



Purim In Our Days

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller Gottlieb

In the *megillah* we read, "Therefore, they called these days 'Purim' from the word 'pur.' Pur in Persian means a lottery. Haman drew lots and chose Adar to carry out the decrees. It seems like such an irrelevant and small part of the holiday. Who cares how Haman came about choosing Adar? In fact, the idea of drawing lots implies fatalism. We could do this and we could do that, but it is what it is. So, what do you do? You try to find out what the overlying pattern is so you can go with the flow. Fatalism is more close to *apikorsus* than idol worship as it believes in a higher force that is unknowing. So, why are we naming a holiday after that? There are all sorts of forms of concealment and arguably one of the most difficult ones to pierce is fatalism. Think of the Holocaust. There were decrees against the Jewish people for reasons that Hashem knows, but why did this one survive and that one suffer? No one knows. So, if you say, well, that's the way it is, some people survived and some suffered, then you have a case of Hamanitis.

A *mitzvah* implies that there's a bond between us and Hashem, that it's not only us towards Him, it's Him towards us. Imagine wool strings going from a very high place, down to you. At the top of the string, the color is white, and as it comes down further it gets bluer and bluer. By the time it reaches you, it's inky blue. But it's still one string, even though the colorations are different. Similarly, our vision and Hashem's light are not the same thing. We never talk about Hashem in essence, we talk about the light of the one who has no end, the way He seeks to be expressed, the way He interacts. But we don't know Him essentially. We don't know the hand that's holding the strings, we know the strings. These strings have nothing fatalistic in them, they're all connected to Hashem's light and His will. But we live in a world where we don't see the source of things. The function of positive *mitzvot* is to strengthen the bond with Hashem, while the negative *mitzvot* tell us how not to destroy it.

Haman's accusations were- "Yesh noh am

mefurad u'mefuzar - The nation is fragmented." They don't keep the laws of the king. It's not worth it for him to allow them to remain. The Gra says where it says the king in the *megillah*, it also means Hashem. Haman is the source of doubt and evil. And he's making accusations about *Am Yisrael*. The *yetzer hara* is making accusations against us, that we're separate. We have the capacity to fragment everything because ego gets in the way. We lose the substance of who we are by focusing upon our differences. It's predicted it'll only get worse until *Moshiach* comes. Not only are we *mifurad*, we're also *mifuzar*- spread throughout the world. Exile means that there's concealment. We're in *galut* to be an example, a light unto the nations but unfortunately, we also pick up the bad traits. "Vedateihem hemelech *einom osim* -They're not keeping the commands of the King. *V'lo shaveh l'melech lahanicham* - It's not worth it for the king to let them be."

Let's look at the *mitzvot* of Purim. If you turn the word *megillah* into a verb you get *l'galot*- to reveal. The truth lies underneath all of the political machinations of the various nations. We have to hear *megillah* both at night and by day, when there's less visibility, and when there's more visibility, and everyone has to hear, because we were all a part of the miracle. We all came to a place of revelation where we saw that it was only Hashem who could save us. *Megillah* is the first *mitzvah* of the day, meant to take us to a place of wanting connection to Hashem. When we first said "Naaseh v'nishma," it was because we saw all of the overwhelming miracles. How could we say no? But on Purim, it was the exact opposite. We turned to Hashem because we were desperate, we recognized that He was the only one who could possibly save us.

The next *mitzvah* of Purim is *mishloach manot*. Love means bonding. The message is, I'm sending you a portion of my Purim meal. This *seudah* is not just for me, it's for us. Hashem never made promises to individuals. "*Banim atem laHashem Elokeichem*." We are not *mifurad*. I'm me and you're you, but we're the same unit.

The *seudah* on Purim atones for the *seudah* of Achashverosh. Could Achashverosh and the grandeur of his court replace us? He thought so, donning the garments of the *kohen gadol* and bringing out the vessels of the *beit hamikdash*. He made the *seudah* because he mistakenly thought that the 70 years of exile was up. He designed his throne to look like Shlomo Hamelech's throne which signified *shalom*. *Shalom* comes from the root word *shalem*. Imagine hundreds of puzzle pieces and fitting them together to create something huge. That's what he envisioned for the Persian empire and that's why it was so important for him to conquer and conquer. It was going to be his imprint, his stamp.

So, what's our Purim *seudah* about? We're celebrating not ourselves and our ability to create a civilization and culture. We're saying it's all Hashem. The feast in many ways is a parallel to the time that precedes the feast. You chose us, only You could save us. We relied on You. And we thank Hashem for all that He gave and continues to give. On Yom Kippur the *kohen gadol* had to confess the sins but then he recognized and expressed gratitude for all of Hashem's kindness. The Gemara says that the face of the *kohen gadol* when Yom Kippur ended was like the sunrise, beauty beyond belief. That's what the *seudah* is meant to be- an emotional experience that takes you out of the constraints of knowing reality through the prism of another culture.

The last *mitzvah* is *matanot le'evyonim*. An *ani* is somebody who lacks, who doesn't have enough. An *evyon* is somebody who wants everything. There's nothing he really has in a way that's *shalem*. It says, "*Ein ani elah badaat*-The worst poverty is when you don't know what to do with your life." *Matanot le'evyonim* is saying we're givers, not takers. We're Hashem's people. "*V'datam ha'melech einom oisem*-We're not perfect." We all lack *daat*. But we want to be givers, a part of those who have even less than us. And when we do that, we become that much greater.



Words That Build: Purim Shpiels

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Beinish Ginsburg

The Chofetz Chaim, quoting the Rambam, writes that the prohibition of *loshon hara* applies even if one doesn't mean to degrade others and even if it is said in a joking manner. This is very relevant to the issue of Purim shpiels (comedy skits). It is common in many yeshivot for the boys to put on a skit for Purim poking fun at their teachers. The Rema discusses two very fascinating laws related to Purim. If someone becomes a bit tipsy and damages his friend's property, if his intent was to damage, he is obligated to pay. If it was done out of merrymaking, he's exempt. Likewise, the Rema notes that taking

things from others on Purim in jest, is not considered stealing. Rav Kaufman quotes the Gra that since it's Purim and there's an atmosphere of merrymaking, people are likely to forgive. But one cannot apply this laxity to *loshon hara*. If one causes a person emotional anguish and pain one can't assume he will forgive. He might look away about a few dollars, but embarrassment in public is more severe. It follows that the only way to stage a Purim shpiel in a permitted way is to make sure the people involved completely forgive beforehand. If not, it is prohibited according to the Torah. It's certainly preferable when you

start the shpiel, to let everyone know you asked the relevant people in advance. If not, you can mislead the audience to think you're committing a serious sin. I once was at a Purim shpiel which poked fun at a school administrator who was known to be exceedingly careful with the yeshiva's money. The boys asked the administrator in advance if they could do a skit about him and he agreed. You can have funny, creative, shpiels, but be sure that it's in the spirit of Torah law.

Tannit Esther

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller Gottlieb

Everything about the sequence in the *megillah* is perplexing. Let's take a closer look. *Galut Bavel* is over according to Achashveirosh's calculation and he throws a party inviting all the Jews to attend. Only Mordechai protests. Nine years later, Achashveirosh runs his horrific beauty contest. Four more years pass and Haman is elevated and makes his decrees. He throws lots and it comes out in Adar, but now it's Nisan, almost a year away.

Yet Mordechai tells Esther, you have to deal with it now. She hasn't been called into the king's chamber for 30 days. She will risk her life by going in on her own. Logically, she should push it off and hope to be called in soon. But Mordechai says no. Why?

Let's look at what happened last year on Oct. 7. Rav Yitzchak Dovid Grossman had been talking about the consequences of our extreme lack of unity- the protests, the verbal abuse between different groups, and he said it would lead to something. Then the news hit. It was a moment that people had to grab and say, yes, now we will change. And some people did. Huge sums of money poured in for *tzedakah*, people made *tzizit* for the soldiers and distributed food and clothing to the refugees. The Likutei Moharan says that change comes from a broken heart. It sometimes requires emergency measures, like a terrible war. And you have to strike while the iron is hot.

We can't even imagine the horror of the

decrees that took place a year before Purim. There was no place to run to. The whole known world was under Persian dominion. The Jews were in a place where *teshuva* was imminent. Esther told Mordechai that the Jews must fast Seder night. It's a matter of life and death. And Mordechai heard it.

So the question now begs, what in fact does fasting actually achieve? We're all made up of body and soul, but it's easy to forget the soul. In the Purim song, Shoshanat Yaakov there's a line- "*Birotom yachad techeilet Mordechai.*" They saw Mordechai wearing *techeilet*. *Techeilit* is the color of the sky reflecting the sea and is meant to remind us of Hashem's throne up on high. But for that to happen, you have to be at that level. The Jews were in that place. They just needed something to spark it, to remind them that there's nothing between them and Hashem.

Every Jew has the potential of *techeilet* in him. This can be understood with the verse in *Sefer Bereishit*, "*V'Hashem beirach et Avraham bakol.*" The Ramban says that there's a *middah* (attribute) within us that is called the daughter. The soul gives birth to a consciousness called *bakol*. There are a range of *middot* within us such as gratitude, loyalty, the desire to meet challenges, to love truth, to sense eternity, and sometimes they eclipse each other. But many times, they work in unison. When they do, that is called *midat hayesod* or kol-one's total

consciousness of spiritual longing. *V'Hashem berach et Avraham b'kol* means that all of Avraham's middot were a reflection of who Hashem was to Him in his life. *Bakol* in a person is parallel to *teichelet*. It's the part of you that wants to see the *kisei hakavod* when you look at the sea and the sky. That self sometimes is eclipsed by physical desires. You want to be self-transcendent. You want to be in touch. You're in shul *Yom Kippur* and someone says, how many more hours? And they don't mean how many hours is there till we could say *Neilah* but rather when can we eat.

The goal of a fast is to rediscover the part of yourself that's not physical. And when you could break your heart through fasting, when you could think about devastation and destruction and suffering, and ask yourself- Who would I be? What would be left of me? Who's the real me? That could lead you to the kind of *teshuva* that Esther saw the Jewish people needed to do.

Esther's *middah* was *malchut* which signifies - no matter what, Hashem rules. This is where *Taanit Esther* is supposed to bring us to. And this naturally leads us to the joy of Purim. Purim is a yes moment. Yes, he's here. Yes, he cares. Yes, my life has value. What you invest into *Taanit Esther* is to a large degree, the key to experiencing real *simcha* on Purim.