know that God cannot be unjust...God will never punish someone who never sinned. He is truthful and will never lie. Do these limitations make Him imperfect? What if a judge could never make a wrong decision...does this limitation detract, or make him more perfect?

There are many matters that are truly impossible in our universe. This is by God's design. He wishes that we "learn" and that means we arrive at laws and rules. But if the universe changes every second, no laws can be observed. Thus, He desires our universe to be constant. Matter will always possess form. The Torah will never change. For if it does, then God is allowing us to believe something that is not always true. It is akin to His lying to man.

God promised He would never change His Torah. That limitation makes Him perfect, as it helps man observe His ways so we might draw closer to a true knowledge of God. ■

Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



Sun Blessing

Saul: Can you tell me more about the blessings for the sun: what is it, why is it done and when is it done? Which is the correct date and time for it? Can you send me translations and the prayers?

Thanks,
Saul

Rabbi: Saul, I will reprint excerpts from a fine article courtesy of Rabbi Dovid Heber located on the Star-K website. The reason for the blessing is to praise God for His creation, as the blessing's text indicates below. On many occasions, we recite this identical blessing. For example, upon seeing oceans and mountains. When we encounter impressive phenomena that strikes us with awe, we are to verbalize praise to the One who created such phenomena. Meaning, we cannot pass on such rare opportunities when our emotions are excited and can be redirected towards God. Of course, trees too are God's

creation. Yet, as we see them so often, we are not awestruck at their appearance. It is the rare phenomena that renders us awestruck. Similarly, when seeing very beautiful people – not normally seen – we are again commanded to praise God. This follows our explanation that it is when we experience unusual phenomena, that our emotions are electrified by a break in the norm. These rare cases when our emotions are amazed at something, are precious chances to bring our emotions more in line with following God.

BIRCHAS HACHAMA 5769

by Rabbi Dovid Heber, Kashrus Administrator

Abaye said that every time the beginning of Spring occurs at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday evening one should go outside the next morning and recite "Baruch atah Hashem Elokainu Melech haolam oseh maaseh braishis," – "Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, Who re-enacts the structure of the creation."

Ideally, Birchas Hachama should be recited before the third hour of the day. B'dieved, one has until chatzos (midday) to recite Birchas Hachama. It is preferably recited while standing – "b'rov am", with a group of other people. Women and children should recite the bracha, as well. A blind person should be yotzai (fulfill his obligation) through hearing someone else make the bracha.

If it is cloudy, the following halachos apply: If one can see the lines of the sun behind the clouds, one may say Birchas Hachama. If it is so cloudy that the sun is not visible, one may not say Birchas Hachama with the name of Hashem. Rather, shortly before chatzos (or when it is obviously going to stay cloudy until chatzos) one would say, "Baruch Ata oseh maaseh braishis" without the name of Hashem.

Why Every 28 Years?

When the world was created, the sun and moon were created on the Wednesday of the week of bri'as haolam (creation of the world). On that day, the beginning of spring (known as "Tekufas Nissan") was at 6:00 p.m., on Tuesday the beginning of the halachic day Wednesday.

It takes approximately 365 days and 6 hours for the Earth to completely revolve one time around the sun. This is equal to 52 weeks, 1 day and 6 hours. Therefore, in the following year (after the world was created) spring began early Thursday at midnight (midnight early Thursday is one day of the week and 6 hours after Tuesday at 6:00 p.m.). The following year it began at 6:00 a.m. on Friday, the following year at noon on Shabbos and the year after that at 6:00 p.m. on Sunday.

Every four years, the time of the tekufa moved five days of the week later (e.g. from 6:00 p.m. Tuesday to 6:00 p.m. Sunday). After 28 years, it returned to the same time that it was at Bri'as Haolam, 6:00 p.m. Tuesday the beginning of "Lail Revi'i" (halachically Wednesday). So, in year 29 (counting from the creation), then years 57, 85, 113 and every 28th year after that, including most recently in 5713 (1953) and 5741 (1981) the tekufa was at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday and Birchas Hachama was recited the next day. Once again, it will be at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday this year. After this year, the next time Birchas Hachama will be recited will be in 5797 (2037) and then again in 5825 (2065). ■

The Ark's Poles

Dr. Recanati: In the parasha, we are told that the Ark's poles were never to be taken out of their rings. Why? The explanation of the wholeness of the Torah is beautiful, but not satisfying. Why aren't we told that the Ark's cover too was not to be taken out? The next time we hear about the poles is in Kings I. 8:8. The poles were "protruding" from the Parochet! Why weren't the poles protruding in the Mishkan which was 10 x 10 cubits, and yet in the larger Temple's Holy of Holies (which was 20 x 20) the poles are described as protruding? If possible, I would appreciate any comment.

Dr. Edoardo Recanati

Rabbi: I do not know that the Mishkan was any different than the Temple; perhaps it too had the poles protruding. But I will share some thoughts I had on this years ago...

What is the purpose of haftoras Pekuday teaching that the Cherubim not only covered the Ark with their wings, but they also covered the poles of the Ark? What is derived from this? Additionally, what may be derived from the command (Exod. 25:15) that the Ark's poles are never to be removed? Lastly, what may be derived from the order of the Ark's assembly, (Exod. 40:20) "he (Moses) placed the Tablets into the Ark, he placed the poles on the Ark and he placed the Kapores (Ark cover) on the Ark"? Shouldn't the poles be last, as the Kapores should most certainly be prior, as it is more essential than the poles?

I believe the answer to all these questions is one concept, that is, that the Ark has no "destination" i.e., the Temple. The Ark outweighs the Temple in importance, as the Ark houses the Law - man's main pursuit in life. Suggesting that the Ark has found 'purpose' in something else,

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attributes greater import to something other than the Ark itself. This is as if to say that a higher purpose in the Ark has been realized by the Ark's arrival in the Temple. This is not so. Torah study must always claim top priority for man. To demonstrate that the Ark has not 'come to finally rest' in the Temple, the poles are never to be removed. This informs us that the Ark which houses the law must be the central focus of the Temple - counter intuitive to what we would expect of such a marvelous structure.

This is why Moses inserted the poles prior to covering the Ark, to demonstrate that the poles of all other objects are merely for transport. But the Ark's poles are integrally tied to the Ark's purpose and designation. Moses therefore displayed the pole's essential character, giving them prominence by inserting them even prior to covering the Ark with the Kapores. This also explains the passage in the haftora that the Cherubim not only covered the Ark with their wings, but they also covered the poles. ■

Absent-minded Mitzvahs

Chaim: There is a concept, that before one performs a mitzvah, he or she should have in mind that their intention is to perform the about-to-happen mitzvah. If you do not have it in mind, is our reward less?

Rabbi: From a halachik standpoint, the Talmud discusses whether mitzvahs require intent. Meaning, if I wave a Lulav with no intent to fulfill a command, will I fulfill my obligation? Rashi teaches that if one performs a mitzvah and does not know why he does so, he forfeits the objective. Does this mean he forfeits all reward? I do not know. Perhaps there is benefit in simply performing acts, since God commanded us to do so. But in that case, the reward for all mitzvahs would be the same. I would suggest one general rule...

The purpose of all mitzvahs is not the absent-minded physical act. The purpose is that we grasp the fundamental idea behind the commands, and then demonstrate our conviction in that truth, by performing the mitzvah, i.e., God's will. The purpose of waving the Lulav in all four earthly directions, and then skyward and downward, contains a beautiful idea...

The Talmud states, (Succah 37b) "Why do we wave the Lulav? R. Yochanan said, we wave out and back (horizontally) to the One who owns all four directions on Earth, and we wave the Lulav

up and down to the One Who owns heaven and Earth". Rabbi Yochanan – in my opinion – separated the two acts of waving "out and back" from "up and down" to teach us that there are two areas of God's dominion which we need to realize: God owning all four directions refers to something other than heaven and Earth. We see this clearly, i.e. that He is the Creator of all. This is why we wave up/down. But if up and down waving covers heaven and Earth, i.e., all creation, what is left to recognize about God's greatness? I believe it is to emphasize His dominion over man's actions - that God has complete knowledge of our travels on Earth (our actions) as alluded to by the "four directions", which is limited to earthly activity. This subtle difference points us to the realization that there are two distinct areas in which we must attest to God's greatness:

1) God is omnipotent, He can do all, as He created heaven and Earth,

2) God is omniscient, He knows all, as He is aware of all our travels and actions.

Now I ask you: if one waves the Lulav without this understanding, wherein lies his benefit? I feel this example teaches how fundamental it is that we all strive to arrive at the underlying ideas our Creator intends we know, before we perform that command the next time. ■

Expecting Reward

Chaim: I'm a little confused. I spoke with a Rabbi a while back, and he advised me, "Not to expect a reward", when I am putting on my tefillin. He said, "The biggest mitzvah we can do, is when we perform a mitzvah, not to expect a reward for it! We should be like a servant, who does what his master commands, without expecting a reward." Yet, every morning, when I pray Shacharis, in the middle of the Shema prayers, The Weekdays Artscroll Siddur says (page 116,) "when reciting the second paragraph, concentrate on accepting all the commandments and the concept of reward and punishment." So here we are instructed to expect a reward.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, "Horeb", Idoth, chapter 38 page 176 TIFILLIN: "While putting on the tefillin we should inwardly, keep in mind: That you have kept your life from becoming extinct only through taking this service upon yourself. That the external fortunes of the people are granted by God only in the measure of your fulfillment of this mitzvah." Page 179 "Thus, the tefillin equip you for the battle of life, and beckon you to victory."

Rabbi Yitzchok Behar Argueti, "MeAm

Lo'ez" says: "Whoever dons tefillin, it will be considered as if he performed all of the 613 Mitzvahs."

Doesn't this imply that if we perform mitzvahs, like putting on our tefillin properly, there will be a reward?

Rabbi: There is no doubt that we are rewarded. But our concept of reward must be defined, and the cases you cite too, must be addressed.

Regarding Artscroll's mention that when reciting the Shema we must concentrate on "reward and punishment", this is because that is the theme of that paragraph. Artscroll does not mean that we should focus on "receiving" a reward when reciting this paragraph. For why should we focus there, more than any other paragraph or prayer? The idea is like I said: the second paragraph of the Shema focuses on the fundamental of "Reward and Punishment" (rain, food). We should therefore insure not to miss its reiteration.

Your opening quote from Talmud Avoda Zara 19a is a fine point. One is far more perfected (our earthly goal) when he or she performs a mitzvah on a higher level. If one simply seeks reward for his mitzvah, and this is why he acts, he does not appreciate how the mitzvah perfects him. He is operating on a base level. But if one does in fact appreciate how a mitzvah perfects him and his ideas, he will desire to perform that mitzvah without interest in reward. This is the idea behind your quote...we should opt for the highest level of functioning. The very perfection is all he desires! Just as you need not offer a reward to someone who avoids poison since that itself is worthwhile to him...we also need not seek "reward" for mitzvahs, when we fully grasp how each one greatly benefits us.

Furthermore, one who seeks reward for mitzvah in this base level, views the mitzvah as one thing, a lower thing, than the reward. This disparages Torah. But King Solomon taught "all desires cannot compare to her (Torah)". (Proverbs 8:11) Thus, nothing outweighs Torah. Now if this is so, what exactly is "reward"? Mustn't that reward be something "other" than the mitzvah or the Torah we studied? The answer is "No". The Rabbis teach us that in the afterlife, "the righteous sit with their crowns on their head, benefiting from God's presence". This metaphor teaches that in the next world, it will be the "crowns on our heads" i.e., our Torah adherence and study, that earns us the next life, and which we continue to enhance. It is only he or she who immerses in Torah study and mitzvahs, who will merit a "crowned head" (a perfected being and value of wisdom) and will inherit the next world where such immersion in wisdom exceeds all

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If Tehillim's author (King David) never suggested his writings were a cure for anything, what right do others have to say so?

People want quick fixes, instead of reflecting and perfecting themselves. Eicha 3:40 says, "Let us search ourselves, analyze, and return to God". The Prophet teaches what we must do, which conflicts with this Tehillim craze. Examination and change are due, not Tehillim. The Prophets speak for a reason: to be followed, not ignored. And be mindful that the Prophets' words, are God's words.

imaginable pleasures. The Talmud continues that one who acts "not" for reward, acts with "Torah as his desire". This corroborates our point.

One final flaw in a person seeking some "reward", is that he does not even comprehend what that reward is. He's holding out for some thing he cannot describe. Such an existence must be frustrating and not what God desires. Thus, we are taught not to live this way, but to fulfill the mitzvahs and serve God "not" for the sake of reward, but where "Torah is our desire".

How can Torah (and not reward) be our desire? This occurs only after we steep ourselves in Torah study, and finally penetrate it's cryptic surface and unveil its marvels. Any Talmudic student will share with you how enlightening were his initial experiences of halachik discovery and philosophic insight. He will light up and describe how such intellectual pleasures intensified over 5, 10 and 20 years. He no longer needs an incentive to sit and learn. He is driven by the pleasure itself, and the conviction in Torah's perfecting qualities. He no longer functions on a "reward" value system, but his very self has paled, and his focus shifted to an awe of the Creator. As the Shema says, such a person loves God with "all his heart, all his soul, and all his might".

And it is easy for him. ■

Tehillim: a problem solver?

Chava: This Purim we are once again trying, as members of Klal Yisroel, to help one another find their beshert, one perek of Tehillim at a time. We are trying to complete Sefer Tehillim as many times as possible as a z'chus (merit) for shidduchim for all those in need.

Rabbi: If Tehillim's author (King David) never suggested his writings were a cure for anything, what right do others have to say so?

Furthermore, God's system is a Reward & Punishment system. If someone sins and deserves God holding back a match, his or her Tehillim recital won't help. And if a person does deserve a shidduch, not saying Tehillim won't deter his or her match. Similarly, if one is unwed due to his or her emotional reluctances or unexamined issues, again, Tehillim recital can in no way change that person's freewill, or his emotions. Suggesting Tehillim is a panacea, denies reality; that there are causes holding back such people from commitment or intimacy. These causes will remain in effect before AND after reciting Tehillim.

Tehillim will not, and cannot do anything. The person must reflect, become convinced of his or her poor choices or emotional issues, work on them, and finally change. Just as Tehillim cannot grow back one's severed limb, it cannot alter our makeup.

But people want quick fixes, instead of reflecting and perfecting themselves. Eicha 3:40 says, "Let us search ourselves, analyze, and return to God". The Prophet teaches what we must do, which conflicts with this Tehillim craze. Examination and change are due, not Tehillim. The Prophets speak for a reason: to be followed, not ignored. And be mindful that the Prophets' words, are God's words.

Chava: I don't think it hurts to daven. If you don't want to participate, then fine. I will be happy to daven for others.

Rabbi: Davening is fine, and what is required. What I oppose is Tehillim.

Chava: There are very few people who don't sin and many people who have their zivug (marriage partner) even though they sin. How is it you are saying one who has their zivug withheld from them that it is due to sinning? I'm not buying that entirely.

Rabbi: There may be one or even many causes for being unwed, or any other undesirable state. My point is that one must examine the self to improve his or her lot, and not recite Tehillim, thinking that Tehillim will address the causes that kept them single until now.

Chava: I do not think we can put ideas or intentions into Dovid haMelech's or anyone else's head. So to say that he did not intend for people to utilize his sefer Tehillim is treading in waters I am not comfortable in.

Rabbi: The burden of proof is not on me to disprove Tehillim as a cure...the burden of proof is on those who suggest Tehillim "is" a cure, when King David never said so.

Chava: Sometimes a person's shidduch needs to be brought close through tefillos, maasim tovim/mitzvot and/or mesakening tikunum...

Rabbi: Yes, what I have been saying.

Chava: Also, since we have bechira (free will), sometimes a person's zivug actually says "no" to them. This is a sad case, but it does happen.

Rabbi: Yes. Also true. ■



THE PURIM STORY

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

The Celebration

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

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

Exchanging Queens

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

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

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

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

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

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Salvation Already in Place

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

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

Haman's Ego – His Downfall

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

Mordechai's Declaration

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

We find more on this topic in the Talmud: The students of Rabbi Shimone bar Yochai asked him why the Jews deserved extermination. It could not be due to their participation in the feast of that

wicked man Achashverosh. For if this were the reason, we would find no just reason why Jews who did not attend were also subject to death. Rabbi Shimone bar Yochai concluded that the Jews deserved punishment because earlier, they had prostrated themselves before Nevuchadnetzar's idol. However, the Talmud concludes that as the Jews only prostrated out of fear, and not based on any conviction in the idol, God too was not going to truly exterminate the Jews, but He desired merely to instill fear in them. (Megilla 12a) We thereby learn that it is a severe crime to recognize idolatry in this fashion, even outwardly. We also learn that Mordechai was correct to oppose idolatry, even though his act would result in such a threat.

Esther's Intervention

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Esther's Plan

How did Esther orchestrate her plan? Esther invited the king and Haman to a private party. Once there, the king asked what her request was, and up to half the kingdom would be awarded her. She responded by requesting that both the king and Haman attend yet another party. What was Esther doing? Why didn't she speak up now, informing the king that Haman planned to annihilate her people? A Rabbi taught that Esther used her honed psychological knowledge to devise her plan. She felt, that had she directly accused Haman, the king's appointed officer, she would not necessarily meet with success, or salvation for the Jews. She planned to create suspicion in the king's mind, as the Talmud states. The king thought, "perhaps Haman is invited to this private party of three, as Esther and Haman are plotting against me. Is there no one who loves me who would not be silent in this matter?" That night the

king could not sleep, and for good reason - Esther successfully aroused the king's suspicion. The king called for the Book of Remembrance to be read, "Perhaps I have not properly rewarded those who love me, and they do not wish to inform me." It was found that Mordechai's previous favor of saving his life went without reward.

Divine Intervention

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

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

The Second Party

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

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

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

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

Reaccepting the Torah

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

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

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

Omission of God’s Name

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

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

We already mentioned that the Jews arose and reaccepted the Torah again. This is based on Esther 9:27. This acceptance was bereft of any Sinai 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 excitedly 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. ■

Happy Purim to all



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