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RABBI REUVEN MANN

HOLIDAY OF
EUPHORIA

RELIGION OF
TRUTH

PURIM LOTTERY

HAMAN &
ASTROLOGY

RABBI BERNIE FOX

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HAPPY PURIM FROM THE JEWISHTIMES!

Rejoice in the reality that God gave us His amazing gift of Torah, and protects those who follow Him. Rabbi Chait taught that we drink to experience a sense of euphoria, as did those ancient saved Jews, and to become vulnerable, trusting ourselves in God.

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

MIN HAHAR

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Religion of Truth

Our religion is based on the supreme value of truth. We must seek to emulate the ways of the Creator who is referred to as relating to His creatures with "abundant mercy and truth."

This absolute value must be adhered to not only when it is convenient.

The Midrash relates that Nimrod commanded Avraham

to renounce the true God and worship idols or face certain death, Avraham refused and was cast into the fiery furnace and emerged miraculously unscathed.

In our long and turbulent history the Jewish People have been faithful to this imperative. We have resisted every attempt to compel us to relinquish our Torah and affirm the validity of alien, man made religions. The

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most compelling example of our unyielding opposition to falsehood is that of Mordechai who put the fate of the entire Nation at risk because he would not bow down to Haman who had assumed the status of a deity.

We would not be here today with our Torah, both written and oral intact, had our predecessors not put their lives on the line in resisting the most severe forms of religious repression.

This principle is of great importance in our time. For thousands of years the Jews were exiled, dispersed and endlessly abused. Our survival, physical and spiritual which was challenged by the most lethal persecution culminating in the Holocaust constitutes one the greatest miracles in history.

Our existential condition has dramatically improved due to the establishment of Israel in 1947. With God's help this tiny country, surrounded by nations seeking her destruction has developed into a potent military force capable of fending off her numerous adversaries. In the Six Day War Of June '67 she defeated a coalition of Arab armies and liberated vital areas of historical Israel such as Hebron and East Yerushalayim.

For the first time since the exile Jews were in control of their political and spiritual affairs. We could visit the Cave of Machpelah and draw inspiration from the Matriarchs and Patriarchs who are buried there.

We could also return to what Moshe Dayan referred to as the "holiest of our holy places" and endeavor to elevate our prayers and reach higher spiritual levels.

However, this newfound opportunity was limited to the Kotel. Many may not be aware that the holiest place and the one most suitable for prayer is the Har Habayit commonly referred to as the Temple Mt.

It is sad but true that the Har Habayit is also the location of the Dome of the Rock. This is a Moslem shrine constructed in 691 to mark the spot which according to Arab legend was the place from which Mohammed's (mythical) ascent to heaven originated.

In my opinion it is not coincidental that they chose to locate their famous edifice in the very place where Judaism's Holy Temple was situated. It was clearly intended to make the statement that Islam had supplanted Judaism as the authentic divine faith.

Before the advent of the '67 war, Jews had limited access to the Kotel and none to the Temple Mt. All that changed on the second day of fighting when heroic Israeli troops liberated Yerushalayim and Commander Motta Gur uttered the electrifying words, "Har Habayit Beyadeinu" ("The Temple Mt. is in our hands").

However the joy and promise of that moment did not last long. Severely flawed and misguided political decisions transformed a great victory into a defeat. Then Defense Minister, Moshe Dayan, Impulsively decided, against the heartfelt importuning of Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren ZT"L, to restore the authority of the Jordanian religious entity known as the Wagf over activities at the Mt.

Dayan was operating under an attitude of appeasement and the delusion that his grand gesture would soften the hateful hearts of our Arab enemies. He could not have been more mistaken. The Arabs have no appreciation for Jewish generos-



ity which they regard as weakness and are contemptuous of what they interpret as insecurity and lack of commitment to their religious beliefs.

We must sadly admit that we dropped the ball because Moshe Dayan did not realize the full opportunity that Hashem had granted us. Our failure to affirm our right to pray at the Har Habayit constitutes a severe violation of our obligation to proclaim the absolute truth of Torah Judaism and to scrupulously refrain from any word or deed that implies acknowledgement of the veracity of any other religion.

The Mosque was located on the Temple Mt. to be a symbol of the Moslem belief that it had superseded Judaism. For over a thousand years we lacked the ability to negate that view. But we knew deep in our hearts that the time would come when we could proudly proclaim that—not for one moment—did we ever believe that Hashem had replaced our religion with another.

The opportunity arrived when Motta Gur and his holy warriors fought like lions to retake the Makom Hamikdash (place of the Sanctuary). Our failure to fully control it and utilize it for its proper purpose, i.e., Jewish worship, amounts to a tacit endorsement of the Arab claim.

We must emulate the moral heroism of the Avot, Mordechai Hayehudi and countless other great Jewish leaders who were prepared to die rather than support the fraudulent claims of man made religions.

Our acceptance of the Waqf restriction of Jewish prayer on the Mt. is a grave desecration of God's Name. It also deprives us of achieving the most efficacious quality of Tefilla.

This is not a call for violence against anyone. It is a plea for Jews to appreciate the supreme significance of the Har Habayit and the great merit of praying there.

If the Jewish People, in ever increasing numbers, will make peaceful pilgrimages to the place of the Temple, Israel's Supreme Court will act to remove all (illegitimate and unlawful) barriers to our full right to serve Hashem there.

And we will sanctify G-D's Name by proclaiming with absolute conviction,

"Moshe emet veTorato emet" (Moshe is true and his Torah is truth). ■

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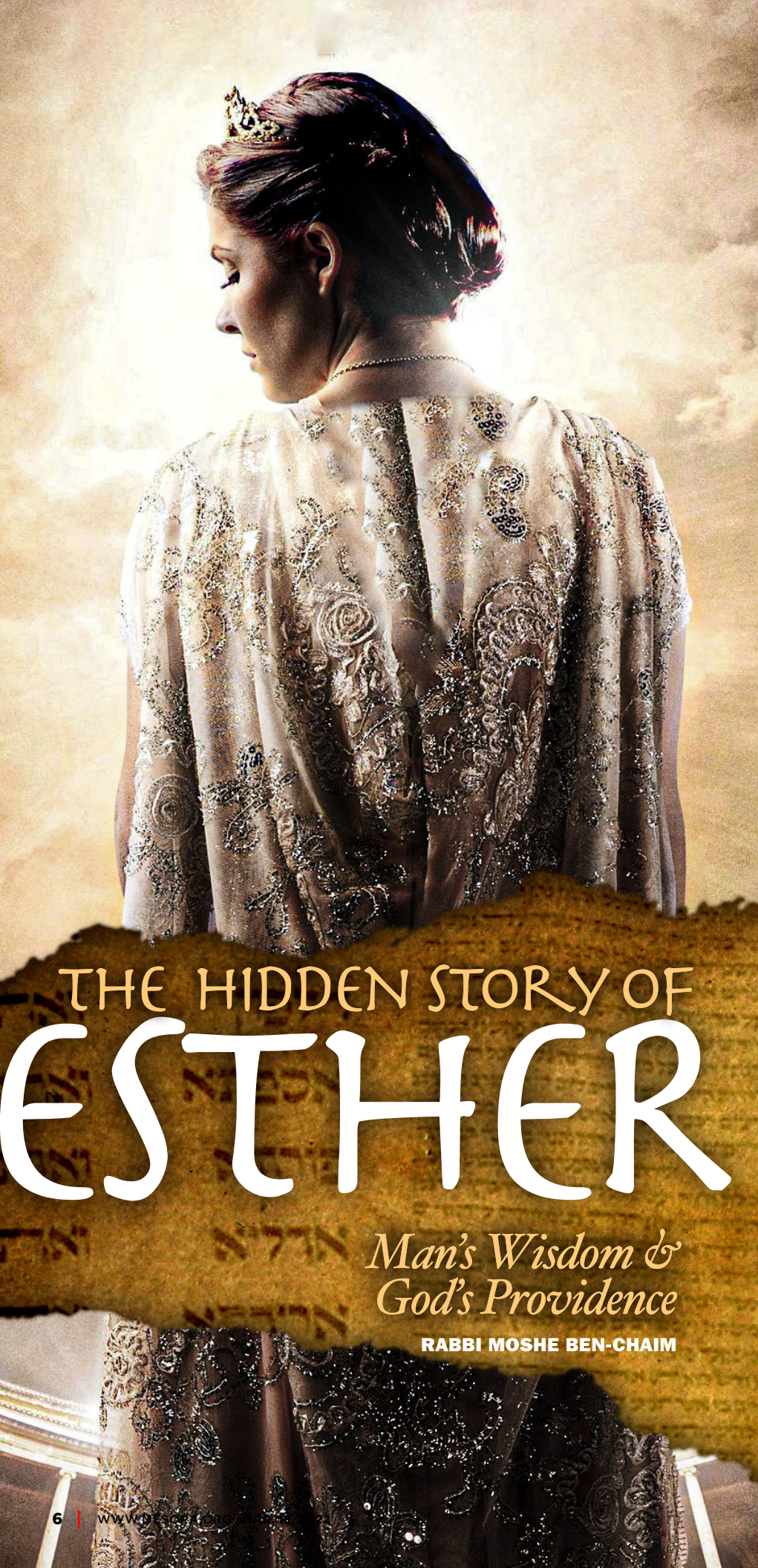


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THE HIDDEN STORY OF ESTHER

*Man's Wisdom &
God's Providence*

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. Certainly, any ruler's position is in constant jeopardy. On the one hand, you must placate your viceroys and ministers to remain loyal. 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 (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 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

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After 3 days of fasting, Esther approaches the king to save the Jews

keep his money – the king covered the war's expense. But this very feast celebrating the lack of truth of 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," i.e., openly displaying her lusts. 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.

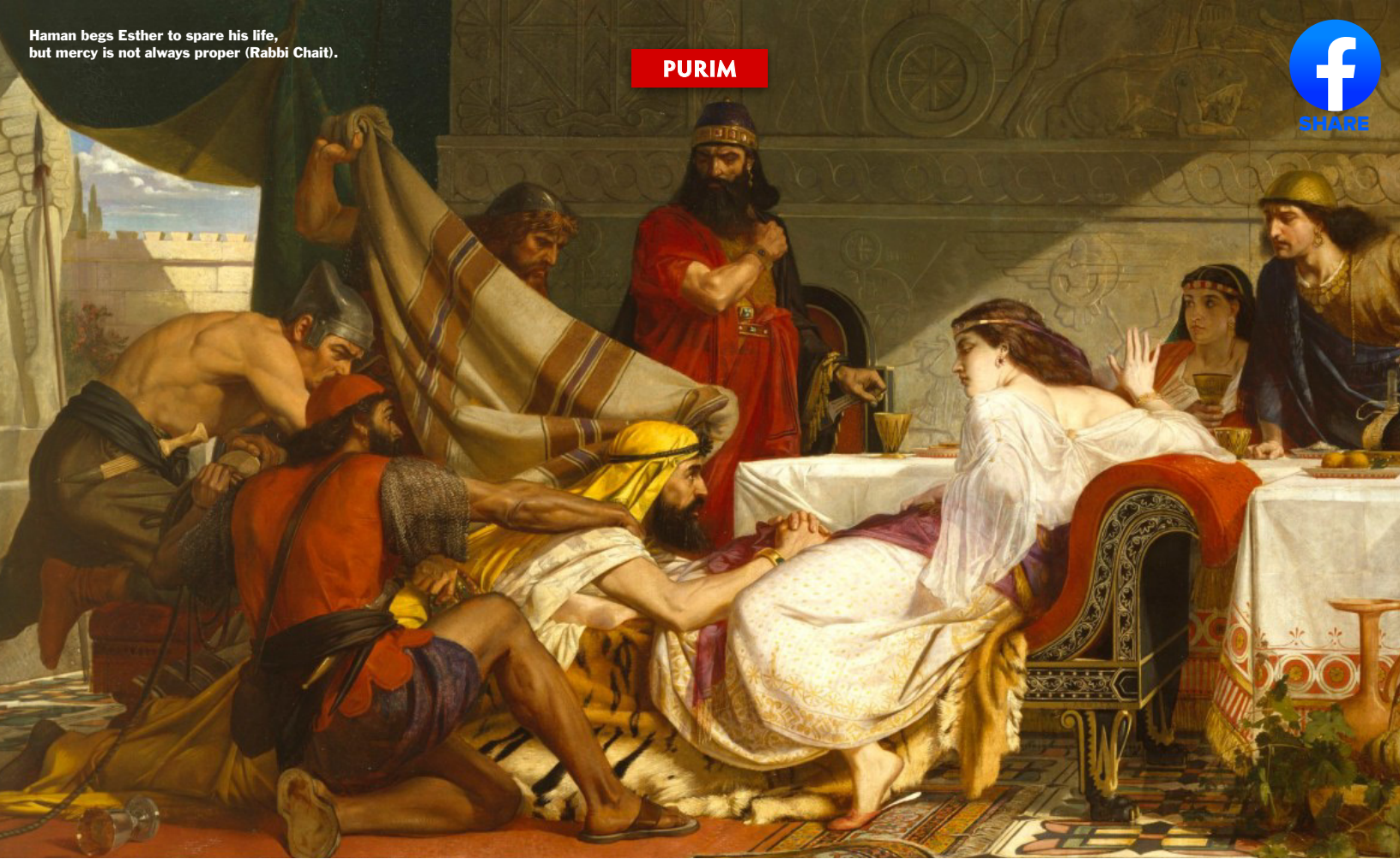
The statement, "Gabriel came and attached a tail to her", indicates that Vashti's disappearance was essential to the Jews' salvation. Otherwise, a Divine act of God sending Gabriel to intervene and elevate her ego over her lusts would not be crucial to the Jews' salvation.

Salvation Already in Place

Along with killing Vashti, Haman advised that a letter be issued, stating that unlike Vashti's opposi-

tion, 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

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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 advisor, Mordechai knew their language. Mordechai informed Esther to warn the king. The matter was investigated, and the would-be assassins were killed. Esther's section as Queen and Mordechai's hearing of this plot reveal God's providence behind the scenes (Megilla 7a).

Haman's Ego: His Downfall

Afterwards, Haman was elevated in position. He moved the king to 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 Nevuchadnezzar'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 this 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

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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, thereby 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. 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? Rabbi Israel Chait 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. 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, precipitating 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, it was 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, 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 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. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



Haman was commanded to parade Mordechai through town in royal garb

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

We already mentioned that the Jews arose and reaccepted the Torah again. This is based on Esther 9:27. This acceptance was bereft of any 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. And, as Purim enabled the Jews to reach the optimum level of love of God, this book alone will remain with the Torah, while all other Prophets and Writing will not (Maimonides, Laws of Megilla 2:18). Megilla embodies Torah's perfections, also explaining why it requires *sirtut*—baseline scoring—like a *sefer Torah*. Rabbi Chait explained that Megilla shares Torah's essence and therefore must appear as a Torah through *sirtut*.

Rabbi 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.

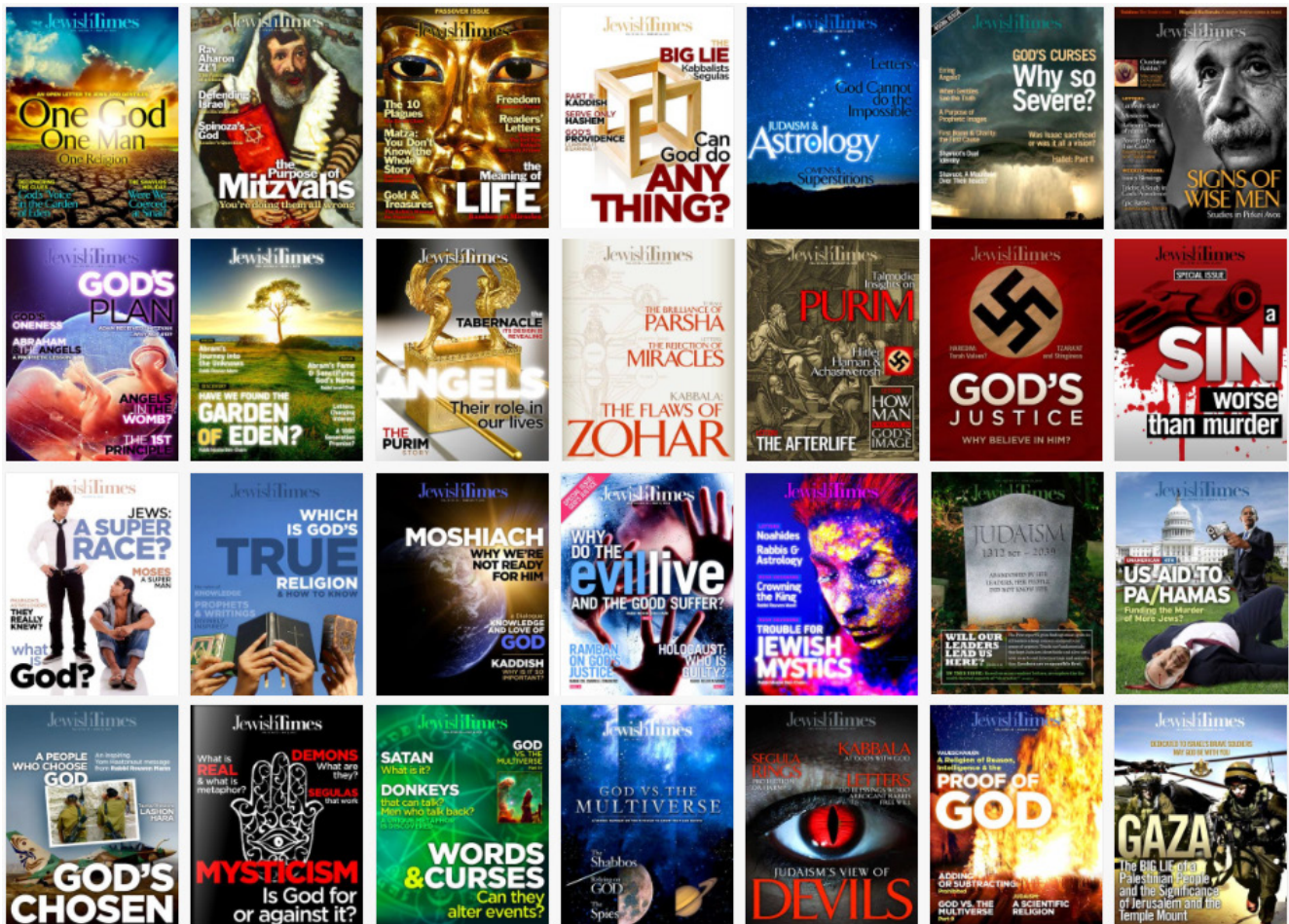
So drink, to experience a gladness, which commemorates the Jews' gladness of old, marveling at the benefit of a true Torah existence. And enjoy the abandonment of guarding yourself this one day, to demonstrate your true belief that it is in God whom we trust.

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. 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.

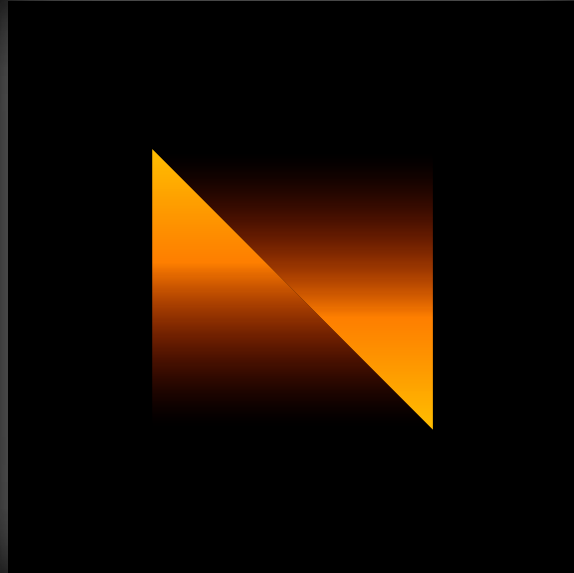
A happy Purim to all! ■

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Purim: the Holiday of Euphoria

The holiday of Purim, celebrates the salvation of the Jews from the wicked plan of annihilation propounded by Haman, a descendant of Amalek. The evil that he sought to perpetrate, was turned upon his own head and he ended up dangling from a rope along with his ten sons. A major theme of the story is that of “VeNahafoch Hu” which means that things were turned upside down.

The idea of opposites looms large in the story of Purim. The enemies of the Jews suffered the fate that was intended for their victims; the time was transformed from one of “sorrow to joy from mourning to holiday” (Esther 9:22). The Jews of the time, began celebrating on the day after the great victory which came about as a result of Esther’s dramatic intercession with the King. And Mordechai decreed that the Jews should continue the festive observances for all future years.

The celebration of Purim, is different from that of other holidays. It contains a strange requirement to drink intoxicating beverages to the point where one can no longer distinguish between, “Cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai.” This represents a significant state of drunkenness which is at first glance, puzzling.

Judaism is not opposed to alcohol, per se, and in fact mandates that certain religious performances, such as Kiddush and Havdala, be recited over a cup of wine. However, it is categorically opposed to excessive drinking which puts a person in a state of irrationality; in which he is not fit to perform Mitzvot.

Therefore, one should be disciplined and only imbibe with moderation. Even on the festive holidays when it is Biblically required to rejoice, the Sages emphasized that the celebration should not be one of debauchery brought on by excessive eating and drinking.

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The Rambam, in Laws of Yom Tov 6:20 says:

When a person eats, drinks and rejoices on Yom Tov he should not excessively indulge in joking and merry-making and say that the more he engages in this the more he increases the Mitzvah; for drunkenness and extreme frivolousness are not real joy but boisterousness and foolishness. And we were not commanded about boisterousness and foolishness but about celebration which contains service of the Creator as it says, "Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d out of joy and a good heart" (Devarim 28:47). Thus, you learn that service is with joy, and it is impossible to serve Hashem from the midst of boisterousness or light-heartedness, and not from the midst of drunkenness.

We should note—that Chanukah which celebrates defeat of the Greek oppressor—is regarded as a day of joy and thanksgiving. It essentially focuses on recitation of Hallel and lighting the Menorah, but does not call for feasting and certainly not drinking. Why is Purim different?

Rabbi Soloveitchik noted, that the holiday of Purim takes place on the fourteenth of Adar and the fifteenth, for those who live in cities that were walled during the time of Joshua. This is because the Jews in the time of Haman, "rested" and celebrated their victories from the previous days. Yet, he asks, the holiday of Chanukah occurs on the twenty fifth of Kislev the day of the actual victory over the Greeks. Why didn't the Rabbis ordain the celebration of Purim on the day of the actual defeat of the Jew's enemies?

He explains that there is a fundamental difference between the establishment of Purim and Chanukah. After the events of Chanukah, the Rabbis convened and decided to ordain a holiday in commemoration of the miracle. They concluded that it should take place on the very day of the miraculous victory.

However, Purim developed differently. The Megilah states, "And the Jews confirmed that which they had begun to do" (Esther 9:27). This means, that in the time of Haman the Jews celebrated the great victory over their enemies on the day after the fighting ceased. Mordechai

decided, that the Jews should commemorate the great miracles in the same manner as the those who had actually experienced the victory.

This insight, enables us to understand the peculiar requirement to get drunk on Purim. The most powerful feeling of joy is that which one experiences when one goes from the lowest level of despair to great salvation. This is what the Jews experienced when their Matzav (situation) was instantaneously transformed, from mourning to a great celebration.

The Jews experienced extreme exhilaration which expressed itself in the removal of all restraints. There were spontaneous outbreaks of joy in which the people came together and distributed servings of foods to friends and gifts to the poor so that everyone could join the party. In moments of euphoria we yearn to reach out to everyone, friends and strangers, to tell of our great fortune and celebrate together.

Historically, the holiday of Purim has always contained an element of exuberance. Students and their rabbis often got together and would "let their hair down." Even distinguished individuals would wear costumes and get into the spirit of "uninhibited" (within reason) outpouring of joy. Students wrote Grammin (poetic ditties) poking fun at various fellow students, institutions and personalities. An aura of celebration prevailed, bolstered by alcohol, and unlike the celebrations of other holidays.

Of course some of these excessive behaviors got out of hand and courted danger. The authorities sought to reduce the possibility of harm, but in general did not attempt to cancel the raucous celebration. I believe that this is because this behavior is rooted in the underlying theme of Purim, that one should let go of his inhibitions and reach the point of "Ad DeLo Yada" (until he no longer perceives the difference between Mordechai and Haman).

The Jewish People are destined to experience the great exuberance of salvation in the Messianic era. "When Hashem brought back those that returned to Zion; we were like dreamers. Then were our mouths filled with laughter and our tongues with songs of joy—then it was said among the nations; 'The L-rd has done great things for them'" (Tehilim 126:1-2).

May we merit to experience this joy, speedily and in our time. ■

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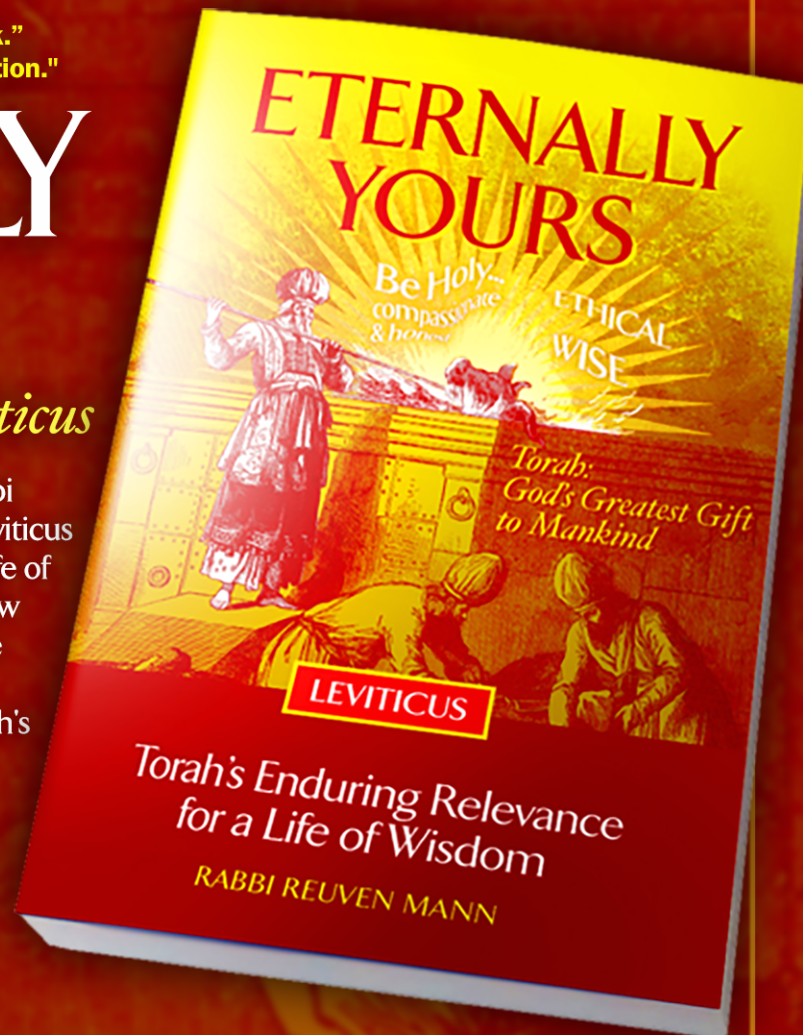
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PURIM

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PURIM Haman's Astrology

And the Jews took upon themselves to do as they had begun, and as Mordechai had written to them. For Haman, the son of Hammedata, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast a pur, that is, the lot, to discomfit them, and to destroy them. But when it came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked plot, which he had devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head; and he and his sons were hanged on the gallows. Therefore, they called these days Purim, after the name of the pur. Therefore, because of all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and that which had come to them (Megilat Esther 9:23-26 translated by Neima Novetsky, with minor revision)

I. Purim – A Strange Name

The above passages describe the Jewish people's acceptance of the observance of Purim. The passages state that they accepted the observance in response to

Mordechai's instruction. The passages summarize the events that Purim celebrates. They explain the origin and meaning of the name of the celebration – Purim. The name is derived from the lottery Haman conducted to determine the day on which the Jews should be destroyed.

The names of our festivals and celebrations communicate important ideas. The name Succot refers to the mitzvah of dwelling in the succah. The name Shavuot refers to the seven weeks that connect the celebration to Pesach. It emphasizes the connection between the two festivals. The name Chanukah refers to the rededication of the Bait Hamikdash – the Sacred Temple. To what does the name Purim refer? It refers to the lottery conducted by Haman. Why is this lottery so important? What if Haman had arbitrarily picked a date for his pogrom against the Jews? What if he had picked a date that best fit his schedule or a date that had a strategic significance? Would the salvation of the Jewish people be less worthy of celebration and commemoration? To understand the message of the name Purim, we must better understand Haman's lottery. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

II. Haman's Lottery

Haman's behavior is not easy to understand. He wanted to destroy the Jewish people. What would we expect him to do to achieve his goal? We would expect him to devise a strategy to win the support of the king. Then he would launch his strategy. Once he would convince the king to endorse his pogrom, he would launch it as soon as possible. By acting quickly, he would prevent his victims from escaping. Also, he would minimize the possibility that shifting circumstances might cause the king to reconsider and withdraw his support.

Haman did not act as we would expect. First, Haman conducted his lottery to determine the date for the Jews' destruction. Through the lottery, he determined that the date would be the thirteenth of Adar. Then, he went to the king and persuaded him to support his plan. With this support, Haman issued a decree that the Jews should be attacked and destroyed on the designated date. All these events occurred in the month of Nisan. Haman issued his decree eleven months before the date selected for his vicious campaign. How can this behavior be explained?

III. Haman's Confidence

Two conclusions emerge from this analysis. First, Haman believed that the date determined by the lottery was enormously significant. The date was essential to the success of his plan. Second, he was very confident in its success. He was not concerned about the eleven-month delay between the issuance of his decree and its execution. He believed that this delay could not undermine his plan. How did he come to these conclusions?

IV. Studying the Megilah in Context

Before addressing our questions, we must identify an important characteristic of Megilat Esther. The work was composed by Mordechai and Esther and addressed to the Jews of their generation. However, it is not just an epistle intended for their specific generation. It is a work of eternal significance. It is a paradoxical document. It addresses an ancient generation with a message relevant to all future generations. Our study of the Megilah must consider this paradox. We study it to uncover and understand its eternal messages. But we must also recognize that these messages are expressed in the context of an ancient generation.

Consider a simple illustration. If a student of the classics decides to study Aristotle, he or she must put aside modern science. If the student studies Aristotle from the scientific perspective of the twenty-first century, he or she will immedi-

ately conclude that Aristotle was naive and even foolish. To appreciate Aristotle's science, the reader must project oneself into the ancient era in which he wrote. If the student can achieve this, then he or she can appreciate Aristotle's effort to organize the phenomena of the material universe into a comprehensible system. To understand the Megilah, we must take the same approach. We must put aside our twenty-first-century assumptions and project ourselves into the era in which it was composed. Let's travel back to antiquity.

Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his supporters all that had happened to him, and his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, "Truly, since Mordechai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Judean descent, you will not prevail over him, for you will surely fall before him." (Megilat Esther 7:13 Translated by Neima Novetsky)

V. Haman's Surprise

Why did Haman select a date for the destruction of the Jews through a lottery? The above pasuk – passage – provides an important insight into his and his contemporaries' thinking.

Haman went to the king to ask that he sanction hanging Mordechai. Haman's timing was critical. The king – Achashverosh – had just discovered that Mordechai had saved his life. He had uncovered and reported a plot to assassinate the king. Achashverosh was startled to discover that Mordechai had not been recognized and rewarded for his loyalty.

Haman arrived at the king's residence prepared to ask for Mordechai's execution. Instead, the king, learning that Haman was in his antechamber, summoned him and enlisted him to reward Mordechai. He was to attire Mordechai in royal robes and lead him through the streets upon the king's horse. He was to declare that this is how the king treats one he wishes to honor.

Haman's only option was to do as the king directed. He executed the king's orders and returned home frustrated and humiliated. He told his wife and companions all that happened. The above pasuk is his wife's response. She tells Haman that his destiny has changed. These events are the beginning of his fall. It will end in his destruction. How did Zeresh – Haman's wife – come to this conclusion?

VI. Haman's Beliefs

The Goan of Vilna explains that Haman accepted astrology as a true and exact science. The movements of the stars and their positions in the heavens control the destinies of nations and individuals. He believed that the stars had caused his ascent to power. This conviction

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underlay his campaign against the Jewish people. He was convinced he would be successful because the stars favored him.

Haman was not an outlier in his belief in the power of the stars. His view was the conventional wisdom of his era. Zeresh also subscribed to this view. According to this view, the impossible had occurred. Haman had been humiliated and forced to lead Mordechai through the streets of Shushan. Something was terribly wrong. Zeresh concluded that the destiny of Mordechai and the Jews was determined by forces more potent than the stars. These forces now favored Mordechai and his people. Haman's plan was unraveling, and disaster awaited.[1]

VII. An Instrument of Astrology

This insight into Haman's beliefs explains his use of a lottery to select a date for his evil campaign. He was searching for a date on which the stars would be best aligned in his favor. He was convinced that his lottery would reveal this date.[2] This also explains Haman's odd confidence. He believed that the eleven-month delay in the execution of his plan would not undermine it. The stars were on his side. His plan could not fail.

Now, we much more clearly understand Haman's lottery and the belief it represented. Haman conducted the lottery to take advantage of the influence of the stars. The lottery represents the belief that the destiny of nations and individuals is determined by the movement of the heavenly bodies.



the destiny of nations and individuals.

For example, we believe that international conflicts or alliances are determined by historical trends, cultural values, political realities, and economic considerations. These influences take the place of the defunct science of astrologers. Economists, sociologists, and political scientists are our modern astrologers.

The story of Purim tells us that these factors and influences may dictate the destinies of other nations. But they cannot determine our future. Only Hashem controls our fate. ■

VIII. Purim's Message

Megilat Esther does not dismiss or even attack this view. Instead, it asserts that the destiny of the Jewish people is not subject to these influences. The fates of others may be dictated by the stars. But ours is directly determined by Hashem. This is the idea communicated by Purim. Haman believed that the destinies of all nations are determined by the stars. The events celebrated by Purim communicated that the Jewish people are unique. Our destiny is in only Hashem's hands.

IX. The Message in a Modern Context

As explained above, the message of Purim is expressed in the terms of an ancient time's beliefs. But the message is eternal. We do not take astrology seriously. We know that the movements of the stars do not dictate events and are not portents. But we have replaced astrology with other influences that we believe determine

[1] Rabbaynu Eliyahu of Vilna, Commentary on Megilat Esther 7:13.

[2] See Rabbaynu Eliyahu of Vilna, Commentary on Megilat Esther 3:7. The balance of the above does not completely correspond with the Gaon's position.

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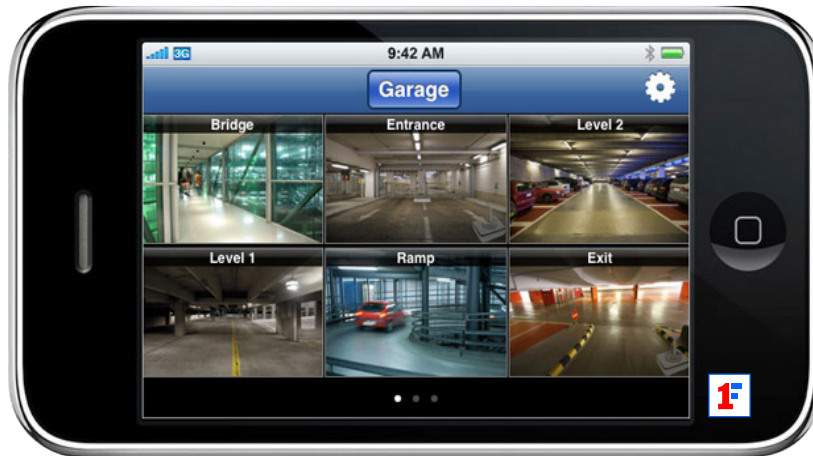
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OUR PURPOSE: WISDOM & MORALITY



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" (Eccl. 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 56:3), "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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