

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON PARSHAS ZACHOR / PURIM - 5758

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Adar--The Herald of Dawn

Rav Aharon Kahn, Rosh Yeshiva and Rosh Kollel Elyon

Nissan is both month and season. It is the month of Pesach and the season of ge'ulah. , Nissan, springtime of the earth, suggests spiritual rebirth and national renewal. We know Nissan well. Less known is that Adar too is a month of renewal and redemption. Purim appears in the very center of Adar exactly thirty days before Pesach. Purim and Pesach are jewels encased in their own vernal matrices, their springtime months. Like Purim itself, with its images of ayeles hashachar, of the transforms from Veho'ir Shushan novocho to vehoir Shushan tzohalo vesomeycho, the month of Adar is nexus of darkness and dawn, it is winter's end and springtime's promise. Adar is Nissan's ayeles hashachar. Adar breaks our long-held assumptions and delivers us from our banalities and commonplaces. Adar insists that, in darkness, light is possible. Adar talks of change, of transformation. Adar denies us our inertia and demands that we begin to dream again. Adar teaches us not to be afraid to dream of ge'ulah. It is only after Adar's initiation that we can embrace Nissan and accept ge'ulah's gifts. It is quite remarkable that HaShem has to coax the messenger who will preach the redemption. But this is what we read in Yeshayahu 40:9. Al har govo'ah 'ali loch mevaseses Tzion, horimi bako'ach kolaych mevaseses Yerushalayim, horimi, al tiro'i, imri le'oray Yehudah hinei Elokeichem. Ascend upon a high mountain, O herald (fem.) of Tzion, raise your voice with strength, O herald (fem.) of Yerushalayim. Raise it, fear not; say to the cities of Yehudah: Behold, your G-d. Al tiro'i--do not fear. What is there to fear? The message is so precious, so wonderful, so luminous. The ge'ulah is here, Moshi'ach is coming. Imagine the red carpet that will be rolled out for the mevaseses! Why, then, will she be afraid? This mevaseses (note the feminine!) has an alter ego. In Yeshayahu 52:7: Mah novu al hehorim raglei mevaser (note here the masculine!) Mashmi'a sholom mevaser tov, mashmi'a yeshu'ah, omayr leTzion molach Elokoyich. How pleasant are the footsteps of the herald (masc.) upon the mountains, announcing peace, heralding good tidings, announcing salvation, saying unto Tzion: Your G-d has reigned! HaShem does not need to coax the mevaser, why is not the mevaser afraid? Why should the mevaseses be afraid? The answer, I believe, lies in the roles of the mevaseses and the mevaser, respectively. They both announce the ge'ulah, but whereas the mevaser develops an already evident reality, the mevaseses must introduce, afresh, the idea of ge'ulah to a skeptic, tired people. There is a vast difference between: Hineh Elokeychem and Molach Elokoyich. Molach, He has reigned, is past tense. HaShem's rule is a tangible, tested reality. The mevaseses calls forth from the darkness of golus that the ge'ulah is almost here, the mevaser comes after and says that the ge'ulah is changing everything. The ge'ulah is coming? Haven't we heard that before? Will it last? Is it really true? Can it be true? And it is so dark outside and Eisav is so menacing. Yes, there will be resistance and doubt. There will be doubt which the mevaseses must overcome, and there will be resistance which the mevaseses must ignore. The mevaseses knows there will be no red carpet, no reception committee. She will be lucky if a handful of enthusiasts greet her on the tarpaulin. So the mevaseses is afraid. And what of those who refuse to be redeemed, who are so of a piece with their golus surroundings that they call golus home and build to stay. "What," queried the villager's wife of her husband, "the Rabbi said that when Moshi'ach comes we have to go to Eretz Yisroel?" "Yes my dear." "And what about the goat?" "I don't know. He didn't say anything about taking the goat." "Go back and tell your Rabbi, if the goat stays, I stay." So the mevaseses is afraid, and lonely. Alone in her knowledge of ge'ulah, trying to

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sell ge'ulah in the marketplace of false jewels and spurious charms, she will discover that her wares entice few, excite few. She is a harbinger, an ayeles hashachar. But for all her preaching it is still dark outside. And so she needs desperately the encouraging word of her Master. Horimi, al tiro'i. Say to the cities of Yehudah: Behold, Hashem is here! Do you not see Him? But He is here, and it is time. And you will see. You will grow new eyes and feel with a new heart. And then it will be so obvious, so eternally implicit. You will read your history all over again and it will be a different history. When the mevaser comes, the path has been paved by that mevaseses, the light has dawned already, and he, this mevaser, gambols from hill to mound and excites everyone with the implications of a ge'ulah which they know and want. The mevaseses, Esther, Ayeles HaShachar, she is the women of all our generations. She is the mother who waits with inner joy her nine month's gestation, carrying the future in an adumbrating womb. She is the mother who suffers even more the pangs of life-giving labor. Al tiro' ki gam zeh loch ben. The mevaseses is a Miriam who refutes her father's paralyzing pessimism and opens a window to yetzias mitrayim. The mevaseses is a generation of women who know that Moshe is coming and who refuse to succumb to the temptations of yi'ush. They will not join in the making of the golden calf. The mevaseses is the woman who hears the meraglim and laughs them off. She knows. HaShem has promised. They will not anguish in the meraglim's panic, in the national despair. To this mevaseses HaShem says: horimi al tiro'i. The mevaseses is the Adar to the mevaser's Nissan. And it is Megillas Esther. Not megillas Mordechai. The mevaseses is a feminine perception. (See also Rashi to Yeshayahu 40:9.) Purim itself teaches this message of a dawn still implicit in the darkness, of a ge'ulah that seems to come out of the most unlikely circumstances. Purim's recipe for a redemption-torte seems to demand bitter ingredients. And on-the-brink, shifting-fortunes, elements of surprise are everywhere present in the megillah. The whole of the megillah seems to resonate with this one message: to see Me you must have faith! So HaShem's name is not written into the megillah even once! It is the mevaseses' message out of the darkness of near despair: Hineh Elokeychem! Nothing can be spelled out. It is all implication, all forcing the reader to be the careful student, the attentive explorer. The mevaseses is like the desperate sailor who shouts from high up on the crow's nest: "Land ahoy." And we are like his mates below, who, because they are on the ship's deck, see nothing but the endless sea. Now the test: If the mevaseses comes, will we say, with the mevaseses, Hineh Elokeychem? Sifrei Minhogim bring the custom of placing a plaque with the words Mishenichnas Adar Marbim Besimchah in one's house, at the beginning of Adar. Exactly where should this plaque be placed? Over the amoh by amoh section of wall which every Jew leaves unfinished as a zecher lechurban. Though still in a profound golus, we mask the darkness that surround us by the light of our emunah and we march on to greet the mevaseses, eager to hear: Hineh Elokeichem. And when do we do this? Mishenichnas Adar. Adar, the month of ayeles hashachar, when all things are possible and yet to happen. ... Publication of the Student Organization of Yeshiva University - March 5,1998

<http://www.ohr.org.il/special/purim/index.htm>

Which Side of Genocide by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

Purim is a time of physical celebration. It is a mitzvah to enjoy a festive meal, to send gifts of food to friends and contributions to the needy - and even to imbibe spirits more than one is accustomed to doing. Chanukah, by contrast, is a time of spiritual celebration. We light candles and add Hallel to our prayers. But there is no obligation to have a festive meal - latkes and doughnuts are only a popular custom. Why this difference between Purim and Chanukah? One suggested approach is that Jews have been historically threatened by two forms of genocide - physical and spiritual. Purim recalls the threat of Haman's "final solution to the Jewish problem." Haman was determined to annihilate every Jew, "young and old, children and women in one day." He would not have abandoned his plan even if the Jews had all abandoned their faith in Hashem. Since it was the physical body of

the Jewish People which was saved from destruction, it is incumbent on the survivors and their heirs throughout the generations to celebrate with their bodies by eating, drinking and sharing such indulgence with others. Chanukah celebrates heavenly rescue from a threat of spiritual genocide. The Hellenist Greeks were interested in forcing assimilation upon the Jewish People, not physically destroying them. Since the threat was a spiritual one, the celebration of our deliverance is a spiritual one of lights and prayers of praise. This very neat explanation is challenged by one of the great Halachic commentaries in the following manner: The Torah forbids the males of the Ammonite and Moabite nations from ever marrying a woman from a Jewish mother, even if they convert to Judaism. Our Sages explain that the Torah distances these nations from our midst because of their great crime in tempting our ancestors to sin through sexual promiscuity and idol worship on their way out of Egypt. The Edomites, on the other hand, are distanced from marrying into our people after conversion for only two generations, despite the fact that they waged war against us and tried to destroy us. The conclusion, say our Sages, is that one who seeks to persuade a person to sin commits a greater crime than one who tries to kill him. Why? Because one who kills him takes him away only from this world, while one who causes him to sin brings upon him Divine retribution which removes him from this world and from the World to Come. Therefore, spiritual genocide is equivalent, if not worse than, physical genocide. Why then should we not physically celebrate our Chanukah deliverance from the physical-spiritual genocide which threatened us? A fascinating response to this challenge is provided by another great Halachic authority: When is causing a Jew to sin equivalent to physical genocide because he loses both worlds? Only when the Jew is enticed to sin as he was by the daughters of Moab who exploited sexual attraction to lead Jews to idol worship. That is why the Moabites were distanced from our people in an even more severe manner than were the Edomites who only tried to perpetrate physical genocide. The Hellenists, on the other hand, attempted to coerce Jews into committing sins. Submission to such pressure can certainly not be viewed as inviting Divine retribution which is expressed in physical and spiritual genocide. But continued violation of religious practice is certain to undermine the spiritual health of a people, and deliverance from such pressure is a cause for celebrating a rescue from spiritual genocide in a purely spiritual way. Which side of genocide does our own generation face? The threat of physical genocide which reared its ugly head in the Holocaust still echoes in the Arab call to Jihad against the Jewish State. But this danger is nowhere near as tangible as that of the spiritual genocide which is decimating our ranks in the form of widespread assimilation and intermarriage. This is not the spiritual genocide of Hellenist, Crusader or Inquisitors. Nowhere are Jews being forced to choose between the cross and the stake, the crescent and the sword. Our problem is that of the Moabite kind, submission to passion for pleasure exacerbated by the powerful forces of social conformity, the age-old desire to be a nation like all nations. This is a situation of "do-it-yourself genocide" where more than six million are trying to achieve a final solution of vanishing into the family of nations, rather than serve as a model for them. On Purim, when we joyfully celebrate our miraculous escape from one side of genocide we must resolve to strengthen our Jewish identity through Jewish education in order to save our people from the other side of genocide.

Sources: ðLevushai Malchus ðTurei Zahav ðEliyahu Rabba

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ravfrand@torah.org March 05, 1998

"RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Titzaveh - Purim -

The Greatest Accolade Given To Mordechai The last verse in the Megilla reads, "For Mordechai, the Yehudi, was viceroy to King Ahashuerus; he was a great man among the Jews, and found favor with the multitude of his brothers (ratzui l'rov echav); he sought the good of his

people and spoke with peace to all his posterity (v'dover shalom l'chol zar'oh)." [Esther 10:3] The Ibn Ezra makes two very interesting comments on this verse. The Ibn Ezra says on the phrase "he found favor with the multitude (literally the majority) of his brothers" that a person can not find favor with everyone, because of jealousy. It is impossible to be completely popular. Then the Ibn Ezra comments on the buildup of praises in the verse. The concluding and seemingly greatest praise is that "he spoke with peace to all his posterity". The Ibn Ezra comments that this means that he was on good terms with all his children and grandchildren. This seems anti-climactic. Is this the greatest thing we can find to say about Mordechai HaYehudi? The Ibn Ezra says this is indeed a great praise. Think of all the children and grandchildren that Mordechai had. Did each one turn out exactly like Mordechai would have wanted? If Mordechai would have wanted all his children and grandchildren to learn in Kollel, do we expect that that is the way it would have worked out? Or if he wanted them all not to learn in Kollel, do we expect that that is the way it would turn out? Maybe there would be a black sheep in the family that did learn in Kollel, or maybe there would be a black sheep that did not! And yet, Mordechai spoke in peace to all descendants. He was able to maintain a peaceful relationship with all his children and all his grandchildren. This, the Ibn Ezra tells us, is a great thing. Because of the natural fear that children have towards parents, it is not always true that there is a loving relationship between parents and children. Therefore if Mordechai could maintain such a relationship, this is indeed the highest accolade that the Torah can offer him.

I think this is a great ethical lesson to us. We try to raise children and we have certain ideals and standards of how we would like our children to be. It doesn't always turn out like that. But we should always strive to maintain a relationship where we can, at least, speak peacefully with all our offspring.

One Who Gladdens Hearts on Purim is Compared to G-d The Ramba"m in the Laws of Yom Tov [6:18] speaks about the nature of the mitzvah of Simchas Yom Tov [Rejoicing on Festivals]. There he says "when he eats and drinks, he has to feed the stranger, the orphan, and widow together with the other poor and unfortunate people. However, he who locks the gates of his courtyard and sits down to feast with his wife and children but does not provide food for the poor and embittered of spirit -- such is not the rejoicing of mitzvah; it is the rejoicing of one's own stomach!" In the Laws of Megilla also, the Ramba"m speaks of the mitzvah of rejoicing on Purim. There he writes [2:17] "It is preferable for a person to be excessive when it comes to the mitzvah of giving gifts to the poor rather than to be excessive when it comes to feasting and sending food portions to friends because there is no greater or more glorious rejoicing than to gladden the hearts of the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the strangers, for one who gladdens the hearts of these unfortunate individuals can be compared to the Shechina (G-d's Divine Presence) as it is written [Yeshaya 57:15] 'to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the crushed'". If we would speculate when there is a greater mitzvah to gladden the hearts of the widows and orphans -- on Yom Tov or on Purim -- we would logically assume that on Yom Tov there would be a bigger mitzvah. Yom Tov, after all, is a Biblical command. Purim is Rabbinic in origin. Yet the Ramba"m goes out of his way and says something that he very rarely says in the entire Mishneh Torah --- "that one who gladdens the hearts of these can be compared to the Shechina"! The Ramba"m does not use such language in connection with the laws of Yom Tov. What is the Ramba"m telling us over here by saying that a person who makes the less fortunate happy on Purim is comparable to G-d? The Medrash in Esther says on the verse "to know what is this (mah ZEH) and about what is this (v'al mah ZEH)" [Esther 4:5] that when Esther queried Mordechai she was alluding to something. She said, "What's happening? What have we done? Never in Jewish history has there been such a decree as Haman has issued. Have they perhaps denied the verse 'This is my G-d' (ZEH Keyli) or perhaps they denied the Ten Commandments about which it is written 'from this way and that way (m'ZEH u-mi'ZEH) were they written?" Esther wanted to know what was happening. The Medrash then says that Mordechai responded by explaining that the reason the Jews were suffering was a result of the

grandson of 'Karahu'. Who is 'Karahu'? 'Karahu' refers to Amalek about which it is stated "Who happened to you (asher Korecha) on the road" [Devorim 25:18]. Our Sages tell us that Amalek represents the antithesis of Belief in this world. Amalek denies the existence of a Creator of the world. When Mordechai told Esther that the Jews are suffering because of 'Karahu', he was saying that the Jews were suffering because of a terrible, terrible, lack of Emunah (belief). This is a lack of belief that even in our own times we don't see. What do I mean? We have non-believing Jews today -- are they greater 'believers' than the Jews in the time of Mordechai and Esther? I mean as follows: The Talmud says that the reason the Jews were deserving of destruction, was that "they enjoyed the banquet of that evil one" [Megilla 12a]. What was so bad about partaking in the banquet of Ahashuerus? Was it Treife [non-kosher]? G-d forbid! "The drinking was according to the law, nothing was forced" [Esther 1:8]. It was Glatt [unquestionably kosher]. It was Cholov Yisroel [supervised milk]. It was Yashan [Bread made from permitted grain]. It had all the Hidurim [done in best possible way]. So what was the sin? The sin was that the Jews attended a Feast by the Goyim at which the Goyim took out the Vessels of Service (Klei Sharays) of the Beis HaMikdash and the Jews sat there and kept on feasting! On this block, in this city, across the country - there are Jews that have very little relationship, unfortunately, with Judaism. But if they would go to even a non-Kosher meal and the hosts would take out vessels and say, "These are the utensils of the Holy Temple", which Jew would not react? Which Jew would not get up and yell, "These are my utensils! These are the vessels of our Beis HaMikdash!"? The fact that the Jews in Shushan could sit there through a meal and use those vessels was a terrible sin! What was wrong with them? What was wrong with those Jews was that they were 'hopeless Jews'. They were Jews who had lost all hope. They had counted the 70 years of the Exile, and knew that the Exile was supposed to be over and yet the Redemption had not yet come. Those were Jews who had seen the building of the Second Beis HaMikdash stopped in its tracks. Those were Jews who had come to the conclusion that there would be no Redemption. Those were Jews who said, "Moshiach is not going to come". Those were hopeless Jews. The difference between those Jews and the Jews of our day is that today, as non-observant as a Jew may be, he is at least a believer in Redemption, and he knows that there is hope. That is what the story of Purim restored. There was a decree. The Jews were motivated to do Teshuva [repent] and the Ribbono shel Olam (Master of the World) came back and breathed life into this dead body of the Jewish people and gave them hope. That is what happened on Purim. G-d took His breath of Life and restored hope to a forlorn nation. Rav Hutner said that as we all know, there is a mitzvah to emulate G-d. If on Purim, G-d brought the dead back to life, if He took hopeless and downtrodden Jews and gave them hope, it becomes our mitzvah on Purim to do the same thing. Therefore the Ramba"m says that on Purim there is no greater mitzvah than to gladden the hearts of the unfortunate and downtrodden. The essence of the day is to give hope, meaning, and comfort to broken-spirited people... because that's what G-d did. Therefore, a person who does this will be comparable to G-d.

Sources and Personalities Rav Avraham Ibn Ezra -- (1089-1164) Composed classic commentary on entire Tanach famous for its grammatical and linguistic analysis. Born in Toledo, Spain. Ramba"m -- Rav Moshe ben Maimon (1135-1204); One of Judaism's leading Torah authorities and philosophers. Codified all of Jewish law in his Mishneh Torah. Rav Yitzchok Hutner -- (1907-1980) Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta R. Chaim Berlin, New York; Author of Pachad Yitzchok, his collected discourses.

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One of the clothes of the Kohan Gadol that we read about in Parshas Tetzaveh was the choshen, the breastplate to which the Urim V'tumim were attached. The names of the twelve tribes, along with those of the Avos and the words shivtei yeshurun, were written on the breastplate, and the relevant letters would stand out to form answers to the Kohan Gadol's questions (Yoma 73b). When the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, however, the Urim V'Tumim were no longer (see Yoma 21b) - which made Mordechai's job something of a challenge. Let us explain.

The story of Purim took place at the end of the seventy-year exile after the destruction of the first Beis HaMikdash, in Persia (which had conquered Babylonia). The navi Yirmiyahu had prophesied that the exile would last just seventy years, and this prophecy was well known to Achashveirosh. As a matter of fact, the party with which Megillas Esther begins was a celebration of the (miscalculated) end of the seventy years - and the (apparent) death of the Jewish G-d, who was not able to redeem His people. Did the Jewish People have the self-respect to stay away from such a party? No! They were at this party, enjoying themselves, and that is why Hashem sent Haman to make his decree against Klal Yisroel (Megillah 12a).

Or so Mordechai said, anyway. Many Jews must have disagreed. It must have seemed to many observers of the Shushan political scene that Haman made his decree because Mordechai refused to bow down to him! And that they had had to participate in Achashverosh's party for political reasons. There were no Urim V'Tumim to help Mordechai prove his point. And yet...

Yet, the Gemara tells us that a remarkable thing happened: The Jews listened to Mordechai's interpretation of the calamity threatening them. They fasted a three-day fast, doing teshuva, and re-accepted the Torah with joy (Shabbos 88a). This refers especially to the Oral Torah - with its requisite respect for the chachamim of the Mesorah. For it was primarily the Torah She'bal peh that the Jews had to be coerced into accepting at Har Sinai (Tanhuma, Parshas Noah). Accepting Mordechai's view of the matter, though it was so different from the "obvious" explanation, truly showed a commitment to looking at life through the eyes of the Torah.

Megillas Esther is full of "coincidences". Vashti is killed, Esther becomes queen (nine years before Haman's decree!), Mordechai overhears the plot to kill Achashverosh, Achashverosh "can't sleep" and learns about Mordechai's favor to him the very night that Haman comes to ask him to kill Mordechai, etc.

There is a unique mitzvah on Purim of ad d'lo yada, to reach, through drinking, a state in which one does not know the difference between Haman and Mordechai. Since when does Judaism tell a Jew alter his sehel-his intellect?? The intellect has its limits. The intellect might tell us Mordechai is wrong. The intellect might tell us there is no hope for the Jews. The intellect might tell us Hashem is not involved in our lives.

Hashem's name does not appear in the Megillah. Yet the message of the Megillah is loud and clear: Hashem is in charge, guiding history and its "coincidences", despite all appearances and intellectual reasoning to the contrary. Get the sechel out of the way for a while, so that the neshama can connect to Hashem in a pure way, as is its nature, unfettered by our explanations, rationalizations, and petty concerns.

And that is why we dress up on Purim. The Latin word persona means mask. A person goes through life masking his true self; concerned with image and unable to show his innate spirituality. On Purim we wear costumes, real costumes and real masks - to show that the outer appearance of the person is not what the pnimiyus-the inner self- really is and really aspires to be. Freed from the need to look a certain way, with the intellect helpfully out of the way, our innate ruchniyus can come out - in a way impossible the rest of the year. Happy Purim!

By Rabbi Nahum Spirn Rabbi Spirn teaches at Hebrew Theological College and learns with the Kollel in the afternoon.

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav. [Fourth in a Series about Business Competition]

QUESTION: An employer hires a worker on condition that he will not enter into competition with him at a later date. Years later, the employee wants to start a business on his own which may compete with his former employer. Does the halachah view this as "stealing" from his former employer? May *bais din* protest his behavior? **DISCUSSION:** The answer to the above question depends on the specific circumstances: If the employee was hired as an apprentice and the employer trained him, then the employee may not strike out on his own if he will be competing with his former employer. If, however, the employee was not trained by the employer but was hired as an experienced worker, then it is not considered "stealing" if he decides at a later date to open his own business(1). The difference between the two cases cited above is as follows: When an employee is hired and paid for his services, the employer does not own his services forever. Once his employment is terminated, the former employer cannot control his opportunities indefinitely, or even for a specific period of time. Even if he made a pre-condition with him, it is not halachically binding(2) and *bais din* has no right to stop him from doing as he pleases(3). If, however, the employer trained him, then he may demand payment from the employee for teaching him the trade. His "payment" could be in the form of a promise that he will not compete with him in the future. If the employee breaks his promise, then he is "stealing" a form of "payment" from his former employer. This may be stopped by a *bais din*.

QUESTION: It has become customary for Jewish book publishers and cassette tape producers to prohibit copying or otherwise reproducing any part of their materials under any circumstances. What, if any, is the halachic background for this prohibition? **DISCUSSION:** The poskim, in their written works, hardly deal with this issue. It is important, therefore, to present some of the arguments that may be made on EITHER side of the question(4):

On the one hand, it may be PERMISSIBLE to copy such material based, in part, on the following arguments: **COMPLETE OWNERSHIP** - When one buys a book or a tape he may do with it whatever he pleases. He may destroy it, lend it to a friend, or make a copy either for himself or for a friend. Since, after all, he paid for the item in full, he is entitled to unrestricted use(5); **INTANGIBLES** - Many poskim maintain that it is halachically permissible for one to benefit from "intangibles" such as another person's idea or invention. Once the creator has committed his wisdom or talent to paper or tape, he no longer owns anything of material value. If so, nothing tangible is being taken away from the rightful owner(6).

But a strong case may be made for **PROHIBITING** copying and reproducing materials: **BENEFITING FROM ANOTHER PERSON'S LABOR** - Although, as stated, many poskim do not expressly prohibit benefiting from another person's creativity, when creativity is one's business the rules are different. If by copying someone else's creation you are causing him a business loss, it may be prohibited according to the majority of the poskim(7). [According to a minority view, *bais din* even has the power to force the copier to pay the publisher whatever profit he has generated from his copying(8).]

GOVERNMENT LAW - In many countries the law prohibits copying or reproducing materials in any form. Halachah follows government law whenever the intent is to protect the safety and welfare of the citizenry(9).

RETENTION OF OWNERSHIP - The publisher may claim that his wares are for sale subject to certain restrictions on the buyer. This parallels the Talmudic case where a seller has the right to withhold certain rights from a buyer(10), provided that he does so at the time of sale. Since the publishers state explicitly that copying is forbidden, it may be argued that their statement is tantamount to a "provisional sale"(11). This is known in halachah as *shiur b'mechirah*, i.e., a sale with partial retention of ownership.

INTANGIBLES - Some poskim do not differentiate between tangible or intangible possessions. In their opinion, the owner of intangible items has the halachic power to prohibit others from infringing on his ownership(12).

None of the above arguments, either pro or con, are exhaustive or

completely irrefutable, especially as regards copying for personal use(13). It goes without saying, however, that one who copies a published or a taped work against the wishes of the publisher or producer stands a good chance of transgressing a serious, possibly Biblical, prohibition. Indeed, Harav M. Feinstein(14) writes that one may not copy a Torah cassette tape without the explicit consent of the producer. He goes on to say that one who does so commits a form of theft, but he does not explain the source for his ruling or the reasoning behind it(15). Other prominent rabbonim have rendered similar rulings orally.

Harav S. Vosner(16) allows copying individual pages from a published book for classroom use. A careful reading of his responsum implies, however, that this is permitted only when we can reasonably assume that the publisher would have no objection. If the publisher, however, clearly objects, it seems that it is prohibited to disregard his objection(17). Note, however, that there are certain publishers and producers who do not object to copying or reproducing their work under certain limited conditions, such as classroom use. In any case, one must be particular to ask each company or author if and how they allow copying, for laxness could result in the violation of a serious prohibition. A possible exception to the above is when a book is out of print and no plans for reprinting are underway. One can argue that in such a case the publisher or author has nothing to lose, for there is no possibility for making a sale. Indeed, some poskim advance the argument that the author is pleased when his work is studied or heard by additional people. A *rav* should be consulted.

QUESTION: When faced with a choice, is there any reason to patronize a Jewish-owned store rather than a non-Jewish-owned store?

DISCUSSION: Rashi in Parshas Behar(18) quotes Toras Kohanim that states that one should patronize a Jew when possible. Although this is not recorded as law in the Rambam and Shulchan Aruch, the Chofetz Chaim(19) rules that one should follow this policy. Even if the Jewish owned business is located a bit further away and it will take longer to shop there, it is still a mitzvah to give preference to the Jewish-owned establishment(20). One must shop at Jewish owned store, however, only when the price is the same or slightly higher. If the price is much higher, then there is no mitzvah to patronize it. The poskim do not give a precise definition of what is considered "much higher" and what is considered "slightly higher"(21), and it may, therefore, be up to each individual to decide this for himself. When judging what is considered much higher or slightly higher, the judgment may be based on the total outlay of money, not on the price differences per item. For instance, if shopping at the non-Jewish store will yield an overall savings of \$20, even though the savings per item is only a few cents, \$20 may be considered a significant difference and it would be permissible to shop at the non-Jewish store(22). The same ruling applies to differences in quality of goods or service. If there is only a slight difference, then it is a mitzvah to support the Jewish businessman. If there is a great disparity, then it is not a mitzvah. There is no mitzvah to patronize a Jew who is classified as a *mumar*(23). The rules of preferring a Jew over a non-Jew apply to retail trade only, not to wholesalers(24).

FOOTNOTES: 1 Teshuvos Chasam Sofer C.M. 9. See Teshuvos Minchas Tzvi (Sechirus Poalim) 10. 2 There are, however, halachic means which an employer can ensure that his employer will not compete with him in the future. For the exact method, a *rav* should be consulted. 3 He will, though, have to deal with the fact that he is breaking his word to the employer. We are concerned here only with the employer's legal rights, not the employee's moral obligation. 4 See The Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society # 21, pg. 84-96, for an excellent review of this subject by Rabbi Yisroel Schneider. 5 See Chasam Sofer C.M. O.C. 2 who debates this question. 6 See Beis Yitzchok Y.D. 2:75 who discusses this theory. 7 There is a Talmudic basis for this claim based on the view of Tosfos Kiddushin 59a, in the name of R' Meir, which is endorsed as practical halachah by many of the authorities, see Rashdam 259; Chasam Sofer C.M. 79; Parashas Mordechai C.M. 67; Nachlas Tzvi C.M. 237. M'harsham 1:202. 8 Masa'as Binyomin 27. 9 Beis Yitzchak Y.D. 2:75, based on the Shach Y.D. 165:8. 10 See Bava Metzia 34a where the concept of *shiur* is mentioned, concerning one who sells sheep yet retains for himself its fleece and offspring. See also Bava Basra 63a. The comparison, though, is not exact, since in our case the seller retains something intangible. 11 This argument is advanced by Rabbi N.Z. Goldberg in Techumin, vol. 6, pg. 181-182. See also vol. 7, pg. 360-380. 12 See Shoel u'Ma'ishiv (Kamma, 1:44). See also Minchas Yitzchak 9:153 who proves that this was the view of the Chofetz Chaim. 13 See Pischei Choshen, Geneva, pg. 287, who tends to be lenient when copying tapes for personal use. He does not, however, issue a clear decision. 14 Igros Moshe O.C. 4:40-19. 15 It is also not clear if in the case discussed there the copier bought the tape or merely borrowed it for the sake of copying it. 16 Shevet ha-Levi 4:202. 17 See Pischei Choshen, Geneva, pg. 287, who disagrees altogether with Harav Vosner's lenient ruling concerning copying pages for classroom use. 18 25:14. It is also quoted as practical halachah

in Teshuvos Tashbatz 3:151 and Teshuvos Rama 10. 19 Ahavas Chesed 5:7 and Nesiv ha -Chesed 12. 20 M'haram Shick C.M. 31. 21 See Minchas Yitzchak 3:129 who remains undecided on this issue. 22 See Kol ha-Torah, vol. 42, pg. 305. 23 Teshuvos Chasam Sofer C.M. 134 - since the word "amisecha" appears in the verse which is the source of this halachah; Minchas Yitzchak 3:129. 24 M'haram Shick C.M. 31; Ahavas Chesed 5:3. In honor of the Wedding Anniversary of [HaRav Doniel and Shoshana Schur,]OD MAYAH V'ESRIM SHANA, [with love from their children, grandchildren and great grand children. If you would like to sponsor an issue of Weekly Halacha, please respond by e-mail to jgross@torah.org or call 216-321-6381 for more information. Weekly-Halacha, Copyright (c) 1998 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and Project Genesis, Inc. The author, Rabbi Neustadt, is the principal of Yavne Teachers' College in Cleveland, Ohio. He is also the Magid Shiur of a daily Mishna Berurah class at Congregation Shomre Shabbos. The Weekly-Halacha Series is distributed L'zchus Hayaed Doniel Meir ben Hinda. Weekly sponsorships are available - please mail to jgross@torah.org. Project Genesis: Torah on the Information Superhighway learn@torah.org 6810 Park Heights Ave. http://www.torah.org/ Baltimore, MD 21215

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Megilat Esther "And those who were close to him were Karshina, Sheitar, Admata, Tarshish, Merres, Marsina, Memuchan..." (Esther 1:14)

The midrash writes that corresponding to King Achashveirosh's seven advisors whose names are listed in the above verse were seven angels who stood before G-d and defended Bnei Yisrael. Each angel pleaded with Hashem using words related to the name of one of the seven advisors. One said, "If Achashveirosh defeats Bnei Yisrael, who will sacrifice before You one year -old calves?" (Referred to in Hebrew as "Par ben shanah" / similar to the name "Karshina") The second said, "Who will sacrifice before You two doves?" ("Shtei Torim" / "Sheitar") The third said, "Who will build for You an earthen altar?" ("Mizbach Adamah" / "Admata") The fourth said, "Who will wear the bigdei kehunah/priestly garments, which contain the gem called 'Tarshish'?" The fifth said, "Who will stir the blood of the sacrifices?" ("Mimarres" / "Merres") The sixth said, "Who will stir the flour offerings?" ("Mimarres" / "Marsina") Finally, the seventh said, "Who will prepare the altar before You?" ("Maicheen" / "Memuchan") When the angels concluded their pleas, Hashem answered, "Bnei Yisrael are My sons. They are My friends. They are My beloved..." Why, of all of the mitzvot, did the angels single out these seven? Why didn't they ask, "Who will put on tefilin? Who will lift the lulav?" R' Eliyahu Hakohen z"l explains: Chazal teach that the day on which the Mishkan was completed was as happy in G-d's "eyes" as the day on which He created the world. When Adam was created, G-d had great expectations for his future. Using his G-d given free will, Adam unfortunately "frustrated" those plans (by eating from the Eitz Ha'daat), but mankind was given a second chance when Bnei Yisrael received the Torah and built the Mishkan. The day on which the Tabernacle was dedicated was therefore as auspicious as the very day on which the world was created. Achashveirosh knew that. As the gemara notes, the purpose of the party described at the beginning of the Megillah was to celebrate the fact that, according to Achashveirosh's calculations, the appointed time for the end of the exile had come and gone without the Bet Hamikdash - successor to the Mishkan - being rebuilt. He therefore donned the garments of the Kohen Gadol (which had been captured in Nevuchadnetzar's war on Yerushalayim) and defiantly celebrated the apparent victory of evil over good. [The Talmud explains how he miscalculated the date of Bnei Yisrael's redemption.] The angels said to G-d, "Achashveirosh is celebrating the demise of the Mishkan and its service. Haman says You are sleeping. Tell us: Whose plan for the Mishkan will stand - Achashveirosh's or Yours?" (Sefer Midrash Talpiot) Hamaayan, Copyright (c) 1998 by Shlomo Katz and Project Genesis, Inc. Posted by Alan Broder, ajb@torah.org. Project Genesis: Torah on the Information Superhighway

THOUGHTS ON THE DAILY DAF brought to you by Kollel Iyun Hadaf of Har Nof Rosh Kollel: Rav Mordecai Kornfeld

Shabbos 88 FORCED TO ACCEPT THE TORAH

QUESTION: The Gemara says that at Har Sinai, Hashem held the mountain above the Jewish people and they accepted the Torah under pressure. The Gemara explains that because of this involuntary acceptance of the Torah, the Jewish people had a "Moda'a Rabah l'Oraisa" -- a claim of immunity for any transgressions that they might commit. This "Moda'ah Rabah" lasted until the Jewish people willfully accepted the Torah during the time of Purim, nearly a thousand years later. If the Jewish people had this claim of immunity due to their forced acceptance of the Torah, why were they punished during the interim years for their sins, before they accepted the Torah willfully? In addition, what does it mean that they were forced to accept the Torah? The Torah tells us that the Jewish people exclaimed, "Na'aseh v'Nishma," which implies that they willfully accepted the Torah!

ANSWERS: (a) TOSFOS (DH Moda'a) answers that although the "Moda'ah Rabah" vindicated them from punishments for most sins, they *were* punished for the sin of Avodah Zarah. The reason is because the Jewish people did accept upon themselves, willfully, not to practice idolatry.

As for how the Gemara can say that their acceptance of the Torah was against their will when we know that they said "Na'aseh v'Nishma," Tosfos explains that initially, before they stood at Har Sinai, they said "Na'aseh v'Nishma," intending to accept the Torah willfully. However, when they

stood at Har Sinai, Hashem had to hold the mountain over them lest they change their minds out of fright, when they saw the mountain afire and the full awe of the Divine presence (which caused their souls to leave their bodies). (b) The MIDRASH TANCHUMA (Parshas Noach) explains that they willfully accepted Torah sh'bi'Ch'tav, the Written Torah (the Pentateuch). If so, it was for the laws of Torah sh'bi'Ch'tav that they were punished. The "Moda'a" was for Torah sh'Ba'al Peh, the Oral Torah, which they were forced to accept. They did not accept it willfully because it is much more difficult. (c) The RAMBAN and RASHBA explain that when they accepted the Torah, they accepted to keep it in the land of Israel. The land of Israel was being given to them only on condition that they keep the Torah (see Tehilim 105:24). The "Moda'a" was in effect only after they were exiled from the land (see Sanhedrin 105a). On Purim they accepted the Torah out of love even in the Diaspora. They wanted to never again be separated from Hashem, so they accepted the Torah such that even if they must go into exile again, they will still remain loyal to the Torah. Thus, the "Moda'a" was no longer in force. The explanation of the Ramban is consistent with his explanation (Vayikra 18:25, Bereishis 26:5) that the primary goals of the Mitzvos are fulfilled only in the land of Israel. Although we must observe the Mitzvos outside of Israel as well, nevertheless the observance of the Torah does not accomplish as much in the spiritual realms when done outside of Israel as it accomplishes when done in Israel.

http://www.virtual.co.il/torah/tanach/special/purim.txt THE TANACH STUDY CENTER
[http://www.virtual.co.il/torah/tanach] In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag MEGILLAT
ESTHER, ITS 'HIDDEN' MESSAGE

Is the Megilla a satire? It certainly sounds like one, but why would a satire be included in the Tanach? In the following shiur we attempt to link this satire to the historical setting of Megilla.

PART I - THE HISTORICAL AND PROPHETIC SETTING We begin our study with one of the most well-known psukim of the Megilla: "Ish YEHUDI haya be -SHUSHAN Ha-BIRA - u-shmo MORDECHEI." (Esther 2:5) Even though this pasuk is proudly read aloud by the entire congregation, most people do not appreciate its 'sting'. However, an ear tuned to the prophecies of Zecharya and familiar with Tanach immediately catches its irony: ISH YEHUDI - implies MORE than simply someone who is Jewish; HA'BIRA - does NOT mean the capital city; and MORDECHAI - is NOT a Jewish name! * The phrase ISH YEHUDI is mentioned only ONE other time in Tanach - in Zecharya 8:23. There it describes a Jew leading tens of non-Jewish followers seeking God in Jerusalem. * The word HA-BIRA in Divrei Ha'yamim describes specifically the BET ha'MIKDASH (the Temple) which King David has prepared for his son Shlomo to build (see 29:1 & 29:19). Prior to the time period of Megilat Esther, the word BIRA finds no other mention in Tanach. * The name MORDECHEI is probably the most provocative word in the entire Megilla for it stems from the name of the Babylonian deity - Marduk. No decent Jew (prior to the Babylonian exile) would have dared giving his son such a name. [Today, it would be comparable to naming a Jewish son: Christopher.] This is not the only pasuk in the Megilla which is filled with irony and satire. In fact, the style of the entire megilla is satirical. Nonetheless, the Megilla is part of the Tanach, and as such, it must contain a PROPHETIC message. How are we to 'uncover' a prophetic message which is 'hidden' by satire? To decipher the prophetic message of the Megilla, we must take the following steps: 1) Base our assumption that the Megilla must contain a prophetic message. 2) Review both the historical and prophetic setting of the time period of the Megilla. 3) Search for a thematic connection between this setting and the story in the Megilla. 4) Support this theme with both Midrashim and textual and thematic parallels from other seforim in Tanach. 5) Explain WHY the Megilla employs this unique style. 6) Explain how the celebration of Purim relates to this theme.

PROPHETIC HISTORY Every sefer in Tanach must have a prophetic message, otherwise it would not have been included in the canon. In regard to the Megilla, it is usually understood that the Megilla teaches us HOW to see the 'hidden hand' of G-d in a series of historical events which ultimately lead to Bnei Yisrael's salvation. In fact, this is usually the explanation given for its name - ESTHER - which may stem from the Hebrew verb "Thastir" - to hide. The Megilla teaches us that we must always find and recognize the hidden hand of God in our history. Why then is the Megilla not more specific in this regard? Why is God's Name not mentioned? Most every other sefer in Tanach expresses this point explicitly. Why is MEGILLAT ESTHER different? Furthermore, most all other seforim in Tanach explain not only WHY and HOW God saves Am Yisrael, but also HOW and WHY He PUNISHES them. This theme of divine retribution is explicit in the Torah in the TOCHACHOT (Vayikra 26:3-46, Dvarim 11:13-17, 28:1-69, etc.) and reiterated over and over again by all of the prophets. In fact Chazal's explanation of the name ESTHER reflects this very same concept: "Esther min ha-Torah mi'nayin?" [What is the Torah source for the story of Esther?] "v'Anochi haster asteir panai ba-yom ha-hu" [I will surely hide my face from you on that day.] (Dvarim 31:18) Although it is commonly understood that the name ESTHER relates to the 'hidden' nature of Am Yisrael's SALVATION from Haman, the Midrash quotes a pasuk which implies quite the opposite. As we will now show, the context of this pasuk relates to HOW and WHY God will PUNISH Bnei Yisrael: "And God told Moshe, after you die... this nation will leave Me and break My covenant... And My anger will be kindled against them on that day and I will forsake them. ["v'HISTARTI panai"] and I will HIDE My face from them... and many evils and troubles shall befall them - so that they will say on that day, are not these evils among us, because God is NOT among us. V'anochi HASTER ASTEIR pa'nai ba'yom ha-hu - and I will HIDE My face from them on

that day because of all the bad that they have done... Now write down this SONG and teach it to Bnei Yisrael, so that it will be My witness..." (Dvarim 31:16-18) In these psukim, God warns Bnei Yisrael that a time may come when God will NOT come to aid of His people. He may punish them for leaving Him by appearing not to care about them ("hester panim"). SHIRAT HA'AZINU teaches Bnei Yisrael how to relate to such situations (see 31:19-20). In that song, we are told: "Z'chor yemot olam, binu shnot dor va-dor..." (Devarim 32:7) [Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past.] The SHIRA teaches us to reflect on our history in order to realize WHY we are being punished. If something goes wrong, it is Am Yisrael who is at fault, not God (see 32:5-6).

Even though God may hide His face, SHIRAT HA'AZINU does promise that God will ultimately redeem His people, however, not necessarily because they deserve redemption. Rather, God will have mercy on our pitiful predicament (see 32:37-38, also 32:26-27) and save us at the 'last minute'.

This is precisely the message of the prophets. They explain to Bnei Yisrael WHAT they have done wrong - WHY they are being punished. Prophecy teaches man not only to thank God for salvation, but to recognize his faults and correct his mistakes. Therefore, precisely the pasuk in Chumash which alludes to Megillat Esther implies that we search the Megilla to understand WHY Bnei Yisrael are being punished - why did they reach a predicament of imminent destruction during this time period? Although the Megilla offers no EXPLICIT reason, that reason should be IMPLICIT. Therefore, we begin our study of the Megilla by examining its prophetic and historical setting in search of that reason. HISTORIC AND PROPHETIC SETTING To pinpoint the time period of the Megilla, we must continue the pasuk mentioned in our introduction: "ISH YEHUDI was in Shushan...whose name was Mordechai... ASHER HOGLA M'YERUSHALAYIM - who was exiled from Jerusalem together with the Exile of YECHONYA Melech Yehuda - who was exiled by Nevuchadnetzar King of Bavel" (2:5-6). [Note that the shoshet g.l.h. (exiled) is used FOUR times in this pasuk!] This pasuk not only sets our time frame to the Babylonian Exile ("galut Bavel"), it also contains textual similarities to a significant pasuk in Sefer Yirmiyahu: "Now these are the words of the book that Yirmiyahu sent from Jerusalem to the elders of the Exile, to the priests, and to the prophets and to all the people - ASHER HOGLA - who were exiled by Nevuchadnetzar from YERUSHALAYIM - who were exiled to Bavel with YEHOYACHIN... (Yr. 29:1-2) [Note: If you are not familiar with this time period, it is highly recommended that you read Yirmiyahu 29:1-15 in its entirety before continuing. See also Kings II 23:31-25:12.] The background to Yirmiyahu's letter (see 28:1-29:15) is his dispute with the false prophets who claim that the Exile of Yehoyachin will be returning within a year or two. Yirmiyahu argues that their stay in Bavel will be for at least SEVENTY years. Therefore, he encourages the Exile to set up homes and families in Bavel for they are the 'long term' future of Am Yisrael. Indeed they are supposed to return to Yerushalayim, but only AFTER the seventy years of Bavel's reign are over. To appreciate this prophetic setting, we must note Yirmiyahu's description of God's EXPECTATIONS from this Exile at the conclusion of the seventy year period: "Thus said the Lord, when the 70 years are complete, I shall remember you and keep my promise to return you to this land... [At that time...] you shall CALL OUT to Me - you shall come and PRAY to Me - and I will hear you...and you will ASK FOR Me and FIND Me; IF YOU WILL SEARCH FOR ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART. I will be there for you, and I shall turn away your captivity and GATHER YOU FROM ALL THE NATIONS wherein you may be dispersed... and I will RETURN YOU to the land from which you were exiled..." (29:10-14)

According to Yirmiyahu, the return of the Exile after seventy years would not be automatic. Rather, it was God's hope that their return would be catalyzed by sincere repentance and a YEARNING to return. In other words, God intended for the Babylonian Exile, as the word 'exile' implies, to be TEMPORARY. People don't stay in 'exile' unless they are FORCED to stay. Exile implies that one CANNOT return to his own land. [Otherwise the translation of "galut" should be 'DIAPSORA' / hey, not a bad ideal!] This prophetic message is congruent with primary theme of Chumash that God desires for the Jewish people to become His 'model' nation - a "mamlechet kohanim ve-goy kadosh" (see Shmot 19:4-6) - to become a vehicle through which all nations will come to recognize God (see Devarim 4:5-8). During the time period of the first Temple, the BET HA'MIKDASH served as a symbol of this purpose. [See previous shiurim on Parshiot Reay, Noach, and Vayetze. Recall that the Mikdash is referred to as: "ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem le-shakhen SHMO sham / see Dvarim 12:5-14.] However, in the time period of Yirmiyahu, God decided to destroy that Temple and exile his people for they no longer fulfilled their purpose. Bnei Yisrael had become so corrupt that rehabilitative punishment became necessary. According to Yirmiyahu, God's hope was for the Exile to 'learn its lesson' in Bavel and then, after the seventy years were over, they would be spiritually prepared and ANXIOUS to return to their homeland and to reconstruct its symbolic shrine - the Temple in Jerusalem. Precisely as Yirmiyahu had predicted, a historical opportunity to return was created when Bavel fell to Persia (see Yirmiyahu 25:11-12, Ezra 1:1). Seventy years after Bavel rose to power, they were defeated by KORESH (=Cyrus the Great), the first king of the PERSIAN Empire. In the first year of his reign, Koresh issued his famous proclamation allowing and encouraging ALL of the Jews of the Persian empire to RETURN to Jerusalem and REBUILD the Temple. The prophets clearly understood this historic decree as the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecy (see Ezra 1:1-4, II Divrei Ha'yamim 36:20-23). As God had promised, the time of redemption from the Babylonian Exile had come. Unfortunately, the response of the Exile to this historic opportunity was less than enthusiastic. A group of some forty thousand did return; however, the majority of Am Yisrael remained in Bavel. For an insight into the tragedy of the missed opportunity we need only quote the explanation given by Rav Yehuda Ha-Levi in Sefer Ha-Kuzari (II.24): "Had the entire nation enthusiastically answered the divine call to return to the Land, the idyllic prophecies of the RETURN TO ZION would have been fulfilled and the SHCHINA would have returned. In reality, however, only a small portion returned. The majority remained in Bavel, willfully accepting the exile, as they did not wish to leave their homes & businesses etc..." (sounds familiar...) those who did return lacked enthusiasm. The apathy of the returnees is echoed in the prophecies of Chagai and Zecharya, the prophets of this time period. (see Chagai 1:1-3; 2:3 see also Zecharya 4:10; 6:15; 7:4-7; 8:6.)

THE THEME OF THE MEGILLA AND ITS SATIRE How does all of this relate to Megilla Esther? The story of Megillat Esther takes place during the PERSIAN time period and thus AFTER the time period when the Jews SHOULD HAVE returned to Jerusalem. Even though there is a controversy concerning precisely which Persian King Achashveirosh was, he most certainly reigned AFTER Koresh (the first Persian king). Considering that Yirmiyahu's seventy years are over and Am Yisrael could have returned to their homeland, why are so many Jews living in Shushan and

all over the Persian empire during the time period of Achashveirosh? Based on this historic and prophetic setting, it is only logical to assume that the impending destruction of Am Yisrael by Haman may be a Divine punishment for their apathy. The Jews preferred SHUSHAN over YERUSHALAYIM, they preferred to subjugate themselves to ACHASHVEYROSH rather than respond to GOD's call to return to their land, they preferred his PALACE over the BET HA'MIKDASH! Even though this prophetic message is not explicit in the Megilla, we will now show that it may be hidden in its satire. [Note: Before we continue, it is important to clarify a problematic issue. We are about to relate many elements in the story of the Megilla to a satiric commentary on Persian Jewry. This does not mean that these events did not actually occur. The story of the Megilla is true and based on historic fact. However its prophetic message is conveyed through the use of literary tools, such as satire and irony. Often, criticism is better received when delivered implicitly rather than explicitly.]

WHOS THE KING? For a start, we will bring two examples where there appears to be an 'echo' of God's voice behind that of Achashveirosh. The story of Vashti may reflect God's utter disappointment with Am Yisrael for not returning to Israel to fulfill their divine purpose, to become God's 'model' nation: "[Vashti was called to] COME to KING and show ALL THE NATIONS her beauty... but she did not come as the King commanded, and he became very angry..." (see Esther 1:9-12) Is not Vashti's behavior similar to that of Am Yisrael? Is not the King's conclusion similar to God's? Is not the fear that all the women in the Persian kingdom will now disobey their husbands ironic? If Am Yisrael (destined to be an "or-la-goyim") does not respond to its divine call, what could God expect from other nations? [Note that in earlier prophecy, Am Yisrael is often compared to God's wife - see Hoshea 2:4,16-18. See also Zecharya 1:1-3, note "shuvu ayli..." and "va'yiktzo", compare 1:12.] After all, whose is the real KING in the Megilla? [Chazal even suggest the possibility that "ha-melech" in the megilla may be "kodesh", as it may be referring to God and not to Achashverosh.]...] Even Haman's petition to Achashverosh to destroy Am Yisrael may echo a similar complaint that God may have against His own nation: "There is a certain nation scattered among the nations whose laws are different than any other nation, but the laws of the King they do not keep, and it is not worthwhile for the King to leave them be." (3:8) In a certain way, Haman's accusation is similar to God's threat in SHIRAT HA'AZINU to destroy AM Yisrael for not keeping His laws (32:26). After all, what purpose is there for God to keep His people if they refuse to obey Him? Even though these first two examples may appear a bit 'stretched', a more convincing textual proof is found in the parallel between Achashverosh's palace and the Bet Mikdash. This parallel is significant for it reflects the fact the Bnei Yisrael had neglected the Bet Ha'Mikdash in Yerushalayim, preferring instead to be dependent on the palace of Achashveirosh. We begin by comparing the overall structure of each:

KODESH K'DOSHIM - CHATZER PNIMIT The Megilla refers to the most inner chamber of the king's palace as the "chatzer ha-pnimit" (5:1), where entry to anyone is forbidden under threat of death - unless CALLED to enter (as Esther feared in 4:11). Here we find an obvious parallel to the KODESH ha'KODASHIM in the MIKDASH (Purim - kippurim!).

KODESH - CHATZER CHITZONA The 'waiting area' outside the inner chamber is called the "chatzer ha-chitzona" (6:4). Here "roey pnei ha'Melech (1:14) like Haman himself are allowed to enter freely. This is parallel to the KODESH where KOHANIM are permitted to enter. [See description of the Temple in Yechezkel 40:18-19.]

AZARA - SHAAAR BET HA'MELECH In front of the palace is "shaar bet ha'melech" where people like Mordechai are permitted to stand (2:18,21). However, here one must dress properly ("aveilt" is not permitted), therefore he can not be there dressed in sackcloth (see 4:2!). This area is parallel to the Azara in the Mikdash.

YERUSHALAYIM - REHOV HA'YR SHUSHAN This is the area "lifnei shaar ha'melech" (4:2) or "rehov ha'yr" (4:6) where Mordechai can dress in sackcloth. This is parallel the city of Yerushalayim surrounding the Mikdash. This parallel is strengthened by the Megilla's use of the word BIRA to describe SHUSHAN. As we explained in our introduction, in Divrei Ha'yamim, the only other time in Tanach prior to Megillat Esther where this word is mentioned, BIRA describes specifically the BET HA'MIKDASH, and in the context of its purpose to serve as a national center and symbol of God's Name. [see DH I 29:1,19, you should read from 29:1-25 to see the context. (You'll find there a familiar passage from davening, which maybe you will now understand a little better.)] Other parallels to Mikdash are found in the use of key words such as "yekar ve-tiferet" (1:4); "tekhelet, butz, ve-argaman" (1:6) in the Megilla's description of the king's party. [Based on the shukim, the gemara (Megilla 12a) claims that Achashveirosh donned the "bigdei Kohen Gadol" at his party!] Even the 6-month party followed by a seven day special celebration may parallel the six months that it took to build the Mishkan (from Yom Kippur till Rosh Chodesh Nisan) followed by the seven day "miluim" ceremony. Likewise, Chazal explain, "ve-keilim mi-keilim shonim" (1:7) as referring to the vessels of the Bet Ha-Mikdash. Chazal even suggest that Haman's decree may have been Am Yisrael's punishment for drinking from these 'keilim' or alternately for their participation in and enjoyment of the royal party (see Megilla 12a). [Note that according to pshat, the "keilim" had returned with Sheshbatzar during the time of Koresh (see Ezra 1:7-8). However, the Midrash emphasizes the thematic connection between the party and Bnei Yisrael's lack of enthusiasm to build the Mikdash.]

Hence we can conclude that the Megilla's satire suggests that during this time period Am Yisrael had replaced: * God with Achashveirosh; * God's Temple with Achashveirosh's palace; and * Yerushalayim ha-BIRA with Shushan ha-BIRA! ["v'nahafokh hu"]

70 DAYS / 70 YEARS Another seemingly unimportant detail in the Megilla concerning WHEN the two decrees were sent may also allude to this prophetic backdrop. Recall that the original decree calling for the destruction of the Jews was sent out on the 13th day of Nisan (3:12). Several days later Haman was hanged and Esther pleaded from the king to repeal this decree (8:3-6). Achashveirosh agreed, HOWEVER, the actual letters were not sent out until the 23rd of Sivan - some TWO MONTHS later (8:9)! What took so long? By carefully comparing these two dates, we again find an amazing reminder of Yirmiyahu's prophecy of the SEVENTY years. Between the 13th of Nisan until the 23rd of Sivan - 70 DAYS elapsed (17+30+23). During these seventy days, all of the Jews throughout the Persian empire were under the tremendous peril of impending destruction, thinking that their doom was inevitable. Could this be an ironic reminder to the Jewish people that they had not heeded Yirmiyahu's prophecy of what he expected from Bnei Yisrael once the seventy years had expired (see 29:10-14)? A similar concept of suffering for a sin, a day for a

year (and vice versa), is found twice in Tanach in related circumstances. After the sin of the "meraglim", the forty days are replaced by the punishment of forty years of wandering. Here, too, the nation opted not to fulfill their divine destiny, preferring a return to Egypt over the conquest of Eretz Yisrael. Yechezkel, too, is required to suffer 'a day for each year.' [For 390 days followed by an additional 40 days, he must lie on his side and repent for the sins of Israel and Yehuda that led to the destruction of Yerushalayim. (Yechezkel 4:1-14!)] A similar claim is made by the Midrash which suggests that Achashverosh threw his 180 day party in celebration of the fact that Yirmiyahu's seventy years were over and the Bet Ha-Mikdash was NOT rebuilt. In pshat, this explanation is unreasonable. Why should the most powerful king of civilization worry about the prophecies of Yirmiyahu, while the Jews themselves do not listen to him? On the level of drash, however, this explanation is enlightening. Chazal, in the spirit of the megilla - "ve-nahafokh hu" - put into Achashverosh's mind what should have been in the mind of Am Yisrael, i.e. the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecy of seventy years and the desire to return.

PESACH AND PURIM Based on our understanding thus far, it is understandable why Israel's salvation from Haman's decree comes only after Am Yisrael collectively accept a three day fast. This fast takes place on the 15,16, & 17th of Nisan. Interestingly enough, the events that led to the repeal of Haman's decree take place 'davka' during the holiday of Pesach - the holiday on which we celebrate our freedom from subjugation to a foreign nation and the beginning of our journey to the Promised Land.

WHY SATIRE? We have shown that the Megilla is laced with allusions to the fact that Am Yisrael does not answer its divine call during the Persian time period. Why is this message only HINTED at but not explicitly stated by Chazal? Most probably for the same reason that it is not explicit in the Megilla. This is the power of satire. In order to strengthen the message, a powerful point is not explicitly stated, but only alluded to. The direct approach used by the other 48 neviim of Tanach had not been very successful ("gedola hasarat ha-taba'at shel Haman yoter mi-48 neviim..."). It seems that Anshei Knesset Ha-gdola, in their decision to canonize Megillat Esther, had hoped that a satirical message would be more powerful than a direct one.

PART II - MEGILLAT ESTHER & SEFER ZECHARYA In Part I we explained how the satire in the Megilla may reflect a prophetic censure of Am Yisrael in Bavel for not returning to Yerushalayim when the opportunity arose during the time of Koresh. In Part II, by identifying which Persian King Achashveyrosh was, we will find additional textual and thematic support of the assumptions made in Part I. The topic of the history of the Persian time period is very complicated and the subject of a major controversy between CHAZAL and the historians. To explain this controversy is beyond the scope of this shiur, instead we will simply present the two conflicting opinions concerning WHEN Achashveyrosh reigned. **CHAZAL'S OPINION - BEFORE DARYAVESH** According to Seder Olam (the majority opinion in Chazal), Achashveyrosh was the Persian King immediately AFTER Koresh, but BEFORE Daryavesh, and thus the story of the Megilla takes place after "shivat tzion" but before the second Bet Ha'Mikdash is actually built. According to this opinion, the events of the Megilla had a tremendous effect on the situation in Yerushalayim. Only two years after the story of Megilla, King Darius, son of Esther gives the Jews permission to return and build the Second Temple. Construction began during the second year of Darius (=Daryavesh).

The events of the Megilla also appear to have catalyzed a major aliya movement. According to Chazal, Ezra's aliya from Bavel took place only a few years afterward, during the seventh year of his reign of Daryavesh (who Chazal identify with Artachshastah see Ezra 7:1-9). Thus, according to Chazal's opinion, the events of the Megilla INDEED had a major effect on the rebuilding of the Temple and "shivat tzion" - the return to Zion.

THE HISTORIAN'S OPINION - AFTER DARYAVESH According to most historians (and a minority opinion in Chazal), Achashveyrosh was the Persian king who succeeded Darius (486 - 465 BCE), and thus the story of the Megilla takes place some forty years AFTER the second was built, and thus after Chagai & Zecharya's plea to return and fulfill the potential of Bayit Sheni. [Its construction began in 521 BCE/2nd year of Darius, the story in the Megilla takes place in 474 BCE.] According to this opinion, no major event takes place immediately after the events in the Megilla. In fact, over two decades pass before a new wave of olim come with Ezra and Nechemya to help strengthen the city of Yerushalayim. [The historians identify Artachshasta with Artaxerxes, not the same king as Darius.] If our assumption concerning the satire of the Megilla is correct, why don't we find a mass aliya movement immediately after the miracle of Purim. [Jews of the twentieth century could ask themselves a similar question!] Furthermore, according to either opinion, shouldn't the manner by which we celebrate Purim relate to this theme and satire? Finally, why is it necessary to celebrate Purim for all generations? Purim is not the only time in our history when we were saved from terrible enemies. Chazal go even one step further. They claim that Purim will be the ONLY holiday kept at the time of the final redemption! (See Rambam hilchot Megilla, Esther 9:28 and commentaries).

THE MEGILLA AND SEFER ZECHARYA To our surprise, the prophecies of Zecharya contain several interesting parallels to the Megilla. We posit that these parallels are intentional. In doing so, the author of Megillat Esther (most probably a member of "anshei knesset ha'gdola" during the time period of Ezra) suggests that Am Yisrael's predicament during the time period of Achashveyrosh may have been caused because Zecharya's prophecies were not taken seriously! To appreciate the message, we must study Zecharya chapters 7->8, the same chapter which describes an ISH YEHUDI (8:23).

DO WE FAST ON TISHA B'AV? The first six chapters of Sefer Zecharya focus on one primary theme - the return of the SHCHINA to Yerushalayim. Its return, Zecharya warns, will be a function of Am Yisrael's covenantal commitment (see 6:15). Redemption is indeed possible, however Zecharya insists that both spiritual AND physical return are necessary: "shuvu eilai.. ve-ashuva aleikhem" (1:3, see also 8:7-8). [It is highly suggested that you read at least the first two chapters of Zecharya (note "hadasiim" and "ish rochev al sus" in chapter 1, and "prazot teshev yerushalaim" in chapter 2) and then chapters 7->8 before continuing.] Construction of the Temple begins in the second year of Daryavesh. Two years later, an official delegation from Bavel arrives in Jerusalem to ask Zecharya a very fundamental question: "Ha-evkeh be-chodesh ha-chamishi?" Should we continue to fast - in the 5th month (the fast of Tisha b'Av)? (see 7:3)

The question appears to be quite legitimate. After all, now that the Temple is rebuilt, there is no reason to fast on Tisha b'Av anymore! However, Zecharya's lengthy and official reply (7:4-8:23) to this question, his prophetic answer to the Babylonian exile, contains an eternal message that relates

to the nature of the ideal redemption process. By analyzing Zecharya's answer, we will find the basis for certain "minhagim" (customs) of Purim. From Zecharya 7:4-7 it appears that God is quite disturbed by their question, for the Jews in Bavel should have been excited about the prospect of returning to Jerusalem. Instead, their only interest was whether or not they have to fast. In the eyes of the prophet, their question reflected a general attitude to the entire redemption process.

Zecharya answers that the fast of Tisha B'Av was not a divine commandment - rather it was a minhag instituted by Chazal to remember not only the Temple's destruction, but also the reason WHY the churban took place (see 7:5-6). Thus, God explains, feasting or fasting is man's decision while God is interested in something much more basic - that Bnei Yisrael keep the mitzvot which they had neglected during the first Temple period. Zecharya continues his answer with two chapters of 'musar' (rebuke) in which he emphasizes the most basic mitzvot which Bnei Yisrael must keep in order for the SHCHINA to return (see 7:8-10): "EMET u-mishpat SHALOM shifitu be-sha'areikhem, ve-chesed ve-rachamim asu ISH et ACHIV. Almana, ve-yatom ve-ANI al ta'ashoku..." (7:8-10) - Truth, social justice, helping the poor and needy, and thinking kindly of one's neighbor, etc.

God is anxious for His SHCHINA to return. He wants Yerushalayim to become a city characterized by truth (8:1-3). God foresees the return the exiles from lands in the east and west. With their return, God and His nation will become once again covenantal partners, through "EMET & TZDACA" (8:7-8). Finally, after many words of encouragement and repeated 'musar' (see 8:11-17), God finally answers the original question concerning the fast days. Should Am Yisrael return to Israel and keep "EMET ve-SHALOM, the four fast days commemorating the destruction of Yerushalayim will become holidays: "TZOM ha'.... [The FOUR FAST DAYS] will be instead for Yehuda days of celebration... [on the condition that] they will love EMET & SHALOM" (see 8:18-19)

Only through EMET & SHALOM, Zecharya's theme in these two chapters, will the redemption process be complete. Then, numerous people from many great nations will come to Yerushalayim in search of God. They will gather around the "ISH YEHUDI", asking for his guidance, for they will have heard that God is with His people. (8:20-23) Had Am Yisrael heeded this prophetic call in the time of Koresh and Daryavesh, then they would not have been scattered among 127 provinces during the time of Achashveyrosh. Instead of celebrating with the Persians in Shushan, the Jews would have been celebrating at the Bet Ha'Mikdash in Yerushalayim. According to this explanation, we can explain Zecharya's prophecy as follows: Zecharya tells Bnei Yisrael that if they show their devotion to God, i.e. if they practice "EMET u-mishpat SHALOM", then the fast days, the days of crying for Jerusalem, will become HOLIDAYS instead. One could suggest that the Mordechai's institution of the yearly celebration of Purim reflects this prophecy for we find the turn around from "yagon" to "simcha", from "MOURNING to HOLIDAY" (see Esther 9:22). Purim may symbolize the manner in which the fast days for Jerusalem will one day become holidays. This could explain the reason for the special mitzvot that we keep on Purim. They reflect Zecharya's repeated message of helping the needy (matanot le-evyonim/ note 7:10) and thinking nicely of one's neighbors (mishloach manot ISH LE-RE'EIHU / note 8:16-17).

Once a year we must remind ourselves of the most basic mitzvot that we must keep IN ORDER that we become WORTHY of returning to Yerushalayim and rebuilding the Bet ha'Mikdash. Certain halachot instituted by Chazal reflect this message. Shushan Purim is REPLACED with Yerushalayim Purim for the walled cities from the time of Yehoshua bin Nun replace the walled city of SHUSHAN! [see Yehoshua 21:42 and its context, compare to Esther 9:2]

SHALOM V'EMET Although this explanation for certain minhagim of Purim may seem a bit 'stretched', textual proof is found in the closing psukim of the Megilla (9:29-32 / read it carefully!). Mordechai and Esther need to send out a second 'igeret' explaining and giving authority ("tokef") to the minhagim of Purim explained in the first 'igeret'. What was the content of this special second 'igeret'? To our surprise, one short phrase: "Divrei SHALOM ve-EMET"! These two key words point directly to Zecharya's prophecy about the fast days becoming holidays (read 8:18-19 again)! They explain not only WHEN, but also WHY the fast days will become holidays - i.e. if Bnei Yisrael keep SHALOM and EMET! The second 'igeret' may simply be an explanation of the purpose of the minhagim of Purim - Mordechai and Esther use this letter to explain to Am Yisrael WHY Purim has been established - a yearly reminder of the prophecies of Zecharya which remain unfulfilled.

The continuation of this "igeret" strengthens this claim. Under what authority ("tokef") does Mordechai institute these halachot? "ka'asher kiymu al nafsham divrei ha-TZOMOT ve-za'akatum" (9:31) [Compare these psukim carefully to Zecharya 8:18-19.] Recall, God had told Zecharya that fast days and feast days are up to man to decide. Now, according to the second 'igeret', just like ("ka'asher") the prophets instituted four fast days in order that we remember Yerushalayim, Mordechai institutes a FEAST DAY to remember Yerushalayim. Most probably, after the events of the Megilla, a mass return to Yerushalayim was not realistic possible. Nonetheless, Mordechai wanted to institute a holiday which would remind Am Yisrael that should this opportunity one day return, we will know how to relate to it properly. Sefer Zecharya and its theme of "shalom v'emet" will be our guide. [This interpretation explain why the celebration of Purim will remain even after the redemption is complete.] Purim, therefore, has deep meaning for all generations. Its message may have been 'hiding' behind the costumes, the drinking ("ad de -LO yada"), the "purim Torah", and "shalach manot". It may have been lost within our ignorance of Tanach. Its message, however, is eternal, just as our aspirations for Yerushalayim are eternal.

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[Didn't make it into Fri. AM distribution] mj-ravtorah@shamash.org March 06, 1998 purim.98 Shiur HaRav Soloveichik ZT"L on Inyanei Purim (Shiur date: 3/5/74)

The Rambam in Hilchos Megila Vchanukah devotes the first 2 chapters of Hilchos Megila and Purim and the last 2 chapters to Hilchos Chanukah. Why did he link them together? The Shulchan Aruch reverses this order and places Hilchos Chanukah before Hilchos Purim. Historically, Purim preceded Chanukah by some 200 years. The Rambam in Hilchos Chanukah

links Chanukah to Purim (3:3) and says that anyone who is obligated to fulfill Mitzvas Megila is obligated in Mitzvas Hadlakas Ner Chanukah. Why does the Rambam emphasize so strongly this link between Chanukah and Purim?

The Rambam in the preamble to Hilchos Megila and Hilchos Chanukah says that they contain 2 Mitzvos Mdivrei Sofrim that are not included in the 613 biblical Mitzvos. The Rambam clearly disagrees with the Baal Halachos Gedolos (BHG) who includes 7 Rabbinic Mitzvos including Purim and Chanukah in the 613 Mitzvos. The Rambam says that it is a well known principle that Megila is a Takanas Neviim, enacted by the prophets.

The Rav said that the Rambam did not put Purim first simply because historically Purim preceded Chanukah. The Gemara (Megila 7a) says that Esther requested that the Anshei Kneses Hagedolah establish Purim for subsequent generations as a holiday, as a day on which the Megila is read (see Rashi). (They were reluctant to do so out of fear of provoking the nations that surrounded them.) The Gemara says (14a) that there were 48 prophets and 7 prophetesses in Jewish History, and none of them removed or added any Mitzvos with the exception of the obligation to read the Megila (enacted during the period of the latter prophets). What was the basis for permitting this addition? It is a simple Kal Vchomer, if Bnay Yisrael said Shira when they were saved from the hand of Pharoh who did not threaten them with physical extinction, how much more so should they be obligated to recite Shira on Purim when they were saved from death at the hands of Haman.

Apparently Chazal were concerned with the prohibition of Baal Tosif, of adding new Mitzvos beyond the 613 biblical obligations. Why were Chazal so concerned about Megila? After all there are many Shevusim by Hilchos Shabbos as well as Shniyos Larayos that are not biblical in nature, yet were enacted by the Rabbis. The general category of Seyag L'Torah comes under the heading Mishmeres Lmishmarti and not Lo Tosiifu Vlo Tigreu Mimenu. Avos Drabi Nasan says that Seyag is enacted to reenforce a Lav Kal, a minor prohibition. No one has ever questioned the concept of Seyag. In fact Shlomo Hamelech enacted Seyagim as well. Megila was the first time that Chazal registered a concern about adding a Mitzvah. The Rambam says that when Hashem caused them to see that there was a hint to Megila in the Torah they accepted it. It was the Kal Vchomer cited in the Gemara that clinched it and negated the concerns of Chazal. Reading the Megila is equivalent with the recitation of Hallel. However, how did this resolve Chazal's concern of Lo Tosifu? If this Mitzvah to recite Hallel via the Megila is a Mitzvah Drabanan, then why were they concerned at all?

The Rav explained that there are some Mitzvos that the obligation (Chiyuv) and the fulfillment (Kiyum Hamitzvah) are both rabbinic in origin. For example Arava on Hoshana Rabbah. There are other Mitzvos where the Chiyuv is Rabbinic but the Kiyum Hamitzvah is Biblical. For example the Rambam in Hilchos Avel says that there is a Rabbinic obligation to visit the sick, to comfort the mourners, to eulogize the dead, to provide for weddings etc. The Rambam says that these are acts of kindness that have no upper limit and even though these obligations are Rabbinic they all come under the category of Vahavta Lrayacha Kamocha. Apparently according to the Rambam there is a Kiyum Doraysa. Yet, these are distinct Rabbinic obligations and the Rambam discusses which has precedence if one is faced with performing both at the same time. On the other hand, all these acts of Chesed are equal from the viewpoint of the biblical obligation of Vahavta Lrayacha Kamocha. We do not find other biblical Mitzvos that the Rambam discusses which instantiation of a Mitzvah should take precedence. Other Mitzvos that are Rabbinic in obligation yet have a Kiyum Doraysa are Krias Hatorah and Tefila where the concepts of Tefila and Krias Hatorah are biblical in that they are connected with Talmud Torah and Avodah Shblev. These Mitzvos have in common that the general obligation to perform the Mitzvah is Doraysa (Talmud Torah, Avodah Shblev), but the particulars of when and how the Mitzvah is to be performed is Drabanan. We find that the patriarchs all prayed. [The Rav said in the name of his father, Reb Moshe ZT"L, and his grandfather Reb Chaim ZT"L that the Rambam is correct that Tefila is Doraysa because it was impossible to imagine that Klal Yisrael did

not pray until the Anshei Kneses Hagedolah came along.]

Megila is a Mitzvah Drabanan but there is a Kiyum Doraysa of Hallel, in that we are obligated to recite praise of Hashem and relate the great miracles that He performed on our behalf. The biblical obligation to praise Hashem can be fulfilled on any day around Purim, it was the Rabanan that fixed the obligation to praise Hashem on the fourteenth day of Adar. The use of the Megila as the vehicle for expressing Hallel to Hashem is Drabanan. Besides the obligation to recite Hallel, the Megila is a vehicle to perform the Mitzvah to obliterate the memory of Amalek, M'chiyas Amalek. (One of the reasons Chazal resisted including Esther in Kisvei Hakodesh was that it would constitute a fourth reference to Amalek. Besides the Megila, Amalek is mentioned 3 times In Tanach. Chazal thought that there was a maximum of 3 times Mdoraysa that Amalek could be mentioned as derived from the verse Ksov Zos Basefer (Megila 7a) until they realized that there was a biblical hint that it could be mentioned a fourth time in the Megila, which is part of Kesuvim). The third reason that Krias Hamegila is a Kiyum Doraysa is because Megila is part of Torah Shbichtav, so reading it fulfills the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah. Therefore there is no problem of Lo Tosifu, because even though the obligation is Rabbinic, the required action fulfills a well defined Kiyum Mitzvah Doraysa.

When it came time to enact the holiday of Chanukah, Chazal had the same question again of Lo Tosifu. The answer was to look at Purim. The Gemara said that based on a Kal Vchomer we recite Hallel (the Megila) on Purim (as noted above the distinction between Geulas Mitzrayim which was from physical bondage, as compared to the Geulas Purim that was from death to life). The same reasoning applied to Chanukah, which was a time of Gzeiras Shemad, forced conversion, where there was also a life and death struggle. Chanukah, like Purim, is also a Rabbinic Mitzvah that has a Kiyum Doraysa, that of offering Shevach V'hodaah to Hashem and to publicize the great miracle that occurred. The Rambam discusses the laws of Megila first because Purim is a prerequisite to understanding Chanukah and how it was enacted by Chazal. That is why the Rambam links them so tightly and says (Hilchos Chanukah 3:3) that anyone who is obligated in the Mitzvah of Krias Megila is obligated to kindle candles on Chanukah.

How did Esther know that a Chiyuv Hamitzvah that is Drabanan and has a Kiyum Hamitzvah Doraysa does not violate Lo Tosifu? One could ask the same question regarding the 4 fast days: how was Jeremiah permitted to enact these fast days? Didn't this violate Lo Tosifu? The answer is that since the obligation to fast in a time of crisis is Doraysa, Jeremiah was able to enact a Rabbinic obligation to fast specifically on these 4 days. The fact that we keep the 4 fast days that are mentioned in Zechariah is also a major proof in favor of establishing the holiday of Purim and the associated day of fasting.

The Rambam defines Megila (and Chanukah) as Takanas Haneviim, a Mitzvah Mdivrei Kabalah. A Mitzvah Mdivrei Kabalah is a Mitzvah Drabanan that is mentioned in Tanach where Hashem instructs the prophet regarding it. There are 3 Mitzvos Mdivrei Kabalah: Mikra Megila, Kibbud Voneg Shabbos (Hilchos Shabbos 30:1), the fast days (Hilchos Taanis 5:4). The proof that Esther was right was that the Megila was included in Kisvei Hakodesh, granting it the same status of Divrei Kabalah as Kibbud Voneg Shabbos and the 4 fast days which were never considered as violations of Lo Tosifu.

It is interesting to note that the prophet has a dialogue with Hashem where he is told to keep the four fast days. Despite this, fasting on these days is still considered a Rabbinic obligation, even though the Kiyum Hamitzvah of fasting and praying to Hashem in a time of crisis is a biblical one. These Mitzvos are even more paradoxical in that if one would desecrate the written section in the Navi where these Mitzvos are mentioned he would violate an Issur Doraysa and receive lashes for desecrating Kisvei Kodesh, however the obligation to fulfill the Mitzvah itself is Rabbinic in nature.

The Rambam (Megila 1:1) says that everyone is obligated with the Mitzvas Krias Hamegila, including women, converts and freed slaves. Why are only freed slaves obligated? After all, Canaanite slaves has similar obligations to women so why did the Rambam omit them? (This is the only

Mitzvah that a woman is obligated to perform but an Eved Canaani is not.)

Also, why did the Rambam mention converts explicitly? Converts are obligated in all Mitzvos? Chazal derive from the words Kal Hanilvim Alayhem in the Megila that there was a special edict to include converts, including all future converts, who otherwise would not have been included in the Mitzvas Purim. We do not find special mention of converts by other Mitzvos. Why single out converts with regards to Purim? (Actually this question can be asked on the Megila itself.)

The Rav explained: the Megila describes how the Jews were victorious in battle and how they came to enact the days of celebration after their victory. It is explicitly stated that the Jews outside of Shushan rested on the fourteenth day of Adar while the Jews of Shushan rested on the fifteenth. This was a spontaneous act of rest after the miracle of vanquishing their respective foes. The following year they celebrated on the same days as a Minhag, custom. The Megila later notes that Mordechai wanted to codify the observance of these days as days of feasting and Yom Tov on all the Jews and on all those that joined them, Al Kal Hanilvim Alayhem. Mordechai enacted the days of Purim as days of feasting and joy based on the Minhag of the previous years that they had already established to celebrate these days. The distinction between when Chanukah and Purim begin bears this point out. The Jews completed their victory and began their celebration immediately on the twenty fifth of Kislev. Purim is celebrated the day after the victory was concluded. Why not celebrate immediately after the victory on the thirteenth of Adar? Because Mordechai simply codified the Minhag which was that they rested on the day after the victory.

Since the celebration of Purim was based on the Minhag established by those that participated in the victory, anyone who did not participate in the festivities that first year would not be included in the obligation in subsequent years. Even though many people converted to Judaism in that period, Vrabim Misyahadim, however these people did not fully share the great joy of the salvation of the Jewish nation from imminent destruction. They were mourning for the many members of their own (former) family who conspired to murder the Jews and were killed during the battle. That is why there was a need to enact a special edict to include converts in the celebration of Purim and for them to accept upon themselves to observe the Mitzvah of Krias Megila and the days of Purim. Only in his subsequent letter to codify the Minhag, did Mordechai seek to establish the days of Purim as days that work was forbidden. In the same letter he sought to include the converts that did not participate in the celebration immediately after the great victory. Bnai Yisrael did not accept the Issur Melacha because that was not part of the original Minhag, but they did accept the days of Purim as days of feasting and happiness based on the Minhag. They also accepted that all converts, including future generations, should celebrate Purim.

Had a convert been obligated in Purim because he is obligated in all Mitzvos like any other Jew, then there would be no reason to exclude an Eved Canaani, who has the same level of observance as a woman based on Gzeirah Shava of Lah Lah. Since Eved Canaani was not included in the Takanah of Kol Hanilvim, only complete converts were, he is not obligated in Megila even though women are. However a freed slave was included in the Takanah of Kol Hanilvim Alayhem.

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Agag at a public ceremony instead of killing him immediately during battle?

* He didn't precisely understand what God wanted him to do? * He didn't admit his guilt immediately, but made up excuses instead?

For either one or even a mixture of these above reasons, it doesn't seem fair that Shaul must lose his kingdom, especially in comparison to David who's sin appears to have been much more severe! In the following shiur, we take a closer look at the details of Shmuel chapter 15 in the context of Sefer Shmuel, as well as their connection to the story of Amalek in Chumash, in an attempt to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of Shaul's sin.

INTRODUCTION The Haftara for Shabbat Zachor describes the tragic story of how Shaul fails God's command that he fulfill the mitzvah to destroy Amalek. [That mitzvah is defined in Parshat Zachor - Devarim 25:17-19, and Shmot 17:8-16.] It is beyond the scope of this shiur to explain why this mitzvah falls specifically on the King of Israel (see Ramban Hilchot Melachim I.1), instead, we will simply begin with the assumption that (at least thematically speaking) the nation of Amalek stands antithetical to the nation of Israel. In other words, while the purpose of Israel is to bring the Name of God to all mankind by establishing a 'model nation' characterized by keeping His laws, Amalek claims that there is no connection between mankind and God and attempts to stop Am Yisrael from achieving their goal. [For example, Amalek first attack just as Bnei Yisrael are about to arrive at Har Sinai - see shiur on Parshat B'shalach.] Therefore, it becomes incumbent upon the King of Israel to destroy Amalek, for it is the king's responsibility to lead Am Yisrael towards achieving their goal. [See Rashi Shmot 17:16.] After several hundred years of 'ad-hoc' leadership (during the time period of the Shoftim), Am Yisrael finally established a Kingdom with the appointment of Shaul. However, the very institution of a King presented Am Yisrael with a problem. On the one hand, a King was necessary to guarantee the achievement of secure borders and economic prosperity. However, there remained the constant fear that a successful king would cause the people to fear their King more than God Himself. Thus, ideally - the king would help lead Am Yisrael towards fulfilling God's goal; but realistically - the fear always remained that a king would REPLACE God rather than REPRESENT Him. To 'solve' this problem, the king of Israel must work under the guidance of a "navi" [a prophet]. By advising the king, it is the navi's responsibility to assure the development of the ideal relationship between the God, the King, and the people. [Iy"h, when our nviim rishonim series reaches Sefer Shmuel, this will be discussed in further detail.]

This is precisely the relationship between Shmuel and Shaul, (and later between Natan & David, Yeshayahu & Chizkiyahu, etc.). Shmuel, the navi, must make sure that Shaul's kingdom will develop according to the ideal scenario. Even though Shaul must lead the people in battle, periodically the navi will make certain demands to assure that the military victory is attributed to God, and not to the king alone. [See for example I Shmuel 13:1-14, see also 10:6-9.]

With this background we begin our study of the Haftara, for Shaul's battle against Amalek constitutes the most critical test of this delicate relationship.

Shaul's battle against Amalek can be viewed as a highlight in his military career. Recall that when Shaul first became king, his standing army numbered a mere 3000 soldiers (see 13:1-3, see also 14:46-48 to see how successful he was, note in contrast to 8:19-20 & 12:12-13.) Now, he enters battle with over 200,000 soldiers (see 15:4). Due to the special nature of the battle against Amalek, God commands Shaul "l'hachrim" [to eradicate] everything belonging to Amalek as well (see 15:2-3). Now this mitzvah of "l'hachrim" is understood as 'total destruction'. In fact, in the law of "ir ha'nidachat" [an entire city that follows idol worship/ see Devarim 13:16-18!], the Torah explains specifically that "l'hachrim" is to gather all of its booty together and burn it! However, in the battle of Yericho, we find a slightly different definition. There, when Yehoshua is commanded to make the city "cherem" (see Yehoshua 6:16-18), looting for personal use is forbidden, however dedicating the gold and silver for God's House is

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[Note: The following shiur is in rough draft form, but I wanted to send it out in time for Shabbat Zachor.]

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SHABBAT ZACHOR - SHAUL & AMALEK [I Shmuel chapter 15]

What was so terrible about Shaul's sin with Amalek? Does he lose his kingdom simply because: * He 'gave-in' to the people's suggestion to offer some of the best sheep from their booty as korbanot? * He preferred to kill

permitted (see 6:24)!

This background can help us understand in a much more positive light just about everything which Shaul does. In fact, we claim that Shaul himself is quite sure that he has acted in an honorable manner. Let's explain: In the aftermath of their victory over Amalek, Shaul (and the people) decide to take some of the best sheep and cattle from the "cherem" in order to offer Korbanot to God (see 15:9 & 15:15). This can be considered no different than the "cherem" of Yericho which was taken for God's sake. Furthermore, Shaul invites the entire nation to the city of Gilgal for a public celebration of the conquest of Amalek. [Read 15:12 ["hiney matziv lo YAD"] carefully to verify this!] Most likely, Shaul plans to offer these korbanot during this celebration. Gilgal is probably chosen as the ideal gathering site due to its historic connection to Yehoshua's conquest of Yericho. [Note also 11:14.] Therefore, when Shaul first encounters Shmuel at Gilgal he proudly announces: "I have fulfilled God's commandment" (15:13). Even after Shmuel inquires regarding the sheep and cattle (15:14), Shaul promptly responds: "From the Amalekites they were taken... IN ORDER to offer korbanot to HASHEM, your God, and the rest was totally destroyed ["he'cherammu"]." (15:15)

In fact, Shaul most probably considered this the most proper form of celebration. Had not Moshe Rabeinu himself built a MIZBAYACH (to offer korbanot) and made a memorial in the aftermath of Bnei Yisrael's victory over Amalek! [See Shmot 17:15-16, note "ki YAD kes Kah..."]

Therefore, when Shmuel counters, charging Shaul that he had not been meticulous in following God's command (see 15:16-19), Shaul insists once again that: "I have listened to God's command, and I have followed the path upon which God sent me, and the people took from the sheep and cattle solely TO OFFER korbanot to Hashem in GILGAL." (see 15:20-21)

Shmuel is not convinced. Once again he censures Shaul, claiming that he had not listened to God (see 15:22-23). In response to this censure, Shaul finally 'breaks' and admits his sin: "And Shaul said to Shmuel, I have sinned, for I have transgressed God's command, for I feared the people and listened to them..." (see 15:24)

This admission of guilt by Shaul is usually understood as sincere, but simply too late. However, if Shaul is indeed sincere, why is he punished so severely? After all, he had good intentions, and now admits his guilt and hopefully has learned his lesson. Is his sin simply because he 'listened to the people', and a king must be more firm with his subjects? Is this trait so critical in the definition of "melech Yisrael"? Furthermore, if he has truly accepted his guilt, why doesn't he transfer his rule to someone more worthy, as Shmuel seems to suggest that he do (see 15:28--29).

Based on the above background, I'd like to offer an alternate interpretation which will explain not only why Shaul is punished, but also why he doesn't 'give up' his kingdom, and why he continues to fight David until the day (before) he dies.

One could suggest that Shaul's admission of guilt in 15:24 is not sincere at all, rather an attempt to appease Shmuel. Let's explain: As we explained, Shaul himself truly believes that he has done nothing wrong at all. He is sure that he has followed God's command properly. In his opinion, his planned celebration at Gilgal will make God's Name even greater. Even though Shmuel has challenged the "kashrut" of this gathering, as Shaul himself explained twice to Shmuel (see 15:13 & 15:20), he is sure that his actions have been flawless.

However, after his first two confrontations with Shmuel, Shaul realizes that it's a 'lost cause'. In Shaul's opinion, Shmuel, his old 'rebbe' (mentor) who had guided him through his entire career, has 'lost it'. Recall that Shmuel is already quite aged (see 8:1 & 12:2!). Shaul simply concludes that Shmuel has become too demanding. As happens so often (to this very day), the successful 'talmid' (student) concludes that he now understands the world much better than his old 'rebbe' does. He still respects him, and is thankful for his guidance, but if a entire career is at stake, it is not so easy to listen; especially when the 'talmid' is 100% sure that he is right and his rebbe is wrong. Therefore, Shaul now takes a new approach. The most important consideration for Shaul is that the 'show must go on'. Recall that they are

standing at a public gathering. Everyone is waiting for Shaul and Shmuel to offer the korbanot and bow down in thanks to God. Because of Shmuel's censure, Shaul is now worried that this great celebration will be canceled. Instead of continuing his argument with Shmuel, who simply cannot be convinced, Shaul decides that it's much easier to admit his guilt. Not that he truly thinks that he is guilty, rather he'll say anything necessary, just to make sure that the celebration continues. This explains Shaul's full statement to Shmuel. Follow carefully: "And Shaul said to Shmuel - I have sinned... NOW atone my sin and RETURN with me [to the celebration in order that] I can BOW DOWN to Hashem." (see 15:24-25)

However, Shmuel remains adamant. He refuses to 'return' with Shaul to the celebration, and instead, he turns to leave. In a desperate attempt to keep Shmuel present, Shaul reaches for his Shmuel's cloak, begging him to stay (see 15:26-27). Tragically, the cloak rips. Realizing the symbolism of this action, Shmuel informs Shaul that God has 'ripped away' his kingdom and will give it to someone else more worthy (see 15:28-29). Shaul refuses to give up. Once again, instead of arguing with Shmuel, he [insincerely] reiterates his guilt in a desperate hope that Shmuel will stay. Listen carefully to Shaul's primary request: "And Shaul said - I have sinned, but NOW please HONOR me, in the eyes of the elders and ALL OF THE PEOPLE [who have gathered for the ceremony at Gilgal!], and return with me so that I can BOW DOWN to HASHEM, your God." (15:30)

Again, Shmuel doesn't agree, but note that Shaul remains firm in his own beliefs: "And Shmuel turned away from Shaul, but Shaul [remained] and BOWED DOWN to God." (15:31)

Note that despite Shmuel's censure, Shaul 'goes on with the show'. He bows down to God, i.e. he continues the ceremony. After all, he can not let his people down. Shmuel doesn't exactly leave either. Even though he doesn't join in the korbanot [he doesn't trust the "hashgacha"], he does insist that Agag be killed immediately. [Most likely, Shaul also had planned to kill Agag in public as part of this ceremony.] Shmuel wants to make sure that the glory of Agag's death will be God's and not Shaul's. Therefore, he prefers to perform the mitzvah himself. [See 15:32-33.] Most likely, this argument between Shmuel and Shaul takes place 'back stage', i.e. not in the public eye. They may note that there is some tension between their two leaders, but do not overhear Shmuel's prophecy that Shaul will lose his kingdom. Shmuel goes home, and we are told that they never see each other again. Tragically, Shmuel mourns his 'talmid' who has gone astray. Shaul, upset that his 'rebbe' no longer understands him, continues to lead Am Yisrael in the manner which he feels is correct. Shaul continues to believe that his actions were correct and that Shmuel had exaggerated in his condemnation. Therefore, Shaul doesn't accept Shmuel's prophecy that he shall lose his kingdom to someone more worthy. Many years later, as David rises to power, this prophecy my 'haunt' him (see chapters 24 & 26), but Shaul remains staunch in his belief that he is the King of Israel, just as Shmuel (in his younger days) had promised (see 10:1,7 & 12:1-2). It is only on the day before his death when Shaul finally realizes his mistake (see chapter 28, "v'akmal"!). [Note how this interpretation explains Shaul's behavior in the remainder of Sefer Shmuel I.]

Now that we have explained the positive nature of Shaul actions, why is he punished so severely? To answer this difficult question, we must return to our discussion of the inherent danger in the institution of a King (see introduction). Even though Shaul's intention for making a this public ceremony may have been noble, its result was exactly the opposite of what God intended. By the total destruction of Amalek, by breaking the norm of taking booty, by acting in a manner which is totally different than a regular war, the people would have better realized its religious significance. Now, by making this public ceremony, it is definitely clear that their King Shaul has defeated Amalek. But again, too much glory has gone to the King, and not enough to God. Because this proper balance is so critical, the most important trait of the royal family must be to forfeit their own honor in favor of the honor of God. Shaul's obsession with "KABDEINU NA" - honor me - becomes his critical flaw. His view that the Kingdom of Israel in itself is equivalent to the honor of God is unacceptable. God much chose a different

royal family, the House of David, who will find the proper balance between the Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of Heaven. As reflected in David's rebuttal of Michal bat SHAUL's criticism of his dancing in front of the ARON: "And Michal said: What HONOR is there today in the King of Israel... and David answered: [I have danced] in front of God who has chosen me over your father... and I have made myself humble, and in with the mothers [whom you think I stood embarrassed] I have shown HONOR." (II Shmuel 6:20-22)

shabbat shalom menachem

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MEGILLAT ESTHER SHE'ASAH NISSIM LA'AVOTEINU
by Yitzchak Etshalom

I
WHERE IS GOD IN THE MEGILLAH? Every year on Purim, Jews all over the world fulfill the Mitzvah of K'riat haMegillah - reading the complete book of Esther from a proper scroll. Before beginning, the reader recites three B'rakhot - the middle of which is Birkat haNes (the blessing recited upon the commemoration of a miracle): Barukh...she'Asah Nissim la'Avoteinu baYamim haHeim baZ'man haZeh (Who performed miracles for our ancestors in those days at this time [of year]). Considering that, unlike the Exodus (and all other Biblical miracles), God's hand is nowhere to be found in the text of the story of Esther and Mordechai, we have to wonder which miracle is the focus of this thanksgiving to God? For which Nes are we praising God? (Parenthetically, the same question could be asked in reference to Hanukkah, where the most central "miracle" we celebrate is a military victory which did not, from the accounts we have, include any miraculous intervention in the conventional understanding of the word. To whatever extent this shiur answer the question vis-a-vis Purim, that answer should carry the same validity for the Hanukkah question. Significantly, Purim and Hanukkah are the two occasions when this B'rakhah is recited.)

A second question, certainly related to the first, focuses on one of the unique features of the Megillah. As is well known, Esther is the only book in T'nakh with absolutely no mention of God (by any Name). Much as the Midrash interprets some occurrences of "the king" in Esther (e.g. 6:1) as a reference to God, this is certainly not p'shat. Why is this story even included in the Biblical canon?

Before moving on, it is prudent to note that some approaches within Rabbinic literature see "hidden Nissim (miracles)" throughout our story; these are, however, not evident from the p'shat. In keeping with the general approach of this shiur, we will try to identify the Nes/Nissim within the text of the Megillah. In order to provide satisfactory answers to these two questions, we will have to address two issues - the nature of a Nes and a new understanding of the story line in Megillat Esther.

II

NES L'HITNOSES

The root of Nes is N -S-S - which means "banner". See, for instance, the verse in T'hilim (60:6): "You have given them who fear You a Nes l'hitNoses - (a raised banner), to rally to it out of bowshot." A miracle (i.e. deliberate suspension of the laws of physics in order to save the righteous individual or people) is a raising of the banner of God's Name in the world - hence the word Nes. (See also B'resheet 22:1 and see if this approach explains Avraham's "trial" - see also Midrash Rabbah ad loc.) There is more than one way in which God's Name becomes glorified in this world. Besides an overt intervention, it is possible for human beings to make His Name manifest by demonstrating the most noble of traits. Keep in mind that we are all created in God's "Image" (whatever that may mean...conscience, free will etc.). When we demonstrate the most noble side of human existence and utilize those traits in the most productive manner possible, this is another (certainly more subtle) demonstration of God's power and glory. It is possible for a Nes to take place within the realm of human valor; although it should be stated that unless the people in question take the next step and utilize this experience to enhance their direct relationship with God, it may be that the whole enterprise would be considered a vain effort.

I would like to suggest that the two most noble human traits, each of which is a reflection of the Tzelem Elokim (Image of God) which sparks all of us, are Wisdom and Courage. I am not talking about wisdom or courage in the usual sense; rather about a special kind of wisdom, a unique type of courage and a special synthesis of the two. We will explore these two characteristics throughout the story and clarify how each was utilized in the most productive and positive manner to bring about the successful salvation of the Jews.

Instead of focusing on one or two passages in the Megillah, we're going to read through the whole story and point out the key "Nes-points" along the way. You'll need a copy of the text - all citations, unless otherwise noted, refer to chapters and verses within the Book of Esther.

As we read through, I will point out several other "layers" of the story - or, alternately, several other ways to read the story and the various messages embedded in the text. As usual, we will be reading the text alone; I will point out various Rabbinic interpolations and interpretations as needed for support and illustration.

III

CHAPTER I

A) THE PARTY (1:1 -1:8)

One other "layer" of the story is satiric; especially when viewed within the context of the rest of T'nakh (as will be explained later), the text is a clear parody. Of what...we will see. As the story opens, we meet our first player: Achashverosh. Although he is described as a powerful king, ruling over 127 provinces from Hodu (India?) to Kush (Ethiopia?) - we soon find that his power is more illusion than reality. First of all, the party about which we read in the first chapter (1:3-8) seems to be his inauguration ball (see v. 2); yet it only takes place in the third year of his rule. This seems to indicate that the transfer of power into his hands was not so smooth. We will soon see that plots abound in and around his court and that his control over the realm is not very secure. The description of the party brings three issues to the fore: The many allusions to the Mishkan (Tabernacle) / Mikdash (Temple). Keep in mind that the Ba'al haMegillah (author) expects every reader to be familiar with T'nakh and will pick up any word-associations made here. Among the materials described here are several

which are prominent in the Mishkan: T'khelet (royal blue), Argaman (purple), Kessef (silver) and Shesh (marble). Indeed, the Midrash posits that the vessels which Achashverosh used at this party were the vessels of the Mikdash - this interpretation was probably motivated by the many Mikdash-associations in the description of the party. (Rav Menachem Liebttag has a fascinating shiur on exactly this point - with many more illustrations. You can find it at his Tanach Study Center Website - [http://www.virtual.co.il/torah/tanach/special/purim.txt]: it comes highly recommended!) Achashverosh seems to be very insecure - both personally and politically. He spares no expense to show off his wealth - and specifically invites the governors, ministers and soldiers of the Persian and Medean armies. It seems that he is trying to consolidate his power and bring the military into his good graces. At the end of his six-month party (1), he invites all the citizenry of Shushan to his gala bash. This insecurity will increase and become a prominent feature in the events of the Megillah. The image of Achashverosh's kingdom, a monarchy governed by protocol. Note how often the word Dat - a Persian word meaning "custom" or "protocol" - shows up in the Megillah: 20 times! (Save for one verse in Daniel, it doesn't appear in any other books of the T'nakh). This would seem to indicate that everything in Achashverosh's realm was done "properly" and that the system was orderly and just. We soon find that this kingdom of Dat is just as illusory as his power.

B) VASHTI (1:9 -22)

Vashti is not, properly speaking, a "player" in this narrative. She is much more of a foil, presented as the set-up for the story to unfold. Even after she is gone (dead? exiled?), her shadow hangs over the palace - but more on that later.

The first indication that Achashverosh's power is a lot of fluff is when he decides to show off his beautiful queen (presumably to outshine the beauty of their wives) - and she refuses to come out! This great king, protector of the realm, defender of the empire, ruler of Persia, etc. etc. controls nothing! His own queen refuses him and is not obeisant to his wishes. (Although in modern times t his would seem to prove nothing about his political power - in Persia of 2500 years ago, this "failing" was quite telling - as we see from the tone of the letters sent out at the end of the first chapter.)

We soon learn something else about the king. For all of his power - he never makes any decisions (is he passive-aggressive?). As a matter of fact, he doesn't ever say "no" to any of his advisors! A strange king - a classic "yes-man" sitting on the throne. We get some insight into how his advisors have learned to "play him". Memuchan (who the Gemara identifies as Haman) knows that if he advises the king to kill (or banish) Vashti on account of her defiance of the king - the drunk monarch may wake up on the morn and feel foolish and humiliated that he had to exile the queen for his own honor - and take out his anger on Memuchan. In order to get the king to "get rid" of Vashti, Memuchan appeals to Achashverosh's sense of justice. He is the defender of men's rights throughout the kingdom and must act decisively on behalf of all the poor princes and governors throughout the Empire whose wives will surely rebel, following Vashti's (unpunished) lead. By appealing to Achashverosh's sense of nobility, the wise advisor allows the king to do what he wants without feeling a sense of humiliation.

Two more notes about the first chapter. First of all, as the Gemara points out, this first set of letters (v. 22) seems to be quite foolish. The king sends out letters to every province, announcing that every man rules in his own house!!!!!! (According to the Gemara, this caused the second letters - announcing the "loosing" of Jewish blood - to be taken less seriously by the citizenry who already case a jaundiced eye on this king's pronouncements). Second, as R. David Hentschke points out (Megadim vol. 23), the kings has to send these letters to each province in their own language (v. 22 - this phrasing shows up several times in the Megillah). As powerful as the king may be, he hasn't been successful in establishing Persian as the language of the realm; perhaps his rule is not so ironclad as it might seem.

IV

CHAPTER 2

A) A NEW QUEEN (2:1 -4)

We are quickly reminded of Achashverosh's inability to decide anything for himself. It takes his servants to suggest finding a new queen by gathering all of the maidens to Shushan for a "tryout" with the king. As a ny student of T'nakh remembers, such a call went out once before - when David was old and near death. As we read in the beginning of Melakhim, they searched for a young maiden throughout Yisra'el - and found Avishag haShunamit. Note the contrast - whereas the one girl was found (although many undoubtedly would have wanted to be chosen); here, all the girls have to be forcibly brought to Shushan (note the wording in v. 3). And why not...who would want follow Vashti?

There is another interesting allusion in v. 3: The phrase v'Yafked haMelekh P'kidim v'Yik'b'tzu reminds us of a nearly similar phrase used in the first "Jew in the foreign court" story. When Yosef successfully interprets Pharaoh's dreams, he advises that Pharaoh appoint officers to collect the wheat of the seven plentiful years - Ya'aseh Pharaoh v'Yafked P'kidim...v'Yik'b'tzu... (B'resheet 41:34-35). This allusion is not for naught; the Ba'al haMegillah is showing us how Achashverosh and his servants viewed these young girls - just like wheat to be collected and brought to the palace.

B) MORDECHAI AND ESTHER (2:5 -20)

We are immediately introduced to our two heroes - Mordechai and Esther. It is critical to note that both of these names are not only Persian (and not Hebrew) - they are both pagan names related to various gods of the pantheon! The Esther-Ishtar-Astarte connection is well-documented (besides the fact that the Megillah explicitly gives her "real" name - Hadassah); our heroine's "Persian" name is associated with the near-Eastern goddess of fertility (Da'at Mikra to 2:7). The Gemara (BT Menahot 65) gives Mordechai a more "Jewish" name - Petah'ya - and, again, the Mordechai-Marduk (god of creation in many mythologies throughout the Near East) connection has been extensively written up (see, e.g. Da'at Mikra ibid.). Why do these two righteous people, through whom God saves His people, have such names?

[note: Jews taking - or being given - non-Jewish "alternated" names when in the foreign court is the norm in T'nakh. Note Yoseph, who is named "Tzoph'nat Pa'a'ne'ach" by Pharaoh; Daniel, who is named "Belt-Shatzar" by N'vuchadnetzar, as well as Daniel's three companions. Note that Jews were occasionally given names which were associated with pagan gods - compare Daniel 1:7 with 4:5. Mordechai and Esther seem to be two examples of the same phenomenon. Note that according to the Gemara (BT Megillah 13a), the name "Esther" was given to her by the non-Jews, in response to her beauty.] Even more curious is Mordechai's insistence that Esther not reveal her identity (as a Jewess) while in the palace (v10, 20). As we shall soon see, even Mordechai's identity was not obvious; he was not distinguished in any external way from any other citizen. There are a couple of verses which are telling within the scope of Esther's successful entrance into the palace. (v. 16) - Esther was finally chosen in the seventh year of Achashverosh's reign - in other words, the selection of a queen took four years. (One very

tired king - See 2:12; even in his hedonistic behavior, he followed Dat!). (v. 17 -19) Compare the royal feast in honor of his queen (ironically - "in place of Vashti" - the dead (or exiled) queen's shadow hangs over the palace and Esther is likely aware that her fate may be no better than her predecessor's) with v. 19. As much as the king loves Esther - his servants are bringing more virgins into the palace! Insecure is the best description of anyone with a position of power in this court.

C) THE PLOT (2:21-23) As we all know, this little paragraph is critical to the later success of our heroes. Note, however, that it is Achashverosh's own guards - who are charged with defending him - who are plotting against him. This kingdom is, indeed, unstable and always ready for a shake-up.

V
CHAPTER 3 A) ENTER HAMAN (3:1-7)

Suddenly - and very much out of the blue - Haman is elevated to a position of importance in the kingdom. This again demonstrates - despite the appearance of Dat - the helter-skelter way in which power and impotence, success and failure - even life and death - are handled most capriciously in the palace.

As much as we know about Achashverosh's terrible insecurity - we quickly learn about Haman's personal devil - his ego. Imagine that the king of the greatest empire on earth has just appointed a relative nobody (as it seems Haman was beforehand) to be grand vizier and that all citizens should pay him homage. Wouldn't he be too enthralled with the sudden attention and respect to care about one or two people who don't bow down? Not Haman - his ego just takes him right past all the knee-benders and focuses his attention on the one person who refuses to bow - Mordechai. As much as we would expect him to be happy with the new position - he is merely enraged (and seemingly obsessed with that rage) at Mordechai. Note that it isn't obvious to Haman that Mordechai is Jewish - Haman has to find that out from someone else in order to figure out which nation to destroy (as he wants to annihilate all of Mordechai's people. By the way, this paints Haman as much less of an ideological anti-semitic than we are used to thinking - but that belongs to another shiur.) Evidently, Mordechai's dress and external demeanor did not mark him as a Jew. Just like his niece, he seems to have been quite assimilated. (The D'rashah of Hazal - explaining that the title "Yehudi" is accorded to anyone who rejects idolatry - seems to support this approach. The implication is that someone who is no other way distinguished as a Jew may still be called "Yehudi" for his rejection of Avodah Zarah. Note the prooftext from Divrei haYamim I regarding Bat Par'o).

Now - Haman, the grand vizier of the kingdom of Dat, decides to wipe out an entire nation due to the slight to his ego. How does he decide when to do it? By lottery (Pur)! What a joke this Dat proves to be!

B) ACHASHVEROSH AND HAMAN (3:8-15) There isn't a whole lot say here; the dialogue between these two speaks for itself. Although everything is done properly, the reader instinctively feels that a king who is willing to condemn a people without even finding out who they are (read 3:8-11 carefully) is not doing a good job of running his empire. In order to keep an eye on the story, let's put together the chronology of events. The king's party (Vashti's farewell bash) took place in the third year of his reign. Esther was crowned - and Mordechai saved the king's life - in the seventh year. Haman had the letters (allowing the anti-semites to kill the Jews) sent out on Nissan 13 in the twelfth year of the king's reign. In other words, Esther has been queen for a bit more than four years by this time - and her identity was still a total secret.

VI
CHAPTER 4 A) ESTHER AND MORDECHAI (4:1-17)

Mordechai finds out about this plot - and begins to demonstrate signs of "Teshuvah" (repentance). (Compare 4:1,3 with Yonah 3:5,6,8) He does not, however, do this in front of the palace gate, where he seems to retain his composure. He does, however, get the message in to Esther as to what is going on and he pleads with her to go to the king and have Haman's order overturned. We are immediately reminded of how capricious this king really is. The beloved queen hasn't seen the king in thirty days (v. 11) (and probably wonders in whose arms he sleeps tonight) - and even she is subject to death if she comes to him unbeckoned unless he agrees to see her (shades of Vashti again!).

At this point, Mordechai sends the message which turns Esther around - and she begins to demonstrate not only her tremendous commitment and courage to her nation; but also an amazing type of wisdom - those very characteristics which reflect her Tzelem Elokim in the most powerful way. "For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." (4:14) Mordechai told her about the B'rit (covenant) between God and the B'nei Yisra'el. We are promised that we will outlive all of the Hamans - but that B'rit only applies to the nation as a whole, not to individuals or families. Esther - you may make it through this next upheaval - and you may not. In any case, the Jews will be saved, as God always has His ways of keeping the B'rit. Esther realizes the wisdom and truth of this argument and acquiesces to Mordechai's plea. Now, she plans her strategy...let's take a peek behind the scenes. First, a few words about this remarkable type of wisdom. It is natural to see everything in life through the eyes of our experience. This is why honest people often find it difficult to disbelieve others or question their motivations; they cannot recognize the lie in the other person's words because they have no such possibility inside of their own hearts. In the same way, kind people often ascribe positive motives to questionable behavior of others - because they could never recognize mean thoughts in others as they have no such thoughts in their own persona. It takes a tremendous type of wisdom to separate yourself from what you instinctively feel and how you usually view the world and to see it from the other person's perspective. While this may be easy in a sympathetic conversation (although not nearly as easy as it seems); it is most difficult when deciding how to fight an enemy. The trick is to learn how to think like the enemy - without becoming the enemy.

This was perhaps the greatest miracle of Hanukkah - that the Maccabees were able to think like Greeks (it certainly took great strategy to outfox that mighty Army with a small band) - without becoming Greeks (well, not for a couple of generations at least). In the same way, we will see how Esther manipulates Achashverosh and Haman into a fateful (and, for Haman, fatal) collision course - simply by playing them according to their own personalities and weaknesses.

VII
CHAPTER 5 A) ESTHER AND

ACHASHVEROSH (5:1-5) Let's keep in mind that Esther is risking her life to come into Achashverosh's throne room - and she knows that the king knows this. In other words, she is aware

that Achashverosh will consider her request to be very important - important enough to risk her life. We would think that when the king favors her and agrees to grant nearly any request - "even until half the kingdom" - that she would seize this opportunity and ask for salvation and for Haman's orders to be rescinded. Instead, she invites Achashverosh and Haman to a special party she has prepared for that very evening. Why didn't she ask for salvation at this point? Esther understood a great deal about politics. Remember - she hasn't seen the king for thirty days. Even if she is still his favorite - she is still not on the "inside" right now. Haman, on the other hand, has just had a drinking party with the king (3 days earlier), celebrating their letters sent out to kill the Jews. If she were to accuse Haman, the king might not believe her and the whole effort would be lost. She invites the two of them to a party. As disgusting as the prospect sounds, it is the first step in a brilliant plan of psychological warfare. Let's consider how each of them would react to this invitation: Haman, as the consummate egotist, has his ego blown up even bigger than before (as we will soon see). He alone is invited to sup with the king and queen! Achashverosh, on the other hand, must be suspicious. There has already been (at least) one plot on his life - now, Esther risked her life just to invite him and Haman to a party? Is something going on between the two of them (more on this later)? Are they plotting against me?

B) THE FIRST PARTY (5:6-8) At this party, the king expects to find out what Esther really has on her mind - maybe his suspicions were for naught? Instead, she surprises him by asking him to return - with Haman - for another party the next night! Following the psychological makeup of our two party guests - each of the states of mind described above became exacerbated. Esther knew that Haman's ego would continue to grow - and she also knew that he would leave the palace via the gate - and see Mordechai sitting there. Just feed his ego - and he will self-destruct.

C) HAMAN AT HOME (9-14) Indeed, Haman becomes so enraged when he sees Mordechai that, after a short bragging session with his family, he runs back to the palace to ask Achashverosh to allow him to hang Mordechai immediately. He cannot wait eleven months to kill his arch-nemesis - he needs satisfaction right away (ah, the impetuous egotist.)

VIII
CHAPTER 6 A) HAMAN AND

ACHASHVEROSH (6:1-10) Why couldn't the king sleep? The Gemara provides the obvious answer - he had thoughts of plot and coup on his worried mind. Why did he call for his chronicles to be read? It seems that this powerful king, ruler over 127 provinces - had no friends. There was no one he could trust or turn to. Esther had planted a terrible bug in his mind - two parties in a row with Haman - what are the two of them planning to do? Indeed - what have they already done? Just as the king discovers that he owes Mordechai a favor from over four years ago - and decides that the way to gain the allegiance of the citizenry is to publicly demonstrate the rewards of loyalty to the crown - Haman turns up in the outer courtyard of the palace. The king had to wonder what Haman was doing there so late at night (!?!). The king summoned Haman for some advice - and for a chance to take him down a peg or two. Now, the king demonstrates some acumen of his own.

In 6:6, the king asks Haman what to do for someone he really favors. Haman, that old egotist, is so caught up in his own power, that he describes a truly regal parade which he assumes will feature him as the honoree. How very surprised he is when the king orders him to take the self -same Mordechai and lead him on the king's horse. (Note that the phrase to be called out while leading this honoree: Kakhah ye'Aseh la'IsH Asher... shows up in one other place in T'nakh. This is the beginning of the formula of Halitza - the refusal of Levirate marriage, which accompanies the woman's disdainful spit. [D'varim 25:9] Draw your own conclusions about the satiric effect accomplished by the Ba'al haMegillah.)

B) HAMAN AND MORDECHAI (6:11-14) Haman returns to his house "in mourning". The Rabbis have a lot to say about the events of this morning - but, even on a p'shat level, it is clear that Haman's fortunes have taken a significant turn for the worse. He is quickly rushed to the second party - and, in his case, his own farewell.

IX
CHAPTER 7

A) THE SECOND PARTY (7:1-9) This is the denouement of the story as far as we are concerned. Haman still doesn't know who Esther is - but he is clearly shattered and his ego is as fragile as ever. Achashverosh is equally disturbed and must be getting more confused by Esther's repeated parties without asking for what she really wants (it is clear that the king knows she wants something more - which is why he keeps asking her). Now, she pulls out all the cards. The king thinks that she and Haman are hatching a plot against him (and have been having an affair?) - and suddenly Haman is revealed as the villain who is plotting against her. Haman thinks that he is still on the road to satisfaction in the matter of the Jews; he'll just need to wait until Adar. He has no idea that Esther is one of "them". Esther points to Haman and all is lost. The confusion and anger of the king, the confusion and fear of Haman - create an emotional jumble which ultimately leads to the king's explosion when he finds Haman lying on Esther's divan, begging for mercy. Haman is erased and (here we go again) Mordechai takes his place (compare 8:2 with 3:10). The capricious king has (for the meantime) elevated the Jews and they are saved. We all know, however, that the happy ending of the story isn't permanent and that the rocky shores of existence in exile (which is probably one of the sub-messages of the Megillah) are not safe for Jews.

X

POSTSCRIPT We have taken a cursory look at some of the events as described in the Megillah and found that Esther displayed extraordinary wisdom and courage in her successful effort to save her people. We are very right to regard this as a Nes as it is a reflection of God's Image as found within our heroine. God's Name is not found - because, unlike Pesach, this is not a story about the suspension of the laws of nature. It is, rather, a story about human strength and nobility used in the most positive and productive effort imaginable - the salvation of Am Yisra'el. (That and a really great satire of the Persian Kingdom)

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VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM) SPECIAL PURIM PACKAGE

"If You Remain Silent at This Time": Esther's Moral Development and Ours
by Harav Aharon Lichtenstein Based on a sicha delivered on Purim
5744 Summarized by Aviad Hacoen Translated by Kaeren Fish and Ronnie
Ziegler

Purim is compared to Yom HaKippurim - indeed, there are many parallels between these two occasions. Both are days of public assembly and soul-searching. My remarks today should be seen in this context. The megilla is known to all of us as "Megillat Esther." The title indicates more than just the identity of a central character around whom the plot revolves. Chazal teach us (Megilla 7a): "Rav Shemuel ben Yehuda said: Esther sent [a message] to the Sages, demanding, 'Inscribe me (my story) for all generations.' (Or, according to an alternate reading, 'Establish me for all generations.')" Hence, the obligation of recording and reading the megilla would seem to arise from a direct request by Esther that HER STORY be inscribed, or set down, for generations: "Inscribe ME, establish ME." But the megilla in fact recounts a story which unfolds in the public arena. Is it the story of Esther alone? Surely it is the story of an entire nation, dispersed throughout Achashverosh's 127 provinces, and faced with the threat of genocide. The story also involves other heroes - Mordekhai among them. Nevertheless, throughout history this book has been known not as "Megillat Ha-yehudim," or even "Megillat Mordekhai," but rather as "Megillat Esther." This being the case, an accurate and thorough reading of the megilla requires that we pay special attention not only to the public, national aspect of the story - the threat of destruction and the salvation - but also to Esther's personal story. Reading and understanding the megilla requires that we understand what happened to ESTHER, and take note of the various stages of her development. What is the actual story of the megilla from this point of view?

I believe that Esther's development finds expression on two interrelated levels: strength of character and moral awareness. The Esther depicted in the closing chapters is entirely different from the Esther of the opening chapters. Let us first study her psychological development and then her moral progress.

Who is the Esther who appears on the scene in the second chapter? A beautiful and comely girl, but powerless. She is devoid of initiative and independence. She is under Mordekhai's patronage; he treats her as his daughter. Even if we adopt the opinion that she was his wife, we are clearly dealing with a woman who lives completely under her husband's wing. "And whatever Mordekhai said, Esther would do - just as when she was still in his home" (2:20). There is a certain lack of sophistication about her, a simplicity and innocence. This point is emphasized not only in her character but also in her outer appearance. All other maidens come to the royal palace with every type of adornment: "Six months [of anointment] with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and women's cosmetics..." (2:12). But "when it was the turn of Esther ... to come to the king, SHE ASKED FOR NOTHING" (2:15). She wears no makeup; she is completely natural, a simple, innocent and honest girl.

At the same time, what is equally apparent is her passivity. She does whatever Mordekhai asks her to, because she lives in his home. And when she lives in the royal palace - no longer under the patronage of Mordekhai but rather under the patronage of the royal entourage - she does only "what she is told by Hegai, the king's officer, appointed over the women." She does everything according to orders, completely devoid of individual will. The portrait of Esther which we have before us, then, is the image of a fading wallflower. Although there was public significance to her entry into the royal palace, there is really nothing that gives her spiritual or national prominence. "Where does the Torah hint at Esther? From the words, 'I shall surely hide My face.'" (This plays on the similarity of the words "haster astir" to the name Esther.) At the beginning of the megilla it is not only the Divine Presence which is hidden - Esther herself is hidden from us. "Esther did not mention her birthplace or her nationality" (2:20). There is no Esther; she is a "tabula rasa." There are no identifiable characteristics, no national identity, no moral

identification, no roots and no background. Rather, she presents the type of natural, cosmopolitan image of one who hails from some unknown part of the 127 provinces and arrives at the royal palace. No one knows whether she is a Mede or a Persian, from the north or from the south. Only one thing is known: she is beautiful and charming. But what is her identity? What is her character? What philosophy hides behind this image?

Such is the Esther of the opening chapters. A glance further on reveals how this innocent girl suddenly displays initiative that we would never have expected of her. She takes on Achashverosh and Haman at their own game; she displays cunning: "Let him come today... let him come tomorrow." She leads them by the nose. She leads Haman into a trap, simultaneously arousing the anger and desire of Achashverosh. Together with her personal initiative, her inner, spiritual, national and moral identities are also realized and come to the fore. The anonymous Esther, the Esther devoid of roots, hailing from the "127 provinces," reveals herself and is transformed into a specific, singular Esther, belonging to a special nation. What characterizes her from that point onwards is not shrinking back into a haze, but on the contrary - an emphasis on her uniqueness, her belonging to a unique people, a nation whose "ways are different."

From here onwards Esther not only displays initiative in the sphere of political manipulations, but, brimming with self-confidence, faces up to Haman. Here Esther takes her place as a worthy member of the royalty, as a leader. Her leadership is so outstanding towards the end of the Megilla that to some degree it overshadows even that of Mordekhai.

Once upon a time, "whatever Mordekhai said, Esther would do." He was the one pulling the strings. Suddenly Mordekhai's own achievements come only in the wake of Esther's initiative. How does Mordekhai come to possess Haman's home? Through Esther. Who writes the megilla? While Mordekhai is still debating, "Queen Esther, daughter of Avichayil, wrote" (9:29), and only afterwards did Mordekhai join her. Now it is Esther who is prepared not only to stand before Achashverosh, but also to send a letter to the Sages and demand, "Write me down! Remember me for all generations!" Is this really the same innocent girl who "did what Mordekhai told her," "whatever she was told by Hegai, the king's officer, appointed over the women?"

The answer - the difference between the end and the beginning - must be sought elsewhere: in the middle of the story, in particular, in four verses in which the change occurs. These verses represent the key to the entire Megilla.

After the royal decree to exterminate all the Jews is issued in Shushan, messengers are dispatched throughout the kingdom to publicize it. Upon hearing the terrible report from her maidens and eunuchs, she begins to awaken somewhat from her inactivity and passivity. "The queen was greatly distressed" (4:4). Esther, who indeed has the power to avert the evil decree, who lives in the royal palace, who could pull the necessary strings, does nothing. She thinks to herself: "The decree has been issued - what can I do? I'm a young and simple girl; I can't move mountains."

What eventually gets her to act? Mordekhai disturbs her. The entire nation of Israel faces mortal danger, and this she is able to bear. But then she hears that Mordekhai, her beloved uncle, has removed his regular clothing and is wearing sackcloth instead. "And she sent clothing to clothe Mordekhai and to remove the sackcloth from upon him, but he did not accept it" (4:4). Instead of trying to have the royal decree canceled, instead of expressing solidarity with her people, instead of joining Mordekhai in protest and mourning, she begs: "Go and make him stop this nonsense; let him accept the decree as it is, let him put on his clothing again." And despite everything, this still represents progress. She no longer displays complete passivity and helplessness. Something has started to move, and once there is concern for the individual Mordekhai, once the mire of passivity has been abandoned and some action is being taken, things start to happen. Mordekhai refuses to take Esther's advice, and replies: "Thank you very much, but how am I to wear respectable clothing when

the sword hangs over the entire nation?" Esther sends messengers to Mordekhai a second time, "to learn what this was and why this was" (4:5). What can be done? Mordekhai sends back a very clear message: a copy of the royal decree. True, it is not clear from the megilla - and this is a critical question in itself - whether Esther knew of the impending decree before it was issued. Even if we suppose - as I am inclined to - that she had heard mention of it, there is still a vast difference between vague rumors which reach her by various means and a copy of the actual decree sent to her directly by Mordekhai. Esther starts to react to his influence, but in a limited way. Mordekhai persists in his appeal to her. "Know, my dearest, that the entire nation of Israel - young and old - is in danger. Everyone. This is the appointed date. Go and do something, in your position as wife in the royal palace: Shout! Appeal! Beg! Pray!" All around the swords are being sharpened, the ammunition is being gathered, but Esther remains unmoved. She tells Mordekhai that she cannot approach the king - it is against palace regulations. "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman comes to the king, to the inner courtyard, without being called, there is a standard penalty - he is put to death!" (4:11). Of course, there are exceptions: "unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter, then he shall live" - but I? "I have not been called to come to the king for thirty days." For a whole month we have not seen each other, and so approaching him will be a problem.

Such was Esther's response even after "the queen was greatly distressed," even after Mordekhai has sent her a copy of the king's decree. Suddenly, Esther might be exposed to personal danger. The entire nation of Israel stands on one side of the scale, and she stands alone on the other. What decides the issue? Obviously, her own problems. If there is a personal interest and a public interest at stake, which is more likely to prevail?!

At this point, Mordekhai sends her a message which, if we read it correctly, is quite terrible. I myself tremble anew each time I reach this verse (4:13): "AND MORDEKHAH SAID TO REPLY TO ESTHER: DO NOT IMAGINE THAT YOU WILL ESCAPE IN THE KING'S PALACE FROM [AMONG] ALL THE JEWS." What a biting accusation! It would seem that he should have told her, "You don't want to do anything? Then don't. You're cowardly and lacking in any initiative! You haven't been called to the king in thirty days? So what?" This would have put Esther in a more positive light. It's terrible that you aren't prepared to risk yourself, even at the expense of the entire nation, but still - it's a result of your inherent weakness.

But Mordekhai doesn't put her reaction down to weakness. He takes his gamble all the way, appealing to the deepest recesses of the Jewish soul. He accuses Esther of refusing to go to the king not because she lacks courage, not out of weakness, but rather as a calculated choice: "Let the entire Jewish nation be destroyed. Let them all perish - young and old, men and women. I will remain secure in the royal palace." This is how Mordekhai interprets her response, and this what he addresses: not weakness, not a lack of courage, but rather what he fears may lie behind everything. Behind the apparent timidity lies apathy. If you really cared, if you considered your own soul to be at stake, would you be able to say, "For a whole month I have not been called to the king"? Is this how someone talks when she believes that her nation is in danger? Is this the response of someone who cares?

Someone who really cares, someone whose consciousness is deeply rooted in the collective experience of Am Yisrael, someone whose destiny is bound up with that of the nation, disregards any consideration of danger or possible anger on the part of the king. In fact, such a person doesn't even have to disregard these thoughts - they don't even enter her mind. Such considerations arise, whether consciously or subconsciously, out of a perception that everyone else may perish, but I will manage to save my own skin. This, as we have mentioned, is a most serious accusation. What does Mordekhai want from her? He knows her, after all. She has been in his care for a long time, a young and innocent girl, passive and naive. Why is he attacking her with

this terrible accusation? Give her the benefit of the doubt! Understand her weakness! How do you expect this unfortunate girl, an orphan who has spent years in the care of others, to courageously enter the royal courtyard?

Mordekhai will not compromise. He understands that if one knows what the situation is, and if one is truly concerned, then no considerations are admissible and no rules are relevant. Rather, one must be prepared for self-sacrifice, taking care that not personal interests but rather national interests will dictate one's plans and actions. "Do not imagine that you will escape in the royal palace from all the Jews!" Mordekhai adds a further note: "For if you will remain silent at this time, relief and salvation will arise for the Jews from somewhere else, and you and your father's house will perish. Who knows, perhaps for the sake of a time like this you came to join the royalty?" (4:14). He is telling Esther: Know that your calculations are mistaken. Not only does your response exhibit moral and ethical rottenness, but you are mistaken in a practical sense as well. Do you believe that everyone will perish and you will remain there, in the royal palace, just because you have succeeded in entering the king's bedroom? Is that how you think God runs His world? Someone who avoids any responsibility, who doesn't care, who isn't prepared to risk himself, who gives his personal ambitions priority over the interests of the nation - is that the person you think will survive? Will he be the one to succeed? Will all values just disappear? "You and your father's house will perish." "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and salvation will arise for the Jews from somewhere else." Salvation will come. I don't know how or from where, but it will come! Those who pay heed to sundry considerations and circum-stances, the doubters and cowards of many types, those who put themselves first - all of these will perish! "Who knows, perhaps for the sake of a time like this you came to join the royalty?" Now is zero hour. This is the test.

At any rate, this is also the turning point. For the doubtful, hesitating, fearful Esther at whom Mordekhai directs this terrible accusation, pushing her back to the wall and demanding that she stop making excuses and abandon her calculations - these are the real calculations: "Look deep into your soul and see what lies behind your hesitation. Do not try to trick either me or yourself. Do not try to trick God. There are no calculations or considerations, no fears or hesitations, no orders or rules. What lies behind all your excuses is APATHY. What you have to decide is, DO I CARE OR DON'T I?" The excuses fall away; Mordekhai rejects, one by one, all of her claims and considerations. Morally laid bare, Esther must make her fateful choice: Do I care or don't I?

It is now that the young, passive, powerless Esther faces her moment of truth, and she prevails. She passes the test. And it is now that she rises to her full height and reveals herself - not just in title, but in essence - as Queen Esther. At this moment Esther realizes that what is at stake is not just another private matter involving Mordekhai. She realizes the dimensions of the threat, the potential tragedy looming over the whole of Am Yisrael, including herself. She is no longer the anonymous Esther; she is prepared to reveal herself, to identify herself openly. She is ready to cooperate, and to stand together with her nation. This Esther understands that her fate and destiny are not her private, personal matter, but rather bound up with those of the nation as a whole. And when the danger and the mission are public, then the course of action, too, will of necessity be a public one: "Go and gather all the Jews" (4:16). Well aware of her true destiny, Esther presents herself before Achashverosh. She discards personal considerations in favor of public ones. Only after she has passed the test is she capable of standing before Achashverosh, appearing before the people, leading the camp, initiating action, demanding and even deciding events.

The key to the question of where we find the transition from the retiring Esther of chapter 2 to the regal and commanding Esther of chapter 9 is to be found in the Esther of chapter 4. In the zero-hour of chapter 4, the fateful showdown between Mordekhai and Esther decided between apathy and empathy, selfishness and selflessness.

As mentioned earlier, the megilla is a story of development on two

levels: one in terms of strength of character, initiative and courage, and the other in terms of moral awareness, of reassessing priorities. The two processes go hand in hand: when Esther finds the WILL to achieve an important end, she finds the ABILITY to do so as well. This is the essence of Mordekhai's message to her - if there is a will, there is a way. But first, you must truly will it. And this is indeed what happens. Once Esther cares enough, she thinks hard and arrives at a solution. Her two-pronged plan consists of prayer - "Gather all the Jews," a call to the Almighty - and donning her royal garb in order to find favor in the eyes of a very human king. There is fasting and crying and tearing the heavens, together with an easy smile and moving to action. When the will prevails, suddenly it becomes apparent that one possesses the means to accomplish. Those potential character traits which until now have been concealed burst outward. Deeply hidden treasures that have lain dormant in the recesses of the soul reveal themselves in the wake of the will and initiative, and prove themselves capable of overturning worlds, canceling decrees, changing the fate of an entire nation.

SUCH WAS ESTHER'S REDEMPTION THEN. AND THE SAME APPLIES TO US TODAY. We are all, to some degree, Esther. Each of us, for whatever reason, has doubts as to his ability to accomplish. We, too, are hesitant: "What, we're going to achieve all that? We're going to save Am Yisrael? I'm going to put a stop to assimilation? Little me? I'm just a youngster; I can achieve only little: a little bit in my neighborhood, a little bit in a youth group, a little bit in the family. But to start a revolution? To determine the future of a nation? To avert an evil decree? Little me?"

Here comes the demand. I don't want to use Mordekhai's words, but I do want to at least pose the question: how much of our resignation is motivated by supposed "inability" and how much is a result of the fact that our concern simply doesn't run deep enough? Esther's concern doesn't run deep enough for two reasons, both extremely serious. On one hand, perhaps she doesn't act because of a lack of knowledge. True, she was told about the decree, she heard something, but with only half an ear - she didn't pay much attention. What penetrated the depths of her soul was only the family issue. The question is obvious: how can this be? The whole of Shushan is shouting it out, there are posters on every corner, children in the streets are sharpening swords, everyone knows. Can it be that only Esther, who is right in the middle of all of it, in the palace, doesn't see? Today too, everyone knows that Am Yisrael is in grave danger. There is danger of assimilation, danger of mixed marriages, danger of people losing their way, danger of being cut off from roots and values. Can it be that only you can't see it? As if this information is hidden somewhere? Is there any difficulty involved in obtaining the statistics on Jewish education in Israel and in the diaspora? Someone who cares enough can get his hands on the figures: sixty percent of Jews in the diaspora are being lost! And the situation here in Israel is nothing to be excited about. A person is quite capable of finding out, if he's interested enough, the number of students who "drop out" of the national-religious system! But even more serious are Mordekhai's words to Esther. At a certain stage there is an effort to give her the benefit of the doubt: "Well, it certainly sounds very strange: the whole of Shushan knows, except the queen?" Still - maybe they told her it was just a possibility, a thought, and she may have thought that the danger wasn't imminent. But after copies of the decree of annihilation were distributed, and Mordekhai brought them to her attention, can Esther still say, "What do you want from me?" Herein lies the ultimate question. It is directed to each and every one of us. Let each person do as Esther did: stand before himself, stand before God, and once the situation is quite clear to him, ask himself, "Where am I, who am I, what comes first, what is vital and what is secondary?" This does not imply that what is secondary is necessarily unimportant: Esther's plans of being queen and ruling over 127 provinces certainly represented serious career considerations. The question is not whether one's personal plans are inherently improper. Rather, a person must ask himself not only whether what he is doing is good and worthy, but whether it is the best and most worthy thing that he could do. He has to keep asking himself, "Is this really

what the circumstances require? Is this the best that I can do at this time?"

Chazal teach that God once criticized no less than the ministering angels themselves. When God saved the Israelites at the Red Sea by drowning the Egyptians, the angels requested to do what would appear to be their rightful job, to fulfill themselves, to express their innermost souls - they wished to break out into a joyous song of praise to God. God said to them: Indeed, song is beautiful and wonderful; it gives expression to the soul. But there are times when even song itself is not worthy of the ministering angels. "My creatures are drowning in the sea, and yet you sing my praise?!" The angels' song itself is not necessarily wrong; it is just inappropriate at that given time. The question is one of priorities. It is good and worthy to sing, but is that all that needs to be done at this particular time? "My creatures are drowning in the sea" - a sea of assimilation, a sea of ignorance, a sea of alienation from Knesset Yisrael, a sea of disconnection from roots. And you - who are capable of moving the carriage out of the mud, you who could lend a hand, you who could uplift the nation, you who could be inculcating values - you offer song?! This is the real question. If you understand the situation - and there is no reason or excuse not to - then you hear the cry that emanates from every part of the country, from every corner of the globe, expressed in the spiritual dangers surrounding us and threatening us on every side. Someone who cares knows what is going on, and once he knows he must ask himself: What significance does this knowledge have for me? To what extent does it cause me pain? To what extent do I identify with world Jewry, in fasting and prayer? To what extent is my spiritual world structured such that Knesset Yisrael and its dangers are on one side and I, with my considerations and private plans, am on the other? Like Esther, we will all have to ask ourselves the question when the time comes: We could have saved; did we? What will be our answer then? More importantly, what is our answer today?

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