

JewishTimes

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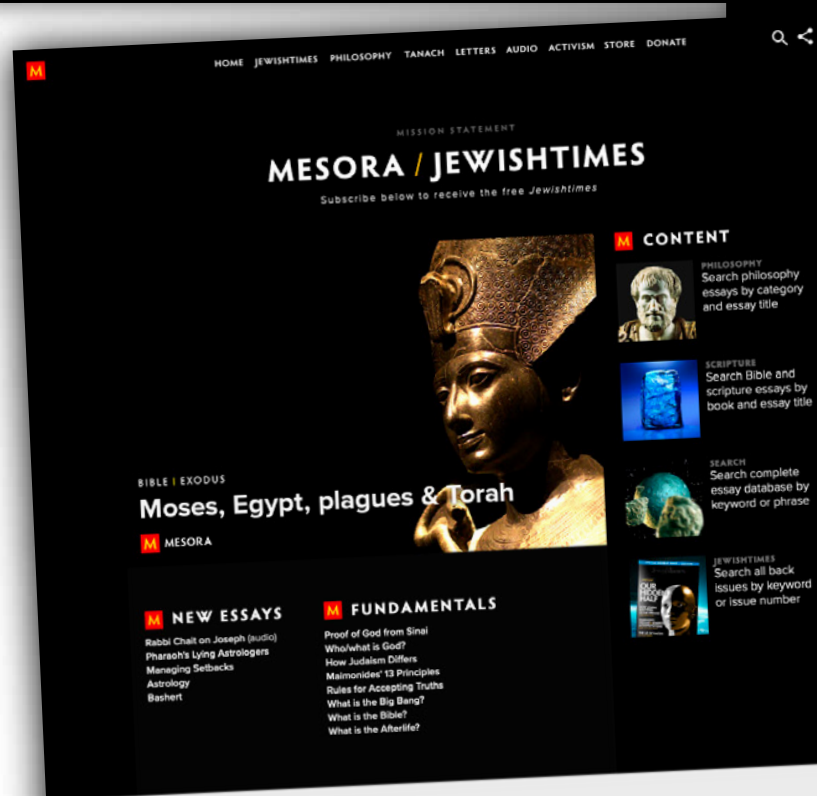
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OUR PURPOSE: WISDOM & MORALITY



God created man to live by truths concerning Him, creation, others and ourselves.

We must study God's instruction about what He is, what is idolatrous or fallacy, we must study nature, psychology, philosophy and morality. This draws us closer to God and He to us, and creates societal harmony which fosters greater Torah for all.

MORE BELOW

Kindness: As equals, all humans must treat others as we wish to be treated. Charity, kindness and justice demand we rise above personal and selfish emotions and recognize that God made others as He made ourselves. Doing so creates harmony, and earns His kindness.

Racism: A Lie: Man descends from Adam. **Black/white twins** unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from Moabites. "Better is the day of death than the day of birth" (Ecc. 7:1). Birth doesn't define us; how we live does.

Insecurity: Man's insecurities can be false, but reality is greater, as it is truth. Man seeks security about his future, accepting fallacies like astrology, amulets, omens, horoscopes and others. God prohibited such practices precisely because they are false. God is more powerful than false notions. Rely on Him alone.

Happiness: Many think wealth and success secure happiness. But Torah teaches happiness stems from study. When pursuing wisdom, one is most happy as Torah offers childlike amazement at every turn. Study offers the daily novelty necessary to retain interest and the depth that offers amazement.

Pleasing Others: Don't seek approval over truth. Torah says, "What can man do to me?" (Psalms 56:5). "Don't fear man" (Deut. 1:17). "Desist from man whose soul is in his nostrils, for what is he considered?" (Isaiah 2:22). Mortal attention is irrelevant. Following God earns all goodness.

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ESTHER

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Why Miracles Happen

The story of Purim recounts the great miracle of salvation that the Jews of Persia experienced in ancient times. All of the Jews, men, women and children were marked for destruction by their enemies on a single day. This was even worse than the threat to Jewish existence which was posed by Nazi Germany.

Hitler could not even dream of annihilating his sworn enemy in just a day. It took him a few years to achieve the number of six million slain. And he had to do his best to keep it secret. Haman had dominion over virtually all of the Jews of that time and he had no need to act surreptitiously. He sent out letters to all the provinces alerting the Jew haters to arm and prepare

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to destroy all their victims on the thirteenth of the month of Adar.

In terms of the existential danger faced by the Jews, Purim and the Holocaust were strikingly similar happenings. The major difference was the outcome. We celebrate Purim because “Venahapoch Hu” (the situation was completely overturned), and it was the Jews who emerged victorious over their enemies.

Sadly, there was no such salvation in the Holocaust. No one intervened to destroy Hitler and rescue the Jews. The Holocaust would have kept going but was only terminated when the Allies advancing from the West and East crushed the Third Reich.

It is important to look deeply into the Megillah to understand what factors were responsible for the miracle of salvation. It would appear that the greatness of the Jewish leaders, Mordechai and Esther was extremely consequential.

Mordechai could be viewed as somehow responsible for the calamity which befell his People, but his provocative behavior was a measure of his greatness. He adamantly refused to conform to the order of the King that everyone must prostrate themselves before Haman. Haman could not abide this offense to his ego and sought revenge not just against Mordechai but the entire nation of which he was a part.

Judaism, emphatically asserts, that it is mandatory to demonstrate respect for the rulers of one’s country. In fact, it is a Rabbinic tradition that Moshe was commanded to display honor to Pharaoh when appearing before him. So it is difficult to comprehend why Mordechai abstained from bowing to Haman.

The answer is to be found in the severe Jewish prohibition against idol-worship. Rabbi Israel Chait explained that Haman’s self-deification was a form of idolatry and that assenting to it would be a desecration of Hashem’s Name, which a Jew would have to resist at the pain of death.

Mordechai’s sanctification of G-D’s Name constituted a great merit for the entire Jewish People for it is our mission to glorify Hashem in the eyes of the world. But Mordechai was active on the practical front as well. He believed that one may not rely on miracles and therefore he “tore his clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes. He went out into the midst of the city, and cried loudly and bitterly.” He knew that he had to get the attention of Esther and mobilize her to use her position as Queen to convince Achashverosh to rescind the evil decree.

He also insisted that Esther come before the King unannounced thereby courting execution. Rabbi Chait explained that this was because the ordinary rules of diplomatic procedure could not be adhered to when dealing with a sadistic and merciless executioner of Hitlerite proportions. She needed to put her life at risk in order to demonstrate to the King how vital this matter was in her eyes.

Esther was a not just the protege of Mordechai, but was a

great personality in her own right. She did not follow the advice of Mordechai to merely beg and plead for her nation before the King. This crisis demanded a different approach. So she independently devised a plan of action which aroused the suspicions of the King concerning Haman and which manipulated Haman into displaying his true inner intentions.

Esther clearly recognized the spiritual dimensions of the catastrophe that had befallen the Jews. She understood that the nation had sinned and would have to return to Hashem in order to have Him on their side. Without divine assistance, it would be virtually impossible to overcome the array of forces that were stacked against them. Accordingly, she summoned the Jews to join her in three days of introspection, repentance and fasting. It was in that sober and divinely inspired state of mind that she thought through all of the issues confronting her and formulated the ideas that would save the day. She separated herself from the instructions of Mordechai, and came up with a counter-intuitive and highly original strategy.

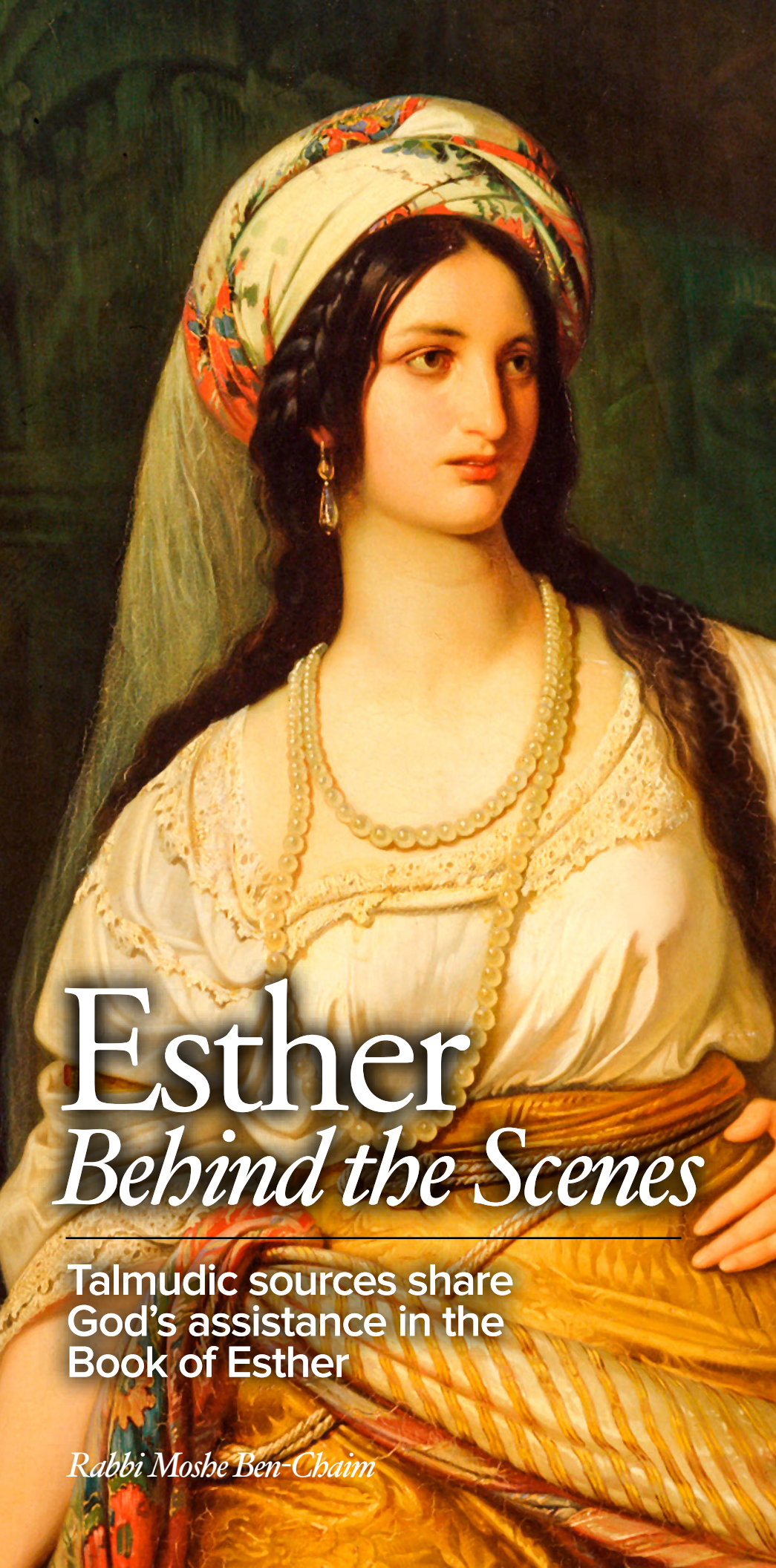
Esther’s plan required great courage, fortitude and trust in the A’Mighty. And it was effective as things started happening almost immediately. “On that night the sleep of the King was disturbed” and he requested that the chronicles of the kingdom be read to him. For some unknown reason the page was turned to the account of Bigsan and Seresh whose plot to kill the King had been foiled by Mordechai the Jew. And yet Haman had not seen fit to reward him!

That was only the beginning of a night of “strange happenings” in which the King’s fascination with Haman was transformed into suspicion and finally loathing. At the second party it only remained for Esther to deliver the coup de gras and Haman was hanged on the very tree he had prepared for Mordechai. Verily, the Yeshuat Hashem (salvation of G-d) is “as the blink of an eye.”

The miracles of Purim were categorically different from those that were performed in Egypt and the wilderness. Those were exclusively attributable to the awesome might of Hashem in subduing all the forces of nature. But in the case of Purim, man played an essential role in triggering the “concealed” wonders. The laws of nature remained intact but the plans of righteous people were brought to fruition by the One who controls all of the elements and creatures in the world He has created.

The story of Purim reminds us of how important the role of man is in confronting crises. The Jew must always be mindful of his primary mission of Kiddush Hashem and be prepared to sacrifice everything in order to fulfill it. And he can never afford to be passive but must actively strive with all of his energy and resources to bring about the results that are required. Then with the proper Teshuva and prayer he may trust that Hashem will come to his assistance. And when that happens no force on earth can stand in his way.

Shabbat Shalom v’Chag Purim Sameach! ■



Esther

Behind the Scenes

Talmudic sources share
God's assistance in the
Book of Esther

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 the walking paths, and were 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 of the failed Jewish redemption. 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 (Tal. 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 the High Priest's garments. The

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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 element 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 naked before him and other officials. 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 labor 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. 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, 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: the king’s second letter to annihilate the Jews was actually countered by his first letter. This is consistent with the 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

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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 advisor, 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. 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 told 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 He does not 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 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 ignorant of crucial information concerning 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 players. 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 for three tasks: 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.

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Thus, her neck or head was lifted through Divine help so she might address the king. 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 her status as queen did not ensure the king's favor. 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 to 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; the salvation of 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 the king's life went unrewarded. Perhaps finding this record too was providential.

Divine Intervention

It was precisely at this moment, in the middle of the night, that Haman approached 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 time of arrival. Be mindful too, that Mordechai only made it into the Book of Remembrance, as he was "fortunate" enough to be passing by, precisely 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 — and not another — 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.

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The Second Party

Now that 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, metaphorically, 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 moment, 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. 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

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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 Megilla, Haman taught us that self-aggrandizement is fatal. His intolerance of a single person not recognizing 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 know 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.

Rabbi Israel Chait taught that 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 those Jews who were saved, 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. Additionally, Rabbi Chait taught that to demonstrate our trust in God's salvation, we drink, so as to place ourselves in a vulnerable state. Our vulnerability when in a drunken state is our demonstration of our trust in God: we have no concern to be on guard, as our true trust is in God, not in our own devices.

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. And enjoy the abandonment of guarding yourself this one day, to demonstrate your true belief that it is in God whom we trust.

May our continued attachment to Torah and mitzvot bring us all to this state where we too arise and reaccept the Torah, not from coercion, but based on understanding, appreciation and love of God's acts. And the only way to obtain such appreciation is through study. This year, allow Purim to instill in you 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 empty and false values presented to us by society chasing wealth and fame...Torah study will truly avail you to the most enjoyable life, the life outlined by God and the Rabbis. If the wisest of men followed this philosophy, they must know better.

A happy Purim to all! ■

MAIMONIDES 13 PRINCIPLES



*To obey this principle,
Mordechai didn't bow
to Haman*

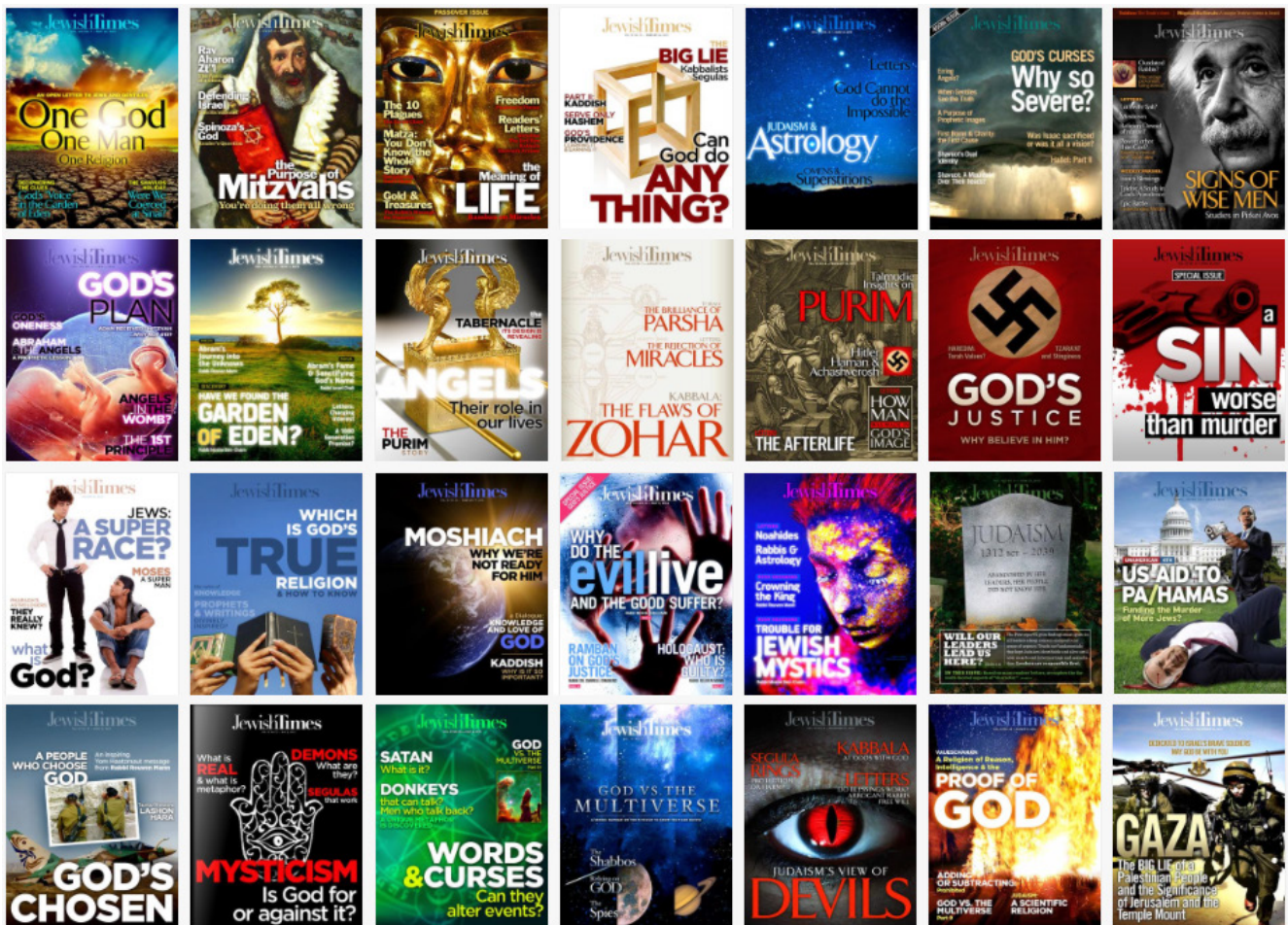
Principle 1. To know the existence of the Creator

To believe in the existence of the Creator, and this Creator is perfect in all manner of existence. He is the cause of all existence. He causes them to exist and they exist only because of Him. And if you could contemplate a case, such that He was not to exist...then all things would cease to exist and there would remain nothing. And if you were to contemplate a case, such that all things would cease to exist aside from the Creator, His existence would not cease. And He would lose nothing; and oneness and kingship is His alone. Hashem of strength is His name because He is sufficient with His own existence, and sufficient [is] just Him alone, and needs no other. And the existences of the angels, and the celestial bodies, and all that is in them and that which is below them...all need Him for their existence. And this is the first pillar and is attested to by the verse, "I am Hashem your God."

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How Being a Therapist Neutralized the Human Condition for Me

LAURA KHAIT

For one and a half years now, I've officially been a therapist at a local community clinic in Brooklyn, NY, and unofficially, for half my life probably. Ever since I realized that compassion, diplomacy, and "sorting things out" were a real and stubborn skill set of mine, I knew what to do. Friends and family reinforced these tendencies in me (especially my grandmother who said I was like a psychologist at 10 years old — no pressure at all, grandma) and at some point in my late twenties, I enrolled into graduate school for training in mental health counseling. Grad school plus some time in the therapeutic trenches of Brooklyn, if you will, led me to the reflections in the article you are about to read.

The human condition is quite complex and varied. There is so much grit, grit and grace in being human, honor in it, even. We are cold and hot, soft and hard, wounded and brave, decent sinners, and tainted saints. Being a therapist has made me respect this conglomerate of all our parts, individually and collectively, and has helped me better see our life experience for what it is, and not what we might want it to be. In other words, it took a lot of the guilt and shame away from being human, softened me to the parts in myself and others that I've shied away from, and helped create much more neutrality and equanimity in how I see myself and others.

I've realized that although we all live some version of a personal life story called: "My Very Important Life Drama," it's not a terminally unique narrative. If I could put all my patients in twenty rooms of a house and leave cameras in there to record the sessions (major HIPAA violation and I'd never do it), you would see that most humans are telling and retelling different versions of the same story. So while we may have had different trials and tribulations on our journeys, the emotions they've elicited are eerily similar: love, joy, loss, disappointment, sadness, shame, numbness, wishing it all went some



completely other way, the desire for a do-over.

To highlight this further, I might sometimes tell Patient A,

"You know, on Wednesdays I work with so-and-so (Patient B), and she and her daughter are navigating such a similar situation. It's normal that you are having such a tough time understanding why your angsty teen has created an igloo out of her room and uses you only for food and laundry."

Or I'll speak with a parent in bereavement over the loss of her son, and I'll reference another patient who is one year down the grief pipeline over the loss of her fiancé to an overdose, still crying and questioning life, but much, much less. There is so much universality in it all, so much more than you or I can even see.

Let me say this again. There is nothing that you have already went through or are

currently going through, that some other human being on the planet, or probably a whole tribe of them, has not already went through or will go through at some point in their lives. Humbling, I know.

The loss? The heartbreak? The affair? The murder? The mental illness? The cancer diagnosis? COVID-19? Someone's been there already, treaded your waters. It's like there's this infinite pool of human experiences we're granted and all 7 billion plus of us are going to experience most of them, in one way or another, at one point in our lives. In fact, the later in life we'll meet, the more overlap we'll probably have. It's beautiful to me, how interwoven all these seemingly separate lives are.

Being a therapist has softened me to these life realities, that some version of my life, you have already lived, and some version of yours, I have yet to experience. Maybe I'll be the mom in therapy at my wits end because my teen daughter has a closer relationship to

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

her phone than with me. Maybe I'll be "the patient" in a reality that dawns closer and closer. Unfortunately, being a therapist does not preclude you from having your own "real problems," a rebellious teen, a gender-confused kid, a cheating spouse, dying parents, existential angst, etc. We all navigate through the same fertile and rancid soil.

Most recently, I worked with a 75 year old woman on a "Regret and Compassion" exercise, although for her purposes, I said

"Just write out all your regrets, by the decade, as many as you can think of."

When you are 75, you can do such a thing. What a privilege. I purposely left out the compassion part, because that was the jewel of this exercise. Besides Frank Sinatra in My Way, we've all got regrets, and more than just "too few to mention." Can we bring compassion to these regrets, whether there are 2, 12 or 22? With my patient, I asked if maybe she could embalm each regret with a salve of compassion, because the regretful events were long gone, but her self-flagellation wasn't.

This lovely woman had many regrets. She regretted not standing up to her abusive dad when he was a literal hard-hitter, she regretted not calling the cops on him (although she ran all the way to the precinct at 10-years-old and then ran right back home in a fit of frenzy), she regretted cheating on all the women she ever loved; there were many, especially the one she had loved the most. "What's wrong with me?" she kept repeating.

"Absolutely nothing," I said. You may be surprised at this, but the only fault of hers I could find, beside from the obvious moral ones of painful infidelity, was that she

thought that there was something wrong in how she had lived her life, the choices she had made. But there wasn't. They were her mistakes to make. Are they even mistakes? Who is to say? What's wrong is to fight the life that she led, to oppose it while being a self-aware warrior who goes to therapy in decade 7.

There are few things now that I find abhorrent, disgusting, shameful, utterly sinful, or better left buried in the gutters of the heart. There are no gutters. Just say the thing, it's already been said by someone, somewhere. I promise you. Generally, and quite gratefully, I can now bring compassion to right about any human experience, even the cringe-worthy ones. There is great comfort in knowing that it already happened to someone else, and yet there they remain, breathing and walking and sipping tea. It's just a matter of time before we all experience the same thing, the raw underbelly of our common humanity with all its grist and grit. We're all still saved by grace, in one way or another, in this lifetime or the next.

Being a therapist, even in these early stages, has taught me to be more comfortable in my own skin, to lean more gently into my flaws and yours, to accept that maybe my shirt was on backwards for the duration of an entire session with the tag sticking out and no one had the courage to tell me about it. Instead of yelling at myself for everything that went wrong, I try to remove some of the charge from the day's events, from my part in them. All the shame and blame, I try to release it. It's not so serious, after all, not so horrible. I did my best to be a decent human today, maybe I was exceptional at it, or maybe just mediocre. Who cares? If I'm caught up in "My Very Important Story," I just breathe a nice dose of neutrality towards that sucker. Neutral. Not unique. Neither my story, nor yours. ■

More by Laura Khait: <https://laura-khait.medium.com>



Esther's Plan

Dani Roth

In Megillas Esther, Esther invites Haman and Achashveirosh to a party, only to invite them to another one. Why did Esther make two parties? She could've told Achashveirosh about Haman's plan at the first one! What was Esther's plan?

Esther knew that if she was to just accuse Haman without any basis, Achashveirosh wouldn't believe her accusation. So Esther's plan was to get him suspicious first, because when a person is suspicious of someone else, they are more apt to accept an accusation on them. So when Esther invited Haman and Achashveirosh to the second party, it was to get Achashveirosh suspicious of Haman: "Why was she inviting Haman again?" Now that Achashveirosh was suspicious, Esther's accusation of Haman was more likely to be believed by Achashveirosh.

At this point, Achashveirosh's suspicions kept him awake at night, and then God stepped in. Achashveirosh couldn't sleep, so asked his servants for the kingdom's records. God then made the page to which he opened be the record of Mordechai saving his life. God stepped in a second time, and made Haman come to Achashveirosh's courtyard at that precise moment, and knock on his door with plans to kill Mordechai. With these events, God primed Achashveirosh to dislike Haman, so Esther's plan would succeed.

Then at the 2nd party, Esther accuses Haman of planning to kill the Jews. Achashveirosh, already primed with ill feeling towards Haman, ran out to the porch for air. While he was outside, Haman was begging Esther to spare him. Then an angel pushed Haman onto her bed on which she was sitting. When Achashveirosh came back in he saw Haman lying on Esther's bed, and he said, "Will you also conquer the queen while I am in the palace?" At this point Charvona told Achashveirosh that Haman had built gallows for Mordechai. Then the king said, "Hang Haman on the same gallows that were intended to kill Mordechai.

We see from the Megillah, that God was assisting the righteous people, even though it doesn't mention His name once. ■

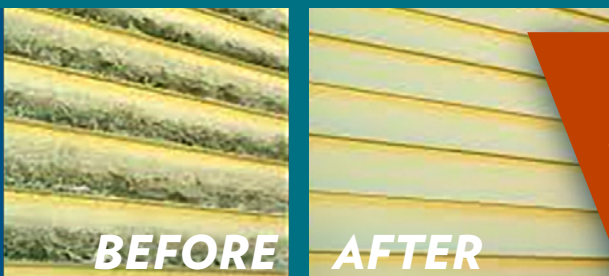
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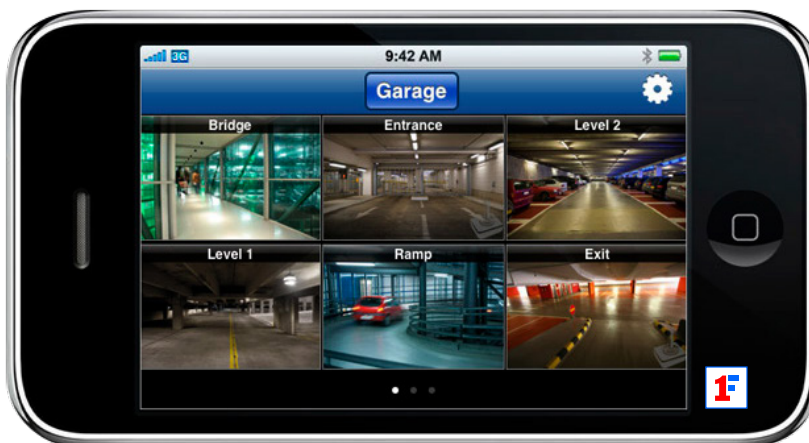
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