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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON TZAV & PURIM - 5771

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Purim: The Holiday in Hiding_From: Aish.com
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Subject: Purim - **The Holiday in Hiding**
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by **Rabbi Emanuel Feldman**

Revealing why the story of Purim is wrapped in a disguise and concealed behind a mask.

Poor Purim. It has become the Jewish mardi gras, a day of revelry, drink, and masquerades. But it is much more than this.

Purim is the holiday in hiding. One has to probe beneath the surface to find the spiritual dimension that lies underneath. In fact, the disguises and the masks are all designed to underscore the essential hiddenness of this day.

This theme of concealment is found in the very name of the heroine of Purim. "Esther" derives from the root str, which in Hebrew means "hidden." In the Torah (Dt. 31:18), God says to Israel: "I will surely hide (hastir astir) My face from you..." The sages see this Hebrew phrase as a subtle suggestion of the hiddenness of God during the time of Esther.

Take Esther herself. No one except Mordecai knows who she really is. Even King Ahashveros is kept in the dark. "Ein Esther magedet moledetah," says the Megillah in 2:20. "Esther did not reveal her origins..." This is the theme of the day: nothing is revealed.

Note also the lineage of the protagonists of the Purim story. It is the lineage of hiddenness. Mordechai and Esther are descendants of mother Rachel. Rachel, the mother of Yosef, is the very essence of hiddenness and concealment. When her sister Leah is substituted for her in marriage to Yaakov, why does Rachel not cry out and protest that an injustice is being done? Because to do so would have humiliated her sister. Rachel knows how to conceal things, including her bitter disappointment.

Rachel's son Joseph is also a master of concealment. His essential qualities of holiness are concealed from his brothers, who do not recognize his greatness because he effectively hides them. And when the brothers come down to Egypt 22 years later, they again fail to recognize

him, for he is now concealed behind his garments. The Talmud (Sotah 10) underscores the hidden qualities of Joseph when it states that -- in the case of Potiphar's wife -- Joseph sanctified the name of God in private, in a hidden way. And Saul, from the same lineage as Joseph, feels unworthy of becoming King of Israel: he hides among the vessels when they search for him to become King.

It is thus fitting that Esther and Mordechai, who stem from the same lineage, should also do their saving work quietly, secretly, in a hidden and concealed manner.

Even God himself is hidden in the Purim story. Search the Megillah from beginning to end, but you find no mention of His name. Is this not strange for a biblical book? The closest we come to a reference to God is when Mordecai says to Esther that redemption for the Jews will come from makom aher, "another place."

To underscore the hiddenness of God, the entire story seems to be one of chance, happenstance, and coincidence -- the very things that the Bible tells us the world is not! In the Megillah, the role of God is unseen, His hand invisible. Queen Vashti just happens to refuse to appear at the royal feast; the King just happens to rid himself of her and to search for a new queen; Mordecai just happens to be in the right place at the right moment to foil a plot against the King's life; the King just happens to have a sleepless night and his courtiers remind him that Mordecai saved his life; Haman just happens to be in the Queen's chambers when the King walks in. Even the date on which the Jews are to be exterminated is determined by the casting of lots: hipil pur hu hagoral, "he cast a pur, that is the lot..." (Esther 3:7) and it is this "pur" that gives us the name of the holiday. All these echoes of randomness and chance suggest anything but the guiding hand of God.

Even the miracle of Purim is a hidden one. Contrast this with the miracle of Hanukah. There, the oil that is enough for one day burns instead for eight days, which is a nes niglah, an open miracle that everyone can see. But the Purim miracle -- whereby the entire Jewish community is saved from destruction -- is a hidden miracle, a nes nistar. The interceding hand of God is invisible. It could easily be ascribed to happenstance, the way everything else in the story seems to be happenstance.

Gradually we begin to understand the role of masks in the Purim story. The entire deliverance of the Jewish people is masked. It is a story wrapped in a disguise, hidden behind a costume, concealed behind a mask.

Even that strange dictum in the Talmud (Megillah 7b) that ordains us to become intoxicated on Purim ad delo yada, "until we know not the difference between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordecai" -- even this is part of the theme of hiddenness. For how strange is the Talmudic advice. Ours is, after all, a tradition that abhors drunkenness. We are a people of the mind, discernment, analysis -- all those things that fall under the rubric of data, knowledge. But on Purim we are bidden to become intoxicated and conceal our vaunted data -- to the point of ad delo yada -- "until there is no data" -- and to enter a universe where reality has no meaning and we begin to realize that it is not our intellects that guide the world but the One Intellect above that guides the world.

There is another strange hiddenness about Purim. This is the most physical of all our holidays. The festive Purim meal, the sending of food gifts, the encouragement to drink to excess -- these are matters that deal with the body. What by contrast, is the most spiritual of our holy days? Obviously it is Yom Kippur. Our observance of these two days are in diametric opposition to one another. But upon closer examination we perceive that the two are closely related in a very hidden but real way. The official name of Yom Kippur is Yom HaKippurim. Literally, this means, "a day like Purim." This is stunning. Yom Kippur is like Purim? How can this be?

It can be, because Purim and Yom Hakippurim are mirror images of one another. On Yom Kippur we are forbidden to eat or drink; on Purim

we are bidden to eat and drink. Yom Kippur is overwhelmingly spiritual; Purim is overwhelmingly physical. But on each day we are required to serve God fully, with our bodies and with our souls.

The lesson is clear: God can be served not only in the solemnity of a Yom Kippur, but also in the revelry of a Purim. God is present not only in the open ark of Yom Kippur when spirituality seems so close, but also in the open food and drink of Purim when spirituality seems so remote. It is much more of a challenge to remember God amidst the revelry than to remember Him in the midst of the solemnity. To imbibe and to feast and to remember the Author of all; this is the great challenge of Purim -- perhaps a greater challenge than any other holy day.

Purim is the holiday in hiding. But its message need not be concealed from us.

The above article by Rabbi Emanuel Feldman appears in his new book "**The Shul Without A Clock**" - Second Thoughts from a Rabbi's Notebook (Feldheim Publications).

This article can also be read at:
http://www.aish.com/purimthemes/purimthemesdefault/Purim_The_Holiday_in_Hiding_.asp

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The Dispute between Mordekhai and the Sanhedrin Based on a sicha by Harav Aharon Lichtenstein

Summarized by Zev Frimer Translated by Kaeren Fish

For Mordekhai the Jew was second-in-command to king Achashverosh, and great among the Jews and accepted by most of his brethren; seeking good for his people and speaking peace to all his descendants. (Esther 10:3)

Commenting on this verse, the Gemara (Megilla 16b) elaborates: "Accepted by most of his brethren" – but not by all of his brethren; this teaches us that some members of the Sanhedrin parted ways with him.

The Gemara does not elaborate as to why some of the Sages of the Sanhedrin parted ways with Mordekhai. Rashi provides the following explanation:

"Parted ways with him" – because Mordekhai abandoned Torah [study] and took up the reigns of power.

According to Rashi, some members of the Sanhedrin severed their ties with Mordekhai because he became the second-in-command to King Achashverosh, instead of being engaged in Torah. Rashi may have deduced this from the context of the Gemara, which quotes several sayings in praise of Torah study in relation to other values, such as building the Temple and honoring parents. In any event, Rashi does not explain what exactly the argument was. However, we can point to several possible issues.

a. In the Gemara (Kiddushin 40b) there is a debate among the Tannaim as to the relationship between study and action:

Rabbi Tarfon and the elders were gathered in the upper chamber of the house of Nitza in Lod, and this question was posed to them: Which is greater, study or action (ma'aseh)?

Rabbi Tarfon answered: "Action is greater."

Rabbi Akiva answered and said, "Study is greater."

All the others present answered and said, "Study is greater, for study leads to action."

It is possible that Mordekhai and the Sanhedrin were debating a similar question. The members of the Sanhedrin believed that, in terms of values, it was better to engage in Torah study than in action, while Mordekhai felt that action should be given preference. (The Rishomim are also divided on this question, since the Gemara's conclusion is not clear. The Gemara establishes that "study is great" – but only because it leads to action.)

However, if we look further on in the Gemara, we see that when the Gemara speaks about "ma'aseh" it is not talking about political power or regular day-to-day activities outside of the beit midrash; rather, it is talking about the fulfillment of practical commandments, such as challa and tithes. We may therefore say that Mordekhai and the Sanhedrin agree that "ma'aseh is greater," but disagree as to what "ma'aseh" means, in this context. The Sages of the Sanhedrin maintained that this term referred to actions with purely halakhic value, such as the fulfillment of practical commandments, and that only these took preference over Torah study. Mordekhai, on the other hand, interpreted the term "ma'aseh" in its broader sense, so as to include all actions that have some worthy value, even if they lack weight on the purely halakhic level.

b. In some contexts, the term "reshut" (optional or voluntary) represents the opposite of "mitzva" (commanded). Thus, for example, we encounter the concept of a "voluntary war" (milchemet reshut), as opposed to "an obligatory war" (milchemet mitzva). From the Gemara (Bava Kama 91b) it appears that, according to those who rule that a person is permitted to injure himself, this action would be considered "voluntary harm." Does the term reshut imply that these actions are morally neutral? Obviously not. For instance, it is clear that the decision of whether to go out to war is not the same as the question of whether to wear a blue tie or a red one. There can be no doubt that the former question belongs to a category that carries considerable moral weight; nevertheless, such decisions are called reshut since there is no clear halakhic imperative or prohibition involved.

Mordekhai, then, maintained that the concept of "ma'aseh" applies not only to the activities that are permitted or forbidden by Torah law, but also to activities that are defined as reshut – such as engaging in politics, economics, social action, etc. These activities admittedly are not "halakhic" in nature, in the strict sense of the word, but there can be no doubt that they have great significance, and can bring about a "repairing the world in the Kingship of God."

We see, for example, in Rambam's Hilkhot Matenot Aniyim (10:7) that the highest level of the mitzva of charity is where a person finds someone else employment in order that he may support himself and not be dependent on others. This charitable person has not lost a single penny in the process, but he has nevertheless fulfilled the commandment of tzedaka in the finest possible way. How much more so, then, a person who accepts upon himself some public position, and within that framework succeeds, for example, in managing the country's finances wisely so that thousands of people are able to find themselves a source of income; such a person is fulfilling a great mitzva. Even if there is not a single paragraph in the Shulchan Arukh dealing with the assumption of political power, it should nevertheless be regarded as the realization of an important and lofty goal, and in certain circumstances it should even be given preference over Torah study.

Hence, it is possible that Mordekhai and the Sanhedrin were not divided over the question of the relationship between study of the Divine will (i.e., Torah) and its realization, but rather over the question of the

scope of the sphere of "ma'aseh" that pertains to the realization of God's will.

c. There is a third possible source of the disagreement. Even if we interpret the term "ma'aseh" in its broadest possible sense, it is still not desirable that a person who is a leading Torah scholar should abandon his study for the sake of the world of action. Would it be better if Rav Shelomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l had been the Prime Minister of Israel, or if Rav Chaim Soloveitchik zt"l had been the Prime Minister of Poland? Such a scenario would certainly not have been beneficial for the world of Torah, and there is considerable doubt as to whether it would have been beneficial for the regimes and citizens involved. The distinction between the world of Torah and the world of ma'aseh must be preserved; they should not be confused with each other.

The Sages of the Sanhedrin believed that, despite the importance of political influence, it would be better for Mordekhai to remain within the world of the beit midrash, rather than mixing two dimensions that did not belong together. Mordekhai, on the other hand, insisted that it was specifically this integration of the different spheres that could bring about mutual fructification and advancement.

d. Another possible source of the dispute arises from the Gemara in Berakhot (63a):

We learn, Hillel the Elder said: At a time when others gather in, [you should] scatter; at a time when others scatter – [you should] gather in. And if you see a generation that holds Torah dear – scatter, as it is written, "There is one who scatters yet increases" (Mishlei 11:24). If you see a generation that does not hold Torah dear - gather in, as it is written, "A time to act for God; they have violated Your Torah" (Tehillim 119:126).

Rashi explains:

"At a time when others gather in" – i.e., the Sages of the generation are not spreading Torah among their students;

"scatter" – you shall spread it and teach the students.

"At a time when others scatter" – when the great Sages of the generation are teaching Torah,

"gather in" – you [shall keep your Torah to yourself]. And do not exercise power over them, for it is for the glory of heaven for a person to maintain humility, and it is written, "A time to act for God; they have violated Your Torah."

"And if you see a generation that does not hold Torah dear, gather in" – do not [teach and thereby] allow words of Torah to be held in derision.

From this Gemara, we learn that when a person is required to choose a sphere of occupation for himself, it is not sufficient that he act in accordance with his own personal hierarchy of values. He must also take into consideration the social circumstances prevailing around him. Sometimes a person regards it as a great value to work in a particular sphere, but at the time of his decision there is no shortage of people working in that area – either because the occupation is saturated with workers, or because there is little demand. On the other hand, there are times when a person may lean against a certain occupation, but there is a need for more people to work in that field.

Every person is "planted" by God in a particular generation and in a specific environment. A person who wants to live wisely must evaluate very carefully what is required of him in the reality in which he lives. There are, admittedly, aims and values that exist beyond time and place, but nevertheless there are priorities that arise from every specific situation. This may be what Ramchal refers to when he introduces his *Messilat Yesharim* with the subject of "man's obligation IN HIS WORLD."

It is possible, then, that Mordekhai and the Sanhedrin were divided as to the question of what was required right then, after the conclusion of the story of the Megilla. This period was characterized, on the one hand, by a great spiritual revival. Am Yisrael, which at the beginning of the Megilla had "enjoyed the banquet of that wicked one," symbolizing

identification with the decadent culture of Shushan – had, by the end of the Megilla, reached a situation of "kiyemu ve-kiblu": a renewed acceptance of the Torah ("they re-accepted it in the days of Achashverosh" – Shabbat 88a). Perhaps Am Yisrael even reached a higher level than the one they had maintained prior to this deterioration: "The place where ba'alei teshuva (penitents) stand is unattainable even by the completely righteous" (Berakhot 34b).

However, a spiritual danger still hung over their heads. So long as they remained under the powerful impression of the salvation from Haman's decree, and had an immediate sense of God's Providence, there was little danger of another spiritual deterioration. But with time, the memory of their miraculous salvation would fade, the spiritual enthusiasm would wear off, and Am Yisrael would sink back into the routine of life. It was for this reason that it was so important to Esther to demand, "Inscribe me [i.e., my story] for all generations" (Megilla 7a). Esther wanted to set aside a day on the Jewish calendar that would bring the story of their salvation into the national consciousness, preventing it from turning into an isolated event that would be forgotten.

The Sages of the Sanhedrin therefore argued that the leadership of the generation was now faced with an incomparably important task: to ensure that the experience and spiritual fervor would be preserved for future generations, rather than dissipating and disappearing. Was this an appropriate time for Mordekhai to assume a position of political power?

Mordekhai, for his part, argued that political power was exactly what the generation needed. Chazal are divided as to whether Achashverosh was a cunning king or a stupid one (Megilla 12a), but what is clear is that he was given to changing moods. At one point in time, he followed his advisor unquestioningly and approved the execution of the queen (Vashti); at another point in time, he followed the queen's advice and approved the execution of his advisor (Haman). At first he expresses agreement to the Haman's plan to slaughter the Jews; afterwards he commands Haman to lead Mordekhai the Jew through the streets of the city with great honor. The phenomenon of the king committing the kingdom to whatever occurs to him at a given time, depending on his mood, is one of the most prominent themes of the Megilla.

Mordekhai therefore argued: Who can guarantee that Achashverosh will not change his mind once again, all of a sudden, and be drawn after some new Haman who may decide to attack the Jews? Would it be responsible to ignore such a fragile political situation? Would this be the right time to go off to the beit midrash? Despite the enormous weight that he accorded Torah study, Mordekhai could not allow himself to choose the beit midrash over the world of political influence, while Am Yisrael was vulnerable and in such great danger. Therefore, he chose to become second-in-command to the king.

We have proposed four possible focuses of the dispute between Mordekhai and the Sanhedrin. What is common to all of them is the fact that the debate was based upon considerations of values and principles alone. This conveys an important message to each and every one of us. A person faced with the need to choose the profession that he will engage in, must ensure that he is guided in his decision by meaningful considerations. He must ask himself where he is needed right now, in which sphere he is able to contribute and to meet the needs of the generation in the most effective way.

In this regard, what is important is not only the bottom-line result – whether one works in a field that, by definition, contributes to society and influences it – but also the manner in which one chooses. What considerations guided one's choice? There may be a situation in which two people choose the same profession, but one makes his choice as a Torah-directed, value-based decision, while the other makes the same decision out of completely selfish considerations. Seemingly, both are responding in equal measure to the needs of the generation, but on the personal, spiritual level there is an enormous difference between a person motivated by a sense of giving, and a person motivated by

personal ambition. In such matters, the motivation is of critical importance, even if the decision is ultimately the same. A person cares about his own self-advancement differs from a person who asks himself continually where he can contribute.

One of the phenomena that characterized the State of Israel in its early years was idealism, rising above one's personal needs for the sake of contributing to society. This reminds us of the Rambam's teaching (Hilkhot Klei ha-Mikdash 3:1) concerning the Leviim – that they must be available and ready for service in the Temple, "whether they want to or not." But just a few decades later everything collapsed, and what guides the average individual now is the question of which occupation most interests him or would be the most lucrative.

When a ben Torah faces such a fateful decision – what he is going to do every day for the next forty or fifty years – he must ask himself, first and foremost, whether it is the public good that he keeps in mind or his own benefit and his personal wishes? Are the "needs of Your people numerous," or it is perhaps the case that "numerous are my wants"?

Clearly, the ideal situation is where there is no contradiction between the needs of the generation and a person's own personal preferences. This overlap is made possible in two different ways. One possibility is that a person succeeds in choosing a sphere which, on the one hand, addresses the needs of the generation, and on the other hand gives him a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment, independent of the sense of giving that accompanies it. Thus, for example, there are people who are drawn to Torah study with all their heart and soul, and find it interesting and enjoyable, without any connection to its inherent value and importance. A person who has such a great, natural love for Torah is fortunate; he is easily delivered from the schism that sometimes divides one's personal desires and the needs of the generation.

But there is another situation, in which a person is not naturally drawn to the sphere that he chooses out of commitment to the needs of society, but ultimately he discovers that there is some overlap between his will and the public good. The Mishna in Avot (2:4) teaches, "Nullify your will before His will." We may understand the mishna as meaning that, on the practical level, a person ultimately should end up doing not what he himself desires, but rather what God wants. But there is another way of understanding it: when a person internalizes the fact that what he is doing is God's will, it can become his will, too. A person generally has no desire to defy God's will; even if he has such a desire, it can be channeled into positive ways of serving God ("With all your heart [means] with both of your inclinations, the positive and negative inclinations," Berakhot 54a). A person wants with all his might to advance God's plans in the world, and even if it seems to him that his personal will is for something else, he internalizes the fact that the realization of God's will is more important than the realization of his own desires.

Thus, the debate over a choice of profession is not limited to Mordekhai and the Sanhedrin. It has occupied, and continues to occupy, many people. There is no single correct answer. Not every person is necessarily suited to the world of Torah study. Every person has his own talents and skills, by means of which he may enrich the world. But a sense of mission, a will to contribute to society, can and should be part of each and every one of us. A person must do some honest soul-searching, to examine carefully what his considerations are in choosing a profession, and then – with God's help – arrive at the proper conclusion.

May it be God's will that we be granted the wisdom to determine the correct priorities, and that we merit help from heaven in choosing a worthy sphere of occupation.

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Lord Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth [From 5764]

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Tsav Blood, Idolatry or War

Today's sedra, speaking about sacrifices, prohibits the eating of blood: Wherever you live, you must not eat the blood of any bird or animal. If anyone eats blood, that person must be cut off from his people. (Lev. 7: 26-27) However, it is clear that this is more than one prohibition among others. The ban on eating blood is fundamental to the Torah. So, for example, it occupies a central place in the covenant G-d makes with Noah - and through him, all humanity - after the Flood:

But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. (Gen. 9: 4) So too, Moses returns to the subject in his great closing addresses in the book of Devarim/Deuteronomy:

But be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life, and you must not eat the life with the meat. You must not eat the blood; pour it out on the ground like water. Do not eat it, so that it may go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is right in the eyes of the Lord. (Deut. 12: 23-25) What is wrong with of eating blood? Maimonides and Nahmanides offer conflicting interpretations. For Maimonides - consistent with his programme throughout The Guide for the Perplexed - it is part of the Torah's extended battle against idolatry. He notes that the Torah uses identical language about idolatry and eating blood:

I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. (Leviticus 17:10)

I will set my face against that man [who engages in Moloch worship] and his family and will cut him off from his people. (Leviticus 20:5) In no context other than blood and idolatry is the expression 'set my face against' used. Idolators, said Maimonides, believed that blood was the food of the spirits, and that by eating it, they would have 'something in common with the spirits' (Guide, III, 46). Eating blood is forbidden because of its association with idolatry.

Nahmanides says, contrariwise, that the ban has to do with human nature. We are affected by what we eat.

If one were to eat the life of all flesh, and it would then attach itself to one's own blood, and they would become united in one's heart, and the result would be a thickening and coarseness of the human soul so that it would closely approach the nature of the animal soul which resided in what he ate . . . (Ramban, Commentary to Lev. 17: 13) Eating blood, implies Nahmanides, makes us cruel, bestial, animal-like.

Which explanation is correct? We now have copious evidence, through archaeology and anthropology, that both are. Maimonides was quite right to see the eating of blood as an idolatrous rite. Human sacrifice was widespread in the ancient world.

Among the Greeks, for example, the god Kronos required human victims. The Maenads, female worshippers of Dionysus, were said to tear living victims apart with their hands and eat them. The Aztecs of South America practised human sacrifice on vast scale, believing that without its meals of human blood, the sun would die: 'Convinced that in order to avoid the final cataclysm it was necessary to fortify the sun, they undertook for themselves the mission of furnishing it with the vital energy found only in the precious liquid which keeps man alive.'

Barbara Ehrenreich, from whose book Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War, these facts come, offers a fascinating speculation on the birth of blood sacrifice. Quoting Walter Burkert, she argues that one of the most formative experiences of the first human beings must have been the terror of being attacked by an animal predator:

The utmost danger is met with excitement and anxiety. Usually there will be but one way of salvation: one member of the group must fall prey to the hungry carnivores, then the rest will be safe for the time being. An

outsider, an invalid, or a young animal will be most liable to become the victim. This situation of pursuit by predators must have played a momentous role in the evolution of civilization, while man, as a hunter, became a predator himself. Ehrenreich suggests that 'the sacrificial ritual in many ways mimics the crisis of a predator's attack. An animal or perhaps a human member of the group is singled out for slaughter, often in a spectacularly bloody manner.' The eating of the victim and his or its blood temporarily occupies the predator, allowing the rest of the group to escape in safety. That is why blood is offered to the gods. As Mircea Eliade noted, 'the divine beings who play a part in initiation ceremonies are usually imagined as beasts of prey - lions and leopards (initiatory animals par excellence) in Africa, jaguars in South America, crocodiles and marine monsters in Oceania.' Blood sacrifice appears when human beings are sufficiently well organized in groups to make the transition from prey to predator. They then relive their fears of being attacked and eaten.

Ehrenreich does not end there, however. Her view is that this emotional reaction - fear and guilt - survives to the present as part of our genetic endowment from earlier times. It leaves two legacies: one, the human tendency to band together in the face of an external threat; the other, the willingness to risk self-sacrifice for the sake of the group. These emotions appear at times of war. They are not the cause of war, but they invest it with 'the profound feelings - dread, awe, and the willingness to sacrifice - that make it "sacred" to us.' They help explain why it is so easy to mobilize people by conjuring up the spectre of an external enemy.

War is a destructive and self-destructive activity. Why then does it persist? Ehrenreich's insight suggests an answer. It is the dysfunctional survival of instincts, profoundly necessary in an age of hunter-gatherers, into an era in which such responses are no longer necessary. Human beings still thrill at the prospect of shedding blood.

Maimonides was right to see in the blood-sacrifice a central idolatrous practice. Nahmanides was equally correct to see it as a symptom of human cruelty. We now sense the profound wisdom of the law forbidding the eating of blood. Only thus could human beings be gradually cured of the deeply ingrained instinct, deriving from a world of predators and prey, in which the key choice is to kill or be killed. Evolutionary psychology has taught us about these genetic residues from earlier times which - because they are not rational - cannot be cured by reason alone, but only by ritual, strict prohibition and habituation. The contemporary world continues to be scarred by violence and terror. Sadly, the ban against blood sacrifice is still relevant. The instinct against which it is a protest - sacrificing life to exorcise fear - still lives on.

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From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein

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Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Jerusalem Post :: Friday, March 18, 2011

WHY WE NEED PURIM SO DESPERATELY :: Rabbi Berel Wein

A Jewish family of five including a three month old infant was murdered in their sleep this past week by a new brand of Hamans that constantly reappear and attempt to destroy us. The army promises to find the murderer/s and arrest him. Though that is a necessary step it will hardly serve as a lasting comfort to all of us who live here in our homeland. The greatness of the story of Purim is not so much that Haman and his cohorts were hanged and killed, important as that is in itself, but that the

Jewish people were saved from annihilation. It is the salvation and survival of Israel that is the focal point of the Purim story. The punishment of our enemies is certain, though not always apparent and certainly not always immediate.

But over the long run of history all those who have persecuted us unmercifully and have attempted to wreak havoc on us have all disappeared from the face of civilization and power. And the Jewish people, bloodied but always unbowed, continue to exist and be the engine of education, innovation and moral conscience to humankind. Thus Purim is not an historical event alone, a story about far away Persia in a long ago time, but it remains our story currently, always relevant and timely. The reality of the world is that there has always been and there will always be a Haman – a Jew hater. Today even, still comes in a Persian name and language and threatens our destruction. Purim teaches us that he eventually will be doomed to defeat though there is no guarantee as to the price we may, God forbid, have to pay to accomplish this end.

There are two heroes to the story of Purim. One naturally is the great queen Esther who emerges as the savior of her people. Esther is the example of the Jew who feels responsible for the Jewish people and its future even at the cost of personal gain or even one's position of power, influence or life itself. It is an act of desperate courage for her to rise against Haman who apparently has the king's ear and confidence and who also apparently represents the majority opinion of the people that she rules over. Certainly her behavior could not be considered politically correct.

There are many Jews today of influence and wealth, power and stature that unfortunately fail to stand up for their fellow Jews and for the only Jewish state in existence in the world. Truth be said, many of them, in all sorts of guises and fancy pious sounding names really stand against us. They fulfill the rabbinic requirement of Purim that they are so drunk on their own Jewish ignorance, assimilation and self-righteousness that they cannot distinguish between Mordecai and Haman.

It is Esther who rises to the occasion and sees things as they are and not as many others would naively wish to see them. This is the source of her heroic role in the Jewish story and the reason that she has had so many namesakes of wonderful Jewish women over the ages.

The other hero is Mordecai. Mordecai is the Jew that annoys us, that is stubborn, demanding, prickly, and possessed of great Jewish paranoia. He is described in the book of Esther in a most succinct fashion: "And Mordecai will not bow down and will not prostrate himself."

Midrash teaches us that there were many who disagreed with Mordecai's behavior. They found his stubbornness to be provocative and that somehow he was at least indirectly responsible for Haman's genocidal intents. Again there are many who feel that the abused bring the abuse upon themselves, that the victims are somehow at least partially or perhaps even fully at fault in their victimization.

The UN, the EU, many NGO's, the boycotters and divestiture activists certainly would pillory Mordecai for his behavior. But without Mordecai there is no Esther and no happy ending to the Purim story. We need stubborn Jews even if we disagree with them ideologically, politically and socially.

And we see at the end of the Purim story that even after Mordecai emerges as such a hero not all Jews are happy with him. They found him wanting spiritually and educationally. Such is the fate of great people in Jewish life.

There never is one hundred percent approval of anyone. But history and the Jewish people have immortalized Mordecai's stubbornness and he remains with Esther the hero of the Purim story. I pray that our Purim story also ends triumphantly.

From Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>

To Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com>
Subject Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

**Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Parshas Tzav**

The Kohen shall don his fitted linen Tunic...he shall separate the ash of what the fire consumed of the elevation-offering on the Altar. (6:3)

Separating the deshen, ash, is the first service of the day. The Kohen takes a shovelful from the innermost ashes on the Altar, placing it on the floor of the Courtyard. These ashes must be from the burnt flesh of the offerings of the previous day. This service was called the Terumas HaDeshen, separating the ash. On Yom Kippur, this service was the first service performed by the Kohen Gadol. Prior to this service, he changed out of his gold vestments, donned linen vestments, and, after performing the rite of Terumas HaDeshen, continued on to the Kodesh HaKedoshim, Holy of Holies, to perform the Yom Kippur service. Why is the Terumas HaDeshen the first service that the Kohen Gadol performed on Yom Kippur?

Horav Simchah Bunim, zl, m'Peshischa explains that when the Kohen Gadol, the individual who represents the apotheosis of holiness within the Jewish people, enters the holiest place, on the holiest day, he might lose sight of the "simple" things, the devarim gashmiim, material/physical needs, of the Jewish people. He is soaring the Heavens; his mind is in a completely different dimension, one in which material needs play no vital role. The Kohen Gadol might forget to pray for the peoples' parnassah, livelihood. Therefore, the Torah mandates that he change into simple linen vestments - sort of "weekday" clothes - and involve himself in a mundane type of activity, such as cleaning the ashes, so that he will remember Klal Yisrael's daily needs.

It is all determined by perspective, what is considered important in the eyes of the individual, and what remains insignificant. The Kohen Gadol is involved in the most sublime levels of sanctity. Thus, he might get carried away, such that he ignores the everyday needs of the Jewish People. The Torah issues a subtle reminder, to keep him on track. In certain instances, thinking lofty thoughts - focusing on the bigger picture - is critical. Chazal teach us that when the manna descended from Heaven, its arrival was accompanied by precious stones and diamonds. The gedolim she'b'am, greatest people of the nation, took those precious stones and put them away. The masses, however, collected only the manna, ignoring the stones. Why? One would think that the masses, the simple Jews, would be the first ones to dig in and fill up their sacks with diamonds. Clearly, he would not ignore them.

Horav Yissachar Frand, Shlita, quotes an interesting observation from Horav Michel Twerski, Shlita, of Milwaukee: The economic conditions that prevailed in the wilderness were unique. No one was in need of funds. The people had everything. It was probably the only time in our history that money did not play a critical role in our lives. The society that embraced the Jewish nation was such that all of the physical needs of the people were met. They received water to their heart's content, compliments of the Well. Manna was visited on them daily from Heaven. Their clothing did not wear out, so there was no reason to purchase new garments. "Styles" probably did not exist. Health was not a factor. They either lived or died, but they did not get sick.

When a society has no physical needs, then what use are precious stones? There is no need to buy, so why would one need money? Thus, when the people noticed the precious stones, they lacked interest in them. Since they had no purpose for them, why should they bother? The precious stones were deemed worthless by most of the nation. Not the gedolim! The great people among them were well aware that one day an occasion would occur in which there would be a mandate for a Mishkan and Bigdei Kehunah, Priestly Vestments, which would require these precious stones. The gedolim had foresight. They saw beyond the "here" and the "now." They saw the big picture. In that scene, precious stones were to become a necessity. Chazal are teaching us what distinguishes the great Jew from his simple counterpart. Leadership has a perspective unlike that of common people. The hamon am, ordinary Jew, sees with his eyes. Thus, he is able to grasp only what his eyes can currently visualize. The leader also sees with his eyes, but his eyesight is directed by his brain, which tells him that there is more than meets the eye.

Yaakov Avinu taught us this lesson. As he and his family descended to Egypt en route to the Egyptian exile, he took trees with him that he later replanted in Egypt. Why? He knew that as difficult as life would be in Egypt, it would one day come to an end. The Jewish People would be redeemed from their slavery. One day their destiny as Hashem's chosen people would be recognized with the Giving of the Torah. This would be followed with Hashem's repose within the Mishkan, which would be built in the wilderness. Trees do not grow in barren desert. Hence, our Patriarch had the foresight to pave the way, to prepare the acacia wood for the

Mishkan. He was not merely caught up with the issues affecting him in the present. His perspective was the future. A Jew looks to the future, because he realizes that "today" has significance only if there is a "Jewish tomorrow." Without a future, the present really has little significance.

Veritably, there is no real present tense in classical Hebrew. Grammarians have taken the verb and converted it into a present tense. Thus, hu ochel - he is eating or he eats - is not the literal translation of the word, since ochel means food. Hu shomer - he watches - is likewise incorrect, since shomer is a watchman. Why is this language bereft of a present tense? It is because there really is intrinsically no present in Judaism. All of our actions are tied both to the past and future, unable to stand alone in the present.

For a Jew, having a sense of time is all-inclusive, encompassing past, present and future. A free man is one who can anticipate the future, hope for the future, and play an active role in achieving his own destiny. A slave has no sense of the dynamic of time. For him, every day is the same. He has nothing to look forward to in the future. A great man plants a tree, even though he knows that he will probably not live long enough to enjoy its fruit. As his grandfather planted for him, so, too, does he plant for his grandson. It is all about tomorrow. If the present is rooted in yesterday, tomorrow is hopeful.

This is the law of the meal-offering...It is most holy, like the sin-offering and like the guilt-offering. (6:10)

The Kli Yakar notes that the standard for kedushah, holiness, is the Korban Chatas, Sin-offering, since the Torah compares the Korban Minchah, Meal-Offering, to a Chatas as its way of underscoring its degree of holiness. With this idea in mind, the Kli Yakar explains Chazal's statement that Makom she baalei teshuvah omdin ein tzadik gamur yachol la'amod, "In the place where a penitent stands, a perfect, righteous person cannot stand." Chazal imply that a perfectly righteous person, who has never sinned, cannot achieve the spiritual superiority that the individual who has sinned and repented is able to attain. The usual explanation is that the penitent has had to overcome difficult challenges in his journey of return. He has reneged his previous lifestyle of sin, eschewing pleasure for commitment; freedom and abandon for responsibility and devotion; overcoming the sinful practices that had been a part of his life, to devote himself to a life of service to Hashem. Once he has arrived at his journey's end, he certainly realizes that it has all been worth the effort, but the road is a challenging one that demands extreme strength of character, resolution and fortitude all the way.

In contrast, the individual who has never sinned has led a life filled with meaning and purpose, a life of pride, a life of sanctity, a life of true beauty. Clearly, he has encountered challenges in maintaining his level of spirituality, but they are unlike the battles that the baal teshuvah must wage. This line of reasoning explains why the baal teshuvah should be recognized, but does not adequately explain why one who has never sinned is subordinate to the baal teshuvah. Is this not extreme?

Furthermore, is there really such a being as a tzaddik gamur, one who has never sinned? Everybody sins - for some it is big sins, for others it is minor infractions - but everyone has a need to repent. Who is the tzaddik gamur?

Shlomo Hamelech says in Koheles (7:15): Al tehi tzaddik harbei, "Do not be too much of a tzaddik." Shlomo Hamelech is surely not advocating laxity in religious observance. He is cautioning the individual not to get carried away. What does this mean? How does one become too much of a tzaddik? Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski explains this from the simultaneous perspectives of a rav and an orthodox clinical psychiatrist. I feel it is important for us to digest and incorporate this perspective into our lives and into the lives of our loved ones.

Torah observance should be a Jew's way of life. Better yet - it is life. It should be joyous and beautiful, meaningful and pride-engendering. While one should practice great vigilance not to transgress any prohibitive commands, he should not permit Torah observance to become a sort of neurosis. We have thousands of sefarim, volumes of Torah literature, to guide us along the proper derech, path, to achieve spiritual fulfillment and to be a nachas, source of pleasure, to Hashem. A clear difference exists, however, between healthy observance and neurotic compulsion. The latter can destroy one's spiritual and physical life, the former will enhance it. Rabbi Twerski cites an example of the woman who was so concerned with her inability to properly rid her home of chametz prior to Pesach that she refused to allow any chametz into the house for the month before Pesach. Each year her neurosis strangled her more until it reached a point that she did not allow chametz in her home - all year around! This is clearly not the Torah's intention.

Unquestionably, one must practice vigilance and care concerning mitzvah performance, but there is a point at which this can become a compulsive neurosis that destroys the meaning and beauty of the mitzvah as well as the person who is carrying it out. In an excellent essay, Dr. Benzion Sorotzkin defines the pursuit of perfection according to the Torah perspective: Is it truly a virtue, or can it be destructive? This paper cannot do justice to an excellent, annotated article that

addresses one of the core issues concerning the failure, rejection and utter disappointment of so many young people who crave acceptance and seek recognition, but do not receive it, due to the "perfection-demanding" society in which they live. He distinguishes between the healthy pursuit and striving for excellence - which is motivated primarily by a desire for success - and the pervasive feelings of shame - which induce a compensatory drive for perfection that highlights the individual's feelings of inadequacy and defectiveness. The bottom line is that one form of "service" is unhealthy and can lead to serious spiritual, emotional and physical issues, while the other promotes satisfaction, pride and a feeling of spiritual achievement.

The issue that we most often shy away from is the religious component. "What does the Torah require of me?" Dr. Sorotzkin posits that the religious activities of the perfectionist are motivated by a sense of fear. Thus, these people tend to be anxious, inflexible, lacking in perspective in their religious observances and overly concerned with the opinions of others. In most cases, they have been imbued with a distorted image of Hashem. Instead of a loving, compassionate and caring Father, they perceive Him to be demanding, unforgiving and vengeful. We do not appease G-d; we pay homage to Him out of love. Hashem is not punitive; He is benevolent and wishes us well. Regrettably, a child who grows up in a home where the primary authority figure is harsh, capricious, unfairly punitive and often vengeful will think that G-d is no different. After all, He is the ultimate authority.

There is so much more to write, but I must return to the dvar Torah. My purpose above was to raise the reader's awareness of a gross distortion of religious perspective, which renders our children the casualties. When Shlomo HaMelech cautioned against being overly righteous, he was discouraging the compulsive tzaddik, the obsessive perfectionist who acts out of fear. He might "snap" and give in to temptation and desire. The individual who enjoys serving Hashem, whose love for Him is boundless, will retain his conviction Chazal assert that the baal teshuva has superiority over this "perfect tzaddik." While it is true that no person is without sin, the baal teshuva has proven to us that one can rectify his past indiscretions with teshuvah and attain a high spiritual status, while still remaining a functioning, normal member of society. The perfectionist will be hard-pressed to stand in his shoes. His fear and compulsiveness leave him open to impure spiritual infiltration that can impugn and ultimately destroy all that he has worked so diligently to attain.

And the flesh of his feast thanksgiving peace-offering must be eaten on the day of its offering; he shall not leave any of it until morning. (7:15)

One who has survived a life-threatening experience brings a Korban Todah, Thanksgiving-offering, as an expression of his gratitude to the Almighty, Who is responsible for his survival. The Korban Todah is basically a Shelamim, Peace-offering - with two distinctions: the Todah is eaten only for one day and night, while the Shelamim is eaten for two days and one night; the Todah is accompanied by the Lachmei Todah, forty loaves of bread of which thirty are matzoh and ten are chametz. Otherwise, these korbanos are very much alike. Horav Zev Weinberger, Shlita, suggests a rationale for including chametz/leavened breads, in this korban, unlike any other korban, and for explaining why the Todah must be eaten in one day.

The Korban Todah is a thanksgiving-offering in which one acknowledges Hashem's role in his continued existence. He understands that his presence here today is the result of a miraculous intervention. When a person acknowledges an overt miracle, his mind comes to the realization that the phenomenon to which we refer as teva, nature, is really a miracle. There are overt miracles and covert miracles. The term which we commonly apply in reference to a covert miracle is - nature. Yes, nature is miracle. It is concealed under a cloak of nature, but a miracle no less. This is the lesson that one should derive as a result of his offering a Korban Todah.

The chametz bread encouraged this line of thinking. We think that when flour and water mix together, it is only natural for the dough to rise after a certain amount of time. This is inaccurate. The dough rises because Hashem has made it rise. It is an overt miracle. One whose cognitive abilities serve him well during his korban experience will recognize this significance and continue thinking, to the point that it finally dawns on him that all of nature is, in effect, a miracle.

This is why the Shte HaLechem, Two Breads, brought in honor of Shavuot, the festival celebrating the Giving of the Torah, are also made of leavened dough. It is through Torah study that one's eyes open up, so that he is finally able to perceive the truths: Nature is miracle.

We experience neis, miracle, every day. In fact, we acknowledge this reality in our Shemoneh Esrai. In the Modim prayer, we say, V'al nisecha she'b'chol yom imanu, "And For Your miracles which are with us everyday." This refers to neis nistar, covert miracles, such that we are not even aware of them Chazal state, Ein baal ha'neis maker b'niso, "The one who has sustained a miracle is (often) unaware of it." Our daily lives are filled with hidden miracles. One could have contracted a serious illness had he gone to a physician to have it diagnosed. Often, the illness

just dissipates, and the individual is none the worse for it. What has happened? A miracle has taken place, and he has been cured. The greatness is that he never knew that he was sick or that he had been healed. He just went along his natural way, unaware that he had just been spared by Hashem. This is what should course through our minds when we recite modim. We could have had a car accident; we could have fallen ill; we could have been in the wrong place at the wrong time - but we were not, and we did not - because Hashem has spared us.

Daily miracles occur which we acknowledge and for which we pay gratitude to Hashem. We now understand the significance of she'b'chol yom, everyday, and why the Korban Todah must be consumed in one day. It is the one day - each day - everyday, that is to be underscored. It is not a one-time Korban Todah; it is a constant daily expression of gratitude.

What is left over from the flesh of the feast-offering shall be burned in fire on the third day. (7:17)

The Sefer HaChinuch considers the imperative to burn nosar, left-over flesh from a Korban, as the Torah's allusion to the significance of having bitachon, trust in Hashem. The Torah disapproves of a person refraining from finishing his portion of the korban for fear that he might not have what to eat tomorrow. Such behavior shows a lack of trust in the Almighty. Hashem will provide him with food for the next day as well. He need not worry. The baal bitachon, one who trusts in Hashem, does not worry about tomorrow's portion. Furthermore, the individual should not concern himself by wasting time and effort searching for other means of support. One should turn only to Hashem, Who is the Source of all sustenance. This does not mean that one should not be mishtadel, endeavor, to provide for himself and his family. He should, however, not make this an obsession. Remembering that Hashem is the only One to Whom we can turn - and the only One Who can bring his hishtadlus to successful fruition - is perhaps the only tool to assure that his endeavors will successfully bear fruit. How often do we go out of our way by begging, cajoling, even selling ourselves, figuratively, so that we can get the "in" on a deal in order to place ourselves in a better position for success? All of these avenues are wasteful; it is only to Hashem that we should turn and to no one else. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, underscores this idea with a powerful analogy.

A benevolent king who had an intense love for his citizens would look for opportunities to shower them with his generosity. He was a sagacious ruler, creative in devising somewhat unconventional projects for them to earn his many gifts. His latest gambit was truly brilliant, but otherwise quite simple. A brook flowed in the palace garden. Its waters were clear, but quite deep. The king called his community together and showed them that at the bottom of the brook lay a large chest filled with diamonds and precious jewels. "Whoever succeeds in descending to the bottom of the brook and brings up the chest may keep its contents."

The entire town was buzzing with excitement. They knew their king. If he gave them the opportunity to retrieve the chest, then it certainly was feasible. They knew his penchant for the dramatic and uncommon. There was probably a simple solution to this challenge. Everybody made an attempt to salvage the valuable chest, but to no avail. The citizens were certain that somehow it could be done, because they knew that the king was a kind-hearted person who truly wanted to enhance their lives with his largesse. Thousands tried their luck, but none succeeded in their attempt. The king was disconcerted over the feeble attempts of his citizens. The project was just not moving forward in the manner in which he had anticipated. One wise member of the community, a laid-back fellow, waited until everyone else had made his attempt. It bothered him that no one had succeeded. The king would never present an impossible challenge. He visited the brook, saw the chest at the bottom, and began to ponder the situation. He looked around the brook at the surrounding area for some clue, until finally he thought he had a way of unraveling the mystery of the submerged treasure chest.

He approached the king and asked, "My lord, is one of the conditions for retrieving the chest that the person becomes soaking wet, or is it possible to salvage the chest and still remain bone-dry?" When the king heard the question, he understood that the wise man had solved the mystery. He replied, "No, he does not have to get wet."

When the person heard this, he quickly obtained a ladder and climbed the tree whose branches overshadowed the brook, and, from in between the branches, he retrieved the chest! He had determined that the king was seeking ingenuity, someone who could figure out that the chest was not in the water but, rather, up in the tree directly above the water. What they were seeing was nothing more than a reflection of the real thing. The wise man knew to look up. He knew where the diamonds were really located.

The lesson to be derived from this analogy is clear: The answer to all of our questions is up Above, Hashem, the compassionate Father Who never forsakes His children. In order to catalyze this abundance one must look up, to the true location

of the chest of diamonds. When Jews look up to Heaven and obligate their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they succeed in accessing Hashem's beneficence. In Memory of our Uncle Lou Feig R' Chaim Eliezer ben Yaakov Shimon z"l Whose devotion to his family and to klal yisrael set the standard of caring and compassion for others. Jackie and Ingrid Smilovitz and Family

From Rabbi Yissocher Frand ryfrand@torah.org & genesis@torah.org
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Subject Rabbi Frand on Parsha

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Tzav

Parshas Tzav introduces the laws of the Korban Todah [Thanksgiving offering] [Vayikra 7:12]. Rashi explains that a Todah offering is brought by "someone who experienced a personal miracle". Rashi gives examples of such – one who traveled on the High Seas or one who traveled through the desert and safely reached his destination, one who was thrown in jail and then released, and one who was sick and recovered.

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld makes an interesting observation. Parshas Vayikra enumerates all the sacrifices that an individual might ever bring with one exception. For some strange reason, the law of Korban Todah does not appear in Parshas Vayikra, but rather first appears in Parshas Tzav.

Parshas Tzav begins with the words: "Command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the law of the Olah offering." This entire parsha is addressed to the Kohanim. They have to know how to execute the laws of sacrifices – how do you bring a Korban, where do you bring a Korban, when do you bring a korban, etc. In a sense, Parshas Tzav serves as a manual for Kohanim. Israelites do not need to be as familiar with the contents of the parsha because they do not offer the actual sacrifices. This strengthens the question. Not only is it problematic why the laws of the Thanksgiving offering do NOT appear in Parshas Vayikra, it is also problematic why DO they appear in Parshas Tzav? Rav Sonnenfeld further asks about Rashi's use of the word "miracle" (nes) to describe the four events that trigger the requirement to bring a Korban Todah. True, each of these situations might involve risk or danger to some extent, but can they truly be categorized as "miracles"? What does this mean?

The truth of the matter is that while these situations may not be in the same category as the splitting the Red Sea or other "Open miracles" (nes galui), they certainly reflect Divine Providence, the Hand of G-d watching over us and do at least fall into the category of "hidden miracles" (nes nistar).

Today, because of advances in medicine, we take for granted that a person can have heart bypass surgery and be back on the job a short time later. For several hours, this person was not breathing on his own, yet we take his recovery for granted! Despite our growing accustomed to the "miraculous", it nevertheless remains miraculous.

The obligation to offer thanksgiving to the Almighty is even to offer it upon experiencing a so-called "natural miracle". The Talmud tells us [Brachos 7b] that when Leah had her fourth child and called him Yehuda saying, "This time I will thank the Almighty" (hapa'am ODEH es Hashem) [Bereshis 29:35], it was the first time in the history of the world that someone expressed gratitude to the Almighty.

This statement puzzles many commentaries – do we not find other places where people expressed gratitude prior to Leah? Was Noach's offering of sacrifices to G-d upon exiting the Ark not a form of thanksgiving to Him? The answer is that until Leah, the people who brought sacrifices or expressed thanks to the Almighty were expressing thanks for OPEN miracles. Leah was the first to express thanks to Him for even a HIDDEN miracle.

When Noach and his family were the only people saved while the whole planet was destroyed, the obvious miracle demanded thanksgiving to the Almighty. However, when one has a baby, it is all too easy to take the attitude "I did it myself". What is more natural than having a baby? Leah said, "No. It is a big deal!" The fact that a woman becomes pregnant and has a normal pregnancy and a normal delivery is a very big deal. It requires an expression of thanksgiving to the One who made it all possible.

A young man who had been married one year had a baby girl. The man asked Rav Eliezer Schach, his Rosh Yeshiva, whether he should make a Kiddush to celebrate the occasion. Rav Schach said, "Suppose you were married for 8 years and your wife was unable to conceive all that time, and then she became pregnant and you had a baby girl. Would you make a Kiddush then? Of course you would. Now that Hashem saved you from 7 years of anguish and frustration, should you not certainly make a Kiddush expressing your gratitude?" It is not just a miracle when a woman has a child after many years of childlessness. It is a miracle even when she has a baby after just one year of marriage.

This is what Leah taught us. A natural miracle is a miracle nevertheless. This is the idea expressed by Rashi when he calls the four types of people who bring a Todah offering, people who have experienced miracles. It is the Nes of seeing the Hand of G-d in every act of nature. This, Rav Sonnenfeld says, explains why the Korban Todah is located in Parshas Tzav and not in Parshas Vayikra. If there is a group of people who need a special exhortation regarding "natural miracles" it is the Kohanim. The Mishna in Avos [5:5] says that there were miracles every single day in the Beis HaMikdash. Flies never came to the slaughtered animals. The wind never deflected the smoke arising from the Altar. They lived with miracles. When someone lives with miracles on a daily basis, then the occurrence of a nes is just another day at the office. People get used to the miracles. That is life. We can become so accustomed to miracles that we no longer appreciate them.

There is a Yiddish expression that conveys the concept that "In a place where there is a printing press, people step on shaimos [Torah texts, etc.]". Outside the printing press, when someone sees shaimos on the floor, he rushes to pick it up and kiss it. However, if the printer would stop to pick up shaimos from the floor every time he saw it, he would not get anything done.

The same thing is true with "common place miracles" – having a baby, recovering from an illness, passing through the desert, and so on. We can become jaded and forget that we are experiencing "miracles".

This is why the laws of Korban Todah are located in Parshas Tzav. We all need to be reminded of the truth that G-d's Providence must be recognized as Divine intervention – i.e. a miracle – even when it occurs frequently. However, the Kohanim who witness miracles on a daily basis, have a special need for this reminder. Therefore, Korban Todah is located in Parshas Tzav, which is directed specifically to the Kohanim.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD
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A Thought for the Week with Rabbi Jay Kelman
A Thought for the Week with Rabbi Jay Kelman
Purim - The Potential of Evil

On Purim the world is turned upside down. A powerless people living in exile manage to instill fear in others leading many to convert to Judaism. Drinking, parties, levity are the norm this one day a year. Even our tzniut is somewhat stripped away. The Shulchahn Aruch records a practice of cross dressing of males and females. It is a day, perhaps the only day which is celebrated with emphasis on the physical, reminding us of the desire of Haman to physically destroy the Jewish people.

Yet the topsy turvy nature of Purim has a more enduring legacy. "The grandchildren of Sancheriv taught Torah in public, the grandchildren of Haman taught Torah in Bnei Brak". Descendants of the most wicked of people are involved in the most holy of tasks. On its most simplistic level we have here a stark application of the Biblical mandate that "children shall not die for the sins of their fathers".

Yet as paradoxical as it sounds, it seems that their great ability at teaching Torah was a direct result of their being descendant from some of the most evil people in history. A quick look at the world around us will confirm what psychologists have noted. The desire to inflict harm is much greater than the desire to do good. How often does one find an excuse not to do something positive and yet how rare that one lets bad weather get in the way of the desire to get back at somebody.

If that power for evil can be harnessed for positive purposes then the potential for good is enormous. It is this idea that the Rabbis had in mind when they declared that it is possible for repentance to convert "sins into merits". The efforts expended in sin can serve as the springboard for tremendous mitzvah observance. Most often evil people are quite talented, unfortunately they have misplaced priorities. Yet these abilities are often passed down to children, both by nature and nurture, who may use these abilities in a most positive sense. It is precisely the descendants of Amalek and (his descendant) Haman, as the personification of evil, that may potentially be the source of great good. The Torah requires us to wipe out Amalek from "under the heavens". Rav Kuk notes that above the heavens, i.e. if the Amaleks of this world do teshuva they have the potential to be the source of goodness.

Purim is the holiday of hester panim, where all is hidden, a notion reflected in Esther's name. A story describing the political goings on in ancient Persia, which on the surface is devoid of religious inspiration, is in reality one of reaffirmation of Torah. It is Purim our Sages note, when the Jewish people willingly accepted the oral law, the law hidden in between the lines of written law. Though G-d's name is nowhere to be found in the megillah, His presence can be felt throughout.

What we often think we understand is often truly hidden from us, a message readily brought home in the current economic times. We wear costumes on Purim highlighting that often what we see is very different than what truly is. The megillah ends by describing the tax policies instituted by Achasverosh. Life continued in Persia as if nothing had really happened. In fact this is one of the reasons noted by our Sages as to why Hallel is not recited on Purim.

Yet while it appeared on the surface as if not much had changed just beneath it Jewish history was unfolding. Not only was the Temple about to be rebuilt, a new epoch was beginning, one marked by the primacy of the oral law. On Purim more than we celebrate the downfall of Haman or the rise of Mordechai, we celebrate the fact that, if not Haman himself then at least his descendants, could play positive roles in Jewish life.

This is an important message to keep in mind as we face our own current Haman who like his Persian ancestor has plans to "destroy, kill and eradicate all the Jews from young to old, men woman and children on one day" (3:13). We must follow in the footsteps of Mordechai and Esther "gather together all the Jewish people" (4:16) confident that "salvation will come to the Jewish people".

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Subject [Rav Kook List]

Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Purim: "Go Gather All The Jews"

During these days of Purim, in this difficult hour, many troubles from without besiege and afflict the entire nation of Israel.

Yet our greatest anguish stems from troubles from within. We lack internal unity, peace in the House of Israel. Let us recall those days and their events as they are recorded in the Scroll of Esther - written, as it was, with Divine inspiration. For the Divine spirit transcends the passage of time and the transient ideologies of each generation. The eternal words "Go gather all of the Jews" shall once again revitalize us and elevate us from our lowly state.

Is Unity Possible?

One may ask: Is it really possible nowadays to gather all of the Jews? Is it possible to unite all the different factions and parties? How will the bones scattered across the vast valley of exile - both material and spiritual - once again form that entity known as Klal Yisrael, and put forth its demands for strength, renewal, and redemption?

The answer is that there is a place where this dispersion, both physical and spiritual, cannot rule over us. But you object: We see with our own eyes the awful internal strife, Jews fighting Jews, brothers turning against brothers like wolves and snakes. How then can one say, "Go gather all of the Jews"?

Whoever thinks that Haman erred when he said, "There is one nation scattered and divided" (Esther 3:8), is mistaken. Indeed, the nation is scattered and divided; but nevertheless, it is 'one nation.' Nor should one question the possibility of a nation being simultaneously united and divided. The world is full of wonders. This nation, whose very survival in history is replete with wondrous wonders, demonstrates by its existence that it is essentially one nation, despite its dispersion.

True, the malady of exile has divided us. But 'the Eternal One of Israel will not lie.' The exile and all of its terrors must come to an end. Now that the wind has begun to blow from the four corners of the earth, from both the troubles surrounding us and from the spiritual revelation which stirs us to return and be rebuilt in the land of our life - now we are nearing the realization that there is a cure for the malady of our dispersion and division. In the final analysis, we are, and shall always be, a united nation. Israel shall once again rise to the eternal words, "Go gather all of the Jews."

The Hidden Spirit

Yet the difficult question obstructing the path of redemption remains - the divisive discord that consumes us. The answer is that there are two sides to a person. Medical treatment utilizes the inner resources of vitality and health that lie hidden within. This inner spirit is so hidden that even the patient is unaware of its existence. Spiritual maladies and their physical manifestations infect only our baser aspects, that side of which we are aware. But our hidden, unknown side always bursts with energy, brimming with life and strength. This hidden repository of health has the power to heal the outer self, which can mislead one into thinking that he is sick and feeble, when in fact he possesses an energetic, healthy soul, full of life and vigor.

That which is true for the individual applies to a much greater degree to the entire collective. Klal Yisrael in particular is truly one nation: "And who is like Your nation, Israel, one nation in the land?" (I Sam. 15:19) We must admit our error in identifying the essence of Israel with its superficial appearance, with its outer, baser side. This self-image has made us fearful. We are conscious only of our dispersion and division. The Hamans of every generation strike at us with their poisonous hatred. Especially in this transition period, they perceive our weak side, for it is visible and recognizable. But precisely through these tribulations we will come to realize that we possess a previously unknown, collective soul, a great national spirit whose existence we had forgotten. It abounds with vitality and possesses sufficient power to renew our lives as of old, and repel all of the Amalekites who wish to assault our weak.

This hidden Judaism, unknown even to ourselves, this great soul of a great nation, bearing both the suffering and the light of the world within it, will become known to us during these portentous times. The blessing of "Go gather all of the Jews" will emerge from its hidden place within the national soul. Every Purim we must appreciate the great inner repository of our blessedness and our essential trait of oneness, which will vanquish our divided side.

From a state of being unable to 'distinguish between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai' will come a higher recognition - to find the

unknown Jew within us. Brothers will know one another and join hands, and a mighty voice will be heard, "Let us rise up and ascend to Zion, to the house of our God" (Jer. 31:5). (First appeared in Ha-Tor, 5694 (1934). Adapted from R. Pesach Jaffe's translation in Celebration of the Soul, pp. 126-129.)
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Weekly Halacha by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

The Mitzvah of Mishloach Manos

Mordechai and Esther, with the approval of the sages of the time, introduced a mitzvah¹ which obligates every person to send two different kinds of foods to one friend on Purim. Two basic reasons are given for this mitzvah:

1. There are impoverished people who are too embarrassed to collect tzedakah for themselves and will therefore not have food for the seudas Purim. By establishing a system whereby everyone receives packages of food on Purim, the rabbis ensured that even the most reticent of individuals will have food for the Purim seudah.²

2. Sending food to a friend or an acquaintance is an expression of goodwill and fraternity. On Purim we wish to instill and perpetuate these feelings.³

Both goals must be met in order to fulfill the mitzvah properly. Therefore, one who sends clothing for mishloach manos does not fulfill the mitzvah⁴ since he did nothing for his friend's Purim meal. Similarly, one who sends mishloach manos anonymously does not fulfill the mitzvah⁵ since no friendship or goodwill is generated between him and the recipient.

Mishloach manos may be sent to any Jewish⁶ adult,⁷ wealthy or poor, with whom one is acquainted or to whom one is related.⁸ Although men should send to men only and women to women only,⁹ families may send to each other.¹⁰

Mishloach manos should be sent and received on Purim day.¹¹ If they are received at night or on the days before or after Purim, the sender does not fulfill the mitzvah.¹² If they are sent before Purim but received on Purim, some poskim hold that the mitzvah is fulfilled¹³ while others hold that it is not.¹⁴

If possible, the mishloach manos should be sent as early as possible on Purim day, but not before the reading of the Megillah on Purim morning.¹⁵

Nowadays, we are witness to a marked proliferation of mishloach manos. Although it is a relatively easy mitzvah to fulfill, if one is unaware of the halachos he could send dozens of mishloach manos and still not properly fulfill the mitzvah.

Question: Are married women and adult children obligated to send mishloach manos?

Discussion: The obligation to send mishloach manos rests upon the individual;¹⁶ hence, a married woman is not exempted by her husband's mishloach manos.¹⁷ A husband and a wife may, however, send mishloach manos together, as long as the mishloach manos is "double sized", i.e., double the amount that either spouse would have sent individually.¹⁸

Some poskim hold that children over 13—even those who are being supported by their parents—are obligated to send their own mishloach manos,¹⁹ while others exempt them since they do not own anything in their own right.²⁰

Parents should educate their minor children in the correct performance of mishloach manos just as they do with every other mitzvah.²¹

Question: May mishloach manos be sent to a mourner?

Discussion: The custom is that mishloach manos are not sent to a mourner²² during the year of mourning for his parents, or during the thirty days of mourning for other relatives.²³ A mourner who receives mishloach manos need not return them, and the sender fulfills his mitzvah by sending those mishloach manos.²⁴ It is permitted for a woman to send mishloach manos to the wife of a mourner or for a man to send to the husband of a mourner.²⁵

While a mourner—even if he is in the middle of shivah—must send mishloach manos, he should refrain from sending "simchah items," e.g., items that elicit laughter and merriment.²⁶

Question: What is the proper amount and type of food that should be sent for mishloach manos?

Discussion: Mishloach manos can be any combination of two kinds of food,²⁷ or one food and one drink,²⁸ or two kinds of drink.²⁹ Although two pieces of the same food are considered as one food,³⁰ the top (white meat) and bottom (dark meat) parts of a chicken are considered two kinds of food.³¹ Some poskim³² specify that the foods be ready to eat and require no further cooking, while others³³ allow even uncooked foods to be sent.

L'chatchilah, one should send foods which could be eaten at the seudas Purim.³⁴ Moreover, one does not fulfill the mitzvah properly if all he sends is a small piece of food, etc. since manos is defined as a portion which is considered worthy of serving others. Some poskim suggest that the minimum amount of mishloach manos is a meal's worth, about 6-7 fl. oz. of food.³⁵ Other poskim require that one send no less of a meal (in volume) than one would normally serve a guest.³⁶ A wealthy person who sends inexpensive items of food does not fulfill the mitzvah properly, for in order for mishloach manos to be considered as an expression of friendship, its cost must be relative to the sender's wealth.³⁷ Similarly, one who sends inexpensive food items to a wealthy person does not fulfill the mitzvah properly, since such items are worthless in his eyes and unappreciated by him.³⁸

1 This is a mitzvah mi-divrei kabbalah, a rabbinical mitzvah which is incorporated into the written text (Esther 9:22). Accordingly, we do not say safek d'Rabbanan l'kulah in regard to the mitzvos of Purim; see O.C. 696:7; Mishnah Berurah 692:16; Tzafnas Panei'ach, Rambam Megillah 1:1; Achiezer 3:73.

2 Terumas ha-Deshen 111.

3 Manos ha-Levi, quoted in Teshuvos Chasam Sofer, O.C. 196.

4 Mishnah Berurah 695:20.

5 Kesav Sofer, O.C. 141.

6 Beis Yitzchak, Y.D. 2:142. See Shraga ha-Meir 4:31.

7 Aruch ha-Shulchan 695:18 rules that one fulfills the mitzvah by sending to a minor, but other poskim disagree; see Ya'avetz 1:12; 2:68, Kaf ha-Chayim 694:12.

8 Some poskim recommend not sending to one's "enemy," to a total stranger or as an acknowledgment of a favor rendered; see Piskei Teshuvos 695, note 54 and 58, and oral ruling by Rav M. Feinstein, quoted in Moadei Yeshurun, pg. 58.

9 Rama, 695:4.

10 Halichos Shelomo 2:19-17 and Orchos Halachah 27.

11 Rama 695:4.

12 Aruch ha-Shulchan 695:16.

13 Be'er Heitev 695:7 quoting Yad Aharon; Beis She'arim, O.C. 381; Chelkas Ya'akov 1:102.

14 Aruch ha-Shulchan 695:16-17. One does not fulfill the mitzvah if the recipient will not be aware on Purim that he received mishloach manos—even if his family accepted it on his behalf; ibid. See also Levushei Mordechai, O.C. 108.

15 Based on Mishnah Berurah 692:1. See also Kaf ha-Chayim 694:18.
 16 Rama, O.C. 695:4.
 17 Magen Avraham 695:12; Chayei Adam 155:33; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 142:4; Mishnah Berurah 695:25; Aruch ha-Shulchan 695:18.
 18 Halichos Shelomo 2:19-15, 17 and Devar Halachah 24 and 27.
 19 Aruch ha-Shulchan 694:2 (concerning matanos la'evyonim); Orchos Chayim 695:2 quoting Me'orei Ohr.
 20 Kinyan Torah 1:132. It follows that if the children have their own possessions, then they are obligated like any adult.
 21 Peri Megadim 695:14; Eishel Avraham 695; Kaf ha-Chayim 695:57. This means that parents should give their children food or money so that they can fulfill the mitzvah; Chanoch l'Na'ar, pg. 66. See, however, Kinyan Torah 1:132 who holds that it is sufficient chinuch to allow the children to deliver the mishloach manos.
 22 Unless he is the rav of the city; Divrei Malkiel 5:237.
 23 Based on Rama, O.C. 696:6.
 24 Kesav Sofer, O.C. 139.
 25 Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (oral ruling, quoted in Penei Baruch, pg. 322).
 26 Mishnah Berurah 696:18.
 27 O.C. 695:4. The opinion of the Ben Ish Chai (Tetzaveh 16) not to place the various kinds of foods on one plate or bowl, since the plate or bowl combines them into one kind of food, has not been accepted by the poskim; Halichos Shelomo 2:19, Orchos Halachah, note 36; Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 2:346.
 28 Mishnah Berurah 695:20.
 29 Aruch ha-Shulchan 695:14. Other poskim recommend that at least one of the items be a food.
 30 Aruch ha-Shulchan 695:14. See Tzitz Eliezer 14:65; 15:31.
 31 Halichos Shelomo 2:19-12. See Mikroei Kodesh, Purim 38.
 32 Magen Avraham 695:11; Ma'asei Rav 249; Chayei Adam 135:31; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 142:2; Aruch ha-Shulchan 695:15.
 33 Peri Chadash, O.C. 695; Ha'amek Sh'eilah 67:9; Shevet Sofer, O.C. 23; Yechaveh Da'as 6:45. Mishnah Berurah 695:20 quotes both views without rendering a decision.
 34 This is because the main purpose of mishloach manos is so that everyone will have a proper Purim meal; see Ma'asei Rav 249.
 35 Zera Yaakov 11, quoted by Sha'arei Teshuvah 694:1.
 36 Rosh Yosef, Megillah 7b; Eishel Avraham 695; Aruch ha-Shulchan 695:15. See Tzitz Eliezer 14:65.
 37 See Sedei Chemed, Purim 8.
 38 Beur Halachah 695:4, s.v. chayav, based on Ritva and Chayei Adam. Weekly-Halacha, Weekly Halacha, Copyright © 2010 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and Torah.org.
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 By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Matanos La'evyonim by Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Megillas Esther teaches that one of the mitzvos established by Mordechai and Esther was "matanos la'evyonim," giving gifts to the poor. Since the megillah states one should give gifts "La'evyonim," which is plural, we derive that one must give gifts to at least two poor people (Gemara Megillah 7b).

WHAT IS THE MINIMUM GIFT TO FULFILL THE MITZVAH?

There are several opinions regarding the minimum gift needed to fulfill the mitzvah. The Maharasha contends that one must give each person an amount significant enough to be respectable (Chiddushei Agados, Megillah 7a s.v. shadar). Some contemporary poskim rule this way.

Zera Yaakov (Shu"t #11) contends that it is sufficient if the poor person could purchase a minimum meal with the gift, which he defines as bread the size of three eggs (quoted in Pischei Teshuvah 694:1). Thus according to this opinion, one fulfills matanos la'evyonim if one gives three slices of bread to each of two poor people (or enough money for each to purchase three slices of bread).

Ritva contends that one is required to give only the value of a prutah, a copper coin worth only a few cents (Ritva, Megillah 7b; Menoras HaMaor; Shu"t Maharil #56). Mishnah Berurah (694:2) rules this way and one can certainly follow this approach.

HOW MUCH SHOULD ONE STRIVE TO GIVE?

The above amounts are indeed extremely paltry matanos la'evyonim and only define the minimum amount to fulfill the mitzvah. There are two other rules that are important:

Firstly, one should give money to every person who asks for a tzedakah donation on Purim without verifying whether he has a legitimate tzedakah need (see Yerushalmi Megillah 1:4). We will explain the details of this halacha later. (It is obvious that one should not make a major donation without verifying that the need is legitimate.)

Secondly, one should calculate how much one intends to spend for shalach manos and the Purim seudah and then designate a greater amount of money for matanos la'evyonim (Rambam, Hilchos Megillah 2:17).

MATANOS LA'EVYONIM VERSUS SHALACH MANOS

Question: Assuming that one has limited resources, which is more important to give, many gifts to the poor or many shalach manos?

One should give a greater amount of matanos la'evyonim and limit how much shalach manos he sends (Rambam, Hilchos Megillah 2:17).

IS IT BETTER TO GIVE A LOT TO A FEW POOR, OR A LITTLE TO EACH?

The Bach rules that someone with 100 gold coins to distribute for matanos la'evyonim should distribute one coin to each of 100 poor people rather than give it all to one individual because this makes more people happy (Bach 695 s.v. v'tzarich lishloach). According to Rav Elyashiv, it is better to give two large gifts that will make two aniyim happy than to give many small gifts that are insufficient to make the recipients happy (quoted in Shevus Yitzchok on Purim, pg. 98).

These two Piskei halacha are not in conflict -- quite the contrary, they complement one another. The mitzvah of matanos la'evyonim is to make as many poor people happy as possible. Receiving a very small gift does not place a smile on a poor man's face, although it fulfills the minimal requirements of the mitzvah as noted above. However, both the Bach's gold coin and Rav Elyashiv's large gift accomplish that the poor person becomes happy. Therefore, giving each person enough of a gift to bring a smile to his face is a bigger mitzvah than giving a very large gift to one person and being unable to bring a smile to the others. Thus, the optimal way to perform the mitzvah is to make as many people happy as possible.

MAY MATANOS LA'EVYONIM COME FROM MAASER FUNDS?

The minimal amount that I am required to give may not be from maaser funds just as one may not spend maaser money on other mitzvos (Shu"t Maharil #56; Magen Avraham 694:1). The additional money that I give may be from maaser (Magen Avraham 694:1). However, since I concluded that one is not required to give more than one perutah to each of two poor people, two perutos are worth only a few cents. Therefore, once can assume that virtually all one's matanos la'evyonim may come from maaser money.

DO I FULFILL THE MITZVAH WITH MONEY GIVEN BEFORE PURIM?

If the poor person receives the money on Purim, one is yotzei (Be'er Heiteiv 695:7; Aruch HaShulchan 694:2). Therefore, one can fulfill the mitzvah by mailing a contribution if one is certain that the poor person will receive it on Purim. If the poor person receives the money before Purim, one is not yotzei (Magen Avraham 694:1).

Similarly, one does not fulfill the mitzvah of matanos la'evyonim if the ani does not receive the money until after Purim.

DO I FULFILL MATANOS LA'EVYONIM BY DONATING MONEY TO AN ORGANIZATION?

If the organization distributes the money to the poor on Purim, I can perform my mitzvah this way.

DOES GETTING A TAX DEDUCTION PRECLUDE ME FROM FULFILLING MATANOS LA'EVYONIM?

If I donate the money through an institution that will distribute the money on Purim, I can fulfill the mitzvah and also deduct the donation from my tax liability.

CAN I FULFILL THE MITZVAH BY CHECK?

If the poor person can convert the check into cash or food on Purim, then I fulfill the mitzvah (Shvus Yitzchok pg. 99, quoting Rav Elyashiv).

DOES MY WIFE NEED TO GIVE HER OWN MATANOS LA'EVYONIM?

A woman is obligated in matanos la'evyonim (Shulchan Aruch 695:4). Magen Avraham states "I did not see that people are careful about this, possibly because this rule applies only to a widow or other woman who does not have a husband but that a married woman fulfills her obligation by having her husband distribute for her. However, one should be more machmir." Thus according to the Magen Avraham, a woman should distribute her own money to the poor. It would be acceptable for a husband to tell his wife, "I am giving matanos la'evyonim specifically on your behalf," but it is better if he gives her the money for her to distribute or gives the money to a shaliach to be zocheh for her, and then gives the money to the ani. Although most poskim follow the Magen Avraham's ruling, some rule that a married woman fulfills the mitzvah when her husband gives, even

without making any special arrangements (Aruch HaShulchan 694:2), and others contend that a married woman has no responsibility to give matanos la'evyonim (Pri Chodosh, quoting Maharikash).

MUST I GIVE MONEY?

No. One fulfills the mitzvah by giving the poor either food or money (Rambam). However, one should give the poor person something that he can use to enhance his celebration of Purim (see Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos Zahav 694:1).

MUST THE POOR PERSON USE THE MONEY FOR PURIM?

No. The poor person may do whatever he wants with the money (see Gemara Bava Metzia 78b).

MAY ONE FULFILL THE MITZVAH AT NIGHT?

One does not fulfill the mitzvos of matanos la'evyonim, shalach manos, or the Purim meal if they are performed at night (see Machatzis HaShekel 694:1).

HOW POOR MUST A PERSON BE TO QUALIFY FOR MATANOS LA'EYONIM?

The Mishnah (Peah 8:8) states that someone who owns less than 200 zuz qualifies to collect most of the Torah's gifts to the poor, including maaser ani, the second tithe reserved for the poor, and peah, the corner of the field left for them. What is the modern equivalent of owning 200 zuz? Contemporary poskim rule that someone whose income is insufficient to pay for his family's expenses qualifies as a poor person for all halachos including matanos la'evyonim. This is assuming that he does not have enough income or savings to support his family without selling basic essentials (Piskei Teshuvos 694:2).

DOES A POOR PERSON HAVE A MITZVAH OF GIVING TO THE POOR?

Does the mitzvah of matanos la'evyonim apply to the poor? Is there an easy way for him to perform it?

The Tur (694) states that "Chayov kol adam litein matanos la'aniyim," "Every person is obligated to give matanos la'evyonim." What is added by emphasizing "kol," everyone? The Bach explains that this emphasizes that even a poor person, who is himself a tzedakah recipient, must also give.

Is there an inexpensive way for a poor person to give matanos la'evyonim?

Yes, he can give part of his seudas Purim to another poor person and the other poor person reciprocates. Thereby, they both fulfill matanos la'evyonim (Mishnah Berurah 694:2). Also, note that according to what I concluded above, a poor person can give a quarter to each of two other paupers and thereby fulfill the mitzvah.

MAY ONE USE MONEY COLLECTED FOR MATANOS LA'EYONIM FOR A DIFFERENT PURPOSE?

One may not use money collected for matanos la'evyonim for a different tzedakah (Gemara Bava Metzia 78b). This is because the people who donated the money expect to fulfill two mitzvos with their donation: tzedakah and the special mitzvah of matanos la'evyonim. Thus, if one uses the money for a different tzedakah purpose, they fulfilled the mitzvah of tzedakah, but not the mitzvah of matanos la'evyonim.

If someone decided to give money for matanos la'evyonim, he is required to give it for this purpose even if he did not say so (Mishnah Berurah 694:6, quoting Hagahos Ashri).

PURIM VERSUS SHUSHAN PURIM

Do residents of Yerushalayim and other ancient walled cities who observe Purim on the fifteenth of Adar (often referred to as "Shushan Purim") fulfill the mitzvah of matanos la'evyonim by giving to the poor who observed Purim the day before? Do people who observe Purim on the Fourteenth fulfill the mitzvah by giving to the poor of Yerushalayim when it is not yet Purim for them? These are good questions that are debated by contemporary poskim.

In the words of the Rambam (Hilchos Megillah 2:17), "It is more important to provide more gifts to the poor than to have a more lavish Purim seudah or send more shalach manos. This is because there is no greater and honored joy than bringing happiness to orphans, widows and the needy. Someone who makes the unfortunate happy is likened to Hashem's Divine Presence, as the pasuk says: 'He who revives the spirit of the lowly and brings to life the heart of the crushed,'" (Yeshayah 57:15).