

Trogdor



Aish

The torah publication that's burninating the countryside!

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

A number of questions beg to be asked relating both to the Biblical portion of the week as well as to the festival of Purim, which takes place both before (Ta'anit Esther, the fast of Esther, on Thursday) and immediately following the Sabbath of TeTzaveh (Saturday night and Sunday being the time when we read the Esther Scroll and participate in all of the concomitant festivities and acts of loving kindness). Firstly, in the Biblical portion why the emphasis on the various garments worn by the priests (from special vestments) and the High Priest (eight special vestments). If "The Merciful One desires the heart," why such significance made about external garb?! Secondly - and also concerning dress - a very difficult gloss of Rav Moshe Isserless (16th Century Ashkenazi decisor) relating to the laws of Purim says as follows: "Concerning the custom to wear costumes on Purim ("false faces," partzufim) and for men to dress in women's clothing, there is no prohibition of this conduct. Their intent is merely for the sake of rejoicing" (Shulhan Arukh, Orah Haim, end of 696).

Now why should Purim rejoicing outweigh the Biblical prohibition of men dressing in women's garb? Is masquerading - dressing like someone else - so central to the festivities of Purim?

In order to understand our Sages, I believe it is necessary to go back to the very first Biblical personality who masqueraded: Father Jacob, who dressed in the garb of his elder brother Esau (Gen 27: 15,16) in order to receive his father's blessing. What would cause Jacob, Biblically described as a "wholehearted individual, a studious tent dweller" (25:27) to don the aggressive and out-door garb of Esau? The truth is because Jacob wanted to become Esau, because Jacob's naïve, introspective and serious personality had been rejected by his father in favor of the more extroverted, silver-tongued ("His entrapment was in his mouth" 25:28) and materialistic-minded Esau. Jacob wanted to become Esau because Jacob yearned for his father's love and embrace!

Jacob assumed a masquerade of the other - and, as happens so very often when someone masquerades, that individual becomes the other, forsaking his true and essential self; Jacob forsook his pure, whole-hearted self which was the truest expression of the Divine spark within him and exchanged it for the outer garb of Esau. And so the Jacob we watch in action for the more than two decades he spent with his Uncle Laban became an accomplished and aggressive businessman - herdsman, a materially successful cattleman who knew very well how to look out for "number one". The outer garb of Esau quickly replaced the inner voice of Jacob.

Perhaps this is why our English word "personality," or "persona," comes from the Latin which means mask; many of us begin to continually wear the masks with which we masquerade, forsake our essential and truest selves for those whom we are pretending to be. And in this sense, Judaism would demand that external clothes do not necessarily make the man, but - very often, - clothes fake the man. That's why the Hebrew begged or garment comes from a root verb which means to deceive, and the Hebrew me'il, which means outer cloak, comes from a root verb which means to embezzle.

From this perspective, we can better understand the characters of the Esther Chronicle. Jews in exile, especially Jews who wish to be part of the Gentile class of their host country, often masquerade or assimilate, appearing to be as Gentile as possible. Hence Esther, whose real Hebrew name was Hadassah (a myrtle branch, which blooms even in the desert) was the Gentile sobriquet - or external calling card, as is were- Esther, from the Persian Goddess Astarte; Mordecai assumes the Persian Marduk. Esther hides her true self - her Jewish identity - by not revealing her nation or her homeland (Esther 2:10). She spends twelve months in preparation for her nocturnal meeting with Ahashverosh, being externally perfumed and cosmeticized so that her wholesome and pure body be "masked over" with all sorts of external fragrances. When she ascends to her lofty majestic position, she certainly does not dress as a Jewess would or reveal in any

TROGDOR AISH IS A FIRED UP (GET IT?) PURIM PRODUCTION
FOR PEOPLE WITH THE SKILLS OF AN ARTIST
WHO ARE, LIKE, JUST A MAN.
THAT IS A...DRAGON-MAN
OR, MAYBE JUST A...DRAGON.

(if you're still clueless, ck out www.homestarrunner.com/sbemail58.html)



This newsletter is distributed everywhere. Yes, that's right, everywhere. If you're there and this newsletter isn't, well, then, you're not really there. That's a good scientific test, by the way. If you wanna know if you're somewhere, just check to see if Trogdor Aish is there. That'll tell ya. If it isn't, you aren't. This publication was made using consummate V's, wingalings, a big beefy arm and imbibed with plenty of majesties. Can't you just see all the majesties? I know what you're thinking. How in the world did you come up with such a terrific idea as Trogdor Aish. Right? Well, I'll tell ya. We held a big contest to see who could come up with the best Purim idea. You would not BELIEVE how many entries were received (cough cough) So I came up with my own ridiculous, lame idea.

Got a better idea? Tell me about it before next Purim! ☺

DISCI AIMFR: No dragons were harmed in the making of this newsletter

way her true identity. In like manner, "Mordecai told the courtiers that he was Jewish " (Esther 3:4) in order to explain his refusal to bow down to Haman. Obviously he did not dress as a Jew with phylacteries and ritual fringes; if he had, he wouldn't have had to inform them of his Jewish ancestry. Esther and Mordecai began as masquerading Persians in order to retain and maintain positions of influence within the Persian Magisterial Court.

Remember, however that just as the masquerader puts on a false exterior façade, from which comes our English "face," the Hebrew word for face is panim, which literally means the internal (self), the true and interior being. Similarly, although Exile by its very nature encourages assimilation and masquerade, nevertheless , the Hebrew word galut actually means to reveal or uncover, and - as the Bible guarantees - there will always come the moment of truth in which the assimilated Jew will return to his true self and re-establish his deepest roots in his homeland (Gen. 15:16, Ex 1:7,8: Lev.26:44,45). The masquerading Jew will either come to himself by throwing off his masquerade in a profound moment of repentance, as when Jacob succeeded in exorcizing the spirit and envy of Esau from within himself and returned to "whole" to his ancestral home and homeland as Yisrael (he strove against beings divine and human, and he prevailed Gen

32:29), or as when an anti- Semite such as Haman forced a moment of truth upon Mordecai and Esther, and they decided in favor of their truest selves as Jews ready to risk their lives for their people and their G-d. At the end of the day, the masquerade falls to the ground and the true Jew must re-discover himself.

Now we understand why so much attention is paid to the garb of the Priests, with their emphasis of the twelve tribes and their statement on the High Priest's forehead turban, "holy unto the Lord": the outer garb of the sacred ministers of the Temple must reflect their inner sanctity and mission, the very antithesis of the initial Purim masquerade, when neither Esther nor Mordecai appeared to be who they really were. And our commandment to drink on Purim reflects our faith that even under the influence of large quantities of wine drunk by the Persian aristocrats, the true Jew will emerge with words of Torah and praise to G-d as did Mordecai and Esther. © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

The editor of this publication is a CPA.

His wife believes that tax-season was created by Jewish accountants specifically so they wouldn't have to help with the Pesach cleaning!

As such, if you see some CPA jokes between divrei torah, you'll know why ☺

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The emphasis in this week's parsha on the clothing of the kohanim-the priests of Israel of the family of Aharon-raises the issue of "Jewish clothing" as practiced throughout the ages. The vestments of the kohanim were divinely ordained and their exact description undoubtedly contains within it realms of spirituality and service to G-d and man. These garments were meant to reflect "honor and glory" on those who wore them-and to the entire household of Israel. In fact, in Second Temple times, when there was no longer any remaining anointment oil that could be used to inaugurate the kohanim into the service in the Temple, the Talmud teaches us that donning the vestments of the priesthood was deemed to be sufficient to officially install them into their holy positions.

Thus, to a great extent, clothing made the person. As such, I feel that it is quite understandable that Jews always placed a great stress upon what clothing they wore and how they dressed. Naturally, the type and style of "Jewish clothing" varied in different ages and locations. The Jews of Persia and Iraq did not wear Polish fur trimmed hats nor did Polish Jews wear head scarves or turbans. The Jews of Amsterdam in the seventeenth and eighteenth century wore triangular cockaded hats and the Lithuanian rabbis of the nineteenth century wore gentlemanly tall silk top hats. But the common denominator to all of this is that, from the time of Moshe onwards,

Jews attempted to dress distinctively, albeit always within the confines and influences of the surrounding general population.

"Jewish clothing" was always meant to be modest, neat and clean. It was to be an "honor and glory" to the wearer and the Jewish society. The Talmud speaks very strongly against Torah scholars who are somehow slovenly in the appearance of their clothing. Poverty was never allowed to be an excuse for stains or dirt on one's garments. In the Temple, the used clothing of the kohanim was still considered to have an element of holiness to them even if they could no longer be worn. Wicks for the candelabra were fashioned from them.

Clothing was never looked at as being a purely inanimate object. After all, the first clothing for humans was fashioned for Adam and Chava by G-d Himself, so to speak. Ill treatment of clothing was deemed to be a punishable offense. King David, in his old age was not warmed by his clothing any longer. The Rabbis attributed this to the fact that he mistreated the clothing of King Saul earlier in his life.

I think all of the above helps explain the importance that clothing, the type of individual "uniforms" that Jews in the world and here in Israel, play in our communal and personal life. Each of us and the groups that we belong to attempt to wear clothing that will be an "honor and glory" to us individually and to the group collectively. We should therefore not only treat clothing with respect but we should respect as well the wearers of those different types of clothing that conform to our traditions of modesty and Jewish pride. © 2007 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

If a lawyer and an IRS agent were both drowning and you could save only one of them, would you go to lunch or read the paper? ©

RABBI BARUCH LEFF

Kol Yaakov

All of us fear judgment. No one likes to go to traffic court for a violation. Certainly we don't crave hearing our bosses' evaluation of our performance. And when we ponder the fact that G-d looks down upon us and judges us, it is quite a scary thought. Yet, with deeper profundity, we will discover that G-d's judgment only comes out of love.

This week's Torah portion, Tetzaveh, describes the commandments regarding the types of clothing and "uniforms" that the kohanim (priests) and the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) would wear for their service in the Tabernacle. In addition to the "glory and splendor" (Shemot 28:2) of these beautiful vestments, the Talmud (Zevachim 88b) reveals that the High Priest's wearing of his special clothes would somehow evoke G-d's mercy

and help the Jewish People achieve atonement (with proper repentance) for various sins. Let us study this passage of the Talmud: "The tunic (shirt) atones for murder. The pants atone for adultery. The turban atones for haughtiness. The belt atones for evil thoughts. The breastplate atones for corrupt justice. The apron atones for idolatry. The robe atones for slanderous speech. And the headplate atones for brazenness."

The High Priest represented the Jewish People through his service in the Tabernacle. He wore 12 precious jewels on his breastplate, each symbolizing one of the 12 tribes (Shemot 28:21). One might describe the High Priest as a living embodiment of the entirety of the Jewish Nation. And this living embodiment was constantly serving in the holy Tabernacle, which was G-d's dwelling amidst the nation. The High Priest was the holiest and closest person to G-d and he was serving in the location most dear to G-d.

It seems strange then for the eight garments of the High Priest to continually remind G-d of the sins of the Jews. True, it is not a reminder in an absolutely negative sense—we are being granted a type of atonement. But one would think that the High Priest's clothing should relate more to expressions of love, merits, or righteous deeds of the Jews, rather than a mention of our sins, even if those sins are forgiven.

And besides, why does G-d constantly care so much about our sins? Why the need to judge us all the time? (The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 16a) says that we are actually judged every day and not just on The Jewish New Year.)

In addition, we actually celebrate Rosh Hashanah as a holiday, even though it is the annual Day of Judgment. What exactly are we celebrating? Do defendants celebrate their day in court? Or do they dread it with nervousness?

Finally, what is so special about turning Bat/Bar Mitzvah? Why do we rejoice when our daughters turn 12 (yes, girls do mature faster) and our sons turn 13? The answer to all of these queries is a fundamental concept in our relationship with G-d.

Why does G-d judge us? It cannot be because He has a need to judge or to exact revenge. G-d, by definition, is perfect and the ultimate source of goodness. He has no needs. It must be that He judges us for our benefit. Why is judgment to our benefit? G-d through His judgment shows us that He cares about everything that we do. We are so important to Him that He constantly watches us. He is concerned with our every move. We are the beings, through our free will, who shape the world and its destiny. Through judgment, we are made aware that every little thing that we do makes a difference. We matter. We are significant and responsible. And responsibility is a tremendous cause for celebration.

We live in a generation that has often been described as one that lacks self-esteem and self-worth. Depression is at an all-time high. There

have never been as many suicides as there have been in modern times. Surely, many people have clinical issues that require professional treatment. But, we could suggest that if we would contemplate on G-d's care for us and that the manner in which we perform our 'small' daily activities matters to Him and to the entirety of the world's existence, would we still have low self-esteem? Our routine moral tests and challenges make or break all of the universe's purpose and meaning. Is that not a cause for immense joy?

So we celebrate Rosh HaShanah, the Day of Judgment. We are happy to have G-d care deeply about our actions. We relish in the thought of having our lives laced with significance.

And we rejoice at a Bar/Bat Mitzvah because we are thrilled with the prospect of a youngster's life becoming more meaningful with the advent of responsibility. Now, every action and thought of the youngster is filled with importance, which was not the case before ages 12 or 13.

The fact that G-d judges us shows His love and concern. He is not indifferent to our actions. The worst type of treatment in a relationship is indifference. Marital therapists know that as long as a couple is still fighting, it is possible to save the marriage. If a husband is bothered by things his wife does, or vice versa, love is still present. That's why they make each other angry. If they become indifferent to each other and disappointments no longer matter to them, divorce is almost inevitable. So too, the fact that G-d cares about all of our actions, for good and for bad, means He loves us.

This is the profundity of G-d's judgment. And this is why our sins and their atonement are such an important factor in the High Priest's clothing. Our sins are foremost on G-d's 'mind' because He loves us and wants to see us improve.

Let's be responsible with our responsibility. If we never knew what we celebrated at our Bar/Bat Mitzvah, let's celebrate a personal and private one today with this newfound awareness of our enormous weight and gravity for the universe.

We matter. © 2007 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.com

A rabbi, a Hindu and a CPA were driving in a car that ran out of gas. They stopped at a farmer's house to spend the night but the farmer had only two beds. "One of you will have to sleep in the barn," he said. The Hindu said, "to show my humility, I'll sleep in the barn," and he goes out to the barn. A few minutes later there was a knock at the door. The Hindu said, "I'm sorry, there's a cow in the barn and it's against my religion to sleep near a cow."

The rabbi said, "no problem, I'll sleep in the barn."

A few minutes later there was a knock at the door and the rabbi said, "I'm sorry, there's a pig in the barn. It's against my religion to sleep near a pig."



The CPA says, "no problem, I'll sleep in the barn."

*A few minutes later there was a knock at the door...it was the pig and the cow. ☺
(now that's funny right there)*

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Summarized by Matan Gildai

Translated by Kaeren Fish

“That they may know that I am the Lord their G-d Who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell in their midst; I am the Lord their G-d." (Shemot 29:46)

Commenting on the expression, "that I might dwell," Rashi writes: "[I brought them out of Egypt] on condition that I dwell in their midst." According to this explanation, the verse is teaching us that the Exodus from Egypt was conditional upon Am Yisrael building the Mishkan, thereby causing the Divine Presence to rest in their midst.

Ramban rejects Rashi's interpretation for linguistic reasons: the introductory "I" in the expression "le-shokhni" ("that I might dwell") is not used in this sense anywhere else. Instead, Ramban proposes that the meaning is the same as "be-shokhni" ("when I dwell"); i.e., Benei Yisrael will know that G-d redeemed them from Egypt in the wake of the revelation of the Divine Presence that will occur in the Mishkan: "They will know when I dwell in their midst that I am the Lord their G-d Who brought them out of the land of Egypt."

The simple meaning of the verse would seem to find its most accurate reflection in the interpretation of Ibn Ezra and Rashbam, both of whom maintain that the verse is teaching that the Exodus from Egypt took place in order that the Holy One, blessed be He, would dwell in the Mishkan. Ibn Ezra comments: "For I took them out of Egypt solely in order that they would make Me a Mishkan and I would dwell in their midst; this is the meaning of the words, 'You shall worship G-d upon this mountain.'"

Ramban quotes Ibn Ezra and adds that this is a "great secret." The secret is that the dwelling of the Divine Presence is actually a Divine need-

G-d, as it were, "needs" His Presence to be brought down into the world by means of the Mishkan, and it is for this reason that he brings Benei Yisrael out of Egypt. Despite the fact that the Mishkan is obviously needed- both materially and spiritually-by Am Yisrael, nevertheless it is also something that G-d "needs," so to

speak.

Clearly, it is very difficult to understand the idea of the Mishkan serving any "need" of G-d. G-d has no "needs" that require satisfaction. But Ramban brings proofs for this idea from explicit verses in Tanakh, such as, for example, "Israel, in whom I take pride" (Yishayahu 49:3), and "He has desired it for His habitation" (Tehillim 132:13).

Chazal expand on this idea and speak of G-d's "desire" with regard to all of creation: "He desired to dwell with His creations in the lower world" (Bamidbar Rabba 13:6). Clearly, Chazal permit themselves to express such an idea only because there are verses that specifically make reference to it.

If we combine the above teaching of Chazal with the verse from the parasha, we arrive at the full picture. G-d desires to live in the world generally, but He wants to dwell in one place more than in all others: among Am Yisrael, in Eretz Yisrael, in the Temple. The verse explains that owing to this desire on G-d's part, there was a need to redeem Benei Yisrael from Egypt, for G-d could not dwell in their midst so long as they were still enslaved and mired in the 49th level of impurity.

Clearly, this goal of the Exodus is added to the natural and simple goal of saving Am Yisrael from suffering. The Torah notes both goals in relation to the Exodus. On the one hand, the salvation from suffering is mentioned: "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and their cry... I shall descend to save them from the hand of Egypt" (Shemot 3:7-8). On the other hand, we find the goal of having a place for the Divine Presence to dwell on earth: "that I brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d" (Bamidbar 15:41). There is the idea of "I took you out from under the suffering of Egypt" (Shemot 6:6), but at the same time there is the idea that "I take you as My nation, and I shall be your G-d."

Another matter that is connected to the idea of G-d's Presence dwelling amongst Israel as a "Divine need" is the concept of the "Divine Presence in exile." This idea, too, is connected to the exile and redemption from Egypt, as G-d tells Yaakov: "I shall go down with you to Egypt, and I shall surely also bring you up" (Bereishit 46:4).

There are two aspects to this idea. On the one hand, "I am with him in distress" (Tehillim 91:15) -- the Divine Presence is exiled of its own will together with Am Yisrael, so as to share in their suffering. As the Gemara teaches (Megilla 29a): "Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai taught: See how beloved Israel are to G-d; to every place where they were exiled, the Divine Presence accompanied them. They were exiled to Egypt; the Divine Presence went with them... they were exiled to Babylon; the Divine Presence went with them...."

On the other hand, the Divine Presence is "forced" into exile, as it were, when Am Yisrael is exiled. Because the Divine Presence is bound up with Am Yisrael, it is "automatically" exiled together with the nation. This is

not an exile of choice, but one that is "forced upon" G-d. The Exodus from Egypt, then, also contains an aspect of redemption of the Divine Presence from its exile.

This idea is relevant for us, too. We are not yet engaged in building a physical Sanctuary, but we must build a spiritual Sanctuary: a sanctuary of values, of Torah and the commandments, in order that G-d will dwell in our midst. We must remember that we need such a sanctuary-so as to sanctify and elevate ourselves, but it is "needed" also by G-d, Who dwells with us. This combination of human and Divine "needs" can be a powerful motivating factor, as well as idea that elevates our daily lives and our Torah living. (*This sicha was delivered on Shabbat parashat Tetzaveh, 5755 [1995].*)

Generally, people who complain about paying income taxes can be divided into two groups: Men and women! ☺

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes on Purim is extraordinarily rich. He has bequeathed us page after page of new, mind-stretching ideas. So be aware that what I offer here is like a drop of water from the ocean or a grain of sand from the beach. The implication is: much joy awaits you if you take the plunge, buy yourself a set of the Sfas Emes, and learn some of the text yourself (or with a chavrusa) each week. Let us work with the third paragraph of the Sfas Emes's ma'amar for Purim in his first year as Rebbe, 5631. The text there begins: "U'mitzvas mishlo'ach manos..." ("The mitzvah of sending presents to one another...") The Sfas Emes immediately appends his comment: "Nir'eh lavo le'ahavas Yisroel" ("Apparently, the objective of this mitzva is to get us to a state of Ahavas Yisroel" [love of our co-religionists]).

Note what the Sfas Emes has just done. His comment on mishlo'ach manos has, in effect, inverted the conventional view of how this mitzva operates. The standard approach sees mishlo'ach manos as an expression of our deeply founded, pre-existent love of our fellow Jews. By contrast, the Sfas Emes has just told us-without making a big splash about it-that in reality, first comes the gift giving; and only later, the love. The Sfas Emes is apparently working here with an idea similar to Sefer HaChinuch's maxim: "Ahdam nif'al lefi pe'ulosov." ("A person becomes what he does.") In the present context, this idea tells us that the purpose of mishlo'ach manos is to get us to a state in which we love our fellow Jews.

The implication is clear. The Sfas Emes takes it for granted that many of us may start from a state in which we do not love our fellow Jews. But he does not stop there. The Sfas Emes goes on to tell us that although we may begin from that state, we should not remain there. And he views

mishlo' ach manos as an instrument to get us from our initial negative or indifferent state to one of true ahavas Yisroel.

The ma'amar moves on now to a new perspective on ahavas Yisroel. The Megilla's first mention of Mordechai refers to him (Esther, 2:5) as "Ish Yehudi..." i.e., "a Jewish person." However, in non-pshat mode, Medrash Rabba reads these words as "Ish yechidi" i.e., "a single person." What does this mean? Is the Medrash telling us that Mordechai was an "isolated person"? A social misfit? Chas veshalom! Read on.

The commentaries on that Medrash explain that Mordechai was called 'yechidi' because he proclaimed HaShem's unity (yichud). How did he do this? By refusing to bow before Haman's idol. But in what amounts to a Medrash on the Medrash, the Sfas Emes reads "Ish yechidi" very differently. The Sfas Emes reads "Ish yechidi" as telling us that Mordechai unified-i.e. brought together- the Jewish people.

Why was it important to bring Klal Yisroel (the Jewish people) together? Because in a state of unity, we were able to fulfill the mitzva (Vayikra, 19:18) of "Ve'ahavta lerei'echa kamocho." (R. Aryeh Kaplan: "Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.") Chazal tell us that this mitzva is a "klal gadol baTorah ("a major principle of Yiddishkeit") By any standard, enabling people to rise above their innate egoism is a major achievement. Hence, the question arises: How did Mordechai do it?

The Sfas Emes answers by citing what may sound like a far-fetched chassidische commentary on the posuk "Ve'ahavta lerei'acha kamocho." That commentary explains: "Rei'acha-zeh Hakadosh Baruch Hu." That is, when the Torah tells us: "Love your neighbor as you love yourself," the Torah is really telling us: love HaShem-who is our true rei'ah ('friend'; 'neighbor') -- as we love ourselves.

You may be wondering: who is the "far-fetched chassidische" commentator quoted above? The answer may come as a surprise: Rashi. He offers this explanation in Gemora Shabbos (31a). In support of this explanation, Rashi cites a posuk (Mishlei, 27:10) which refers to HaShem as our "rei'a". To maintain credibility, I quote the posuk: "Rei'acha verei'ah avicha ahl ta'azov". (Artsroll: "Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father.")

The Sfas Emes proceeds to explain HOW ahavas HaShem can lead to ahavas Yisroel. If we all cling tightly to the inner core of our existence- to HaShem-we are all connected to each other. Then, in fact, all of Bnei Yisroel are one. And, recognizing that joint inner connection, we can treat each other-in reality, ourselves-with love. Thus, in principle, we can reach Ahavas Yisroel by starting with Ahavas HaShem.

Continuing in this vein, the Sfas Emes refers us to the posuk (Esther, 8:11) which says: "nikhalu ve'amod ahl nafsham". That is, Bnei

Yisroel "came together and defended themselves." The Sfas Emes points out that in the Hebrew text, the word translated here as "themselves" is given in the singular. Thus, translated literally, the pasuk says: "they defended their 'nefesh'". As you see, the word 'nefesh' is in the singular. But from the context, we know that the text is speaking about a multitude. Why does the text not use the plural?

To answer, the Sfas Emes refers us to Rashi on Bereishis, 46:26. That posuk speaks of the Bnei Yisroel who went to Mitzrayim. There, too, the Torah is speaking of many people but, nevertheless, employs the singular word "nefesh." Rashi there notes the contrast with the family of Esav Harasha, of whom the Torah (Bereishis, 36, 6) speaks in the plural, "nafshos beiso." Rashi explains that Bnei Yisroel is referred to in the singular because they all served the one HaShem. Thus, in that case, too, many people holding tightly to the same HaShem became, in effect, one. Hence, the posuk can-and does in fact-refer to them in the singular.

(Why do the Torah-and Rashi-have to tell us that all Bnei Yisroel served the same HaShem? Perhaps because an uninformed observer could easily misperceive the situation. That is, seeing the individual tribes-each with its own headgear and garb; with its own way of pronouncing Hebrew words; its own poskim; and its minhagim (customs) -- a person would have the impression that, in fact, they were serving different deities. For this reason, we have to be told that, notwithstanding superficial impressions, we are in fact one people.)

Finally, the Sfas Emes cites his grandfather, the Chiddushei HaRim, who noted an important fact. Our coming together-initially for self-defense and ultimately, with mishlo'ach manos-generated ahavas Yisroel and achdus (unity). This achdus, in turn, had a further beneficial effect. Unity enabled us to receive the Torah again, in Esther's time, as we had received it at Har Sinai-"ke'ish echad belev echad." (As one person with one heart.") Receiving the Torah in that manner was no small thing. Awareness of that 'side effect' of Purim should increase our joy. In fact, Purim is the happiest day in the year. © 2007 by Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

On the first day G-d created the dog. G-d said, "Sit all day by the door of your house and bark at anyone who comes in or walks past. I will give you a life span of twenty years."

The dog said, "That's too long to be barking. Give me ten years and I'll give you back the other ten." So G-d agreed.

On the second day G-d created the monkey. G-d said, "Entertain people, do monkey tricks, and make them laugh. I'll give you a twenty-year life span."

The monkey said, "How boring, monkey tricks for twenty years? I don't think so. Dog gave you back ten, so that's what I'll do too, okay?" And G-d agreed.

On the third day G-d created the cow. G-d said, "You must go to the field with the farmer all day long and suffer under the sun, have calves and give milk to support the farmer. I will give you a life span of sixty years."

The cow said, "That's kind of a tough life you want me to live for sixty years. Let me have twenty and I'll give back the other forty." And G-d agreed again.

On the fourth day G-d created man. G-d said, "Eat, sleep, play, marry and enjoy your life. I'll give you twenty years."

Man said, "What? Only twenty years! Tell you what, I'll take my twenty, and the forty the cow gave back and the ten the monkey gave back and the ten the dog gave back, that makes eighty, okay?"

"Okay," said G-d, "You've got a deal."

So that is why the first twenty years we eat, sleep, play, and enjoy ourselves; for the next forty years we slave in the sun to support our family; for the next ten years we do monkey tricks to entertain the grandchildren; and for the last ten years we sit on the front porch and bark at everyone. ☺

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

When Esther was reluctant to approach Achashverosh to beseech him to spare her nation, Mordechai tried to convince her to proceed anyway (Esther 4:13-14). Part of his argument why she should risk her life by appearing before the king uninvited was "who knows if for a time such as this you became queen," i.e. that G-d arranged for you to be in a position where you can petition the king on behalf of the Jews.

Knowing the Purim story may give us 20/20 hindsight. Nevertheless, this statement always struck me as being rather strange. Isn't it obvious that this was why she became Queen? Had Mordechai said that "perhaps" this was the reason, I could understand that at the time they weren't completely sure. But framing it as "who knows" makes it seem as if there were other possible reasons that seemed more likely, with Mordechai having to point out that for all we know it is for this reason instead. What did they originally think was G-d's plan for making Esther the queen until Haman's evil decree made them realize that G-d may have had something else in mind?

Although the plot of the Megillah centers around Haman's attempt to wipe out the Jews, there is a subplot as well—the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash (Holy Temple) in Jerusalem. The 70 years of the Babylonian exile were about to end, although exactly when they started (and therefore when they would end) was unclear. The party Achashverosh threw at the beginning of the Megillah was meant to celebrate what he thought was the passing of the 70-year mark without the Temple being rebuilt (see Megillah 11b). At the party, he used the vessels from the Temple (see Esther Rabbah 2:11)



and wore the garments of the Kohain Gadol (Esther Rabbah 2:1). This theme, with the Jews longing for the Temple while the non-Jews tried to thwart it, exists throughout the Megillah. Our sages, of blessed memory, filled us in on what was going on behind the scenes.

Queen Vashti may have had to be put to death in order to make way for Esther, but she was being punished for preventing Achashverosh from allowing the Temple from being rebuilt, asking him how he could rebuild what her grandfather (Nevuchadnezar) worked so hard to destroy (Agadas Esther 1:12).

Mordechai finding out about the assassination plot against Achashverosh may have been integral in foiling Haman, but by saving the king Mordechai hoped to be able to get on his good side, thereby having a better chance of convincing him to allow the Temple to be rebuilt (Agadas Esther 2:22).

Achashverosh wanted to fulfill Mordechai's wishes, but wasn't willing to rebuild the Temple. However, he didn't want to turn down his request either. What did he do? He elevated Haman, who was so vehemently against having the Temple rebuilt, so that they would be busy fighting each other over the issue, thus letting Achashverosh off the hook (see Midrash Abba Guryon on 3:1).

When Achashverosh offered Queen Esther anything she wanted, "up to half of the kingdom" (Esther 5:6), he really meant anything but permission to rebuild the Temple (see Targum), which was in issue that was dividing the kingdom (with the Jews wanting it so badly and their enemies fervently against it).

In this context, it seems likely that when Esther was chosen to be the queen, both she and Mordechai assumed (or at the very least hoped) that the reason G-d had put her in the position of being the wife of the only man in the world that could authorize the rebuilding of the Temple was to be able to convince him to do so (see Rashi on Esther 2:11).

After Esther became queen, she convinced Achashverosh to appoint Mordechai to be a royal officer (see Agadas Esther 2:22). Mordechai saved the king's life, and it looked very promising that there was enough influence in the palace to convince him to reinstate the permission that Koresh had previously given to rebuild the Temple (see Ezra 1:1-4). Achashverosh wanted no part of it, so brought in Haman to offset Mordechai's influence. When Haman took it further, ordering the complete annihilation of the Jewish people, Mordechai realized that Esther might not have become queen in order to bring about the rebuilding of the Temple, as he had originally thought. For "who knows if it was for a time such as this," when our very existence is hanging in the

balance, "that you became queen." © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

During a service at an old shul, when the Shema was said, half the people stood and half remained seated. Those standing started yelling that everyone should stand and the seated ones started yelling that everyone should sit down.

The rabbi didn't know what to do, so he decided to ask the oldest member of the shul, a 98 year old bedridden man, what the tradition in the shul always was.

"is the tradition to stand?" the rabbi asked.

"No, that's not the tradition," the man answered.

"Then the tradition is to sit?" said the rabbi.

"No, that's not the tradition either," the man answered.

"Well the congregants fight all the time, yelling at each other about whether they should sit or stand!" the rabbi exclaimed.

"AHA!" said the older man. "THAT is the tradition!" ☺

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Built into an open democratic system of government is the idea that too much power should not be invested in any one individual. Such a policy leads to dictatorship and the forcing of a community to comply to the demands of one person. Hence, the concept of checks and balances in which individuals in government invested with power are checked and balanced out by other individuals.

Indeed checks and balances is a basic principal of the American political system. This idea is also found in the wisdom of the Torah. Each individual in Torah leadership has unique tasks and, in the end, limits and checks the power of the other.

For example: the navi (prophet) serves as the bearer of ethical standards; the melech (king) heads the executive branch; the sanhedrin, the judiciary. And, as our portion points out, the kohen serves as the ritual model for the Am (people). When a leader assumes more than one of these roles it leads to devastation. This type of devastation actually occurred in the time of the Maccabees who became not only the executive heads of the people, but also the ritual leadership.

The Torah takes the concept of checks and balances a step further. Built into the respective roles of Jewish leadership is the recognition that each of these powerful and important leaders are subservient to a higher power, to G-d. In the end, G-d is the ultimate check and balance.

The navi never speaks without the imprimatur of G-d. Unlike the Christian model where their man-G-d speaks in the first person, our navi speaks with the retrain, "Thus says the Lord (ko amar Hashem)."

Similarly, the melech must carry a Torah with him at all times. He does this so that he constantly understands that he does not dictate the law,

rather the Torah dictates the law to him. Even the judiciary has its limits for the highest court can only offer the law based on the foundations and principles set forth at Sinai by the Almighty.

It is not only the role definitions that convey limitation of power, even the clothes worn remind the leaders of this message. Around the head of the priest is the tzitz (a plate of pure gold), upon which the words kodesh L'Hashem, "Holy to the Lord" are stated (Exodus 28:36). In contrast to the ancient priest who so often abused his power, our kohen is reminded constantly that whatever his power, it emerges from the Almighty.

In this sense the priest in the Tabernacle is a fixing of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. There, in the beauty of Eden they disobey G-d's words. Here, in the mishkan, a kind of Garden of Eden within the larger world, the kohen is mandated to follow the word of G-d. It is not a coincidence that in Eden after eating from the tree, G-d makes clothes, katnot, for Adam and Eve. (Genesis 3:21) Here in the fixing story the priest also wears clothes (khetonet). (Exodus 28:4) Here, however, the priest wearing khetonet follows the word of G-d.

In contemporary times where politicians feel so entitled that they often act as if they are superhuman, the roles and messages presented in the Torah teach us that in the end, each person, no matter her or his stature, is human and is fallible. Only G-d is infallible and stands alone as the ultimate check and balance. © 2007 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

A dietitian was addressing a large audience, "The material we put into our stomachs is enough to have killed most of us years ago. Red meat is awful, soft drinks erode the stomach lining, Chinese food is loaded with MSG and no one realizes the long-term harm caused by germs in our drinking water.

"But there's one thing that is the most dangerous of all and most of us have eaten it or will at some time. Can anyone tell me what food it is that causes the most grief and suffering for years after eating it?"

A 75 year old man in the front row stood up and said, "Wedding cake!" ☺

Happy Purim!