

Toras Blades

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YAFFA GANZ

Purim Patterns

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Purim is here again - and like its motto "Venahafoch hu" when nothing is quite what it seems to be, Purim represents complexity, confusion and conflict. It was a time of shortsightedness, even blindness; of contradictory options and opinions; of danger and fear; of hopelessness; and finally, of renewed emuna, teshuva, salvation and unprecedented joy. Purim may be a joyful, "fun" holiday today, but while it was happening, it was not a "fun time" at all. And it took a long while to transpire - nine long years of tension and fear from the time of Achashverosh's first banquet until the Jewish celebrations of victory.

Each of our holidays is rich in connotations, different aspects, dimensions and lessons. In addition to its more obvious and familiar themes, Purim, which took place in Persia, also resonates with echoes of Eretz Yisrael, the Holy Land. The story takes place against the background of the Churban, some seventy years after the destruction of the First Temple and the dramatic declaration by Cyrus allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and commence with rebuilding the Beis Hamikdash (Holy Temple). The Jews, however, are slow to return and few accept the Divine opportunity. The majority prefer to remain in Babylon/Persia. The building of the wall around Jerusalem grinds to a halt and it is at this point that Achashverosh comes to the throne and Amalek, in the form of Haman, comes on stage.

The Megillah (Book of Esther) begins with a series of grand celebrations. Achashverosh is now king. Single-handedly, he alone rules the world. Confident that he sits securely on his throne, he dares even to use the utensils from the destroyed the Holy Temple for his opulent banquets. The

Jews, anxious to retain their status as citizens-in-good-standing, comply, cooperate, are even complimented by the attention they receive from the king. Even the sight of the holy utensils from the Temple cannot keep them from the king's banquet. Many participate.

But not all. One Ish Yehudi- a Jew - refuses. Not just an ordinary Jew, but a member of the Sanhedrin whose long and honorable lineage is traced all the way back to the tribes of Binyamin and Yehuda.

Binyamin was the sole son of Yaakov, the only one of the twelve tribes, who was born in Eretz Yisrael; the only one who did not bow down to Esav, the grandfather of Amalek. What is his descendant Mordechai doing in Persia? We are immediately informed that he did not emigrate of his own free will. He was among the exiles from Yerushalayim with Yechonya the King of Yehuda. He, however, was among those who returned to the Land of Israel after the Declaration of Coresh. When the rebuilding in Jerusalem was stopped, he returned to Bavel/Persia to lobby for the resumption of the work on the wall and the Holy Temple. No Babylonian Jew he!

The Megillah concludes with the victory and salvation of the Jews and Mordechai's meteoric rise to power. The logical conclusion of the story should have been the Jews' return to the Holy Land, renewed construction of the Temple. That should have/could have been the last glorious chapter of the Megillah. But it is not. Instead, we are told that the great deeds of Mordechai are recorded in the "annals of the Kings of Media and Persia" - a strange ending indeed. Since when does the Tanach utilize outside sources to teach us Jewish history?

Perhaps because the continuation of the story was no longer Jewish history. Mordechai ruled a worldwide empire, collected taxes, developed the economy, brought peace and prosperity to the hundred and twenty-seven provinces. He was second only to the king - a powerful, important public figure. But this was no longer Jewish history. The continuation of Mordechai's career rightfully belonged to the "annals of Media and Persia".

Another, more direct connection between Purim and the Land of Israel is the designation of Shushan Purim. Unlike all other holidays, two

TORAS BLADES IS A PURIM PRODUCTION FOR WILD AND WACKY PEOPLE WHO LIKE TO HURL THEMSELVES INTO THE FUTURE AT BREAKNECK SPEED ON JET PROPELLED ROLLERBLADES. IT'S ALSO FOR THOSE OF US WHO ARE CONTENT TO SIT ON THE SIDE AND LAUGH AT THEM WHEN THEY WIPE OUT MASSIVELY.



This newsletter is distributed all over the rockin' and rolling world (even the holy country of Brooklyn) via email and the internet-shminternet (that's the yiddish momma version). For more info, for suggestions, to hurl epithets at the editor or comment on his receding hairline you can email yitz@aishdas.org. He won't answer any of it, he doesn't really care what you think, but at least this way you'll feel like you're being useful. © Toras Blades can be downloaded from aishdas.org or you can simply pick one up at the Salvation Army. The material presented in this publication was blatantly stolen from some dude who was walking down the streets of Manhattan. The editor is currently doing time at Sing Sing for his misdeeds and would be very appreciative if you'd email him a file. And some hamentashen. And a steak dinner too. A freilachen Purim!

days were designated for Purim - the 14th of Adar, and a 2nd day on the 15th. Although it originally marked the additional victory celebrations in the Persian capital Shushan, the Sages decreed and then defined this second, special day of Purim in such a way that Jewry would honor and remember Jerusalem and the Land of Israel which, at that time, were in ruins.

Despite the miracle and salvation, Purim is the one holiday when we do not recite the Hallel thanksgiving prayer. One of the reasons given was that once the Jewish People entered the Land, a communal Hallel is no longer said to commemorate miracles which took place outside the Land.

While the Shalosh Regalim - the three major holidays - are all intrinsically connected to the Holy Land and Chanukah is a Holy Land story par excellence, Purim seems to be a chutz la'aretz (Diaspora) story. But in Purim, nothing is what it seems to be! In addition to all the other messages inherent in Purim, we find the Megillah full of signs pointing to the eternal connection between Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael. Even amidst a miraculous salvation in exile, we remain firmly anchored in the Holy Land, always connected to the center of the world where the Torah is destined to be fulfilled and we are destined to establish a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation, poised to glorify the Name of G-d for all the world.

This Purim, 5765/2005, Jews in Israel cannot help but hear echoes of the original Purim story. Just as the story of Purim unfolded over nine long, difficult, frightening years, today, almost 2500 years later, we too are in the midst of another epic saga, this time in the Holy Land itself. For the past twelve years, since the Oslo accords in 1993, life in the Land of Israel has degenerated from a constant but low level mini-war, to a maxi-intifada, and onward to a dangerous, confusing era when the State of Israel no longer seems to know what it is doing or where it is going. No one seems to be in control and the government seems to feel that it has no choice but to "bow down" and conform to the dictates of the gentile world.

How are we to respond to the political and military issues facing us today? How fearful must we be of the nations of the world? Is it permissible to allow parts of the Holy Land, our Divine inheritance, to pass into non-Jewish hands? How can thousands of Jews be forced to leave their land, their homes, and their livelihoods; their schools, yeshivas (rabbinical schools) and shuls? Should our enemies be allowed to "inherit" our Divine inheritance? One cannot help but view the entire scenario with broken hearts.

Personally, I keep thinking of the Jews in Shushan and the 127 provinces. They hoped and prayed for salvation, not knowing if, or when, or how it would come. Yet it did come, and from the most unlikely places. We too hope and pray that we will be granted salvation from an incomprehensible governmental decree, and that we will not, chas v'challah, Heaven forefend, be the instrument for a universal desecration of G-d's Name. For there is no doubt that the world out there, all the descendants of Haman and Amalek, are just waiting to see 8000 Jews wrenched out of parts of Israel and the land given over to the modern day Phlishtim - a new Palestinian "nation" which never existed and who, like the original Philistines invaded the Holy Land and were (and still are) dedicated to our destruction.

Aside from the horrific desecration of G-d's Name inherent in such a scenario, how can we possibly countenance the terrible suffering which would ensue from the uprooting and dispersal of over one thousand Jewish families, hard working, upright Jews who learn, live and love Torah and who are mekadesh shem shamayim - sanctify the Heavenly Name - with their daily, unending mesirus nefesh (self-sacrifice) for the Holy Land? Like Queen Esther, we too must say, "Ki eychacha uchal v'raiti b'ra'ah asher yimtza et ami? For how can I endure to see the evil that shall befall my people?"

Any Jew who does not contemplate this horrendous possibility with deep pain and anguish is not in sync with Am Yisrael and the communal Jewish soul. Rachel the matriarch herself must again be weeping for her children; the forefathers must be crying; the Shechina (Divine presence) itself must be shedding tears.

But even in the midst of our tears, Purim arrives - a time of hope and renewed opportunity. A time of surprises, salvation and joy. Just as Purim 5751/1991 brought us an amazing and thoroughly unexpected contemporary venahafoch hu - turnabout - with the end of the Gulf War, we pray that Purim 5765 will spell the end of the newest evil decree. We pray that the merit of the brave and wonderful people of Katif will stand us in good stead and help bring another wondrous turnabout for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. © 2005 Y. Ganz & www.JewishWorldReview.com.

*Two antennas met on a roof, fell in love and got married.
The ceremony wasn't much, but the reception was excellent!*

RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

Purim; Our Connection to Israel

On all the major Jewish holidays one is required to recite the Hallel except Purim. The only two holidays that are rabbinic in origin are Chanukah and Purim. On Chanukah the full Hallel is said, but on Purim Hallel is omitted.

The Talmud offers two reasons why we delete the Hallel service on Purim. Rav Yitzchak states that the obligation to recite the Hallel is only on miracles that occurred in Israel. Since the Purim venue is Persia and the saving of the Jews occurred there, we don't say Hallel. The Talmud asks; but the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt occurred outside Israel! Yet we recite the Hallel on Passover? To which the Talmud responds; since the Jewish people had not yet entered Eretz Yisrael the saying of Hallel was mandated even if it happened outside of Israel. Once they conquered the land of Israel however, only miracles that were associated with the land of Israel obligated one to say Hallel. Since Purim occurred outside the land of Israel, Hallel is not recited.

A second reason offered by Rabbi Nachman is that the very reading of the Megillah expresses praise to G-d and therefore the recitation of Hallel is not required.

According to the first reason sited one might ask; surely there were other miracles that occurred during the wanderings of the Jewish people in the desert? Why do we only say Hallel recalling the exodus from Egypt? Regardless of the many answers that could be suggested, one thing is for sure; there was a desire by our rabbis to connect the holiday of Purim to the land of Israel.

Our sages further stress this connection when dealing with the date of the reading of the Megillah. Most communities celebrate Purim on the fourteenth of Adar. However anyone living in a city that was walled from the time of Joshua's conquest of the land of Israel, must celebrate Purim on the fifteenth. One could ask what the conquest of Israel has to do with Purim? Surely it would make more sense to connect Purim to the Jews in Persia

and say that any city that was walled from the time of the Purim story in Shushan, should read the Megillah on the fifteenth? Why do we once again introduce the land of Israel to the story of Purim?

After the destruction of the first Temple the majority of the Jewish people were exiled to Babalonia. Years later under the rule of Cyrus the Jews were invited to return to Israel and rebuild the Holy Temple. When they finally returned only a small amount of Jews representing the Jewish population in exile made the trip. Our prophets tell us that these Jews were not the nobility of the Jewish community but rather the poor and the downtrodden. The elite and the wealthy were very comfortable in their exiled lands and had no intention of returning to Israel. They were so comfortable, that during the reign of Achashverous-the Purim story-they were very influential and were invited to take part in a feast at the king's palace and drink from the vessels that were taken during the sacking of the Temple and Jerusalem.

It now becomes clear why our sages connected Purim with the land of Israel. It is to stress the centrality of the land of Israel in the Jewish experience. For no matter how comfortable we might feel in the Diaspora, even if we are invited to the White House as guests of the President or even if we run for Vice president, our hearts must be in Israel where our history evolves.

One can easily compare the situation of Purim with the American Jew's reticence in returning to Israel and making Aliya today. The comforts of our society allow us to rationalize our not living in Israel and to even postulate that "Yishuv Eretz Yisrael", living in Israel, is not a vital mitzvah today.

As Jews our goal must be to live in Israel. Purim reminds Diaspora Jewry of their falling short of one of the central obligations of Jewish existence. © 2005 Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The following was received as an email forward so it MUST be true...

My name is Rabbi Olabamu Wabatunji and I am the Morah D'Asra of Lagos, Nigeria. Thank G-d, we are now forming a New Kollel for over 30 yungerleit and their families, to be known as Kollel Roei Arayos. We have collected significant funding for the new building, and obtained the services of the well know architect Moishe Osher Ben-Pil, whose study of many Prakim of Shmos has made him an expert on construction using mud bricks. Our funds currently exceed 13.5 million US dollars, which we must convert into Nigerian Nairas (NGN 1,822,500,000)

Due to your well known honesty and tzidkus, we are pleased to offer you an opportunity to take part in this great mitzvah, and to obtain agra demitzva as well. Since we must deposit this money in an American bank account to begin the currency conversion, we will gladly give you 10% of this money (\$1,350,000) if you will let us use yours. Simply reply to this email and send us the following information:

Your social security number

The name of your bank, and your account number

The name of your next of kin

Your yichus (mother's maiden name)

Your hat size

How long you wait after eating fleishigs

My Hashem bless you for your help, and may you have a freilechen Purim! ☺

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Both the Babylonian Talmud (Megillah 7a) and the Jerusalem Talmud (1:5) discuss a conversation between Mordecai and Esther - who wanted Megillas Esther to be included as a canonical book of the Bible, and the sages - who were reluctant to include it until they realized that a verse in the Torah (Shemos 17:14) alluded to authorizing its inclusion. The Jerusalem Talmud continues, though, with a fascinating statement attributed to five Talmudic sages (some of whom are quoted as the transmitter of the previously mentioned conversation) that seems to contradict the premise of the first conversation, while raising additional issues as well.

"Rav and R' Chanina and R' Yonasan and Bar Kafra and R' Yehoshua ben Levi said [that] this Megillah was said to Moshe at Sinai; it's just that there is no chronological order [followed] in the Torah."

First of all, if it was told to Moshe on Mt. Sinai, why were the sages at the time of Mordecai and Esther reluctant to include it? Secondly, the Talmud (Bava Basra 15a) explicitly says that Megillas Esther was authored by the Men of the Great Assembly; how could it be claimed that it had already been told to Moshe centuries earlier? Finally, why would the Megillah be considered "out of order" if the story didn't actually happen until after the other books of the Bible?

There is a parallel Midrash to this statement (Rus Rabbah 4:7) that adds one twist, as it comes from a slightly different perspective. Three instances are brought where the sages ("the lower court") instituted something that was approved in heaven ("the upper court"), one of which is the original reluctance to include the Megillah as part of the Bible until they realized that the Torah had authorized it. In response to this the five previously mentioned sages (none of whom are quoted in the first part of the Midrash) say that the Megillah was not instituted by the sages, but was "said to Moshe at Sinai, it's just that there is no chronological order [followed] in the Torah." Besides the addition of "not being said (i.e. instituted) by the court," we clearly see that, at least in the Midrash, those who relate the original reluctance to include the Megillah in the Bible differ with those who claim it originated at Sinai. Nonetheless, the fact that Rav, R' Chanina and R' Yonasan convey this reluctance in the Talmud would seem to indicate that the reluctance itself and the possibility that the Megillah was told to Moshe are not mutually exclusive.

The sages debating about whether or not to include the Megillah indicates that they weren't sure whether or not they were authorized to do so. The Midrash apparently understands the resolution to have been finding an "asmachta," a "hint" put in the Torah to authorize it. These five sages then counter by stating that it is more than just an "asmachta," but was the actual intent of the verse. The Talmud, on the other hand, while agreeing that they were originally unsure whether or not they were authorized to include it in the Bible, understands the resolution to be realizing that this verse authorizes them to do so. Not through an "asmachta," but as the actual intent of the verse. In order to gain a better understanding of this resolution, let's examine this verse a little more closely.

After Amalek attacks the newly freed Nation of Israel (Shemos 17:8), Moshe sends Yehoshua to battle them (17:9). Eventually, Yehoshua defeats them (17:13), after which G-d tells Moshe to "write this down as a remembrance in a book" that Amalek will eventually be wiped out (17:14). The sages realized that the word "this" refers to the destruction of Amalek being mentioned in the Torah, the word "remembrance" to the near destruction done by Shaul (Shemuel I 15:2-9), and "book" to Megillas Esther. (See the Jerusalem Talmud for an explanation of how each of these words implies their respective places in the Bible.) In essence, then, G-d is telling Moshe that there will be mentions of the destruction of Amalek in each category of TaNaKh - hence the authorization to put the downfall of Haman the Amaleki in the Bible.

But when did this authorization actually occur? Was it right after the war Yehoshua fought with Amalek, which is where this "section" of the Torah is written? Without any further clarification, it can be assumed that this is where the directive was given to "write down" the need to destroy Amalek. It was about this detail - when the actual commandment was made - that these 5 sages tell us that it occurred later, at Sinai. The potential problem with positing that it was given later is that the verses that discuss the issue are written earlier, immediately after the first war with Amalek is described. In response to this discrepancy, they add that "the Torah is not written in chronological order," so this verse appearing earlier than Sinai does not negate the possibility that it was actually given later, at Sinai.

Rav, R' Chanina and R' Yonasan (and possibly Bar Kafra and R' Yehoshua ben Levi as well) all agree that originally the sages were not sure whether or not they were authorized to include the Megillah as part of the Bible, but then realized that this verse indicates that they were. Once it was known that this authorization was given, these sages add that "this Megillah," i.e. the authorization to include an additional mention about the destruction of Amalek as part of the Biblical canon, was given at Sinai - even if the actual verse appears earlier. The Megillah was written by the Men of

the Great Assembly (of whom Mordecai was one), but the authorization to include it as part of the Bible was given at Sinai. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

*What would you call someone sleeping in shul?
An idle worshipper!*

RABBI YONASAN SACKS

The Uniqueness of Purim

The Medrash Sochar Tov (Mishlei, Parsha 9) distinguishes between Purim and the other festive days of the year: "kol hamoadim betailim v'yemei haPurim lo yiheyu betailim shene'emar v'yemei haPurim ho'eille v'lo ya'avru mitoch haYehudim v'zichram lo yasuf mizaram' (Esther, 9:28) -- All festivals will cease with the exception of Purim, as it is written, and these days of Purim shall never cease among the Jews, nor shall their remembrance perish from their descendants."

Throughout each yom tov we celebrate the nissim gluyim, overt and obvious miracles that Hashem performs for Klal Yisroel. Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkos are times when the hashgachas Hashem is undeniably revealed. Indeed, Ben Zoma maintains that l'asid lavo we will not mention yetsias Mitzrayim in our daily tefillos. The Gemara (Berachos 14b) explains that this view is based on the pasuk in Yirmiyahu (27:7-8):

"Hiney yamim boim neum Hashem v'lo yomru od chai Hashem asher he'ela es Bnai Yisroel mei'Eretz Mitzrayim, ki im chai Hashem asher he'ela v'asher heivi es zarah Beis Yisroel mei'Eretz Tzafona u'mikol ha'aratzos asher hidachtim shom"-Behold days are coming, the word of Hashem, when people will no longer swear, as Hashem lives, who brought Bnai Yisroel up from the land of Mitzrayim, but rather, as Hashem lives, who brought up and brought back the offspring of Bnai Yisroel from the land of the North and all the lands where he had dispersed them.

Accordingly the Midrash asserts that when we experience the geulah asidah bimeheira biyameinu we will no longer commemorate our yomim tovim in the same way, but rather we will celebrate the miracle of our current redemption.

Purim, however, teaches us a different lesson. Unlike other yomim tovim, during which we celebrate nissim gluyim, Purim, the Gra explains, teaches us to recognize and appreciate the yad Hashem in times of hester panim. Even in the darkness of galus, one finds and experiences hasra'as hashechinah. This lesson endures forever-"v'zichram lo yasuf mizaram' (Esther, 9:28)".

Indeed the Ramban so magnificently explains: "Umin hanissim hagedolim hamefursamim adam modeh bnissim hanistarim sheheim yesod haTorah kulah. She'ein laadam cheilek b'Toras Moshe rabbeinu ad shena'amin bechol devarienu u'mikreinu shekulam nissim ein bohem tevah uminhago shel olam, bein b'rabbim, bein b'yachid"-through the great open

miracles one comes to admit the hidden miracles which constitute the foundation of the whole Torah. For no one can have a part in the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu unless he believes that all our words and our events are miraculous in scope, there being no natural or customary way of the world, whether affecting the public or the individual" Hakadosh Baruch Hu at times performs nissim gluyim to hone our vision to recognize and appreciate nissim nistarim. The gemara (Megillah 6b) asks why does Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel insist that we celebrate Purim during Adar Sheini? The gemara answers, "amar Rabbi Tevi, ta'ama d'Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel mismach geulah l'geulah adif-it is preferable to link the redemption of Purim with the redemption of Pesach. The connection between Pesach and Purim, between the nissim gluyim and nissim nistarim, underscores the infinite nissim and chassadim that Hakadosh Baruch Hu bestows on each one of us. May we be zoche to recognize and appreciate "nissecha sheb'chol yom imanu." © 2005 Rabbi Y. Sacks & the TorahWeb Foundation

During a service at an old synagogue in Eastern Europe, when the Shema prayer was said, half the congregants stood up and half remained sitting. The half that was seated started yelling at those standing to sit down, and the ones standing yelled at the ones sitting to stand up...

The rabbi, learned as he was in the Law and commentaries, didn't know what to do. His congregation suggested that he consult a housebound 98 year old man who was one of the original founders of their temple. The rabbi hoped the elderly man would be able to tell him what the actual temple tradition was, so he went to the nursing home with a representative of each faction of the congregation.

The one whose followers stood during Shema said to the old man, "Is the tradition to stand during this prayer?" The old man answered, "No, that is not the tradition."

The one whose followers sat said, "Then the tradition is to sit during Shema!" The old man answered, "No, that is not the tradition."

Then the rabbi said to the old man, "But the congregants fight all the time, yelling at each other about whether they should sit or stand..."

The old man interrupted, exclaiming, "THAT is the tradition!"

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The festival of Purim comes closest to being the Jewish answer to the Mardi Gras-a festival in which everyone is disguised in a special costume. Indeed, this practice is even confirmed in our halakhic code: "And the custom to dress in costume on Purim and even for a man to dress in a woman's garb and a woman in a man's garb is not forbidden, since the only intent is to express festive joy..." (Shulchan Aruch, Rama 696,8). What lies behind this celebration through disguises?

The fact is that the very word "persona", from which we derive the word personality, actually comes from the Latin which means mask. A famous sociologist once made the point that there are four "yous" to every

human being: who you are, who you think you are, who others think you are and who you would like others to think you are. Most of us wear a mask as we face the outside world; we try to appear the way we would like others to think we are and not necessarily the way we actually are.

Our accomplice in appearing to being what we are not, are our clothes. Although many American sartorial publicists would have us believe that "clothes make the man", the real truth is that clothes fake the man. Even every day dress may very well be a costume which hides the real persona which lurks behind a three piece suite or a very finely tailored dress. The Hebrew language expresses this truth by its usage of the word 'begged' for garment which is based on the root which means to betray and its usage of its Hebrew word me'il which means cloak or jacket which is based on a root which means to steal; many a wolf parades in sheep's clothing and many an evil thought can be hid under a black hat or behind a long beard. Of course it is perfectly, and even praiseworthy, to dress in a way in which we would like to become, to attempt to change our personality to fit the kind of garb which represents the person we would like to be. Hence, it is understandable that one would wear bright colors when depressed in order to try and emerge from the depression, or to wear one's ritual fringes out and put on an especially modest garment as a means of striving for greater religious perfection. However, in the final analysis it is crucial that the gap between who we are and who we appear to be is not too great.

To a very great extent, the essence of the Purim story is the difference between appearance and reality. The story opens with its description of a magnificent building of royal blue, purple and linen-materials which would appear to be related to the Sanctuary in the desert and then to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem; the reality however is that they are part and parcel of the palace of the Persian king, which has become a kind of substitute sanctuary for the Jews of Persia. The Jewish community itself seems to be very proud and strong; indeed the Jews are also invited to the great bash which Achashverosh makes for his citizens. The reality however is that the Jews remain extremely vulnerable to the extent that one advisor named Haman is able to enact a decree for the destruction of the entire community.

Mordechai and Esther are fascinating personalities, who are described as important Jews but who-at the same time that they seem to be leaders of their people-are also playing a game of getting ahead in the Persian oligarchy. The Hebrew name Hadassah is conveniently exchanged for the more Persian Esther (Astarte) and the name Mordechai, apparently from the Persian god Mardoch, is clearly a Persian name. (This is not very different from Jews who are named Mark or Matthew or Victoria) Mordechai apparently doesn't dress very Jewish because Haman has to be told that he is a Jew; neither does Esther express her Judaism on her sleeve; much the

opposite, she hides her Jewish ancestry from those overseeing the beauty contest and does not appear to be conflicted about living with a Persian king. In the beginning of our story, Mordechai and Esther seem to be posing very much as Persians.

The moment of truth arrives when the Jewish community is about to be destroyed, and Mordechai-refusing to bow or bend his knee before Haman, demonstrates publicly on behalf of his people. He also reminds Esther that if the Jews are destroyed she dare not fantasize that she will be saved. And that it was in order that she emerge now as a proud Jewess to save her people that she has achieved her position of power. Esther passes her test with flying colors, risking both this world and the next world by placing her life on the line for the sake of her people.

In the final analysis, the entire story of Purim is not the way it appears to be. To the superficial reader, the book appears to be a succession of coincidences which lead to the ultimate survival of the Jews. G-d never appears up front. However, with a bit of deeper insight it becomes clear that it is the Divine hand guiding history which brought about the specific confluence of events which secured our Jewish victory. Indeed, the real message of the Scroll is that coincidence is G-d's way of letting us know that He remains in charge even if it may be anonymously.

The Talmud tells us that it is incumbent for a person to get drunk (Aramaic, besumei) on Purim until he can no longer distinguish between praising Mordechai and cursing Haman. The Meiri notes that in Hebrew the word bosem means fragrant perfume. Since our truest personality comes out under the influence of inebriating beverages, it is only if sweet and fragrant words of Torah and praise to G-d will emanate from our mouths when we drink, that we are allowed to drink. From this perspective, Purim is a test. Are we really what we appear to be, or who we would like to be? If not, you may dress in the manner in which you would like others to perceive you, but you better not drink. © 2005 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

An elderly woman from Brooklyn decided to prepare her will and make her final requests. She told her rabbi she had two final requests. First, she wanted to be cremated, and second, she wanted her ashes scattered over Bloomingdale's. "Bloomingdale's?" the rabbi exclaimed. "Why Bloomingdale's?" "Then I'll be sure my daughters visit me twice a week."

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's portion continues the theme of the sacrificial service. There are many suggestions as to the reasoning behind this enigmatic, yet important element of our tradition.

Ramban understands the Mishkan (tabernacle) as a kind of portable Mt. Sinai. Mt. Sinai was a physical mountain through which the Jewish people were able to feel God's presence more powerfully. This was also the purpose of the Mishkan, where God's presence was integrated into human souls.

There are many similarities between Mt. Sinai and the Mishkan. As Am Yisrael (the people of Israel) surrounded Mt. Sinai, the place from where the voice of God was heard, so too, did Israel encamp around the Mishkan from where the presence of God was especially felt. In this sense, the Mishkan was a constant ratification of the covenant at Mt. Sinai between God and the Jewish people that was validated at Mt. Sinai. The covenant is reaffirmed through the tabernacle.

With this concept of the Mishkan in mind, the sacrifices can be understood. The two major covenants in the Torah - the covenant of the pieces and the covenant at Sinai are accompanied by sacrifice. (Genesis 15:9,10; Exodus 24:5) Indeed, as God appears at Mt. Sinai, the covenant reaches its crescendo when the Jewish people eat and drink. (Exodus 24:11)

The presence of a sacrifice in these covenantal experiences can be looked upon as a celebration of this glorious moment of meeting between God and his people. Much like a seuda (a lavish meal) celebrates our relationship with God on Shabbat or Yom Tov, so too the korban (sacrifice) celebrates the covenant. The covenant is eternalized through rituals associated with the sacrificial service.

In his book "The Temple," Rabbi Joshua Berman notes that salt was always used on the korban and is called brit melach. (Leviticus 2:13) As salt gives sharpness and longer life to food, so too is the covenant blessed with eternity. In Rabbi Berman's words, the salt marks "the eternal nature of the covenant... [it is] a statement about the lasting duration of the covenantal bond."

Flour (mincha) and wine (nesachim), which are also often associated with sacrifices, teach the message of the importance of tradition coupled with freshness. The best wine is the wine that is old, wine that is rooted in the past. Flour, on the other hand is edible if it is new, if it is fresh. Continuity in the sacrificial service depends upon the bridging of the past with the present forging a new and profound future.

While we do not celebrate the covenant with sacrifices today, we must constantly see to it that the covenant seems new and fresh. While maintaining the tradition of the past, it should always be a creative, stirring, and exciting shir chadash (new song) - otherwise the love with God becomes stale.

The korbanot offered in the Mishkan, together with its fine ingredients are glorious reminders of our endless love of the Ruler of Rulers.

It is the ultimate State Dinner. But this time, the honoree is truly worthy - it is, after all, God Himself. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

Two women came before wise King Solomon, dragging between them a young man in a three-piece suit. "This young lawyer agreed to marry my daughter," said one.

"No! He agreed to marry MY daughter," said the other.

And so they haggled before the King until he called for silence.

"Bring me my biggest sword," said Solomon, "and I shall hew the young attorney in half. Each of you shall receive a half."

"Sounds good to me," said the first lady.

But the other woman said, "Oh Sire, do not spill innocent blood.

Let the other woman's daughter marry him."

The wise king did not hesitate a moment. "The attorney must marry the first lady's daughter," he proclaimed.

"But she was willing to hew him in two!" exclaimed the king's advisor.

"Indeed," said wise King Solomon. "That shows she is the TRUE mother-in-law."

RICK DINITZ

Halacha MiDisney

While Disney World does maintain daily minyanim throughout the park, many poskim have declared it forbidden to pray with them. They proclaim that mice cannot serve as shlichei tzibbur, and it is well known that this practice is common at Disney synagogues. However, the chancellor of Disney World has ruled that mice are acceptable as agents, as long as they have taken upon themselves the obligations of daily tfilah. Mishlei states that there are no atheists in mouse holes. Furthermore, on Shabbat, dwarves receive all seven aliyot. Dwarves reading from the Torah damages k'vod hatzibbur, even if all of the women are asleep (or rather, even if they appear to be dead, after swallowing a restrictive psak). (Incidentally, Sleepy maintains that he is a kohen, based on family tradition passed from father to son since the days of Aharon. Other dwarves recall that Sleepy is a descendant of Honi M'agel, and hence cannot be a kohen-but this is circular reasoning.) However, even those who permit aliyot for dwarves forbid them to serve as shlichei tzibbur. Apparently, dwarves are incapable of reciting the prayers properly, as they always whistle through their avodah-even Grumpy! Someone who hears this whistling and responds "Amen" is not yotze. Disney synagogues also count mermaids in a minyan, in an obvious end-run around the age-old regulations to keep women barefoot. Since mermaids have no feet, they (technically) cannot stand for the Amidah, even though they remain shoeless. Yesh raglayim ladavar. Heaping scandal upon scandal, mermaids, crickets, mice and ducks all sit on the same side of the mechitzah with wooden boys-clearly violating the prohibition against kilayim. Sometimes after a tough day working the crowds through a steamy Florida afternoon, many of the regulars prefer to daven at home over a stiff drink. To ensure a minyan for

Minchah, the Disney rabbis even count singing tableware and kitchen implements. Although this pushes the halachic envelope, each piece can cite a klal [general principle] whereby it must be included in the minyan: The spoon counsels us "dan chaf b'zchut"[judge a spoon with merit]. The knife cites "sakin b'adam shelo b'fanav"[a knife (serves) in (stead of) a person when (a person is) not present]. The candlesticks remind us that "ner mitzvah, v'Torah or"[a candle (can do any) mitzvah, but the Torah is only leather]. The goblet intones "kos yayin malei k'virkat Adoshem"[a full cup of wine is equivalent to blessing Hashem]. The frying pan sings "laKel yeratzu k'minchah al machavat" [to Hashem it is as pleasing as Minchah davened by a pan]. The teacup refrains "sefel tov l'chol oseihem" [a cup is as good as anyone (who) does (it for) them]. The wine bottle chides "al tistakel b'kankan, elah b'ma sheyesh bo" [don't look at the bottle, rather see what's inside it]. The clock chimes in "tfilah mitzvah shehazman grama" [prayer is a mitzvah that time begins]. Several others declare "va'ani tefilati" [I am my prayer]. Still others quote R' Hillel: "b'makom she'ayn anashim hishtadel lihiyot ish" [In a place where there aren't (enough) men, strive to be a man]. Several of the most stringent authorities complain that Disney World is open on Shabbat, so all Disney characters who are union members are prohibited from serving in public synagogue roles because they are mechalelei Shabbat b'fantasia. Lenient sources justify their work as melachah she-aynah tzricha l'Goofy. R' Bambi says "hakol kasher l'tzvi" [anything to make a buck]. This Purim Torah is codified in the sefer lyunei Achbarim v'Anashim [Of Mice and Men] of R' Don Yitzchak Abarvazel. R' Abarvazel was an ancestor of the Katchke Rebbe. To properly grasp the full depth of his insights, one must be at least 40 years old and have raised children and even then, it is advantageous to first fulfill the mitzvah of ad lo yada yada yada. M-I-C (See you in costume) K-E-Y (Why? Because it's Purim!) M-O-U-S-E- from the diary of Michoel b. Velvel of Anaheim. © 2000 R. Dinitz, Special thanks to Phil Goldwasser, who posed the question that opened the floodgates of silliness. Pitchu li shaarei matzchik.

Know why the price of air at gas stations keeps going up? Inflation!

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

The first part of this week's Torah portion describes the laws of the sacrifices: Olah (Vayikra 6:2-6), Mincha (6:7-16), Chatat (6:17-23), Asham (7:1-10), and Shelamin (7:11-36). In each case, the collection of laws is called "Torah," implying a homogenous and complete set of rules. However, in spite of the identical heading, the description of the Olah is clearly different from the others. For the other sacrifices, the "Torah" is a description of the rituals to be performed. One example is the Mincha:

"Let him lift up from it with his fist, from the fine flour of the Mincha and its best portion, and all the incense on the Mincha, and offer it on the Altar" [6:8]. Or, the Chatat: "The Kohen who performs the ritual shall eat it, it shall be eaten in a holy place, in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. Anything that touches its flesh will become holy." [6:19-20]. The Olah, on the other hand, is described not in terms of the sacrifice itself but with respect to what is left behind after it is burned: "This is the law of the Olah, this is the Olah which is on its flame on the Altar... And the Kohen will put on his cloak of linen and dress his skin in linen trousers, and he shall lift up the ash which the flame has devoured from the Olah on the Altar, and place it near the Altar. And he shall remove his clothing and put on other clothes, and remove the ash to the outside of the camp, to a pure place." [6:2-4]. What is the significance of this difference in approach?

Evidently the exceptional treatment of the "Torah" of the Olah is a way of emphasizing the full meaning of this type of sacrifice. The main element of the descriptions of the sacrifices is the eating of the flesh, whether by the Kohanim or by the owners (for a Shelamin), emphasizing the difference between the parts of the animal that are burned on the Altar and those that are eaten. With respect to the Mincha, for example, the offer on the Altar is first described, "Let him lift up from it with his fist, from the fine flour of the Mincha and its best portion, and all the incense on the Mincha, and offer it on the Altar" [6:8]. This is followed immediately by the aspect of eating: "And what is left from it shall be eaten by Aharon and his sons, let it be eaten as matzot in a holy place, they shall eat it in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting" [6:9]. The same is true for the Asham sacrifice. First the parts that are to be burned on the Altar are listed, "Let him offer all its fat, the tail and the fat that covers the intestines, and the two kidneys and the fat that covers them... And the Kohen shall offer them on the Altar." [7:3-5]. And this is followed by the way the other portions are to be eaten, "Every male among the Kohanim shall eat it, let it be eaten in a holy place." [7:6].

The same sequence appears with respect to the Olah. Here again the first command is to offer flesh on the Altar, and once again the subject of "eating" appears, but in this case the verse refers to collecting the ashes and "consuming" by the Altar. "And he shall lift up the ash which the flame has devoured from the Olah" [6:3]. This in fact emphasizes the significance of the Olah sacrifice, which is not divided with man at all, as opposed to all the other sacrifices. The Olah is an expression of complete sacrifice to G-d, based on a feeling of fear and distance. This implies that the main ritual of this sacrifice is related to the ashes, as a sign of the complete consumption of the sacrifice. This is accompanied by a repeated emphasis on another element, the flame: "Let the flame burn on the Altar... And the flame on the Altar will burn on it... Let there be a permanent flame on the Altar, it shall not be extinguished..." [6:2,5,6]. This fire, which will descend from heaven on the

eighth day of the dedication of the Tabernacle, will always serve to emphasize the feeling of fear that is required of those who come to the holy site ("A devouring fire!" see Devarim 4:24). This special attribute is most clearly seen in the Olah, as opposed to the other sacrifices, which serve to emphasize the alternative aspect of a partnership with the Kohanim and the owners of the sacrifice, in line with the close approach and the love between the Almighty and Bnei Yisrael.

Have you hear about the dislexic rabbi? He walks around all day saying "Yo!"



RABBI YONASON GOLDSON

The Jewish Response to Terror

The biblical blueprint for dealing with enemies

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Pogroms. Genocide. Jihad. These are the devices our enemies have directed against us throughout the ages, for no other reason than because we are Jews. Yet for all that, the commitment to mercy and justice that defines us as a people and sets us apart from the other nations of the earth ensures that we would never seek the destruction of another people simply because of who they are.

Or wouldn't we?

You shall erase the memory of Amolek from beneath the heavens. So the book of Deuteronomy commands us - a command renewed from generation to generation across the span of Jewish history - to strike down the nation of Amolek and obliterate its memory from the consciousness of mankind.

How is such a precept defensible? How can we claim the moral high ground over our enemies if we resort to the same tactics that they employ against us?

The decree against Amolek, however, is based upon neither racial hatred, ethnic struggle, religious ideology, nor even historical justification.

Many nations have differed from the Jews in belief, practice, and culture, and many of these have waged war against us and sought our destruction. But only the nation of Amolek warrants such condemnation, not only that we seek out and destroy it, but that we never forget the reason why.

Remember what Amolek did to you on the way, as you departed from Egypt: How they fell upon you in the desert, when you were tired and weary, and cut down the weak who trailed behind you.

Why did Amolek attack us? Why did they descend upon us in the desert, unprovoked, and attempt to annihilate us?

At the time of the Jewish exodus from Egypt, 3317 years ago, the entire world witnessed an event both unprecedented and never to be repeated: The miraculous destruction of the most powerful nation on earth and the even more miraculous supremacy of a small and oppressed people. No one in the world doubted the involvement of the Divine Hand behind the upheaval, nor could anyone fail to recognize the significance of this fledgling nation: the rise of the Jewish nation introduced human civilization to such ideals as peace, collective conscience, social responsibility and, above all, a standard of moral values that would become the foundation of all ethics and human virtue.

Such ideals, previously unknown to human society, did not find immediate universal acceptance. Indeed, the values of Judaism have been rejected and discarded time after time throughout human history. But in the wake of the miraculous destruction of Egypt, every nation and every people recognized what the Jewish nation represented. And every nation stood in awe of them. Every nation except one.

The nation of Amolek despised the very concept of moral standards. They would accept no moral authority, would make every sacrifice to protect their moral autonomy, and would employ any tactic to strike out against the nation who, by teaching morality to the world, threatened to render them a pariah.

Why is it important that they cut down the weak who trailed behind you? What does it reveal that they chose the moment when an unsuspecting people were tired and weary to attack? What perverse strategy drove them to embark upon a hopeless campaign of violence that had no hope of success?

In short, Amolek introduced the world to the tactics of terrorism, launching a suicide campaign against the defenseless, against the tired and the weary, just as their ideological descendants would later blow themselves up to murder women and children, waging brutal physical and psychological war upon a civilian population - not for clearly defined political gain, but to spread chaos and the moral confusion of disorder.

In response, the Torah teaches us the only possible answer to terror: Not negotiation, not compromise, not appeasement, not even military

conquest and domination - none of these will ever succeed against the terrorist who seeks nothing less than the obliteration of his enemies, the terrorist driven by such singular purpose that he will sacrifice everything to achieve it and will stop at nothing until he has attained it. He will use others' desire for peace, their respect for human life, and their confidence in the ultimate goodness of mankind as weapons to destroy them; he will make any promise and offer any gesture of goodwill to gain the opportunity to take another life, to cripple another limb, to break the spirit of all who stand between him and moral anarchy.

In confronting terror, little has changed over the course of 33 centuries. Four centuries after Amolek's attack upon the Jews in the desert, King Saul showed a moment's mercy to the king of Amolek, thereby allowing both that nation and its ideology of terror to survive. Five centuries after that, when the Jews of Persia thought to appease Haman, a descendant of Amolek, they very nearly brought about their own destruction, saved only by the miracle of Purim. Similarly did the governments of Europe seek to appease the greatest criminal in modern times, empowering him to send millions to meaningless death in pointless battle and incinerate millions more in an incomprehensible Holocaust.

And today, Western governments and ideologues continue to promote negotiation with and concession to terror, even as more and more innocents are murdered and maimed. Like King Saul, they prove the talmudic dictum that one who shows mercy at a time for cruelty will show cruelty at a time of mercy. For all its insistence upon compassion, upon virtue, upon love for our fellow man, Judaism teaches the cold practicality of confrontation with terror, that there can be no peace with those committed to violence, that there can be no offer of good faith to those who renounce faithfulness, that there can be no respect for the lives of those who devote their lives to dealing out death.

For those who live and die for the sake of terror, only one course of action exists to preserve the society that makes peace and justice possible: to erase their memory from beneath the heavens. © 2005 Rabbi Y. Goldson & www.JewishWorldReview.com.

A rabbi who's been leading a congregation for many years is upset by the fact that he's never been able to eat pork. So he devises a plan whereby he flies to a remote tropical island and checks into a hotel. He immediately gets himself a table at the finest restaurant and orders the most expensive pork dish on the menu.

As he's eagerly waiting for it to be served, he hears his name called from across the restaurant. He looks up to see 10 of his loyal congregants approaching. His luck, they'd chosen the same time to visit the same remote location! Just at that moment, the waiter comes out with a huge silver tray carrying a whole roasted pig with an apple in its mouth. The rabbi looks up sheepishly at his congregants and says, "Wow - you order an apple in this place and look how it's served!"

MEISH GOLDISH

Purim – An International Tale

King Achashverosh was Finnish with his disobedient wife Vashti. "You Congo now!" he ordered her. After she had Ghana way, the king's messengers went Roman the land to find a new queen. And India end, the beautiful Esther won the crown.

Meanwhile, 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.

"You very stubborn man. You Jews are such Bahamas! If you keep 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. 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, "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. Haman cried bitterly. "Iraq my brains in an effort to destroy the Jews. But that sneaky Mordechai - Egypt me! "

Haman and his ten sons were hanged and went immediately to the Netherlands. And to Sweden the deal, the Jews were allowed to Polish off the rest of their foes as well.

"You lost your enemies and Uganda friend," the king smiled.

And that is why the Purim story Israeli a miracle. G-d decided to China light on His chosen people.

So now, let's celebrate! Forget all your Syria's business and just Serb up some wine and Taiwan on! Happy Purim!!!



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