

[CS Late breaking dvar torah:

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Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

### Purim: An Enduring Festival of Faith and Hope

Rambam closes Hilchos Megillah (2:18) by citing the enigmatic view of the Talmud Yerushalmi ("haneviim vehaketuvim atidin libatel vechamishah sidrei Torah ein atidin libatel; ...Resh Lakish amar af Megillat Esther vehalachot ein atidin libatel...vezichram lo yasuf mizaram") that elevates Megillat Esther above the rest of Nach and that groups it with the Torah itself as the exclusive biblical canon in the era of yemot ha-mashiach. Ra'avad registers his objection to this apparently unvarnished reading that he conceives as being simply untenable. Instead, he proposes that the Yerushalmi intended only to limit public readings to Torah and Megillat Esther, while the canonical status and stature of the entire Tanach remains inviolate. Nonetheless, even in his qualified interpretation, Megillat Esther emerges with elite status that needs to be accounted for. The proof-text invoked by the Yerushalmi - (Megillat Esther 9:28) - is particularly intriguing as it presumably (emphasized by Radvaz, as we shall discuss) accentuates the unforgettable distresses and dangers leading to Purim, alongside and notwithstanding the ultimate joyous conclusion.

The Midrash (Mishlei 9) articulates a parallel perspective on the singular standing of Purim with respect to other moadim - "shekol hamoadim beteilim veyemei haPurim lo yihyu beteilim". Rashba (Responsa 1:93) was queried about the astonishing assertion that the moadim excluding Purim are subject to cancellation. Even as he emphatically rejected, even dismissed the superficial reading and implication of this text, Rashba posited that the midrash identifies a unique facet shared only by Purim and Yom Kippur. He explains that although other festivals are also depicted as "chukat olam" in the sense of being unqualified annual obligations ("azharah"), only Yom Kippur and Purim are guaranteed ("havtachah") to be eternally relevant and immune to any historical disruption or dislocation, irrespective of Klal Yisrael's conduct! It is curious that while Rashba accounts for Yom Kippur's intrinsic status - the fact that the day itself conveys expiation ("itzumo shel yom mekaper"), perhaps even absent repentance (particularly according to Rebbe [Shavuot 13a] also the author of this midrash), he does not articulate the basis for Purim's special status, almost as if it is self-evident.

Radvaz (Resp. 2:666), responding to a query about the aforementioned Yerushalmi passage, notes the Rashba's discussion of the midrash, integrates the two sources, and provides additional insight into both texts. He suggests that the spiritually conducive climate of the messianic era might render the other festivals somewhat gratuitous, but that Purim's theme, rooted as the Yerushalmi proof-text indicates, in the challenge of severe crisis and calamity and its subsequent joyous resolution remains acutely compelling and ever regnant - "ki yihyu Yisrael zochrim hatza'ar, vechi nimkeru lemitah, vekol mah she'ira lahem beoto zeman".

Indeed, the change in the Megillah's formulation of this festival reflects an acute focus on hashgachah, faith, spiritual resilience, and indomitable optimism. The Megillah (9:19) initially depicts Purim as a more conventional "yom tov" typically expressed by "simchah u-mishteh" in conjunction with the more specific focus on "mishloach manot ish le-reiehu". The Talmud (Megillah 5b), weighing whether there is a prohibition against "melachah" on Purim ultimately dismisses this ubiquitous and defining mo'ed standard, noting that several verses later, the Megillah (9:22) reformulated the holiday, dropping this typical feature - "Melachah lo kabilu alayhu demeikara ketiv simchah umishteh veyom tov, u-levasof ketiv la'asot otam yemei mishteh vesimchah, veilu yom tov lo ketiv". While the Talmud does not emphasize them, other equally important, albeit subtle changes were also introduced into the new and normative articulation of Purim. The precedence of "mishteh" to "simchah" conveys a different motif than a typical yom tov seduah, one in which the heightened consciousness of Hashem's mercy and generosity triggered by targeted physicality (a proper, reflective

application of "ad delo yada") is appropriately employed. [See also the view and formulation of the Yerushalmi Megillah 1:4 regarding the exclusion of seudat Purim on shabbat. I hope to examine this fascinating text and issue elsewhere, as it possibly also crystallizes the unique focus of Purim with respect to the initiatives to formalize it as a festival, as well as its singular features that differentiate it from typical moadim.] Moreover, the exclusion of "yom tov" was accompanied by the inclusion of "matanot le'evyonim", a particularly crucial and defining theme, as we shall briefly elaborate. Especially in light of the elite elevated status of Purim, reflected by the Yerushalmi and midrashic texts, these differences should not be perceived as reflecting a less rigorous protocol, a concession to the rabbinic status of the commemoration. Rather, the changes characterize a bolder spiritual aspiration, one more conducive to highlighting the ubiquity and urgency of Hashem's special providence that stems from the irrevocable and inimitable bond with Klal Yisrael.

Let us briefly focus on the centrality of matanot le'evyonim as it likely exemplifies Purim's special theme. Rambam (2:17, see Magid Mishnah and also compare with Hilchos Yom Tov 6:20) strikingly asserts that this facet of Purim commemoration surpasses mishloach manot, notwithstanding the fact that it was, unlike mishloach manot, only inserted into the later iteration of Purim. Apparently, the addition of "matanot le'evyonim" in conjunction with the subtraction of "yom tov" is characteristic. Perhaps Rambam's assertion is further substantiated, maybe even inspired by the view of R. Yosef (Megillah 4b). The Talmud notes that the megillah is not read on shabbat and provides two different rationales. The normative view (Hilchos Megillah 1:13) is that, like lulav and shofar, there is a concern lest one come to violate the prohibition to carry on shabbat. However, the gemara also records R. Yosef's argument that one cannot separate matanot le'evyonim from keriat ha-megillah inasmuch as there is an urgent expectation of support in conjunction with the keriah - "eineihem shel aniyyim nesuot le-mikra Megillah" - that cannot be met on shabbat! The fear of chilul Shabbat per se is not a sufficient obstacle, but the disappointment of evyonim is! This inextricable link is normatively manifest in the law (Megillah 4b and Rambam Hilchos Megillah 2:14) that although kefarim dwellers who advance their keriat ha-Megilah do not partake of the seudah or mishloach manot until Adar 14, matanot le'evyonim is fulfilled in conjunction with the earlier keriah to avoid frustrating the hopes of evyonim! The choice of the term "evyonim" rather than "aniyyim" in this context underscores the theme of desperation and the urgency not only of assistance but equally of hope and optimism.

The danger and distress of am Yisrael in the aftermath of Haman's genocidal plot engendered a renewed and advance appreciation for Divine providence, and the role of faith, trust, and optimism. For this reason, Taanit Esther, defined by the charge of "leich kenos ha-Yehudim", plays and outsize role on Purim. [I hope to demonstrate this elsewhere.] The themes of "ve-nahapoch hu", "balayalah hazeh nadedah shenat ha-melech", "u-mi yodea im le-eit kazot higa'at lemlachut" and others highlight the centrality of Divine providence and reflect the special bond that always defines the relationship between Hashem and Klal Yisrael. Rav Amram Gaon ruled that one should say tahanun on Purim, as it is a day that highlights the efficacy of prayer. His stirring articulation of this idea is vital reading. We read the Megillah closely as a "sefer" but equally with a broader vision of hashgachah as an "iggeret" for this very reason.

If the crisis background of Purim was merely the context for greater joy, appreciation, and hoda'ah alone that surely would have been very significant and merited a holiday, although one that was cast in a more conventional form. The decision to structure Purim in a singular manner that more broadly emphasizes the proper halachic way to process and respond to crisis and distress and that embodies the ubiquitous need for faith and trust catapulted Purim still further, establishing it as an elite indispensable mo'ed, as crystallized by the ambitious statements of the Yerushalmi and the midrash.

The crises of recent years have again tested our perspective on Purim. The superficial and mistaken impression that Purim is a celebration or at least a pretext for frivolity precludes its full commemoration in somber times. In fact, as Rashba explains, there is no historical circumstances that would justify cancelling or even minimizing Purim. Indeed, its focus on optimism and faith – shekol kovecha lo yevoshu velo yikalmu lanezah, kol hachosim bach (see also Rambam's stirring depiction of Purim in his preamble to Yad Hachazakah) – establishes a properly appreciated and appropriately celebrated Purim as even more vital in times of uncertainty and crisis.

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## Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

### KI TISA

In this week's Torah reading we learn of the ingredients and mixture that created the incense offering in the Holy Temple. The list of ingredients and its formula are transmitted to us through the words of the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud. The ingredients and measurements were to be exact and any deviation from the established formula rendered the offering unacceptable.

The incense offering differs from all other Temple offerings because of the fact that it is ephemeral and physically nonexistent. It literally goes up in smoke. However, it leaves a fragrance that is so powerful that, as the Talmud explains, the animal kingdom as far away as Jericho was affected by this fragrance.

There are those who say that the miracle attributed to the Temple in the book of Avot, that no flies appeared on the temple grounds even though it was basically a meat slaughterhouse, was due to the wafting of the smoke that emanated from the incense offering on a daily basis. Be that as it may be, there is no doubt that the incense offering was meant to be a protective measure for the Jewish people. We find later in the Bible that it was used to diffuse plagues that were brought upon the people because of their intransigence and sins. It nevertheless was a lethal offering, which if done improperly and/or without authorization, brought death upon those who practiced it. We see this from the story of the sons of Aaron and from the even greater tragedy of the destruction of Korach and his followers.

The incense offering was a purely spiritual event. It was smoke and air. It left a powerful fragrance, but though it could be appreciated and even internalized it could not be touched or felt by human hands. The service of God is often purely spiritual, characterized by love, devotion and faith. These are not traits that can be held in one's hands or subject to storage. The very vagueness of these necessary spiritual traits makes them difficult to define, let alone observe. And these spiritual traits need to be handled carefully and with proper judgment.

Too much faith can lead to poor decisions and a naïve view of life and religion. Not enough faith will only lead to pessimism and permanent disappointment. The same is true for all other spiritual traits – they are necessary for the correct service of God but they can be easily mishandled and misinterpreted. The Torah purposely defined its physical commandments. These definitions apply even to the spiritual commandments as well. The Torah gives forth a fragrance – a fragrance of goodness, kindness and a whiff of eternity.

Though we no longer have the ability to offer incense on a daily basis, we do have the ability to serve our Creator, in a spiritual sense, with our minds and hearts and souls. Though these may not be physically reflective to others, Heaven recognizes them clearly. It is our incense offering.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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## The Birth of a New Freedom

### Ki Tissa

#### Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Witnessing the birth of a new idea is a little like watching the birth of a galaxy through the Hubble Space Telescope. We can witness just such

an event in a famous rabbinical commentary to a key verse in this week's Parsha.

The way to see it is to ask the question: what is the Hebrew word for freedom? Instinctively, we answer cherut. After all, we say that God brought us me-avdut le-cherut, “from slavery to freedom.”

We call Pesach, the Festival of Freedom, ‘Zeman Cheruteinu’. So it comes as a surprise to discover that not once does the Torah, or even Tanach as a whole, use the word cherut in the sense of freedom, and only once does it use the word, or at least the related word charut, in any sense whatever.

There are two biblical words for freedom. One is chofshi/chofesh, used in connection with the freeing of slaves (as in Ex. 21:2). That too is the word used in Israel's national anthem, Hatikvah, which speaks about “the two-thousand-year hope to be a free people [am chofshi] in our land.”

The other is dror, used in connection with the Jubilee year, as engraved on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia:

“Proclaim liberty [dror] throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.”

Lev. 25:10

The same word appears in Isaiah's great words, “to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom [dror] for the captives. (Is. 61:1)”

However, the Sages coined a new word. Here is the passage in which it occurs:

The Tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved [charut] on the Tablets” (Ex. 32:16). Read not charut, “engraved” but cherut, “freedom,” for the only person who is truly free is one who is occupied with Torah study.

Avot 6:2

The reference is to the first Tablets given by God to Moses just before the sin of the Golden Calf. This is the only appearance in Tanach of root ch-r-t (with a tav), but a related word, ch-r-t (with a tet) appears in the story of the Golden Calf itself, when the Torah tells us that Aaron shaped it with a cheret, an “engraving tool.” The Egyptian magicians are called chartumim, which may mean “engravers of hieroglyphics.” So how did a word that means “engraved” come to mean “freedom”?

Besides which, why was a new term for freedom needed? If the Hebrew language already had two, why was a third necessary? And why did it stem from this word, which meant ‘engraved’? To answer these questions, let us engage in some conceptual archaeology.

Chofesh/chofshi is what a slave becomes when he or she goes free. This means that he can do what he likes. There is no one to order him around. The word is related to chafetz, “desire” and chapes, “seek”. Chofesh is the freedom to pursue your desires. It is what philosophers call negative liberty. It means the absence of coercion.

Chofesh is fine for individual freedom. But it does not constitute collective freedom. A society in which everyone was free to do what they liked would not be a free society. It would be, at best, like the society we saw on the streets of London and Manchester in the summer of 2011, with people breaking shop windows, looting, and assaulting strangers.

More likely it would be what failed states are today: a society without the rule of law, with no effective government, honest police, or independent courts. It would be what Hobbes called “the war of every man against every man” in which life would be “nasty, brutish and short.” Something like this is referred to in the last verse of the Book of Judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did that which was right in his own eyes.”

A free society needs law. But law is a constraint on freedom. It forbids me to do something I might wish to do. How then are we to reconcile law and liberty? That is a question at the heart of Judaism – which is a religion of both law and liberty.

To answer this, the Sages made an extraordinary leap of the imagination. Consider two forms of writing in ancient times. One is to use ink on parchment, another is to engrave words in stone. There is a marked difference between these two methods. The ink and parchment are two different materials. The ink is external to the parchment. It is

superimposed upon it, and it does not become part of the parchment. It remains distinct, and so it can be rubbed off and removed. But an engraving does not use some new substance. It is carved out of the stone itself. It becomes part of it, and cannot easily be obliterated.

Now consider these two ways of writing as metaphors for law. There are laws that are externally imposed. People keep them because they fear that if they do not, they will be caught and punished. But if there is no chance that they will be caught, they make break the rules, for the law has not changed their desires. That kind of law – imposed on us like ink on parchment – is a limitation of freedom.

But there can be a different kind of society in which people keep the law not because they fear they will be caught and punished, but because they know the law, they have studied it, they understand it, they have internalised it, and it has become part of who they are. They no longer desire to do what the law forbids because they now know it is wrong and they wrestle with their own temptations and desires. Such a law needs no police because it is based not on external force but on internal transformation through the process of education. The law is like writing engraved in stone.

Imagine such a society. You can walk in the streets without fear. You don't need high walls and alarms to keep your home safe. You can leave your car unlocked and still expect to find it there when you return. People keep the law because they care about the common good. That is a free society.

Now imagine the other kind of society, which needs a heavy police presence, constant surveillance, neighbourhood watch schemes, security devices and personnel, and still people are afraid to walk alone at night. People think they are free because they have been taught that all morality is relative, and you can do what you like so long as you do not harm others. No one who has seen such a society can seriously believe it is free. Individuals may be free, but society as a whole has to be on constant guard because it is at constant risk. It is a society with little trust and much fear.

Hence the brilliant new concept that emerged in rabbinic Judaism: cherut, the freedom that comes to a society – of which Jews were called on to be pioneers – where people not only know the law but study it constantly until it is engraved on their hearts as the commandments were once engraved on stone. That is what the Sages meant when they said, “Read not charut, engraved, but cherut, freedom, for the only person who is truly free is one who is occupied with Torah study.” In such a society you keep the law because you want to, because having studied the law you understand why it is there. In such a society there is no conflict between law and freedom.

Where did the Sages get this idea from? I believe it came from their deep understanding of what Jeremiah meant when he spoke of the renewed covenant that would come into being once Jews returned after the Babylonian exile. The renewed covenant, he said, “will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt ... This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time – declares the Lord – I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts ...” (Jer. 31:31-33)

Many centuries later Josephus recorded that this had actually happened.

“Should anyone of our nation be asked about our laws, he will repeat them as readily as his own name. The result of our thorough education in our laws from the very dawn of intelligence is that they are, as it were, engraved on our souls.”

To this day, many still do not fully understand this revolutionary idea. People still think that a free society can be brought about simply by democratic elections and political structures. But democracy, as Alexis de Tocqueville said long ago, may simply turn out to be “the tyranny of the majority.”

Freedom is born in the school and the house of study. That is the freedom still pioneered by the people who, more than any other, have devoted their time to studying, understanding and internalising the law. What is the Jewish people? A nation of constitutional lawyers. Why? Because only when the law is engraved on our souls can we achieve

collective freedom without sacrificing individual freedom. That is cherut — Judaism's great contribution to the idea and practice of liberty.

## **The Joy of Purim Illuminates the Entire Year**

### **Revivim Rabbi Eliezer Melamed**

The essence of Purim is to provide inspiration for the entire year • Sometimes, in our eagerness to increase joy, we overdo it to the point where it no longer brings happiness • We need to return to the basics and fulfill the mitzvot of Purim properly • Any additions beyond that should only be made if they genuinely enhance joy • Even the mitzvah of drinking should not cause distress to family members • While the halachic status of Amalek no longer applies today, the principle of completely overcoming a cruel enemy remains valid

Since Purim lasts only one day, and it is impossible to send endless mishloach manot or participate in meals with all relatives and friends, the question arises: To whom should we prioritize sending portions—our closest friends who are always by our side, or those with whom our relationships are sometimes strained? Should we send two lavish portions to select friends, or ten, twenty, or thirty simpler packages? Similarly, with the feast—should we invite family members from this side or that side, close friends, or perhaps new immigrants? Should the meal be for ten participants or fifty?

The answer is that all these ideas are valid, as this is the essence of Purim—to inspire us throughout the year. Although we cannot send portions to everyone on Purim, the beauty of giving can extend beyond Purim itself. Throughout the year, we can send thoughtful packages to friends and acquaintances—for example, when baking challah or preparing a special dish for Shabbat, we can make a little extra and send it to a friend who had a tough week, is celebrating a birthday, started a new job, or lost one. This way, we extend the heartwarming connection of Purim throughout the year.

The same applies to the feast. While we can only dine with a limited group on Purim, the joy of the meal should deepen our appreciation for friendship and connection, encouraging us to participate in our loved ones' celebrations year-round—weddings, brit milah ceremonies, and other family and community gatherings. Similarly, the mitzvah of matanot la'evyonim (gifts to the poor) should inspire us to continue giving tzedakah, such as ma'aser kesafim (a tenth of our earnings) or even a fifth, throughout the year.

The mitzvah of reading the Megillah also provides lasting lessons. Through hearing the Megillah, we learn about God's providence in the world and how evil can be transformed into good. This understanding strengthens us to continue studying Torah and recognizing divine guidance throughout the year.

**A Woman's Profound Question About the Joy of Purim**

Q: I am a woman for whom Purim has become a difficult day. Instead of being a joyful occasion, it is one of the most burdensome days of the year. The need to prepare numerous mishloach manot, organize the feast, help the children with their costumes, and accompany them in delivering the packages is overwhelming. This is compounded by hearing the Megillah twice, with all the delays and noise during the “Haman” beatings. The feast itself is also stressful. While my husband usually helps with Shabbat and festival meals, on Purim I am solely responsible. Additionally, I worry that my husband might get drunk, leaving me to manage both him and the children, along with the discomfort and embarrassment it sometimes causes. I understand that some women enjoy all of this, but I suspect I am not alone in feeling this way.

A: The problem is that in our desire to increase joy, we sometimes overdo it to the point where it ceases to be joyful. This is true for any good thing—when taken to excess, it becomes burdensome and even harmful. Compliments are pleasant, but when exaggerated, they become ridiculous. Friendship is wonderful, but excessive clinging can become oppressive.

Therefore, it is essential to return to the basics and fulfill the mitzvot of Purim properly, ensuring that any additions genuinely enhance joy.

**Mishloach Manot:**

The mitzvah is to send two food items to one person. Each spouse should send one package, containing at least two portions. Originally, the Purim meal preparation included the preparation of mishloach manot—sharing from what was already prepared for the feast. This minimized the burden while maximizing joy, as one received the best of what their friend had made. Since there is a mitzvah to educate children, each child should give one package to a friend, and beyond that, additional gifts should only be given if they bring joy.

**Megillah Reading:**

Similarly, when it comes to the Megillah reading, it is best to find a comfortable environment. Ideally, the Megillah should be read in a public setting, but if the noise of beating “Haman” is disturbing, it is appropriate to attend a quieter reading. As I wrote in *Peninei Halacha*: “Those who wish to continue the custom of beating ‘Haman’ may do so, provided that the entire congregation can still hear the Megillah clearly. However, it is preferable to avoid making noise during the reading, and synagogues where most congregants prefer a quiet reading should announce in advance that no noise will be made.”

**The Feast:**

Regarding the Purim feast, instead of organizing an overly large gathering, it is better to hold the meal within the family circle. It can be shared with another family, but it is also perfectly acceptable to celebrate with just the nuclear family. The meal should include bread and be as dignified as a festival meal. While meat is preferred for the main dish, chicken, fish, or even dairy dishes are also acceptable.

**The Mitzvah of Drinking:**

The mitzvah of drinking on Purim is derived from the verse “to make them days of feasting and rejoicing” (Esther 9:22). There are two primary approaches:

Some hold that one should become intoxicated to the point where they cannot distinguish between “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordechai.” However, if a person knows that they might act inappropriately when drunk, they should only drink enough to become drowsy and fall asleep.

Others argue that the mitzvah is simply to drink more than usual but not to become drunk to the point of losing control.

**Practical Halacha:**

Each person should choose the approach that allows them to fulfill the mitzvah joyfully. If a man’s drinking causes his wife distress, he should follow the more moderate approach. If the wife is significantly burdened, this may indicate that he is exceeding even the lenient opinion.

**Remembering Amalek:**

This Shabbat, we fulfill the mitzvah of reading Parashat Zachor, reminding us not to show excessive mercy to our enemies. History teaches that when we were too lenient, we suffered—whether during King Saul’s time, or in the days of King Ahab. Although the specific mitzvah to destroy Amalek no longer applies today, the principle remains that a cruel enemy must be decisively defeated.

**The Daily ‘Peninah’:**

On Shushan Purim, participants in the “Peninei Halacha” daily learning program (in Hebrew) will begin the study of Shabbat. By the end of the year, they will complete the two volumes on Shabbat laws, including the 39 melachot, and will then proceed to study the laws of prayer. This initiative involves approximately 6,000 participants across the country.

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## **Parshat Ki Tisa: Sweet and Not So Savory Spices – The Jewish Melting Pot**

**Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone**

“And God spoke unto Moses: Take unto you sweet spices, stacte [nataf], onycha [shelet] and galbanum [helbena], these sweet spices with pure frankincense [levona], all of an equal weight.” (Exodus 30:34)

One of the most unique aspects of the Sanctuary, continued in the Holy Temples, was the sweet-smelling spices of the incense burned on a special altar and whose inspiring fragrance permeated the House of God. In the portion of Ki Tisa the Torah lists the different spices, and their

names – in Hebrew or English – are strange to our modern ears. But stranger still is the Rabbinic commentary that one of those spices – specifically helbena – is hardly sweet smelling. On the contrary, as Rashi writes, helbena “...is a malodorous spice which is known [to us as] galbanah [galbanum]. Scripture enumerates it among the spices of the incense to teach us that we shouldn’t look upon the inclusion of Jewish transgressors in our fasts and prayers as something insignificant in our eyes; indeed, they [the transgressors of Israel] must also be included amongst us” (Rashi, ad loc.).

Rashi is conveying a most significant rabbinic insight. The community of Israel – in Hebrew a tzibur – must consist of all types of Jews: righteous (the letter tzadi for tzaddikim), intermediate (the letter bet for benonim), and wicked (the letter reish for resha’im), just as the incense of the Sanctuary included spices of unappetizing fragrance. Perhaps because we must learn to take responsibility for every member of the “family” no matter what their behavior, perhaps because what appears to us as wicked may in reality be more genuine spirituality, perhaps because no evil is without its redeeming feature or perhaps merely in order to remind us not to be judgmental towards other human beings, the message of the incense could not be clearer: no Jew, even the most egregious sinner, dare be dismissed with mockery and derision from the sacred congregation of Israel. Every Jew must be allowed to contribute, and only when every Jew is included does the sweet fragrance properly emerge.

We have already seen how the Torah portion of Ki Tisa contains another striking example of the significance of every single Jew in Israel in the aftermath of the great sin in the desert. We read that soon after the revelation at Sinai, Moses’ prolonged communion with the divine frightened the people into worshipping a golden calf. Our sages teach:

“And God said to Moses, ‘Go down’ (Ex. 32:7). Interprets R. Elazar: God was commanding Moses to descend from his elevated position. ‘The only reason I gave you greatness is because of Israel, and now that Israel has sinned, what do I need you for?’” (Berakhot 32a)

God is reminding Moses that God’s covenant with Abraham was with every single Jew. No Jew dare be discounted; every Jew must be loved, taught, and at least given the opportunity to come closer to God and our traditions. Even the Jew who is serving idols must be spoken to, ministered to!

A month or so after this portion is read, the Seder itself becomes a living demonstration of the necessity to include rather than to exclude any Jew. Take note of the proverbial four children: the wise child, the wicked child, the simple child and the child who knows not what to ask. It is instructive that the wicked child is not defined by the compiler of the Haggada as one who eats non-kosher food or desecrates the Sabbath; the wicked child is rather the one who says “Of what value is this work for you?” Wickedness is defined as excluding oneself from the general Jewish community. And even if a person excludes herself – and is therefore called wicked – we dare not exclude her. Our Seder table must always be welcoming enough to include everyone, no matter who.

Indeed, towards the end of the Seder we are instructed to open the door for Elijah the prophet, forerunner of the Messiah. In the past I’ve commented that opening the door for Elijah seems superfluous given Elijah’s uncanny ability to visit every single Seder in the world; anyone capable of accomplishing such a remarkable feat certainly would not be stopped by a closed door. One answer that I’ve proposed is that the opening of the door is not really for Elijah; it is rather a symbolic gesture of opening the door to the fifth child, the child who has moved so far from the Jewish people that he isn’t even at the Seder! We must go out to find him – even if he is at a neighborhood dance club or a Far East ashram – and invite him to come back in.

And why is Elijah associated with this gesture toward the fifth child? The closing verse of the last prophet included in the canon, Malakhi, declares: “Behold I will send Elijah, the prophet, before the coming of the great and awesome day of God, and he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers...” (Malakhi 3:23). No one, not the “wicked” child, and not even the “invisible” child, is to be excluded from the Seder, the commemoration

of our first redemption. Parents and children must all join together in a loving and accepting reunion.

There is a fascinating halakhic ramification of our desire to include rather than to exclude. The Talmud (Eruvin 69b) suggests that a public desecrater of the Sabbath is comparable to an idolater, whose wine cannot be drunk and who cannot be counted for a statutory quorum (minyan) for prayer. Does this mean that a Jew who does not observe the Sabbath laws and rituals forfeits his rights to belong to a proper Jewish congregation? One of the towering Torah giants of nineteenth-century Germany, Rabbi David Zvi Hoffman, raises this very question in his collection of responsa, *Mellamed Leho'il* (Responsum 29), where he resoundingly rules that the Talmudic comparison no longer applies. He explains that during Talmudic times, when the overwhelming majority of the Jewish people was observant, and when a Jew was defined in terms of their Torah observance, any Jew who publicly desecrated the Sabbath was effectively testifying to their exclusion from the Jewish people. Therefore, in Talmudic times, a public Sabbath desecrator became the equivalent of an idolater; in effect, the perpetrator of such a public crime was excluding himself from the congregation of Israel and such a person was thereby relinquishing any rights to Jewish privileges. However, explains Rabbi Hoffman, when – sadly enough – the overwhelming majority of Jews are not observant (and today this is even truer than it was in nineteenth-century Germany), a Jew who publicly desecrates the Sabbath is not at all making a statement of exclusion from the peoplehood of Israel. On the contrary, the very fact that such a desecrater attends a synagogue (if only a few times a year) and is willing to partake in the service indicates a definite feeling of belonging and a will to belong to the historic community of Israel. Therefore, Rabbi Hoffman concludes, a Sabbath desecrater must not only be included in a minyan, but must be encouraged to become more involved.

#### A Curious Postscript

On a recent plane trip from New York to Israel, I felt myself awakened by a rather startling question. Someone wanted to see my tzitzit (ritual fringes). Still half asleep, I opened my shirt, showing the aggressive questioner what he wanted. I thought that perhaps he needed to borrow them. “Good,” he said, “in that case please join us for a minyan for morning prayers.” Somewhat confused, I asked him what my wearing or not wearing tzitzit had to do with my joining the minyan. “You know,” he said, “you can’t pray with just any Jew. But chances are that a Jew who wears tzitzit also observes the Sabbath.”

I was quite taken aback, to say the least. I reminded the zealot that the source for the requirement of ten people for a minyan was derived from God’s statement to Moses, “How long must I suffer this evil congregation...?” (Num. 14:27). And the evil congregation to which God is referring is the ten out of twelve scouts who didn’t want to conquer the Land of Israel. Since the word “eda” (congregation) refers to ten scouts, we know that ten comprise a minyan. Now these ten scouts are considered to have committed one of the most grievous sins of the Bible by their refusal to leave the desert and inhabit Israel. If such individuals are the very source for a congregational quorum, how could someone be excluded if he doesn’t wear the ritual fringes?

I did not choose to pray with such a hand-picked group; I chose rather to pray with those who had been rejected by the tzitzit checking minyan gatherer, confident that they would be far more acceptable to the God of compassion and unconditional love to whom we pray!

Shabbat Shalom

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#### Under the Big Top

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

“Why do some people wear big yarmulkes that cover their entire head?”

“How large must my yarmulke be?”

“Is there a halachic difference between going bareheaded indoors versus outdoors?”

“Why don’t we clip a waterproof yarmulke to our heads while we swim?”

“May one swear an oath, using G-d’s Name, while bareheaded?”

Answer:

All of the above questions concern the laws regarding covering one’s head and walking bareheaded, a topic mentioned several times in the Gemara. For example:

“Rabbi Huna, the son of Rabbi Yehoshua, did not walk four amos (about seven feet) with an uncovered head, saying, ‘The Shechinah is above my head’” (Kiddushin 31a). Similarly, the Gemara says elsewhere that Rabbi Huna the son of Rabbi Yehoshua said about himself, “I will be rewarded, because I never walked four amos with an uncovered head” (Shabbos 118b).

“Ravina was sitting in front of Rav Yirmiyah of Difti when a man passed by and did not cover his head. Ravina said to Rav Yirmiyah of Difti, ‘How arrogant is this man (for walking bareheaded in the presence of Torah scholars)?’ Rav Yirmiyah responded, ‘Perhaps he comes from the town of Mechasya, where the people are so familiar with talmidei chachamim (that in their presence the townspeople do not cover their heads)’” (Kiddushin 33a).

“An astrologer told the mother of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak: ‘Your son will be a thief.’ To avoid this from happening, she made sure that his head was always covered, and cautioned him: ‘Cover your head, so that you will always be in fear of Heaven and always pray for Divine assistance in serving Hashem.’ Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak was unaware of the reason behind her instructions, but always followed them meticulously, from his youth and on into adulthood, when he became a great Torah scholar. One day, he was studying Torah under a date palm that was not his, when his head covering fell off. Raising his eyes, he saw the dates, and his yetzer hora overwhelmed him. It was so powerful that he snapped off dates with his teeth, thus fulfilling the prophecy of the astrologer” (Shabbos 156b).

Mesechta Sofrim, which is a collection of beraisos, or halachic teachings of the tanna'im not included in the Mishnah, quotes a dispute whether someone whose head is uncovered

may lead the services by being poreis al shema, which means to recite kaddish and borchu that follow the pesukei dezimra. (There are various opinions as to how much of the prayer is included in poreis al shema, a topic beyond the scope of this article.) The first opinion, mentioned anonymously, permits someone bareheaded to lead the services, whereas the second opinion prohibits doing so, because one may not say Hashem’s name with an uncovered head (Sofrim 14:15). In a dispute of this nature, the general rule is that we follow the first opinion, although, in this particular dispute, we find authorities who rule according to the second opinion.

The Rambam about being bareheaded

The Rambam prohibits praying the shemoneh esrei bareheaded (Hilchos Tefillah 5:5), and he also states that it is appropriate for a talmid chacham to cover his head at all times (Hilchos Dei’os 5:6).

Interpreting the Talmudic sources

Based on the above sources, most, but not all, halachic authorities contend that, in Talmudic times, covering one’s head was performed on special occasions, such as when praying, reciting blessings, and in the presence of a Torah scholar, but was not always otherwise observed (Tur, Orach Chayim 8, as explained by Darkei Moshe; Shu”t Maharshal #72; Gra on Orach Chayim 8:2). These rulings imply that someone other than a talmid chacham is not required to cover his head, except when davening. As we will soon see, most authorities conclude that, today, one is required to cover one’s head, because of reasons that did not apply in the time of the Gemara.

A minority opinion

We must note that one prominent late authority, Rav Shelomo Kluger, understands the Talmudic sources in a different way. He contends that, even in earlier times, it was forbidden to leave one’s head completely uncovered. In his opinion, the passages that imply that a person may go bareheaded are, in fact, allowing him to have his head partially covered (Shu”t Ha’elef Lecha Shelomo #3).

Protecting from sin

According to all opinions, covering one’s head helps achieve yiras shamayim, being in constant recognition and awe of G-d’s presence, as borne out by the anecdote of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak that I quoted

above. Let us understand this story in its context, which concerns the topic of ein mazal leYisroel.

Ein mazal leYisroel

Hashem set up the world in such a way that the events that transpire in one's life, and even one's personality and tendencies, are influenced by one's mazal. However, because of the principle of ein mazal leYisroel, one can override this preordained fortune through prayer. Recognizing that Hashem is The Source of all, and praying to Him for help and assistance, can change one's situation.

We now understand what Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak's mother did. The astrologer understood the mazalos and knew that her son was born under a mazal that would influence him to steal. Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak's mother knew that although mazalos have a strong influence on a person, their power is not absolute. Therefore, she understood, correctly, that the astrologer's diagnosis presented her with a reason to treat her son in a special way. Since prayer and being careful about mitzvah observance can offset the influence of mazalos, this is what she taught him, knowing that covering one's head provides a strong influence. She was proven correct, because her son developed into a great Torah scholar and yerei shamayim, despite the influences of his personal mazalos. Still, only when he remained on guard and kept his head covered was he able to combat his tremendous drive to steal. The moment his head became uncovered, the temptation to steal overwhelmed him. He now knew that, in spite of his tremendous accomplishments in ruchniyus, he could not relax his guard, even for a second. We also understand why the custom developed that people cover their heads at all times, even though the Gemara did not require it.

Responsum of the Maharshal

With this background, we can understand the following responsum, penned by the sixteenth-century halachic luminary, Rav Shelomo Luria, known as the Maharshal. "I am unaware of a prohibition to recite a beracha without a cover on one's head. Although the Terumas Hadeshen was certain that it is prohibited to mention G-d's Name without one's head being covered, I am unaware of the source of this ruling. He writes that it is a dispute in Mesechta Sofrim, and, furthermore, Rabbeinu Yerucham writes that it is prohibited to recite a beracha bareheaded. Even though I do not dispute the earlier authorities unless I find a major scholar on my side of the dispute, I am inclined to be lenient in ruling that one may recite a beracha and even recite kerias shema bareheaded. I can prove this from a Midrash Rabbah that states that a human king requires people to rise and uncover their heads in respect, prior to reading a declaration that he has issued, which they then read with great awe and trepidation. Hakadosh Baruch Hu told the Jews that when you read My declaration, the shema, you are not required to stand while doing so, nor are you required to expose your heads." The Maharshal notes that this midrash implies that uncovering one's head while reciting shema is not required, and it is certainly not prohibited.

The Maharshal continues: "Despite my own proofs to the contrary, what can I do that people consider being bareheaded to be prohibited? However, I am astonished at the custom of treating uncovering one's head as a prohibited activity, even when not praying. I have no idea where they got this from. The only source that we find about having one's head uncovered is regarding a woman; it is only a midas chasidus (exemplary conduct) to be careful not to walk four amos bareheaded -- but this midas chasidus applies only to someone walking four amos and not to one walking a shorter distance, as implied by the statement of Rav Huna the son of Rav Yehoshua... . Furthermore, I found written that being bareheaded is a concern only when one is outdoors... . Avoiding reciting G-d's Name with an exposed head is a midas chasidus, just as is avoiding walking four amos bareheaded. However, the Rif wrote that we should protest someone's entering a shul bareheaded, and the Tur wrote that one should not pray bareheaded, but did not prohibit reciting shema bareheaded."

The Maharshal then concludes: "I am powerless to change this approach. Since people are in the practice of not being bareheaded anywhere, I may not be lenient in their presence. I heard of a talmid chacham who used to study Torah bareheaded, saying that the covering

bothered him. Although, technically, there is nothing wrong with being bareheaded, even from a perspective of exemplary conduct (midas chasidus), provided one is not saying G-d's Name, nevertheless, a talmid chacham should be careful not to do this, since people may think that he is not serious about his observance of Torah and mitzvos. Therefore, a talmid chacham should not study Torah bareheaded, even in the privacy of his own home, lest someone see him and, as a result, treat him without the proper respect he is due."

In his conclusion, the Maharshal rules that a talmid chacham is required to cover his head. He also contends that one may recite a beracha by placing his hand over his head, despite the rule that one part of the body is not considered a proper cover over another part (see Berachos 24b and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 74:1). The Maharshal reasons that since, in his opinion, halacha does not require one to cover one's head when saying Hashem's Name, and the reason one needs to cover his head is only so that people not consider him to be someone who does not take the Torah seriously, it is sufficient to place one's hand over one's head to fulfill this concern.

Other authorities

Although the Gra (on Orach Chayim 8:2) echoes the Maharshal's approach to the subject at hand, early poskim follow a more stringent approach. The Terumas Hadeshen (1:10), the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 91:3, 4) and the Rema (Orach Chayim 74:2) rule that it is prohibited to say Hashem's Name bareheaded, following the second opinion of Mesechta Sofrim. As a result, they conclude that a person may not recite a beracha with only his hand on top of his head, although the Shulchan Aruch permits reciting a beracha with someone else's hand covering your head. As I will explain shortly, the Taz agrees that one may not recite a beracha with only one's hand on top of his head, but he permits standing or walking four amos with one's hand on top of his head.

The Bach (comments to Tur Orach Chayim, Chapter 2) takes issue with a different lenient ruling of the Maharshal, contending that it is forbidden to walk bareheaded even less than four amos.

The Taz's approach

Although the Maharshal concluded that the only reason one should not go bareheaded is because people will look at him askance, the Taz (Orach Chayim 8:3) concludes that, in our day, it is halachically prohibited to be bareheaded. In his opinion, since the gentiles of the Western world are meticulous to uncover their heads upon entering a building, being bareheaded violates the law of bechukoseihem lo seileichu (Vayikra 18:3), one may not follow the practices of the gentiles. This lo saaseh of the Torah is often called chukos akum. There are many opinions among the rishonim and the poskim as to the exact definition of what is included under chukos akum. The Taz explains that since the gentiles consider it unacceptable to have one's head covered indoors, uncovering one's head violates this prohibition.

Thus, according to the Taz, there are two different reasons to have one's head covered: to encourage one's yiras shamayim and because of chukos akum. Placing one's hand over one's head is sufficient to avoid chukos akum, since this shows that one does not want to sit bareheaded, but it is not sufficient to allow one to recite a beracha.

Bareheaded indoors

Based on the Maharshal, the Be'er Heiteiv (Orach Chayim 2:6) rules that, under extenuating circumstances, one is permitted to have one's head exposed while indoors. However, the Bechor Shor (Shabbos 118b) opposes this ruling, contending that having one's head exposed indoors is a more serious violation of chukos akum than outdoors, since the practice of the gentiles is deliberately to be bareheaded indoors.

At this point, we can return to one of our original questions: "Is there a halachic difference between going bareheaded indoors versus outdoors?" According to the Maharshal and the Be'er Heiteiv, although, under normal circumstances, one should cover one's head in both venues, walking bareheaded outdoors is of greater concern. Under extenuating circumstances, the Be'er Heiteiv permitted walking indoors bareheaded. However, the Bechor Shor considers walking bareheaded indoors to be a more serious violation of halacha, since it violates chukos akum,

whereas walking outdoors with one's head exposed violates only the minhag Yisroel.

#### Livelihood

Although Rav Moshe Feinstein rules according to the Taz that one is required to cover one's head whether indoors or outdoors, he concludes that when one's employment or livelihood may be jeopardized, it is permitted to work bareheaded. This ruling applies only while someone is at his place of work, but once he leaves his place of employment, he must cover his head, since his livelihood is no longer jeopardized (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 1:1 and 4:2; Choshen Mishpat 1:93). (Those interested in seeing two very different approaches to this question are encouraged to compare Shu"t Nachalas Binyamin #30 and Shu"t Melamed Leho'il, Yoreh Deah, #56.)

#### Different gentiles

Some authorities note that the Taz's reason should apply only in Western countries and other places where the gentiles have a specific practice to uncover their heads. However, in places where the gentiles have no such concerns, such as in Moslem countries, there is no prohibition of chukos akum in leaving one's head uncovered (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 1:1). It may still be prohibited because of Jewish custom.

#### Swearing bareheaded

At this point, let us examine a different one of our opening questions: "May one swear an oath, using G-d's Name, while bareheaded?"

This question returns us to the dispute in Mesechta Sofrim that I quoted earlier, whether one may recite Hashem's Name bareheaded. According to the halachic authorities who rule like the first tanna, there is nothing technically wrong with reciting Hashem's Name bareheaded. Even among those authorities, such as the Terumas Hadeshen (1:10), who rule like the second tanna and prohibit enunciating Hashem's Name bareheaded, many, including the Terumas Hadeshen himself (2:203), rule that one may recite an oath bareheaded. For example, the Beis Lechem Yehudah (Yoreh Deah 157:5) rules that, when no other option exists, it is permitted to swear an oath while bareheaded.

#### Under the big top

At this point, we can examine two of our opening questions:

"Why do some people wear big yarmulkes that cover their entire head?"

"How large must my yarmulke be?"

In the above-quoted responsum of Rav Shelomo Kluger, he ruled that one is required to cover one's head completely when walking outdoors four amos or more. When walking less than this distance, or when walking indoors, one must cover one's head, but it does not need to be covered completely. This explains why some people wear big yarmulkes that cover their entire head.

However, this ruling is not universally accepted. Rav Moshe Feinstein was asked how can people walk in the street wearing only a yarmulke, when Rav Shelomo Kluger required covering one's entire head? Rav Moshe demonstrates that all the major authorities disagreed with Rav Kluger's ruling. Rav Moshe concludes that even a small yarmulke meets the halachic requirements, but that individuals who would like to follow the more stringent opinion of Rav Kluger with regard to walking outside should cover their heads in a way that covers more than half the top of the head.

#### Swimming bareheaded

Previously, I quoted the following question: "Why don't we clip a waterproof yarmulke to our heads while we swim?"

One of the authorities mentioned above, the Bechor Shor, rules that there is no requirement to cover your head while swimming or while walking from the changing room to the mikveh, not even as a midas chasidus. He demonstrates from passages of the Gemara that midas chasidus does not include covering your head in the mikveh, and also notes that swimming bareheaded does not violate chukas akum, since it is obvious that the uncovered head is not because one is trying to mimic gentile practice.

#### Conclusion

We see from the halachic sources that covering one's head was a highly respected practice that assisted a person's growth in yiras shamayim. With time, covering one's head became part of the "uniform" of the Jewish man. In addition, there are other halachic reasons to keep one's head covered, such as chukos akum. When donning a yarmulke or other head covering, one should avail himself of the opportunity to think about our Father in Heaven.

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#### The Nazis and Purim

by Jonathan Rosenblum

#### Mishpacha Magazine

Hitler's identification with Haman, and even before that with Haman's ancestor Amalek, was fully justified

Did you know that Hitler yemach shemo was obsessed with Purim? Well, I didn't either, until I came across an entire chapter devoted to the subject in Rabbi Raphael Shore's new book, Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Jew (about which I'll be writing at much greater length in the near future).

When Hitler declared war on the United States, in the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor — as misbegotten a decision for him as Haman's decision to build a gallows 50 amos high upon which to hang Mordechai proved for him — he accused President Roosevelt and the Jews of "preparing a second Purim." In a radio address to the nation in early 1944, when the Allies were already bombing Berlin, Hitler warned of a "second triumphant Purim festival" if the Nazis lost.

Most remarkably, the Nazis fully identified with Haman. Historian Martin Gilbert, in his magisterial The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War, details how in Eastern Europe, the Nazis carried out mass murders of Jews near to Purim on the calendar, or on Purim itself.

And on at least two occasions, ten Jews were hung on Purim day to avenge the ten sons of Haman. In the Polish town of Zdunska Wola, 30 miles west of Lodz, the Gestapo demanded from the Jewish Council ten young healthy Jews "for work." Subsequently, the Jewish Council was ordered to bring them to a place where the gallows had already been prepared and to hang them with their own hands. All the Jews of the town were forced to watch the sight of their fellow Jews writhing on the gallows.

In the Polish city of Piotrkow, on Purim day, the Jews legally living in the ghetto were told that there would be an exchange of ten Jews, who had to possess university degrees, for ten Germans living on a settlement in Palestine. That evening, the Jews thus selected were driven to the Jewish cemetery to be executed. But there turned out to be only eight, so the cemetery watchman and his wife were added to bring the total of those executed to ten — again in revenge for the ten sons of Haman.

HITLER'S IDENTIFICATION with Haman, and even before that with Haman's ancestor Amalek, was fully justified. And not just because he, like Haman, sought to "destroy, to kill, and to exterminate all the Jews." As early as 1920, Hitler wrote that the great war with the Jews would only be won when every single Jew was killed, because if even one survived, the race would be reconstituted.

Amalek is the great denier of Hashgachah Pratis and sower of doubt in Hashem in the world. When the entire world trembled before the Jews after Yetzias Mitzrayim, Amalek attacked and thereby cooled off the bath (of fear of Hashem and His people). In that first battle, Amalek cut off the sign of the covenant between Hashem and the Jewish People and cast it defiantly heavenward. Amalek's descendant Haman believed everything depended on chance, and famously cast lots to determine the day for the destruction of the Jews.

Hitler too believed in a universe governed solely by chance, specifically an evolutionary process driven by random mutations and natural selection. He transferred that view to the social realm and was an ardent proponent of Social Darwinism, the view that mankind develops through the survival of the fittest in a state of perpetual war.

As such, he despised all religion — "humanitarianism" — and the belief that mankind is subject to a Divine moral code. His hatred of the Jews was that they had inflicted the "wound" of morality upon mankind.

Christianity was only a slightly less repugnant stepchild of Judaism in his eyes. A popular song of the Hitler Youth went: "We need no stinkin' Christian virtue."

STILL, HITLER ENTERTAINED a niggling doubt that perhaps "destiny desires the final victory of this little nation." One of the first and ugliest Nazi propaganda films, *The Eternal Jew*, expressed precisely that point. Though it is a ceaseless catalogue of disgusting images of Jews throughout the ages, its very title captures the fear that the Jews are indeed eternal. That is why Purim played such an outsized role in Hitler's thought, for it provided proof of Hashem's providential protection of the Jewish People.

Hitler did not live to see the final downfall of the Thousand Year Reich, but one of his most vicious henchmen, Julius Streicher yemach shemo, publisher of the notorious *Der Stürmer*, did. Streicher was tried at Nuremberg for having promulgated Jewish hatred so vile that it incited the Germans to crimes against humanity.

He was hanged along with nine other Nazi war criminals, the last of the ten followers of Haman to be led to the gallows. (In the listing of the ten sons of Haman in the Megillah, three letters are written smaller than the others: tav, shin, and zayin, which are equal in value to the last three digits in 5707, the Hebrew year in which Streicher was executed.) Like Pharaoh at Yam Suf, Hashem kept Streicher alive long enough to understand clearly the truth of what Hitler only suspected: Hashem's divine protection of His chosen people.

As Streicher was about to be hanged — a hanging that was bungled and extended his agony — he shouted out, "Purimfest 1946!"

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## Drasha

### By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Ki Sisa

Higher than Sinai

In the aftermath of the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe's mortality is transformed to immortality as — anthropomorphic as it may sound — he gets G-d to change his mind.

Hashem, who had threatened to destroy Klall Yisrael after the sin of the Golden Calf, finally assures Moshe that His presence will accompany them on their sojourn. But Moshe, it seems, is still not satisfied. In what appears as a daring move, he asks Hashem for more. Not only does he want assurance of the accompaniment of the Divine presence, Moshe now asks Hashem to "show me Your face" (Exodus 33:18). It is not enough that Hashem forgives the Jews for the most audacious sin of their young history. It is not enough that he assures them that he will guide them in the desert. Moshe wants more! He asks for a mortal existence despite an immortal act. He wants to connect to the corporeal with the Omnipotent in a way never done before. He wants to feast his soul on the most spiritual meal ingested through human vision. He wants to see G-d.

Hashem explains that it is impossible to see Him and live. The human soul cannot be confined to a spatiotemporal existence after it has experienced the endless world of infinite spirituality. And thus the answer is, "No. You may however, see my back" (cf. Exodus 33:20-23). Of course the world of G-d's face as opposed to his back fill tomes of commentators from those who analyze textual reference to the great kabbalists, and it certainly has no place in a fax of internet sheet. What does interest me is Moshe's persistence. Why was he dissatisfied with G-d's first acquiescence? What propelled him, after almost losing Klall yisrael to ask for the greatest show of G-d's bond to His creation's?

Lou Maidenbaum, former President of Met Foods, help establish the Gedaliah Maidenbaum Preparatory School Division of Yeshiva of South Shore. Before passing away last month, he was confined to a hospital in Miami Beach.

But in his sick bed he never lost his spunk, charm or the will to live life to its fullest.

A week before he passed away, he was in his hospital room and was experiencing some discomfort. He pressed the button for a nurse, but no one came. Five minutes later he rang again. Still no response. He tried two more times and then decided a new tactic.

He picked up the telephone and dialed 3 digits. 9-1-1. "Emergency services, came the woman's voice, "what is the problem?" "I'm having difficulty breathing" gasped Lou. "Where are you calling from?" "Mount Sinai Hospital, Room 321," came the response. "Mount Sinai Hospital?" Repeated the incredulous dispatcher, "what are you calling us for? You are in the Hospital already!" Lady," he shouted to the operator. "This is my life we are talking about. And If this is the way I'll get the best response, then I'm calling 911!

Moshe knew that he was — on Sinai — with G-d — receiving the Torah. However, that was not enough. He was not complacent about his accomplishment. He was not content with being the transmitter of eternity. He wanted more! He wanted to attain the highest possible level of mortal achievement. He wanted to see G-d. He wanted to spiritually feast on the face of the Omnipotent. Moshe was only concerned, to attain the greatest degree of spirituality that he possibly could reach. There was nothing else on his mind or in his soul. Hashem responded that if that level is attained, the soul will flee from its mortal constraints and refuse to re-enter a corporal being. "No man shall see Me and live" (Exodus 22:20). So Moshe had to concede with the highest level the physical body could endure. But in Moshe's quest to go higher than Sinai he taught us a great lesson. No matter what level you think you are on, if you are standing on earth, you must reach for the mountain and when you are standing on the mountain you must reach for the clouds. And even if you are standing on a cloud you must reach for the stars.

Good Shabbos

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

In honor of the marriage of Mordechai Merenstein to Leah Dukler. May they be zocheh to build a bayis ne'eman b'Yisrael!

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## Parsha Insights

### By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

Parshas Ki Sisa

What's Bad is Good

This week we read parshas Ki Tisa. The central happening of this parsha is the chait ha'egel {the sin of the golden calf} and the ensuing discussion between Hashem and Moshe about how that event would affect the way Hashem would deal with Klal Yisroel {the Nation of Israel}. This is very applicable to the Purim holiday that we celebrate this week as Purim both ushered in and revealed to us the essence of a new stage.

Hashem instructed Moshe, together with Bnei Yisroel {the children of Israel}, to ascend to Eretz Yisroel {the Land of Israel}. "V'shalachti l'fanecha mal'ach {And I will send before you an angel}[33:2]." This angel will clear the way for you as you ascend "to the land flowing with milk and honey [33:3]."

The S'forno explains that Moshe was being told to take Bnei Yisroel out of the wilderness wherein they needed to be sustained miraculously. This was a level that they were no longer worthy of after the chait ha'egel. Instead, they were instructed to go to the land flowing with milk and honey. There they could be sustained in a non-miraculous manner. "And the nation heard this bad news (that Hashem would not be resting amongst them to the degree that He had been) and they mourned [33:4]." The Bnei Yisroel mourned this loss of closeness between them and Hashem.

Hashem responds that "in one moment, while I'm going up with you (if you'll rebel against me) I'll destroy you [33:5]." The S'forno explains that Hashem was explaining to them that they were mourning and upset over something that was in their best interests. The degree to which Hashem's presence is revealed determines the severity of the affront when we rebel against Him. Being an "am k'shay oref {a 'stiff-necked people}" we were better off having a mal'ach {angel} travel with us in the place of Hashem Himself.

Moshe continue to plead on behalf of Bnei Yisroel until Hashem acquiesced — He would accompany them. The mal'ach was put on hold until he appeared to Yehoshua when Yehoshua was about to begin his conquest of Eretz Yisroel.



Bnei Yisroel having elevated themselves through their t'shuvah {repentance} represented by their mourning, coupled with the prayers of Moshe, brought about the situation where it would no longer be better to have a mal'ach accompany them. Until that point, however, what we perceived as a cause for mourning was actually the best possible thing for us.

This is one of the basic teachings of Purim, contained in a seemingly very strange commandment. We know that the job of a Jew is to always retain focus of who he is and why he was sent down to this world. The more trying and difficult the situation through which one can maintain that focus — the greater the individual. Yet, on Purim, we seem to be commanded to lose focus! “Ad d'lo yadah bain arur Haman l'baruch Mordechai” — we are commanded to reach a state where we can't differentiate between “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordechai”. How can this commandment be understood?

The miracle of Purim took place during a very confusing period of our history. The first Temple had been destroyed and we were in the midst of the Babylonian exile. The era of prophecy had drawn to a close. Yirmiyahu's prophecy of our being redeemed after seventy years was quite ambiguous in terms of from when those seventy years should be counted. Achshverosh's party was made to celebrate the expiration of those seventy years (according to his miscalculation) and the subsequent end of the nation of Israel. In his eyes, seventy years passing without the Jews being redeemed meant that Hashem had rejected them as a people and as a nation. (With this in mind, we can better understand the enormity of the sin of the Jews attending and participating in such a celebration.)

It is stated in our prayers that ultimately, “Hashem will be (recognized as) King over the entire land, on that day Hashem and His name will be One.” In this world we have different names for Hashem which represent the different ways that we perceive Hashem's dealings with us. We have names for Hashem which refer to His attribute of mercy and other names which refer to His attribute of Justice. In the confusion of this world we see certain things as being ‘tov’ {good} and other's as ‘ra’ {evil}. Hashem's name is not One. However, ultimately, we will have the clarity of vision to see how it was all one attribute — different ways of bringing about that very same result. At that time His name will be One.

At this confusing time in our history, Hashem needed to clearly show us that we had not been dismissed from our national mission nor had we been set adrift. Although there no longer were open revelations of Hashem to man, He was still intimately involved in shaping and guiding the happenings of the world. There would be a lot of apparent ‘ra’ going on, but that too would be harnessed by Hashem's guiding hand to shepherd this world toward its destiny.

At the time of Purim, Haman, the scion of Amalek, had brought the nation of Israel to the verge of annihilation. He had successfully removed Queen Vashti, allowing for his own personal power to grow. He had built gallows upon which he planned to publicly hang Mordechai, the leader of the Jews. He had set a date for the total destruction of the Jews and he had the whole kingdom as eager and ready accomplices. It was a time of overpowering ‘ra’.

It was then that Hashem, who's name is not mentioned even once throughout Megilas Esther, showed that Haman was actually unwittingly preparing the Jewish nation's redemption with every step of his scheme of destruction. His removal of Queen Vashti opened the way for Queen Esther. The gallows he prepared for Mordechai raised the ire of Achshverosh, prompting him to proclaim that Haman and his sons should be hung on those very gallows. The day set aside for our destruction turned into a day for us to avenge our enemies.

Each episode of the Megilah, if viewed as an isolated incident, could have been considered a simple coincidence. The entire Megilah, however, with its delicately woven series of events all combining into an exquisite tapestry, is clearly nothing else but the loving hand of Hashem. Concealed, yet coordinating the events, leading to the redemption of Bnei Yisroel and a subsequent rededication to Him and His Torah.

The miracle of Purim affords a view from the future, from the end of time, from the time of absolute clarity. From the “day that Hashem and His name will be One.” A glimpse of that unity. An understanding that everything — all that we perceive as ‘tov’ and all that we perceive as ‘ra’ — is used by Hashem to bring about the ultimate destiny of Klal Yisroel. There is no difference between “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordechai”. All are tools in the hands of Hashem Echod {One}.

Wishing you a joyous Purim and a good Shabbos,  
Yisroel Ciner

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## The Megillah for Today

### A Purim Message

The ArtScroll / Mesorah Heritage Foundation

Chazal taught that although there were hundreds of thousands of prophets, only those prophecies that had messages for future generations were included in Neviim and Kesuvim (the Holy Books of Prophets and Writings). This applies to the Book of Esther as well — the last Book to be included in the Kisei Kodesh.

Indeed, it is striking that much of Megillas Esther parallels current Jewish history. Anti-Semitism was obviously present, if not rampant, in ancient Persia; otherwise, Haman's proposed genocide could not have come so close to success. Just as one cannot legislate love, one cannot legislate hatred great enough to bring about mass murder of men, women, and children. For nine years in Shushan and Persia, most Jews thought the way to survive in a foreign, inhospitable culture was to “adapt.” Thus they participated too enthusiastically in Achshverosh's long-lasting gastronomic carousal, and even intermarriage was not uncommon.

But when Haman's decree became law and Mordechai and Esther called for prayer and fasting, the inner Jewish spark of holiness became reignited, and in the aftermath of the Purim miracle there was a new embrace of Torah, an embrace that was even more fervent than the acceptance of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

Present but Unseen

An enduring and important lesson of Purim — one that illuminates and gives hope in all future exiles — derives from the surprising fact that the Name of Hashem does not appear in Megillas Esther. To unperceptive eyes, the Megillah reads like an exciting adventure story composed of a string of random, unrelated events that took place over a period of nine years, and then the author ties them all together in a surprise, happy ending. Nothing G-dly about that.

But to us, who see things through Torah lenses, Megillas Esther shows that Hashem orchestrates events, even when He appears to be absent.

Throughout Jewish history's many exiles, expulsions, and spiritual declines, the Megillah reminds us that Hashem does not forsake His nation. As Mordechai declared to a hesitant Esther, “Relief and salvation will come to the Jews from a different place”; the question is not if there would be salvation, but how and when, and who would be Hashem's agent. The result of the Purim miracle was twofold. Jews realized that it was a miracle, that it proved that the scattered, “random” events were far from random, that they were all ingredients of Hashem's plan. And when the climax came, the Jews of Shushan realized that there were two competing scenarios, Haman's and l'havdil Hashem's, and that the key that overturned Haman's designs was Jewish faith, prayer, and allegiance to the Torah.

The Eternal Spark

In our own time, we have seen similar recognition that we are the nation of Torah and its Giver. Soldiers, many of whom had never learned Talmud before, or who had not opened a Gemara in years, suddenly felt a compulsion to learn Torah. The inner Jewish soul was expressing itself in time of danger.

Mesorah Heritage Foundation and the Schottenstein family collaborated to print paperback Gemaras and Chumashim. To date, close to half a million Gemaras have been distributed, and photos abound of soldiers with rifles on their shoulders and Gemaras on their laps, as they learn during respites.

Zaka volunteers, who have a truly grisly and holy responsibility, often are traumatized after constant exposure to their heartbreaking work. How could the volunteers find the strength to cope and continue? Gedolim were consulted, and The answer was “Torah”. In response, Zaka offered its members the opportunity to join in learning Tractate Bava Basra with Daf Yomi. The response was astounding and overwhelming.

Not long ago, 600 Zaka volunteers, from chareidi to semi-secular, came together to make a siyum, with their volumes of the Schottenstein Hebrew Talmud.

Many hostages and their families became baalei teshuvah. The inner spark — the pintele Yid — became ignited by adversity and privation. Instead of losing hope they gained faith.

Who in his “right mind” could have predicted such a thing?

Megillas Esther is the last of the Kisvei Kodesh, the only one that was created in galus. The Jewish people remained in galus after the Purim miracle, so Megillas Esther represents the message of Jewish survival no matter where, the proof that the “Protector of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps,” not in the torture tunnels of Gaza, not on the campuses of Harvard or Columbia, not wherever Jews are in spiritual or physical danger, not at times when it seemed that the Torah world was terminally ill.

The sacred Books of Tanach are sealed, but the book of Jewish eternity is still being written. And you, the friends and supporters of ArtScroll/ Mesorah, are still writing chapters in that book.

Thanks to you, our writers and editors are continuing our half-century of dedication of bringing Torah to our brethren in their own language. As you read these lines, they are writing new ones, all in the service of Hashem and His people, and all made possible by your generosity.

The ancient Purim miracle was the prelude to the building of the Second Beis HaMikdash. May this Purim be the prelude to the coming of Mashiach and the building of the Third and permanent Beis HaMikdash, speedily, in our time.

H A P P Y P U R I M !!! The ArtScroll / Mesorah Heritage Foundation family Rabbi Gedaliah Zlotowitz Rabbi Nossan Scherman Rabbi Sheah Brander

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**Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

**Parshas Ki Sisa**

**The Symbolism of the Half Shekel Donation – Part One**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1241 The Case of the Mishloach Manos That Was Delivered to the Wrong Person. Good Shabbos!

The Symbolism of the Half Shekel Donation – Part One

Parshas Ki Sisa begins with the mitzvah of Machatzis Hashekel – the census based on the standard donation of a half shekel coin from all males aged twenty years and up, whether rich or poor. Rashi comments on the words “zeh yitnu” (“this they shall give”) (Shemos 30:13): “He showed him a fiery coin whose weight was a half shekel and said (to Moshe), ‘this is what they shall give.’”

Chazal say that Hashem had to show the coin to Moshe physically because he had difficulty conceptualizing the idea of donating a coin. This is not the first time Chazal say that Moshe had difficulty picturing something in his mind without a Divinely-provided visual aid. Chazal say that Moshe could not picture in his mind exactly what the Menorah was to look like, so, there too, Hashem showed him the image of a Menorah.

The Menorah was extremely intricate, so it is easy to understand the difficulty Moshe had creating that particular kayli (vessel). Moshe couldn’t quite envision it, so Hashem showed him what it looked like. Similarly, Chazal say by the parsha of the sheratzim – which crawling reptiles were forbidden and which were permitted – that Moshe also needed the Ribono shel Olam to show him what the specified sheratzim looked like. That is also very understandable.

However, many commentaries are troubled about the drasha in this week’s parsha. It is not so difficult to imagine what a coin looks like.

Moshe Rabbeinu was certainly aware of what coins looked like and he did not need a picture to figure out the coins with which the census payment was to be transacted. Even in the days of Avraham Avinu, coins were used in the transaction of the purchase of Sora’s burial plot. So, a first question is, what was so difficult that necessitated Moshe being shown a coin? A second question is, what is the significance of Hashem showing Moshe a coin of fire? Obviously, the coins that would be donated would be made of gold, silver, or copper, not of fire. Why did Hashem specifically show Moshe a coin of fire?

The Oznayim l’Torah (Rav Zalman Sorotzkin (1881-1966)) explains (as do others) that Moshe Rabbeinu was not perplexed by what a coin looks like. Rather, Moshe couldn’t understand the fact that the census donation was called a kofer nafsho (atonement) (Shemos 30:12). Moshe did not understand how money could be a kaparah. Moshe knew full well that money is not necessarily the vehicle to bring kaparah to people.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin says that the Ribono shel Olam was trying to teach something to Moshe Rabbeinu by specifically showing him a fiery coin, rather than one made from precious metal. We cannot live without fire. It cooks our food. It heats our homes and makes us comfortable. Yet fire, as we all know, can be terribly destructive. Fire has this duality – this paradox – that a person cannot live without it, and yet it can be one of the most destructive forces.

This is what the Ribono shel Olam was trying to show Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe, you are perplexed as to how money can be a kaparah (an atonement)? Money can be a kaparah because it depends on what you do with it. You can do tremendous things with money, and the world could not exist without money. We would not be in the building we are in without money. We would not be as educated as we are without money. However, just like when fire is not properly controlled, it can be extremely hazardous, so too, if money is not properly controlled, it can be extremely hazardous. That is when it becomes destructive.

Rav Sorotzkin also points out a second observation related to the idea that by the census, “he’ashir (the rich man) shall not give more and the poor man shall not give less.” (Shemos 30:15) The same half shekel coin was supposed to atone for everyone – both the rich man and the poor man. Without knowing specifically how much a half shekel coin was worth in those days, it is understandable how such a donation might serve as a kaparah for a poor man. A poor man will need to dig deep into his pockets and forgo the value of this half shekel coin. For him, such a donation can quite conceivably serve as a kaparah. But how can the same half shekel coin serve as a kaparah for a rich man? Whatever a half-shekel was worth, it was not very much. It certainly did not serve as a significant sacrifice for men of means.

Rav Sorotzkin explains that the kaparah for the ashir was not related to digging deep into his pocket for the half-shekel. The kaparah for the ashir emanates from needing to stay in the same line as the poor man in order to donate his half-shekel coin. For an ashir, who is used to VIP treatment (Ich bin nisht fun di pashete mentchin), this is beneath his dignity. He is used to first class seating. He is knocked down several pegs psychologically by needing to sit in economy class with everyone else. For him, that is a kaparah.

The bottom line is that there was kaparah for both the rich and the poor, even though the kaparah came about in different ways. For the poor person it came about because he had to make a financial sacrifice even for a half-shekel. For the rich person there is also a sacrifice, to find himself on the same level as the simple people, the masses.

The Symbolism of the Half Shekel Donation – Part Two

I saw another insight on the symbolism of a fiery coin. There is an interesting Medrash Rabbah in last week’s parsha (Tezaveh) explaining the metaphor “Ki ner mitzvah v’Torah ohr” (for a candle is a mitzvah and the Torah is light) (Mishlei 6:23). It is a well-known fact that it is difficult for people to part with their money. For some people, it is more difficult and for some people it is less difficult, but in general, it is not easy for a person to part with his hard-earned money.

Hashem speaks of a “coin of fire.” The idea is that it is possible to light a thousand other candles from a single lit candle without diminishing the first candle’s light at all. This census donation is the first time Hashem is

asking us to give tzedakah (charity). Hashem is reminding us that tzedakah is like fire: When you give, it does not diminish the fire from which it came. This is what Hashem is teaching us with the pasuk “Ki ner mitzvah v'Torah Ohr.”

The Rambam writes in Hilchos Matonos L'aniyim: “A person never becomes poor from giving charity.”

The “coin of fire” teaches us this lesson: Don't think you will be lacking after giving this half-shekel coin. Just as a single candle can light a thousand candles without diminishing its light at all, that is the way tzedakah is as well.

This fits in with a comment of the Baal Haturim in this week's parsha. “v'nasnu ish kofer nafsho...” (and a man will give an atonement for his soul...) (Shemos 30:12). The Baal Haturim writes that the word v'nasnu (vov-nun-saf-nun-vov) can be read forwards and backwards without changing its meaning or spelling. This teaches, he writes, that whatever a person gives in tzedakah will return to him and he will not be missing anything from having given it.

I knew someone who invested a lot of money with Bernie Madoff and lost his entire retirement account when the Madoff Ponzi scheme collapsed. However, the money this fellow had given to tzedakah, he of course had not given to Bernie Madoff. That money remained with him. In other words, he lost the money he wanted to invest – to make his fortune. But the money that he gave to tzedakah remained forever to his credit.

A person needs to keep these facts in mind: A person never becomes impoverished from tzedakah and tzedakah is like fire in that it can light other fires without its light being diminished.

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## Parshas Ki Sisa

### Rav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of bas Pinchos, Anna Salver. Analyze This

And the Almighty passed by before him, and proclaimed, Hashem, Hashem [...] (34:6).

Rashi (ad loc) explains that the name “Hashem” refers to the Almighty's attribute of mercy. Rashi goes on to quote the Gemara in Rosh Hashanah (17b), which explains why the Torah mentions the name “Hashem” twice in the possuk: “The first name ‘Hashem’ refers to the attribute of mercy before a person sins, and the second one refers to the attribute of mercy after one sins.”

The Ohr HaChaim (34:6) quotes Rosh's comments on the Gemara: “Why does one need the attribute of mercy before one sins; ‘Because Hashem knows that a person is going to sin.’” The Ohr HaChaim understands this to mean that even though Hashem knows that a person is going to sin He takes no action because of his attribute of mercy.

The Ohr HaChaim asks; “I do not understand this answer, for if Hashem would punish someone before that person sins (knowing that a sin is going to be committed), then what is the point of someone being born? Hashem, with His omniscience, can hold every soul accountable to their future actions and judge them right away.”

In other words, since Hashem knows what a person is going to do, He can hold him responsible prior to him actually sinning. Therefore Hashem, in His benevolence, initiates the attribute of mercy and withholds punishment. As the Ohr HaChaim points out, this approach presents a philosophical dilemma: What is the point of living if Hashem has already begun judging you before you actually act?

A careful reading of Rosh's actual words can, perhaps, give us a different understanding of what he really means. The exact language of Rosh is, “Even though He knows that a person will eventually come to sin, He treats each person with the attribute of mercy.” Rosh never says anything about Hashem's right to punish which, in turn, is being restrained by the attribute of mercy.

Perhaps Rosh means to say something entirely different. Very often when a person knows that he is being carefully evaluated or analyzed, such as on a first date or when a mother-in-law comes to visit, he is very uncomfortable and feels as though he is navigating landmines; every step has to be carefully considered before being made.

Similarly, when you are driving next to a state trooper on the highway you will inevitably feel like that trooper is just waiting to pounce and give you a ticket for some infraction.

Unfortunately, many people also feel this way about their parents or spouse; “they are just waiting for me to make a mistake so that they can criticize me.” This leads to a terrible family dynamic because there is an inherent discomfort in

being around that person. No one likes to feel like they are being judged every second of every day.

Thus, Rosh is teaching us a fundamental lesson in Hashem's benevolence. Of course Hashem judges us and there is accountability; that is a basic tenet of life. But He does so in order to help us make decisions that are good for us and the world around us. The point of creation is for Hashem to bestow good upon us, therefore, even when mistakes are made He initiates His attribute of mercy to lessen or eliminate the punishment.

Just as one would feel more comfortable driving next to a state trooper with a “get out of jail free” card in one's pocket, so too does Hashem provide a cushion by letting us know that there is an attribute of mercy even before we sin. Hashem displays His mercy first to demonstrate that He isn't looking to pounce on us for mistakes.

Hashem is also demonstrating the delicate balance that we must strive to achieve with our families. Of course there must be accountability in a family, but we must always convey that it is coming from a place of love; we support each other, even when one makes a mistake, because we care much more about what is done right than what is done wrong.

Eternally Yours

Let my anger burn against them and I shall annihilate them [...] Moshe pleaded with Hashem [...] why should Egypt say, 'With evil intent did He take them out [...] to annihilate them from the face of the earth' (32:10-12).

Parshas Ki Sisa details the unfaithfulness of Bnei Yisroel through their sin of the Golden Calf, and Hashem's threat to totally wipe out the Jewish people. Moshe begs Hashem to reconsider with the argument that if Hashem annihilated Bnei Yisroel then the Egyptians would say that Hashem took them out of Egypt with the intention of destroying them. Seemingly, Moshe is saying that it reflects poorly on Hashem to destroy Bnei Yisroel.

On the face of it, this argument seems nothing short of ludicrous. First of all, Hashem made such incredible miracles on behalf of the Jewish people – the ten plagues, the splitting of the Red Sea, and the delivery of food and water in the desert – where is the intent to destroy them? But even more compelling, Bnei Yisroel actually committed a capital offense by being unfaithful to Hashem. Clearly, Hashem is well within His right to utterly wipe them from the face of the earth.

In order to understand what Moshe is really saying we have to consider the state of Bnei Yisroel when they were about to leave Egypt. During the time that it took for the ten plagues to play out (close to a year) there was a dramatic shift in the status of the Jews in Egypt. In fact, Chazal teach us that a full eighty percent of the Jews didn't leave Egypt. During that year of plagues, the Egyptians had developed a whole new respect for the Jews who now had a powerful ally that was punishing the Egyptians for their misdeeds. Jews also began to accumulate wealth because they were impervious to the effect of the plagues. Furthermore, the Egyptians began to build friendships with members of Bnei Yisroel.

Consider for a moment an individual who has a guaranteed job with a generous salary and an employer that will guarantee his future. He enjoys the city he lives in and the friendships he has built over time. What do you think would happen if this person were to be offered a new job with a salary that is five times what he is currently earning but with two stipulations: 1) he has to move to a new city 2) the new job carries no guarantees – that is he can be fired “at will.” Clearly, this individual would be crazy to leave his comfortable guaranteed first job and an environment he loves.

This was the situation Bnei Yisroel faced after the ten plagues. For all intents and purposes the Egyptians were accepting them as friends and doing business with them. This is why so many stayed behind. The only possible reason that Bnei Yisroel could rationalize leaving Egypt was that Hashem was promising them a guaranteed permanent relationship. Of course, the destination was mostly unknown to them, but their desire to enter into a permanent relationship with Hashem propelled the remaining twenty percent to leave Egypt and follow Hashem.

This is Moshe's argument, “Hashem, the reason Bnei Yisroel left Egypt is because of the guarantee of a permanent eternal connection. If you wipe them out, the Egyptians will laugh and say Hashem never intended to have a permanent relationship with them; the Jews were fooled!” By redeeming us from Egypt, Hashem guaranteed that we would survive as a nation – His nation. This is what Bnei Yisroel bought into when they decided to leave Egypt. Hashem agrees with Moshe's argument and the threat of annihilation is removed.

This is also what is said in the Haggadah; “In every generation someone rises up to annihilate the Jewish people – and every time Hashem saves us from their hands.” This, perhaps, is the greatest miracle of all. Every empire that sought to destroy the Jewish people is long gone and mostly forgotten. Yet, the Jewish people not only survived, we have thrived and succeeded under the bleakest of circumstances. This is a testament to Hashem's promise of our continued existence because of our eternal relationship with Him.

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**The Man with the Golden Arm Who Saved Millions**

### By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

Tara Delia/Australian Red Cross Blood Service

“Thank you for donating almost \$7 million to our Boca Raton Synagogue community.” Chaim didn’t know what I was talking about when I called him to thank him. \$7 million? He had made a generous contribution but only a fraction of that enormous amount. Why was I thanking him for something he didn’t give? Two months earlier, Chaim was visiting Boca Raton and made an appointment to meet with me. Before we began discussing the topic he had come to meet about, he casually asked me about the BRS campus expansion. “Why is there no energy or excitement, where is the publicity and active campaign?” I shared that we had been successful raising a significant amount but had hit a wall and encountered some challenges that were holding us back. “Why not do a matching campaign? Raise new money from matchers who give on condition that the local and global community respond generously and match it.” I reflexively shot him down and told him we don’t do those kinds of things, that will never work, it isn’t for us. He made one more push, explaining why he thought it was a good idea, and we quickly pivoted to his topic.

For the rest of that day, I couldn’t stop thinking about what he said. Maybe we could do a matching campaign. Maybe it would create an energy, buzz, community buy-in, and excitement. Surely it was worth a try. Fast forward less than two months and not only did we meet our goal of \$6 million, we Baruch Hashem blew past it and are so grateful that people continue to give, as our work is not yet done.

Chaim had “randomly” come to Boca and “coincidentally” chose to meet when he spontaneously, “happened” to raise the idea of a matching campaign and the result was an influx of almost \$7 million towards helping us build a center of Jewish life and learning from which to share Torah light and inspiration to the world. Had I not alerted Chaim, he would come upstairs after 120 and Hashem would say, yasher koach on raising almost \$7 million for a community in Florida you don’t even live in.

One person can make an enormous difference with the right word in the right moment and we never know which word and which moment.

Esther didn’t want to go to Achashveirosh without being invited, she hesitated to reveal her true identity and wanted to continue to keep it a secret. Esther preferred the passive route, the spectator position. But thanks to Mordechai’s encouragement and power of persuasion, she mustered the courage and conviction to enter without invitation, to speak despite the risk. The result was one woman saved an entire nation. The story of Megillas Esther and the power of Purim is the story and directive to go from passive to active, from bystander to bringing about redemption. Never underestimate your power to positively impact the world when you simply care enough to step up instead of sitting back.

In 1951, a 14-year-old Australian boy named James Harrison had major surgery to save his life, the removal of one of his lungs. He was alive, thanks in large part to a vast quantity of transfused blood he had received. He was hospitalized for three months but when he came out, he was determined to pay it forward by donating blood himself. The problem was Australia’s laws required blood donors to be at least 18 years old. After turning 18, Harrison made good on his promise, and despite a fear of needles, he began to donate blood regularly.

At the time, doctors in Australia were struggling to figure out why thousands of births in the country were resulting in miscarriages, stillbirths or brain defects for the babies. In 1967, they discovered the babies were suffering from Haemolytic Disease of the Newborn, or HDN. The condition arises when a woman with an Rh negative blood type becomes pregnant with a baby who has Rh positive blood, and the incompatibility causes the mother’s body to reject the fetus’s red blood cells.

Doctors in Australia discovered that a very rare antibody in blood called Anti-D could be used to make a lifesaving medication that when given to mothers whose blood is at risk of developing HDN would keep the baby safe. Researchers scoured blood banks to see whose blood might contain this antibody and found a donor in New South Wales named James Harrison. Scientists asked him to participate in an experimental Anti-D program that turned out to be effective in saving these babies.

For more than 60 years, Harrison donated blood every single week and his plasma was used to make millions of Anti-D injections. Every ampoule of Anti-d ever made in Australia has a piece of James in it. Because about 17% of pregnant women in Australia require the Anti-D injections, the Australian blood service estimates that Harrison has helped 2.4 million babies in the country.

After donating 1,100 times, at 81 years old, despite wanting to continue, James Harrison was forced to retire from donating blood. James Harrison, appropriately nicknamed “The man with the golden arm,” passed away last month at the age of 88, one person who without exaggeration saved millions of lives.

Don’t underestimate your ability to impact others. Chaim contributed millions of dollars to our community without even knowing it. James Harrison saved millions of babies in Australia. Queen Esther, with one act of sacrifice and courage, saved the Jewish people.

To the world, you may be one person, but to one person, you may be what saves their world.

### Rav Kook Torah

#### Ki Tissa: Wisdom for the Wise

When appointing Betzalel and other craftsmen to construct the Tabernacle, God declared, “In the heart of all wise-hearted, I have placed wisdom” (Ex. 31:6).

Why should God give wisdom to the wise — it is the fools who need it!

A person who wishes to increase his physical strength will not achieve his goal by developing his intellectual powers. He needs to concentrate on building up his body, with physical exercise, healthy food, and proper sleep.

But the opposite can also be true. When we strengthen the body, we enable the mind to reach its full potential. This is nature’s rule of “A healthy mind in a healthy body.”

Beyond the objective of strengthening the intellect and broadening one’s knowledge lies an even higher goal: the pursuit of ruach hakodesh (divine inspiration) and prophecy. The relationship between the body and the mind parallels the relationship between ‘natural wisdom’ (the arts and sciences) and ‘divinely-emanated wisdom.’ We may aspire to prophetic enlightenment, but we must first gain proficiency in the natural sciences.

Maimonides mentions this requisite intellectual preparation for prophecy in the Mishneh Torah, Yesodei HaTorah 7:1:

“Prophecy is only bestowed to a sage who is great in wisdom, of strong character... And he must possess an extremely expansive and accurate worldview.”

We need to expand all of the mind’s intellectual capabilities in order to fulfill the rule of “a healthy mind in a healthy body” on a spiritual level. Then an enriched prophetic inspiration will emerge within the broadened framework of a penetrating, enlightened mind.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 158-159. Adapted from Orot HaKodesh vol. I, pp. 66-67)

**Siyum in memory of YOCHANAN BEN YEKUTIEL YEHUDA (JOCHANAN KLEIN) is ready to enroll.**

visit <https://www.lzechernishmas.com/signup.php?id=12573> in order to participate in the siyum DECEMBER 10/2025

לע"נ  
יוחנן בן יקותיאל יודא ע"ה  
שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה  
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה  
אנא מלכה בת ישראל