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## Weekly Parsha

# Tzav

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And the Kohen shall put on his linen vestments and the linen pants he shall wear over flesh. And he shall lift the ashes of the burnt offering, consumed by the fire, that are on the altar. And he shall place them by the altar.” (VaYikra 6:3)

One of the activities that occur each day in the Temple is the

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# THE Purim STORY

WITH INSIGHTS FROM  
TALMUD MEGILLAH

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**K**ing 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.

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## Purim



*Haman's decree against the Jews is read.*

*Haman used a lottery to  
select the day of the Jew's  
extermination. He intended  
to show that the Jews have  
no Divine providence.  
Therefore, this holiday is  
called Purim (lottery)  
emphasizing the opposite:  
salvation happened only  
because of God's providence.  
(As told over by Rabbi E. Feder)*

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.

### Salvation 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

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## Purim



*Mordechai sits, refusing to bow to Haman*

*God's name is not found in the Megillah. This focuses the Purim story on those Jews who embodied a life of wisdom, and its success.*

*(As told over by Rabbi E. Feder)*

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*

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

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## Purim

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.

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.

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## Purim



*Esther accuses Haman of planning the annihilation of her people.*

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?

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

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## Purim

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.

## God’s Name Omitted

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 Sinaic coercion. They truly appreciated the Torah system. Since Sinai was apparently lacking this unbiased devotion, perhaps God’s purposeful covert methods during Purim were designed to allow such an appreciation to surface. The very words included in the Megilla that the Jews reaccepted the Torah are significant – they teach that this was essential. Therefore, we can suggest that to enable the Jews this opportunity, God minimized His presence, which allowed the Jews

to focus instead on Esther and Mordechai, admiring how their lives, guided by Torah wisdom, yielded remarkable results.

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

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

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

*A Joyous  
Purim to all!*

(Early, illustrated megillahs)

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removal of the ashes from the altar – Haramat HaDeshen. This procedure is performed in the morning prior to placing the first offering upon the altar. The collected ashes are placed next to the altar and subsequently removed from the Mikdash. Two of the details related in our passage provide a fundamental insight into this activity, Haramat HaDeshen. The passage tells us that a Kohen must perform the activity. The pasuk also stipulates that the Kohen must wear his priestly vestments when executing this duty. These two requirements indicate that this activity is an element of the service in the Mikdash. Therefore, like all other services, only a Kohen dressed in his special vestments can perform this activity.

The Talmud comments in Tractate Yoma that the Kohen does not wear his normal priestly vestments when removing the ashes from the Mikdash. Instead, he wears a set of garments that are similar in design to the normal vestments, but of lesser quality. The Talmud explains that it is not appropriate for a servant to serve his master in the same garments worn when preparing the meal. Therefore, the Kohen should not perform the more exalted services of the Temple in the same vestments worn in preparing the altar.[1] Maimonides asserts that this principle does not only apply to the removal of the ashes from the Mikdash. It also applies to the Haramat HaDeshen discussed in our passage.[2]

Rashi offers an astounding explanation of the comments of the Talmud. Rashi explains the clothing that the servant wears in preparing the meal absorb odors and become stained in the process. It is not appropriate for the servant to then serve his master in this clothing. Similarly, once the Kohen has worn a set of vestments during the Haramat HaDeshen, it is not appropriate for him to wear these garments when performing the other services in the Mikdash.

There are a number of problems with Rashi's explanation of the Talmud's comments. First, according to Rashi, special garments are needed for the Haramat HaDeshen because, in the process of performing this service, the garments will become soiled. However, the Torah already assures that these garments will not be worn when performing the other services. The Torah requires that the garments worn by the Kohen during service must be new, clean and tailored to the Kohen.[3] This requirement is adequate to assure that the Kohen will not wear soiled garments in the performance of service in the Mikdash. Why is it necessary to establish a separate requirement that the Kohen wear special vestments for Haramat HaDeshen?

Second, the vestments worn during the

Haramat HaDeshen are of lesser quality than the garments worn for other services. Rashi's explanation responds to the requirement that the Kohen change his garments after the Haramat HaDeshen. However, Rashi does not seem to offer a reason for requiring garments of lesser quality for Haramat HaDeshen.

There is another discussion in the Talmud that provides an explanation of Rashi's position. The Talmud comments in Tractate Shabbat that Rav Anan wore a simple black garment when preparing food for Shabbat. He did this out of consideration of the principle that the servant should not prepare a meal for the master in the same garments in which he will serve the meal.[4] The Talmud's comments are difficult to understand. We are required to wear special clean garments on Shabbat.[5] However, Rav Anan went beyond this requirement. He wore a special garment on the eve of Shabbat for the purpose of preparing the Shabbat meals. What was the purpose of Rav Anan's additional custom?

One can designate special garments for Shabbat in two ways. The direct method is to select a special set of clothing and to set it aside for Shabbat. However, there is another means of designation. One can select an alternative mundane garment worn when preparing for Shabbat. It must be a garment that contrasts with the Shabbat garments. Through wearing this mundane garment when preparing for Shabbat, the person demonstrates that a superior set of clothing is held in reserve for Shabbat itself. In other words, if garments similar to the Shabbat clothing are worn in preparing for Shabbat, the status of the Shabbat clothing is diminished. How special are the Shabbat garments if similar clothing is worn

when cooking the food! Wearing contrasting, inferior clothing during preparation demonstrates the significance of the Shabbat clothing.

This explains Rav Anan's custom. Certainly, we can assume that Rav Anan selected special clothing for Shabbat. However, in order to further demonstrate the elevated status of his Shabbat attire, he also designated a contrasting mundane garment to be worn in preparing for Shabbat.

We can now understand Rashi's explanation of the Talmud's comments in Tractate Yoma. Rashi recognizes that it is not necessary to require special garments for Haramat HaDeshen in order to assure that clean vestments are worn during the other services. The Torah assures that the vestments worn for the other services will be clean through a direct prohibition against wearing soiled garments during any service. However, Rashi maintains that the garments worn during the other services must be special. They must reflect the



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elevated status of the service performed by the Kohen. Rashi maintains that the lesser garments worn by the Kohen during the Haramat HaDeshen enhance the elevated designation of the garments worn during the other services. The garments of the Haramat HaDeshen – a lesser form of service – contrast with the garments worn during the other services. This contrast demonstrates the elevated status of the superior vestments worn for the more elevated services. In other words, if the Haramat HaDeshen – a grimy responsibility – could be performed in the typical vestments of the Kohen, the significance of these vestments would be diminished. How special are the typical garments if they are worn for the grimy job of removing the ashes from the altar!

**“If it offered as a Thanksgiving offering, then it must be presented with unleavened loaves mixed with oil, flat matzahs saturated with oil and loaves made of boiled flour mixed with oil.” (VaYikra 7:12)**

The Todah – Thanksgiving offering – is a type of Shelamim sacrifice. Rashi explains that it is brought in response to surviving a dangerous situation. For example, one who recovers from a serious illness would offer a Todah.[6] Rashi's source for these comments is the Talmud in Tractate Berachot. The Talmud is not discussing the Todah sacrifice. The topic in the Talmud is Birkat HaGomel. This is a blessing recited when one escapes danger. The Talmud outlines the specific situations that require reciting Birkat HaGomel.[7] Rashi maintains that these criteria also apply to the Todah sacrifice. However, Rashi does not indicate the reason that the Todah sacrifice and Birkat HaGomel share these criteria.

Rabbaynu Asher explains that Birkat HaGomel replaces the Todah sacrifice. We cannot offer the Todah in our times. In order to replace the Todah, the Sages established Birkat HaGomel.[8] This explains Rashi's assumption that the Todah and Birkat HaGomel share identical criteria. Birkat HaGomel is derived from the Todah. Rashi assumes that the criteria for the blessing must be derived from the Todah offering.

There is another blessing recited in response to experiencing a rescue. One who revisits a place at which the individual experienced a personal miracle is obligated to state a blessing.[9] However, there is an interesting difference between these two blessings. Birkat HaGomel is said in a group of ten people. Preferably the group should include two

scholars.[10] The blessing recited at revisiting the location of a personal miracle does not require ten people. Why does Birkat HaGomel require a company of ten? Why does the blessing on a miracle not require ten people?

There is a basic difference between these two blessings. The blessing for a miracle is an act of personal recognition and thanksgiving. Because this blessing is a personal act it does not require the presence of a group. In contrast, Birkat HaGomel is a public declaration of the Almightys' benevolence. One confirms to others that personal experience proves G-d's kindness. The blessing is a public testimony. It follows that a group must be present.

This interpretation of Birkat HaGomel explains an interesting halacha. According to many opinions, women do not recite Birkat HaGomel. Others argue. They maintain that women do say the blessing. However, these dissenters stipulate that the woman should recite the blessing in a group of women including a single male.[11] This seems to be an odd requirement. In halacha, women do not constitute a quorum or minyan. Why in this case is a group of ten, composed primarily of women, appropriate?

In order to answer this question, we need to understand the requirement of ten people for Birkat HaGomel. Generally, this stipulation is associated with aspects of teffilah – prayer – and other activities requiring a tzibur – a congregation. A congregation is created through ten males. However, Birkat HaGomel is not a prayer that requires a congregation. It requires a group of ten for an entirely different reason. The blessing is an act of teaching others and sharing one's own encounter with the Almighty's kindness. One must share with a group. In order to meet this requirement, a group of women is suitable. ■

[1] Mesechet Yoma 23b.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tamidim U'Musafim

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Klai Mikdash 8:4.

[4] Tractate Shabbat 119a.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Shabbat 30:3.

[6] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 7:12.

[7] Mesechet Berachot 54b.

[8] Rabbaynu Asher, Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Berachot, Chapter 9, note 3.

[9] Rav Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 218:4.

[10] Rav Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 219:3.

[11] Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan, Mishne Berurah 219:3.



## Purim / Anti-Semitism

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

# Semitism

What generates anti-Semitism? Is it any different than hatred towards any religion and its people? Is it caused by the Jews' poor actions? Or does anti-Semitism exist regardless of how Jews act? Aside from attacking Jews verbally or physically, is it justifiable? If not, how may it be eliminated?

A Rabbi once explained:

"When Jacob was strategizing how to escape from the clutches of his approaching twin Eisav, he told Eisav, 'I have resided with the wicked Lavan and yet have kept the 613 commandments and have not learnt from his wicked deeds.' What does Eisav, the wicked, and the rejecter of Torah values, care if Jacob kept the 613 commandments while he lived with Lavan? Furthermore, it seems this message could only antagonize Eisav.

Chazal (the Rabbis) say, quoting the Rambam in his Igeret Teyman, that the reason the mountain from which the Torah was given was called Sinai, was because from this same mountain came down sinah (hatred) to the other nations of the world. Meaning to say that the very source of the hatred that the other nations harbor toward the Jews - is the Torah itself. What then did Jacob intend to accomplish by implying to Eisav that he kept the Torah, when this very Torah was the source of Eisav's hatred for Yaakov? The Rabbi also expounded:

*"The Talmud (Pesachim 49b) tells us that the hatred of an ignorant Jew toward the Torah scholar is greater than the hatred the idolaters have for the Jewish nation."*

In both instances the cause is the same: Eisav resented his twin Jacob for the blessings Isaac their father gave to Jacob exclusively. And the Talmud teaches that Gentiles hate the Jew for their reception of the Torah at Sinai. Both Eisav and the Gentiles are resentful of G-d's favoritism for the Jew. (Jacob's blessing from Isaac were bestowed with G-d's will.) When the Talmud compares the ignorant Jew's hatred of the Torah scholar exceeds the Gentiles' hatred of the Jews, our idea finds additional support: the ignorant Jew is more aware of the Torah than the Gentile. As such, he senses more accurately what he lacks, and acts out this disdain for his own shortcomings, by hating he that has the good, i.e., the Torah. However, since a

gentile is less informed about the Torah truths than a typical Jew, his disdain is on a lesser level.

We come to understand the root of anti-Semitism as jealousy over religion. One, who is anti-Semitic, is so as he is deeply disturbed by his knowledge that he is not favored by G-d. This is an area where man's emotions are most aroused. Man's primary barometer of self-estimation is tied to what he knows truthfully is the "self", i.e., his values and religious beliefs. It is therefore no surprise that it is religion that is the root of so many wars throughout history.

When other nations are confronted with the indisputable truth of G-d's Sinai selection of the Jew as His emissaries to the world, there is a sibling rivalry of sorts. But the Jew is at fault if he boasts this role, while simultaneously abandoning his observance of the Torah. Even the Torah observer too cannot boast that which was bestowed on "Abraham's descendants", and not due to his own merit. Personal merit is not why we are the chosen people. This is a denial of G-d's own words:

Deuteronomy, 10:15:

*"Only in your fathers did God desire and did He love them, and He chose their seed after them from all other peoples, as this day."*

Jews are selected due to their descent from Abraham, and Abraham was selected based on his absolute, undiluted adherence to truth. All peoples should take a lesson from G-d's word. G-d "chooses" only those who adhere to truth, as exemplified by Abraham. One who adheres to truth must come to the realization that "multiple religions" must contradict each other by definition. All must be false - except one. The goal is to arrive at an honest acceptance of what reality determines is the true, G-d-given religion. But until such a time when religions will embrace truth, in place of the current "defend-at-all-cost" approach, anti-Semitism will be alive and well, seeking opportunities to attack G-d's chosen, as a means of self justification.

The Rabbi who I quoted earlier taught that Jacob's response to Eisav was for good reason. We might think that telling a wicked Eisav that he has not veered from the Torah has no meaning to him. But in fact, it does. Jacob understood that in order

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## Purim / Anti-Semitism

for one to hate the Jew, he must have justifiable cause to vent his aggression. The cause in Jacob's case would be Jacob's abandonment of the monotheistic system received from Isaac, and learned on his own. Only in this case would Eisav feel justified in killing Jacob. The Rabbi said:

"There is an amazing Rashi in support of this idea in Toldos regarding the blessing Yitzchak gave to Eisav. Toldos 27:38-40: "Yitzchak, his [Eisav's] father replied and said to him... you shall live by your sword, and you shall serve your brother. When you have cause to be grieved, you will throw off his yoke from your neck." And on the words "when you have caused to be grieved," Rashi writes, "... meaning to say, when the Israelites will transgress the Torah and you will have justification to grieve over the blessings which he took, [then] you will throw off his yoke."

With no fault, Eisav could not harm Jacob. For this reason, Jacob told Eisav that he did not veer from the Torah. A person requires justification for all his actions, unconditionally. The Rabbi also quoted the Koran, where it penalizes the Jew for veering from his laws, and thus, deserving of attack by the Koran. We see the same principle at work.

In contrast, when the Jews uphold G-d's Torah, they are admired, as the Torah says:

*"And you shall watch them and keep them as they (the commands) are your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear all these statutes and declare 'what a wise and understanding people is this great nation. Because what great nation has God close to them like God, whenever (they) call to Him? And what great nation has statutes and laws as righteous as this entire Torah'..." (Deuteronomy 4:6-8)*

One example of when this took place, was during King Solomon's reign, when Queen Sheba came to hear his wisdom, bringing his lavish gifts:

Kings I, 10:1-10:

*"And Queen Sheba heard the*

*tidings of Solomon in the name of G-d, and she came to test him with riddles. And she came to Jerusalem with an exceedingly great entourage, camels carrying spices, and very much gold, and fine stones, and she came to Solomon and spoke to him, all that she had on her heart. And Solomon told her all her words, there was no matter hidden from the king that he did not tell (respond) to her. And Queen Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon, and the house (Temple) that he built. And the food of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the standing of his officers, and their clothing and their drinks, and his sacrifices that he brought up to the house of G-d, and she had no spirit left in her. And she said to the king, "The matter that I heard in my land was true regarding your matters and your wisdom. And I did not believe the matters until I came, and my eyes saw, and not even half the matter was told to me, there is more wisdom and good than the matter I heard. It should be that G-d is blessed, in that he desired you, to place you onto the throne of Israel in G-d's eternal love for Israel, and He has placed you as king to do justice and righteousness." And she gave to the king 120 kikar of gold, and very much spices, and fine stones, there never came again the quantity of spices that Queen Sheba gave to King Solomon."*

Queen Sheba – who our Rabbis describe as a greatly intelligent person – received answers to every one of her riddles. The verse says she "heard the tidings of Solomon in the name of G-d". This means her inquiries were about true, deep wisdom, G-d's knowledge. She was so impressed by King Solomon's wisdom that she said "It should be that G-d is blessed." What is significant is that her response was praise for G-d. She did not come to King Solomon with any agenda to find fault with him, supporting her culture. Queen Sheba, who searched for truth and found it in abundance in King Solomon, was awed by the Creator – not anti-Semitic towards His chosen ones.

Anti-Semitism can be dealt with. If Jews study Torah and live in accord

with the perfect ideas created by G-d, other nations will have an opportunity to see G-d's wisdom. This is our obligation. And when the nations are afforded knowledge of G-d's Torah through contact with learned Jews, they will see a different life. They will be imbued with the perfection of Judaism, and will desire to learn more. They will appreciate the wisdom G-d desires all mankind to possess. The nations will no longer focus on "people", or Jews, but they will focus on G-d. This is exactly what happened with Queen Sheba. She came to King Solomon to verify his knowledge, and she ended with a love for G-d's wisdom, displayed in the king's answers. Her unmatched gifts prove her sincerity. As any scientist is awed by the cosmos, any person will be awed by the wisdom that is encapsulated in the Torah. But if as Jews, we do not study, and perform the Torah's laws, by what means will other nations have a chance at seeing Torah wisdom? By what means will other nations realize the true distinction of the Jew, and abandon anti-Semitism?

Jews continue to act with an ignorant, destructive, and disgusting arrogance, instead of a learned concern for other nations. This is seen in Yeshivas who scorn Gentiles with the term "Goy", with overly religious parents who won't allow their children to marry converts, and with Jews in general who feel "above" others. Wake up. Didn't G-d create the Gentile nations as well? Doesn't He desire their perfection too?

Jews are not making an effort to conclude whether Judaism is truth, whether Sinai actually proves G-d's existence, and His will that we adhere to the Torah. This is laziness, and it is self-destructive. Would you be astonished to know that the greatest minds found Sinai as a clear proof of G-d's existence? Perhaps you are afraid of the obligations that follow such a realization. How can a person ignore the fact that he or she is "created", and there must be a Creator? How can one ignore clear proof that G-d exists, gave us a Torah, and that it is for our good, and is the most pleasurable life?

Jews attempt to assimilate to a lifestyle not desired by G-d.

Intermarriage and adoption of alien, cultural habits are the primary symptoms of a Jew's corruption. Torah was given to oppose alien lifestyles, and Jews do just the opposite, they gravitate to heathen practices, and anti-Semitic peoples. Jews wish to gain approval in the eyes of those who did not receive the Torah. It is sadly backwards. The Jew is to be a teacher, not a student.

Ironically, the very abandoning of our concern for approval by other nations, and rather, adhering to our heritage, displaying G-d's truth and knowledge through performing His commands, is the very solution to the anti-Semitic problem. Studying and applying Judaism, the only true religion, (plagiarized by others) not only instills truths and appreciation for reality in our minds, but in the hearts and minds of every other nation.

Placating other nations with foolish tactics of freeing homicide bombers, curtailing revenge on murders, and talking peace with assassins and butchers, is the problem, not the solution. These decisions are not the result of studying G-d's wisdom, but are gravely, ignorant errors, and therefore will continue to fail.

G-d knows what creates peace. He commanded us in the Torah for our own good, and for the good of all peoples. Follow G-d's absolute, true ideas, not man's invented politics.

Anti-Semitism will end when the nations see the beauty in G-d's Torah. Until then, Jews show them nothing but desperation, and a people who abandoned their G-d. As Jacob taught us, this justifies their attacks. □

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## Laws

# the Laws of Purim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

**“There are those that maintain that the reading of Parshat Zachor and Parshat Parah is a Torah obligation. Therefore, people living in an area in which there is not a congregation are obligated to come to a place that has a minyan for these Shabbatot. This is in order to hear these Torah readings that are Torah commandments.”** (Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chaim 685:7)

The Shabbat prior to Purim, we read Parshat Zachor. This special reading is found at the end of Parshat Ki Tetze. It discusses two mitzvot. The first is the obligation to remember the evil of Amalek. The second is the obligation to destroy the very memory of this corrupt nation. Shulchan Aruch notes that, according to many authorities, the reading of Parshat Zachor is required in order to fulfill the mitzvah of remembering Amalek. Therefore, it is important for every person to hear this reading.

Parshat Zachor is one of two sections in the Torah that discusses the wickedness of Amalek. The second section is at the end of Parshat Beshalach. These passages describe the unprovoked war that Amalek waged against Bnai Yisrael. This section also records Hashem's pledge to destroy Amalek. These passages are the Torah reading for Purim. Magen Avraham raises an interesting question. Can one fulfill the obligation to recall the wickedness of Amalek through the Purim Torah reading? This reading also discusses the wickedness of Amalek.

Magen Avraham suggests that one can fulfill the obligation to remember Amalek with the Purim reading. He argues that there is no reason for specifically requiring one to read the passages at the end of Parshat Ki Tetze. Neither is there any obvious reason for requiring that one fulfill the mitzvah the week before Purim.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Zt"l disagrees. He points out that there is a basic difference between these two sections. Parshat Zachor discusses the mitzvot regarding Amalek. These are the mitzvot to remember Amalek and to destroy the nation. The reading of Purim does not describe these commandments.

Rav Soloveitchik continues his analysis with a very simple question. What is the nature of this mitzvah to remember Amalek? In his Mishne Torah, Maimonides implies that this commandment to remember Amalek is closely linked to the mitzvah to destroy the nation. Maimonides explains that we are required to destroy Amalek. Then, he adds that we are required to regularly recall the evil of Amalek in order to evoke an abhorrence of this nation. Maimonides seems to imply that remembering Amalek is a precursor to waging war against the nation. We remember Amalek in order to motivate us to fulfill the commandment to destroy Amalek.[1]

This implication is confirmed by Maimonides' formulation of the mitzvah to destroy Amalek in his Sefer HaMitzvot. There, Maimonides writes that we are obligated to recall the evil of Amalek in order to motivate the Bnai Yisrael to wage war with this wicked nation.[2]

Rav Soloveitchik suggests that Maimonides' formulation of the mitzvah to remember Amalek suggests that Parshat Zachor may be specifically required. It is possible that the Purim reading is not adequate. The mitzvah to remember Amalek is designed to provide motivation for waging war. It is reasonable to assume that the mitzvah can only be fulfilled through a Torah reading that specifies the obligation to destroy Amalek. Through this reading, the recollection of Amalek's wickedness is linked to the commandment to destroy the nation. The Purim reading does not discuss the requirement to wage war against Amalek. This commandment is only mentioned in Parshat Zachor.[3]

**One is obligated to read the Megilah at night and to repeat it during the day...** (Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayyim 687:1)

Shulchan Aruch explains that the Megilah is read twice on Purim. It is read at night and during the day. This law is

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## Laws

derived from the Talmud in Tractate Megilah.[4] Tosefot and many other commentaries explain that the two readings of the Megilah are not of equal importance. The more fundamental reading is during the day. There are numerous proofs for this assertion. One simple proof is that the fundamental mitzvot of Purim are observed during the day. For example, the Purim feast can only be held during the day. The Talmud equates these observances to the reading of the Megilah. The equation seems to imply that, just as other mitzvot performed of Purim must be performed during the day, so too the reading of the Megilah is related to the day of Purim and not the night. [5]

This raises an interesting question. Why, then is the Megilah read at night? Secondly, the wording of Shulchan Aruch and the Talmud seem to imply that the nighttime reading is the more fundamental. Both refer to the daytime reading as a repetition of the nighttime reading. Referring to the second reading as a repetition indicates that it is secondary!

Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (Netziv) Zt"l answers this question through a brilliant explanation of the relationship between the two readings. In order to understand his explanation, we must more carefully study the text of the Talmud.

The discussion in the Talmud begins by quoting Ribbee Yehoshua ben Levi. He explains that a person is required to read the Megilah at night and lessnotah by day. The term lessnotah can be interpreted in two ways. It can mean "to learn" or it can be understood as "to repeat". At first the Talmud understands the term to mean "to learn". According to this interpretation, we are required to read the Megilah at night and the study the laws during the day. The Talmud rejects this interpretation and concludes that lessnotah means "to repeat". Therefore, the requirement is to read the Megilah at night and repeat the reading during the day.

Netziv asks, "How could the Talmud initially assume that the Megilah is not read during the day?" Yet this seems to be the Talmud's original understanding of Ribbee Yehoshua ben Levi's lesson. The Talmud interprets his statement to mean that the Megilah is read at night and the laws of Purim are studied during the day!

Netziv responds that the Talmud never assumed that the laws of Purim should be learned to the exclusion of reading the Megilah. The Talmud always understood that the fundamental reading of the Megilah takes place during the daytime. Instead, the Talmud originally assumed that Ribbee Yehoshua ben

Levi was establishing an additional requirement. Beyond the mere reading to the Megilah, one must study the laws. This enriches the reading of the Megilah. Through the study of the laws, the student acquires a more advanced comprehension of the Megilah's contents. Netziv further points out that this initial interpretation of Ribbee Yehoshua ben Levi's dictum reveals an essential premise of the Talmud. The Talmud assumes that Ribbee Yehoshua ben Levi is not describing the fundamental mitzvah of reading the Megilah. The fundamental mitzvah is to merely read the Megilah during the day! Ribbee Yehoshua ben Levi is establishing a requirement to enhance this performance.

Through identifying the Talmud's premise, Netziv answers our questions. The Talmud rejects its initial interpretation of Ribbee Yehoshua ben Levi's lesson. His intention is to require the reading of the Megilah at night and its repetition during the day. However, the Talmud never abandons its essential premise! Ribbee Yehoshua ben Levi is establishing a requirement to enhance the performance of the mitzvah. In order to enhance the reading during the day, it must be preceded by a reading during the night. The daytime reading will be a repetition of the nighttime reading. Like any material, the Megilah more is understood more clearly with review! Because the daytime reading is a second review, it will be better understood and appreciated.

Netziv explains that the nighttime reading is required to prepare us for the daytime reading. The daytime reading must be a repetition of the nighttime reading. True, the Talmud and Shulchan Aruch refer to the daytime reading as a repetition. However, this is not intended to diminish the importance of this second reading. The intention is to stress its fundamental nature. Through rendering this daytime reading into a repetition it is enhanced with greater understanding and appreciation.[6] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 5:5.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 189.

[3] Rav Michel Sherkin, Harrai Kedem, Chapter 195.

[4] Mesechet Megilah 4a.

[5] Tosefot, Mesechet Megilah 4a.

[6] Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (Netziv), Meromai Sadeh, Commentary on Mesechet Megilah 4a.

## Megillah

# Haman's Intolerance

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

In the Megillas Esther read on Purim, (3:4), we learn that the other ministers had informed Haman that Mordechai was not following Haman's command to bow to him. Why did these ministers in King Achashverosh's court need to inform Haman? Wouldn't Haman know this, seeing Mordechai perfectly erect?

Either Haman knew or didn't know about Mordechai's refusal. If Haman didn't know, then it makes sense in 3:5 that his anger flared upon hearing Mordechai's deviation. This is in line with Haman's nature. When he would first hear of something going against his egocentricity, Haman would be angered.

But perhaps Haman did in fact know that Mordechai didn't bow to him. This is more plausible, as why should Haman alone be ignorant of Mordechai's behavior? This being the case, we must ask, "Why didn't he get angered about Mordechai's refusal immediately upon his first encounter of Mordechai's disobedience?"

One possibility is that the very same ego which caused Haman to desire others to bow to him, would also cause him to avoid the reality of that one person disgracing him. This is intolerable to Haman, and perhaps why he didn't face it until it was brought out in the open in 3:4 (suggested by Eva Tavlin). Only now did Haman have to deal with it as he could no longer act for his own motives alone, i.e., suppressing this disturbing fact. Similarly, Pharaoh forgot Joseph after Joseph's death. A Rabbi explained, Pharaoh could not tolerate the loss of Joseph. He was in great need of Joseph's insights in order that he, Pharaoh, could successfully rule Egypt. Therefore, upon Joseph's death, Pharaoh feigned complete ignorance of the entire era of Joseph as a means of saying, "I never needed him and I am a capable ruler independent of another person's assistance". Such a denial allows Pharaoh to feel capable once again.

Haman acted as Pharaoh, denying Mordechai's blatant opposition, but only to the point when the matter was no longer avoidable. The other ministers in the courtyard who brought this news to Haman did so as they did not want to see Mordechai escaping punishment. This is why the passage states "to see if Mordechai's position would stand". ■