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OUR HEARTS ARE FILLED WITH GRATITUDE TO HASHEM
Mazal Tov to Ahuva and Yoni Gold on their Marriage
— SHIFRA AND LARRY SHAFIER
Purim Sameach to all our readers around the world!

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Purim and Zionism This Year

HINDSIGHT IS 20/20 VISION

It has been just over 120 years since Herzl founded the World Zionist Organization and a little over 70 since the establishment of the State of Israel. This year 2020 in the Gregorian calendar affords us an opportunity to reflect on the achievements of the last 120 years, especially since Jews the world over can vote once again in the WZO election this year, culminating in the US on Shushan Purim.

As we come together to shape our future, let us look back on Purim through the prism of the past. Perhaps this will give us a crucial historical perspective.

A PURIM PRIMER

Is it so simple for a young Jewish girl, a pure and pious bat Yisrael, to enter a beauty pageant to marry a gentile king? Once she wins the contest, is she then halachically permitted to live with this king and not give up her life? The Sages\(^1\) were troubled by the fact that Esther seems to have transgressed one of the three cardinal sins – sexual immorality – for which the Jewish people are called upon to give up their lives rather than transgress. Furthermore, the fact that Esther’s marriage to the king was known to all, added an additional halachic complexity of committing a sin in public. While the Talmud finds justifications for her actions, there is no doubt that this was an area of great controversy with tragic personal ramifications for Esther.\(^2\)

So complex were Mordechai’s actions that the final verse of the Megillah concludes that he was “liked by most of his brethren” but not all, despite the great salvation he brought. This implies that a significant minority of Jews did not approve of Mordechai and his actions. The Talmud notes\(^3\) that this verse refers to members of the Sanhedrin, who distanced themselves from him as an act of protest and disapproval. The “reward” he received for saving the Jewish people was, incredibly, a demotion in his standing in the Sanhedrin.

All of the above point to the fact that the times of Esther and Mordechai and the events of the Purim story were highly complex, at times divisive and greatly contentious from a halachic and Torah point of view.

REMEMBERING THINGS THE WAY THEY WERE NOT

It seems perplexing to me how all the controversies and complexities of Purim have not found their way into the consciousness of later generations. We celebrate Purim today without any trace of the contentious, divisive and controversial elements described above. We dress up our young daughters as Queen Esther oblivious to the terrible and immodest circumstances she had to face in the inner chambers of a non-Jewish king. We laud Mordechai as the fearless hero of the Purim saga, once again oblivious to his major disputes with the Sages of that generation. We wear costumes in a lighthearted vein and sound our gragger totally out of tune with the raging controversy with which their actions were met in real time.

WHY IS THIS THE CASE?

“Hindsight is 20/20.” This sharp aphorism expresses a salient truism of life – when we look back at events with the benefit of hindsight, we tend to see things with a clarity that cannot be seen during the course of the experience itself. This allows us to view past events through a totally different prism than those who lived through them. Their reality was fraught with complexity and controversy, as real life always is, while ours is filled with clarity and precision. The passage of time allows us to distinguish between the eternal core of these events and their external wrapping. We are

Continued on page 4
able to wholeheartedly embrace and unequivocally celebrate the role these events played and continue to play in our ongoing survival and destiny.

**ZIONISM AND ISRAEL**

With that hindsight, let us look back for a moment at the monumental achievements of the Zionist Movement and modern Israel – miracles of Biblical proportions which cannot be overstated. The establishment of an independent State only three years after the ovens of Auschwitz; the creation of a place of refuge to gather millions of Jewish exiles from over 100 countries speaking more than 80 languages after 2,000 years of wandering; transforming the Land from an arid terrain and barren backwater into a flourishing agricultural oasis and ecological marvel; reviving Hebrew from an ancient and static language of textual study into the living lingua franca of Jewish society; building a thriving and sustainable economy from the poverty stricken old Yishuv; a handful of young pioneers and Holocaust survivors overcoming political and military odds to defeat much larger and better trained national armies; the rebuilding of the Torah world with arguably more Torah learners than any time in history – all come together to create modern-day Israel at the epicenter of Jewish religious, cultural and political life today. More than anything, Israel has revived the spirit of a broken people so soon after the devastation of the Holocaust, reinvented hope in place of despair, faith in place of tragedy, life in the face of death and the belief in a bright future over the reality of a devastating past.

Despite this remarkable reality, its miraculous nature is not always easy for all to discern. The birth of Zionism and the State of Israel were fraught with spiritual and halachic complexities not dissimilar to the Purim epoch. Significant numbers of both the original and current protagonists in the Zionism and Israel story were and are distant from traditional Torah values, and some were and are even antagonistic at times. In many ways, Zionism was one of the ideological “isms” of the late 19th century, growing out of western romantic nationalism and the era of emancipation and hashkalah. Much of the cultural milieu both then and now is at times challenging to reconcile with Torah values. One example of many is the judicial system in Israel, established on tenets of Ottoman civil law and British common law rather than on traditional Torah law. These dichotomies and complexities cause confusion and create doubt as to the appropriate spiritual context within which to place these events.

**BACK TO THE FUTURE**

However, the critical difference between the Purim saga then and Israel today is not necessarily in the degree of complexity of the circumstances in which they transpired, but rather in the timing. We view Purim with absolute clarity because we look back. Our current reality can be clouded and confusing because we are still living through it. The distance of time has allowed us to see Purim for what it truly was in the Divine order – a period in history, with ongoing and everlasting impact, that ensured the survival of the Jewish people and the fulfillment of our spiritual destiny.

The perspective of hindsight allows us to discern between the crucial and the circumstantial, thereby stripping the husk from the kernel, the essential from the external, and providing an opportunity to appreciate and celebrate Purim’s eternal lessons.

May this Purim perspective of 2020 give us an even greater appreciation of the enormity of our generation and the crucial role Israel plays in the drama of Jewish survival and destiny.

By this Purim, may we all have voted in the WZO elections, becoming proactive participants in shaping the future of the Zionist Movement, the State of Israel and our collective Jewish future.

---

1 Sanhedrin 74b.
2 The Talmud (ibid.) offers two explanations for Esther’s behavior. Abaye mentions since her role in the sexual act was a passive one, she exempting her from these transgressions. Rava says that the reason for the exemption was that Achashverosh’s motivation was to fulfill his own personal desires rather than deliberately cause her to transgress the Torah. Tosafot (D.H. Ve’ah Esther Farhesya Havai), quoting the Talmud (Megillah 13a), deduces that Esther was not Mordechai’s cousin as the verse implies (Esther 2:7) but his wife, whom he did not divorce. Hence at the time she was taken to Achashverosh, he was still married to her, further complicating the matter. The above answers are based on the assumption that Esther was coerced to be with Achashverosh. This is most certainly implied in Esther 2:16. Her status as ‘coerced’ changes though, according to the Talmud (Megillah 15a), when Mordechai commands her to initiate contact with Achashverosh when she has had no contact with him for 30 days (Esther 4:11). By heeding Mordechai’s command to enter the king’s inner chamber and re-establish the relationship with him, she was no longer ‘coerced’ – but now acting out of her own free will. The Noda BeYehuda (Responsa, second edition, Y.D. 161) notes that by doing so, she was no longer halachically protected by the justifications mentioned by Abaye and Rava above and ostensibly should have given up her life. He continues to state that the reason she did not do so was that she had the potential to bring salvation to all of Klal Yisrael. In such a case, she was permitted to initiate the relationship in order to save the Jewish people and was not required to give up her life.
4 Yalkut Shimoni 1054.
5 Megillah 15a.

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RECONNECTING WITH OUR TRUE SELVES

THE SIN

Why were the Jews of Achashverosh’s empire threatened with annihilation? What terrible sin had they committed? The talmidim (students) suggested that they were being punished for having participated in the hedonistic 180 days Shushan feast. If so, responded their Rebbe, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai (Rashbi), only Shushan’s Jews should have been culpable.

The Jews were being punished for having worshipped avoda zara. If they were guilty of the grave sin of avoda zara, asked the talmidim, why were the Jews ultimately saved? Rashbi answered that the Jews were spared because they did not actually believe in the avoda zara they were physically bowing down to. They were forced to bow, but it was not their true belief. Hashem responded in kind – He made believe that He intended to decree the Jews’ annihilation even though He did not actually intend it.

Many commentaries ask an obvious question. Why did Hashem pretend to decree their annihilation? Though bowing down to avoda zara is never justified, when done so under duress it is not a punishable offense?

POSTURING

I believe the answer lies in the danger of posturing. People do their best to relate to different types of people. We look for common ground and try to speak each other’s language. The danger is that people get so used to speaking the language of others that their own often becomes blurred.

The challenge of interfacing with others while maintaining our cultural independence is even greater when we are in galut – living and functioning in a foreign society. Though we avoid full assimilation in the surrounding culture, we do our best to assimilate within it. Often Jews are unable to truly be themselves. An example of this is Esther herself who is unable to reveal her true identity in Achashverosh’s court. At what point do the things we ‘make-believe’ we identify with become what we truly identify with, who we actually are?

When the Jews acted as if they were serving a foreign god and identifying with their host nation, the true Hashem acted as if He was severing His relationship with them by causing those very nations to turn against them. Throughout the ages, when Jews mistakenly came to view themselves as part of the nations we lived amongst, Hashem had these nations reject us.

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

After Haman’s decree, the Jews faced a moment of truth, a moment of personal reflection. Which world was their real one? What was their true identity?

Thankfully, the Jews were able to reconnect with and sharpen their true selves, which allowed for Esther to do the same. The Jews clarified their true selves and Hashem clarified His true intentions. Tehillim describes Hashem as our shadow. The Ba’al Shem Tov explained that Hashem’s relationship with us reflects our’s with Him. When we muffle our identity, He muffles His love and care for us. When we assert our true selves, He expresses His true love.

REVEALING BY CONCEALING

The costumes customarily worn on Purim remind us that our actual faces and dress may not accurately reflect our true selves. Concealing our external selves gives us the opportunity to emulate our Purim era ancestors by reconnecting with and embracing our true internal selves.

TODAY’S GLOBAL VILLAGE

These issues are even more relevant and challenging for people living in the contemporary global village era. Even Jews living in Israel continue their connection, interaction, and close relationships with the broader world. The internet and the impersonal communication it offers allow for people to maintain and cultivate multiple identities. Do our awareness, immersion, and multiple identities blur our true identity and beliefs? Though always relevant and important, Purim has added and unique relevance to Jews in the 21st century. As we return to our Land, we need to ensure that the process includes our return to our true personal and national selves.

Modern communication allows us to continue impacting the world even as we separate geographically from it. Purim is the time to ensure that this continued engagement allows us to impact without blurring our religious and cultural identity.

1 Esther 1:4.
2 Rashi explains that this refers to a sin in the time of Nebuchadnezzar.
3 Megillah 12a.
4 See, for example, Maharsha et al.
5 See, for example, Rambam Hilchot Avoda Zara 3:6.
6 Esther 2:20.
7 See, for example, Yechezkel 10:20-32-34.
8 Esther 7:4a.
9 121:5.

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PERAZIM AND PERAZOT: 
ISRAEL’S DEBATE WITH THE DIASPORA

Following the description of the battles in which the Jews of Shushan and beyond prevailed against their enemies, we are told of the process of acceptance of the festival of Purim throughout the Jewish Diaspora. The milah mancha (key word) “k-y-m” (to establish) appears seven times in Megillat Esther chapter 9, verses 21-32, to express the four stages of the institutionalization of the festival.

1. We first hear of the spontaneous celebrations that took place on the day after the battles, whereupon the Jews in the king’s provinces rested on the 14th of Adar while the Jews of Shushan celebrated the day after their second day of fighting – the 15th of Adar.

2. The following years, the Jews of villages (haPerazim) living in the unwalled towns (beArei haPerazot) “made the 14th of the month of Adar a day of joy and feasting and yom tov, with the sending of portions to one another.”

3. Mordechai sent letters to all of the Jews “near and far” that all of the Jews celebrate for two days – “the 14th day of the month of Adar and the 15th day of the same, year by year.” He also highlighted alongside “sending of portions,” the addition of “gifts to the poor,” thereby emphasizing the obligation of including others and giving of charity as imperative to the “feasting and joy.”

Our initial impression is that this is the final stage in the acceptance of the festival of Purim. As the subsequent verses state: “The Jews understood which they had started to do and as Mordechai had written to them…”

4. However, by the end of the chapter we are told of a dispatch of new letters describing a fourth stage – “Queen Esther, daughter of Avichayil, wrote with Mordechai the Jew with all emphasis to confirm this second letter to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Achashverosh, [with] words of peace and truth, to confirm these days of Purim at their appointed time, as Mordechai the Jew and Queen Esther had established for them, and as they had established for themselves and for their descendants concerning the fasts and the lamentations.”

What need was there to send out additional letters confirming what had already been established? Apparently, “words of peace and truth” reveal reconciliation of a conflict that existed, implying that Mordechai’s previous order to celebrate the 15th of Adar in addition to the 14th was not universally accepted!

The Jews of the other provinces of the king are unusually called “the Jews of the perazim (villages) who dwelled in the perazot (unwalled) towns.” What are these “unwalled towns” in which the Jews celebrate their own salvation but are reluctant to concede to Mordechai’s request to also celebrate on the 15th to commemorate the salvation in Shushan, the primary site of the miracle?

Rabbi Professor Yonatan Grossman proposes that these are the Jewish communities in the Land of Israel, who while grateful towards Mordechai and the Jews in Shushan for demonstrating selflessness and catalyzing salvation, did not regard the Jews in chutz laaretz as authorized to establish Jewish tradition.

Only when Queen Esther (bearing the royal seal) and Mordechai the Jew (identifying with Yehuda in Israel) dispatched the second set of letters was there reconciliation and acceptance. These letters contained “words of peace and truth,” encouraging the Jews in Israel to confirm the establishment of Purim on the basis of the precedent of establishing the fasts of the destruction of the Temple. Mordechai and Esther emphasize that they do not intend to establish a new exilic holiday, but rather regard the halachic institutionalization of Purim as a direct continuation of the Jewish tradition of fasting over the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash.

Ultimately, the Jews in Israel accepted upon themselves to celebrate both days of Purim together with their brethren in the Diaspora! This, however, is not the halachic practice today. The “fifth stage” is codified in Massechet Megillah: “Towns that have been surrounded by a wall since the days of Yehoshua Bin-Nun read [the Megillah] on the 15th. Villages and large towns read on the 14th.”

Mordechai’s suggestion that the festival be celebrated on the 15th even beyond Shushan is accepted. The Tannaim in Eretz Yisrael, however, qualified that the identity of those who celebrate the victory of Shushan be determined according to the conquest of the Land of Israel. This way we are assured not to lose sight of G-d’s hand in salvation for Jews in chutz laaretz, as a continuation of (and prelude to) the conquests and settlement of Eretz Yisrael!

1 See VBM Megillat Esther, shiurim 23-24.
3 Mishnah Megillah 1:1.

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The Role of the Purim Miracle

The Netivot, in his commentary to Megillat Esther, writes that on the occasion of the nes Purim (Purim miracle), the Sages of that generation perceived that this episode would, in some way, serve as an atchalta deGeula, a preparatory step towards the building of the Second Beit HaMikdash. As such, Purim did conform to the rules and regulations of Megillat Ta’anit, and therefore, the prohibition of bal tisif did not apply to it. Therefore, Purim could already be established in its time as a Yom Tov, just as the other Yamim Tovim in Megillat Ta’anit were enacted due to their role in the improvement and preservation of the Beit HaMikdash.

The Netivot argues that the Sages felt that Purim was an atchalta deGeula because the eradication of the descendants of Amalek, the stage immediately after the downfall of Haman HaAgagi and his sons. Indeed, the Gemara understands that the fact that he was a Jewish king ruling over Eretz Yisrael did have meaning to Daryaveish. The Gemara, in discussing which month to use to mark the new year of Daryaveish’s reign, considers his kingship a malchut Yisrael, and therefore counts from the month of Nissan. Only later, after he “spoiled,” is his reign reckoned like that of non-Jewish kings, from the month of Tishrei. Presumably, this occurred after Esther had already passed away and his government became so secularized that he no longer identified himself as a Jewish king, according to the Queen Mother, Esther, who must have interceded on behalf of the Jewish people at this time.

This suggestion explains why this non-Jewish king would be interested in supporting, both politically and financially, the enterprise of rebuilding the Beit HaMikdash. Esther must have persuaded her son, due to their Jewish roots, to support this cause, and that is why the king acquiesced.

Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Moadim.

1 Megillat Setarim 9:19.
2 As does the Sfat Emet, Purim 5643, s.v. inyan.
3 The Yerushalmi in Yevamot (2:6), though, cites an opinion that Haman is described in the Megillah as ben Hamdatis (the name of the son of Agag, king of Amalek) not because Haman was an actual descendant of Amalek, but rather because he was similarly an enemy of the Jews. Rather, it was seen as an atchalta deGeula despite its otherwise tragic consequences – that Esther was forced to marry the non-Jewish Achashveirosh and remain with him after the conclusion of the Purim episode. As such, they declared the day a Yom Tov.

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Geniza for Parasha Sheets

Although there is much to discuss regarding this topic, we will suffice here with a short overview.

The Mishnah says: “With regard to all sacred writings, one may rescue them from the fire on Shabbat... even though they were written in any foreign language, they are still sacred and require burial.” And so the poskim decreed that all forms of written Torah require geniza (placing them in a respectable place and not discarding them wantonly.)

The Talmud concludes that not only do Scriptures require geniza, but also any written form of Oral Torah, siddurim, translations, etc., even if they are not written in lashon haKoheyn – Hebrew.

A translation of the book of Job also requires geniza. From this, we learn that even writings not containing the name of G-d or pesukim need geniza. The Rambam too says that erasing the words of the Torah is prohibited even when they do not contain G-d’s name. The Tashbetz agrees but holds that if the writing does not contain G-d’s name, the obligation of geniza is on a rabbinic level. He also holds that even temporary words of Torah, such as those written on a board or paper in order to teach, have holiness and therefore require geniza. However, one can erase them in order to teach other words of Torah.

REASONS FOR LENIENCY

Hence it seems that parasha sheets in shul need geniza. However, in many cases, the contents are largely related to Judaism and faith, but without direct interpretation of the Tanach and its verses. Such articles do not require geniza.

Even when there are quotations from the Tanach, there is still room to discuss the obligation of geniza. The Shvut Yaakov Responsa is lenient and allows one to burn sacred books when they are worn and no longer needed and there is no respectful place to store them (3:10). Seemingly, this can be said for parasha sheets.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein suggested that once a book is no longer used for learning, it no longer retains its kedusha and therefore does not require geniza. Based on this, there is room to be lenient and say that parasha sheets should not require geniza either. However, since Rabbi Feinstein’s words were quite revolutionary, he himself did not want to be lenient without the agreement of other poskim.

SUGGESTION

There may be another respectful way to dispose of the sheets without geniza.

According to the Rambam, “All sacred writings and their commentaries and elucidations must not be burned or lost by hand...” whereas if a non-Jew writes any sacred writings or the name of G-d, that does require geniza.

In light of this, there seem to be two different issues:

1. Prohibition of burning: this prohibition includes all sacred writings, commentaries, and the like.

2. Obligation of geniza: this obligation includes only the name of G-d or Biblical verses.

If that is true, then the seven holy names of G-d require geniza, as do verses of Tanach. However, while they must not be degraded and burned, can be respectfully placed in a garbage bag. And this is particularly true about parasha sheets, because they are not produced to last, and neither are they handwritten, but printed (and there are those who maintain that there is no sanctity in this kind of printed material).

THE BOTTOM LINE

From a purely halachic point of view, it is preferable to put parasha sheets in geniza. Nevertheless, Melkor HaDin, it seems that one can respectfully place parasha sheets in a garbage bag (preferably two) or in a recycling bin (in a bag), especially when it is unclear if there is even a rabbinic requirement (when none of the seven holy names appear in the text).

Apart from that, nowadays there are so many sheets that if they were all put in geniza, it would be an affront to the other sacred writings in the geniza!

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1. Shabbat 115a.
2. Shulchan Aruch, OC 334:12; Magen Avraham 100:16.
3. Rashi ibid.
5. Tashbetz Responsa 1:2.
6. RAY YAAKOV Ariel.
7. There are those who disagree with the Shvut Yaakov and allow burning only in special cases, for example, the Be’er Sheva Responsa, siman 43, and Knesset Yechezkel, Yoreh Deah, siman 37.
8. Teshuvot VeHanhagot 1:4153.

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If you don’t want to keep HaMizrachi, you can double-wrap it before disposal, or place it directly into sheimos.
Bnei Yisrael have fought with many nations throughout history, but we have only been commanded to destroy one – Amalek. This mitzvah is valid not only in the desert when Amalek fought with Israel and was a threat to their existence but also to the future when Bnei Yisrael will be in their own Land: “Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt – how, undeterred by fear of G-d, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. Therefore, when the L-rd your G-d grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that the L-rd your G-d is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget.”

1 Devarim 25:17-19.

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The Gemara¹ tells that there was an additional Kabbalat Torah (acceptance of the Torah) at the time of Purim – קבלת תורה. What caused such a radical national acceptance, at a time when nothing supernatural even took place? Furthermore, why is the phrase that it occurred during the time of the wicked Achashverosh, rather than simply writing in the days of Mordechai and Esther?

The Gemara² gives us the basis for the holiday of Purim, and for the connected obligation of reading the Megillah. “If we celebrate being given our freedom from Egypt, we shall surely celebrate our being given our lives in the days of Haman.” The commentators debate the level of obligation that this logic really reflects. Some³ suggest that it might even be Biblical, others⁴ see it as purely Rabbinic, while others yet⁵ say that it’s somewhere in the middle, דיברי קבלה – kabbalistic words – stronger than a typical Rabbinic ordinance, but less than a Biblical one.⁶ Taking a step back, hashkafically speaking, let us ask why is there such confusion and difference of opinion? Why isn’t the category clear?

Moreover, the Megillah itself has an unclear categorization. Shmuel holds⁷ that the Megillah does not have the full status of כתבי הקודש – “It was given to be read and not to be written.” Ritva says that it’s not really part of Tanach, but it’s not enough to be called part of the Oral Torah. Rav Betzalel Zholti (⁷⁸) has a lengthy yet fascinating discussion about the Megillah representing Oral Torah allowed to be part of the Tanach. And again we ask, why is there such confusion? Why isn’t it clear?

Finally, Am Yisrael has adopted the custom of reading the Megillah both at night and day. Rav Soloveitchik⁸, based on the two different verses quoted, suggests that the Megillah functions both as a prayer and as praise, a cry and a song. How can it be both? Aren’t they opposites?

Maybe the answer to all of these questions goes to the root of the holiday of Purim. As many discuss, the fundamental message we must absorb is G-d’s hidden hand in the natural world, G-d orchestrating events behind the scenes to bring about our salvation. It looks like a tree for Mordechai, but it’s really for Haman. It looks like a tragic kidnapping of a young maiden, but it’s really setting the stage for the future heroine. This is the secret message, to recognize that not everything is as it seems. Maybe that’s the secret hashkafic message behind all of the above halachic discussions. It looks totally Rabbinic, but it might have Biblical tones as well. It looks like Written Torah but it’s really Oral Torah. It looks like a song, but it also might be a cry.

That’s the recognition we had during the Purim story. We realized how much there is beyond the surface, and how much we need to appreciate the Master of all Ceremonies. And maybe that’s the message of “in the days of Achashverosh.” The Gemara² has two opinions about whether he was a wise or foolish king; again highlighting this essence of the holiday itself. Things aren’t as simple as they seem. Yehi Ratzon⁹ that we all merit to see G-d behind all the scenes of our lives, and may we also merit to accept the Torah in a renewed and exciting way.

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¹ Shabbat 88a.
² Megillah 14a.
³ Tosafot Rid, Chatam Sofer 1:161.
⁴ Ran.
⁵ Ramban, Rashba.
⁶ See also a fascinating suggestion of Turei Even, Megillah 4.
⁷ Megillah 7a.
⁸ Harerei Kedem, 1:192.
⁹ Megillah 12a.

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In one of the most perfectly orchestrated scenes of the Megillah, after Esther exposes Haman, Achashverosh resigns to his gardens to clear his head. Upon returning, he finds Haman “lying prostrate on the couch on which Esther reclined.” Assuming the worst, the king’s temper flares, and seizing the moment, Charvona suggests that the king use the gallows – that Haman had been preparing for Mordechai – to hang Haman himself. The king agrees and the Jews’ enemy is killed.

Chazal, commenting on this scene,1 tell us that the Angel Michael was present in the room and that it was he that shoved Haman onto Esther’s couch at just the right moment. In a similar vein, the Midrash claims that Charvona, who voiced the brilliantly ironic plan, was in fact none other than Elyahu HaNavi. The Midrash notes how tenuous the situation was and to account for its favorable outcome, points to a Divine intervention not evident in the plain text. This Midrash is only one of the myriads of examples in which Chazal insert a supernatural element into the Megillah to help explain the perfectly serendipitous unfolding of events.

Chazal are not the first to reshape the story in this fashion. As early as the second century BCE, we have evidence that the Greek-speaking Jews in Alexandria included G-d’s name in their translation, in addition to elements such as prayers and prophetic dreams. These early additions and Midrashim reflect one of the ways in which ancient Jews dealt with the anomalous nature of the Megillah. Simply stated, they tweaked the text, deduced hidden implications, and in doing so brought the Megillah more in line with the other books of Tanach.

That being said, we know that the pshat of any work of Tanach is always the place we begin our study, and so it is important to consider why the author of the Megillah intentionally left G-d’s name out of the work.

Perhaps, we should consider that in writing a book that speaks to the Jewish experience in exile, the author is reflecting, as realistically as possible, what that experience is all about. G-d tells Moshe that when we, Israel, breach the covenant with Him, G-d will hide His face from us.2 Exile, the Torah tells us, is not just about being removed from the Land; it is about the inability to perceive those ways in which G-d intervenes in the world on our behalf. The evils and suffering are the fallout of that “hidden face.” The Jews of Shushan were in exile, vulnerable to the whims of a despot, and as the Megillah depicts ever so realistically, there were no overt miracles to save them. And while at first blush this scenario seems untenable, the beauty of the Megillah is the way in which it suggests Jews confront this reality.

The Jews of Shushan didn’t sit around waiting for a miracle, they gathered their forces, united in support of Esther, and when they did so, their fate took a turn. Mordechai and Esther are the heroes of the Megillah, not because they split the sea, made it rain or caused the sun to stand still in the heavens. They are the heroes of the Megillah because they stepped into history when their people needed them and put the needs of their nation before their own. It is precisely their lack of prophetic vision that makes them our heroes from the Megillah’s perspective. They didn’t act because G-d commanded them to, they acted because they understood that when G-d’s face is hidden, we don’t have the luxury of remaining apathetic to the needs of our people.

G-d’s absence from the Megillah reminds us that when His face is hidden, our hopes for survival lie in our ability to set aside our differences and rally around our shared interests. If we can do that, then like the Jews of Shushan, may we merit to transition from a people “scattered and dispersed” to Jews that enjoy “light and gladness, happiness and honor.”

1 Esther Rabbah 10.
2 Devarim 31.

Yael Leibowitz has taught Continuing Education courses and served as Resident Scholar in New York. She is currently teaching as she continues her studies at Bar-Ilan University.
Is it really possible today to gather all of the Jews? How can one unite all the different factions and parties... We see with our own eyes the awful internal strife, Jews fighting Jews, brothers turning against brothers like wolves and snakes. How then can one say, 'Go, gather all the Jews'?

Rav Kook wrote these words in 1933, following the murder of Chaim Arlozorov, which tore the fabric of pre-Israel society to pieces. It’s been close to a century, and yet they sound more relevant than ever. Rav Kook proclaimed a diagnosis of Am Yisrael from an unlikely source, the evil Haman: “Whoever thinks Haman was lying when he said, ‘There is one nation scattered and divided’ is mistaken. Indeed, this one nation is scattered and divided, but it is one nation nevertheless. One might question the possibility of a nation being simultaneously united and divided... there are wonders in the world! This nation, whose entire existence rests upon wonders, demonstrates by its very existence that it is essentially one nation.”

In times of emergency, the foundations of oneness are exposed. In war times they send us to defy danger, to display unequivocal devotion. In peace times they push us to locate the last Israeli hiker in the Far East after an earthquake, rallying dozens of backpackers overnight. They abandon their dream-trip in Peru or Nepal and use the same dedication and energy to search and rescue.

From this oneness, Jews all over the world derive the strength to pray, to get involved, to care.

However, it is not these emergencies that makes us one. They are just an expression of the oneness of our people. An amazing, powerful expression – which I have felt myself, and no cynical statement would ever diminish its value to me – but I’m convinced that extreme times come to tell us what we are capable of, despite the many controversies, or perhaps because of our rich and diverse nature.

It is much easier to lean on the mystical unity described by Rav Kook than to answer the question, “What connects us here and now?” Or the more pessimistic version, “Does anything still connect us?”

Yes, Haman reminds us of the ever-reemerging antisemitism. Beyond that, we share legacy, history, language, connection to the Land, an inclination towards fervor and a time-old talent for machloket (dispute), gifts for entrepreneurship and innovation and more.

To me, ultimately, it is the shared choice of Hope that binds us. Optimism, not naiveté, that refuses to be suspicious and bitter. In the words of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks: “Optimism is the belief that it will be okay. Hope is the belief that together we can make it okay. A Jew who knows the history of his people cannot be an optimist. But a Jew worthy of his name never abandons hope... To be a Jew is to be an agent of hope.”

That is what I learned: I don’t have to like everyone. Not even within the family. But love is a different story. It is a covenant of responsibility, dedication, honor. Contrary to common conception, one often loves even those one doesn’t like.

I choose to believe Rav Kook’s words. Anyone who chooses to adhere to a more cynical version of reality will do so at their own peril:

“Medical treatment of the individual draws from the inner springs of vitality... This hidden repository of health has the power to affect the outer self, which misleads one into thinking that he is sick and feeble when in fact he possesses an energetic, healthy soul, full of life and vigor. That applies to a much greater degree to the entire collective. Klal Yisrael is truly one nation: ‘And who is like Your nation, Israel, one nation in the land?’ We must admit our error in identifying the essence of Israel with its outer, surface appearance. For this self-image has made us fearful. We are conscious only of our dispersion and division... This hidden Judaism, unknown even to ourselves, this great soul of a great nation, which bears within it both the suffering and the light of the world, will become known to us during these portentous (Purim) times. The blessing of ‘Go, gather all the Jews’ will emerge from its unknown place in the national soul... and the virtue of our oneness, shall vanquish our scattered and divided side.”

1 Esther 4:16.
2 Ma’amarei HaReiya, p.155.
3 Esther 3:8.
4 Covenant and Conversation, rabbisacks.org, May 1, 2010.
5 Shmuel Bet 7:23
6 Ma’amarei HaReiya, Ibid

Rabbanit Rachelle Fraenkel teaches Torah at midrashot in Israel
The book of Esther teaches us that “these days of Purim will never depart from the Jewish people and their generations.” The message being communicated here is that the struggle for Jewish survival – physical and otherwise – represented by the holiday of Purim, is a never-ending challenge that will not depart from our midst as long as the Jewish people exists.

The fixation of the rest of the world on the Jewish people and Judaism is one of the great inexplicable mysteries of human existence. And the fact that in so many instances in history, and unfortunately now in current events, this fascination reveals itself in hatred, persecution and violence, takes this matter beyond our level of rational comprehension. Yet the fact remains that no Holocaust museum has ever dented the heart and mind of the anti-Semites who so abound in this world.

One would have thought that with all the Holocaust programs, movies, books and archives, they would somehow have put a fitting end to the disease of antisemitism, both personal and national. However, it is obvious this is not the case and that much of the non-Jewish world is still afflicted by antisemitism and its consequences. And it is most disturbing that when Jews mention or address the topic, most of the world is simply affronted by their temerity in raising the issue.

Though all of history, past and recent shows that antisemitism destroys not only the Jews but the society that feeds it as well, the world generally prefers to either ignore it entirely or to have an attitude of denial towards those who attempt to expose its cause.

As has often been the case in Jewish history, there are many Jews, wittingly or unwittingly, innocently or maliciously, who join in the chorus of the anti-Semites. This is because there are many Jews who are ignorant of Judaism and therefore do not take their Jewishness seriously. They have lost contact with their Jewish soul and spend their lives looking for substitute ideals to give a semblance of meaning to their existence.

At best, their Jewishness is secondary and subservient to other causes they deem to be either more important than Judaism or, in a twisted understanding of the matter, they feel these causes represent Judaism itself. Their loyalty is to political and ideological movements and this loyalty often translates itself into a form of self-hatred and Jewish sponsored antisemitism. This is especially true regarding their attitude towards the Jewish State of Israel and its accomplishments and even its very existence.

Israel, which in our time embodies Jewish survival and resilience, can and will often be sacrificed on the altar of current political correctness or wild utopian beliefs and platforms. It is no exaggeration to say that some of the current antisemitism and anti-Israel attitudes that so afflict our world are financed and promoted by Jews themselves. Queen Esther and Mordechai had their naysayers as well.

It is certainly no longer fashionable in society to maintain the old mantra that I learned in the American public school system 80 years ago...’my country, right or wrong, my country!’ In today’s world, my country is always wrong, always deficient, always unfair, and imperfect. Therefore, instead of deserving my support, it deserves to be roundly condemned by the elitists and utopian believers who never cease to promote their pie-in-the-sky agenda.

The Jewish people throughout the ages, no matter how scattered and impoverished our condition, were always loyal to one another and to the sacred duty to help support one another and to protect Jewish values and beliefs from the hatred and attacks of the outside world. There was a song popular in the Yiddish-speaking world the main chorus of which was, “whatever we are we are, but we are Jews!” We used to sing that song, amongst many others, on Purim in yeshiva.

But what you say when under the influence of liquor, we believe to be true and valid when we are cold stone sober. It was that feeling of Purim that permeated the lives of those that rebuilt the Jewish people after the Holocaust, created the State of Israel and revised and expanded the study of the Torah in our time. I hope that you all enjoy an eternal Purim that will never depart from our midst.

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Bank notes are hard to fake. Joy, on the other hand, can be faked quite easily. You can put on a smiling face, giggle loudly and fool everyone (even yourself) that you’re the happiest person around. But the lie will eventually come to light and sooner or later you’ll have to pay a price. Because anyone who settles for the fake product will miss the experience of the real thing – sincere, deep and innermost joy in this wonderful world.

How can one distinguish between real happiness and fake happiness? Rabbi Yoni Lavi gives us some guidelines:

“True joy does not depend on external means, like loud music or alcoholic beverages. It is also unrelated to how much money you have and how many likes you got today. It is gentle and independent, stemming from the inside but noticeable from the outside. It is not based on what you have but mainly on who you are. True joy does not wait for special days or unusual events to appear. It can appear even in the bleak, cold days of winter.

Fake joy stems from detaching oneself from reality. I need to “go out” to “make a living.” Searching far away rather than in the close circles of family, work and familiar surroundings. Fake joy is short-lived. It doesn’t last longer than a few minutes or hours. It leaves behind a bitter aftertaste, as if you just ate something spoiled... Often, fake joy comes at someone else’s expense, as part of a package deal that also includes cynicism, deception, selfishness and patronization.

True joy does not involve cliquishness or ridicule. It does not belong to a closed and elitist group, but multiplies when you share it with others. Such joy gives you strength and motivation to move on, to attempt the impossible. It does not expire the next day. True joy can manifest itself in spontaneous dance or liberated laughter, but it doesn’t have to, for it is strong and stable, with no need for external validation. True joy is closely linked to faith and a positive attitude, to being happy with what you have, and to the glass being half full. It does not ignore or deny the disadvantages and difficulties of reality but knows how to put them in perspective.

Fake joy is like the evil Haman. The man who was on top of the world, the President of Shushan. He possessed infinite wealth and honor as everyone kneeled and bowed to him. Except for one man. One Mordechai who didn’t bow down to him was enough to explode the fantasy he had weaved for himself.

True joy knows how to appreciate and get excited about even the small and mundane, not waiting for a big boom to jolt it into action. It refuses to take the sea of endless gifts we swim in for granted and remembers to say thank you every morning, for everything. True joy is not an eye-catcher. It knows how to contain and even elaborate on her fake namesake, but won’t settle for it. It is constantly striving for that deep and wonderful place that does not depend on external validation but thrives in its own healthy, honest and happy being.”

Megillat Esther is a sequence of events that can be explained logically. There is no miracle in the Megillah that comes down from the sky, but a series of events that are surprising but plausible. So what exactly is the miracle we celebrate on Purim? Why should the Megillah
be read at all? This is Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz’s answer: “It turns out that the extraordinary miracles, the famous paradigms, did not always have a long-lasting effect, or bring about a dramatic change in the character of the people. Megillat Esther presents us with a different educational direction: Esther and Mordechai are believers, who pray and fast, finally managing to save the people, not by changing the order of nature, but through a miracle that is seemingly natural, hidden within the dull reality. It is precisely this occurrence that leaves its imprint for millennia.

We too have to write the ‘scroll of our lives,’ and find the hidden within the visible. We must recognize such things, and to do that we must keep our eyes open and pay attention. The very fact a person sits and does the accounts of the day and the month, the events of his life, and measures and weighs them, and connects all the small and large combinations, makes him see the ‘everyday miracles.’ That’s why we say venahafochu why we say on Purim.

We have to reverse our view of our daily reality to reveal the good that lies within it.”

3 How do we remember what is really important on Purim? It’s a day with a lot of mess, masks and noise and that can pass quickly through all the technical tasks. Here’s a point to ponder about our role on Purim, from Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi: “At the beginning of the Megillah, Esther is not called malka, queen. Even though she has already been selected for the role, she is almost always called Esther. But then comes the moment of change. She hears about the decree of extermination and decides to plea to the king on behalf of her people. Suddenly, a woman gets up in the morning and feels she is a people. Then we read: ‘Esther put on royal apparel.’ That’s it. From this moment, Esther is already a queen. Even Achashverosh notices and asks: ‘What about you, Queen Esther?’ Because when she represents a people, when she has a role and mission, she undergoes a transformation. We draw tremendous power from the fact that someone else depends on us, that we have meaning not only for ourselves, that we are not small and limited but big. It gives us a kingdom. Purim possesses tremendous power to pray for the other, for kindness to others, for a smile for the whole family, for enlightenment, for caring. Achashverosh asks Esther what she wants. She could have thought only about herself and asked for up to half the kingdom. But she asked for her nation. That’s a queen.”

4 A youth counselor anonymously sent us the following message, which he had sent to his young charges. He felt that the accepted notion of “courage” on Purim was one of disintegration, liberation, and chaos: “Actually, we all put limits on ourselves. Deciding ‘I am such and such,’ ‘It’s too hard for me,’ and that we cannot change. But on Purim, everything moves and you can get out of the rut. This is an opportunity to make that inner change, venahafochu, and to break the imaginary boundaries. Usually, when talking about breaking boundaries and frameworks you think of something negative. When talking about the courage to do things we don’t do all year, it means going wild and losing control. But what about the second option? How about breaking my boundaries in a positive direction? What about plucking up courage and daring to do the good things I’ve always wanted to do? Who said that drinking on Purim must bring you to shallowness and shame rather to a deep, spiritual and happy place? These days we allow ourselves to go wild. Go crazy by all means but let’s do it in a fresh, controlled and promising direction!”

5 This is our first Purim on shlichut, outside the Land of Israel. We don’t really know what Purim looks like in America. Here is what a veteran shaliach of the Zionist Organization in Connecticut told us: “In Israel, everyone knows Purim is coming. It’s everywhere: in toy stores, grocery stores, in commercials, on the street. You feel Purim in the air because Judaism just encompasses you in Israel. In America, they celebrate St. Patrick’s Day. Everything is painted green-clover for this Christian holiday. Easter comes with eggs and rabbits everywhere. Masks? Rattles? Maybe when you go to Brooklyn you’ll see some. If we do not forcibly create a Purim atmosphere here, we’ll feel nothing. That’s why we try to expose the next generation here to their heritage and encourage them to remain Jewish out of love and choice. Often, their only opportunity here to eat Jewish is in the school sukka. On Chanukah we fight the lights and shine of the Christian holiday season, and even now Purim is hard work. It’s a challenge. So I wanted you to remember what a privilege it is to live in Israel even with all the security and politics. Here is not the same as there. Happy Purim.”
There is a unique law in the approach to Purim. מִשֶּׁנִּכְנָס אֲדָר מַרְבִּין בְּשִׂמְחָה — “From the beginning of Adar, we increase in joy.” It is stated in the Talmud, and is based on the passage in the Megillah in which Mordechai sends a letter throughout the land instructing Jews “to observe the 14th day of the month of Adar and the 15th day, every year — the days on which the Jews obtained rest from their enemies and the month which for them was turned from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday.”

This, in turn, refers back to the text in which Haman decided on the timing of his decree: “In the first month, the month of Nissan, in the 12th year of Achashverosh, they cast pur (that is, lots) before Haman from day to day, and from month to month until the 12th month, which is the month of Adar.”

The difficulties are obvious though. Why an entire month? The key events were focused on a few days, the 13th to the 15th, not the whole month. And why simcha? We can understand why the Jews of the time felt exhilaration. The decree sentencing them to death had been rescinded. Their enemies had been punished. Haman had been hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordechai. Mordechai himself had been raised to greatness.

But is joy the emotion we should feel in perpetuity, remembering those events? The first warrant for genocide against the Jewish people (the second if one counts Pharaoh’s plan to kill all newborn Jewish males) had been frustrated. Is simcha the appropriate emotion? Surely what we should feel is relief, not joy. Pesach is the proof. The word “joy” is never mentioned in the Torah in connection with it.
Besides which, the Talmud asks why we do not say Hallel on Purim. It gives several answers. The most powerful is that in Hallel we say, “Servants of the Lord, give praise” – meaning we are no longer the servants of Pharaoh. But, says the Talmud, even after the deliverance of Purim, Jews were still the servants of Achashverosh. Tragedy had been averted but there was no real change in the hazards of life in the Diaspora.

It seems to me therefore that the simcha we celebrate throughout the month of Adar is different from the normal joy we feel when something good and positive has happened to us or our people. That is expressive joy. The simcha of Adar, by contrast, is therapeutic joy.

Imagine what it is to be part of a people that had once heard the command issued against them: “to destroy, kill and annihilate all the people that had once heard the memory of Amalek, but to make a joke out of the whole episode. You wear masks. You drink a little too much. You make a Purim spiel.

Precisely because the threat was so serious, you refuse to be serious – and in that refusal you are doing something very serious indeed. You are denying your enemies a victory. You are declaring you will not be intimidated. As the date of the scheduled destruction approaches, you surround yourself with the single most effective antidote to fear: joy in life itself. As the three-sentence summary of Jewish history puts it: “They tried to destroy us. We survived. Let’s eat.”

Humor is the Jewish way of defeating hate. What you can laugh at, you cannot be held captive by.

I learned this from a Holocaust survivor. Some years ago, I wrote a book, Celebrating Life, to write my way out of the depression I fell into after the death of my father, of blessed memory. It was a cheer-you-up book, and it became a favourite of the Holocaust survivors. One of them, however, told me that a particular passage in the book was incorrect. Commenting on Roberto Begnini’s comedy about the Holocaust, Life is Beautiful, I had said that though I agreed with his thesis – a sense of humour keeps you sane – that was not enough in Auschwitz to keep you alive.

“On that, you are wrong,” the survivor said, and then told me his story. He had been in Auschwitz, and he soon realised that if he failed to keep his spirits up, he would die. So he made a pact with another young man, that they would both look out, each day, for some occurrence they found amusing. At the end of each day they would tell one another their story and they would laugh together. “That sense of humour saved my life,” he said. I stood corrected. He was right.

That is what we do on Purim. The joy, the merrymaking, the food, the drink, the whole carnival atmosphere, are there to allow us to live with the risks of being a Jew – in the past, and tragically in the present also – without being terrified, traumatised or intimidated. It is the most counter-intuitive response to terror, and the most effective. Terrorists aim to terrify. To be a Jew is to refuse to be terrified.

Terror, hatred, violence – the dark forces that are currently ravaging country after country in the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, parts of Asia and even in the United States – are always ultimately self-destructive. Those who practise them are always, as was Haman, hoisted on their own petard, destroyed by their very will to destruction. And yes, we as Jews must fight antisemitism, the demonization of Israel, and the intimidation of Jewish students on campus.

But we must never let ourselves be intimidated – and the Jewish way to avoid this is marbim besimcha, to increase our joy. The people who can know the full darkness of history and yet rejoice is a people whose spirit no power on earth can ever break. Purim Sameach.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is Emeritus Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth @RabbiSacks · www.RabbiSacks.org

1 Ta’anit 29a.
2 Esther 9:21-22.
3 Ibid. 3:7.
4 Megillah 14a.
5 Esther 3:13.
For Rav Kook, Purim is a portal to the Messianic era; a day that allows us to taste from the World to Come. This defining characteristic of Purim explains many of the day’s unique elements.

Generally, we cannot experience true joy as all worldly experiences contain at least a trace of sadness. True bliss is reserved for the World to Come when “our mouths will be filled with laughter.”1 On Purim though, we gain a taste of this unmitigated ecstasy and achieve the highest levels of simcha.2

Generally, we dare not lose our self-control due to the fear that our lurking darker side will emerge. On Purim though, we embrace inebriation, trusting the Messianic promise that even without cognitive inhibitions only the pure essence of the Jewish soul will emerge.3

Generally, we have clear definitions of good and evil and attempt to love good and hate evil. On Purim though, we attain the Messianic “good eye” which reveals the Divine core of every aspect of reality. Therefore, we cannot wholeheartedly declare “cursed be Haman.”4

Rav Kook’s approach to Purim raises a pressing question. Unfortunately, we do not live in the Messianic reality. We do not experience unbridled joy, we do not allow ourselves to act unchecked and we must certainly fight against evil. Why then do we have a day that mimics a world that is not ours? What is the goal of play-acting the redeemed world if once the sun sets on Purim eve we sink back into our fallen and limited reality?

This question can be broadened to other aspects of Rav Kook’s thought. His corpus contains dozens of vivid depictions of the utopian reality and he exhorts his readers to similarly spend time visualizing a redeemed world in their minds’ eye. Why? Is this not a mere exercise in escapism?

The answer is a key principle in Rav Kook’s approach to life. Yes, we live in a fallen reality. Yes, we cannot practically live life in its ideal form and must work within the constraints of our current state. But simultaneously we can never come to terms with the world as it is. We need a healthy dose of dreaming, yearning, and imagining the Messianic reality. Without a vision of redemption, we will never be able to extricate ourselves from the mires of exilic existence.

Broadly speaking, Rav Kook sees two benefits to this sort of exercise. First, on a practical level, a clear destination is necessary to be able to correctly navigate the present. Without knowing where we are headed, we will lose our direction and fail to partner with G-d to create the ideal world. As Rav Kook writes: “To the great future all eyes must look… this itself will guide life to the heights.”5

Second, on a spiritual level, being touched by eternity refines our personalities in the here and now. Dreaming about a world in which evil is vanquished and injustice is abolished, in which all of humanity streams to Yerushalayim to experience G-d’s palpable presence and learn His ways, can spiritually elevate us. In the words of Rav Kook: “Anticipating redemption purifies life, expands the mind and refines the spirit.”6

While such visualizations are always important, Rav Kook saw Purim as an auspicious time for accessing the Messianic reality. On Purim, we can move beyond dreaming and experientially taste the World to Come. This small portal to the future allows our ephemeral dreams of a perfect world to slowly take shape in our minds and hearts, and eventually in the world itself.

“Great dreams are the foundation of the world. There are different levels: The prophets dream – ‘in a dream will I speak to him.’ The poets dream while awake. The great thinkers dream of the rectification of the world. We all dream [of] when ‘G-d will restore the return to Zion [we were as dreamers]’... Only the free dream which rebels against the limits of reality is, in truth, the truer essence of reality.”7

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1 Tehillim 126:2.  
2 Olat HaReiya, vol. 1 p. 439.  
3 Ibid.  
4 Moadei HaReiya, p. 246.  
5 Devarim 25:19.  
6 Middot HaReiya, Ahava paragraph 6.  
7 Orot, Yisrael UTechiyato, paragraph 20.  
8 Orot HaKodesh vol. 3, p. 353.  
9 Ibid. vol. 1, p. 226.

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The Subtle Option

Subtle wines on Purim? Sounds a little strange, no?
The Purim Seuda requires responsible drinking (please do not drive afterward or at least have a designated driver accompany you if you are going to friends or family). When drinking big, bold, full-bodied wines one's palate often gets tired quickly, losing the ability to enjoy more wines after a glass or two.

I believe the solution is to broaden your horizons. Sure, with the mitzvah of the Seuda and drinking ad delo yada (to the point one cannot understand the difference between Haman and Mordechai), Purim is one of the main “wine holidays.”

We learn from Megillat Esther that even when G-d is not intervening as obviously and publicly as he is with the plagues or splitting the sea, he nonetheless never abandons the Jewish people. On the contrary, Haman had plotted to hang Mordechai and eradicate us. G-d, however, turned Haman’s plans upside down – venahafochhu. Haman was hung on the gallows he had built to hang Mordechai, and the Jewish people fought back and won against the mighty Persian Army.

So with wine. Let’s do venahafochhu and turn things around as well. Instead of opening the bottles you have been stashing away for special occasions, keep them for the upcoming yamim tovim and go for more approachable, somewhat lighter wines.

I recently had the opportunity to taste many new and interesting wines. Tabor Winery, located in Kfar Tavor, just came out with the latest vintage of their Adama series of high-value wines, which includes a lovely, crisp Rosé 2019 made from Barbera grapes, with citrus, strawberry, tropical fruit notes and subtle minerals... delicious.

Vitkin Winery has a unique dry Gewürztraminer 2018 that is delightful, complex, fragrant and restrained yet very much approachable with hints of lychee, white peach, lime and rose petals.

Netofa is an incredible boutique winery in the Lower Galilee, with its vineyards nestled at the foot of Mount Tavor. They make wines from Mediterranean varieties originating from regions such as the Rhône Valley in France, Spain and Portugal. Netofa’s wines showcase the unique richness of Israel’s ancient terroirs and microclimates. Their wines are made by veteran winemaker Pierre
Miodownick, who for over three decades produced some of the best kosher wines to ever come out of Europe. Miodownick’s experience, combined with the Israeli sunshine and soil, has yielded the Netofa Tel Qasser Red 2017, a blend of Grenache and Syrah. It’s a smooth blend medium in body and features an elegant mouth-feel with hints of red forest berries and Mediterranean herbs, as well as a long and elegant finish.

Jezreel Valley has an unusual wine made from Argaman, a grape variety indigenous to Israel, where it was created in the 1970s, a hybrid of the French-Spanish Carignan and the Portuguese Sousão. While the previous vintage was a bit on the heavy side, the 2016 is more restrained and nuanced, making it even more interesting and pleasant to sip. It truly provides an intriguing drinking experience and I highly recommend you check it out!

Last, but certainly not least, if you prefer sweeter wines I suggest you be on the lookout for the Herzog Late Harvest Chenin Blanc 2018 (or any other vintage). This dessert wine is a crowd-pleaser, appealing to both amateurs and sophisticated palates. With notes of honey, quince jam and baked pears, it is the perfect companion to Hamantaschen. It is also available in a 375ml format which makes it a great gift to include in your Mishloach Manot.

Mishenichnas Adar marbin beSimcha! When the month of Adar comes in, we shall rejoice! These wines will definitely play their part.

Purim Sameach, LeChaim!

Gabriel Geller is manager of wine education for Royal Wine Corp, the world’s largest distributor of kosher wines.
A malek irrefutably casts a giant shadow over Megillat Esther. We are all familiar with the commentators that point to Haman as a direct descendant of King Agag and the continuation of the battle that Moshe fought at Refidim. The war against Amalek, both at Refidim and in Shushan, presents similar problems and resolutions – and a message that pledging fidelity to Torah is the way to rebound from this trauma.

Looking closely, Amalek appears at these two low points in our nation's existence. Analyzing the cause of this crisis is our first step. On the verse of Amalek's aggression, Midrash Tanchuma states, “The aggressor comes only when there is sin and transgression.”

Upon exiting from Egypt and passing through Refidim, Amalek seizes the moment to attack Bnei Yisrael at a moment of spiritual weakness, described by Moshe as, “when you were famished and weary,” and cut down the stragglers in the rear.1 The Mechilta delves into the name of the incident, Refidim, implying weakness, not of Moshe’s hands in the battle, but the Jews’ weakness with respect to observing the Torah.

Likewise, in Megillat Esther, the Jewish people are described as “scattered and dispersed among the other peoples.”2 The Midrash alludes to the reality that many enjoyed the questionably kosher feasts that King Achashverosh hosted, and they seemed so spiritually uninspired and detached that they casually witnessed the use of the holy utensils of the Beit HaMikdash for such base activities. Such a reality made it an opportune time for Haman to destroy Am Yisrael.

The dramatic reaction to both of these national attacks led to an almost singular solution and tikkun – a recommitment to Torah. Directly after the incident at Refidim comes Kabbalat HaTorah at Har Sinai. Similarly, in Megillat Esther, we see that “Jews undertook and irrevocably obligated themselves and their descendants, and all who might join them”3 – (Kimu veKiblu) as the Gemara notes how, in the aftermath of the genocidal edict, we recommitted to all the terms of Torah.

This is the traditional, oft-quoted, uplifting emphasis – giving chizuk to the notion that our commitment to Torah is the antidote to our national ills.

But there is more. Looking deeper at these texts we see something very significant. We see it first in Moshe’s call to appoint Yehoshua to take up the battle against Amalek. On the verse, “and recite it into Yehoshua’s ears,” Rashi quotes the Mechilta that Yehoshua “was destined to bring Israel into the Land [of Israel] and] to pay him [Amalek] his recompense.” Not only was this the first hint to Moshe that Yehoshua would lead the nation into Eretz Yisrael, but that it is precisely this mission of conquering and entering the Land that made Yehoshua the perfect emissary to fight and be the victor against Amalek.

So too with the Purim story, the Megillah concludes not only with a recounting of the miraculous turnabout of events but also hints to the re-calibration to the national project of Shivat Tzion. At this very moment in history, confluence of events leads to the very seeds of Geula being planted.

These two famous Biblical episodes share a pattern – one of subjugation followed by a two-step redemption. The first brings a strengthened commitment to Torah followed by linking a commitment to enter/return to Eretz Yisrael. The war against Amalek is one about faith, but it is also about our destiny.

We are living in miraculous times that we too often take for granted, perhaps because we struggle to keep up with our daily responsibilities. Gifted the opportunity to zoom out, we can better appreciate the processes that are unfolding before our very eyes.

Just recently, tens of thousands of men and women gathered in siyumei haShas around the world. Without a doubt – breathtaking, inspirational, motivational and awe-inspiring moments for our people. It was a truly remarkable opportunity to bask in the glory of a growing commitment to our Torah and indeed this has sparked so many to excitedly commit and pledge to personal daily learning.

Just as we’ve seen thousands excitedly, for the first time, commit themselves to this cycle of Daf Yomi, I would humbly suggest that Am Yisrael is now ready for this second stage of redemption, and patterning this historical process, turn its attention to our second tikkun of building ourselves and our nation and our Land, in Eretz Yisrael.

Perhaps this Purim, we should pause and ponder an additional Kimu veKiblu. To dream and envision ourselves living in our true Home.

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1 Orach Chaim 686.
2 Tikkunei Zohar 21.
3 Shemot 32:31.
4 Mishna Yoma 1:1.

Rabbi Yehoshua Fass is Co-Founder and Executive Director of Nefesh B’Nefesh.
Rava said: “A person must drink on Purim until he cannot distinguish between cursed Haman and blessed Mordechai.”

Rabba and Rabbi Zeira held a Purim feast together. They became intoxicated. Rabba arose and slaughtered Rabbi Zeira. The next day, he asked for mercy and Rabbi Zeira was revived.

The following year, Rabba said to him: “Let the master come and we will make a Purim feast together.” Rabbi Zeira answered: “A miracle does not happen every time.” (Megillah 7b)

Before I begin to comment on this humorous story, I offer the possibility that it is a halachic text and not only an aggadic addition. A major debate exists as to the extent of the obligation to drink on Purim. Some authorities understand that a person should truly become drunk. Of course, even those authorities would condemn drunkenness that leads to immoral and improper behavior. The Rema\(^1\) recommended that one drink enough to become tired, thus creating a situation in which one cannot distinguish between cursed Mordechai and cursed Haman. The Ba’al HaMa’or\(^2\) understands that the whole point of the Rabba / R. Zeira episode is to reject the rule that one should drink on Purim. The Gemara deliberately places this story after the halachic discussion of the obligation to become drunk, in order to argue that the Halacha could not obligate something with such destructive potential.

On an aggadic level, what does this story illustrate? Maharsha refuses to take this tale at face value. It simply cannot be true that Rabba killed his colleague. Instead, Maharsha suggests that Purim’s wild merriment led to a situation in which Rabbi Zeira drank too much and became seriously ill. Rabba prayed for him and he was restored to health. Even if we accept this reading, the story still illustrates the perils of alcohol, as it caused a dangerous health issue.

Rav Yitzchak Hutner raises a different possibility in his *Pachad Yitzchak*.\(^3\) He begins with the Midrashic idea that at Sinai, every word of G-d caused the souls of the people to depart, until eventually their souls came back and the people were revived. For Rav Hutner, this conveys something about the experience of receiving the Torah. In its ideal form, *Kabbalat HaTorah* serves as a transformative experience, which renders the recipient other than he or she was previously. The Midrash about souls departing and returning conveys the sense of renewal brought about by the Torah.

The Gemara\(^4\) famously views Purim as a second accepting of the Torah, done freely without the element of coercion present at Sinai. If so, Purim should also include this element of vitality and renewal. Rabbi Zeira’s death and return to life indicate this novel identity achieved through the fresh acceptance of Torah in a successful Purim.

I admit that Rav Hutner may intend this interpretation more as a good homily than as the simple reading of this story. He explicitly states that he will interpret this story differently today than he does the rest of the year. In any case, let us work with his interpretation and raise a question he does not ask. According to his reading, why does Rabbi Zeira express reluctance to come back to Rabba’s party the following year?

Perhaps this kind of identity-altering experience also includes an intimidating element. Change frightens us and it might seem safer to maintain one’s current Torah personality, especially if it already incorporates much of worth. If so, this story challenges us not to fear the attempt to make this holiday an acceptance of Torah with far-reaching implications for religious growth. Realizing the inner meaning of this holiday depends much more on authenticity and inwardness than on the quantity one drinks. Happy Purim!

This essay initially appeared on the Yeshivat Har Etzion VBM website and was subsequently reprinted in R. Blau’s *Fresh Fruit and Vintage Wine: The Ethics and Wisdom of the Aggada*.

\(^1\) Orach Chaim 695:2.

\(^2\) On Rif 3b.

\(^3\) Purim, 32.

\(^4\) Shabbat 88a.

Rabbi Yitzchak Blau is a Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Orayta. He is the author of *Fresh Fruit and Vintage Wine: The Ethics and Wisdom of the Aggada*. 
Purim has a special halacha that splits the celebrations into two days: those in the perazot – cities not surrounded by walls in the days of Yehoshua Bin-Nun – read the Megillah and fulfill the mitzvot of Purim on the 14th of Adar, while those in the crachim – cities surrounded by walls in the days of Yehoshua Bin-Nun (such as Yerushalayim) – read the Megillah and fulfill the mitzvot of Purim on the 15th of Adar.1

Despite this distinction, those who live in the perazot should increase their seudah on the 15th and those who live in the crachim should increase their seudah on the 14th.2 In any case, Al HaNissim is only recited on the day on which the Megillah is read; 3 however, no matter where you are from, Tachanun is not recited on either day.4

WHICH CITIES ARE CONSIDERED SURROUNDED BY A WALL?

In our times, only Yerushalayim is definitely considered a walled city from the days of Yehoshua Bin-Nun, and the Megillah is only read there on the 15th of Adar. Other cities are considered mesupakot (possible, but uncertain) walled cities such as Tiveria, Hebron, Tzfat, Yaffo, Lod, Be’er Sheva and more. What should those living in these cities do?

According to some of the Rishonim, in mesupakot cities, the Megillah should only be read on the 14th of Adar and it is a midat chassidut (an especially righteous standard of conduct) to read the Megillah on the 15th as well. However, the Rambam holds that me’ikar haDin (according to the letter of the law), in mesupakot cities the Megillah must be read on both the 14th and 15th, but one only says the beracha over the Megillah on the 14th. The Shulchan Aruch rules like the Rambam. The other mitzvot (matanot laEvyonim, mishloach manot, seudah) are also fulfilled on both days.5 Most poskim hold that in the mesupakot cities, Al HaNissim is recited in the Amidah and Birkat HaMazon on both days,6 while the Purim Torah portion is read only on the 14th and not on the 15th, out of concern for a possibly superfluous beracha.7

In practice, in some of the cities we mentioned (such as Hebron and Lod), there is a custom to fulfill the Purim laws on both days. However, in other cities (such as Be’er Sheva and Yaffo), it is generally accepted that they were not walled at the time of Yehoshua, and so they celebrate Purim only on the 14th of Adar. In any case, if you are in one of these cities, you should follow the local custom.

SAMUCH VENIREH

Not only do the crachim read the Megillah on the 15th of Adar, but the cities defined as samuch veNireh to the crach do as well. Samuch is a city located within approximately one kilometer (mil) of the walled city. Nireh is a city that can be seen from the crach, even if it is more than a mil away, on condition that the city and the crach participate with each other in municipal affairs (however, some Achronim are of the opinion that even a Nireh must be within one mil of the city).

The discussion of Samuch veNireh has increased with the development and expansion of Yerushalayim. In practice, most of the neighborhoods of Yerushalayim are connected to the Old City through continuous building, so the accepted practice in all of them is to read the Megillah and fulfill the mitzvot of Purim on the 15th of Adar.8 The only neighborhood over which there is a debate is Ramot, which is not connected by continuous building, but even there, most of the community reads the Megillah only on the 15th..

1 Esther 9:19-22; Shulchan Aruch 388.
2 Rama 695:2.
3 Rama 693:2.
4 Shulchan Aruch 693:3.
5 Megillah 1:13.
6 MRI 688:4.
7 Ibid 693:6.
8 Luach Eretz Yisrael.
10 Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach; Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliashiv.
The most complicated issue in the laws of Purim is *ben ir she'Halach leCrach* (one who went from an unwalled city to a walled city). This is particularly relevant traveling to and from Yerushalayim on Purim.

The following charts detail possible situations. *The halacha in each situation is only applicable when what a person did was what they originally planned to do.* If one's plans changed during Purim (whether intentionally or unexpectedly), determining the halacha is much more complicated and a Rabbi should be consulted.

### A. From an Unwalled City to a Walled City

<table>
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<tr>
<th>When did you arrive at the walled city?</th>
<th>14th at night</th>
<th>15th at night</th>
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<tr>
<td>When did you return to the unwalled city?</td>
<td>Before dawn on the 14th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practical Halacha</td>
<td>Read on the 14th</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Read on the 14th</td>
<td>Read on the 15th</td>
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Read on the 14th with a *beracha*. Most Achronim are of the opinion that such a case is obligated to read on the 15th as well. However, there are those who say that only one who completely moved their lodgings must read a second time (Rav Frankel). Even though one who is lenient and reads just once has fulfilled the *mitzvah*, it is best to read on the 15th as well, without a *beracha*, and without reading it on behalf of others.

### B. From a walled City to an Unwalled City

<table>
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<td>Read on the 14th with a <em>beracha</em> and on the 15th without a <em>beracha</em></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Read on 15th</td>
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Most Achronim are of the opinion that such a case is completely *patur* (exempt) from Purim and that *lechatchila* (from the outset) one should not do this. One who finds themselves in such a situation should read on the 15th without a *beracha*. 
This year, Tuesday, March 3, will be 7 Adar, Moshe Rabbeinu’s birthday – and yahrzeit (the 3,372nd, by my count). The Gemara (Menachot 29) tells a rather bizarre story: when Moshe went up on Har Sinai to receive the Torah, he saw G-d sitting and attaching tagin – crowns – to selected letters (Shin, Ayin, Tet, Nun, Zayin, Gimel and Tzadee) of the Torah. Moshe was puzzled by these crowns, but G-d explained:

“Generations from now, there will be a man named Akiva who will derive meaning from every single stroke.”

Moshe asked to see this person and was whisked to Rabbi Akiva’s Beit Midrash where he sat at the back. As he listened, he failed to understand the lesson being taught and began to feel faint. Just then, a student asked Akiva, “From where do you derive these laws?” Rabbi Akiva answered, “These laws were given to Moshe on Mt. Sinai!” And Moshe was relieved, and satisfied.

After hearing this story, I wondered: if Moshe was transported here today, would he be satisfied with our state of affairs?

Well, Moshe was first and foremost the Lawgiver, the principal purveyor of G-d’s Torah. I think he’d be quite pleased to learn that Torah is being studied all over the world – arguably more than at any point in our history! Most widely in the State of Israel, where the government spends hundreds of millions of shekels each year in support of Torah learning. Men, women, young children, yeshiva students, religious and secular Jews alike have a deep affection for learning Torah; in fact, no generation before us ever had more commentaries on, or copies of the Torah in their possession.

Moshe was also a fierce fighter for truth and justice. From the moment he killed the Egyptian taskmaster, he stood up for what was right, even if it meant confronting G-d Himself. I think he would be appalled at the way Jews are maligned and under attack today in so many places, at all the lies and slander cast our way. He’d urge us to reject indifference and apathy and battle that injustice with all our might, as well as eradicate the corruption that all too often infects our own society and tarnishes our good name and holy character.

Moshe loved the Jewish people with all his heart. He sacrificed mightily for us and defended us at every opportunity, often saving us from Divine punishment. The humblest man ever born, Moshe never considered himself better than anyone else, and he reached out to each and every Jew, even to those who disagreed with him. I think he’d be tremendously impressed by the countless acts of chesed being done each moment by Jews, as well as the myriad charitable organizations in the Jewish world. Unfortunately, he would likely be disgusted by the all-too-common curse of infighting among our people – which he experienced in his own time too of course – a persistent malady he hoped would someday end.

Finally, Moshe’s last, and perhaps most ardent wish, was to come to Israel. He tried every-which-way to convince G-d to stamp his “teudat zehut,” his ID, so he could enter even as a normal citizen without any fanfare or special treatment, but alas, it was not to be. Yet he would be thrilled to see the amazing number of Jews who now live in Israel – fast approaching a majority of world Jewry – as well as the fantastic nation we have built with great effort and sacrifice. As a former king and general, Moshe would marvel at the stupendous army which zealously guards Israel, and he would be awestruck at the beauty of Jerusalem and the ingathering of Jews from every corner of the world.

But what would he say about all those Jews who have yet to accept the precious gift the Almighty has given us? How would he explain the fact that the majority of Jews have never even visited Israel, even once? For all his unmatched wisdom, even Moshe would be hard-pressed to answer that question.

Rabbi Stewart Weiss is Director of the Jewish Outreach Center of Ra’anana jocmtv@netvision.net.il
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| 1 | OUR PHYSICAL SAFETY | Expand security funding and provisions to protect Jewish life at US synagogues, yeshiva day schools and Jewish community centers |
| 2 | OUR JEWISH IDENTITY | Combat BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) and antisemitism with programs that empower our students on college campuses across the US |
| 3 | OUR LAND | Support continued growth of communities in Eretz Yisrael including the Golan Heights, Judea, Samaria and the Jordan Valley |
| 4 | OUR PURPOSE | Fight for funding to perpetuate Torah values that enables more of our children to study in gap year yeshiva/seminary programs and expands the global network of shlichim |

## WHAT YOU LOSE BY NOT VOTING

| 1 | OUR PHYSICAL SAFETY | Render our Jewish institutions vulnerable and unprotected |
| 2 | OUR JEWISH IDENTITY | Allow BDS and nefarious antisemitism to run rampant across college campuses and beyond |
| 3 | OUR LAND | Stifle continued development of communities in the Golan Heights, Judea, Samaria and the Jordan Valley |
| 4 | OUR PURPOSE | Eliminate or dramatically reduce subsidies to gap year students studying in yeshiva/seminary programs and shrink communal shlichut opportunities |

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Cheri Tannenbaum
A frequent cause of lack of shalom bayit (marital harmony) is the tendency of either spouse to stubbornly insist on getting one’s way and refusing to consider the merits of the other spouse’s opinion. Understandably, husband and wife may have different opinions, but things can be worked out if they are flexible.

At some Chassidic weddings, there is a dance known as “The Dance of Rebbe Elimelech.”

Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk is highly revered and is considered among the greatest of the Chassidic tzaddikim. He is the author of Noam Elimelech. The Rebbe of Belz would refuse to enter a house in which there was not a Noam Elimelech. When the Alter Rebbe, Rebbe Shneur Zalman, once visited the home of a misnagdic gadol, he saw that the Noam Elimelech had been cast on the floor underneath a bookcase. The gadol asked the Alter Rebbe, “Can you tell me anything about the author of this sefer?” The Alter Rebbe said, “If you were to throw the author of this sefer under a bookcase, you would not hear a single word of complaint.”

Chassidim speak glowingly about Rebbe Elimelech, saying, “If he had lived at the time of formation of the Talmud, he would have been considered qualified to be the tanna of a Mishnah.”

Rebbe Elimelech had far greater things to do than to choreograph a dance. His dance consists of pairs of men dancing toward each other, and when they meet, the proximal pair bows down, and the distal pair lift their arms to form an arch, allowing the proximal pair to pass beneath the arch. As they meet the next pair, the ones that bowed now form an arch, and the previous arch-formers now bend down to pass.

It is a beautiful, graceful dance, but if any pair refuses to bend down, they collide.

The message to the couple is, “If you refuse to yield, there will be a collision.”

“My way is the only way” is a fatal blow to shalom bayit.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski is a psychiatrist and rabbi, and founder of the Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Pennsylvania.
When dealing with a child who is already overtly rebellious, parents and teachers can play a pivotal role in helping him or her feel connected. The key dynamic underlying such behavior is feeling alienated and set apart from the mainstream.

Perhaps the most potent antidote to feeling angry and alienated is feeling appreciated and understood. When parents and teachers make harsh or belittling remarks or treat a child in a manner that the child perceives as unfair, the child’s downward spiral may accelerate. Conversely, a combination of time, support and understanding can go a long way toward bringing a rebellious adolescent back on the path of more productive and meaningful behavior.

The following recommendations can be considered:

**LIMIT SETTING**

A rebellious child does best with a balance between love and limits. Research indicates that the following consequences work best with disruptive children and adolescents: First, punishments are consistent and not overly harsh, and are administered briefly, unemotionally and clearly. Second, they stem logically from the misbehavior and make sense to the child. Third, they are viewed as fair, not as unfair, the child’s downward spiral may accelerate. Conversely, a combination of time, support and understanding can go a long way toward bringing a rebellious adolescent back on the path of more productive and meaningful behavior.

When a parent or teacher shows that he or she does not take the child’s misbehavior personally and disapproves of the behavior and not the child, consequences tend to be far more effective. A parent once told me that he always wondered why his child bristled at the slightest criticism from either parent but was able to take even the toughest and most demanding direction from his basketball coach. I explained that when children know that everybody is “on the same team” they will accept even the most demanding set of rules willingly. They are most likely to rebel when they feel that their parent or teacher isn’t with them on the same team.

However, even when following these discipline guidelines, children tend to engage in negative persistence. They won’t accept the logic and keep nagging about the consequences. An effective way of dealing with negative persistence is illustrated by Rabbi Henoch Leibowitz. He quotes the Midrash that Avraham Avinu was on his way to the Akeidah, the Satan approached him and tried to convince him that G-d didn’t really command him to slaughter his son. First the Satan said, “How could it be that you waited 100 years for this son and now you are going to slaughter him?” Then he said “How could it be that G-d commanded to you commit murder?” Each time, Avraham responded “al menat ken” – I am doing so despite what you just said.

Avraham’s response is somewhat puzzling. Why didn’t he just respond, “You are lying. G-d did command me to slaughter my son?” Rabbi Leibowitz answers that there is no point in debating the Satan. Avraham didn’t want to get sucked into an argument that would give credence to the other side.

The same could be said about negative persistence. When a child is given a consequence, the logic should be explained at the outset. If the child then persists, he or she should be told “we are no longer discussing the reasons for the consequence,” and after the third time the child nags, the conversation should be ended completely.

How do we choose worthy battlegrounds? How do we know which acts of rebellion require consequences and which can be ignored? The Midrash Tanchuma provides numerous examples of how the Arot handled conflict. They didn’t respond at the beginning of the conflict, but instead waited for the right moment to respond – natnu makom lesha’a – they gave space for the moment and walked away from the conflict until there was a moment they could respond in a way that would be effective.

When dealing with rebelliousness, there are situations that are dangerous and we can’t just ignore what is going on. However, there are situations where we can give space and make a strategic withdrawal. When the relationship is not only about dealing with negative behavior, we can form a positive relationship.

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1 Barkley, 1998.
2 Mishlei 19:10.
3 Shemot Rabah 1.
4 Chidushei HaLev, Bereishit p. 103.
5 Vayechi 6.

**Dr. David Pelcovitz** holds the Gwendolyn and Joseph Straus Chair in Psychology and Jewish Education at the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration at Yeshiva University.
The third special Torah reading in the series of four, Parashat Parah, is read annually on the Shabbat immediately after Purim. The general understanding is that this reading is a reminder of the ritual cleansing and purification that took place before Pesach. The eating of the Korban Pesach on Seder night was prohibited to the individual who had been spiritually defiled by coming in contact with a corpse. The antidote to this state of defilement was the procedure of sprinkling upon the individual, on the third day and the seventh day, from the aqueous solution containing the ashes of the parah adumah – Red Heifer.

As much of our contemporary Pesach experience includes multiple reminders of our exilic state, so too, this reading of Parashat Parah serves the purpose of reminding the people that had we been living at the time of a functioning Beit HaMikdash, we would have dealt with cleansing ourselves spiritually at this time so we could partake in the eating of the Korban Pesach.

Yet one may suggest that this reading of Parashat Parah is a post-Purim reading rather than an exclusively pre-Pesach reminder.

As in childbirth, the Purim postpartum experience can be downright depressing. After the gaiety of the Purim feast, with its excessive drinking, has worn off, the harsh realities of life return, reminding us that not every day is Purim.

Perhaps we welcomed with relief the one day in the year when masquerading was considered proper and living a lie was not out of order. However, that kind of existence – albeit for a short time only – can have damaging consequences for our regular everyday life. In the Shulchan Aruch, mention is made of a post-Purim three-day fasting period to atone for any possible transgression that may have taken place on Purim while intoxicated. Such infractions could include insults, damages incurred or missing the daily prayers.

Even if not in a literal sense, much blood can be spilled on Purim. The Purim postpartum experience demands that we pray to undo the damage. Hence, the custom of a three-day fasting period after Purim carries much weight.

The Kabbalistic Zohar refers to Purim itself as a type of Yom Kippur, for on both days we go from suffering to enjoyment. However on Purim day, no one actually feels any kind of Yom Kippur spirit. In truth, the cathartic spirit of Purim is a post-Purim experience. In this realm, the reading of Parashat Parah on the Shabbat immediately after Purim plays a major function. Halacha draws many parallels between the High Priest’s Yom Kippur experience and those priests responsible for the preparation of the Red Heifer mixture.

Parashat Ki Tisa provides one of the sources for the High Priest not wearing his standard uniform of eight garments adorned in gold while performing the exclusive Yom Kippur activity. While confessing on behalf of the nation for the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe spells out the crime of fashioning a golden deity. The sin of the Golden Calf was the belief that G-d would actually masquerade as gold. The High Priest, in seeking atonement on behalf of the nation, would wear white as a sign of purification from the shining bright gold. And as the High Priest wore white on Yom Kippur, the priests assigned to the task of preparing the Red Heifer concoction wore white as well.

Another significant parallel can be viewed in the halacha that the High Priest was separated from his family for one full week prior to Yom Kippur. In the Talmud, the identical halacha is taught in reference to the priests who prepare the Red Heifer.

No doubt, Yom Kippur and Parashat Parah enjoy a common theme. In both cases, man confronts his tragic mortality while groping to connect somehow to the Infinite for security and salvation.

Atonement on Yom Kippur is attained due to the closeness of standing “before G-d.” So too, G-d’s presence is also perceived in the preparation of the Red Heifer mixture.

The Purim postpartum experience, as portrayed through Parashat Parah, allows us to gain deeper insights and feelings into the Yom Kippur side of Purim. Only then can the nation be properly prepared for the redemptive spirit of Pesach.

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1 Orach Chaim 686.
2 Tikkunei Zohar 21.
3 Shemot 32:31.
4 Mishna Yoma 1:1.
5 Yoma 2a.
WHO IS MELOTEC’S LEADERSHIP?
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(Applied mathematics) – musician, inventor.
Formerly Chief Scientist – Motorola Israel.

CO-FOUNDER
Kfir Luzzatto Ph.D.
musician, inventor and patent attorney.

CO-FOUNDER
Ran Luzzatto BSc
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Have a Start-Up? To be featured in this section, please email production@mizrachi.org
Israel’s political stalemate is debilitating in so many ways. Government decision-making in matters of economy, infrastructure, military budget, and more, has essentially been frozen since December 2018.

Worse still is that political paralysis may be diminishing perceptions of Israeli prowess and weakening Israel’s deterrence posture. Friend and foe alike may be beginning to wonder whether Israel has stable leadership capable of confidently asserting Israel’s diplomatic and defense priorities.

When friends like US President Trump are frustrated by Israel’s political instability and lose patience it’s bad enough. When foes like Iranian leader Khamenei mock Israel’s military and diplomatic gumption it’s dangerous.

Understand: the main reason that Israel has been able to avoid significant, full-scale war over the past decade, despite the many security threats thrown at it by the crumbling Arab Middle East and the marching-marauding Iranians, has been the assessment in global capitals that Israel is skillfully and defiantly led by a strong leader and coherent government.

Whether they liked Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or not, allies and adversaries knew that they faced determined Israeli leadership. Trump, Russian President Putin, German Chancellor Merkel, Egyptian President Sisi, Jordanian King Abdullah, Turkish wannabe-sultan Erdogan, and Palestinian and Iranian leaders too – knew of Israel’s strictly-set-out security red lines and resolute diplomatic principles.

They knew that Israel knew how to maneuver creatively on the global playing field to build new alliances and that Israel didn’t flinch from confrontation when truly necessary. At the very least, this bought Israel grudging respect and considerable strategic flexibility. This has allowed Israel to conduct a forceful “war between wars” against Iranian and Shiite militias in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq with relative impunity, without this erupting into comprehensive war.

But this stance – what amounts to Israel’s deterrence posture – requires constant care. Deterrence needs to be compellingly and consistently maintained or it loses its cogency. Like any agricultural field, it needs regular plowing, seeding, and especially weeding if it is going to yield a harvest.

Israel will be hard-pressed to maintain this deterrent posture if the political stalemate lingers for too much longer. Israel’s strategic situation doesn’t brook inertia. Israel simply can’t afford an endless leadership limbo.

Prolonged political uncertainty poses two different dangers: that Israel’s enemies will be tempted to take advantage of its infirmity, and that Israel will be unable to take advantage of emerging grand diplomatic opportunities.

It’s obvious that security tensions are bubbling very close to the surface, both versus Hamas in Gaza and Iranian forces in Lebanon and Syria. It is likely that the IDF soon will need to take action in these areas to degrade enemy capabilities and rebuild the long-term deterrence equation. The hot situation in the Persian Gulf could erupt into regional war too, and Israel may be implicated. This reality requires a stable government.

Equally concerning is that Israel risks missing strategic opportunities embedded in the Trump Mideast peace plan.

The Trump team clearly understands Israel’s need to prevent runaway Palestinian statehood; the emergence of a radical state that prolongs and exacerbates conflict with Israel instead of ending it. As such, the US plan dialed-back from the “international consensus” whereby Israel was expected to broker fully-fledged Palestinian states in the West Bank and Gaza.

And then, when the plan inevitably flounders on the shoals of Palestinian rejectionism ( alas), it seems likely that the US will support Israel’s long-term sovereign needs in the broad Jerusalem envelope, Jordan Valley and parts of Judea and Samaria. These are areas about which there is a broad political consensus in Israel. The Trump team already has said that it recognizes the inalienable right of Jews to live in Judea and Samaria as a matter of historical truth, international law and basic acknowledgment of reality.

This is an astounding shift in US policy, and Israel mustn’t flub the opportunity to capitalize on this. Again, this requires a stable Israeli government and preferably a broad one.

David M. Weinberg is vice president of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, jiss.org.il. His personal site is davidmweinberg.com
Israel is holding a historic third election. Sometimes historic is intended positively – this is not one of those instances. Not only is the Israeli government running out of money to cover the costs associated with the elections, but many Israeli citizens are running out of patience and interest in all things associated with the election. There is a general sense of frustration and political apathy.

After two elections in Israel with the same result of paralysis, one begins to feel impotent. It is hard to understand what will change by voting again. The coalitions may have shifted slightly on both the right and the left, but the final numbers still look disturbingly similar, implying that once again, no final government will be formed. Whether you support Blue and White or Likud, Yemin HaChadash or the new merged Labor and Meretz, it almost feels as if one’s vote doesn’t count. In the end, nothing gets resolved.

Lower turnouts to the ballot box matter, as does lack of broader engagement in the political process. When citizens stop being interested and connected with their political system, bad things happen. Studies have shown that the best defense of democracy is broad citizen involvement – implying that once again, no final government will be formed. Whether you support Blue and White or Likud, Yemin HaChadash or the new merged Labor and Meretz, it almost feels as if one’s vote doesn’t count. In the end, nothing gets resolved.

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Given these times of political exhaustion, apathy, or sense of ineffectiveness, we can learn an important message from Megillat Esther. One of the striking things in the Megillah is that G-d’s name is not mentioned at all – there was hester panim (literally a hiding of His face). This is explained as a method of teaching us – especially in exile – that in the end there is a larger force operating behind the scenes in their world: “Who knows if you were brought to your royal position if not for a time like this?” Mordechai points out to Esther. They act assertively to influence politics and policy.

Jews are taught that faith and prayer are important, but we must make our own hishtadlut (effort) – especially in these times of hester panim. We may not be living in Shushan, but there are still matters of life and death, issues around the future of the Jewish people in Israel and abroad, that will be determined by our elected leaders.

We have an obligation to engage politically in order to bring about the best possible policies for the Jewish people, and for all our fellow citizens. In spite of our exhaustion, we in Israel have to turn out for the third time and then pray that miraculously our elected leaders will come together to form the best possible government.

Dr. Sharon Goldman is a frequent speaker and writer on Zionism, the American-Jewish diaspora, and the US-Israel relationship.
Venahafochu
FROM PERSECUTORS TO PROTECTORS

Last Purim, the US Secretary of State sat down for an interview in Jerusalem with the Christian Broadcasting Network. In his televised remarks, Mike Pompeo claimed that President Trump is a modern-day Queen Esther, raised up by G-d to defend Israel against Iran, “for such a time as this.”

Pompeo’s interview set off a media firestorm about the growing influence of powerful Evangelical Christians on American foreign policy. More recently, Vice President Mike Pence, a devout Evangelical, recited the “Shehechiyanu” blessing in Hebrew at Yad Vashem, and a few days later, Evangelical pastors and Orthodox rabbis stood side by side in Washington, DC for the release of President Trump’s “Deal of the Century.”

Many in the Orthodox community are surprised to hear that Christian Zionists sound a lot like Religious Zionist Jews in recognizing the spiritual significance of the State of Israel. Others are understandably skeptical at this sudden outpouring of love from our historic adversaries. However, Chazal teach us that non-Jews recognizing the Hand of G-d and supporting the return of Am Yisrael to Eretz Yisrael is an integral part of the Atchalta DeGeula, the beginning of the Redemption, with great significance and special relevance on Purim.

There is a curious line toward the end of Megillat Esther. After the main narrative is over and the Jews are no longer in grave danger, it says, “And in every province and in every city, when the king’s command and decree arrived, there was gladness and joy among the Jews (yehudim), a feast and a holiday. And many of the people of the land were mityahadim for the fear of the Jews had fallen on them.”

The Ibn Ezra points out that mityahadim is an unusual word, in fact, this is its only appearance in the entire Tanach. Rashi explains it means mitgayrim, i.e. that many Persians converted to Judaism at that time. Others argue, based on the Gemara, that it disqualifies converts who are motivated by fear, and so the Da’at Mikra offers the possibility that it refers to many who “came close to the Jewish people.” Either way, this line serves as a dramatic capstone to the original miracle, and an appropriate example of venahafochu, where the very enemies who tried to harm us became our allies at the end of the story.

This verse not only teaches an important insight into our ancient history, but has great meaning for our present and future as well.

According to the Midrash, Purim has a unique position amongst the other holidays. “All holidays will be nullified in the future, but Purim will never be nullified.” The Rambam rules accordingly, that “all the books of Nevi’im and Ketuvim will be nullified in the days of Mashiah, except for Megillat Esther, which will endure.”

Commentators ancient and modern connect these two themes of the non-Jews coming towards the Jewish people and the eternal nature of Chag Purim and Megillat Esther.

Rabbeinu Bachaye and the Sfat Emet both explain that just like the non-Jews were mityahadim at the time of the Purim story, so too in the future, the nations of the world will turn toward the Jewish people. They both bring a proof from Zephania, whose prophetic vision for the world is simply incredible, “For then I will change (ehpoch) the nations and grant them purity of speech, so they will all call out in the name of G-d and serve Him with one accord.”

Throughout our history, the Jewish people have had few friends and many enemies, with new adversaries rising up in every generation. It’s hard to imagine that Rabbeinu Bachaye, who lived in medieval Spain under bitter Christian persecution, or the Sfat Emet, living in 19th century Poland, could have ever believed that so many Christians would venahafochu – transform from being our persecutors to our protectors.

Whatever mityahadim precisely means in Megillat Esther, we know that Yehudim comes from the root ‘to give thanks.’ As such, we should all go into this Purim with extra “gladness and joy” in deep appreciation for today’s mityahadim, the millions of non-Jews who G-d has sent to assist the Jewish people and stand with Israel, “for such a time as this.”

1 Esther 4:14.
2 Esther 8:17.
3 Yevamot 24b.
4 Yalkut Shimon Mishlei.
5 Rambam Hilchot Megillah and Chanukah 2:18.
6 Kad HaKemach Purim 1:5.
7 Purim 5662.
8 Zephaniah 3:9.

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Sefar Shoftim offers an insightful model for understanding our history. Enemies attack us because we have done something to violate our relationship with G-d. Their attack is not so much punishment as it is a wake-up call to reflect on our behavior and correct it. While that model works when there is a navi to help us interpret the events, it becomes that much more challenging when we are left to speculate what the proximate cause of our troubles is. When it comes to the Purim story, it behooves us to undertake a similar process. And although there is no navi, the text of Megillat Esther is an invaluable resource.

To be sure, there are many different ways of slicing the story of the Megillah, and many have offered fascinating layers of understanding which shed light on what precipitated the trouble in the first place. I’d like to share one insight that is often overlooked.

After Haman’s death, Mordechai and Esther achieve permission from the king to allow the Yehudim to fight back against their attackers. What would have been had they not received permission? Would they have sat passively, waiting for their enemies to slaughter them? A single word in the text reveals an entirely new layer. They did not ask for permission to fight back, but to gather as communities (lehikahel) and organize themselves to fight back. Indeed, this word appears repeatedly afterward to describe what the Yehudim did in preparation for the battle.

This idea takes on extra poignancy when we reflect on Haman’s initial charge against the Yehudim. When Haman presents his plan to the king, he portrays the Yehudim as a nation that is scattered and divided. Haman’s comment may have been intended to convey one idea to his king, yet through his words, we get an insight into what may have been plaguing us. We were a fragmented nation, and as such were threatening our very existence. All Haman did was notice this and highlight it, and his plan served as the catalyst for the repair which Mordechai and Esther figured out needed to happen.

The theme of Purim, as a reminder for us to invest seriously in building a wide umbrella to embrace a broad range of Jews, is reflected in some of the practices the Yehudim began in the days of the Megillah and which are still in place today. The mitzvah to have a seuda is fundamentally to gather with our closest friends and family and celebrate with them. That inner circle is expanded when we add mishloach manot, sending portions of our seuda to those who can’t physically be there with us. The final expansion of our sense of community is expressed in the mitzvah of matanot laEvyonim. These are people whom we don’t even imagine inviting to our meal, either in person or virtually (through mishloach manot). Despite that, we are instructed to keep them in mind and make sure that they have enough resources to be able to create their own seuda.

We live in an era of extreme communal fragmentation. People who won’t eat anyone’s hashgacha other than their own community’s; delegitimation of those who think differently than us, act differently than us, or look different than us; litmus tests to see if the other is kosher enough for us. The challenge takes on different forms in varying communities, and in Israel it is a burning issue affecting core questions such as conversion, control of religious services, marriage and divorce, the inclusion of non-Orthodox expressions of Judaism, the burial of Israeli soldiers who are not halachically Jewish, and so much more. That fragmentation is reminiscent of Haman’s description of the Yehudim in his time. If we are to learn from Purim, we need to place finding what unites us as our number one priority.

1 Esther 8:11.

Rabbi Dr. Zvi Grumet is a teacher, educator and innovative Tanach scholar.
When Iran Welcomed

By Professor Mikhal Dekel

In the summer of 1942, Bandar Pahlavi, a sleepy Iranian port town on the Caspian Sea, became a city of refugees. On its shores were clusters of tents, a quarantine area for typhoid patients and a large area for distributing food. Outside the tented area, local peddlers hung baskets of sweet cakes and sewing thread, disappearing periodically when club-wielding policemen appeared.

The refugees were Polish citizens who three years prior, with the outbreak of World War II, had fled into the Soviet Union and now, having journeyed nearly 5,000 miles, sailed from Soviet Turkmenistan to northern Iran. More than 43,000 refugees arrived in Bandar Pahlavi in March 1942.

A second wave of almost 70,000 came with the August transports, and a third group of nearly 2,700 was transferred by land from Turkmenistan to Mashhad in eastern Iran. Of these, 3,000 – perhaps more – were Jewish, including four rabbis and nearly 1,000 unaccompanied children taken from Polish orphanages in the Soviet Union. There were also several hundred Polish Jewish stowaways, recent converts to Catholicism, women who pretended to be married to Polish officers, and the like.

Those who arrived in Bandar Pahlavi on the first transports in March 1942 were placed in small hotels and in the Cinema Shir-o-Khorshid. The gravely ill were transferred to local hospitals, the mildly ill were quarantined in a separate tent area, and the rest were shaved, stripped of their lice-infested clothes, given a blanket and a new set of clothing and underwear, and within weeks transferred to one of six refugee camps in Tehran, Isfahan or Ahvaz.

The world the refugees entered was one in which the British and Soviet empires had not yet collapsed; the State of Israel had not yet been born; and the Islamic Republic of Iran was decades away from existence. Months earlier, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Anglo-Soviet troops invaded Iran, deposed and exiled the Germany-friendly Reza Shah, and anointed his pro-British son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who would go on to rule until 1979.

15-year-old Emil Landau, a Jewish boy from Warsaw, recalled his arrival in Iran in his diary:

“On the historic day of August 16, 1942... in 40 degrees and some weather, the first group of passengers leaves on the tugboat’s dock and after a half-hour sail arrives at the small port, Bandar Pahlavi. Difficult to transmit in writing the first impression. Each one feels as if he is born again, has come to a place out of this world. The port’s waters are littered with colorful boats; the surroundings are mowed lawns and flowerbeds; rows of impressive Chevrolets and Studebakers wait for transport, and everything seems good and beautiful, everything smiles together with the Persians, and with the Indian soldiers who gaze at the arrivals with pity. After we are onshore everyone hugs everyone.”

Iran was the dream of every Jewish and Christian Polish refugee in Central Asia, a respite from years of starvation in the Soviet Union. It was the first country they had encountered since the beginning of the war that had not been ravaged by war, hunger and disease.

“To us... it is a heaven,” Hayim Zeev Hirschberg, a Warsaw-born rabbi, wrote.

In Bandar Pahlavi, next to the 75-member Polish delegatura that welcomed the Polish refugees, stood a lone representative of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, the governing body of the Jewish population in then British-controlled Palestine. The man, Rafael Szaffar, had immigrated to Palestine from Poland before the war and had been clandestinely sent to Tehran to aid and organize Jewish refugees. Szaffar reported to the Agency that the Jewish refugees were arriving “swollen from starvation, dressed in rags” and looking “much worse than the Poles.”

Onshore in Iran, he met a Zionist activist and well-known lawyer from his Polish hometown and asked him to identify other Polish Jews among the refugees who had been active in Zionist movements in Poland. The lawyer pointed out 23-year-old David Lauenberg, a member of Hashomer HaTzair, the socialist Zionist movement. Before the war, Lauenberg had been an officer cadet in the Polish army.

When the war began, he fought in the first battle of Warsaw, was wounded, evacuated east, and eventually captured by the Red Army as a prisoner of war. After his release he tried to reenlist into the Polish Army in exile, but overhearing Polish soldiers at a recruitment center in Kremina saying, “How do we get rid of these filthy Jews? They are shoving themselves everywhere,” he bartered his jacket for a drunken soldier’s uniform and sailed to Iran as a stowaway.
I was furious to the bottom of my soul. Here I go to reenlist, and these Poles, with whom we fought side by side through the horror of the Gulags, in their eyes I was a filthy Jew again,” Lauenberg wrote. In Bandar Pahlavi, he was handed a fresh set of clothes and instructed: “Change your clothes, speak no language but Hebrew, and pretend you are an emissary from the Land of Israel.”

At that moment, Lauenberg wrote, “I was no longer a hapless refugee, a migrant without a home, but I belonged to a nation.” He assembled Jewish children from among the general Polish camps and was appointed director of what was known as Zydowski sierociniec – the Jewish orphanage – on the outskirts of Tehran.

Several hundred unaccompanied Jewish refugee children were transferred directly from Bandar Pahlavi to the Jewish orphanage, located inside Dushan Tappeh, a former Iranian air force base that now served as a refugee camp for Polish civilians. Five miles to the east of Tehran, with the silhouettes of the Alborz Mountains hovering above it, the camp had a handful of buildings – the air force’s former Technical University, some aircraft hangers, the artillery regiment building – and rows of barracks and canvas tents, six of which had been allocated to the Jewish orphanage.

“In the orphanage, I felt like a child again,” Lauenberg later wrote. “The orphanage was a place where I could be myself.”

Several hundred unaccompanied Jewish refugee children were transferred directly from Bandar Pahlavi to the Jewish orphanage, located inside Dushan Tappeh, a former Iranian air force base that now served as a refugee camp for Polish civilians. Five miles to the east of Tehran, with the silhouettes of the Alborz Mountains hovering above it, the camp had a handful of buildings – the air force’s former Technical University, some aircraft hangers, the artillery regiment building – and rows of barracks and canvas tents, six of which had been allocated to the Jewish orphanage.

Iran, with its decentralized, multiethnic, multilingual national makeup, so radically different from the nominally homogeneous European nation-states, tolerated (at least initially), the development of a Polish – and to a degree even a Jewish – independent state within its borders.

By early 1943, after rising bread costs spurred widespread demonstrations among the local population, the majority of Polish refugees – both Jewish and Christian – would flee Iran to India, Lebanon and Syria. The largest number would transfer to British-controlled Palestine.

There, Jewish children would be raised on kibbutzim, at boarding schools, and with foster families as future citizens of a Jewish state, while Polish children would attend Catholic schools in Jerusalem and Nazareth, and mixed schools in Tel Aviv. Like Tehran, Tel Aviv became a city of Polish refugees.

Polish citizens studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, conservatories, and technical schools; they played in jazz bands, directed plays, and held literary soirees. They published Polish-language periodicals: the Gazeta Polska, the Drozde, and printed new editions of books of Polish poetry, anthologies and textbooks from old editions owned by the Hebrew University. Alongside and sometimes together with the local Jewish population, they dispatched aid to Jewish and Christian refugees in the Soviet Union, Africa and elsewhere.

In Palestine, tensions between Christians and Jews subsided considerably. Most civilian Christian refugees stayed there until 1947 when the British Mandate over Palestine ended. Few remained forever.

Today, few Poles, Israelis, or Iranians remember this chapter in their history, though the traces – graves of Polish Jewish children in Tehran’s Jewish cemetery, graves of Poles in Jerusalem and Jaffa, plaques thanking G-d for the deliverance of Polish children from the Soviet Union to Jerusalem, memoirs written in Tehran and Tel Aviv – remain as testaments to this forgotten past.

It is ironic, even tragic, that in the 1940s, the leading cities of two countries now steeped in conflict with one another were cosmopolitan and mostly peaceful homes to thousands of refugees. But it also provides hope that one day, such a world might exist again.

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"My name is Chaim," I said, “but my friends call me Hymie.” The test examiner wrinkled her nose: “Hymie? That’s such a galut (exile-like) name!” I was momentarily speechless. “I like that name.”

That exchange took place almost 30 years ago, but it was only this year I realized why the examiner didn’t like my name. I discovered that Hymie is a stereotypical Jewish name in America, used perjoratively by Jew haters. Antisemitic pastor Jesse Jackson said in 1984 that New York was too Jewish, or in his own words: “Hymietown.” Evidently, because of this antisemitism, the lowest grade on my matriculation certificate was in spoken English.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the name Chaim is ranked 29th among the names given to babies in Israel. But I suspect that almost all of the 591 babies named Chaim in 2018 were born to ultra-Orthodox families. For those who are not Ultra-Orthodox, Chaim is also too exile-like.

Chaim really is an exile name, in the sense that it was created in exile. Non-biblical Hebrew names, which our ancestors renewed in exile, are very unpopular in Israel. Beautiful Hebrew names like Chaim and Nissim, Nachman and Rachamim and Saadia, have become very unacceptable to us because they carry connotations of older Jews living in the Diaspora. I thank my parents for granting me the name of my grandfather, the watchmaker from Lodz. And if he and his name ring of exile, I will happily live with that. If others avoid the name Chaim — which of course means ‘life’ — it’s their problem. However, unfortunately, this dislike of exile leads us to give up even more important things in life.

We would have preferred not to have experienced exile. But G-d willed it and we were sent into exile, and over those 2,000 years, we managed to create some very good things. Not only a few beautiful names, but also the Babylonian Talmud, and Maimonides, and the Vilna Gaon and the Baal Shem Tov, the Ben Ish Chai, and so on.

Exile was bad, but not everything that emerged from the exile was bad. Sometimes it is precisely in times of trouble and distress that people and nations discover their best qualities. Writer Stefan Zweig once said that it was only because of World War I that he learned to write properly, from his heart. He did not give up these new skills even when the war was over. In the years of exile, our ancestors suffered bitter and terrible torments, and out of them came a tremendous effort to reach transcendent heights, which no other people could attain.

On Shabbat, before Birkat HaMazon, we sing Psalm 126, Shir HaMaalot, “Song of Ascents,” which deals with the return to Zion. We proclaim, “They who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy.” It seems to me that the simple interpretation is that we sowed tears in the years of exile and now we can reap joy. I learn from this verse that the years of exile were not years of stagnation but years of sowing and planting. Will we now give up the fruits of this great national effort?

There are those who claim that our ancestors only began to develop a detailed and meticulous practice of worship in exile but this is not true. Anyone who learns Mishnah Shabbat or Mishnah Kelim will see that much before the exile we already had a detailed, multi-layered system in place. It is true that in exile our forefathers developed a supreme degree of dedication to these detailed laws. And although we may be ashamed of their failures, we must not give up on their huge achievements.

Immigrants usually lose their communal identity after one generation. This is certainly the case today for a lot of Israelis emigrating to America. Our exiled ancestors succeeded much more than we did. Wherever they went, they organized themselves into strong communities, through which the Jewish nation survived. They established unprecedented values of chesed, prayed together, studied together, preserved their culture and customs, and even judged themselves according to the laws of our teachings. All this was done by our exiled ancestors in the midst of an alienating and hostile environment.

I wish we could reach their level. We have much weaker stamina in the face of much easier pressures. I wish our Jerusalem was a little more “Hymietown.”
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The Talmud relates a conversation between Esther, Queen of Persia, and the Jewish Sages of her generation: “Esther sent to the Sages saying, Commemorate me for future generations.” The Sages, out of deference to Esther and her dedication and loyalty to the Jewish people, acquiesce to her request. Subsequently, Esther also requests of the Sages to “Write an account of me for posterity.” They agree to this as well. In this way, Esther merited that the Megillah of Esther was included in the Bible and is read twice annually on Purim.

Why didn’t Esther say, “Commemorate us for future generations” and “write an account of us for posterity,” as Mordechai was seemingly an equal partner in the volte-face and the miraculous events that took place in Shushan? Why did Esther not ensure that Mordechai too be immortalized for eternity? The Sages’ actions are even more astonishing, as they acceded to Esther’s demand and memorialized her alone in the title of the Megillah. They did not entitle it Megillat Mordechai, or at the very least Megillat Esther and Mordechai.

On a superficial level, we might suggest that Esther alone approached the Sages and asked that they “commemorate me for future generations.” It is for this reason that the Megillah is named for her. Moreover, it was Esther who facilitated the salvation and miraculous events and therefore the Megillah bears her name.

Another approach states that since the entire miracle was veiled and occurred beneath the surface – Mordechai heard Bigtan and Teresh plotting the murder of the king, he related the news to Esther, the plot and Mordechai’s involvement were registered in the king’s diary and then, at the appropriate time and in mysterious fashion, Mordechai received his reward and the flow of the story was completely reversed. For this reason, the Megillah is named Esther from the Hebrew word hester, hidden.

Mordechai was one of the Sages of the Sanhedrin. When the king’s decree to “destroy, kill, and cause all the Jews to perish” was issued and signed with the royal signet ring, it was only natural that Mordechai would tear his clothes, dress himself in sackcloth, go out to a public place, bemoan his fate and do everything in his power to reverse the decree.

As opposed to Mordechai, Esther, whose Jewish roots were tenuous and who came from what might even have been an assimilated family, and who presently sat tucked away in the palace as the Empire’s First Lady, could not be expected to act similarly. Esther thus surprised when she called Mordechai, ordered him to collect all of the Jews and endangered herself by approaching the king without being summoned.

When Esther chose to act, and urged Mordechai to act too, to save her family and the Jewish people, Esther had reached the highest echelon of society. When she approached the king without an invitation, she ran the risk of losing not only her glory and status but also her life.

Esther earned the right to request “commemorate me for future generations” and “write an account of me for posterity.” Esther merited that the Megillah would be written and preserved for future generations and would bear her name. In this way, the Sages wished to encourage Jews the world over, in every generation, to act for the benefit of their people. By initiating acts such as these, the Sages guaranteed that the agents would be enshrined in the annals of the Jewish people for posterity.

We are currently in the midst of elections for the World Zionist Congress, which, G-d willing, is scheduled to take place in October this year.

At the Congress, the members of the executive boards of the World Zionist Organization and the National Institutions will be elected for new five-year terms. The Congress will also set the priorities that guide its activities, its image and the allocation of its resources. The World Mizrachi Movement represents the Orthodox stream, which combines Torah and Science and Torah and State. Its representatives on the Zionist Executive are the ones who advocate and fight for the aforementioned issues. In acting for the benefit of the Jewish people, it is incumbent upon us to ensure the success of the Mizrachi Movement.
Born in Bobruisk, Belorussia (White Russia), Isaac Nissenbaum became an active Zionist at a very young age. While attending Volozhin, he joined the yeshiva’s secret nationalistic association called Netzach Yisrael, set up when the government forced the closure of the yeshiva. The society demanded that all its members declare their allegiance to Eretz Yisrael. In 1889, he married and moved to Minsk where he continued activities with Netzach Yisrael in secret and became known in public as one of the great darshanim (orators) of the time.

In 1893, Rabbi Nissenbaum was ordained and later in the year attended a secret Chovevei Zion meeting, headed by Rabbi Samuel Mohilever, where Mizrachi began as a religious section of Chibbat Zion. These two individuals developed a close working relationship and Nissenbaum moved to Bialystok in 1894 to become Rav Mohilever’s secretary, a position he retained until the latter’s death. It was during this time that Nissenbaum became known as a central figure in the Zionist Movement. He used his oratorical abilities, traveling through Russia, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, becoming known as the traveling Zionist preacher. He had a great influence on Orthodox Jewry as he spoke in a medium that they understood, including in his speeches many allusions and explanations of Midrashic and Zohar texts.

With the appearance of Herzl, Rabbi Nissenbaum became the link of communication between Herzl and Chovevei Zion. He was also among those who attended the First Zionist Congress and was later elected as one of the World Zionist Organization’s representatives in Russia. For seven months he would reside in Bialystok and for five months he would travel from place to place to organize activities on behalf of the new yishuv in Eretz Yisrael. In Warsaw, where he settled in 1901, he continued with his Zionist activities, attending all Zionist functions.

When Mizrachi was founded in 1902, Rabbi Nissenbaum served as secretary to their first congress. In 1905, during the Sixth Zionist Congress which considered the Uganda proposal, he traveled to Eretz Yisrael to fight against it and those who supported it. He fought vehemently against the proposal. After the Uganda proposal failed, he returned to Poland and continued his Zionist activities, even though such activity was outlawed and brought with it great personal danger. He also continued to speak every Shabbat in the Moriah Synagogue, a tradition he maintained for over 30 years. There he spoke one Shabbat a month in Hebrew and thus became the first darshan to speak in Hebrew in public.

At the 11th Zionist Congress, in 1913, Rabbi Nissenbaum once again began to take an active role in Mizrachi affairs. Coupled with his being an executive of the Polish Zionist Organization and one of the leaders of the Jewish National Fund, this made him the backbone of the large Mizrachi following in Poland and the surrounding countries. Among the most notable pamphlets he wrote was the first explanatory booklet of the ideals and goals of the Jewish National Fund (J.N.F.).

Following World War I, Rabbi Nissenbaum became editor of the weekly Mizrahi paper in Poland and in 1937 became head of the local Mizrahi Movement. As World War II began to engulf Europe, he refused to leave Poland and was murdered in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942. He left behind works on Zionism and copies of his speeches, including HaDat VeHaTechiya HaLeumit, HaYehadut HaLeumit and Imrei Derush. Kibbutz Be’erot Yitzchak, established on January 26, 1943, was named in his memory.
Today, many people associate Akko (Acre) with the impressive Crusader remains, the Bahai Gardens, or even the beach. However, there are multiple noteworthy Jewish sites in the city as well.

Akko is mentioned in Shoftim as part of the tribal land of Asher and is one of the cities that should perhaps celebrate Shushan Purim, as it was walled in the times of Yehoshua Bin-Nun. According to the Mishnah in Megillah, cities surrounded by a wall during the times of Yehoshua should celebrate Purim on the 15th of Adar, otherwise known as Shushan Purim.

The Rishonim ask, why go back to the times of Yehoshua to define which walled cities celebrate Shushan Purim as opposed to the time period of Purim itself? The Ramban, who lived in Akko for a short term following his Aliyah, explains¹ that there was an influx of Jews to Israel during the time of Achashverosh’s rule. At this time, many of the cities, including Yerushalayim, sat in ruin. The Sages were concerned that had they ruled that walled cities should celebrate Shushan Purim, it would have highlighted the desperate state of Eretz Yisrael, disheartening the returning Jews. By including all walled cities from the time of Yehoshua, the Sages were able to strengthen the Persian olim by reminding them of the glory of the Land, in addition to honoring the Land of Israel itself.

When visiting Jewish sites in Akko, one can explore both the old and new city. Just outside the entrance of the Crusader Hall is the Akko prison. The citadel, built during Ottoman rule, was used as a prison during the British Mandate period. Many famous members of the Jewish underground – the Haganah, Etzel and Lechi – were imprisoned here for their activities against the British in support of founding the Jewish State, including Ze’ev Jabotinsky and Moshe Dayan. On May 4, 1947, Etzel forces broke into the prison, freeing 41 underground members. Unfortunately, six were killed in the ensuing battle, and eight were recaptured. In addition, three members of the break-in force were killed and five were captured, three of them sentenced to death. Unlike the British prison in Jerusalem’s Russian Compound, a number of Jewish prisoners were hanged in Akko. Today, several rooms are open to the public, including prison cells, solitary confinement rooms, the break-in point, the gallows, and rooms that have been repurposed as memorials.

If one ventures further into the Old City of Akko, you will find the Ramchal’s Shul. The Ramchal, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, lived in Akko from 1743 to 1747, before he died there of the plague. His shul was one of two shuls in Akko at the time. Because of the beauty of its building, Dar-el-Omar, an autonomous Bedouin ruler of northern Israel during the Ottoman period, built a mosque in the shul in 1758 and moved the Jewish congregation to a smaller building, where it still stands today. While the Ramchal never actually prayed in this smaller building, it continues to bear his name as well as house a Torah scroll written by him, on gazelle hide with pomegranate ink, now on display there. In addition, near the Aron Kodesh, there is a pit a few feet deep, now covered over. The Chazan used to descend into this pit to pray “from the depths” as described in Tehillim 130: מִמַּעֲמַקִּים קְרָאתִיךָ ה. While the sanctuary is small and lacking a women’s section, it is a significant part of the Jewish story of the city, and well worth a visit.

Another remarkable shul in Akko is the Ohr Torah Synagogue, better known as the Tunisian Shul. Located in the newer part of the city, the shul was founded by Tunisian olim, Tzion Badash, in 1955. His idea was simple, and the outcome is magnificent. Almost every inch of the building’s interior is covered in mosaics depicting different scenes from Jewish history. The mosaics were produced by artists in Kibbutz Eilon and every tile is created from crushed natural rocks found around Israel. This magnificent site is still an active shul today. It is open during tefilla times or you can be in touch with Tzion’s daughter, who now helps coordinate private visits.

Considering its fascinating Jewish sites, Akko is definitely worth a stop during your next northern adventure.

¹ Megillah 2a.

Rivi Frankel is a tour guide in Israel working with individuals and groups from all backgrounds, and particularly with children and teens.
When Mordechai persuades Esther to intercede for her people, their conversation displays with painful clarity how a human being responds to a situation in which G-d withholds communication from her.

In this crucial scene, Mordechai plays a strangely oblique role. Wearing sackcloth, he approaches the palace gate, knowing that the law forbids him to enter. He simply waits by the gate, making no attempt to send Esther a message. Esther's servants report his silent appearance; she sends a change of clothing, but he refuses to accept it. In other words, he claims her attention by the report of his costume but refuses to speak directly to her, since that would mean divesting himself of his mourning. She then takes the initiative, summoning a messenger—"to know why and wherefore."

From this point on, the dialogue is conducted solely through a third party. They do not see each other and the messenger carries their words. Mordechai tells her of "all that has befallen him," of the edict of destruction against the Jews. He instructs her to beseech the king for her people's lives.

The Midrash picks up on the expression "all that had befallen him," hearing in it a reference to Mordechai's dream – his source of knowledge. "Befallen" suggests a chance event – unpredictably, in a dream, knowledge has "happened" to him. Esther responds unequivocally, on the basis of her own knowledge: the end is clear for anyone who approaches the king unsummoned. Everyone knows her fate will be death. The alternative is almost purely hypothetical – "unless the king extends his golden scepter to her" – particularly in view of the fact that the king has shown no interest in her for 30 days.

This last observation comes as a shock to the reader. If the king has lost interest in Esther, the possibility of a providential purpose to this marriage vanishes. Even if, on the most sanguine reading of the text, the threads of Divine intentionality have been prepared over the course of many years, their convergence at this moment of need has been foiled by the whim of the king's fancy.

A month earlier, Esther might have responded differently to Mordechai's plea, confident she could use the king's love to save her people. Now, if she attempts to approach the king, she will surely die.

Mordechai's answer is almost aggressive in its directness: if the people are destroyed, Esther will die as well. But they will be saved by some other means, and she will perish, and who knows? Perhaps she was positioned in the palace for just such an opportunity?

Mordechai offers her nothing in the way of encouragement or security. He withdraws the support of any privileged knowledge. It is no more than a possibility, a hypothesis, that she was placed in this position precisely for this moment of crisis. If the king does indeed extend his scepter to her, the providential possibility will have demonstrated its truth.

But at this moment, what is to impel her to risk her life? No providential knowledge, no prophecy, not even an intuition – merely a *Who knows?* – a fiction that may retrospectively make sense of the whole narrative.

Moreover, while Mordechai does have faith that the people will be saved in one way or another, he cannot cover Esther with that mantle of confidence. All he can tell her is "if you keep silent at this moment ..." In the words of the Midrash, "If you are silent now, and do not defend your people, you will have nothing to say in the world to come."

Throughout her marriage, Esther has remained silent about her origins. Now Mordechai, who commanded that silence, urges her to break it. That silence was for the sake of this moment. Now she must speak, take up a position, or else lose her voice forever. This moment is all she has, her chance to make herself heard. But who knows?

In her crisis, she is alone. Mordechai will not blur the stark nature of her situation. At this moment, he is no longer her touchstone, her tutor, nurturer, father, mother. Even his visual presence is withheld from her. She had opened the dialogue with a wish to know. When he replies, *Who knows?*, he cuts the traces of her dependency and springs her free.

*Adapted from The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious.*

**Esther Sprung Free**

**Dr. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg** has taught Torah at leading institutions in Jerusalem for the last 30 years.
Makkat Hachoshech – The Plague of Darkness
According to Midrash Rabbah, the ninth plague – darkness – took place in Adar. There is a debate as to how long the darkness lasted, with the Midrash Leckach Tov stating that darkness lasted just three days, while the Midrash Rabbah states that every plague lasted for one month, i.e. the entire month of Adar was plunged into darkness!

Moshe Rabbeinu’s Birthday and Date of Death
According to tradition, the seventh of Adar is the date of Moshe’s death. It is also the date of his birth, 120 years earlier. It is believed that Moshe was born in Adar I and died in Adar II.

The Torah says that no-one knows Moshe Rabbeinu’s exact burial place, “even to this day.” From this idea, the Israel Defense Forces have designated this day to remember those soldiers who fell in battle yet their bodies have not been found or identified. On Mount Herzl, there is a wall with the names of 588 fallen soldiers whose burial places are unknown.

Completion of the Second Beit Hamikdash
A little more than 50 years after the destruction of the First Temple, the Babylonians, who had destroyed the First Beit HaMikdash, were vanquished by the rising Persian Empire. The Persian king, Cyrus the Great, soon authorized the Jews to rebuild the Temple, but construction ground to a halt due to interference by the Samaritans. Exactly 70 years after the destruction of the First Beit HaMikdash, the Jews began building again.

“And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.”

On the third day of Adar, the construction of the Second Beit HaMikdash was completed, 20 years after work had begun!

Choni the Circle Maker Prays for Rain
According to the Talmud, on the 20th of Adar, when G-d had not sent rain yet that winter, Choni drew a circle in the dust, stood inside it, and informed G-d that he would not move until it rained. When it began to drizzle, Choni told G-d that he was not satisfied and expected more rain; it then began to pour. He explained that he wanted a gentle rain, at which point the rain calmed to a normal rain.

While Adar is most famous for Ta’anit Esther, Purim and Shushan Purim, there are actually a number of historically significant days that occurred during this month.

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in History

He was almost put into cherem (excommunication) for this incident, in which he showed “dis-honor” to G-d. However, Shimon ben Shetach, Queen Shlomtzion’s brother, excused him, saying that he was Choni and had a special relationship with G-d.

**YOM NIKANOR AND YOM TURIANUS**

The 12th of Adar, known as Yom Turianus, and the 13th of Adar, Yom Nikanor, are two examples of minor Second Beit HaMikdash holidays that appear in Megillat Ta’anit. These are days on which it was forbidden to fast or to eulogize. Yom Nikanor celebrated the death of Nikanor, a Greek general, who would wave his hand at Yerushalayim and its environs and say, “When will this fall into my hands so that I can crush it?” He was captured and killed when the Chashmonaim succeeded in driving the Greeks out of Israel.

Yom Turianus celebrated the death of Trajan, a Roman officer who put two Jews – Pappas and Luley-nanus – to death. Before doing so, he mocked them publicly, challenging the Jewish G-d to intervene on their behalf, as He was reputed to have done on behalf of Chananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

**PURIM OF VINZ**

This communal Purim, on the 20th day of Adar, commemorates the persecution and expulsion of the Jewish population of the Frankfurter Judengasse during the Fettmilch Uprising in 1614 and their restoration to their homes on the order of the German emperor in 1616. The antisemitic leader of the uprising, Vincent Fettmilch, styled himself as the “New Haman” and propagated attacks on the Jewish community. In a final attack, the Jews were expelled and their property confiscated.

Several months later, the German emperor ordered that Fettmilch be executed for the injustice; his beheaded and quartered corpse was hung on the gates of the city. Fettmilch’s house was also razed, and an account of his crimes and punishment was engraved on a pillar at the site. The Frankfurt authorities welcomed the Jewish population back with military honors. A “Vincent Megillah” was composed in Hebrew and Yiddish by Rabbi Elchanan HaElen.

1 Devarim 34:6.
2 Ezra 6:15.
3 Taanit 23a.
4 See Daniel 3.
In contrast to Yirmiyahu, who envisions Bnei Yisrael’s redemption from the Exile as a process that begins with teshuva, Yechezkel foresees the possibility of a redemption process that may begin even without teshuva:

“Say to the House of Israel: ... Not for your sake will I act, but for the sake of My holy Name, which you have profaned among the nations. And the nations shall know that I am the L-rd when... I will take you from among the nations and gather you in from all the countries and bring you back to your own land.”

According to Yechezkel, a redemption process may begin even if Bnei Yisrael are not worthy, however – for an interesting reason, relating to how non-Jews may view the very presence of a Jewish community outside their Land.

“And when they came to the nations... they profaned My holy name; in that people said of them: ‘These are the people of G-d, yet they had to leave His Land!’

Therefore I am concerned for My holy Name that Bnei Yisrael have caused to be profaned among the nations to which they have come.”

For this reason, G-d may redeem His people even though they are not deserving, in order that His Name will no longer be profaned among the nations [“lema’an shemo”].

Clearly, Yechezkel would prefer for the redemption process to begin in the manner described by Yirmiyahu. However, Yechezkel claims that even if this teshuva process is not initiated by Bnei Yisrael, G-d will nonetheless redeem His people.

A similar theme is found earlier in Yechezkel’s description of Bnei Yisrael’s redemption from Egypt. G-d’s original hope was for Bnei Yisrael to perform teshuva before the plagues began:

“On the day that I chose Israel... when I made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt ... when I said ‘Ani Hashem Elokeichem’... that same day I swore to take them out of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey... And I said to them [at that time]: Each man must rid himself of his detestable ways, and not defile himself with the fetishes of Egypt, [for] ‘Ani Hashem Elokeichem’.

But they rebelled against Me, ‘velo avu lishmoa aylai,’ no one rid himself from his detestable ways, no one gave up the fetishes of Egypt, and I resolved to pour out My fury upon them.”

Yechezkel states explicitly what Sefer Shemot had only alluded to: G-d had called upon Bnei Yisrael to repent prior to the Exodus to be worthy of their redemption. He had instructed them to cleanse themselves of the tumah of their Egyptian culture in preparation for G-d’s revelation “beShem Havaya.” However, Bnei Yisrael did not listen.

Bnei Yisrael may have not been deserving redemption at that time, however Yechezkel explains that G-d saved them from Egypt primarily for the sake of His Name:

“But I acted for the sake of My Name in order that it not be profaned in the sight of the nations [‘va’as lema’an shemi...’]

Hence, Yechezkel foresees that Bnei Yisrael’s redemption from the Babylonian Exile may occur in a manner similar to their original redemption from Egypt. It may begin even if the Jewish people are not worthy, however once the process begins and G-d brings the people back to their land, at a later stage in the process, they will ultimately need to perform proper repentance. As the prophet explains, this teshuva process will be symbolized by the sprinkling of water:

“And I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall become clean: I will cleanse you from all your tumah... And I will give you a new heart and new spirit... in order that you will once again follow My laws and observe My rules. Then you shall dwell in the Land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people and I will be Your G-d...”

This concept of ‘sprinkling of water upon you’ to cleanse you from your sins’ is quite similar to the Laws of the ‘Parah Adumah’ – where the sprinkling the “mei chatat” will cleanse an individual who became “tamei”. Most likely, this is why this chapter was chosen as the Haftarah for Parashat Parah.

Therefore, based on Yechezkel, Parashat Parah should remind us not only of our technical need to cleanse ourselves from tumat met in order to bring the Korban Pesach, but more so to remind ourselves that should we find ourselves in a redemption process from Exile that begins without teshuva, it is incumbent upon us to mend our evil ways and repent properly during that process so that it can continue in the most ideal manner.

3. Ibid. 20-21.
4. Ibid. 20:5-8.
5. See ibid. 20:9-10.

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Purim
Remedy Before Ailment

"After these events, King Achashverosh promoted Haman…" 1

This verse is written following the story in the Megillah in which Mordechai saves King Achashverosh’s life by exposing Bigtan and Teresh’s attempt to assassinate him. The Gemara 2 comments that this is an illustration of the principle that G-d is יַמְדִּיצָה רְפוּאָה לַמַּכָּה — He does not strike the Jewish people unless He has already created a remedy beforehand. The story of Mordechai saving Achashverosh’s life will play an instrumental role in the salvation of the Jewish people from Haman later in the Megillah.

The notion that G-d creates the antidote to the suffering before the suffering comes to pass is difficult to understand. What is the difference to the ailing individual if the solution to his problem comes into existence before or after his suffering? Either way, he will first suffer and subsequently be healed.

The Malbim 3 explains that G-d creates the remedy before the suffering in order to teach us that we should not view our challenges in a vacuum. We should not despair and feel abandoned; quite the opposite! Even in the midst of suffering the Jewish people know that G-d already has salvation set up. Today’s suffering is G-d’s way of preparing us and leading us to the great things He has in store for the future. The Malbim compares this to a person who must undergo surgery. Before the surgery, he prepares all that is necessary to aid in his recovery. Obviously, not only these preparations but the surgery itself is for his own good.

The Kedushat Levi explains this idea by comparing it to someone who has a small vessel and wants to expand it and make it larger. In order to do so, the smaller vessel must first be broken, and only then can he build on it and make it bigger.

In Parashat Beshalach the Torah says כל המחלות פוגשו עמל ארץ מצרים אל מצרים, “all of the sicknesses which I have placed upon Egypt I shall not place upon you because I am G-d your healer.” Rav Chaim Paltiel asks what healing is necessary if G-d is saying we won’t get sick in the first place. The Malbim explains based on the above idea. The sicknesses that were put upon the Egyptians were to their detriment. Not so with the suffering of the Jewish people. Although we also must endure suffering, it is ultimately for our benefit. G-d is using that suffering to elevate us to greater spiritual heights.

As we enter the month of Adar, מִשֶּׁנִּכְנָס אֲדָר מַרְבִּין בְּשִֹמְחָה, we eagerly anticipate the fulfillment of the verse in the Megillah, וְנַהֲפוֹךְ הוּא אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלְטוּ הַיְּהוּדִים הֵמָּה בְּשׂנְאֵיהֶֽם, “there will be a reversal and the Jewish people shall rule over their enemies.” We pray that all the sufferings of our people will come to an end and that we may see how they were G-d’s way of bringing us to our ultimate destiny of being a sovereign people in our homeland with the building of the Beit HaMikdash speedily in our days!

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1 Esther 3:1.
2 Megillah 13b.
3 Esther 2:21.

Rabbi Aryeh Ifrah is a Senior Ram at Yeshivat Torat Shraga
In the reading of Shabbat Zachor, the Torah uses the word *karecha* (met you) to describe Amalek’s encounter with the Israelites. Maharal connects this word to *mikreh* (chance), and explains that Amalek represents the ideology that everything in the world takes place by chance. There is no sense, order or plan to the world. Whatever you suggest or believe, the opposite is also possible and feasible. There are no absolutes, no standards.

Megillat Esther also speaks to this ideological question. My rebbe, Rav Michael Rosensweig, once explained that at first glance, the respective perspectives of Esther and Mordechai exemplify differing attitudes towards the moral relativism of Amalek. On the one hand, Esther seems to embrace a more subjective approach to the truth – she is purposefully deceitful, rising to royalty while disguising her real identity. Picking up on this, the Talmud questions how she was able to compromise religious standards in her relationship with the king. She is reluctant to act even when the nation is endangered. Even in her plea with Achashverosh, she maintains that she would not have intervened if the stakes were only to prevent *Klal Yisrael* from being enslaved.

In contrast, Mordechai stands up for his religious convictions, notwithstanding the evident danger. The Megillah depicts his refusal to bow to Haman in the future tense as well, *לָכָּה לֹא יִכְרַע יִכְרַע וְלֹא יִֽשְׁתַּחֲוֶֽה* – he would not bend nor bow, emphasizing that his conduct stemmed from an unshakeable conviction that could not change. He maintains absolute trust in Divine Providence, *וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם לְעֵת כָּזֹאת הִגַּעַתְּ* – And who knows, perhaps you have attained the royal position for just such an event!

However, upon further examination, while Mordechai and Esther surely played different roles, they also worked in concert, and their approaches were not mutually exclusive. Indeed, Esther’s subterfuge was actually at Mordechai’s request. Also, when diplomacy and prayer ran its course, Esther repeatedly put her own survival at risk to ensure the survival of *Klal Yisrael*.

As the story of Esther nears its conclusion, the Megillah itself is depicted as *דִּבְרֵי שָׁלוֹם וֶאֱמֶֽת* – matters of peace and truth. From this striking phrase, the Gemara derives that the Megillah requires *sirtut* (engraved lines) like *amitah shel Torah* – the Truth of Torah. *Shalom* and *Emet* are usually seen as contrasting values: peace is associated with diplomacy and compromise, and truth often identified with unyielding steadfastness and even inflexibility in the protection of the just and the right. *Sirtut* in the Megillah highlights the presence of order and structure in service of an absolute moral standard – the very opposite of Amalek’s relativistic worldview.

As we analyze our own *Avodat Hashem* in a world which is growing increasingly relativistic – where the very idea of objective truth is mocked as outdated – Megillat Esther can inspire us to consider how we can further our commitment to *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael* through the moral and religious standards of Torah that have animated us for generations.

Rabbi Dr. Yehuda Seif is the Rosh Yeshiva and Executive Director of Yeshivat and Midrashet Torah v’Avodah

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2. Ohr Chadash 4.
3. Sanhedrin 74b.
7. Megillah 16b.

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NAME OF EVENT
“Talking in Shul” Series

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN RUNNING THE EVENT
We are currently in our third season of the series. Each season has been held on Friday nights in the winter.

TARGET DEMOGRAPHIC
Adults and teens.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
40–50 people.

WHY DID YOU START THE EVENT?
Our rabbi, Rabbi Larry Rothwachs, initiated the “Talking in Shul” series in response to conversations with shul members on varying sensitive topics and upon recognizing the need for an open forum where these topics could be discussed in a safe and non-confrontational environment.

WHAT IS THE EVENT?
On Friday night, following the Shabbat meal at home, members return to the shul for open discussions on sensitive and controversial issues. Rather than deliver a lecture, Rabbi Rothwachs introduces the topic and then moderates a discussion among participants. Topics covered are ones not usually covered in a regular shiur or drasha format such as “Jewry’s Jury: Racism in the Orthodox Community,” “Frum a Distance: When Family and Friends Leave Orthodoxy,” and “All Smiles: Exhibiting Healthy Self-Expression in the Age of the Selfie.”

HOW HAS THE EVENT IMPACTED THE COMMUNITY?
These programs have been profoundly effective in creating open, honest, and respectful dialogue about numerous issues of great relevance and significance to the members of our community.

ADVICE FOR THOSE WHO WOULD LIKE TO START SOMETHING SIMILAR IN THEIR COMMUNITY
The starting point would be to consult with your local Rabbi and understand your community and whether there is interest in this type of program.

For more information or advice, contact Rabbi Larry Rothwachs at rabbi@bethaaron.org
Persian Red Tape: Reflections on Megillat Esther

by Dr. Erica Brown

We open the Megilla and walk straight into Ahasuerus’s palace as a guest from Shushan. First, there’s the sumptuous banquet with the notables of ancient Persia, eyeing all the objects on display set out to impress us. It doesn’t matter if we’re a little late because the party will last for half a year: “For no fewer than a hundred and eighty days, he displayed the vast riches of his kingdom and the splendid glory of his majesty”(1:4).

On day 180, Ahasuerus opened his home for seven days to all in Shushan, “high and low alike;” this is a great time to encourage friends to gawk who didn’t make the first cut. The text also invites us to look high and low, from ceiling to floor, while in this magnificent towering residence, at a building and a lifestyle totally out of reach for the average resident of one of the king’s 127 provinces: “Hangings of white cotton and blue wool, caught up with cords of fine linen and purple wool to silver rods and alabaster columns; and there were couches of gold and silver on flooring of marble, alabaster, mother-of-pearl and mosaics”(1:6).

Next, we’ll walk to the bar, where “royal wine was served in abundance as befits a king, in golden goblets, goblets of varied design”(1:7). Most importantly, no restrictions were placed on the alcohol. Joining the king in his inebriated state, we can watch a dramatic royal meltdown after the king appointed not one, but seven of his courtiers, to fetch Vashti, his wife. Another seven ministers would be summoned to discuss the legal protocol required in response to Vasthi’s refusal, whereupon Vasthi would be banished and an edict created for every marriage in the empire. It’s all been very entertaining.

Just as we are ready to go home, tanked up with some great gossip, the vast postal apparatus was operationalized to get word out: “Dispatches were sent out to all the provinces...” (1:22). So many horses. So many riders. We’d report on this exciting detail, too, to all our friends and neighbors outside Shushan who weren’t invited. What power, what beauty, what luxury we encountered. We could discuss it all for hours.

There is no chapter in Tanakh like the first chapter of Esther. We have few buildings described in Tanakh, and none of them belonging to a Gentile king. We have Israelite monarchs but none described with the governmental trappings accompanying Ahasuerus. Everything about him and his reign is excessive – from his holdings to his temper – and will soon turn oppressive, and not only towards the Jews. The young women in this book will be decorative ornaments used to satisfy the king’s lust and then thrown into a second harem, never to return to their families. Jews will be threatened with annihilation but will live. Tens of thousands of Persians, however, will die. They will be unprotected by their very government because of the stringency and inflexibility of outdated laws.

The most influential unnamed character in the Book of Esther is introduced in chapter one: bureaucracy. It’s the silent, pervasive presence with which every named character must contend. It seduces and manipulates. Once we acknowledge it, we cannot help but see bureaucracy everywhere as an unwieldy, machine-like apparatus that entangles and obstructs. American politician, Eugene McCarthy, once quipped, “The only thing that saves us from bureaucracy is its inefficiency.” But inefficiency also has its dangers. It not only saves. It kills. Esther is a referendum on the bureaucracy of diaspora life and the dangers of a place where Jews have no autonomy, where we are subjected to the twin and contradictory problems of exile: rigidity and randomness. Wary of its many trappings, Esther asks us to reach deeper and higher than someone else’s irrational rules and superficial priorities. We answer to a Higher Authority.

Dr. Erica Brown is the author of Esther: Power, Fate, and Fragility in Exile, the newest volume in the Maggid Studies in Tanakh series. Esther is now available from www.maggidbooks.com and at Jewish bookstores.

A PURIM GIFT FROM KOREN PUBLISHERS
BIRA

How should Shushan HaBira be translated? A very popular option is “Shushan the capital.” That seems to make sense – in Modern Hebrew bira means “capital,” and Shushan was the capital of Persia. However, that’s not what the word meant when the Megillah was written.

The word appears in later biblical books like Nechemia, Divrei HaYamim, and Daniel, where it referred to a building; either a fortress or palace or in some cases, the Temple. It did not mean a city. And in Megillat Esther, there are distinct references to Shushan HaBira and the City of Shushan (Ha’ir Shushan). And these aren’t synonyms, because in some verses both phrases appear.

Knowing that bira meant “fortress” helps us understand a number of difficult passages:

In verse 1:5 it says that the king made a banquet in his garden for everyone who lived in Shushan HaBira and the City of Shushan (Ha’ir Shushan). And so today those two are placed together: ir bira means “capital city.”

MEDINA

In the beginning of Megillat Esther, it says that Ahashverosh ruled over 127 medinot. What is a medina?

The meaning has changed significantly over the years. The word comes from the same root as the word din, “law,” and so originally had the meaning “judisdiction.” It appears in the later books of the Bible (like Esther), and meant “province” or “district.”

In Aramaic, however, medina meant “city” (perhaps influenced by the Greek polis – meaning “city-state.”) This meaning of the word entered Hebrew in the Rabbinic period, and while there are Rabbinic writings where it still meant “province” or “land,” it was commonly understood as city. In fact, it was likely the Aramaic-speaking Jewish residents that started calling the Arabian city Yathrib “Medina” – i.e. “the city.”

Whether medina meant a province or a city, it never referred to a sovereign country. So why is the independent nation of Israel known as Medinat Yisrael?

This goes back to Herzl, whose initial vision of Zionism appeared in a pamphlet called Der Judenstaat (The Jews’ State). During the 19th century, the concept of “state” in Europe was going through a transformation. Instead of being merely a province, or a division of a federation, it took on the sense of an independent country. And so when the Zionist leaders were looking for a word for the new country, medina was a good option. Like “state,” it had gone through that change in meaning, and unlike mamlisha – “kingdom” – it didn’t have any connotation of royal rule.

Modern Hebrew uses both medina and “polis.” We have medinuiot for “policy,” but politika for “politics.” And while medinai and politikai are basically synonyms, medinai – “statesman” sounds a little more noble than politikai – “politician.” Even the royal mamlisha found its way into Modern Hebrew. Mamlishi is difficult to translate, but it combines the senses of “national,” “of the state,” and “official.” It ultimately tried to capture the reverence the people once had for the king, and transfer that to the state. For a people whose medina had been a subservient district at best, instead of an independent state for so long, such an aspiration is quite understandable!

1 Esther 3:15, 8:14-15.
Why isn't Hallel recited on Purim?

Why, unlike nearly all other holidays, is Hallel not recited on Purim? The Gemara presents three answers:

1) Hallel is not recited over any miracle that took place outside of Eretz Yisrael, and the Purim miracle happened in Persia, the kingdom of Achashverosh.

2) Rav Nachman theorized that the reading of the Megillah itself is an act of reciting Hallel.

3) Rava explained that at the beginning of Hallel we recite Psalm 113, which starts: “Hallelu-yah, hallelu avdei HaShem,” meaning, that we, servants of HaShem, praise Him. Therefore, on Pesach, for example, we recite “Hallelu avdei HaShem,” because we were saved from enslavement under the Egyptian Pharaoh and became servants of HaShem. However, with the Purim miracle, although the Jews were saved from death, they remained under the rule of Achashverosh. As such, Hallel is not read on Purim.

[TO READ THE REST OF MASECHET MEGILLAH, visit our website: www.talmudisraeli.org]

ILLUSTRATION OF THE WEEK — Put on your thinking cap!

LOOK CLOSETLY AT THE ILLUSTRATION AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. Who is the woman in the illustration?
2. Who are the two men standing at the gate?
3. Who is the man next to the woman and what is the woman giving him?
4. Where did the event depicted in the illustration take place?
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