

**BNEI  
AKIVA**  
UNITED KINGDOM



# IGGERET HABAYIT

A COLLECTION OF DIVREI TORAH FROM BOGRIM AND MADRICHIM



Adar II 5779

Shalom Chaverim,

**“על־פֿון קראו לַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה פּוּרִים עַל־שֵׁם הַפּוּר עַל־פֿון עַל־פֿלְדִּבְרֵי הָאֲגֵרֶת הַזֹּאת וּמֵהֶרָאוּ עַל־כֵּךָ וּמָה הִגִּיעַ אֲלֵיהֶם”**

*“That is why they called these days ‘Purim’ from the word ‘Pur’. Therefore, because of all that was written in this letter (Iggeret), and because of what they had experienced, and what has happened to them.” (Esther 9:26)*

At the end of the Megillah, Esther and Mordechai sent out an Iggeret (letter) to all the Jews in all the provinces of King Achashverosh, to charge them to observe the festival of Purim on the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar annually.

In the very next Pasuk it says that:

**“קִיְמוּ וְקַבְּלוּ הַיְּהוּדִים עֲלֵיהֶם”**

*“The Jews established and accepted upon themselves...” (9:27)*

The basic understanding of this Pasuk is that they took upon themselves to observe these two days of Purim, the 14th of Adar generally, and the 15th in Shushan and walled cities. However, in the Gemara (Shabbat 88a), Rava interprets this differently in response to a comment that Bnei Yisrael seemed to be coerced into accepting the Torah at Har Sinai:

**“אמר רבא אף על פי כן הדור קבלוה בימי אחשוורוש דכתיב קימו וקבלו היהודים קיימו מה שקיבלו כבר”**

*Rava said: Nevertheless, they accepted [the Torah] again in the time of Achashverosh, as it is written: “The Jews established and accepted”: [The Jews] established what they had already accepted [in the days of Moshe].*

The Jews reaccepted the Torah out of the love for God engendered by this miracle. Purim is about realising the true strength of our love for God and His love for us, and through this love we rededicate ourselves to the Torah. For all of us, Purim can serve as a time of renewal in our relationship with Torah. It can wake us up from the daily grind and habitual type of Torah learning, where we find ourselves going about mechanically, without deep emotional thought and connection. It can inspire us to reach out for something new, to take on new projects and initiatives. Purim can remind us of what we once knew and of the way we used to engage with Torah, that youthful fascination with our holiest sources.

It is with this in mind, and following the success of *“Chanukat Habayit”*, that we are delighted to present *“Iggeret Habayit”*: A collection of Divrei Torah from Bogrim and Madrichim which includes a short Dvar Torah for each Perek of the Megillah and five Divrei Torah exploring a range of themes of Purim in greater depth. Our educational publications are part of a broader effort to expand and develop the education of the Tnua and to bring Religious Zionist thinking to the forethought of Anglo-Jewry. We also produce Shabbat Lashem, our weekly parasha sheet with Divrei Torah for Shuls and communities and will hopefully be producing many more publications throughout the year.

We would like to thank our anonymous donors for making this possible.

We hope you enjoy learning *“Iggeret Habayit”* and we wish you all a Purim Sameach!

B'Virkat Shalom l'Torah v'Avodah,

**Mazkirut 5779**

**Rav Aharon Herskovitz**

**Rabbanit Shira Herskovitz**



# SPOILER ALERT!

RABBANIT SHIRA HERSKOVITZ | RABBANIT SHLICHAH



My favourite part of going to the movies is watching the trailers, seeing an entire movie's highlights in just a few short minutes. Aharon, on the other hand, dislikes trailers very much, feeling that they give away the ending. It's true that it is not as enjoyable if you know what the end will be. So too, when we read stories in Tanach it is as if we have already watched the trailer, even if we don't remember every little

detail, we are familiar with the stories.

Imagine what it would be like to read Tanach with a fresh set of eyes, to read the text without knowing how things will turn out. Can you imagine learning about the Exodus from Egypt and not knowing if Bnei Yisrael would make it? There would be riveting suspense and excitement throughout the Perakim and a clear sense of awe and amazement at their eventual redemption. Even the first story in Tanach has a shocking twist. We would expect Adam and Chava to spend eternity in Gan Eden and couldn't possibly predict that their story would end in sin and expulsion.

What would the story of Megillat Esther be like if we didn't know the ending, if we were not sure who would prevail? We would all be attentively hanging onto every word, sitting on the edge of our seats, holding our breath as Esther appears before Achashverosh, unsure of how he will respond to her.

I think we tend to be a little indifferent to the Megillah because we know that the story will end up with the Jewish people victorious. But, in reality, the story of Purim is quite scary. The future of the Jewish people is in peril and Esther and Mordechai's lives are at stake.

There are many moments in the Megillah when there seems to be a clear trajectory and in the last moment, everything changes - ונהפוך הוא. Haman and Mordechai's relationship is full of these unexpected moments. We think Haman might succeed in killing Mordechai but in the end, Haman is hung on the very tree that was destined for Mordechai. When Achashverosh asks Haman's advice for the person who he wants to show appreciation there is no doubt in Haman's mind that Achashverosh is referring to him. The sudden twist when he finds out that his brilliant idea of how he would want to be respected is instead used on Mordechai is shocking and ironic.

There are many moments in our lives when the future isn't clear to us. There have been times in the past few years that life was leading one way and then took an unexpected turn. As many of you know, I never thought we would find ourselves living in London or being the parents of twins. But that is the essence of life. We can't see the big picture. We aren't privy to a reading of our whole life with the hindsight the Megillah offers. It's important to remember that even though Hashem's name doesn't appear in the Megillah and sometimes we don't clearly see Him in our lives, we are exactly where we should be. Hashem knows the ending and knows what needs to happen along the way.

I want to challenge you this year to try and read the Megillah in a new light; to try and forget what happens next and to truly see Yad Hashem in every scene as the story unfolds. Let's try and continue this in our personal lives as well. Purim Sameach!

# פרק א'

## CHAPTER ONE

Perek Aleph centres on the interaction between King Achashverosh and Queen Vashti during the royal parties of Shushan.

What was the source for Queen Vashti's refusal to appear before the king? Surely, she could have foreseen that Achashverosh would have responded quite negatively to her refusing his request for her to appear!

One approach in Chazal highlights the fact that Vashti felt appearing before the king in the manner he requested (to show off her beauty) would be beneath her dignity, as a descendant of royalty (Midrash Abba Gurion, Parasha 1). The Gra reads this into the wording as well: Vashti is continually referred to as "*Vashti, the Queen*", yet when she refuses his request we are told, "*And Queen Vashti refused*" (Esther 1:12). In other words, her royalty is not a **modifier** but an **integral part of who she is**.

RAV AHARON HERSKOVITZ | RAV SHALIACH

# LESSONS FROM ANCIENT PERSIA

MADELEINE FERRIS | SHEVET MORASHA



During the second chapter, a series of events occur resulting in Jewish influence in places of authority; Achashverosh begins a worldwide search for a new queen, in the form of a beauty pageant, choosing Esther to replace Queen Vashti. Prior to the pageant, Achashverosh had been

angered, resulting in him abruptly changing the law of the country, enabling him to judge matters to his benefit, without consulting his ministers and advisors.

As a result, the only people the king saw on a regular basis were his butler, waiters and scribes. They believed Achashverosh had been angered by the fact that he no longer had a beautiful queen, and so the solution was obvious: hold a beauty pageant to find another. The staff did not consider any characteristic other than beauty in their quest for a queen, whereas the advisors would have prioritised a woman of perhaps royal lineage or of a more distinguished descent. The Jews were despised by the nations of the world, and Achashverosh's perspective was not dissimilar, meaning that had Esther's descent been prioritised in his search for a queen, she would not have been chosen.

Ultimately, had it not been for Achashverosh's fit of anger, Esther would not have been in a powerful enough position to thwart Haman's plans. Had Esther not been taken as Achashverosh's queen, Mordechai would not have been standing at the palace gates to ensure her safety and heard the guards plotting against the king. Through informing the king of this treason, Mordechai, Esther's uncle - another Jew - was able to gain favour and respect, despite his heritage.

Megillat Esther is one of the first stories within the Tanach to take place after the exile from Israel. The story has special relevance to modern Jewry, who must be especially aware of the examples set by Esther and apply them to their lives. There are parallels between the story of Esther's rise to royalty and the role of individuals in supporting minorities in British politics today. In spite of powerful anti-Semitism, on Purim, we celebrate yet another example of Jewish survival, withstanding persecution and hatred. Despite no mention of Hashem throughout the story, we admire the miracles taking place, leading to the Jewish people being saved from Haman's destructive plans. The miracles are not obvious; some are simply a result of being in the correct place at the correct time, but nonetheless, miraculous events

פרק ב'

## CHAPTER TWO

LEAH MALKINSON | SHEVET OROT

During this section King Achashverosh becomes sad from the loss of queen Vashti and wishes to seek a new queen, however, his advisors and ministers became too afraid to approach him. This meant that the only people who saw the king on a regular basis were those who had no choice: the butler, the waiters, the scribes, the cleaners, and all the servants who attended to the king's personal needs. With less knowledge than the king's ministers and advisors, the servants assumed Achashverosh was upset simply because he lost a beautiful queen and therefore the solution would be to find a new, beautiful queen. The solution seemed obvious, a 'beauty contest' to find the best-looking girl to be the new queen.

Had the king consulted with his ministers and advisors they would have suggested a woman with royal ancestry, someone who was fit to be queen, almost certainly not a Jewish girl, however as the only advice came from the servants, Achashverosh willingly agreed. Without the king's own advisors fearing him, a beauty contest would not have taken place. Without a beauty contest, Esther would not have been chosen as queen. Without Esther as queen, Haman's plot against the Jews would not have been stopped. An important message to take not only from this section but the whole Purim story is the concept that Hashem was always there. Although He is never mentioned in the megillah, ultimately it was Hashem's plans to save the Jews, no matter the path we take, Hashem knows our final destination.



within the chapter were instrumental in Jewish survival.

The name 'Esther' has its roots in the Hebrew word for 'hidden', recalling the passage from Devarim (31:17) where it is stated: "I will hide my face from them". Evidently, although Hashem is not explicitly mentioned in the Megillah itself, His influence is clear. The hidden nature of Hashem's miracles, combined with Esther fulfilling her role in becoming queen despite her reservations, parallels with the active role that Jews must play in the world without total reliance on divine support.

There is much to be learnt from the Purim story, regarding how we should conduct ourselves in society as a whole, and how whilst we can rely on Hashem for help, we as Jews must endeavour to partake in the society which we find ourselves in, without sole reliance on Divine Intervention. Haman was one of Achashverosh's advisors; a genocidal Amalekite full of hatred towards Jews. Achashverosh ultimately undermined Haman's wicked ways, but Haman was nonetheless a man well-respected by the tyrannical king.

Through Hashem's guidance in Achashverosh's unravelling of the political process and not consulting with his advisors, Esther was able to become queen, and as a result, Mordechai was able to inform the king of treason. As a by-product of the actions of the king, Jews were slowly able to gain favour within places of authority. It was therefore only through Hashem's miracles that the Jews had influence over the king, so deep was the pre-disposed hatred against them. However, had such evil and prejudiced people not had political influence, there would have been no need for Hashem to perform a miracle, or indeed for Esther to have used her newfound influence to prevent yet another genocide of the Jewish people.

Whilst the society that we now live in is different from that of ancient Persia, it is important to keep in mind the dangers of allowing malignant and hateful people into positions of power, and to ensure that we as a nation are constantly working to create a more stable and peaceful world, so that others will never have to endure the same discrimination as our ancestors. We must remember that whilst we can rely on Hashem for help, we must also within our lives take initiative and act for the benefit of the nation as a whole.

**MADELEINE IS SGANIT AT MILL HILL SVIVA AND WAS A MADRICHA ON ALEPH CHALUTZI MACHANE 5778**

Megillat Esther uses many adjectives to describe Haman.

One of them is "Tzoreir ha'Yehudim." This is a confusing description of Haman because "Tzoreir" is literally translated as to bind or tie together. However, this adjective is used because when Haman maligned the Jewish people, he told the king **יְשֻׁנוּ עַם אֶחָד מִפְּזָר וּמִפְּרֶד** — "There is one nation, scattered and separated." (Esther 3:8).

Commentators explain this to mean that there was complete disharmony between the Jews.

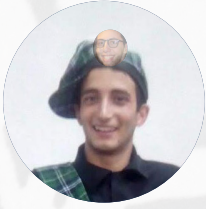
To counteract this, Esther saw that there was a need for unity, so instructed Mordechai, **יְקַוּוּ אֶת־כָּל־הַיְהוּדִים** — "Go gather together all the Jews" (*ibid.* 4:16).

This reveals that because of Haman's vicious plots against the Jewish people they were united and bound together. This is because Esther's strength of character saw Haman trying to disunite Bnei Yisroel and because of her words the Jews were unified and managed to survive against all odds.

We are at a time where political figures such as Jeremy Corbyn are pictured together with anti-Semitic captions in the JC (/JT for Northerners) each week and instead of reading this and shrugging it off we need to reunite as a people so that we can continue to live our lives as Jews.

# HATACH'S TRUE IDENTITY

NATHAN DANIELS | SHEVET NE'EMAN



When people are asked to name the heroes of the Purim story, they will undoubtedly mention Esther and Mordechai. Some - more adventurous - people might even bring up Charvona as a rarely mentioned, yet crucial, character in

the story. However, no one would even contemplate suggesting the prophet Daniel as one of our Purim protagonists. Indeed, why should they? Daniel isn't even mentioned in the Megillah, right?

Well according to some sources that's not actually the case.

In the fourth Perek, we are introduced to a new character called Hatach:

וַתִּקְרָא אֶסְתֵּר לְהַתָּךְ מִסֵּרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הָעֵמִיד לְפָנֶיהָ  
וַתִּצְוֶהוּ עַל־מַרְדֵּכָי לְדַעַת מַה־זֶּה וְעַל־מַה־זֶּה

*Then Esther summoned Hatach, one of the King's chamberlains whom he appointed to attend her and sent him to Mordecai to learn what this was about and why. (Esther 4:5)*

But who is Hatach and why is he deemed important enough to be named?

The Gemara in Masechet Megillah says that Hatach is, in fact, another name for the prophet Daniel (of the lion's den story). If that is the case, why was he stripped of his name and given a new identity for the story?

The Me'am Loez brings forward a reason for the name change. He suggests that Daniel was not called by his proper name as the gematria of Daniel adds up to 95, the same as the gematria of Haman. Therefore, to prevent any association between the two characters, Daniel is given a new name. This is in line with the beliefs of the Menos HaLevi who said that the name change was implemented by Mordechai and Esther when they wrote the Megillah to protect Daniel's reputation.

However, the original Gemara disagrees, stating "he was Hatach, from the Hebrew word 'cut' because he was cut down and demoted from his position of greatness which he held at the courts of the previous

# פרק ד'

## CHAPTER FOUR

**PENINA MYERSON | SHEVET NE'EMAN** The fourth Perek is an important turning point in the narrative of the Megillah. Though Esther has gone down in history as the heroine of the Megillah - it is named for her after all - until this point, Mordechai has been the active presence. He is introduced to us before Esther and it is he who openly defies Haman and saves the life of Achashverosh. Esther, on the other hand, seems passive - she is taken without any agency to the king (2:8) and when in the palace follows Mordechai's instruction for how she should behave. This is the Perek where everything changes, and Esther takes on the active role which will result in the salvation of the Jewish people.

However, we should note that this doesn't appear to be something that is easy for her to do. Indeed, she initially refuses to go to the king at all. There is an important lesson to be learnt from this; it is not always easy to be a heroine, even in your own story, but Esther encourages us to stand up and be active, whether or not this comes naturally and however difficult the situation may be. If Esther could do it, then so can we.

יבוא המלך והמון אלהמשתה  
 אשר אעשה להם  
 "Let Your Majesty and  
 Haman come to the banquet  
 with I shall make for them"  
 (Esther 5:8)

DAN ELLIS | SHEVETAVICHAI  
 It seems strange that when Esther presents herself to Achashverosh and he asks her what her request is, she invites both the king and Haman to a banquet. Once there she is asked, again, what her request is, and she invites them both to **another** banquet, the next night. Why doesn't she expose Haman at the first banquet?

It seems that the events in that 24 hours are key. In that time period, Achashverosh has a sleepless night and recalls that he never repaid Mordechai for saving his life – an event that happened five years prior. Whilst the name of Hashem is never recorded in the Megillah, these events show that He was truly in control of everything. Had Mordechai been honoured for his actions previously, the king would not have felt an allegiance to the Jewish people of his kingdom at the time of Esther's banquet; and had Esther exposed Haman and his plot before the king's restless night, the king would not have recalled his debt in a way that would have saved the Jewish people.

In the same way that Hashem was hidden in the Megillah, we are all liable to feel that He is not with us all the time – countless atrocities make us question His presence. However, in the same way, that Hashem guided the entire Purim story to save the Jewish people, so too, He is with us, even when we feel that He has abandoned us, guiding us forwards to eventual salvation.

kings. Therefore, the Maharal writes that the Megillah does not call him Daniel outright to emphasize the evil of Achashverosh, in that a person like Haman was brought to greatness while Daniel was removed from his position of influence.

The Meshech Chochmah goes even further. He agrees that the name symbolises a demotion of some sort, however, he disagrees with what that original greatness was. He claims that Daniel's greatness was his selfless commitment to his faith while serving in the courts of pagan kings.

So where does the demotion occur?

He continues, "when the entire Jewish nation demonstrated this same devotion for an entire year, by reconnecting to their faith instead of abandoning it to spare their lives, Daniel was 'demoted from his greatness'- his extraordinary feat was revealed to be in the nature of every ordinary Jew."

What was the reconnection to the Jewish faith?

Earlier on in the fourth Perek, we see the Jews reaction to Haman's decree:

וּבְכָל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה מִקּוֹם אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרַהֲמֶלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ מֵגִיעַ אֲבֵל  
 גָּדוֹל לְיְהוּדִים וְצוּם וּבְכִי וּמִסְפָּד שֶׁקֶ וְאִפֶּר יָצַע לְרַבִּים

*In every province that the king's command and decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and everybody lay in sackcloth and ashes. (ibid. 4:3)*

The collective sorrow, mourning and fasting that the Jews in Persia undertook brought them back to their faith and demonstrated the same devotion that Daniel had shown.

We can see from this that whilst devotion to our faith should be in our nature, in times of trouble we should hope to emulate Daniel as it is a true sign of greatness. We must also remember that a strong sense of community and unity can raise us up to higher levels.



# THE POWER OF GIVING

SARA COWEN | SHEVET AVICHAJ



Last year, I spent an extraordinary nine months with Bnei Akiva on Kivun in Israel. I spent each festival in a different place, Succot in Netanya, Chanukah on kibbutz and Purim and Pesach in Jerusalem.

My year was a whirlwind of experiences, opportunities and personal growth, fostered by amazing madrichim and Rav Ari, our former Rav Shaliach. They placed a lot of emphasis on social action and charity, and volunteering was a huge part of the year. From food packing and agriculture in the Negev to Magen David Adom and teaching in schools in the North. We were given a new understanding of the challenges faced in Israeli society and also reminded of the deeply ingrained responsibility people feel towards their fellow citizens.

Purim in Jerusalem was crazy. In the night the streets were packed with people singing and dancing, and the city felt alive with celebration. I had never experienced this many people celebrating for the same reason. There were street parties on every corner, raves in the shuk and ridiculous costumes. Even though this celebration is what makes Purim so amazing, the festival also reminds us to care for those less fortunate than us, and our responsibility to help them. That's why I find the Mitzvah of Matanot L'Evyonim (giving to the poor, specifically on Purim) very powerful. The money you give on the day of Purim is specifically required to go towards a Purim Seudah for a family in need. This means that amongst the chaos and thrill of Purim (the costumes, food, and your dad in an 80s afro wig) comes a strong reminder of our responsibility to help others.

In his Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Megillah v'Chanukah Chapter 2) Rambam brings the laws of Matanot L'Evyonim right in the middle of the laws concerning the Purim Seudah itself, showing just how linked they are. After explaining the bare minimum of what Matanot L'Evyonim entails (a separate gift of either money, cooked dishes or ready to eat food for at least two individuals) he states the importance of this Mitzvah relative to the other Mitzvot of Purim, and praises in the highest terms the one who fulfils it:

# פרק ו'

## CHAPTER SIX

NAOMI BROOKARSH | SHEVET MORASHA

וְהָמָן נִדְחָף אֶלְבֵיתוֹ אֲבֵל וְחָפֵי רֹאשׁ

*"And Haman rushed home, mourning and with his head covered" (Esther 6:12)*

Haman is forced to parade Mordechai around the city, dressed in royal clothing and riding on the king's horse. This was a great embarrassment for Haman as he is publicly honouring Mordechai.

The Gemara (Megillah 16a) says that as Haman was leading Mordechai through the streets, Haman's daughter saw them from the rooftop. She saw someone dressed in Jewish clothing leading someone in royal clothing. She was convinced the one on the horse was her father and the leader was Mordechai. She took a chamber pot and emptied it on her father's head thinking it was Mordechai. However, when her father looked up and she saw his face, she realised her mistake and committed suicide by throwing herself from the roof. This is why it says he came home mourning.

The word נִדְחָף - literally means he was pushed. When an important person dressed in royal clothing walks through the streets, everyone wants to see them. However, Haman smelt from the chamber pot and everyone pushed him to move away.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

Megillat Esther is full of miracles, however, one of the more understated marvels occurs in Chapter 7.

Rav Soloveitchik points out in his book 'Days of Deliverance' that this is the point where Esther succeeded in convincing Achashverosh that Haman is a direct threat to the king's safety. This is proved by the words הַגַּם – "also". As well as the kingdom, Haman wants to take something else – the queen! הַגַּם לְכַבוֹשׁ אֶת־הַמַּלְכָּה – "Would you **also** attack the queen!" (Esther 7:8)

Esther succeeded. A young daughter of immigrants persuaded the most powerful leader in the land. This is yet another example in the unlikely history of the Jewish nation of us rising against the odds. The motivation of the individual – Esther – resulted in the victory of the nation – Am Yisrael. Providence wanted Esther to prosper. God's spirit descended on her and she attained victory.

מוֹטֵב לְאָדָם לְהִרְבוֹת בְּמַתָּנוֹת אַבְיוֹנִים מִלְהִרְבוֹת בְּסַעֲדָתוֹ וּבְשִׁלוּחַ מְנוֹת לְרַעֲיוֹ. שְׂאִין שָׂם שְׂמֵחָה גְדוֹלָה וּמִפְאָרָה אֲלֵא לְשִׂמְחָה לֵב עֲנִיִּים וְיִתוּמִים וְאֶלְמָנוֹת וְגֵרִים. שֶׁהִמְשִׁיחַ לֵב הָאֲמָלָלִים הָאֵלוּ דוּמָה לְשִׂכְיָנָה שְׁנֵאָמַר (ישעיה נז טו):  
לְהַחְיֹת רוּחַ שְׂפָלִים וּלְהַחְיֹת לֵב נִדְכָּאִים נִדְכָּאִים

*It is better for a person to increase their Matanot L'Evyonim more than their Seuda and Mishloach Manot, for there is no greater or more glorious joy than gladdening the hearts of those less fortunate. One who gladdens the hearts of these unhappy people resembles the Divine Presence, as it says (Yeshaya 57:15): "I revive the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the broken."*

Every Jewish holiday revolves around food, and the well-known phrase, "they tried to kill us, we survived, let's eat", couldn't be more relevant for Purim. But every Jewish holiday also has a strong charitable obligation associated specifically with giving food. The Pesach Haggadah states: "Whoever is hungry, come and eat; whoever is needy, come and celebrate Pesach", while on Chanukah we give gelt. On Purim, our Mitzvah is to give money so that those unable to afford a Purim Seudah can enjoy one. This shows us that Purim is not just about celebrating with friends and family, but also about sharing that celebration with the entire community. Facilitating this through our charity is an amazing thing.

After the night of crazy celebration in Jerusalem, Kivun took some donated Mishloach Manot to distribute in Shaare Zedek hospital in Jerusalem. It was amazing to visit the hospital I had spent two months in and out of when volunteering with Magen David Adom. We arrived with gifts for those unable to enjoy Purim to the fullest and sang and danced our way through the children's ward. It was very special, not just to celebrate Purim in Jerusalem for the first time, but to help those in need and bring the same joy I felt, into their lives too. So, this Purim, don your wig, dance and celebrate this extraordinary festival with your community, but remember the power of giving Matanot L'Evyonim – your own chance to give that same joy to someone else.

**SARA WAS A MADRICHA ON BET BASE MACHANE 5778**

# THE NATURE OF SIMCHA

SAUL BISHOP | SHEVET MORASHA



As we draw closer to Purim there is a Halacha of increasing our joy – *Mishenichnas Adar Marbim Besimcha* – which comes from the Gemara (Taanit 29a) which says, “from the beginning of Adar we increase in joy.”

The question can be asked, why does the Mitzvah apply to the whole month? Surely the Simcha should only apply to the 14th (Purim itself) and the 15th (Shushan Purim), for the Megillah says that on these days:

...פְּנִימִים אֲשֶׁר־נָחוּ בָהֶם הַיְהוּדִים מֵאוֹיְבֵיהֶם...

*“The Jews obtained rest from their enemies...” (Esther 9:22)*

Furthermore, should we really be feeling the emotion of Simcha? Whilst it makes sense that the Jews were excited that their death sentence had been removed and that Haman had just been hanged, was this emotion appropriate? Surely a more appropriate reaction should have been relief, not joy.

The Gemara (Megillah 14a) asks why we don't say Hallel on Purim. Of the many answers given, the most profound is the fact that the words of Hallel contain the following injunction:

הַלְלֵנוּ-ה' הַלְלוּ עַבְדֵי ה' הַלְלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם ה'

*“Praise God! Give praise, Servants of God, and praise the name of God” (Tehillim 113:1)*

This phrase has Yetziat Mitzraim in mind and refers to the fact that the Bnei Yisrael were taken from being slaves to Pharaoh and were placed exclusively in the service of God. Yet after the Purim story, the Jews were still servants to Achashverosh. Yes, the tragedy had been turned on its head, but there were no other tangible changes. Instead of realising the necessity of caring for themselves, administering their own state and living in their homeland, the Jews remained spread throughout their Persian diaspora, replete with all the dangers of living under a non-Jewish King.

Former Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks answers that it must be that this Simcha we celebrate through the month of Adar differs from the regular joy we feel when something good happens to us. Our regular emotion is expressive joy, reflective of our inner feelings and a natural reaction and outgrowth from them. In contrast, the Simcha of Adar is

# פרק ח'

## CHAPTER EIGHT

DANI JACOBSON | SHEVET NA'ALEH  
Esther has finally made Achashverosh see Haman's true intentions clearly and so he allows her to write to all the Jewish people, encouraging them to assemble and fight for their lives.

Before the battle takes place, we read that the Jews enjoyed *אוֹרָה וְשִׂמְחָה וְיָקָר וְשֵׁשׁ וְיָקָר* - “light and gladness, happiness and honour” (Esther 8:16). Rabbi Yehudah explains (Megillah 16b) that these four things refer respectively to their renewed abilities to study Torah, celebrate the Chagim, perform Brit Milah and lay Tefillin.

On the one hand, even the opportunity to defend themselves seems to have been celebrated prematurely as a victory, on the other, perhaps the Jews, under existential threat, knew that reaching out to God was the only way to win the upcoming war.

This leads to the age-old question: do we keep our mitzvot or do they keep us?



DANIEL DAVIS | SHEVET EITAN

The ninth Perek of Megillat Esther introduces one of the main themes of Purim, - ונהפוך הוא - literally meaning that everything became the other way around or the opposite. In this context, it specifically refers to Bnei Yisrael rising up and defeating the enemies who were set to destroy them. Yet, the theme extends throughout the Megillah and it is most true of Achashverosh.

He starts the Megillah by celebrating the fact that the prophecy of Bnei Yisrael returning from *Galut* - the exile - hadn't been fulfilled. He has the audacity to do so using the Kelim of the Beit Hamikdash.

By the end, he overturns Haman's evil decree and rectifies his evil ways. There is no other person in the Megillah who undergoes a bigger change.

therapeutic joy, a state we actively raise ourselves too in order to counter otherwise negative feelings and heal our wounds.

Imagine what it would have been like to live at the time, to have heard the very words of the command:

... להשמיד להרג ולאבד את כל יהודים מנער ועד זקן טף ונשים ביום אחד...  
וישללם לבז

*"Destroy, massacre and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, on one day ... and plunder all their possessions"* (Esther 3:13)

As Jews living in the shadow of the Holocaust, who have met survivors and seen the camps and memorials, we don't have to stretch our imagination too far. The Final solution may have been averted on Purim, but even afterwards Jews knew they were still vulnerable. Purim does not have a truly happy ending, and each year we are reminded of this trauma.

However, the Jewish response to trauma is counterintuitive and incredible. We defeat fear with joy and conquer terror by a collective celebration. Whilst the tragic story is being read out from the Megillah we make a racquet, not only to block out Amalek's name, but also to make a joke out of the ridiculous nature of the story.

It was precisely because the threat was so serious that we refuse to be serious. By refusing, we are actually doing something very serious. We are denying our enemies any form of victory. As the date of our timetabled annihilation approaches, we surround ourselves in the single most effective antidote to fear. Joy in life itself. The unique Mitzvot of Purim all relate to communal life and sharing our joy with others. This is the Jewish way of conquering fear and defeating hatred.

Whilst our struggles may not be on the scale of the Purim story, we must still fight them. When facing antisemitism and the negative portrayal of Israel, we must never find ourselves being intimidated. We can successfully avoid this by being *"Marbeh Besimcha"* - increasing our joy. The fact that we can rejoice when facing the darkness of history reflects the power of a people whose spirit will never break.

**SAUL IS SGAN AT SALFORD SVIVA AND WAS A MADRICH ON ALEPH SUMMER MACHANE 5778**

# OVERVIEW OF HILCHOT PURIM FROM RAV AHARON

## KRIAT MEGILLAH

- Men and women are obligated to read the Megillah by night and by day.
- Before reading, we make three Berachot: *al mikra Megillah*, *she'asa nissim*, *shehechianu*, and one Beracha upon the conclusion.
- *L'chatchila*, one should read together with a minyan, but may do so without.
- There is a preference to read with as large a group as possible.
- The Megillah must be read from the scroll, but up to half may be read by heart. For this reason, if one missed a word (due to noise and the like), they may read it to themselves and continue with the communal reading.

## MATANOT L'EVYONIM

- Men and women are obligated to give one gift to **two** poor people on the day of Purim. This as well is meant to create Purim as a day of giving and care for others, that our *simcha* be framed in this manner.
- According to most *poskim*, husbands and wives, as well as (*bar/bat mitzvah* age) children are **each** obligated (though they can theoretically fulfil each other's obligations by giving **additional** gifts).
- The money given should be sufficient to buy a simple food. The money given should be **in addition** to the tithe usually given to tzedakah.
- If one does not know (or is not aware of knowing) someone needy (who cannot provide for their family's needs for a year), they may give money to those in charge of raising tzedakah to pass on to those in need.
- **The money must reach the needy on Purim itself** (i.e. putting money to the side/in a tzedakah box is not enough).

## SEUDAT PURIM

- There is a general obligation to have Purim be a day of *mishte v'simcha*.
- The *seudah* should include not just food and drink but also giving thanks to Hashem for the miracles He has done for us.
- It should be eaten in the company of others.
- It is possible to continue the *seudah* into the following night (it must be started while still day), and *Al Hanissim* is still recited in benching.
- *Mincha* should be said before commencing the *seudah* if one is planning on drinking alcohol.
- It is proper to have bread and meat at this meal, and one should have some wine if possible.

## MISHLOACH MANOT

- Men and women are obligated to send to one person two portions of food on Purim. This is either to enable others to fulfil their mitzvah of *seudah* or to increase peace, friendship and unity amongst Am Yisrael.
- There is a *hiddur* to give foods that can/will be used at the *seudah* itself.
- It is preferable to send food that is ready to eat.
- The food must be sent during the day (not at night).
- One who is unable to give (for example, they are away), should ideally appoint a *shaliach* to give for them on the day itself.
- Communal *Mishlochei Manot* by and large do **not** fulfil one's obligation (though they can be a fulfilment of the idea behind the mitzvah, as well as of tzedakah; it is possible to fulfil *Matanot L'Evyonim* under certain conditions if the extra money is given to the poor on Purim).