

Tiras Aish

The Torah newsletter that claims to be cornier than all the rest!

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The sedra of Tetsaveh, as commentators have noted, has one unusual feature: it is the only sedra from the beginning of Shemot to the end of Devarim that does not contain the name of Moses. Several interpretations have been offered: The Vilna Gaon suggests that it is related to the fact that in most years it is read during the week in which the seventh of Adar falls: the day of Moses' death. During this week we sense the loss of the greatest leader in Jewish history -- and his absence from Tetsaveh expresses that loss.

The Baal HaTurim relates it to Moses' plea, in next week's sedra, for G-d to forgive Israel. "If not," says Moses, "blot me out of the book you have written" (32:32). There is a principle that "The curse of a sage comes true, even if it was conditional" (Makkot 11a). Thus for one week his name was "blotted out" from the Torah.

The Paneach Raza relates it to another principle: "There is no anger that does not leave an impression" When Moses, for the last time, declined G-d's invitation to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt, saying "Please send someone else", G-d "became angry with Moses" (Ex. 4:13-14) and told him that his brother Aaron would accompany him. For that reason Moses forfeited the role he might otherwise have had, of becoming the first of Israel's priests, a role that went instead to Aaron. That is why he is missing from the sedra of Tetsaveh which is dedicated to the role of the Cohen.

All three explanations focus on an absence. However, perhaps the simplest explanation is that Tetsaveh is dedicated to a presence, one that had a decisive influence on Judaism and Jewish history.

Judaism is unusual in that it recognises not one form of religious leadership but two: the navi and Cohen, the prophet and the priest. The figure of the prophet has always captured the imagination. He (or she) is a person of drama, "speaking truth to power", unafraid to challenge kings and courts or society as a whole in the name of high, even utopian ideals. No other type of religious personality has had the impact as the prophets of Israel, of whom the greatest was Moses. The priests, by contrast, were for

the most part quieter figures, a-political, who served in the sanctuary rather than in the spotlight of political debate. Yet they, no less than the prophets, sustained Israel as a holy nation. Indeed, though Israel were summoned to become "a kingdom of priests" they were never called on to be a people of prophets (Moses said, "Would that all G-d's people were prophets", but this was a wish, not a reality).

Let us therefore consider some of the differences between a prophet and a priest:

- The role of priest was dynastic. It passed from father to son. The role of prophet was not dynastic. Moses' own sons did not succeed him; Joshua, his disciple did.

- The task of the priest was related to his office. It was not inherently personal or charismatic. The prophets, by contrast, each imparted their own personality. "No two prophets had the same style" (This, incidentally, is why there were prophetesses but no priestesses: this corresponds to the difference between formal office and personal authority. See R. Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, Responsa Binyan Av, I:65).

- The priests wore a special uniform; the prophets did not.

- There are rules of kavod (honour) due to a Cohen. There are no corresponding rules for the honour due to a prophet. A prophet is honoured by being listened to, not by formal protocols of respect.

- The priests were removed from the people. They served in the Temple. They were not allowed to become defiled. There were restrictions on whom they might marry. The prophet, by contrast, was usually part of the people. He might be a shepherd like Moses or Amos, or a farmer like Elisha. Until the word or vision came, there was nothing special in his work or social class.

- The priest offered up sacrifices in silence. The prophet served G-d through the word.

- They lived in two different modes of time. The priest functioned in cyclical time -- the day (or week or month) that is like yesterday or tomorrow.

- The prophet lived in covenantal (sometimes inaccurately called linear) time - the today that is radically unlike yesterday or tomorrow. The service of the priest never changed; that of the prophet was constantly changing. Another

same vein, the natural human tendency to enjoy being honored can be a factor in spurring us to undertake beneficial efforts on behalf of people in need. Perhaps the honor of the priestly garments can lead the Priest to work with greater vigor for Am Yisrael.

Sometimes greater responsibility can lead to honor and, at times, honor can inspire greater commitment. It has often been said that "clothes make the man." The Torah here is completing the sentence, with the teaching that clothes are there to make us act for others. © 2013 *Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns*

*What do you call a Frenchman wearing sandals?
Philippe Philoppe!*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

When we thank G-d for saving us from Haman in Al Hanisim, the verse in the M'gilla describing Haman's intent (3:13) is quoted; "[he] wanted to destroy, kill and wipe out all of the Jews, from young to old, [including] children and women, on one day, on the 13th [day] of the 12th month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions." This last clause seems problematic, for several reasons. First of all, it's quite awkward to include the part of the decree that called for "plundering our possessions" while thanking G-d for saving our lives. Would the loss of material possessions mean anything to their owners after they were murdered? Why was this aspect included in the prayer of thanks and praise? Would our expression of gratitude be any less complete if this part of the verse wasn't quoted? Secondly, although our possessions being plundered was a primary motivator for our enemies to kill us (since they could take our belongings afterwards, see Ralbag), and is therefore included in the wording of the decree (in the M'gilla), the word "decree" is not included in Al Hanisim; we are describing what "Haman wanted to do," not what he decreed. We are therefore stating that "Haman wanted to plunder our possessions." Not that he wanted our possessions to be plundered by others so that they would kill us, but that he himself wanted to take possession of our things. How can we state that Haman wanted to take our things for himself if our possessions would have been taken by those who killed us, not by Haman?

The very notion that the king of the Persian empire would allow a decree of genocide to be issued seems rather far-fetched. For a king who had to maintain the loyalty of 127 different provinces, wiping out one of the

nations he was supposed to be protecting would be very problematic. Did Achashveirosh really want to be thought of as barbaric by the people of his empire? He didn't seem to even be aware that such a decree was issued, as when Esther pleaded for her life and the life of her people (7:3), he asked her who wanted to kill them (7:5). Unless he was feigning ignorance, wasn't it obvious who it was? How many peoples in his kingdom were slated to be wiped out? Additionally, if a decree to wipe out every Jew was issued in Nisan to be carried out 11 months later, in Adar, why would any Jew remain in the Persian empire? Why didn't they all move to Greece, or somewhere else not ruled by Achashveirosh? Why didn't they rebel, or at least cause a major commotion? There were powerful Jews in the capital city of Shushan (Mordechai being one of them). Why was Mordechai the only one who seemed to be concerned (see 4:1)? Was Esther so sheltered in the palace that she had to ask Mordechai why he was mourning (4:5)?

In "Esther/Ruth/Jonah Deciphered," Stephen Gabriel Rosenberg, Ph.D, asks numerous questions about the plot of the Purim story as described in the M'gilla (including why the Jews didn't just leave), and makes some fascinating suggestions. Although not all of them are consistent with the text of the M'gilla, the way it was understood by our sages, or even with some of his own suggestions, one of his main suggestions makes a lot of sense, has historical backing, and would explain a lot of otherwise curious verses.

One of the main issues facing Achashveirosh, at least by the time Haman became second-in-command, was the finances of the kingdom. The Persian army had quashed a rebellion in Egypt (Kush's northern neighbor, at the western end of the empire) during the first two years of his rule, and Achashveirosh had thrown a six month party, giving the leaders of each of his provinces a turn having a private audience with the king so that he could solidify his rule and gauge how they would react if he attacked Greece. After a less than successful war with Greece, the royal treasury was depleted, but placing additional taxes on the people in his empire would hardly be tolerated. It was at this point that Haman suggested a plan to raise revenue without increasing taxes across the board.

Until then, taxes were levied on property owners, with the local governors collecting the property taxes within their province. Haman suggested adding a head tax on top of that, but only on one nation, one that was "scattered and separated among the nations in all of the provinces of the empire" (3:8), so had no real power base to fight the tax. Of course administering this new head tax on the people of a scattered nation would be quite onerous, but Haman had a way to deal with that as well. Rather than the local governors collecting it, or the king hiring new tax collectors, Haman offered to become a "tax farmer," paying the king a flat amount (10,000 talents of silver, see 3:9), to come from "those doing the work" (ibid), i.e.

those collecting the tax, with anything collected above and beyond the 10,000 silver talents going to Haman (with a percentage going to his tax collectors). In order to raise such a substantial amount, an exorbitant sum was imposed on each person--man, woman and child (Dr. Rosenberg goes through the numbers to show how high the tax on each "head" was).

This head tax would be extremely difficult to pay; even those who could would likely have to use their life savings and/or go into severe debt. Therefore, the consequences of not paying it would have to be severe. And they were; any person whose "head tax" was not paid by the due date (the 13th of Adar) would (or could) be put to death. In other words, the decree was framed as a highly focused head tax that gave the tax collectors the legal right to do whatever it takes to collect it--even if it means executing those who fail to pay--rather than an order of genocide that allowed for taking the victims possessions.

Did anyone think that failure to pay would really bring about mass executions? Was the decree seen as a death warrant or as a heavily-worded tax levy? Achashveirosh, desperate to raise needed funds, went along with it; "the money is given to you" (3:11), i.e. any funds collected above the 10,000 silver talents that would go into the royal treasury belonged to Haman, "as well as the nation, to do to it whatever you see fit" (ibid), i.e. you have the authority to make the consequences of not paying anything you want, even death. Nevertheless, when Esther told him that had the consequences of not paying the head tax "only" been to be sold into slavery she wouldn't ask him to intervene, but since the intention was to actually kill her people (7:4) she had to, he was either taken aback or pretended to be, having thought of Haman's decree as a tax levy not an order of genocide. Although the decree was known by all (3:14), no one fled the empire, as they also viewed it as a harsh tax levy rather than a death warrant. Only Mordechai understood that Haman's real intent was to murder Jews, men, women and children, using unpaid taxes as a cover, and this is how he framed the decree when he described it in the M'gilla.

Although we are thanking G-d for sparing our lives, if the decree that would have led to genocide was framed as a tax levy, it would be inappropriate to ignore that facet completely, and the "plundering of our possessions" was therefore included in Al Hanisim. And since Haman would have been allowed to keep everything he collected beyond 10,000 silver talents, it could be said that it was Haman himself who wanted to plunder our possessions.

This approach can also explain the wording of the Purim stanza of Ma'oz Tzur, sung after lighting the Chanukah candles; "[Haman's] abundant sons and his possessions were hung on wood." We know that his ten sons were hung (9:13), but were his possessions also hung? If Haman was supposed to keep all the tax money collected above 10,000 silver talents,

even after he was hung (7:10) it would have gone to his sons. However, after Haman and his sons were all killed, even if Achashveirosh couldn't confiscate Haman's private possessions (besides his "royal" house), he could take the tax funds that Haman and his family would have kept and deposit them in the royal treasury instead. In essence, by killing all of Haman's sons and hanging them, his possessions could also be said (in prose form) to have been "hung," as it was the hanging of those who would have inherited him that allowed the funds to go towards the king's deficit.

If the circumstances that allowed the decree to have been issued centered around the need to raise funds to cover the expenses of Achashveirosh's wars, it is fitting that the M'gilla ends with a description of Achashveirosh placing taxes on everybody (10:1). Whether Achashveirosh returned the funds from the head tax to those Jews who had paid them and these new taxes replaced those funds or these taxes were less severe than they otherwise would have been because of the funds raised through the head tax is unknown. Nevertheless, highlighting the taxes at the end indicates that raising funds for the royal treasury played a primary role in the Purim story, including Haman's fateful decree possibly being presented as a tax levy rather than as genocide. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

*Why did the pirate go to the Caribbean?
He wanted some arr and arr!*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“You shall make (the High Priest) a head-plate (Hebrew tzitz) of pure gold, and you shall engrave upon it, engraved like a signet ring, 'Holy to the Lord'. You shall place it on a cord of turquoise wool (Hebrew t'khelet) and it shall be on the turban . . . (Hebrew mitznefet)." (Exodus 28:36,37)

Our Talmudic Sages teach that "the Merciful One requires the human heart"; G-d looks to one's innermost soul rather than to one's external garb. Nevertheless, our clothing affects our mood and expresses a message about ourselves to society. Virtually everyone 'dresses up' for special occasions. Halakha mandates unique garb for the Sabbath and the Festivals. Men and women are expected to dress modestly and the mourner may not change his outer garments for all seven days of mourning (except for the Sabbath).

From this perspective, we can understand why the Kohen-Priests must wear special garments when officiating in the Sanctuary. Our Biblical portion mandates: "You shall make vestments of sanctity for Aaron your brother for glory and splendor" (Exodus 28:2) And all Jewish male are expected to cover their heads (especially when praying or eating, but

preferably at all times) as well as wearing a special undergarment called tzitzit, with ritual fringes on each of its four corners.

Let us examine the significance of these special vestments. The head covering worn by observant Jews probably harks back to the turban of the High priest. The Talmud describes how great scholars such as Rav Hunah would not walk a distance of four cubits without covering their heads, as a constant reminder of the Divine Presence. (B.T. Kiddushin 31a). Apparently the Catholic Church adopted the custom at that time, and so the Cardinals and the Pope always appear publicly with head covering. Much of Ashkenazi Jewry for at least the last 300 years have universalized this custom to include all adult males, with the Yiddish word for the head covering being yarmulke, a contraction of two Aramaic words yarei malka, one who is in constant awe of the Divine King.

The four-cornered undergarment with ritual fringes as well as the more visible prayer shawl is Biblically mandated for every male Jew: "The children of Israel shall make for themselves tzitzit (ritual fringes) on the corners of their garments...and they shall place upon the tzitzit of each corner a thread of t'khelet (turquoise wool) in order that you may see it and remember all the commandments and perform them; you may not seek out after (the stirrings) of your heart and after (the lustings) of your eyes to harlot after them. This is all so that you may remember and perform all of my commandments and be holy to your G-d" (Numbers 15: 37-40)

Here the symbolism is nothing short of amazing. You will remember from our Biblical portion that the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) wears a tzitz (headplate) placed on a cord of t'khelet (or turquoise wool) upon his forehead; upon this tzitz is engraved the words, "Holy unto the Lord". In a parallel fashion, Jewish men wear tzitzit (a "smaller" tzitz) - fringes with a thread of t'khelet. This too is to remind him that he must be holy to G-d.

The t'khelet, or turquoise wool, was a very expensive dye extracted from the rare hilazon mollusk, a color reserved for royalty in ancient times. The High Priest was Jewish royalty; in a slightly lesser fashion, so was every Jew.

The High Priest, whose risked becoming a heretical Saducee rather than remaining a G-d-fearing, halakha-practicing Pharisee, had to dedicate his thoughts to G-d; therefore his tzitz (headplate) is on his forehead. The average Jew, however, whose major risk lies in straying after inappropriate sexual urges has to remember to dedicate his body to G-d. Therefore, the tzitzit - or ritual fringes - are in the area of his lower body parts.

Most important of all, every Jew is seen as royalty, as a mini-High-Priest. When Jewish men look at the fringes, they are reminded of all of G-d's commandments. The Hebrew word tzitzit has the numerical value of 600, and - when we add the five knots and the eight strings on each corner the sum total comes to 613.

The Talmud goes one step further, "the turquoise - t'khelet- is similar to the color of the sea, the color of the sea is similar to the color of the heavens, and the heavens are similar to the Divine throne of glory" (B.T. Menahot 43 b)

The Jewish people were charged by G-d to be a sacred nation, which can only be achieved when we dedicate our lives to the 613 commandments. Additionally, G-d commanded us to be a kingdom of Priest-Teachers to the world. At the very least, we must spread the 7 Noahide Laws of morality to all peoples. (Exodus 19: 6, Maimonides Laws of Kings 8,10). This second charge is symbolized by the turquoise of the sea and the turquoise of the heaven reminiscent of the G-d who created the heavens and the earth.

Yes, we must remember - and strengthen - the uniqueness of our nation, but at the same time we must express the noblesse oblige of our royal status by reaching out to every human being and lovingly attempting to bring them the priestly benediction of peace and redemption. © 2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

The bidding was proceeding furiously and strong when the Head Auctioneer suddenly announced, 'A gentleman in this room has lost a wallet containing ten thousand dollars. If returned, he will pay a reward of two thousand dollars. There was a moment's silence in the auction house and from the back of the room came a shout, 'Two thousand five hundred.'

RABBI CAL LULESS

Purim TV

In keeping with my desire to increase my Torah learning, I have decided to significantly reduce the amount of time I spend watching TV. However, at times, I have found that my Yaitzer Hora keeps tempting me with TV shows, both old and new, waiting for me on my DVR. To fight the temptation to watch my favorite shows, I just turned off the TV set so that I can clear my mind and, once again, review the story of Purim.

A long time ago, there was this *Biggest Loser* named Achashverosh. Not only did he have a *Castle* in Persia, but also he had a *House* that extended to *The Outer Limits* of the *Jersey Shore*. His empire couldn't be put into *Numbers*. Even with his *Bonanza*, he was a victim of *Arrested Development*, relying constantly upon *Two and a Half Men* as advisors.

For the Jews of that time there was a *Fear Factor*, in that the King was the *Law & Order* for the entire kingdom. But they were *Survivors* and felt that they would not be in *Jeopardy* if they pretended that they were *Family Guys* and followed the *Rules of Engagement* with the King.

To show off his wealth (and to celebrate the fact that the *Grimm* Jews had no *Voice* in their future), the King decided to *Face the Nation* and throw an *Extra* great party. He claimed "There will be *Entertainment Tonight*,

and, since I am *The King of Queens*, Vashti, who is *The Good Wife*, will show *Skin*, *Tonight*, to a *Full House*." Vashti was less than *Charmed* at the request to offer *Sex in the City* and refused to appear *Buffy*. After the *Scandal*, Vashti *Vanished*, *Without a Trace*.

Without a Queen, people would start thinking that Achashverosh was just a *Celebrity Apprentice*. The King was now a *Bachelor* and was in need of a *Wife Swap*. He decided to have a tryout for the kingdom's *Bachelorettes*, to see who would be *Queen for a Day*. Announcements went out asking who wants to be a *Persian Idol*?" It was an *Amazing Race*, as every *Desperate Housewife* applied for the opportunity to have an *Extreme Makeover* and *Swap Places*.

Esther was one of many *Broke Girls*, who lived a *Simple Life*, *Close to Home*, with her uncle, Mordechai. If anything, she would look for a *Medium Person of Interest* to marry and be satisfied with plain *Parenthood*. However, her life in *Cougar Town* was interrupted when she was caught in the King's *Open House* for a new wife. Although she thought she was *Less Than Perfect* and just a bag of *Bones*, by the *Third Watch*, Achashverosh claimed "she is a *Smash*" and she was selected to be the next Queen.

As was *The Practice* of that time, Esther was brought to the *Celebrity Mansion*, to be given an eleven month *Extreme Makeover*. There was no question that they made an *Odd Couple*, but Esther was a *Survivor* and was told by her Uncle Mordechai to keep her Jewishness hidden from Achashverosh's *Criminal Mind*. The King wanted to know about her heritage, *How I Met My Mother* and so on, but Esther said "I've Got a Secret," knowing that the King would not agree to her version of the *Big Bang Theory*.

Mordechai didn't have a *Private Practice*, himself, but was a *Mentalist* and part of the King's ministers. He was an Insider, being *The Guardian* of Esther, who was not a *Gossip Girl*, in that no one in the Court knew she was a Jewess. While *Keeping Up Appearances*, Mordechai overheard some *Criminal Minds* with a plot to kill the King. He warned The Court that the King was in *Jeopardy*, and the plot was foiled by the *Cops*. However, instead of making *The News* and being featured on *CSI:Persia*, this feat was simply recorded in the King's book of records.

A chief minister of the King was one of the *Liars and Thieves*, Haman. He was *Young and Restless* in terms of wanting power. Most of all, he hated the Jews. Since Mordechai refused to bow to Haman, who thought himself to be an *Idol*, there was no *Love Connection* between them. Haman wanted him dead.

Haman, crafty as a *Fox*, realized he couldn't prosecute the Jews in *The People's Court*, so he worked on the King. He told him that the *Weakest Link* in his kingdom was the Jews, who weren't *Friends* of the King. He

convinced the King by saying "Today, we should choose a *Dateline* to rid ourselves of these people." The King replied "*That's What I Like About You*." They took a lottery and selected a date. At *The Office*, plans concerning the eradication of the Jews were sent throughout the kingdom, and everyone agreed they wouldn't want to be around during the *Wipeout* of these poor people.

As *Time Goes By*, Haman prepared for Mordechai's execution. He figured *The Wheel of Fortune* was going his way and ordered *The Unit* to prepare a tree for Mordechai's public hanging. Meanwhile the Jews heard about the King's plan for their destruction and each person feared for their *Brothers and Sisters*.

While Esther was getting by with her *Will and Grace*, Mordechai warned her that they were all in *Jeopardy*. "You must go to the King and plead our cause," said Mordechai. "This isn't a *Blind Date* in which I could go to the *Full House* and talk to the King about our *Just Cause*," said Esther. "If the King doesn't feel like a *Family Guy*, I'm dead. Why don't you *Just Shoot Me*?" But Mordechai insisted that *All of Us* were in this together, and she had to go to the King. She said, "*In Case of Emergency*, let every Jew fast so that Hashem will *Watch Over Me*."

Esther went to the King, and instead of having a *Family Feud*, he welcomed her. She asked if he and Haman could join her for a party at *30 Rock*. She asked the King, "*Deal or No Deal*?" The King enthusiastically answered, "*Yes Dear*." Haman was *Extra* pleased that he was invited. It's like we're *All in the Family*.

During those *48 Hours*, the King was *Up All Night*, and couldn't sleep, not even for *60 Minutes*. He tried looking out over the sea, but even his *Baywatch* couldn't make him drowsy. Finally, he had his aid read from the *Early Edition* of his records, and he was told about Mordechai never being rewarded for saving the King's life. "This is not a *Cold Case*," said the King, "*As The World Turns*, I will rectify the situation."

Haman was on his way for a *Late Night* visit with the King. When the King asked him "How should one honor a deserving member of the court?" Haman thought *Today* is a *Good Day*! Haman described a great *Makeover* of clothes, jewelry and a public parade. "Don't *Curb Your Enthusiasm*" said the King, "Do it all for Mordechai." Haman was not in *7th Heaven* over the change in plans.

Later that night, Haman was having *Reasonable Doubt* about how well his plans were going. However, he prided himself that the Jews would soon be *History*. "*Tonight* is the Queen's party, and I'll be honored," thought Haman. He didn't have *20/20* foresight.

The Late Show with the Queen started with Esther pleading with a drunk Achashverosh for her life and for that of her people. Haman was

Touched by an Angel and fell on top of Esther in a very uncompromising position. Haman said, "ER, I'm sorry," but the King exploded like a Nova. Just then, an aid said that Haman had prepared a hanging rope for someone. The king said, "Who's Line is it?" When told it was for Mordechai, The king ordered Haman hung instead and demanded to see the *Body of Proof*.

Mordechai and Esther were now in the *Frontline* of correcting all that Haman had planned. All the cities were informed that there was a *Late Show* to the original orders, and that the Jews could defend themselves. Word also got out that the Jews now had members in very high places who would protect them, since It's *All Relative*. Cheers were heard in all the Jewish homes and a great celebration took place.

Although some thought that the saving of the Jewish people was just the result of the *Real World* and how it works, we all know *It's a Miracle* from Hashem's kindness and forgiveness.

There, you see, all my past TV watching has had no adverse impact on my outlook on the world. However, my wife tells me if I turn on the tube one more time, we'll be before *Judge Judy* in *Divorce Court*. A Happy Purim to all! © 2012 Forwarded by a friend – I wish I had the original author to give credit!

A boy was bagging groceries at a supermarket. One day the store installed a machine for squeezing fresh orange juice. Intrigued, the young man asked if he could be allowed to work the machine, but his request was denied. Said the store manager, "Sorry, kid, but baggers can't be juicers!"

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah ordains that the olive oil used to light the eternal menorah -- candelabra -- must be of the purest and best available. There is obvious logic to this requirement. Impure oil will cause the flames to stutter and flicker. Impure oil also may exude an unpleasant odor and make the task of the daily cleaning of the oil lamps difficult and inefficient. Yet I feel that the basic underlying reason for this requirement of purity of the oil lies in the value that the Torah advances in the performance of all positive things in life -- the necessity to do things correctly, enthusiastically and with exactitude.

In' halachic' parlance this is called 'kavanah' -- the intent to perform the commandment and deed properly and in the best possible way. That is the story of the pure container of oil that is the core of the miraculous story of Chanuka. The Hasmoneans could have used regular, even impure oil and still not have violated any strong 'halachic' stricture. Yet the idea of 'kavanah', of doing the matter in the best way possible, introduces an element of special dedication and holiness into what otherwise would be an event of rote and habit. This is what drives the spirit of holiness and eternity

that accompanies the performance of 'mitzvot.' So the requirement of the Torah for the purest possible oil to fuel the holy and eternal menorah -- candelabra -- is readily understandable when the concept of 'kavanah' is factored into the value system of the Torah.

The light of the menorah has never been dimmed over the long history of the Jewish people. Though the menorah itself has long ago disappeared from the view of the Jewish public -- it was no longer present even in Second Temple times -- the idea of its light and influence has continued to be present in Jewish life. The flame is not a tangible item -- it is, in reality, an item of spirit more than of substance.

It provides light and warmth and psychological support in very difficult times and circumstances. Yet, its influence and support is somehow directly connected to the investment into actually kindling it. That is the import of the words of the rabbis in Avot that according to the effort invested so is the accomplishment and reward.

All things spiritual are dependent upon the effort invested in creating that sense of spirit -- the purer the oil, the brighter and firmer the flame. This simple yet profound message forms the heart of this week's 'parsha.' It also forms the heart of all values and commandments that the Torah ordains for us.

The 'parsha' of 'Tetave' speaks to all of us in a direct and personal fashion. It encompasses all of the goals of Judaism and is, in itself the light of spirituality that lights our souls and lives. © 2013 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.

*What do you do with epileptic lettuce?
You make a seizure salad!*

RABBI MICHAEL ROSENSWEIG

TorahWeb

“Mishenikhnas Adar marbin be-simchah." As we anticipate the upcoming celebration of Purim, it is incumbent upon us to explore some of the central themes of that joyous holiday that marks the miraculous if subtle salvation of the Jewish people. As the story nears conclusion (Esther 9:30), the megillah itself is depicted as "divrei shalom ve-emet -- matters of peace and truth". What is signified by this surprising characterization and combination? Indeed, the mefarshim (ad loc) struggle to interpret these words.

The gemara (Megillah 16b) derives from this enigmatic phrase that the megillah requires sirtut (lines) like "amitah shel Torah" (most mefarshim -- like a sefer Torah; Rabbeinu Tam -- like a mezuzah). The Talmud

Yerushalmi explains that this consideration establishes the megillah as the kind of sacred text that also justifies and even demands rabbinic explication (nitan lidaresh -- see Chidushei ha-Griz on Hilchos Megillah). Why does the description of the megillah as "divrei shalom ve-emet" trigger this response and justify this conclusion?

Generally, the qualities of peace and truth present a study in contrast. Peace is typically associated with diplomacy and compromise, albeit often for the sake of a greater good or larger prize. Truth conjures images of rigid principle and can be identified with unyielding steadfastness, even inflexibility in the protection of the just and the right. Indeed, Chazal (Berreishit Rabbah) convey that the competing qualities of truth and peace disagreed about the very creation of imperfect man.

A preliminary analysis of the Purim story might reinforce the impression that the respective perspectives of Esther and Mordechai exemplified these contrasting and mutually exclusive approaches of peace and truth. Esther's manages to rise to royalty even as she disguises her real identity (2:10). The Talmud (Sanhedrin 74b) questions how she was able to compromise religious standards in her relationship with the king. She appears very reticent to take bold action that might antagonize the king even when the nation is endangered. Indeed, Mordechai practically accuses her of self-interest (al tedami be-nafshekh... 4:13) Even as she is poised to act on behalf of Klal Yisrael, she maintains a diplomatic posture, professing that she would not have expended her political capital and intervened if the stakes were only to prevent Klal Yisrael from being enslaved (7:4).

Mordechai, in sharp contrast, is described as defiant in the protection of his religious convictions, notwithstanding the evident danger. The megillah depicts his refusal to bow to Haman in future tense as well -- "lo yichre ve-lo yishtachaveh "(3:2), emphasizing that his conduct stemmed from unshakeable conviction that could not change. According to some mefarshim, he refused to employ even legitimate heterim (license or allowance) that would have safeguarded him from jeopardy (see Tosafot Sanhedrin 61b re. ha-oved mei-ahavah u-mi-yirah). He emerges as a fearless crusading figure on behalf of his nation, urging actions to avert calamity, cajoling Esther with his faith in Divine providence -- "u-mi yodea im la-eit ka-zot higaat la-malchut" (4:14).

However, further reflection reveals a more nuanced perspective. While Mordechai and Esther surely played different roles and even exhibited different postures and perspectives, they also worked in concert, and their respective inclinations were hardly mutually exclusive. Indeed, Esther's subterfuge was actually at Mordechai's behest (2:10). Moreover, when diplomacy and prayer ran its course, Esther repeatedly put her own survival at risk to ensure the survival of Klal Yisrael (4:15; 7:3,6). In retrospect, one may perceive the differences between Mordechai and Esther as a matter of

leadership style, possibly also due to personality, maturity, and different roles, rather than as reflecting a significant difference in commitment to principle.

We find a parallel relationship of shalom and emet, each of which is utilized idealistically in the leadership of Klal Yisrael in the Torah's depiction of Moshe and Aharon. The gemara (Sanhedrin 6b-7a) characterizes Moshe Rabbeinu as one who embodies the quality of unwavering justice -- yikov hadin et ha-har. Moshe is associated with truth -- Moshe emet ve-torato emet. Aharon is identified with love and peace (in Pirkei Avot he is described as ohvev shalom ve-rodef shalom) and is the father of pesharah (compromise). Chazal note that only the beloved peace-making Aharon was mourned by "kol beit Yisrael." Yet, these are not viewed as incompatible persona or even approaches. Indeed, Tehillim extols the interaction, integration and harmony of the two brothers -- "hineh mah tov u-mah naim shevet achim gam yachad". Each of these midot plays a crucial role in Jewish leadership as long as the goals are idealistic and the motivations are principled and sincere. In fact, each of these qualities qualifies as a Divine characteristic and even a sheim Hashem. Chotamo shel Hakadosh Baruch Hu emet -- Hashem's seal is truth. Equally, Shalom (Peace) is a Divine name (Shelomoh -- mi she-hashalom shelo).

We tend to view megillat Esther as an exotic tale that is inspiring as a demonstration of Divine providence, but not so evidently relevant or applicable to our mundane experience. Moreover, we sometimes perceive the rush of events in the megillah as unruly and chaotic interactions that are nevertheless guided by or at least redeemed by Divine intervention. The imperative of sirtut in the megillah provides a corrective to this impression, as it accentuates the presence of a subtle order and structure. This stylistic norm in the megillah inspires us to think anew about the relationships, values, and personalities that are at work. It not only permits us but demands that we subject the entire megillah to multilayered scrutiny, like Torah itself. The coexistence of, and interaction between shalom and emet, seemingly disparate, highlights the megillah's deeper layers, as well as its importance as a paradigm of Jewish leadership and crisis survival. Thus, the sirtut, inspired by divrei shalom ve-emet dictates that the megillah is the kind of ketuvim that is conducive to profound rabbinic explication ("nitan lidaresh"). © 2013 Rabbi M. Rosenzweig and The TorahWeb Foundation

*Why couldn't Dracula's wife get to sleep?
Because of his coffin!*

Hog Samayach!

