Happy Purim!

This issue is dedicated in loving memory of Professor Cyril Domb by his wife and children.
Absolute evil has existed for millennia. It constitutes a single-minded, systematic focus to destroy all good in the world. According to Torah tradition, it has a name. Amalek. The Torah commands us to always remember and never forget what Amalek represents.

This is the essence of Parashat Zachor. Our Sages instituted an annual public Torah reading on the Shabbat preceding Purim, lest we forget Amalek’s role in world affairs. The saga of the most infamous Amalekite, Haman, at the heart of the Megillah, is a sobering reminder of the existence of absolute evil and our obligation to confront it.

Final Solutions

Having mentioned absolute evil, most situations in life are not so black or white. Certainly in ethical terms, little is absolutely good or absolutely bad, but rather nuanced with many shades of moral grey. Nevertheless, world and Jewish history are testament to the undeniable existence of destructive ideologies of significant evil.

Haman’s intention was to kill every last Jew in all 127 countries of Achashverosh’s global empire in one day. His Final Solution was on the brink of implementation. It was only through the grace of G-d and the actions of Mordechai and Esther that his plan was thwarted at the last minute. Thousands of years later, Hitler declared the same intentions. Tragically, he succeeded in murdering one third of the Jewish people, and if not for the hand of Providence guiding the actions of the Allied Forces, he would have gone much further. Unstopped and unchecked, this type of evil would, G-d forbid, destroy every last Jew wherever they are.

The Perennial Battle

Even though Amalek no longer exists as a nation, it most certainly exists as an ideology. Its goal is to eradicate everything good in the world – first the Jewish people, and all those who stand for morality and justice.

Remarkably, only two nations are called רֵאשִׁית, the first of nations – the Jewish people and Amalek.

The point is clear. These two nations are pitted against each other in the perennial battle of good versus evil. Just as on an individual level we battle constantly between our good and evil impulses, so too these forces struggle with one another on a cosmic level – the collective mission of the Jewish people as opposed to that of Amalek.

The struggle between good and evil is at the core of much literature and art. Because it is so central to the psychological and historical reality of the human condition. Heroes and villains are locked in constant battle.

Individuals and societies possess both the passion for altruistic good and the impulse for self-destructive evil. Israel’s mission is chiefly the former; Amalek’s the latter.

It was not by chance that Amalek was the first nation to attack Israel, as soon as we came out of Egypt. This can be sourced from Parashat Zachor. Here are two remarkable points which highlight Amalek’s pursuit of evil:

“How he happened upon you on the way and cut off all the stragglers at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and he did not fear G-d” (Deuteronomy 25, 17-19).

Finally, there is no stated motive for this attack. Amalek was not motivated by any normative political or military reasoning. Theirs was not a battle over land or religion nor a war of defense, deterrence or display of regional power. They chose to attack for no reason other than to commit evil for its own sake. To sow darkness at the very dawn of Israel’s aspirations to be ‘a light unto the nations.’

Secondly, Amalek always intentionally targets innocent civilians.

Their is not a regular military confrontation but rather a purposeful and systematic attack on those lagging behind: the elderly, the young, the weak and the infirm. They attacked the most vulnerable and defenseless in society.
Amalek Today
Amalek-type evil has taken on a new name. Terrorism. The aim of international terrorism is to do exactly what its name implies: to terrorize anywhere and everywhere. The acceptable international norm in military interaction is that an army confronts another, and only combatants in uniform fight against their counterparts. Civilians are beyond the pale of ideological and military conflict. An Amalek mindset operates differently. It is specifically the civilians, the non-combatants, who are the aim of their terror.

Hamas and Hezbollah terrorize Israeli civilians just getting on with their lives. Al-Qaida, ISIS and the like do the same in cities around the world. Iran today is the greatest supporter of international terror and has its own diabolical aspirations for nuclear hegemony. 9/11 showed us just what warped minds of terror could conjure up. There seems to be no limit to the immoral perversion and distortion of heart and mind.

Terrorism, as fitting for an Amalek-type ideology, exists outside the moral consensus and international convention of normative political, military and societal living.

Yet if one thing is clear, understandable and proven about Amalekite anti-Semitism it is this – it begins with the Jews but never ends with them. One can be sure it will spill over to all fair-minded, good people around the world. Buildings and planes in New York, trains in Madrid, buses in London, night clubs in Bali, schools in Toulouse, stores in Paris and coffee shops in Sydney are all fair game. Radical Islamic terror is the latest incarnation of Amalek’s global mission.

The Leaders’ Crucial Role
Therefore it is incumbent on statesmen and leaders to comprehend the challenge of dealing with Amalek.

It was Mordechai who had this clarity of moral vision and courageous t emoji to stand up to Haman. It was his and Esther’s heroic leadership, with assistance from Above, that prevented the total annihilation of the Jewish people.

What would have happened to Europe, and beyond, if not for the heroic leadership of Winston Churchill in the 1940s? Charles Krauthammer, America’s sorely missed preeminent columnist, argued that Churchill’s role in confronting Nazism was so indispensable that it made him the most important person of the 20th century. 1 What enabled Churchill to be the right statesman at the right time was his absolute clarity of vision of what Nazism stood for and aspired to achieve and what the right response was to that evil.

From countless articles in the 30s, it is evident that he, more than anyone else, understood and articulated the looming threat. In 1935, many branded him as an extremist sowing panic and viewing the world in simplistic, black-and-white terms. By 1940, none of his critics could doubt him. In our nuclear age, Churchill’s brand of leadership, courage and clarity of vision is more critical than ever.

Yes, life is very nuanced and complex and must be viewed with great sophistication. And yes, this Amalek-type hatred is rooted in a small minority with the majority being good, peace-loving people. Nevertheless, we have to be very mindful that our own nuanced sophistication does not cloud our vision in dealing with this scourge of evil. The great advantage of open, pluralistic and democratic “live and let live” society must not become our greatest weakness. The forces of good cannot prevail if we are not armed with robust moral clarity.

Parashat Zachor is the perennial reminder of this need. Purim is the primer of how to contend with this evil and how each player has their part to play. The Hamans of the world will always attempt to win over the Achashveroshes – to isolate, sanction, punish and persecute the Jews. The Mordechais and Esthers must display clarity and courageousness in confronting this evil in the face of fierce opposition and impossible odds. And the ultimate role is played by the Almighty, behind the scenes, masking the indispensable face of Providence in the drama of human and Jewish destiny.

1 The Netziv (HaAmek Davar, Exodus 17:14), distinguishes between the nation of Amalek which no longer exists and the ideology of Amalek which persists to this day.

2 Regarding Israel: “Israel is holy to G-d, the first of His grain…” (Jeremiah 2:3).

Regarding Amalek, in Bilaam’s prophecy: “When he saw Amalek, he took up his parable and said, “Amalek was the first of the nations, and his fate shall be everlasting destruction” (Numbers 24:20).

3 The Malbim on the above verse says that none of these five reasons at the core of all normative military conflict were present here.

4 Rambam (Laws of Kings and Their Wars 1:1). Based on the Talmud (Sanhedrin 20b), the mitzvah of remembering and confronting Amalek is a mitzvah on telling the Jewish people as a collective – and is to be implemented by the king. Indeed, Rabbi Meshulam Roth in his Halachic responsa (Kol Mevasser 2:42) notes that majority of opinions rule that this mitzvah is incumbent upon the king.

5 Things That Matter, p.22.
HOW TO LEAD
WHEN G-D IS SILENT

Throughout most of Tanach, G-d instructs leaders how to lead the Jewish people; the leader’s role is often merely to inspire the people to follow. Nowadays, when we no longer have prophecy, we lack such clear direction. This reality demands a different form of leadership; it requires leaders who can speculatively determine Providence’s way forward and convince others to follow that path.

Megillat Esther – a sefer bereft of prophecy (and the very mention of G-d’s name) – presents models of such leadership. Although left to their own devices in determining a course of action, Mordechai and Esther are successful in saving the Jewish people from a terrifying fate. They are excellent models for post-prophesy contemporary leaders.

Initially, the Megillah focuses on Mordechai as dominant and proactive, while Esther is passive. Mordechai is formally introduced (Esther 2:5-6), adopts Esther (2:7), discovers and foils the plot to kill Achashverosh (2:22), and actively responds to Haman’s scheme (4:1-2). In contrast, Esther is taken with the other girls to the palace, and eventually to Achashverosh (2:8-16). Her decision not to reveal her nationality is based on Mordechai’s command (2:10). Esther’s first independent action is described only in chapter 4, when she attempts to convince Mordechai to dispense with his mourner’s clothes (4:4-5).

Indeed, when Mordechai directs her to beg Achashverosh to prevent the genocide, she hesitates to act (4:11).

Mordechai responds with sharp rebuke: “If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows – perhaps it was to serve at this time that you attained royalty” (4:13-14).

Mordechai does not have an explanation why Esther became queen, nor does he have a prophecy regarding the correct way forward (hence ‘perhaps’) – but this does not prevent him giving her clear directives regarding what Providence expects from her. Thus, Mordechai is very much a model of leadership in a post-prophetic era. Mordechai’s leadership continues after the miraculous turn of events, in his authorship not only of the letters sent to reverse the decree (8:9), but also of the letters charging the Jews to immortalize Purim as a holiday (9:20).

Megillat Mordechai to Megillat Esther
If Mordechai is so dominant, why is the Megillah not named after him?

I believe the answer lies in the marked change in Esther’s character at the critical moment in the story. Esther responds to Mordechai’s rebuke not only by taking action, but by taking the reins of leadership. She responds not by consenting to his command, but rather by changing it – planning parties for Achashverosh and Haman – and by expanding it to include the Jewish people in the process (4:15-16).

With this initiative Esther becomes active commander rather than passive commanded. Esther shows that Mordechai is not the only leader. Furthermore, Esther reminds us that Jewish salvation hinges not on the heroic actions of individual martyrs, but on the individual’s ability to inspire the rest of the people to identify with the mission.

Esther’s emergence as leader not only eclipses Mordechai, who fades into the background, but turns him into the commanded (4:17). In the Megillah’s central chapters (when the reversal [VeNahafotch Hu] occurs), it is Esther, not Mordechai, who plays an active role. Esther brings Mordechai back into the picture only after Haman’s plot is revealed and he is hanged (8:1). Mordechai may be the one to record the story, but it is a tale highlighted by Esther’s leadership and heroics. Esther ultimately played the pivotal human role in facilitating the heavenly miracle.

By acting, Esther honors her forebears. Esther’s risky act of faith glorifies the ancestry Mordechai says would be lost if she failed to act. This is why when the Megillah mentions Esther’s authorship, a crowning moment of her leadership, it refers to her as bat Avichail – Avichail’s daughter (9:29) – for the first time since her initial appearance in chapter 2.

Leadership Takeaways

We would be wise to learn important lessons from these leadership models. From Mordechai we learn of the leader’s responsibility to question why we find ourselves in the positions we do, speculate about what actions are expected from us, and ensure that we and others rise to the occasion. From Esther we learn that even those led by others are not exempt from the responsibility of leadership. There are moments in life when we are all called upon to lead and bring others into the circle of action.

Rav Reuven Taragin is Educational Director of World Mizrachi and Dean of the Yeshivat HaKotel Overseas Program
ravtaragin@mizrachi.org
A MIZRACHI MESSAGE
IN DISGUISE

Our Sages teach\(^1\) that Esther implored the leaders in Yerushalayim to canonize Megillat Esther despite its apparent anti-Torah messages – including the absence of G-d’s name, a heroine who seemingly intermarries, and the omission of Eretz Yisrael! They acceded and also instituted Purim as a Jewish holiday, for they recognized that there was a message, albeit somewhat disguised, that must be conveyed to future generations.\(^2\)

As we begin reading, we notice that the authors (Mordechai and Esther) place the story in the historical context of Persia rather than the Jewish context, i.e. highlighting the exile of the Babylonian-Persian Jews and their detachment from their brethren in Israel. They also introduce us to events in the city of Shushan HaBira – the capital city. This implies much more than the palace’s mere geographical location, for the only other city referred to as HaBira in Tanach is Yerushalayim (with the Beit Mikdash at its center!)\(^3\) This is the first of numerous allusions to Jerusalem and the Temple in Megillat Esther; a means of (not-so) subtly criticizing the Jews for remaining in Persia despite Cyrus allowing them to return to their homeland and rebuild their Temple.

Only 42,360 Jews returned to Yerushalayim to do so,\(^4\) with the remaining masses comfortably settled in the Diaspora. Mordechai and Esther composed the Megillah and Anshei Knesset HaGedolah edited and canonized the work (Bava Batra 15a), deliberately lacing the text with poignant allusions to a makom acher – a different community of Jews. They employ satire to censure the Jews of chutz laAretz for their loss of direction, identity and values. Through humor, irony, and exaggeration, they mock the Persian Jews for not answering the Divine call of Shivat Tzion (Return to Zion).

Here are some of the satirical devices in the first eight verses alone. Note the stark parallels and literary connections between Achashverosh’s palace and the Mishkan/Mikdash.\(^6\)

Following a six-month series of “Pentagon parties,” a seven-day feast is held in the king’s courtyard – המליאה הכהנים נבראו במקדש. This reminds us of the seven days of ספירת העומר that should have been celebrated in Yerushalayim (reminiscent of the seven-day inaugural ceremony of the Mishkan, or when king Shlomo inaugurated the Beit HaMikdash!)

The colors, materials and garments displayed at the feasts evoke the textiles described in the construction of the Mishkan and Mikdash. The juxtaposition of the המליאה בראשונה המליאה only appears one other time in Tanach – in the description of the priestly garments.\(^7\) Why are the Jews looking at the palace in Shushan as if it is the Temple, and why are they marveling at the garments of the Persian king instead of those of the High Priest?

Many architectural and linguistic parallels (e.g. inner court/outer court) designed to criticize the Jews for preferring the palace and neglecting G-d’s sanctuary.

The unusual verb מִילוּאִים, referring to the establishment of a mandated drinking culture, reminds us of the verb used in the establishment of the Beit HaMikdash. Perhaps the authors are condemning Shushan’s Jews for indulging in a foreign culture of festivities instead of helping to build the Mikdash in Yerushalayim.

Numerous midrashim hint at this tension between the Jews in Israel and those in the Diaspora and the two royal edifices in the respective lands. In the description of the palace in Shushan the sophisticated reader should hear the sounds of the Mikdash and see its vessels. The Mikdash in Yerushalayim HaBira houses the true King. The impending destruction of the Jews in Shushan may be a Divine punishment for their abandonment of values – for preferring Shushan over Yerushalayim, for subjugating themselves to Achashverosh rather than returning to the Land to serve G-d, and for replacing the Temple with the king’s palace! Hence, the one sefer in Tanach that does not mention Eretz Yisrael is perhaps the most Zionistical of all, subtly beseeching the Jews in the Diaspora not to lose sight of their brothers and sisters in Israel, their capital city of Yerushalayim, and their King, Who is waiting for their return home.

\(^1\) Megillah 7a.
\(^2\) And thereby will never be annulled even after the Final Redemption. See Yerushalmi Megillah 1:5.
\(^3\) Chronicles 1, 29:1 and 29:19.
\(^4\) See Ezra 2:64.
\(^5\) Esther 4:14.
\(^6\) For a longer version, see Rabbi Menachem Leibtag’s “Megillat Esther: Its ‘Hidden’ Message”: www.tanach.org/purim.htm
\(^7\) Exodus 28:2.
\(^8\) Haggai 2:8, Zechariah 8:9.
\(^9\) See Megillah 12a-b, 15b.

Rabbanit Shani Taragin is Educational Director of World Mizrachi. She directs the Bellows Eshkolot and Mizrachi Lapidot Educators’ Programs in Matan and teaches in various women’s higher educational institutions in Israel
shani@mizrachi.org
In Proverbs (27:21) it says Ish lefi mahalalo – a person according to their praise, which Rabbeinu Yonah interprets to mean that a person is known by whom and what they praise. From their praise you will discover what is important to them and what their values are.

Rav Yitzchak Hutner says that there are some people – cynics – who actually praise nothing. In the language of our Sages, such a person is called a letz, a scoffer. For the cynic, life is empty; there is nothing worthy of praise, nothing important, special or meaningful. Cynicism means looking at life coldly and valuing nothing. Citing the Midrash which compares Amalek to the letz, Rav Hutner says that this insight about cynicism is the gateway to understanding the essential philosophical struggle portrayed by Purim.

One key Purim question is: why did Haman cast random lots to choose a date for destroying the Jewish people, instead of planning and choosing an appropriate date?

Haman came from the nation of Amalek, the ultimate cynics. We see their true nature exhibited in the first attack against the Jewish people, where the verse says asher karcha baderech, who chanced upon you on the way. The word karcha, from the word mikreih, means by chance, indicative of Amalek’s philosophy that everything happens by chance. They believed in the randomness of life and so were the ultimate cynics.

When the Jewish people came out of Egypt, no one dared to threaten them. The Torah describes the fear and trepidation that the nations felt in the face of this people, which had just emerged victorious from Egypt, the superpower at that time, and which had witnessed the miracles of the 10 plagues and the splitting of the sea. There was an aura of invincibility about the Jewish people, until Amalek launched their attack.

What gave Amalek the confidence to attack the Jews? Their cynicism. They had heard of the plagues and the miracles but they cynically rejected their significance. Amalek’s worldview was based on a philosophy of randomness: life is meaningless and makes no difference, and things just happen. Haman’s method of casting lots for a date for the genocide stemmed from Amalek’s worldview.

The word Purim represents the philosophy against which the Jewish people were fighting at the time – the philosophy of Amalek, the worldview that life is empty and random.

Torah is based on a belief in purpose and Divine Providence. G-d created the world and it is perfect by design; it didn’t just happen. Each one of us is in this world because G-d wants us to be here. He has given each of us a mission to fulfil, and therefore what we do is indeed meaningful and important. Everything we do on a daily basis has significance in His eyes; it is neither random nor meaningless. Amalek believed none of this. They believed that nothing was important or special.

One of the Torah’s core concepts is kedusha. Kedusha is difficult to capture in one English word, though it is generally translated as holiness. Kedusha entails designating something for a specific purpose, making something unique. This is why the key component of a Jewish marriage ceremony is kiddushin, signifying that there is a special relationship here, and that this man and this woman have designated one another as their spouse, to the exclusion of all others. The concept of kedusha conveys to us that there is something special in this world, and that this world is the very opposite of randomness. The theory of random evolution seeks to exclude G-d from the creation of the world. It claims that the awesome magnificence we see all around us, in all of its perfection, just came about by chance. If that dismal view was true; if we are all here because of some big accident, then life is indeed meaningless and our behaviour, whether good or bad, moral or immoral, would make no difference. That is the ultimate cynicism.

In contrast, Torah is founded on the principle that human life is sacred. It is not just an accident. All human beings are created by G-d with a G-dly soul, and with a holy mission on earth. This is kedusha: recognising that life is special, that what we do is special, and that every human being is special. Life is filled with purpose and meaning. And that is what we celebrate with the great victory of Purim.

Rabbi Dr. Warren Goldstein is the Chief Rabbi of South Africa office@chiefrabbi.co.za
Making a
KIDDUSH HASHEM

Torah Yiddishkeit is totally dependent on the authoritative gedolei Yisrael. We can understand the written Torah only as the Talmud explains it, and we can know the Talmudic halacha only as the poskim explain it.

For generations, it has been a practice to drink wine to excess on Purim, as the Talmud says, to the point of not knowing the difference between “Cursed be Haman and blessed be Mordechai.” By the way, when the wicked are punished, it is a blessing for the righteous, and vice-versa – when the righteous are blessed, it is a punishment for the wicked. What difference is there really between punishing the wicked and rewarding the righteous? You probably cannot tell the difference when sober, so what is the point of drinking?

A common error is to drink until you don’t know whom you are cursing and whom you are blessing. That is not what the Talmud says.

Drunkenness is ugly. The Shulchan Aruch (695:2) cites the Talmud, and Rama says that it is enough if one drinks a bit more than usual and then takes a nap. The Mishna Berurah says, “This is indeed appropriate.”

I believe it is a chilul Hashem to get drunk and throw up on the sidewalk. Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky says that it indeed an aveira (sin). Hatzala reports taking many young men to ER because of their drinking.

The Torah forbids making an altar of a single rock. Although G-d desired this in the days of the patriarchs, now that heathens use this as an altar, G-d despises it. One of today’s single rocks is excessive drinking, which is widespread and gives rise to many serious problems. We should have zero tolerance for excess drinking.

The basic mitzvah, You shall love G-d, has elicited questions from the commentaries. How can one be commanded to love G-d? Love is an emotion, and one cannot be ordered to love. The Talmud (Yoma 86a) explains that the mitzvah is to make G-d beloved by others, i.e., to behave in a manner that will cause others to appreciate the beauty of the Torah and to respect G-d.

Obviously, when a person drinks to excess, one’s behavior is obnoxious and this results in observers losing respect for G-d and Yiddishkeit.

We have an opportunity to make a true kiddush Hashem by following the ruling of the Mishna Berurah, and having a dignified Purim.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski is a psychiatrist and founder of the Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Pittsburgh ajht613@gmail.com
In contrast, Rava said: One is obligated to drink on Purim until he cannot distinguish (ad delo yada) between “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordechai.” (Megillah 7b)

This famous statement is difficult to understand, as it does not seem to fit with the general halachic approach, with its emphasis on maintaining intellectual clarity at all times.

The continuation of the gemara is also challenging. The gemara relates that Rabba and Rabbi Zeira once celebrated the Purim feast together, and they became drunk. In his stupor, Rabba killed Rabbi Zeira. When Rabba realized what he had done, he prayed for mercy, and Rabbi Zeira came back to life. The following year, Rabba invited Rabbi Zeira to once again join him for the Purim feast, but Rabbi Zeira declined, as he did not wish to rely on a miracle of resurrection happening again.

There appears to be a clear contradiction between the gemara’s initial statement and the story that follows it. The story implies that drunkenness is dangerous, and the simple conclusion from this would appear to be that one should not become drunk on Purim. In contrast to Rava’s statement regarding the obligation to drink to the point of loss of lucidity.

We find three approaches among the Rishonim to explain this puzzling gemara.

According to Rabbeinu Ephraim (cited in Ba’al Ha-Me’or, Megillah 3b in the Rif’s pages), the point of the story is to demonstrate that Rava’s statement was rejected; one should not, in fact, drink wine to the point of “ad delo yada.” In contrast, the Rif (Megillah 3b) and Rosh (Megillah 1:8) cite Rava’s statement without comment and omit the story entirely, implying that there is indeed an obligation to become completely inebriated on Purim.

Many Rishonim take the third approach that maintains an obligation to drink wine but limits the extent of necessary drunkenness.

The Rambam rules (Hilchot Megillah 2:15) that one should drink wine until he falls asleep out of drunkenness, thereby attaining the goal of “ad delo yada.” Tosafot (Megillah 7b) similarly writes that one should drink only to the point that his words become slurred and unclear. Rabbi Kiyu Yerucham (Toldot Adam VeChava 10:1) writes that one need only achieve the level of drunkenness, thereby attaining the goal of “ad delo yada.”

Obviously, less wine is necessary in order for one to achieve the states described by these Rishonim.

The Orchot Chaim (Megillah VePurim 38) maintains that one should drink “somewhat more than he is used to, so that he will be very joyful and will make the poor happy.” He unequivocally rejects the possibility that one is obligated to become drunk on Purim:

For drunkenness is utterly forbidden, and there is no greater sin than this, as it leads to immorality and murder and many other sins.

The Meiri (Megillah 7b) elaborates on the nature of the obligation:

We are not obligated to become drunk and to demean ourselves out of joy, for we are not commanded to be joyful with frivolity and nonsense, but rather joyful in pleasure, which leads one to love G-d and express gratitude for the miracles He performed for us.

The Shulchan Aruch (695:2) cites Rava’s statement without comment, indicating that he accepts the view of the Rif and the Rosh. In contrast, the Rema cites the views of the Orchot Chaim and the Rambam. Accordingly, the Mishnah Berurah (695:5) concludes that one should drink more than he is used to, to the point that he falls asleep.

In practice, the reality today is that imbuing alcohol and becoming drunk can often have a damaging effect on one’s health and well-being, and disrupt society. Therefore, it is best to drink only a small amount of wine on Purim. Each individual should ensure that the small amount that he drinks leads to spiritual attainment and not to inappropriate behavior. The alcohol should serve to release one’s inhibitions somewhat so that he can attain holiness – and not, G-d forbid, the opposite. Women should avoid drinking even more than men, as alcohol has a stronger effect on them.

The Slonimer Rebbe (Netivot Shalom, Purim, p. 57) writes that on Purim, we have the ability to reach our inner core even without drinking wine. He notes that Rava states that one is obligated to become drunk “bePuraya” – in Purim, i.e. one should become inebriated not through wine, but through the lofty power of Purim itself.

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon is Head of Mizrahi’s Shalhevet Educational Advisory Board, Chairman of the Halacha Education Center and Rabbi of Machon Lev
The Megillah's
Oft-Missed Message

The story of Megillat Esther takes place in exile and describes how the Jewish people were saved from the decree of those who wished to destroy us. Although G-d’s name is not mentioned in the Megillah, the precise orchestration of the events brings about the salvation of the Jews, clearly indicating that it is Divine Providence that guides everything that takes place in the story.

In many respects, the story of the Megillah reflects the history of the Jews in exile over the course of thousands of years.

First, we find that the Jews of the Diaspora wanted to be partners in the culture of the nations among whom they lived, just as the Jews of Persia participated in Achashverosh’s feast. Indeed, according to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, this was the reason the Jews were threatened with annihilation at the time of the Purim story.1

We further find that the Jewish people has persisted in maintaining Jewish identity throughout the generations, despite living among other peoples. In fact, this was Haman’s precise accusation against us:

“There is a certain nation, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king’s laws, and it is not in Your Majesty’s interest to tolerate them.”2

Moreover, over the centuries, the Jews in exile have made many attempts to develop close relations with the rulers so that they could have influence in the government and some measure of control over their fate. Mordechai and Esther are the paradigms of this, as they rise to key positions in the government and succeed in convincing the king to save their people.

Of course, Haman’s decree of annihilation is the first of many anti-Semitic decrees imposed on the Jews in exile.3 The Megillah story tells of the Jewish people’s miraculous survival despite all the attempts to destroy us and the ever-present danger of assimilation.

Thus we celebrate Purim not only to commemorate a distant historical event, but also to remind us of the Divine Providence that guides the Jewish people and allows us to survive and thrive despite the lengthy exile and the existential dangers – both physical and spiritual – that we have faced and continue to face throughout history.

But that is not all.

Megillat Esther also reflects another oft-ignored historical reality. The events of the Megillah took place at the same time as the Return to Zion. Achashverosh was one of the Persian kings of the Achaemenid Empire, which began when Cyrus conquered Babylonia. Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to Eretz Yisrael and rebuild the Beit HaMikdash.4 Nevertheless, although the Jews were permitted to return to Eretz Yisrael and although some had already begun to rebuild the Beit HaMikdash, most of the nation preferred to remain in exile instead of confronting the myriad challenges involved in making aliyah at the time.5 Megillat Esther describes the high price those Jews paid for remaining in exile.

Life in exile entails many challenges, ranging from spiritual assimilation to physical destruction at the hands of anti-Semites. While it is true that G-d watches over the Jewish people even when we are in exile – as described in Megillat Esther and as proven throughout history – the calamitous events experienced by our people exact a toll and prove to us again and again that life in exile is not our natural habitat.

Yes, there are still many challenges in making aliyah, but an important message of Purim is to embrace the opportunity to return to Eretz Yisrael and renew our national and spiritual independence.

1 Megillah 12a.
2 Esther 3:8.
3 Pharaoh’s decrees against the Jews were issued before they were considered a unified nation.
4 See Ezra, ch. 1.
5 These difficulties are described in the books of Tanach written at that time: Ezra, Nechemia, Chaggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.
The joy of Purim, writes Rabbi Zev Leff, is knowing without any doubt that G-d is in charge and runs the world, even when we ourselves are so confused that we can’t tell the difference between the good and the bad. It is Amalek, the nation of Haman, that symbolizes this doubt, a doubt introduced to the world when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and blurred the difference between good and evil.

The Netivot Shalom says that the mitzvot of Purim help us to resolve these doubts and to make us whole in all of our relationships. By reading the Megillah, we achieve wholeness with G-d as we see His hand in all, whether we feel close to Him with Baruch Mordechai or distant from Him with Arur Haman. He always takes care of us, as we always remain His children. With the mitzvot of Mishloach Manot and Matanot LaEvyonim, we create a sense of closeness with others and society at large. When we send to our close friends, it is a sense of Baruch Mordechai or distant from Him with Arur Haman. He always takes care of us, as we always remain His children. With the mitzvot of Mishloach Manot and Matanot LaEvyonim, we create a sense of closeness with others and society at large. When we send to our close friends, it is a sense of Baruch Mordechai, and when we include people with whom we do not necessarily have a close relationship, whom we may perceive as Arur Haman, we are blurring the difference between the two. Finally, when one elevates drinking wine from a purely physical pursuit to a spiritual pursuit, one is creating an integrated whole of his spiritual and physical natures.

The goal of Purim is to reach the level before Adam’s sin, when we saw everything as good, when there was no doubt about it, when “Cursed is Haman” and “Blessed is Mordechai” were both good. Our mitzvah is to eradicate the Amalek, the doubt within ourselves. Purim is a time of perfection, a time to make everyone happy, to give to the poor and the orphan so that they too can be happy, to unify the world.

Rabbi Reiss, quoting Chazal, points out that Haman is alluded to in G-d’s question to Adam after the sin, HaMiN HaEtz – did you eat from the tree? The doubt that Amalek re-instilled in Bnei Yisrael after the Exodus, and the doubt and fear that Haman instilled in Bnei Yisrael, all stem from that same sin, relying on human senses and human logic to determine one’s actions rather than on G-d’s will. The repair is to sublimate our will to His.

Rabbi Roth z”l in Sichot Eliyahu expands on this idea. It was human reasoning rather than the Torah that informed the decision of most of the Jews to bow down to Haman, for they reasoned it was dangerous to defy the king’s command in public. However, when it comes to Jewish law, one must sublimate one’s personal reason to G-d’s will and understand that He knows best. On every holiday we offer something to G-d. On Sukkot we give up our houses, on Pesach we give up bread, and on Yom Kippur we give up physical comfort. On Purim, we give up our personal and subjective understanding and reasoning.

Rav Pincus z”l notes that G-d responded to our initiative. He responded to our national circumcision and redeemed us from Egypt; He responded to our declaration of Na’aseh veNishma – we will do and we will hear, with the gift of the Torah. But sometimes our initiative is not enough. Although Queen Esther and Bnei Yisrael fasted for three days, that was not enough to counter the decree against us. G-d then told us to move aside and let Him do what was necessary. Sometimes our knowledge gets in our own way. We think we’re in control. When we’re drunk, we have no control and leave G-d to do His work. When we relinquish our control on Purim, it is appropriate to ask Him to grant us those things we feel we are incapable of achieving on our own.

Let go. Let G-d.

Interestingly, Rabbi Schorr in HaLekach VeHaLibuv writes that the plague of darkness in Egypt occurred on Purim. But the Jews had light in all their living spaces and wherever they went. With this light they were able to see all hidden things. This light comes down to us each Purim and allows us to see into the recesses of our souls. When we can use that light to give ourselves over to G-d, we can redeem ourselves from our constraints and experience the light and miracle of Purim throughout the year.

1 Genesis 3:11. Note that the allusion is found in the context of a question, an awakening of doubt.
2 Exodus 24:7.

Mrs. Shira Smiles is a sought-after international lecturer, a popular seminary teacher, and an experienced curriculum developer
sasmiles@gmail.com

Want to receive HaMizrachi by email before every chag? Sign up at www.mizrachi.org/hamizrachi
THE BEAUTY OF ILLUMINATED JUDAICA

We are known as the People of the Book, Am HaSefer in Hebrew, a civilization rooted in foundational texts that are studied, interpreted and illuminated. While we recite Megillat Esther from a parchment scroll on Purim itself, creative renderings of the text have been captivating our attention for hundreds of years, encouraging artists around the world to express their imaginative interpretations of each narrative. While there is certainly no dearth of adorned Megillot, no book in Jewish history has been illustrated more often and in more variations than the Passover Haggadah – the story of the birth of a people.

This column will focus on two magnificent new works that are bound to enhance the upcoming Passover holiday.

Signs and Wonders: 100 Haggadah Masterpieces by Adam Cohen, Associate Professor in the History of Art at University of Toronto, is the first book to survey the magnificent history of the illustrated Haggadah through seven centuries, from the Middle Ages to contemporary times. Focusing on the finest examples, the large-size coffee table book reproduces each illustration in full color, alongside short descriptions that explore the meaning of the imagery, the achievement of the artist, and the larger historical context in which the book was produced.

 Writes award-winning novelist, Dara Horn: “This isn’t just an art book, it is a history of the Jewish imagination. At first you look at these pictures and see only the strangeness of a time beyond your own. But as you move through Cohen’s eloquent commentary, you enter the most immortal of stories, lived and celebrated in every generation up to ours. I was surprised to find myself moved beyond words.”

The Passover Haggadah Graphic Novel is a gorgeous new visual rendering of the exodus narrative by acclaimed Batman comics creator Jordan B. Gorfinikel (“Gorf”) and Israeli artist Erez Zadok with translation by David Olivestone. This vibrantly-illustrated work integrates a brand new, modern translation into sophisticated and fun sequential art that brings the epic story to life. The graphic novel pages are presented alongside the unabridged, traditional Seder text in Hebrew and transliteration, and accompanied by ‘how-to’ instructional cartoons.

The New York Times calls the tone of the Passover Haggadah Graphic Novel “respectful yet playful.”

Looking through this new work, one cannot overlook how Gorf’s lively imagination combined with Erez’s incredible illustrative abilities imbue every single page with color, personality, richness, and nuance that only today’s generation will appreciate.

The diversity of these two works shows how illuminated Jewish texts bear the mark of their own time and place. Despite variations, the core message in every Passover Haggadah remains the same: to be a free, unified nation living vibrantly in our own homeland. L’Shana HaBa’ah B’Yerushalayim!
Any time that a couple views something as a challenge, it helps to have a mindset that helps strengthen the relationship. Here are three ways to build that mindset:

1. Staying in Touch

It’s extremely important to stay in touch during the week, to talk, to show interest in each other. That should be obvious, but sometimes husband and wife should take a step back and stay in touch with their goals. Psychology research shows that every time we examine our goals – whether in marriage, as parents, as Jews – it actually makes for higher happiness levels and better relationships. As it says in Proverbs (29:18), “b’ain chazon yepara am” – when there is no vision, the people go wild. Without that vision, we will grow apart from what and whom we cherish.

So make time during the week to check in with each other and with yourselves about where you’re going. My favorite way of thinking about this are the three questions Jacob tells his family to prepare for as they are about to confront Esau: who are you, where are you going, and what are you going to do with what you have?”

Says the Piazecker1 in the name of the Ba’al Shem Tov, another way of reading the words v’aradtem meheirah (usually translated as ‘and you will be lost quickly’), that we say in the Shema, is to get rid of the rush in your life.

Stop. Grasp the power of stillness. Ask yourself those three questions. Studies repeatedly show that families that value periods of cheshbon haNefesh, soul searching, are stronger and deal better with life’s stresses and challenges.

2. Turning Towards

John Mordecai Gottman, one of the world’s leading marital therapists, gave a talk to a group of about 300 rabbis. He spent two days teaching the basics of how to help couples with shalom bayit (marital harmony). And now I keep hearing the rabbis say, “You know how he made a difference in my life? Two words: “turning towards.”

Gottman showed a video of couples spending a week in his laboratory at the University of Washington. He observed them and gave them feedback on their marriages. He highlighted one point in particular. It’s a couple sitting down for breakfast. Husband reading the paper, sipping his coffee. Wife looking out of the window at the beautiful lake on campus. She turns towards him and says, “Aren’t we lucky to be able to spend the week here working on our marriage?” And he says, “Uh huh,” and continues to read the sports news.

That moment, says Gottman, is a moment of choice, a nekudat haBechirah2 – the point of choice in a marriage that makes all the difference. It’s easy to fix. When she starts a potentially serious conversation, he has a choice – either to go back to the newspaper or to say to himself, “There’s nothing more important in my life now than to turn towards my wife and talk to her about something important. And there is nothing more important than our relationship.”

Gottman finds that when couples make that small shift in their relationship – turning towards – marriages can improve no end.

3. You Never Know

I often hear couples complaining about how much better their friends’ marriages seem to be. “Why can’t you treat me like he treats her? Why can’t you be more easygoing with me like so-and-so?”

First, it’s never helpful to compare yourself to others. You never know what’s really going on in somebody else’s home. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve had people in my office sitting down and comparing, and I have to bite my tongue because I know that later I’m going to be seeing the very couple they admire to try and salvage their marriage.

You know what the research shows? That if you spend just a few minutes every day or a number of times a week deliberately reminding yourself of what it is that you love and admire and are grateful for in your spouse – it actually makes a shift in your shalom bayit.

---

1 Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto.
2 A reference to Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler’s assertion that a person only has free choice in a very circumscribed area – their “point of choice.” Each person has a different point of choice.

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.
Many years ago, before I began to specialize in adolescent education, I thought that success in educating our teenagers was dependent on our (the parents’) educational policy, and on the messages and content we transmit to our children.

I thought that if we guided our teenagers on the right path and transmitted “positive” messages, we could hope for educational success. Similarly, healthy dialogue was also important – and a useful skill to acquire – but it wasn’t really at the heart of our children’s education.

However, as the years passed, I have learned that dialogue with our children is not an option or an occasional and useful tool. It is the core of our educational efforts. To paraphrase the Kuzari – it is the root of faith and the root of rebellion. In other words, healthy communication with your teenager is the key to educational success, just as deficient communication with your teenager is a recipe for educational failure.

Why? Because if our communication is no good, we become detached from each other. We stop being relevant in his or her life. Even if we offer the best educational guidance, it is worthless, because the child won’t listen. If we are not relevant for them, neither are our educational messages.

There are those who believe that conversations with children only fulfil an important role at a younger age. A child needs support and encouragement, coddling and indulgence. A warm conversation supplies all that. But when he or she reaches adolescence, they do not need hugging and pampering for the sake of it. They are mature enough to cope with their emotional needs by themselves. Hence, it is unnecessary to invest in emotional communication. Talks should be to the point and practical, as only fitting for an adult.

Wrong. Someone who is on the way to becoming an adult is not an adult. He or she is in the process of building. Emotions are developing and evolving and emotional needs are huge.

Despite their outward appearance, our teenagers still need warm reinforcement and emotional support, and they do want gentle parental accompaniment. Even at this age, dialogue fulfills a major role in emotional support. Because if our children don’t receive it at home, they will search elsewhere for what they need, for better or for worse.

In short, healthy communication with our teenagers is a fundamental element of education: 1. It’s the glue that connects children and parents, and the condition for imparting values in all areas of life – personal, religious, social, etc. 2. It is crucial for addressing the young person’s emotional needs.

What is emotional dialogue? In contrast to an informative conversation, void of too much personal content, the emotional conversation relates to personal experiences, feelings and emotions. First and foremost, it shows an interest in what the adolescent is going through. Not only what we want from them, or what we don’t like about their behavior, but what is important to them, what occupies their mind all day and every day.

For many adolescents, even this kind of dialogue is not enough. They enjoy involving their parents in their feelings but they expect more – they want understanding. In the hot spots of parent-child debate, the child asks for understanding despite disagreement. It is important to children that parents do not ridicule or ignore their opinion but that they try and understand their perspective, reasons and needs.

If the parents do not understand, the youth is deeply offended. And this ‘wound’ becomes deeper because it’s his or her own parents. If strangers don’t understand, it’s not pleasant but we can cope, because they’re not expected to understand anyway. They are also not usually connected in any deep emotional way.

But a child expects his parents to at least make the effort to understand. If he senses that they do not understand him, he hurts. And to reduce the pain he could choose the option of detaching himself from them, keeping a safe distance and limiting contact.

There are parents who are scared that any expression of “understanding” their child’s behavior will be construed by the latter as approval, legitimization. Therefore they avoid it and only confront him or her when they disapprove of their behavior. This is a mistake. We can simultaneously demonstrate genuine understanding and genuine disagreement: “I understand you, I understand where you’re coming from and what you need. However, despite that, I think it would be better to act differently, and here’s why.”

Rabbi Elisha Aviner is a teacher in the Yeshivat Hesder Ma’ale Adumim and Founder of Lev Avot, which advises parents with adolescent education issues aviner@neto.net.il
higa’at lamalchut. And who knows – perhaps it was to serve at this time that you attained royalty.” This is the ultimate statement of hashgacha pratit, Divine Providence. It reflects the fundamental belief that G-d never abandons us, that He puts us where we are – with these gifts, at this time, with these dangers, and in this place – because we have something to do. Even when G-d seems to be “hiding,” if you listen hard enough, you can hear Him calling to us as individuals: “U’mi yodei’a im la’et kazot higa’at lamalchut!” Was it not for this very challenge that you are here in this place at this time?

The third book of the Torah begins with the words, “Vayikra el Moshe,” “And He called to Moshe.” In a Torah scroll, the word “Vayikra” is written with a very small letter aleph at the end, so that it could also be read as “Vayikar,” “And He happened upon.” These two words sound the same, but are in fact completely different, even opposites. Mikreh describes something that happens coincidentally, without Divine Providence. Mikra, in contrast, is used to describe a calling from G-d, a direction to fulfill a particular task. Why, then, is the aleph written small, blurring the line between these two terms? To teach us that it is sometimes difficult to hear G-d’s call. It might even be a silent call, a kol demama daka – a voice you can hear only if you are listening. Even in the worst hester panim, G-d is always calling upon us to act.

One of my great heroes was a man called Victor Frankl, a...
psychotherapist in Vienna who was imprisoned in Auschwitz during World War II. In all of history, there was never a period of greater *hester panim* than that of the Holocaust. Yet Victor Frankl was a man of faith, and he knew G-d was calling on him to do something even in Auschwitz, at the gates of Hell itself. He decided that G-d wanted him to give his fellow prisoners a will to live, because only if they were to have that will would they have the strength to survive. So he approached each prisoner whom he thought was about to fall into despair, and he gave them a role in life, one they had yet to accomplish. This sense of renewed purpose helped compel these men, women, and children to stay alive, to survive Auschwitz and fulfill their calling. Even in Auschwitz, Victor Frankl heard the call – a *Vayikra* with a tiny aleph.

Then there is the story about a man named Eddie Jacobson, an ordinary Jewish boy from the Lower East Side of New York who moved as a child to Kansas City. He became buddies with another boy there, eventually doing military service alongside him during World War I and opening a business with him after the war. When the business failed, they drifted apart. Eddie Jacobson became a traveling salesman; his friend, Harry S. Truman, ended up as President of the United States.

In 1947-48, it became evident that the declaration of a Jewish State in Israel would be possible only with the recognition of the United States, but the State Department advised the President not to support the creation of the State of Israel. Individual Jews and Jewish organizations made great efforts to speak to the President in the White House, but every attempt was rebuffed. Even Chaim Weizmann, the leader of the Zionist movement at the time, was refused a meeting. Someone remembered Eddie Jacobson, and he was asked to try to convince President Truman to meet with Weizmann. And that is exactly what happened! Truman could not say no to his old buddy, and he agreed to the meeting. As a result, the United States voted in favor of the creation of a Jewish State. In fact, the United States, under Truman, was the first county in the world to recognize the State after Ben-Gurion’s Declaration of Independence.

If it can happen to Eddie Jacobson, it can happen to any one of us. “Perhaps it was to serve at this time that you attained royalty!” G-d calls upon each of us, even when there is *hester panim*, even when the *Vayikra* is written with a small aleph that can barely be seen or heard. You are here for a reason!

The Rambam writes that a person should always consider himself and the entire world as if they are evenly poised between merit and sin. One’s next deed may tilt the balance of his life; it may tilt the balance of someone else’s life, and it may even tilt the balance of the universe. We never know the possible consequences of our actions, but one action or one friendship may ultimately change the world.

So when G-d calls, may each of us have the courage to respond, “*Hineini*! Here I am, G-d. Tell me what to do and I will do it.”

---

1 Chullin 39b.
2 Deuteronomy 31:18.
4 Ibid. 4:13-14.
5 See Rashi, Leviticus 1:1, who notes this distinction in comparing G-d’s interactions with Moshe and Bilaam.
7 See Sanhedrin 4:5.

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

When Israelis go to the polls on April 9, they will be picking a party, not a prime minister. So how exactly will Israel’s next leader get into office? Here’s the rundown...

**Stage 1: Election Day**

Every Israeli citizen 18 or over who is located in Israel on Election Day is eligible to vote for one registered political party. Any Israeli citizen aged 21 or over has the right to stand as a candidate.

A party must be legally registered with the party registrar to run in the election, or an alliance of factions can decide to run together.

Israel did hold two direct votes for prime minister in 1996 and 1999 (Benjamin Netanyahu beat Shimon Peres in the first but lost to Ehud Barak in the second), but has since reverted back to the old electoral process in which citizens vote for one party. Voter location doesn’t matter, since the whole country functions as one district and voters cast their ballot for a party, not a particular candidate.

The higher threshold is the reason the so-called Arab parties – United Arab List-Ta’al, Balad and the Arab-Jewish Hadash – all run together under the Joint List ticket. It is also why small parties may join up with other factions closer to Election Day, in a bid to give themselves a better chance of passing the electoral threshold.

The distribution of Knesset seats to each party passing the threshold is determined by proportional representation: all valid votes are divided by 120 (the number of seats in Knesset), to determine how many votes entitle a party to a single seat.

The number of Knesset seats allotted to each party is a result of the total votes it receives divided by the number of votes for a single seat. Since this allocation does not generally fill all the seats in the Knesset (some of the votes will have gone to parties that don’t make it into the parliament), the party or party alliance with the most surplus votes gets an extra seat, and so on until all 120 seats are filled.

Once the ballots have been counted and surplus votes allocated, Israel will have a 21st Knesset – but no prime minister. Yes, the head of the largest party in

---

**THE ISRAELI ELECTIONS: Everything You Need to Know**
the Knesset often ends up serving as premier. But does it have to be that way? No. It’s still only the first stage.

**Stage 2: Party Recommendations**

All elected parties can now recommend a candidate for prime minister (though they are not obligated to do so), and submit the recommendation to the President. They can recommend the head of any of the elected parties, including their own.

One of the major factors in this decision is which parties will serve in the governing coalition. Even the largest party can’t go it alone, since partners are needed to form a coalition of at least 61 MKs before a new government can be sworn in.

Since there can be no prime minister without a coalition, the premiership is always a function of both the size of the largest party and the size of its political bloc, says Reuven Hazan, chairman of the Political Science Department at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

But the issue of political blocs often takes on an outsize role because the largest parties nowadays rarely secure over 30 seats. “The further a party gets from 61 seats, the more important its partners are,” says Hazan.

**Stage 3: Presidential Decision**

Once the President receives the recommendations, he assigns the task of forming a government to the party leader who has the greatest chance of establishing a coalition – meaning the candidate who has the support of the most MKs. The President is under no obligation to assign the task to the leader of the largest party in the Knesset if that party does not have the most support.

The President is also authorized to recommend a unity government, in which two parties share power and rotate the premiership, but does not have the power to impose it against their will.

**Stage 4: Coalition Building**

The candidate chosen by the President, after consultation with the Knesset, does not become prime minister until he or she forms a coalition that is confirmed by the Knesset.

The candidate has 42 days to form a coalition (well, 28 days plus a 14-day extension the President can grant). If the candidate fails to win the support of at least 61 MKs in that time, the President can task another candidate with forming a coalition.

That happened to Shimon Peres in 1990, during what has become known as “the stinking maneuver.” Peres, who was chairman of the Labor Party at the time, had attempted to withdraw from a unity government with Yitzhak Shamir’s Likud and form a government with Shas.

After the unity government was toppled in a no-confidence motion, Likud and Labor each had the support of 60 MKs, giving the President – then Chaim Herzog – the right to decide whom to task with forming a government. Peres got the first shot but failed to come up with a coalition, and Shamir became prime minister again.

The second candidate has 28 days to form a coalition, with no possibility of an extension. The law also provides for the possibility that the second candidate will fail, in which case a majority of MKs can ask the President to task another candidate with forming a coalition in just 14 days. If the third candidate fails as well, the Knesset is dispersed and new elections are held within 90 days.

**Stage 5: Knesset Confirmation**

Once the prime minister-designate has formed a government, the coalition must report to the Knesset what its basic policies are, which parties are in the coalition and who will get which portfolio in the cabinet.

The Knesset needs to confirm the coalition in an investiture vote – essentially the opposite of a no-confidence motion. Then the Prime Minister and the new government, Israel’s 35th, will be sworn into office.

(Adapted from an article that first appeared in Haaretz.)

Shoshana Kordova is a freelance writer, editor and content strategist shoshanakordova@gmail.com
his listening to the people and sparing Agag, while Mordechai does not listen to others and intentionally snubs Haman. By taking an unpopular stand and not compromising his ideals, Mordechai causes Haman to overreact and precipitate his own downfall. This aspect of leadership must have been inherited from Yehuda, who had shown his willingness to take unpopular stands when he persuaded his brothers not to sell Yosef and when he admitted his relationship with Tamar.

Esther actually has a Hebrew name, Hadassah, but for the rest of the Megillah she is known by the Persian, Esther, or Istahar, which means moon. Esther reminds us of hester panim, a situation in which Divine Providence is not readily apparent, but concealed within natural events. G-d’s name is absent from the entire Megillah to demonstrate this point, although it is hinted at in crucial moments. Even Istahar sounds like sahar, a crescent, reminding us of the moon when most of it is invisible.

When the Jewish nation is in exile, they are likened to a woman whose husband has left her and she evokes his memory in many different ways. Esther, forcibly taken to the king’s palace, is not just an individual. She is a symbol of her nation’s removal from their beloved Land, from the Shechina’s warm embrace, to a situation where G-d is ostensibly hiding His Face.

Our yearning for G-d is analogized in Shir HaShirim as the yearning of a bride for her beloved. At the outset (1:1-2) she longs for his kisses and caresses but then hopes just to be able to smell his smell. The sense of smell can help recover lost memories as if they are still fresh. A widow will hug her husband’s clothes even when she cannot physically be close to him.

The names Esther and Mordechai allude to the sense of smell. Esther is Hadassah, a myrtle branch with a strong smell. Mordechai – מירא דכיא – suggests the myrrh from the holy oil. But Esther is also the same gematria as shoshana (661), and we immediately think of the metaphor כְּשׁוֹשַׁנָּה בֵּין הַחוֹחִים “, like a rose among thorns,” which is an apt description both of Esther and of Am Yisrael at the time of the Megillah. The rose is trapped among many thorns, but its fragrance is pervasive and enchanting.

Thus, while the Jewish nation in exile cannot tangibly experience the Shechina’s presence, they can at least sense the Shechina’s redolence through Mordechai and Esther, just as a woman can use her olfactory sense to reunite with her husband. Both Mordechai and Esther had רוח קדוש, the Divine Spirit, and the word for smell – ריח – stems from the same root as רוח. When the wife in Shir HaShirim discovers that despite her husband’s efforts to find her, she has missed him, she describes him to her friends: שושנה כוסות מר עובר “his lips were akin to roses, dripping with myrrh” (5:13). Metzudot explains that she is remembering her husband’s smell, but she uses the metaphors of shoshana and mor, the same ones that describe Mordechai and Esther.
Hidden Treasures
Megillat Esther

This verse would appear to be a pivotal point in Megillat Esther. For the first time we encounter the concept of fate, destiny, casting lots. We also need to understand the plural form – פּוּר, פּוּרִים – used to describe the festival פּוּרִים, the name of the festival, as well as אֲדָר, the month in which we celebrate it. Haman’s actions appear out of character for such a powerful figure; he should simply go to the king and obtain an order to destroy the Jews. Yet Haman is shrewd and realizes the Jews have not survived for so long by chance. He puts their success down to luck and omen believer, there is no escaping one's fate. He is so sure of his success that he is willing to wait an entire 11 months (an eternity in political terms) for an opportune moment to attack; hence the reference to the month of Nissan.

Haman cast his lots, but other lots were cast in heaven to achieve a favorable outcome, and therefore we can assume that the author of the Megillah is making one of his cryptic references to G-d. The word פּוּר refers to G-d, and this was the same lot as the גּוֹרָל that came up for Haman. Haman is indeed a bystander, not realizing what is happening when he takes his chances. We however can now celebrate פּוּר (plural), the transformation of Haman’s lots into favorable ones for us. If we look at the word פּוּר, it really can have two opposing connotations, because by changing the letters, one way we can read פּוּר as “they weakened”, and by changing them another way we get פּוּר, “they multiplied” or “grew”. Haman may have sought to weaken us through his lots, but the opposite result ensued: רָפוּ רָפוּ חֲמָן. Haman’s battle is essentially a continuation of Amalek’s war against Israel. Amalek’s gematria is the same as יֵשׁ-אֵין, “doubt”, since his primary goal is to place doubt in our hearts and weaken the intense feelings of אֱמוּנָה which we feel towards G-d. Amalek attacks at the very moment that Yisrael ask themselves: "לְפוּרֵינוּ אִם אָיִן הֲיֵשׁ אֵין הֲדַסָּה?" Mordechai’s way of fighting this doubt is by adding more faith, and therefore פּוּר may now be interpreted as inculcating Esther with אֱמוּנָה, the opposite of the doubt and skepticism sown by Amalek.

Haman uses chance to attack the Jewish nation. Chance is also a form of doubt. If things occur by chance, there is no Providence coordinating them. Therefore פּוּר is also the same numerical value as סָפֵק, “doubt” , since his primary goal is to place doubt in our hearts and weaken the intense feelings of אֱמוּנָה which we feel towards G-d. The Bnei Yissachar (Adar 3) adds that the primordial snake did the same thing to Chava, placing doubts in her mind about G-d’s existence to make her sin. He says that the word יֵשׁ, which Chava uses to describe how she was beguiled by the snake, is a strange word, but it includes אֱמוּנָה, “faith”, and san. The snake used Chava’s moment of doubt, אֱמוּנָה, as there or isn’t there? – to persuade her to sin.

After the Megillah, some congregations recite a poem stating that we rejoice because בחודש אֲדָר הִפִּיל פּוּר הָמָן פּוּר מִיּוֹם לְיוֹם הִפִּיל פּוּר הוּא. After the Megillah, some congregations recite a poem stating that we rejoice because לחודש אֲדָר בְּקִרְבֵּנוּ אִם אָיִן הֲיֵשׁ אֵין הֲדַסָּה. This is there or isn’t there? – to persuade us to fight this doubt. This is the opposite of אֱמוּנָה, the opposite of our nation’s weakest time. But he did not reckon on Divine intervention changing the lots in our favor. In his mind, the mind of an idol worshiper and omen believer, there is no escaping one's fate. He is so sure of his success that he is willing to wait an entire 11 months (an eternity in political terms) for an opportune moment to attack; hence the reference to the month of Nissan.

The intriguing word פּוּר sounds as if Haman cast his lots, but other lots were cast in heaven to achieve a favorable outcome, and therefore we can assume that the author of the Megillah is making one of his cryptic references to G-d. The word פּוּר refers to G-d, and this was the same lot as the גּוֹרָל that came up for Haman. Haman is indeed a bystander, not realizing what is happening when he takes his chances. We however can now celebrate פּוּר (plural), the transformation of Haman’s lots into favorable ones for us. If we look at the word פּוּר, it really can have two opposing connotations, because by changing the letters, one way we can read פּוּר as “they weakened”, and by changing them another way we get פּוּר, “they multiplied” or “grew”. Haman may have sought to weaken us through his lots, but the opposite result ensued: רָפוּ רָפוּ חֲמָן. Haman’s battle is essentially a continuation of Amalek’s war against Israel. Amalek’s gematria is the same as יֵשׁ-אֵין, “doubt”, since his primary goal is to place doubt in our hearts and weaken the intense feelings of אֱמוּנָה which we feel towards G-d. Amalek attacks at the very moment that Yisrael ask themselves: "לְפוּרֵינוּ אִם אָיִן הֲיֵשׁ אֵין הֲדַסָּה?" Mordechai’s way of fighting this doubt is by adding more faith, and therefore פּוּר may now be interpreted as inculcating Esther with אֱמוּנָה, the opposite of the doubt and skepticism sown by Amalek.

Rabbi Yoel Domb is a teacher and the author of Hidden Treasures of the Megillah. He is a son of the late Professor Cyril Domb.
Professor Cyril Domb, whose distinguished career as a professor of theoretical physics spanned three decades at King’s College, London, and another two decades at Bar Ilan University in Ramat Gan, succeeded in his public Jewish profile in straddling diametrically opposed camps and opinions and initiating fruitful enterprises within each camp. He achieved this feat with both grace and geniality, as he truly loved and appreciated every person for what they were and hated schisms and sectarianism.

In the early 1950s, he collaborated with his dear lifelong friend Harry Schimmel in establishing Hovevei Torah, an organization dedicated to disseminating Torah and raising the low and undemanding standards of observance in Anglo-Jewry. The highly successful organization fostered the study of Mishna by individuals and groups and attracted some of the prominent Gedolim of the time – including the Ponevezher Rav and Chief Rabbi Herzog – to visit England and celebrate the completion of Mishna study cycles. Many other shiurim and events stemmed from this vibrant organization.

In the 1960s, Professor Domb embarked on another phase of public activity, at the behest of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who asked him, one of the leading Orthodox scientists of his era, to lecture and write on topics of Torah and science. Over a period of 40 years, Professor Domb dealt with dilemmas posed by science to religious belief and, using his broad knowledge and acumen, succeeded in finding solutions for many of these problems. He served as head of the British branch of AOJS (Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists) and published numerous articles, culminating in the hugely popular book “Challenge,” which he edited with Rabbi Aryeh Carmell.

Professor Domb’s zeal for Jewish education led him to assume the role of Minister of Education in UK Chief Rabbi Jakobovits’s “cabinet” of communal leaders, and he set an example himself by teaching and lecturing in different institutions, attempting to define and demonstrate “systematic methods of Torah study.”

Despite his prestigious career (he was the only Orthodox scientist conferred a Fellow of the Royal Society), Professor Domb was essentially a devoted family man. He never allowed work to interfere with family occasions and invested much time and effort in educating and encouraging his children in their scholastic pursuits.

An ardent Zionist already from youth, Professor Domb meticulously planned his career to enable him to make aliya at the first opportunity. After retiring early, he strove to promote Bar Ilan University and Machon Lev, where he served as academic president. Even after retiring from his professorship, he established BADAD, a magazine devoted to issues of Torah and science. The initials of the magazine – BeKol Derachecha Da’ehu – “Know G-d in all your ways” – epitomize Professor Domb’s ability to recognize G-d in all manners of life and to sanctify His name wherever he went. May his memory be blessed.
A Woman’s Soul

10 Practical Wonders
FOR PURIM NIGHT

Every Jewish woman is Queen Esther. Why? The Hebrew word מלכה literally means the Queen of Esther. It should have said אסתר המלכה, Esther the Queen, or המלכה אסתר, The Queen, Esther. On Purim, each of us is a Queen of Esther. It’s as if we are part of her; we receive something of her powers and strengths, magic from her majesty. On the night of Purim, we proudly wear her crown.

Here are 10 segulot (acts with metaphysical potential) for this sublime night of Purim:

1. Before you go to hear the Megillah, put a beautiful tablecloth on the table and light two candles, in memory of Mordechai and Esther.

2. Leave a bowl of nuts and seeds on the table — in memory of Esther who was stringent about keeping kosher in Achashverosh’s house and ate only nuts and seeds.

3. Wear a festive outfit! The Megillah tells us that clothing brings about salvation: "The rose of Jacob rejoiced and was glad when together they saw the blue of Mordechai’s clothes." Even before the decree had been annulled, Haman put the regally-dressed Mordechai on the horse and everyone saw and rejoiced. So tonight, dress for redemption!

4. Keep smiling. Please don’t be angry! Purim is a holiday, a day of simple joy. We receive a special Heavenly helping of joy today. There is no room for anger and annoyance (so says the Chida).

During the Megillah reading there are special moments, when G-d Himself sends you a huge portion of Mishloach Manot:

5. The moment of the initial blessing — על המקרה מלך — on reading the Megillah, we read about a revelation of a hidden world exposed once a year, the world of Mordechai and Esther — a world in which decrees are annulled, a world of aspects of reversal of fortunes — from which G-d sends you a generous helping of “abundance, purity, mercy, marital partners and righteous children” (Rabbi Yosef Caro).

6. During the Megillah, open your heart to serenity and comfort. Why did Esther request “write me down for generations”? So that future generations could find solace in the Megillah story, at all times.

7. You don’t read the Megillah. You pray the Megillah (Rabbi Ziskind), because it is about you. At every “Haman,” think about your greatest troubles. When he rises to power, be worried. Your problems and fears are controlling you. When they hang him, rejoice, because it means your own personal release and victory is at hand.

8. The moment the 10 sons of Haman are hanged. The Chassidim say that each son represents one of our bad character traits, and as they are hanged, we ‘kill’ our own faults and defects. So for every name, think about one trait or habit you want to ‘hang on the gallows.’ For example, Parshandata (פרשנדטא) = being judgmental, from לֶרֶשֶׁת (лерשה) = to interpret; Dalphon (דַּלְפוֹן) = a poverty (דלות) mindset; Aspata (אספטא) = being easily offended, from אַסְפָּתָא, “to collect”, i.e. everything people say about you), etc.

9. Purim — פורים — is a time for fertility (פריוות) and matchmaking. Couples are very prominent in the Megillah – Vashti and Achashverosh, Zeresh and Haman, and of course Mordechai and Esther. So immediately after the Megillah reading, pray for children and shidduchim (the Shla HaKadosh).

10. A special emotional time of Divine Will. Midnight on Purim eve is a powerful moment. The Midrash tells us that at this hour G-d heard the sounds of bleating from the city of Shushan: “What are the sounds of young goats in My ears?” He asked His entourage. They replied, “It is the voice of Your children, the little children of Israel about to die under Haman’s decree.”

So at midnight on Purim eve, the time G-d is listening to the cries of infants and annulling decrees, stand and say the following: “Hashem, I am your daughter and You are my Father! It says a father must find a shidduch for his daughter - You must find me a shidduch I am Your daughter! It says a father must provide for his daughter - You must provide me a good living, I am Your daughter!” It says a father must make his children happy. Make me happy Father!”

On the night of Purim, G-d is incapable – so to speak – of saying no to prayers like these.

1 The phrase Malkat Esther seemingly originated in songs and other sources in the 1920s and 30s.

Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi is a popular Israeli teacher, speaker and writer.
In the last two years, the number of Israelis getting married through the Rabbinate has dropped by 10%. According to the Rabbinate, the number of Israelis getting married in civil ceremonies overseas has also decreased. There are more Israelis getting married in Reform ceremonies but the numbers are small and do not affect the general trend. No, the situation is not as catastrophic as it is in the States, but it certainly is worrying.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs suggests that it stems from a “dramatic rise” in the number of unmarried couples living together. But that’s not accurate. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, there were 83,600 unmarried Jewish couples cohabiting in Israel in 2014, and in 2017 there were 82,600. This is approximately 6% of all Jewish couples in the country, and that number is dropping too. That means many more Israelis are living alone and their relationships are perhaps incidental and occasional.

Yes, Israelis are part of a global trend in this too. Historian Stephanie Coontz, in her important book, “Marriage, a History,” says that she intended to write about how the current marriage crisis is not exceptional, that the conservatives are exaggerating, that there have been similar trends in the past. But then she discovered that there have never been so many people who live alone. So many short relationships, so much loneliness and so much isolation.

It’s a pattern we see in many areas of our lives: short, diverse relationships, with no commitment. That’s the Netflix secret. Instead of committing yourself to a number of TV channels that dictate what you watch, you choose for yourself, at any given moment, from an unlimited range, with no obligation, at your own pace. You can even watch a whole season of episodes in one night if you want.

It works for Netflix in TV, for Spotify in music, and for Amazon, Ali Express and eBay in shopping: huge variety, freedom of choice, 24/7, zero obligation.

The Netflix approach also works somewhat in data. When I was a child doing a project on Norway, I had to write to the Norwegian Embassy and beg them to send me some material. They did. In Norwegian. It’s so much easier to collect information today. But we often tend to get confused between information and knowledge.

For example, you take a blood test and one of the values is abnormal. It always is. The next step is to search on Google for what that means. You then reach the conclusion you’re about to die. About a year ago, a beloved relative of mine told her husband, “I looked on Google, and it seems I have a disease with a 50% chance of death.” To which her husband replied, “Lucky you! All the rest of us have a 100% chance and you only have 50!” And then they went to the doctor, who told them they had got it wrong and everything was fine. The beloved relative is alive and well, and has almost finished cleaning for Pesach.

Can we really replace decades of medical experience with 30 seconds on Google? Rabbis also have to deal with similar issues, with people looking up “Umbrella permitted on Shabbat,” or “Kitniyot Pesach Ashkenazim Kulah (leniency),” thinking themselves at least worthy of the Chief Rabbi position.

The world is pulling us to the Netflix model in our relationships as well. But there it bombs. In relationships, bingeing is poison to the soul. Total freedom, constant choice, switching with no commitment – that’s an insurmountable obstacle for any meaningful bond.

To receive love and devotion one has to give love and devotion. Under the chupa we bless bride and groom that they should be like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden: she should always be the only woman in the world for him, and he should be the only man in the world for her. To reach this level, they must have already begun to behave like that: turning off the Netflix-emotions and deducing themselves to each other.

More and more people are finding themselves jumping from one short relationship to another. It’s not necessarily their fault, and they do not always choose this lifestyle. It’s worth listening to them though, and trying to help those who are genuinely searching for the perfect match. Look at the people around you and lend a helping hand where you can. But also be aware of global trends. A huge mountain of loneliness is rising higher and higher in our world, and it’s a sight that crushes my heart.

(This article first appeared in Makor Rishon in Hebrew.)

Rabbi Chaim Navon is a renowned educator and author. He wrote a book (in Hebrew) about Rav Soloveichik’s teachings on relationships, sexuality and family
Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them, When a man from you brings a sacrifice to the L-rd; from animals, from cattle, or from the flock, you shall bring your sacrifice. (Leviticus 1:2)

Before we read about the laws of sacrifices in the Book of Leviticus, we are told that there were pauses between each time G-d spoke to Moses to give him new instructions (from cattle, from the flock, etc.) Rashi asks why the pauses? He answers that they were “to give Moses a break; time to contemplate between one section and the next, between one matter and the other” (Leviticus 1:1).

Amazing! We just can’t constantly bombard ourselves with incessant information, even if it is important. And precisely because it is so important and sacred. We need a break to listen, to absorb what we have heard and appreciate the content.

I once heard the following story from Rabbi Yehoshua Hartman, of the Hasmonean High School in London:

Many years ago, I went to a lecture by Rabbi Moshe Shapira and brought along the latest technological wonder, a voice-activated tape recorder. When it detected a voice, it would spring into action. If all was quiet it would not record and thereby save space on the tape.

I was very excited to use my new toy and proudly placed it on the table in front of the rabbi. Rabbi Shapira noticed the machine and asked what was so special about it. When I told him that it would only record his words and not his pauses, he looked at me and said, “If that’s the case, you’ll be missing out on the most important parts of my shiur!”

Sivan Rahav-Meir is a popular Israeli journalist, broadcaster and author of #Parasha sivanrahavmeir@gmail.com

Advertise in HaMizrachi!

Reach over 200,000 people in hundreds of shuls and communities all over the US and worldwide

To advertise in HaMizrachi email
production@hamizrachi.org
The Megillah itself tells us that the memory and commemoration of the days of Purim will continue until eternity and never disappear from Jewish life. Extraordinarily, the Talmud expands this statement to mean that even at the end of days when the other commandments of the Torah may no longer be necessary because of the exalted state of spirituality within the Jewish nation and mankind as a whole, the commemoration and memory of the days of Purim will continue even then.

Jews live with a constant Purim story unfolding in all generations and over all time. The story of Purim, as it has come down to us through the writings of Mordechai and Esther, is a story replete with individual characters whose personalities and actions define the story itself. These characters are prototypes for later personalities, ideas, plots and events that occur throughout history.

Every generation is charged with reviewing the story of Purim in its time and to see the events and characters of its generation in the light of the grand heavenly scheme that Purim represents. Surveying today's scene and events, I think that I can identify someone who can fill the bill as far as King Achashverosh is concerned. I can also cast someone as a humble and destroyed Queen Vashti.

There also are an abundance of tyrants, haters and corrupt officials who certainly can represent Haman in our current reconstruction of the Purim story. Even some of the minor characters of the Megillah, such as Charvonah, can be discerned in our current world. But my fantasy Purim story has, as of yet, been unable to fit in the two main characters, the heroic figures that make the story of Purim timeless and eternal.

Who is to play the roles of Mordechai and Esther in our current Purim scenario? Where are they when, seemingly, we need them most? Against all odds, ignoring advice from friends and threats from foes, Mordechai will not kneel nor bow down to false gods and cruel tyrants. Queen Esther for her part risks life and limb, position and honor, wealth and comfort, to come to the aid of her people in their hour of need. She is a Jewess first and only secondarily is she the queen of Persia.

These two people, Mordechai and Esther, have set very high standards for Jewish behavior for all later generations. Criticized from within and persecuted from without, they persevered and through their loyalty and commitment to the Torah, people and the Jewish nation, brought about salvation and triumph.

There are such people amongst us today as well. Our task is to recognize and identify them, strengthen them in their efforts and support them against the misguided other Jews and non-Jews. All of us have the ability to fill in our own playbill with the characters – the heroes and villains, if you will – and construct our own current living Purim story. We live in momentous times where miracles abound for the Jewish people. Just as in the original Purim story the miracles were hidden and not necessarily obvious to all, so too is this the case in our time as well.

It apparently requires dangerous circumstances to bring about some semblance of Jewish unity. Even then, there are always those who dissent, carp and criticize. They were present in Persia long ago when the original Purim story unfolded, and they exist today in various forms, organizations and institutions. They always profess great human goals and deep concern for the future of the Jewish people while at the same time taking actions that are detrimental to the Jewish present and outrightly dangerous to the Jewish future.

Mordechai and Esther are a little too Jewish for them. They are too brash, too stubborn, too clannish and are unnecessarily provocative. Mordechai and Esther in their time did not receive universal approbation. It is only history, in its unfolding of events, that has proven them correct and heroic. We cannot expect that people who aspire to be Mordechai and Esther in our time should be universally accepted, loved, admired… and followed.

This is a reality of Jewish and human life that must be accepted and factored into the general pursuit of the good and noble. Hidden miracles abound in our current world as far as the Jewish people are concerned. Anyone who has the good fortune of living in the Land of Israel today instinctively realizes this on a daily basis. Let us strengthen ourselves and be determined and strong as our current Purim story unfolds around us.

Rabbi Berel Wein is Senior Rabbi of Beit Knesset HaNassi in Jerusalem and Director of the Destiny Foundation

Want to receive HaMizrachi by email before every chag? Sign up at www.mizrachi.org/hamizrachi
A successful design experience over thirty years.

An Israeli based design studio serving international clients.

Our mission is to provide our clients with functional, luxury, high-end design.

The design process is highly sensitive to our customers’ requirements and needs and we provide full service till one year after occupancy.

Shlomie Lieberman Architecture and Interior Design

www.shlomielieberman.com
shlomilieb@gmail.com
972-50-5306765
AGAINST UNILATERAL WITHDRAWALS

Given the Arab regional meltdown, the inroads made by radical Islam in the Palestinian national movement, and deep incapacities in the Palestinian Authority – it’s hard to believe that anybody still hawks the same-old “solutions” for the Palestinian-Israeli arena.

And yet that is what center-left generals and Barak-Olmdert era officials are doing, with the presentation of yet another passé plan for unilateral Israeli withdrawals from Judea and Samaria (the West Bank). Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Yadlin and a group of colleagues at the Tel Aviv-based Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) have suggested a plan to separate Israel from the Palestinians. They would unilaterally create a contiguous Palestinian “entity” under the control of the Palestinian Authority comprising approximately 65% of the West Bank and take steps to starve settlements outside the so-called settlement blocs.

The “new strategic framework” is nicely wrapped-up as professional and politically-neutral research that took a year of intensive discussions to produce, and is couched in high-soaring language about “taking Zionist initiative.” But essentially it’s the same plan for unilateral withdrawals in the absence of peace with the Palestinians that General Yadlin used as a political platform when he stood as Zionist Union candidate for defense minister in 2015.

Now, the leader of Israel’s new “centrist” political party, Lt. General (res.) Benny Gantz, has dropped hints that he too sees the need for Israel to unilaterally “shape a new reality” in the territories.

Unilateral Israeli withdrawals will neither enhance Israeli security nor improve Israel’s international position and moral standing. As the Lebanon and Gaza precedents proved, unilateral Israeli withdrawals only guarantee continuation of the conflict and even its escalation, not its de-escalation.

After the Israeli withdrawals outlined in the plan, how is Israel going to be able to prevent the fall of Judea and Samaria to Hamas or one of the other jihadist groups now swarming the Mideast? If Israel reserves the right to raid the territories to root out Hamas cells, how is that any different from the situation today? And if the IDF keeps a significant troop presence on the hilltops and at key junctures, who will really consider this an end to the Israeli “occupation”?

Moreover, with Israel’s civilian settlements in the Samarian mountains asphyxiated, one can imagine what will befall Israel’s rump troop presence in the West Bank. Remember how badly Israel’s “security zone” in southern Lebanon worked out? Israeli forces had no legitimacy whatsoever, engendered sustained international opprobrium, and the IDF suffered constant casualties. Does anyone want to turn Judea and Samaria into southern Lebanon?

Unilateral moves will not provide Israel with diplomatic breathing room either. Withdrawing from one part of the territories won’t convince anyone that Israel has a right to keep other parts. On the contrary: A partial Israeli pullout will intensify the illegitimacy of any remaining presence in the territories. Every Israeli retreat is taken as proof that the territories are all stolen property that must be returned to their rightful Palestinian owners. Unilateral withdrawals will bolster Palestinian maximalism, not engender Palestinian cooperation or moderation.

Worst of all, unilateral withdrawals will unnecessarily and unjustifiably tear asunder Israel internal fabric. It’s indefensible to tie a death-knell tourniquet on Israeli towns in Judea and Samaria – if at all – without comprehensive and sustainable peace in the offing.

Consequently, I prefer the views of Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror and Col. (res.) Dr. Eran Lerman, who were Prime Minister Netanyahu’s national security advisors (and are now fellows at JISS – the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, the leading conservative think tank). They have written that Israel must not jeopardize its existence by embarking on rash initiatives – neither unilateral withdrawals nor annexations – that would radically worsen its security situation, just to please proponents of “forward progress” at any cost. This risk is not worth taking.

Amidst violent events, it is easy to be tempted to seek decisive “solutions” to the Palestinian problem(s) – in both Gaza and the West Bank – through drastic military action, or through equally dramatic concessions. But given the lessons of recent history, as well as the unpredictable nature of regional events, it makes sense to adhere to “conflict management” and piecemeal arrangements.

This is not a cowardly choice by hapless political and military leaders, but a rational choice in irrational circumstances; even more so when the Iranian challenge looms larger than ever on Israel’s immediate horizons. Patience has its own merits.

David M. Weinberg is vice president of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, jiss.org.il. His personal site is davidmweinberg.com
Wait! Before you look it up, you won’t find it. Numerophobia is the fear of numbers, so why isn’t numerophilia the love of numbers? But I digress.

Megillat Esther has many numbers. You can turn any of the following into questions and fun for family and guests at your Seuda.

The first verse starts us off with 7 and 20 and 100, a number we were introduced to in Parashat Chayei Sara. More on that later.

The numbers 12, 13, 14, and 15 show up a lot. The 12th month is Adar. Haman’s plot was for the 13th of the month. Fighting took place on the 13th and 14th. And no more fighting was on the 14th and 15th.

Besides Adar, three other months are numbered and named. The first month is Nisan and the 3rd month is Sivan. 10th month is Tevet. (You should have many questions so far.) 7 is Sivan. 10th month is Tevet. (You can turn any of the following numbers without error. One doesn’t need much wine to not be able to add more as Yiska, in Sefer Bereishit!)

Frequency of Names

Speaking of Mordechai and Haman (and others), Mordechai’s name occurs 58 times in the Megillah and Haman’s 54. But add another 4 times for Zeresh and you get 58. Esther’s name appears 55 times. Add one more for המלכה and you get 56. Close. Don’t give up though. Twice Esther is referred to simply as המלכה, which brings us to 58!

58 is also the numeric value of החן – charm, grace, inner beauty, a word used 6 times in the Megillah in connection with Esther. Ahashverosh appears 29 times, which is half of 58. (Rabbi Nachman Kahana suggested with a smile that this number relates to the king’s offer to give Esther up to half of his kingdom.)

The Beauty Connection

We hinted at a connection between the 127 states in Ahashverosh’s kingdom, and Sara’s age when she died. Both Sara Imeinu and Esther HaMalka are referred to as being beautiful women. Here’s an interesting numerical connection. As noted, Esther is named 55 times in the Megillah, plus once as Hadassah. Sara + Sara appear 35 times, plus once more as Yiska, in Sefer Bereishit!

Number Bonus

A matching numerical value doesn’t really prove anything, but it does sometimes provide the cherry on top of the ice cream sundae.

We all view Haman as the main villain of the Megillah. But how do you rank Ahashverosh? The kindergarten version of the Purim story paints him as detached, distracted, gullible, pleased with himself… but notice the following scene. Haman approaches the king for his approval of the plot to kill all the Jews of the kingdom. Haman offers 10,000 silver talents to the king’s treasury for the royal seal of approval. The king obliges, gives his signet ring to Haman and tells him to keep his money. Ahashverosher does not agree to Haman’s request because of the bribe. He apparently shares Haman’s distaste for the Jews and is equally enthusiastic about the project. המלך וס QA חטבתה – and the king and Haman sat and drank, sharing equally in the plot to destroy the Jews.

Megillat Esther gives us a lot of numbers to play with and consequently many topics to discuss and explore. Have a very enjoyable Purim, but an educational one too!
10 Useful (or Useless) Purim Facts to share with your family and amaze your friends

1. Megillat Esther contains words that do not appear anywhere else in Tanach:
   • Tevet: the 10th Hebrew month
   • Kasher: fit (kosher)
   • Patshegen: a copy of the text
   • AchaShdarpenim (see how fast you can say that): Persian word for the King’s officers
   • Karpas: a Persian word for cotton. (Could also be used for parking...)

2. All the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are found in Chapter 3, verse 13. See if you can find them all.

3. The word מִשְׁתֶּה (banquet) occurs 20 times in Megillat Esther (which is equal to the total of all the times it appears in the rest of Tanach). So what?

4. The longest verse in Tanach appears where? Wow! You’re smart! Yes, Megillat Esther! See if you can find it in Chapter 8. (The English translation is even longer!)

5. The Talmud tells us that on Purim one should drink until he can’t tell the difference between “Blessed be Mordechai” (ברוך מרדכי) and “Cursed be Haman” (אָרוּר הַמָּן). Now, see if you can calculate the gematria (numerical value) of those two expressions. If there is no difference between the two numbers, it must mean you shouldn’t drink at all (well, not wine anyway). What else could it hint at?

6. Did you know that there are towns called Esther in Missouri and Louisiana?

7. Did you know that there is a Queen Esther Street in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Beit Shemesh in Israel? Maybe in other places too but you’ll have to come here and find them for yourself.

8. The Hadassah organization was founded on Purim in 1912. Hadassah is Esther’s Hebrew name.

9. There are only 9 facts here, not 10.

10. When Adar Arrives We Increase Our Joy

The Sages said, “When Av arrives we reduce [our] joy, and when Adar arrives we increase [our] joy” (Ta’anit 29a). In saying this, the Sages teach us that nothing happens by chance and that every season has its own character and nature. If both Temples were destroyed on the ninth of Av, it is a sign that the beginning of Av is naturally a time of trouble. And if the miracle of Purim occurred in the middle of Adar, it is a sign that this month can transform bad into good.

We feel ordinary joy over the good that exists in the world, but our joy is not complete, because there is still evil and pain in the world. However, when even the bad turns into good, our joy increases and becomes complete. This is what happened on Purim: God turned the bad into good and saved His people, Israel.

This teaches us that everything that happens in the world – even the bad – will eventually become good.

The greater our faith and our commitment to Torah, the closer we bring the ultimate redemption, when all evil will turn into good, and when joy will abound in the world. Since the month of Adar has the unique character of transforming bad into good, “when Adar arrives we increase [our] joy.”

(From Peninei Halacha, Zemanim, by Rabbi Eliezer Melamed)

Some Bad Purim Jokes

Yossi: “Look at that bunch of cows!”
Ruti: “Not bunch, herd!”
Yossi: “Herd what?”
Ruti: “Of cows.”
Yossi: “Heard of cows? Of course I’ve heard of cows!!”
Abba: “Shmuli, please can you have a look at the left turn signal on the car and tell me if it is working or not?”
Shmuli: “Of course I can, Abba. Yes ... no ... yes ... no ...
yes ...”
Mother: “Waiter, waiter! I’m in a hurry, will my matzah be long?”
Waiter: “No madam, it will be square!!”
(Apologies, this is a Pesach joke and should have been cleaned out of here)
The Fab Four

There are four mitzvot on Purim, all beginning with the Hebrew letter mem – מ. Together they form the word מمممم... which I suppose would make M&Ms an appropriate candy for Purim...

- מְגִלַּת אֶסְּתֵּר – Reading the Book of Esther out loud
-ミשְׁתֶּה וְשִׁמְחָה – Having a festive meal and rejoicing
- מִשְׁלוֹחַ מָנוֹת – Sending festive food gifts to friends
- מַתָּנוֹת לָאֶבְיוֹנִים – Giving gifts (charity) to the poor

Traditionally, the book of Esther is read out loud at synagogue twice on Purim: once at night and once during the day. In Hebrew it is called Megillat Esther, which means ‘revealing the hidden.’

What is hidden in the story?

Well, G-d’s name is not mentioned at all. He is hidden. But the miraculous turn of events – from Haman wishing to hang Mordechai and destroy the Jewish people to him himself being hanged and the Jews winning the battle – reveals that G-d was acting behind the scenes all the time.

The same is true in our own lives. Sometimes we don’t see G-d – perhaps when we’re sad or in trouble – but He is always there, ready to נוֹנַהֲפוֹךְ הוּא – to turn our situation around and make things better.

However, just like Mordechai and Esther, we have to act first. And never give up hope.

MIRUP DROW ELBMARCS
Unscramble the following Purim words:

HASSNUH  [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
WOGALLS  [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
THAIVS  [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
NEUQE  [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
TRYTOLE  [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

Now that you’ve unscrambled the above words, take the highlighted letters and put one letter in each box below to get the answer to the following question:

What did the grape say when the elephant stepped on it?

Nothing.

It just let out a little [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]!
The story of Purim is a truly international tale. King Achashverosh was Finnish with his disobedient wife Vashti.

“You Congo now!” he ordered.

After she had Ghana way, the king’s messengers went Roman the land to find a new queen. India end, the gorgeous Esther won the crown.

“Ukreign now, Djibouti,” proclaimed the king, who told the press, “I absolutely Andorra” (presumably because she had brown hair, i.e. she was a Brunei).

So they chose a date to Thai the knot but it was too wet. “Bah, rain!” lamented the wedding organizers, who were now rather Camerooned, because they’d taken quite a Gambia on this event.

However, they still had a banquet, with chopped Bolivia and a Middle eastern Cuba soup (fried in a special Japan), making sure of course to recite Greece after meals.

Some time later, Mordechai sat outside the palace, where the Chile Haman would Czech up on him daily.

“I Haiti you because you refuse to bow to me!” Haman scolded Mordechai. “USA very stubborn man. You Jews are such Bahamas! If you keep this up, Denmark my words! I will have all your people killed! Just Kuwait and see, you Turkey!”

Mordechai went into mourning and tore his clothes – a custom known as Korea. He urged Esther to plead with the king. The Jews fasted for three days and grew very Hungary. Esther approached the king and asked, “Kenya Belize come to a banquet I’ve prepared for you and Haman?” At the feast, she invited her guests to a second banquet to eat Samoa.

Meanwhile, the king couldn’t sleep and he’d forgotten about Mordechai’s intervention with Bhutan and Teresh. He must have had a Malaysia, most likely a bout of Indonesia.

It was only be Kosovo Mordechai that he was still alive and on the throne. At any rate, he ordered that Mordechai be rewarded and given the Côte d’Ivoire.

Then the king asked, “Esther, why Jamaica big meal like this? Just tell me what you want. Unto half my United Kingdom will I give you.” Esther replied, “It Spain full for me to say this, but Haman is Russian to kill my people.”

Haman’s loud Wales could be heard as he carried Honduran this scene.

“Oman!” he cried bitterly. “Iraq my brains in an effort to destroy the Jews. But that sneaky Mordechai – Egypt me!”

“Ha ha! I win Haman. It’s your Laos,” sneered Mordechai.

“That’s Niger here nor there, you Jew. It’s just all pretty Nepalling if you ask me.”

So Haman was taken away and they counted his sons. The Italy was 10, and they were hanged along with their father, the whole motley crew going immediately to the Netherlands.

To Sweden the deal, the king sent a messenger to Rwanda around the 127 provinces and allow the Jews to Polish off the rest of their foes as well.

“You lost your enemies and Uganda friend,” the king winked at Mordechai and Esther. And that’s why the Purim story Israeli a miracle. G-d decided to China light on His chosen people. So let’s celebrate!

Forget all your Syria’s business and just be happy. Sudan around the table, Serb up some wine (just Yemen though. Yewomen should Bangladesh or Singapore. However, this does not mean that men should Dominican women. Not at all. It’s a free country!) Happy Purim!

This story has been made into a mobile app, called Purim Togo.

Adapted from an original piece by Meish Goldish and printed with his permission.
MIZRACHI UK’s SUCCESSFUL MULTIMEDIA MUSICAL EXTRAVAGANZA IS COMING TO ISRAEL!

Experience a journey through time

With uplifting imagery, inspiring music and powerful words, the story of the Jewish nation and the eternal connection to the Jewish land will unfold before your eyes.

March 16, 2019 • 8:45 PM
At Kehillat Nitzanim, 3 Asher Street, Jerusalem

Tickets: ₪110 • Details and online booking: www.mizrachi.org/dreams

Hamizrachi Offer! Bring this ad with you and pay only ₪75 (no advanced booking required)

Starring Chazan Jonny Turgel
Stanmore and Canons Park Synagogue

Presented by Rabbi Andrew Shaw
Chief Executive, Mizrachi UK

And featuring the highly acclaimed Asaf Flum Band
**Discover the World 2019**

- **Winter Ski Getaway**
  - Les 3 Vallées, France
  - 10 March – 31 March

- **Magic Of Morocco**
  - 25 March
  - 17 June
  - 9 September

- **Classical China**
  - 18 April – Passover Tour
  - 23 May
  - 5 September

- **Adventurous Tanzania**
  - 21 August
  - 11 December

- **Spain, Gibraltar & Portugal**
  - 20 May
  - 9 September

- **Vietnam & Cambodia**
  - 26 February
  - 20 August

- **Spectacular Peru**
  - 5 March
  - 9 July
  - 12 November

- **India Golden Triangle**
  - 16 Dec 2019
  - 13 Jan 2020

- **Japan**
  - 25 March
  - 1 July

- **The Silk Road: China & Uzbekistan**
  - 2 July

- **Ecuador & The Galapagos Islands**
  - 14 August

- **Scottish Whisky**
  - 16 June
  - 23 June

---

**Kosher Cruising at its Best!**

- Japan 16 June
- Greek Isles 30 June
- Mediterranean 8 July & 19 August
- Norway Fjords 16 August
- Alaska 18 August

---

**African Safari Adventures**

- Private Tours
- Families & Individuals
- Classic South Africa
- African Signature Tour
- Stunning Southern Africa

Choose your own travel dates!

---

With grateful thanks to the founding sponsors of **Hamizrachi** —

The Lamm Family of Melbourne, Australia