
~ PURIM II ~

The Mitzvot of the Day

In all areas of Jewish life, the mitzvot are the means by which we can emulate God, develop and refine our character, strengthen Jewish belief, and infuse every action with purpose. To fully appreciate and participate in the festivities of Purim one needs to be familiar with the mitzvot of the day, and understand the deep meaning behind them. The mitzvot of Purim themselves reflect the central themes discussed in the first Morasha shiur on Purim: Purim Unmasked. With these added insights, Purim is revealed not only as a day of joy and sharing, but as one of the spiritual highlights of the entire year, when each Jew can forge a special closeness to God and with the entire Jewish people.

In this class we will examine the various mitzvot and customs of Purim, including fasting on *Ta'anit Esther* (the Fast of Esther) on the day before Purim, and giving charity, wearing costumes, and engaging in festivities on the day itself.

This class will address the following questions:

- ~ Why do we fast on the day before Purim?
- ~ What are the seven mitzvot of Purim?
- ~ What is the symbolism of these mitzvot, and how can a person grow from them?
- ~ Why is there a mitzvah to drink on Purim to the point of inebriation when Judaism otherwise prides itself on self-control?
- ~ Why do we wear costumes on Purim?

Class Outline:

Section I. Ta'anit Esther – National Redemption and Personal Return

Section II. The Mitzvot of Purim

Part A. Adding Thanksgiving to the Daily Prayers – Expressing Gratitude

Part B. Reading Megillat Esther – Perceiving God's Hidden Hand

Part C. Reading the Description of Amalek's Attack – Removing Evil from Within Ourselves

Part D. Giving Gifts of Food to Friends – Giving Generates Love

Part E. Giving Gifts to the Poor – Going Beyond Our Self-Centeredness

Part F. Eating a Festive Meal with Others – Creating Unity

Section III. Getting Drunk on Purim

Section IV. Costumes – a Symbol of God's Hidden Face

Section V. The Two Days of Purim

SECTION I. TA'ANIT ESTHER – NATIONAL REDEMPTION AND PERSONAL RETURN

Purim is preceded by Ta'anit Esther on the 13th of the Hebrew month of Adar (usually corresponding to late February or early March). As an introduction to the historical events that led to Ta'anit Esther, the following is a dramatic story about how one needs a wake-up call to stop heading in the wrong direction:

His first words to all of us that evening were astounding and riveting. "I used to be a jet fighter pilot for the Israeli Air Force." R' Yaakov Sherman, a Jerusalem kollel fellow in his early 30's, also known as Koby, told this incredible story.

It was 21h30 as five Israeli jet fighter planes stood on the tarmac in formation. There was no reason to suspect that tonight's maneuvers would be out of the ordinary. Koby and his team had worked in tandem for weeks as they performed their drills with pinpoint precision in total darkness.

After takeoff, Koby picked a practice target, and radioed his team to be in position. But as Koby banked his jet to the right as he prepared to climb, his head began to spin as vertigo – a condition of confusion and disorientation due to movements of fluid in the inner ear – overtook him, so that he could not determine direction or altitude. Without realizing it, Koby had turned his plane upside down, yet was still flying at the same high speed. Bewildered, Koby was sure he was flying right side up.

To his shock and utter disbelief the altimeter indicated that he was losing altitude and hurtling downward at a frightening speed. As a safety precaution, Israeli jet fighters are equipped with two altimeters to protect pilots struck by vertigo, since they may rationalize that the altimeter is defective. Koby was jolted into reality when both altimeters showed he was losing altitude!

Koby radioed the four other pilots and screamed in a panic, "Tell me my position. Am I going up or down?"

"You're going down," yelled Gadi looking at the radar in his plane, "reverse your position!"

Koby would have to pull the yoke – the stick that controls the direction of the plane – back toward himself to bring his plane right side up, but he was convinced that this maneuver would send the plane toward the ground, killing him on impact. With his body demanding that he do one thing and his mind insisting that he do another, he did "what was the hardest thing I ever did in my life." Terror stricken, he pulled the yoke toward himself. Slowly the plane turned over, and having been redirected, it headed skyward.

Now sitting in front of us, R' Yaakov said, "Years later, I had an insight that the flight that night was symbolic of my internal struggle for spiritual growth. At times we lead our lives in certain ways, sure that we are growing spiritually, but in fact it's the reverse. We can act unaware that in reality we are affected by spiritual vertigo!" (Rabbi Paysach Krohn, Reflections of the Maggid, p. 29)

Sometimes the Jewish people lose focus of what their mission and purpose is in the world – a national "spiritual vertigo." Such was the case when it appeared that the Persian exile (526 BCE) would go on indefinitely and that the Jewish people would never return to rebuild the Temple in the Land of Israel. They had so lost their course in exile, and were in such despair of regaining their special relationship with God, that they were even reverting to idolatry (Megillah 12a; Yeshayahu/Isaiah 49:14, 50:1).

Ta'anit Esther recalls historical events that were a national wake-up call to re-set the course of the Jewish people. For on this day, the 13th of Adar in 456 BCE, the king of Persia (modern day Iraq) decreed that the entire Jewish people be wiped out.

1. **Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 686:2; Mishnah Berurah, ibid.** – Since the Jewish people fasted when they went to war on the 13th of Adar in the times of Mordechai, we also fast on this day.

Shulchan Aruch:

We fast on the 13th day of Adar.

Mishnah Berurah:

The reason we fast on this day is because in the time of Mordechai and Esther [456 BCE], the Jews assembled to defend themselves from their enemies on the 13th of Adar [for it was the day upon which the Persian king had decreed that they should be destroyed]. On this day, they prayed for God's compassion and assistance to rise up against their enemies.

We find that the Jewish people fasted on the day of the battle. This is based on the statement of the Sages that Moshe (Moses) fasted on the day that the Jewish people fought against the nation of Amalek [Shemot/Exodus 17:10, see Rashi ibid.]. Certainly, the Jewish people also fasted when they went to war on the 13th of Adar in the times of Mordechai, and therefore we fast on this day too.

This day is called the Fast of Esther, to remind ourselves of the fact that God sees and hears every person in the time of his distress, when he calls out and returns to God with all his heart, as was done at that time.

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תרפו סעיף ב
מתענים ב"ג באדר

משנה ברורה סימן תרפו ס"ק ב

מתענין ב"ג באדר - כי בימי מרדכי ואסתר נקהלו ביום
י"ג באדר להלחם ולעמוד על נפשם, והיו צריכין לבקש
רחמים ותחנונים שיעזרם ה' להנקם מאויביהם,

ומצינו כשהיו ביום מלחמה שהיו מתענין, שכן אמרו
רז"ל שמושה רבינו עליו השלום ביום שנלחם עם עמלק
היה מתענה, וא"כ בודאי גם בימי מרדכי היו מתענים
באותו יום, ולכן נהגו כל ישראל להתענות ב"ג באדר.

ונקרא תענית אסתר, כדי לזכור שהש"י רואה ושומע
כל איש בעת צרתו כאשר יתענה וישוב אל ה' בכל
לבבו, כמו שעשה בימים ההם:

The laws pertaining to Ta'anit Esther are similar to those of the public fast days. These include the prohibition to eat and drink from dawn until night, reciting *selichot* (supplications), reading from the Torah, and adding *Aneinu* to the *Shemoneh Esrei* (Rabbi Ze'ev Greenwald, Sha'arei Halachah 31:8-9).

As discussed in the Morasha class Purim Unmasked, the decree of destruction against the Jews was triggered by a laxness in their religious observance. Esther called upon the entire Jewish people to fast in order to arouse Heavenly mercy so that her request to Achashveirosh to spare the Jews would be answered:

2. **Esther 4:15-16** – The fast also commemorates the fact that Queen Esther and the Jews of her city fasted before she entered the king's chambers at the risk of her life to ask him to cancel the decree of destruction against the Jewish people.

Then Esther said in reply to Mordechai, "Go, assemble all the Jews that are to be found in Shushan, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day, and I and my servants will also fast. Then I will come to the king though it is unlawful, and if I perish, I perish."

ותאמר אסתר להשיב אל מרדכי. לך פגום את כל
היהודים הנמצאים בשושן וצומו עלי ואל תאכלו ואל
תשתו שלשת ימים לילה ויום גם אני ונערתי אצום
כן ובגן אבוא אל המלך אשר לא כדת וכאשר אבדתי
אבדתי.

Fasting is a means to help inspire us to introspect and return sincerely to God:

3. **Mishnah Berurah 549:1 – The goal of a fast day is resolving to improve one’s thoughts, speech, and actions. If one fasts without striving to improve oneself, then one has ignored the essence of the day.**

Therefore, every person should introspect on these fast days, evaluate his actions, and do *teshuvah* [a correction of one’s actions and character].

Because the essence of the day is *not* the fast. Just like it is written regarding the people of Nineveh: “And God saw their [improved] behavior.” The Sages explain that it does not state that God saw their fasting and sackcloths, but rather that He saw “their [improved] behavior.” Because the fast is only a prelude to *teshuvah*.

Therefore, those people who go for strolls and waste away the day when they fast have placed that which is secondary [fasting] over that which is primary [*teshuvah*].

ולכן חייב כל איש לשום אל לבו באותן הימים
ולפשפש במעשיו ולשוב בהן

כי אין העיקר התענית כמו שכתוב באנשי נינוה “וירא
ה’ את מעשיהם” ואמרו חז”ל ‘את שקם ואת תעניתם’
לא נאמר אלא ‘את מעשיהם’ ואין התענית אלא הכנה
לתשובה

לכן אותם האנשים שכשהם מתענים הולכים במיול
ובדברים בטלים תפשו הטפל והניחו העיקר...

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ☞ Which nation fasts on the day it goes to war? The Jewish people understand that victory or defeat in battle is ultimately dependent on their relationship with God. To restate their commitment to this relationship, and to reject any avenue of success apart from closeness to God, they fasted on the day that they went to battle to defend themselves from the Persian decree of annihilation.
- ☞ Indeed, for the Jewish people – a nation whose history is anything but “natural” – fasting and returning to God is their weapon of protection. The Fast of Esther is to remind us of this fact on a communal level.
- ☞ On an individual level, the fast inspires one to introspect and work on improving his negative character traits.

SECTION II. THE MITZVOT OF PURIM

We will now discuss the seven mitzvot of the day of Purim itself, in sequential order.

Significantly, the celebration of Purim is not held on the day that the battle took place (13th of Adar), but on the day after it (which begins on the night of the 14th of Adar and continues until the next night). The focus of our celebration is Jewish survival rather than the downfall of our enemies (Mishlei/Proverbs 24:17).

1. Rabbi Avie Gold, *Purim: Its Observance and Significance*, p. 37 – Purim has six positive mitzvot and one negative commandment.

Although the reading of Megillat Esther is the first mitzvah that comes to mind when Purim is mentioned ... closer examination reveals that the laws of Purim comprise seven distinct mitzvot. Six of these are positive mitzvot; one is a negative requirement.

In order of their appearance during Purim, the six positive mitzvot are:

1. Adding the paragraph beginning *Al HaNissim* [lit. "For the miracles"] to the day's *Shemoneh Esrei* silent prayers and to *Birkat HaMazon*, the Blessing after Meals, (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 693:2, 695:3)
2. Reading the Megillah, the Scroll of Esther, at night and again in the morning
3. Reading the Torah passage (Shemot/Exodus 17:8-16) regarding Amalek's attack on Israel soon after the nation was redeemed from Egypt (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 693:4)
4. Sending food portions to friends
5. Giving gifts to the poor, and
6. Having a festive meal

The negative mitzvah is the prohibition against delivering eulogies and fasting [ibid. 697:1].

We will now discuss the meaning and some of the practical laws (*halachot*) of the six positive mitzvot of the day.

PART A. ADDING THANKSGIVING TO THE DAILY PRAYERS – EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

As an expression of gratitude and thanksgiving the following text is inserted into the silent *Shemoneh Esrei* and the Blessing after Meals:

1. *Al HaNissim (For the Miracles)*, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, pp. 112-114, 186 – *Al HaNissim is an outpouring of gratitude for the miracles that occurred on Purim.*

We gratefully thank You ... for the miracles, and for the salvation, and for the mighty deeds, and for the battles which You performed for our forefathers in those days, at this time.

In the days of Mordechai and Esther, in Shushan, the capital, when Haman, the wicked, rose up against them and sought to destroy, to slay, and to exterminate all the Jews, young and old, infants and women, on the same day, on the thirteenth of the twelfth month which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions.

But You, in Your abundant mercy, nullified his counsel and frustrated his intention and caused

על הנסים ועל הפקדון ועל הגבורות ועל התשועות ועל
המלחמות שעשית לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה:

בימי מרדכי ואסתר בשושן הבירה. בשעמד עליהם
המן הרשע. בקש להשמיד להרוג ולאבד את כל
היהודים מנער ועד זקן, טף ונשים ביום אחד. בשלשה
עשר לחודש שנים עשר. הוא חודש אדר. ושללם לבו:

ואתה ברחמיך הרבים. הפרת את עצתו. וקלקלת את

his plan to return upon his own head and they hanged him and his sons on the gallows.

מחשבתו. והשבות לו גמולו בראשו. ותלו אותו ואת בניו על העץ.

2. **Rabbi Avie Gold, Purim: Its Observance and Significance, p. 38 – We acknowledge and express gratitude for the Purim miracles which are both hidden and revealed.**

Al HaNissim, For the Miracles, is a declaration of thankfulness for the miracles, both obvious and hidden, by which God saved Jews from physical annihilation on Purim. Therefore, it is inserted into *Modim*, the blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrei* devoted to expressions of gratitude and into *Nodeh*, the blessing of *Birkat HaMazon* that is dedicated to giving thanks for the Land of Israel, the Exodus, the covenant of circumcision, the Torah, life, grace, kindness, and food.

By recognizing the historical miracles that happened in another time and place, we are more likely to recognize the hidden miracles that take place daily in our *personal* lives:

3. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. II, p. 133 – Recognizing historical miracles helps us to recognize the miracles that take place every day in our personal lives.**

“For the miracles ... in those days, at this time” – this means that we acknowledge the miracles that happened then, “in those days,” and at the same time we express gratitude for the miracles which God does every day for us, which is the phrase “at this time.”

“בימים ההם ובזמן הזה” כלומר אנו מודים על הניסים שהיו “בימים ההם” ובו בזמן אנו מודים על הניסים שהקב“ה עושה עמנו בכל יום וזהו “ובזמן הזה.”

In practice, there are two aspects of gratitude:

1. One must *acknowledge* the good and all its details.
2. One must *verbally express* thanks. (In Hebrew the words for “acknowledge” and “thanks” share the same root, *hoda’ah*.)

By fulfilling both aspects of gratitude, one feels bonds of admiration and love for the benefactor – namely God. As an example to us, people of great character remember acts of kindness done for them, and take every opportunity to give thanks to the benefactor when they meet them (Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, *V’Yedata Shalom B’Ohalecha – Guidance for Shalom Bayit*, p. 40).

PART B. READING MEGILLAT ESTHER – PERCEIVING GOD’S HIDDEN HAND

The most well-known mitzvah of Purim is reading Megillat Esther (the Book of Esther). The Megillah story of redemption and hope has been read annually by every generation of Jews since its events occurred in Persia. In the following story, Len Blaifeder, an advertising director from New York, describes how his grandfather’s Megillah serves as a link between past, present, and future generations.

On Purim, I am seated beside him [the author’s father] some 35 years ago in a small Bronx synagogue not far from Yankee Stadium ... I listen as the bearded, aged chazan chants the Story of Esther from beneath a yellowing tallit. I watch as my father’s eyes move rhythmically with the chanting from right to left, right to left, so as not to miss a single word of the telling. Although I am a mischievous eight-year-old boy, I know not to disturb my father for he is a “traveler” as well.

Is he in the land of Shushan along with other Jews on a spiritual pilgrimage of hope and inspiration? Maybe for a minute or so, but more likely he is in the Warsaw suburb of Pelcowizna, where as an eight-year-old, he too sat next to his father, a learned craftsman, jeweler, and scholar who commissioned a handsome sum to have his Megillah created so that on Purim he could bask in the luxury of his heritage.

Does his father, my Grandpa Mendel, realize that his proud and sturdy Megillat Esther would one day find its way to America and that it would be treasured by his grandson whom he would never meet? He very well might have, because he also fashioned by hand a sturdy brass cover for his Megillah that has served as its protection across the many miles that it has traveled.

The Megillah offers me a deep attachment to the holiday and a still growing connection to my father and his father as well. For no matter where I may be on Purim, I hold fast to it like a relay runner holds his baton, knowing just how precious it is within my grasp. (Len Blaufeder, Pop's Megillah, www.aish.com.)

The following sources will discuss the practical details of this mitzvah, and its deeper meanings.

1. **Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 689:1-2 – Everyone is required to hear the Megillah being read.**

Everyone is obligated to hear the Megillah being read: men, women ... and we train children to hear it [who have reached the age of education, approximately age 6] ...

One fulfills one's obligation to read the Megillah either by actually reading it oneself, or by hearing it read from someone who is obligated [i.e. above Bar Mitzvah].

הכל חייבים בקריאתה, אנשים ונשים... ומחנכים את הקטנים לקרותה.

אחד הקורא ואחד השומע מן הקורא, יצא ידי חובתו; והוא שישמע ממי שהוא חייב בקריאתה.

The entire Megillah must be read publicly from a kosher scroll, which has been hand-written with proper ink on parchment with line-markings (*sirtut*), like a Sefer Torah (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 691:1-11).

Other laws pertaining to the reading are:

2. **Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 687:2; Mishnah Berurah, ibid. – The laws include reading or hearing the Megillah once at night and once in the day, which overrides almost all other mitzvot, and reading it in a public setting.**

Shulchan Aruch:

A person is obligated to read the Megillah twice: once at night and again in the day.

Mishnah Berurah:

It is read twice to recall the miracle that occurred through the Jews crying out in their troubles by day and by night.

Shulchan Aruch:

[The Megillah reading is so important that even] Torah study is postponed to hear the reading; all the more so, other Torah mitzvot are overridden to hear the reading.

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תרפ"ו סעיף א
חייב אדם לקרות המגילה בלילה ולחזור ולשנותה ביום.

משנה ברורה סימן תרפ"ו ס"ק ב
ולחזור ולשנותה ביום - זכר לנס שהיו צועקים בימי צרתם יום ולילה:

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תרפ"ו סעיף ב
מבטלים תלמוד תורה לשמוע מקרא מגילה, קל וחומר לשאר מצוות של תורה שכולם נדחים מפני מקרא מגילה.

Mishnah Berurah:

Even if a person has one hundred people in his home at the Megillah reading with him, but the community is reading it in shul at the same time, it is still a mitzvah for him to hear it in shul with the larger group. This is due to the concept of *b'rov am hadrat melech* – “with the multitude of the nation is the King honored” (Mishlei 14:28).

משנה ברורה סימן תרצ ס"ק סב

ואם בעת ההוא קורין אותה בצבור בבהכ"נ, אז אפילו יש לו ק' אנשים בביתו, מצוה לילך לשם משום "ברוב עם הדרת מלך", וכן מי שהיה ביתו סמוך לביהכ"נ וחלונותיו פתוחות לביהכ"נ אפ"ה צריך לילך לבהכ"נ לכו"ע משום ברוב עם ועיין בבה"ל:

3. Selected sources – Laws of hearing the Megillah being read include hearing the blessings and making sure to hear every word.

The one reading the Megillah for the congregation says three blessings before he commences: (1) “Blessed are You ... Who has commanded us regarding the reading of the Megillah,” (2) “...Who performed miracles for our forefathers, in those days at this time,” (3) “...Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this time” (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 692:1).

[The blessings can be found in The Complete ArtScroll Siddur, p. 787.]

The reader must have in mind that he is fulfilling the congregation's obligation to read the Megillah, and likewise each member of the congregation should have in mind to fulfill his obligation by hearing it read (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 690:14).

All present must listen intently, and hear every word from the reader. If the reader misses a single word, or the listener did not hear a single word, they do not fulfill their obligation, and are required to re-read the missed words (Mishnah Berurah 690:48).

Therefore, every person should try to have a Chumash ... from which he can read [the missed words to himself until he catches up to the reader, at which point he may resume listening] (ibid., 690:19).

Rema:

The custom is to make noise when Haman's name is mentioned during the Megillah reading in shul, to fulfill the command to wipe out the remembrance of Amalek [Devarim/Deuteronomy 25:17-19] (Rema, Orach Chaim 690:17).

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תרצב סעיף א

הקורא את המגילה מברך לפניה ג' ברכות: על מקרא מגילה, ושעשה נסים, ושהחינו.

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תרצ סעיף יד

הקורא את המגילה צריך שיכוין להוציא השומע, וצריך (שיכוין) השומע לצאת.

משנה ברורה סימן תרצ ס"ק מח

וצריך השומע להאזין אוזנו ולשמוע כל תיבה ותיבה מפני הקורא. ואם חיסר הקורא אפילו תיבה אחת וכן אם השומע חיסר תיבה אחת לשמוע לא יצאו וצריך לחזור:

משנה ברורה סימן תרצ ס"ק יט

... ולכן צורך גדול להיות לכל אחד חומש ... ויוצא מה שקורא על כל פנים מחומש ויוצא על כל פנים דיעבד.

רמ"א אורח חיים סימן תרצ סעיף יז

כדי שימחה שמו על דרך: מוחה תמוחה את זכר עמלק (דברים כה, יט) ... נשתרבב המנהג שמכים המון כשקורים המגילה בבהכ"נ.

4. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. II, p. 221 – One who reads the Megillah must see and feel that the “coincidental” events were all directed by God. For this reason the entire scroll should be unrolled before the reader, and the events read in their correct order.**

On the one hand, God's direction of events in Megillat Esther is hidden [*hester*, hinted to in the name *Esther*]. On the other hand it is revealed [*megaleh*, hinted to in the word *Megillah*], for the Megillah reveals to us God's deliverance in every aspect of the events, even though His Presence was hidden ...

The law is that the reader must unroll the entire Megillah before starting the reading [so that it lies unrolled before him] (Shulchan Aruch 690:17). The idea is that one be able to see in one glance how all the events of Purim are connected, and how even the negative events led to God's salvation.¹⁰

(Footnote 10) This is also the reason why the verses of the Megillah should be read in the correct order [ibid. 690:6] ... Because someone who reads it backwards does not see and feel the astounding way in which God directs events, and how He uses nature to bring about salvation.

מחד גיסא מגילת אסתר היא "הסתר", ומאידך היא "מגילה" - מְגַלָּה לָנו אֶת יְשׁוּעַת הַשׁי"ת לְכָל פְּרָטוֹ, כִּי־צַד בָּאֵה הַיְשׁוּעָה מִתּוֹךְ הַהִסְתֵּר הַגָּדוֹל שֶׁל הַגְּלוּת ...

וְצָרִיךְ לִפְרוֹשׁ אוֹתָהּ בְּשַׁעַת הַקְּרִיאָה (שׁו"ע תרצ, יז) לְרֹאוֹת בְּמַבֵּט כְּלָלִי אֵיךְ כָּל הַמְּאֻרְעוֹת הָיוּ קְשׁוּרִים זֶה בְּזֶה, וְאֵף מֵעֲשֵׂי הָרַע הֵבִיאוּ לַיְשׁוּעָה ה'.¹⁰

10. זֶהוּ גַם הַטַּעַם לְהִלְכָה "הַקּוֹרֵא אֶת הַמְּגִילָה לְמִפְרָע לֹא יֵצֵא" (מְגִילָה פ"ב מ"א) ... הַקּוֹרֵא לְמִפְרָע אֵינוֹ מֵרְגִישׁ וְרוֹאֵה אֶת נִפְלְאוֹת הַנְּהַגְתָּ ה' אֵיךְ הִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בְּמִסְגֵּרַת הַטַּבֵּעַ לְהֵבִיא אֶת הַיְשׁוּעָה.

It must be remembered that the events of the Megillah occurred over a period of nine years. Only when one reads all the events together can one see how they are all connected, even though originally no one could fathom how they were all related (Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. II, p. 219).

PART C. READING THE DESCRIPTION OF AMALEK'S ATTACK – REMOVING EVIL FROM WITHIN OURSELVES

The nation of Amalek is the leading force of evil in the world (Bamidbar/Numbers 24:20), in contrast to the Jewish people who are the leading force of good. Consequently, the struggle of Israel and Amalek is the eternal struggle of good versus evil (Rabbi Nosson Scherman, Stone Chumash, p. 391).

A descendant of the Amalekites, Haman, had ascended to the position of prime minister of the Persian Empire (Esther 3:1). This rabid anti-Semite planned an empire-wide pogrom to eliminate the Jewish people.

Therefore, on Purim we read about the origins of Amalek's enmity toward the Jewish people and the Divine assurance that God will erase the memory of Amalek from the face of the earth (Shemot 17:14; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 693:4), meaning that the time will come when evil will ultimately be defeated and disappear.

1. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. II, pp. 231-2 – We must remove the evil from within ourselves before we can wipe out evil in the world, as represented by Amalek.**

[The meaning of the mitzvah to wipe out Amalek is as follows:] First, one must despise evil and

רְאֵשִׁית צָרִיךְ לְשַׁנּוֹא אֶת הָרַע, לֹא לְתַתּוֹת ח"ו אֵיזָה עֶרֶךְ וְחֲשִׁיבוֹת לְרַע. וְכֵן הֵי מְרַגְלָא בְּפִמְוִיָּה דְהַגְהָ"צ ר'

not give it any value or importance. As Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein used to say: Since we cannot physically identify who is a descendant of Amalek today, the essence of the mitzvah to wipe out Amalek is for every one of us to reject and despise the evil that is inside himself.

Through this, we will uproot and erase the “Amalek” – any evil that is within us.

יחזקאל לוינשטיין וצ"ל שעיקר מצות מחיית עמלק
עבורנו בזמן הזה, שאין אפשרות להרוג את עמלק
הגשמי, היא שכל אחד מאתנו ימאס וישנא את הרע
שבתוך עצמו,

ועי"ז נעקור ונמחה את ה"עמלק" - הרע שבקרבנו.

PART D. GIVING GIFTS OF FOOD TO FRIENDS – GIVING GENERATES LOVE

The last three mitzvot of Purim are recorded in the following verses:

1. Esther 9:20-22 – On the 14th or 15th of Adar, depending on one's residence, we send gifts to friends and to the poor, and enjoy a festive meal.

And Mordechai recorded these events [the miracles of Purim], and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Achashveirosh, both near and far, [charging them] to observe annually the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and the fifteenth day, as the day on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and the month which had been turned about for them from one of sorrow to joy, and from mourning to festival; to observe them as (1) *days of feasting and gladness*, and (2) *sending gifts of food to one another [mishloach manot]*, and (3) *gifts to the poor [matanot l'evyonim]*.

ויכתב מרדכי את הדברים האלה וישלח ספרים אל כל
היהודים אשר בכל מדינות המלך אחשוורוש הקרובים
והרחוקים. לקיים עליהם להיות עשים את יום ארבעה
עשר לחודש אדר ואת יום חמשה עשר בו בכל שנה
ושנה. כימים אשר נחזו בהם היהודים מאיביהם והחודש
אשר נהפך להם מינון לשמחה ומאכל ליום טוב
לעשות אותם ימי משתה ושמחה ומשלח מנות איש
לרעהו ומתנות לאבנים.

The next source explains the connection between these three mitzvot:

2. Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 181 – Since Purim recalls a threat to our physical existence, we celebrate our deliverance with mitzvot that focus on the physical: giving money to the poor, gifts to friends, and eating a festive meal.

While the events of Chanukah were principally a threat to our *spiritual* survival, Purim recalls a threat to the *physical* existence of the Jewish people. Haman attempted to physically destroy every Jewish man, woman, and child. We celebrate our deliverance from this threat with mitzvot that focus on the physical (Levush Malchut, Orach Chaim 670). We give money to the poor and gifts of food to our friends; we eat a festive meal and drink wine.

In the following story, told by Solly Ganor, a Holocaust survivor from Dachau concentration camp, it seems that God Himself was the sender of miraculous mishloach manot. In March 1945, toward the end of the war, Mr. Ganor had a fellow inmate who was affectionately known as “Chaim the Rabbi.” Mr. Ganor describes how they had forgotten which calendar day it was, until Chaim the Rabbi reminded them that it was Purim.

Then it dawned on us that back home, a million years ago, this was the time of the year when we children were dressing up for Purim, playing, and eating Hamantaschen. Chaim the “rabbi” remembered the exact date according to the Jewish calendar. We hardly knew what day it was.

Chaim then divided the roles of Queen Esther, Mordechai, Vashti, and Haman among the onlookers. I was honored to receive the role of Mordechai, and we all ended up dancing in the snow. So we had our Purim Shpiel in Dachau.

But that was not the end of the story. The “rabbi” promised us that we will get today our mishloach manot, our gifts of food, and we thought that it was hardly likely to happen.

But, miracle of miracles, the same afternoon, a delegation of the International Red Cross came to the camp. It was the first time that they bothered about us. Still, we welcomed them with open arms, because they brought us the mishloach manot that the “rabbi” had promised.

Each one of us received a parcel containing a tin of sweet condensed milk, a small bar of chocolate, a box of sugar cubes, and a pack of cigarettes. It is impossible to describe our joy! Here we were starving to death, and suddenly on Purim, we received these heavenly gifts. Since then, we never doubted the “rabbi.”

His prediction also came true. Two months later Haman/Hitler went to the gallows, and took his own life in Berlin, while we were rescued by the American army, on May 2, 1945.

As a sign of hope and comfort, mishloach manot had arrived at the Dachau concentration camp in the most miraculous fashion. (Solly Ganor, Purim in Dachau, www.aish.com.)

The Talmud (Megillah 7a) states that one should send two portions of food to a friend on Purim. The details follow:

3. Selected sources – Selected laws concerning mishloach manot.

1. How does one perform this mitzvah?

On the day of Purim one must send two items of food to at least one person (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 695:4).

2. What is the reason for this mitzvah?

(a) To ensure that everyone has sufficient food for the Purim meal (Terumas HaDeshen, responsa 111).

(b) To increase love and friendship between Jews [thereby dismissing Haman’s accusations of strife and dissention among Jews, [Esther 3:8] (Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch, Moadim U’Zmanim 2:186).

[This is an ideal opportunity to repair broken relationships with others by sending parcels of food to them.]

3. Is it praiseworthy to send to many people?

Yes, it is praiseworthy (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 695:4), but it is better to spend more

1. שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תרצה סעיף ד
חייב לשלוח לחבירו ... שתי מנות לאיש אחד.

2. תרומת הדשן סימן קיא
טעם דמשלוח מנות הוא כדי שיהא לכל אחד די וספק
לקיים הסעודה כדינא.

מועו"ז ה"ב ס' קפו
ובספר "מנות הלוי" מפרש שטעם המצוה משום
ריעות.

3. שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תרצה סעיף ד
...וכל המרבה לשלוח לרעים משובח.

money on gifts to the poor [matanot l'evyonim, see Part E] than on one's Purim meal or mishloach manot (Mishnah Berurah 694:3).

4. Are all types of food suitable?

[Preferably,] one should send food that is ready to be eaten immediately, and does not require cooking. If one sends a cooked dish, wine, or fruit, then it can be eaten at the recipient's Purim meal. However, raw meat [or raw fish] that requires cooking should not be sent (Moadim U'Zmanim 2:186).

5. May one send two portions of the same food?

[No, the two food items must be different:] one should either send two different types of food, or two different types of drink, or a food and a drink (Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chaim 695:14).

6. What is the minimum quantity of food?

[Ideally, the food should be of a respectable quantity according to the standards of the sender and recipient.] If one sends something very small to a wealthy person then one has not fulfilled this mitzvah [i.e. one should send a nicer package to a wealthy person than to a poor person] (Biur Halachah 695, s.v. *chayiv lishloach*). A wealthy person should send a nicer package than a poor person (Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch, Teshuvos V'Hanhagos 2:354).

משנה ברורה סימן תרצד ס"ק ג

באמת מוטב להרבות במתנות לאביונים מלהרבות בסעודתו ובשלוח מנות לרעיו.

4. ועו"ח"ב ס' קפו

בעיני לשלוח מנות דבר הראוי לאכול כמות שהוא ולא צריך בישול...אם שולח דבר מבושל או יין ופירות וכדומה הוה כשולח דבר לצורך סעודה אבל בבשר חי שצריך עוד בישול... לא מיקרי מנה ולא מהני.

5. ערוך השולחן אורח חיים סימן תרצה סעיף יד

וברור הדבר דצריך לשלוח שני מיני אוכלין או שני מיני משקין או מין אוכל ומין משקה... אבל שני חתיכות ממין אחד אינו מועיל דכי מפני שחתכן נחשבם לשנים

6. ביאור הלכה סימן תרצה ד"ה חייב לשלוח

אם שולח לעשיר דבר פחות אינו יוצא בזה ידי משלוח מנות ...

תשובות והנהגות ח"ב ס' שנד

... ואם אחד מהם עשיר ישלח לאדם אחד כפי הנאת עשיר.

When first proposing his evil plot to Achashveirosh, Haman described the Jewish people as a "scattered and dispersed nation" (Esther 3:8). He did not only mean that they were geographically dispersed, but that they were not unified, and would thus be easy prey for their enemies. The Jewish people lacked the spiritual protection that comes as a result of a loving unity between them (Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra 26:2). In order to help re-unify the Jewish people, the mitzvah of sending food gifts to friends was instituted.

4. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol II, p. 204 – Even though giving to others is an expression of love, nevertheless the love is generated in the first place by the act of giving.

The reason why the Sages instituted the mitzvah of sending food gifts to one another, was to increase mutual feelings of closeness between people. And once people feel close to each other, then love between them develops ...

Generally, when one sends a gift to a friend, it is an expression of a pre-existing love between the two people ... But from here [the mitzvah of mishloach manot] we learn that it is the opposite: love is the result of giving. Even though originally

זה הטעם לתקנת חז"ל משלוח מנות איש לרעהו, שע"י זה יבואו לקירבו הדדית, וע"י קירוב הלבבות בין איש לרעהו תגדל האהבה ...

בנוהג שבעולם כששולחים מתנה איש לרעהו הרי זה כבר תוצאה וביטוי של האהבה שקדמה לה...אלא מכאן לומדים שהדבר הפוך - האהבה היא תוצאה מהנתינה, אכן תחילתו היא מעשה חיצוני בלבד, אבל

the giving is an external action only, nevertheless real inner love will develop as a consequence of it.

This is the purpose of the mitzvah of mishloach manot: to create mutual love, and thus awaken the power of unity in our times, as we had in previous generations.

סופו לבוא כתוצאה מכך לאהבה פנימית.

זו התכלית בקיום מצות משלוח מנות - ליצור אהבה הדדית, וע"י כך לעורר את כח האחדות לדורות - בזמן הזה.

PART E. GIVING GIFTS TO THE POOR – GOING BEYOND OUR SELF-CENTEREDNESS

Apart from sending food gifts to friends, there is also a mitzvah on the day of Purim to send money or food to the poor.

1. Selected sources – Selected laws concerning matanot l'evyonim.

1. How does one perform this mitzvah?

[On the day of Purim,] a person must give one gift each to at least two poor people. (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 694:1).

The gift may be either money or food (Mishnah Berurah 694:2).

2. How much food or money must one give?

It is only called a "gift" if it is something of benefit and substance, and therefore it should be the amount [of food] that is usually eaten at a regular meal [or the equivalent amount of money] (Sha'arei Teshuvah, Orach Chaim 694:1).

It is better to spend more on this mitzvah than on mishloach manot and the Purim feast. There is no greater joy than gladdening the hearts of orphans, widows, and needy people. One who does so is likened to God, as it says, "To revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the downtrodden" [Yeshayahu 57:15] (Mishnah Berurah 694:3).

3. Is it better to give two large donations or many small ones? Since the primary objective of the mitzvah is to bring joy to the poor, one is required to give an amount that would make a poor person happy. Therefore, it is preferable to give two large donations. This will bring more joy to the recipients than if one would give many small donations (Rabbi Yitzchak Darzi, Shevut Yitzchak 8:2, citing R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv).

1. שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תרצד סעיף א
חייב כל אדם ליתן לפחות שתי מתנות לשני עניים.

משנה ברורה סימן תרצד ס"ק ב
ורשאי ליתן מאכל או מעות...

2. שערי תשובה סימן תרצד ס"ק א
אינה קרויה מתנה אא"כ יש בה כדי מתנה המועלת
דהיינו כדי שיעור סעודה...

משנה ברורה סימן תרצד ס"ק ג
באמת מוטב להרבות במתנות לאביונים מלהרבות
בסעודתו ובשלוח מנות לרעיו, שאין שמחה גדולה
ומפוארה אלא לשמח לב עניים יתומים ואלמנות
ודומה לשכינה שנאמר "להחיות רוח שפלים ולהשיב
לב נדכאים."

3. שבות יצחק פ"ח הל' ב בשם הגריש"א.
ושמעתי מהגאון רב יוסף שלום אלישיב שליט"א
דמכל מקום כדי לקיים המצוה כראוי לכתחילה צריך
ליתן מתנה שיש בה כדי לשמח את העני. ומוטב ליתן
שתי מתנות חשובות שיש בהם כדי לשמח, מאשר
להלק מתנות מועטות להרבה עניים.

A check may be given if it can easily be exchanged for cash through a bank or used to make a purchase (ibid. 8:3).

4. *What if one does not know who is qualified to receive the gifts?* One does not need to personally give the money. Rather one can give it via an authorized charity collector, who will distribute the money to the poor on the day of Purim itself. (Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chaim 694:2).

5. *Must one give money to anyone who asks for charity?* [During the rest of the year] if someone needs clothes and comes and says: “Give me clothes,” we investigate to see that his need is legitimate [i.e. a person is not obligated to give charity to all who ask] (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 251:10).

However, money given on Purim is distributed freely, and therefore we give [at least a small donation] to anyone who extends his hand (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 694:3).

Whoever gives charity on Purim causes powerful and far-reaching improvements in all the higher worlds, more so than on other days. Therefore, one should give more than usual (Yesod v'Shores HaAvodah 12:6).

שם הל' ג בשם הגריש"א.

יכול לכתחילה ליתן מתנות לאביונים בצ"ק אם ניתן בזמן שהעני יכול היום לילך לבנק לפדותו או אם יכול לקנות בו במקום זה.

4. ערוך השולחן אורח חיים סימן תרצד סעיף ב ופשוט הוא דא"צ ליתן בעצמו ויכול ליתן גם ע"י שליח ויכול להעמיד שליח קודם פורים שיתן בשבילו בפורים מתנות לאביונים.

5. שולחן ערוך יורה דעה סימן רנא סעיף י היה ערום ובא ואמר: כסוני, בודקין אחריו אם הוא רמאי.

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תרצד סעיף ג אין מדקדקים במעות פורים, אלא כל מי שפושט ידו ליטול נותנים לו.

יסוד ושורש העבודה שער "ב פרק ו' כי ביום הזה עושה אדם במצות הצדקה תקונים נפלאים, גדולים, ונוראים במדות, ובעולמות העליונים הקדושים לאין תכלית יותר מבשאר הימים. לכן ירבה אדם בצדקה.

2. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol II, p. 205 – Giving gifts to the poor helps us feel responsible for others and creates unity.**

The reason for the mitzvah of giving gifts to the poor on Purim is to help us feel responsible for others, through which we eradicate our own desires.

מתנות לאביונים - להרגיש את עצמו כאחראי לזולת, וכתוצאה מכך מבטל את רצונותיו הפרטיים.

3. **Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, Gateway to Happiness, p. 137 – Giving gifts and helping others turns strangers into friends.**

“If you make an effort to help everyone you meet, you will feel close to everyone. A stranger is someone you have not yet helped. Doing acts of kindness for everyone you can fills your world with friends and loved ones” (Michtav M’Eliyahu, Vol. I, p. 37).

Make a list of people with whom you would like to become closer. Beside each name write a few acts of kindness you could do for them that they would appreciate.

You never know who will be the recipient of your charity, as illustrated in the following story:

Every Purim, the great Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner (Lithuania, 1749-1821) used to fill his pockets with coins for charity. He would walk the streets and give money to any person who requested it, no questions asked.

One Purim, a poor man approached him and said, “If I tell you a ‘gut vort’ (a nice Torah thought) on the Megillah, will you then give me a larger amount of money?”

R’ Chaim laughed and agreed. The man said, “The Midrash relates (Yalkut Shimoni, Esther, 1057) that Elijah the Prophet appeared in a reincarnated form before Mordechai and revealed to him this message, ‘It is possible that God will listen to the prayers of your people and save them, for Haman’s decree to kill the Jews was signed not in blood, which signifies an irrevocable decree, but with the official signet of clay, which signifies a decree that can be annulled.’ My question is, where is there a hint of this in the Megillah?”

R’ Chaim was perplexed and said, “I don’t know, please tell me.”

The man replied, “Every time it says the word המלך, the king, in the Megillah, it also refers to God, the King of kings. Thus the verse states, ‘אם על המלך טוב יכתב לאבדם – If it please the king, let it be recorded that they, the Jews, be destroyed’ (Esther 3:9). The word לאבדם, destroyed, can also be read as two words, לאבדם, literally ‘not with blood.’ Hence the verse would take on a new meaning: If it please the King (God), let the decree be recorded, but not with blood.”

R’ Chaim was ecstatic at the originality of the vort. He went and told it to his rebbi, the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797). The Gaon listened and then smiled. “Do you know who it was who told you that vort? It was none other than the one who revealed it to Mordechai himself – Eliyahu HaNavi (Elijah the Prophet).” (Rabbi Paysach Krohn, The Maggid Speaks, p. 162.)

PART F. EATING A FESTIVE MEAL WITH OTHERS – CREATING UNITY

The final positive mitzvah on Purim is to eat a festive meal during the day with others. According to most authorities, one should eat bread and meat at the daytime meal, and this is the prevalent custom (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 696:7). In addition, one should have a nicer meal than usual on the evening of Purim (ibid. 695:1, 2).

To set the spiritual tone of the daytime meal:

- One should relate the Purim miracles and sing praises to God during the meal (Mishnah Berurah 695:4).
- One should have in mind that eating the meal is a mitzvah (ibid.).
- One should spend a little time studying Torah before the meal (Rema, ibid. 695:2). There is a mitzvah to begin studying the laws of Pesach on the 14th of Adar (Mishnah Berurah 429:2).

(The obligation to drink wine during the festive meal will be discussed in the next section.)

1. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol II, p. 205 – The festive meal is a way to create unity, which is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah afresh every year.

The Purim meal, as it is referred to in the verse: “And these days should be remembered and celebrated by every generation [and] every family (Esther 9:28).” Rashi explains that the celebration is by means of: “people gathering together, and eating and drinking together ...”

סעודת פורים - כמבואר בפסוק (אסתר ט, כח)
 “והימים האלה נזכרים ונעשים בכל דור ודור משפחה
 ומשפחה” וגו’ מבאר רש”י “מתאספים יחד ואוכלים
 ושותים יחד ...”

The aim of the Purim meal is to unify everyone present, and for everyone in the group to bring happiness to his friend. Through this we pass on to future generations the unique re-acceptance of the Torah that occurred in those days of Purim when: “[the nation was] like one man, with one heart” [Rashi, Shemot 19:2, referring to the nation’s acceptance of the Written Torah on Har Sinai].

סעודת פורים מטרתה לאחד את כולם ולשמוח בצוותא איש עם רעהו, וע"י זה מנחילים לדורות את הקבלה המחודשת בימים ההם - כאיש אחד בלב אחד.

When one exerts special effort and forethought to protect another’s dignity and save him from embarrassment, then one creates true unity among the Jewish people, as the following story so beautifully illustrates:

There was a girl in Jerusalem who had suffered the disappointment of a broken engagement. She was very despondent and asked her father if he could take her to receive a blessing and encouragement from the gadol hador (the leader of the generation), Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (1910-1995, Jerusalem).

After many delays and unsuccessful attempts, they came to R’ Shlomo Zalman’s house on Purim afternoon. The father apologized for disturbing the meal, explained the situation and then said, “If the Rav will allow me, I will bring my daughter in for just a moment.”

“Please, rather let me go out to her. She needn’t come in,” said R’ Shlomo Zalman. The father suggested again that he remain seated, but R’ Shlomo was already going out to greet the young woman who was waiting. After listening carefully to what had happened to her, he gave the girl encouragement and reassurance. He told her that he had every confidence that she would find her right shidduch (marriage partner) in the near future, and that God would bless her with the means to bring happiness to her life.

The girl was so moved by R’ Shlomo Zalman’s words and genuine concern that she burst into tears. She buried her face in her cupped hands and tried to thank him, but she could hardly speak. R’ Shlomo Zalman waited patiently for her to compose herself, and wished her a happy Purim. As he walked back to the dining room he turned to the young woman’s father and said softly, “This is why I didn’t want her to come in.”

R’ Shlomo Zalman understood the emotion of the moment and anticipated that she might be moved to cry. To spare her embarrassment, he went out to her – rather than have her cry in front of total strangers in the dining room. (Adapted from Rabbi Paysach Krohn, Echoes of the Maggid, p. 81.)

2. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol II, p. 205 – All the mitzvot of the day – giving gifts of food to friends, giving gifts to the poor, and eating a festive meal with others – have a common purpose: to create unity among the Jewish people so that we should merit God’s deliverance.

Through this unity [generated by the mitzvot of the day] we will merit God’s deliverance in our days, as it occurred then. And in truth, this salvation is dependent on us. For when we are unified and bonded like one entity, and we remove our selfishness for the purpose of a common goal – which is to fulfill the Will of God – then we merit God’s salvation as in those days.

וע"י כך זוכים אנו לישועת ה' בזמן הזה - כבימים ההם. וכאמור, ישועת ה' זו תלויה בנו, כשאנו מאוגדים ומאוחדים כחטיבה אחת, מבטלים את רצונותינו האישיים למטרה אחת בלבד - רצון ה', ע"י זאת זוכים לישועת ה' כבימים ההם - בזמן הזה.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ☞ Every day of the Jewish calendar brings with it the opportunities for growth and spiritual ascent that were available on the original day in history (Derech Hashem 4:7:6). For example, Pesach brings with it the opportunity to attain freedom; Shavuot affords the opportunity to attain Torah and Godly wisdom; and Sukkot is associated with joy and trust.
- ☞ Purim is no different. Its range of mitzvot and observances enable us to express gratitude, perceive God's Hand in history, love one's fellow, and create unity among the Jewish people, which were all experienced so intensely on the original Purim.

SECTION III. GETTING DRUNK ON PURIM

A law of Purim which is difficult to understand is the obligation to drink wine during the festive meal. Its origin is the following Gemara:

1. **Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Megillah 7b – A person is obligated to drink on Purim until he cannot distinguish Haman from Mordechai. One of the Sages “killed Rabbi Zeira while drinking, and then revived him.”**

Rava said, “A person is obligated to drink on Purim until he does not know the difference between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai.’”

Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira made a Purim feast together. They drank, whereupon Rabbah arose and killed [lit. slaughtered] Rabbi Zeira. The next day, Rabbah pleaded for Divine mercy, and thereby brought Rabbi Zeira back to life. The next year, Rabbah said to Rabbi Zeira, “Come, let's make a Purim feast together.” Rabbi Zeira said, “Miracles do not happen all the time.”

אמר רבא: מיחייב איניש לבסומי בפוריא עד דלא ידע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי.

רבה ורבי זירא עבדו סעודת פורים בהדי הדדי, איבסום, קם רבה שחטיה לרבי זירא. למחר בעי רחמי ואחייה. לשנה אמר ליה: ניתי מר ונעביד סעודת פורים בהדי הדדי - !אמר ליה: לא בכל שעתא ושעתא מתרחיש ניסא.

2. **Maharsha, ibid. – The real explanation is that Rabbi Zeira drank too much and was close to dying, until Rabbah prayed for him and thus revived him.**

“Rabbah arose and killed [lit. slaughtered] Rabbi Zeira” – it is unthinkable to explain this passage literally. Rather, the meaning is it was “as if he killed him,” i.e. Rabbah gave him wine and forced him to drink too much until Rabbi Zeira fell ill and was in danger of dying. Thus, the Talmud employs the term “slaughtering,” for drinking wine is done via the throat, which is the place of slaughtering ... and Rabbah prayed that Rabbi Zeira would not die from this illness. And we find that the term “bring back to life” is a substitute for “heal.”

קם רבה שחטיה לרבי זירא כו'. דבר תמוה הוא לפרשו כפשטיה ונראה דר"ל כעין שחטיה, דאגבריה חמרא וכפייה לשתות יותר מדאי עד שחלה ונטה למות, ולכך נקטיה בלשון שחטיה דשתיית היין נקרא ע"ש הגרון מקום שחטיה ... וקאמרי דהתפלל עליו שלא ימות מחולי זה עד שנתרפא, וחי, ומצינו במקרא ובתלמוד לשון חי מלשון רפואה:

3. **Maharal, Chiddushei Aggadot Vol. III, Sanhedrin 70a, pp. 168-169 – Wine is powerful and Godly. For this reason, if it is used correctly one achieves a spiritual ascent, and if used incorrectly it can kill.**

Wine is not part of this world, for wine has a Divine aspect to it, for it “gladdens God and man” [Shoftim/Judges 9:13]. This can be understood by seeing that wine comes from the inside of a grape which is hidden. This teaches that wine comes from a hidden place [and has a spiritual aspect] that is not part of the visible world ...

Regarding anything that is powerful and has a Divine aspect, such as wine, the following is true: if it is used correctly one acquires a spiritual ascent; however, if it is used incorrectly one acquires a form of death ... When one drinks wine correctly, one is made sharp and given Divine wisdom. And if one just drinks due to one's base desires and becomes drunk, he brings on himself death and mourning.

פירוש היין אינו ראוי לעולם הזה, כי היין יש בו ענין אלקי שהרי הוא משמח אלקים ואנשים. ודבר זה יכול האדם לדעת ולהבין שהוא יוצא מן פנימית הענב שהוא נסתר, מורה על שהיין יש לו מקום נסתר אינו מן העולם בנגלה....

... וכל דבר שהוא חשוב ויש בו ענין אלקי אם ישתמש בו כראוי קונה ע"י זה מעלה, ואם אינו משתמש בו כראוי קונה ע"י זה מיתה... וכן כאשר ישתה היין כראוי מפקח אותו ונותן לו השכל העליון, ואם אינו כך רק ששותה אותו לתאותו וישתכר מביא לו יללה ומיתה.

In summary: anything powerful is either constructive or destructive. It all depends on whether it is “used or abused.” Wine is no exception to this rule. Therefore, it is not surprising that wine can be used to achieve tremendous spiritual heights on Purim, or, through extended abuse, can turn a person into an alcoholic.

Some of the spiritual and mystical benefits that can be achieved from the power of wine will be discussed in the following four sources.

4. **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. II, pp. 467-8 – The deeper meaning of drinking on Purim is to return to the spiritual state of Adam before the sin where we will no longer be confused between good and evil. We need to prepare for this from the beginning of the month of Adar.**

The joy of Purim in all its aspects requires preparation and contemplation *before* the day arrives. Without this, the day could turn into the opposite: empty drunkenness.

“When the month of Adar arrives we increase our joy” [Ta’anit 29a]: this means that from the beginning of Adar we start preparing ourselves for true joy on Purim. We prepare by studying the true form and spirit that the day should have, and contemplating its deeper aspects ...

The Talmud states (Chullin 139b), “A person is obligated to drink on Purim until he does not know the difference between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai’” (Megillah 7b). Related to this is the following question: “Where

שמחה זאת על כל הכלול בה צריכה הכנה והתבוננות לפני בוא החג הקדוש הזה לבל ייהפך ח"ו ליום הוללות ושכרות.

כאשר משנכנס אדר מרבים בשמחה, יש להתכונן מראש חודש אדר לשמחה אמיתית בפורים. ההכנה היא: ללמוד היטב מהי צורת החג באמת ולהתבונן בגדלות הענינים ...

“חייב איניש לבסומי בפוריא עד דלא ידע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי” (מגילה ז, ע"ב). הרי “המן מן התורה מגנין? ‘המן הַעֵץ ... אֶכְלָתָּ” (חולין קלט, ע"ב).

is Haman mentioned in the Torah? The answer is in the phrase, ‘Did you [pronounced *hamin*, but could be read as *haman*] eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?’” (Bereishit/Genesis 3:11).

[The meaning of the above is as follows:] Haman is the extreme expression of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. After the sin of Adam, good and evil were mixed together inside man’s personality. But Haman represents that which is completely evil, without even a trace of good. Mordechai and Esther fought against Haman and overcame him. Through their victory the Jewish people reached a spiritual elevation where they no longer wanted to be in a situation of the Tree of the Knowledge [i.e. intermingling to the point of confusion] of Good and Evil. Rather, their soul desire was the Tree of Life, which represents a state where there are no longer two divergent paths of “blessed” and “cursed.” Rather, it is all good and “blessed”! ... This is the obligation to drink on Purim until “you do not know” [the distinction between good and evil], i.e. to taste the Tree of Life.

המן הוא התוצאה הקיצונית של עץ הדעת טוב ורע. אחרי חטאו של אדם הראשון מעורב הטוב והרע בכל כחות אדם. המן הוא מסוים ברע, שאין בו אפילו צל של טוב. נלחמו בו מרדכי ואסתר ויכלו לו. והכלל ישראל שהגיע על ידי נצחון זה לעומק ורוממות נפשו אינו רוצה עוד במצב של עץ הדעת טוב ורע – משאת נפשו הוא עץ החיים, שאין בו עוד שתי הדרכים של ארור וברוך, אלא דרך אחת של “ברוך” לבד! ... וזהו החיוב להתבסס בפורים “עד דלא ידע” – לטעם טעמו של עץ החיים.

To summarize the previous source: “not knowing between good and evil” does *not* mean losing one’s sense of right and wrong because of drunkenness. Rather “not knowing between good and evil” refers to a return to the idyllic state of Adam in the Garden of Eden. For in the language of the Torah, “knowing” is a reference to mixing two things closely together (for example: “And Adam knew his wife Chavah [Eve],” Bereishit 4:1). By eating from the Tree of the *Knowledge* of Good and Evil, good became tragically mixed with evil. By drinking to the point of “*not* knowing between good and evil” we are expressing our desire to return to a state where good and evil are *no longer* mixed, to a state where everything is pure good.

5. **Rabbi Yeruchom Levovitz, Da’as Chochmah U’Mussar, Vol. I, p. 400 – Drinking on Purim frees the body from the control of the mind to test if the body can be raised to the level of the soul.**

The intent of the Sages [when they said that a person is obligated to drink until he cannot distinguish between Haman and Mordechai] is that on Purim one must “test and elevate” the body. For the essence of Purim is a spiritual repair of the body, so that the material body reaches the spiritual level of the soul and ultimate good. This will occur fully in the World to Come when the body will be the soul [i.e. when the body will no longer be a barrier to the expression of the soul].

כונתם בזה, שבפורים חייב אדם לבחון הגוף, דיסוד הפורים הריהו תיקון הגוף, שהגוף עצמו יהיה כלו טוב ונשמה, דיסוד הפורים הוא יסוד הלעתיד לבוא שהגוף עצמו יהיה נשמה.

Therefore, a person must test the level of the body by drinking until his mind can no longer distinguish [between good and bad]. At this point the body will be freed from the control of the mind ... because under normal circumstances the body is held under the tight control of the mind ... Then he tests and elevates the body by saying, "Cursed be Haman and blessed be Mordechai." Now the body *itself* has reached the level of the soul, for even now, without the control of the mind, he recognizes good and desires Divine wisdom and mitzvot.

וחייב אדם לבחון הגוף ולבסומי עד שיבוא לידי בחינה שלא יבחין בשכלו כלל, ואז יהיה הגוף חפשי ממוסרותיו ... ששכלו של אדם הוא שאוסר את הגוף בכבלים ... ואז יבחון עצמו באמירת "דורבו ומה רורא ילב סגו, המושג יהיה ומצע פוגהש ונייהד, "יכדרמ... תוצמו הרותב יפח היהיו בוטב ריכי לכשה

6. **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. II, p. 468 – When intoxicated, pure Torah and creative genius comes out of the mouths of Torah leaders, for even their physical bodies embody Divine wisdom.**

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883) used to get extremely drunk on Purim. Yet in this state he would spend the entire day speaking novel words of Torah, with razor-sharp clarity and creative genius, in all areas of the Talmud. He used to call this, "giving the body a test," to see whether even his physical body was an embodiment of Divine wisdom ...

For us, who are small in Torah and in the service of God, it is enough to "drink more than usual, without getting so drunk" (Rema, Orach Chaim 681:2). Let us guard the loftiness of the day and not let it turn into an empty waste of time.

ר' ישראל זללה"ה היה רגיל להיות בפורים שיכור כשכרותו של לוט ממש, ובמצב זה היה אומר כל היום בלי הרף חידושים בחריפות וגאונות להפליא בכל הש"ס. הוא קרא לזה "לעשות בחינה על הגוף", היינו לבחון אם הוא במדרגת "חוש" שהגוף יהיה קרובה לתורה הקדושה ...

אנחנו, בני אדם קטנים, קטנים בתורתנו ובעבודתו, די לנו גם בפורים להתבסס "יותר מלימודנו, ואין צריך להתכשר כל כך" (רמ"א באו"ח תרצא, ב). ונתכונן לשמור על רוממות היום לבל ייהפוך ח"ו ליום הוללות ובטלה.

7. **Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 182 – Drinking allows one to reveal his hidden self, just as God revealed His hidden Presence on Purim.**

Consuming alcohol mirrors the events of Purim in another way as well ... Intoxication causes a person to reveal elements of his inner self that are usually hidden. ["When wine goes in, that which is hidden comes out," (Eruvin 65a).] What transpired on Purim revealed the love of God for the Jewish people ... which had been hidden during the time of the Persian Exile.

The next source presents some of the practical details of drinking (and avoiding alcohol poisoning) during the festive meal:

8. **Selected sources – Selected laws relating to drinking on Purim.**

1. *How does one perform the mitzvah of rejoicing?*
A man is required to drink wine on Purim (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 695:2).

1. שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תרצה סעיף ב
חייב אינש לבסומי בפוריא...

Unlike on other *Yomim Tovim* when drinking wine is only a means to reach a state of happiness, on Purim drinking wine is itself a mitzvah, as the verse states: “A day of feasting and gladness” [Esther 9:22] (Emek Berachah, p. 126).

2. Why did the Sages institute such a mitzvah?

Because all of the miracles of Purim occurred through feasting with wine. Queen Vashti was removed at a feast [held by King Achashveirosh], and this led to the appointment of Esther as the new queen. Similarly, Haman met his downfall at a feast [held by Esther, and this led to the abolishment of Haman's evil decree. Since the miracles revolved around the feasts of wine] the Sages instituted the drinking of wine and becoming inebriated as a reminder of these events (Biur Halachah, Orach Chaim 695, s.v. *chayav inish*).

3. Is a person obligated to become drunk?

[According to some authorities, there is such an obligation. In the words of the Sages] a person is required to drink until he can no longer distinguish between “cursed be Haman” and “blessed be Mordechai” (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 695:2).

According to others, one is only required to drink more than usual, but not to the point of becoming drunk. One should then go to sleep and thereby be unable to distinguish between “cursed be Haman” and “blessed be Mordechai” (Rema, Orach Chaim 695:2).

4. Which authority should one follow?

The Sages certainly did not want people to become drunks and make fools of themselves. Nor is the intention to have empty and meaningless joy, rather, to use refined physical enjoyments to reach great heights of love of God and wonder at the miracles He did for us ...

However, a person who suspects that intoxication will prevent him from performing mitzvot, or from washing his hands before the meal, or from saying the appropriate blessings on food, or from praying properly, or may lead to inappropriate light-headedness, should [follow the second opinion and drink with moderation and] not get drunk. Everything that one does should be purely for the sake of Heaven (Biur Halachah 695 s.v. *ad d'lo yadah*).

עמק ברכה עמ' קבו בשם הגרי"ז

הא דנשתנה שמחת פורים מכל שאר השמחות של מועדים, דלא מצינו בשום שמחה דין כזה שיתחייב לבסומי בשתיית יין ... אבל בפורים, כיון דכתיב משתה ושמחה [אסתר ט' כ"ב], נמצא שהמשתה עצמה היא היא גוף המצוה ...

2. ביאור הלכה סימן תרצה ד"ה חייב איניש

מפני שכל הניסים שנעשו לישראל בימי אחשורוש היו ע"י משתה, כי בתחלה נטרדה ושתי ע"י משתה ובאה אסתר, וכן ענין המן ומפלתו היה ע"י משתה, ולכן חייבו חכמים להשתכר עד כדי שיהא נזכר הנס הגדול בשתיית היין.

3. שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תרצה סעיף ב

חייב איניש לבסומי בפוריא עד דלא ידע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי.

רמ"א שם

ויש אומרים דאין צריך להשתכר כל כך, אלא שישתה יותר מלימודו וישן, ומתוך שישן אינו יודע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי.

4. ביאור הלכה סימן תרצה ד"ה עד דלא

אין אנו מצוין להשתכר ולהפחית עצמינו מתוך השמחה. שלא נצטוונו על שמחה של הוללות ושל שטות, אלא בשמחה של תענוג שיגיע מתוכה לאהבת הש"י, והודאה על הנסים שעשה לנו ...

ואמנם היודע בעצמו שיזלזל אז במצוה מן המצות, בנטילת ידים וברכה וברכת המזון, או שלא יתפלל מנחה או מעריב, או שיהווג קלות ראש, מוטב שלא ישתכר, וכל מעשיו יהיו לשם שמים.

The purpose of drinking on Purim is also to recognize God through joy (Biur Halachah 695 s.v. *ad d'lo yadah*), as the following source humorously illustrates:

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach once taught a Purim lesson. He asked: What's the difference between a drunkard and a Jew who gets drunk on Purim?

Answer: When you show two fingers to a drunkard he sees four, if you hold up five fingers he sees three, etc.

But when you hold up two fingers to a Jew who is drunk on Purim, he sees One, five fingers he sees One, three fingers he sees One, etc. (From www.aishinside.com.)

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

- ☞ What does it mean to get drunk on Purim and not be able to discern between good and bad? Doesn't a Jew pride himself on being in control of his thoughts and actions, not to mention conducting himself with refinement and sensitivity?
- ☞ The explanation is as follows: wine is powerful and if used correctly can help a person achieve a great spiritual ascent, but if used incorrectly, it can make a person fall. Therefore, a person should prepare himself from the beginning of Adar to experience true joy on Purim by understanding the significance of the drinking.
- ☞ One idea is that we drink to the point where we can no longer differentiate between "blessed is Mordechai and cursed is Haman," symbolic of our desire to return to the spiritual state of Adam before the sin where we will no longer be confused between good and evil.
- ☞ Another idea is that drinking on Purim frees the body from the control of the mind to test if the body can be raised to the level of the soul. Since wine reveals a person's hidden self, when great Torah Sages become drunk they pour forth Divine wisdom with razor-sharp clarity and creative genius.
- ☞ For those of us who are not yet great Torah Sages, and suspect that being overly drunk could detract from the awesome power of the day, we are encouraged to drink with moderation. The purpose of drinking on Purim is also to recognize God through joy.

SECTION IV. COSTUMES – A SYMBOL OF GOD'S HIDDEN FACE

One of the best-known and most popular customs of Purim is disguising oneself and dressing up in a costume (Rema, Orach Chaim 696:8). Various reasons are given as the basis of this practice.

The Talmud (Ta'anit 9a) states the principle that there is nothing mentioned in the Writings (*Ketuvim*) which is not alluded to in *Chumash* (the Five Books of Moses), and thus the Talmud asks:

1. Talmud Bavli, Chullin 139b

Where do we find an allusion to Esther in the Torah? The verse states, "And I will surely hide My face on that day" (Devarim 31:18). The Hebrew word for "I will hide," *astir* is from the same root as the name *Esther*].

אסתר מן התורה מניין? ואנכי הסתר אסתיר.

Thus we see that a “hidden face” is intrinsic to the spirit of Purim. On a superficial level the Purim story appears to be a series of natural events and fortuitous coincidences. However, when a person digs beneath the surface and studies the story in depth, he realizes that Divine Providence was constantly guiding events.

The wearing of masks and costumes alludes to the fact that God was, so to speak, hiding behind the scenes. This is also one of the reasons why the Name of God does not appear anywhere in the Megillah. This is the phenomenon described in the verse above: “I will surely hide my face on that day” [Devarim 31:18] (Minhag Yisrael Torah, Ch. 696).

2. **Rabbi Akiva Tatz, Worldmask, p. 205 – God hides behind a mask of nature and it is our mission to reveal His Presence.**

Purim is the time of masks; God has gone into hiding in Jewish history, He has donned a mask. But He is not distant; if one is distant he does not need a mask to avoid being identified, the distance achieves that. No, a mask is necessary when one is very close and yet wishes to remain hidden.

The world is His mask; nature hides His Presence. But this same world, this same nature, needs only to be peeled back to reveal its Source. The ordeal is doubt; all may appear coincidental, and the Amalek ideology may be found in the culture of today – nothing has absolute meaning or value, all is accident. The mask is heavy and convincing. But that should not deter us from our function, the function of revealing the Reality behind the mask.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV:

- ∞ The world is a mask which hides a deeper reality. But it is a unique mask: it hides, and yet it reveals; it is opaque and yet transparent (Rabbi Akiva Tatz, Worldmask).
- ∞ Whether the mask of nature will hide or reveal, depends on our choice to look for the One behind the mask. The custom to disguise one’s outward appearance on Purim is to remind us to seek out God’s hidden, yet very close, Presence behind the “mask” of nature.

SECTION V. THE TWO DAYS OF PURIM

In this section we will explain the reason for the two different days on which Purim is celebrated.

1. **Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 698:1; Mishnah Berurah 688:1, – The reason for the two different days of Purim.**

Shulchan Aruch:

Cities that have a wall from the days of Yehoshua (Joshua) – even if the wall is no longer standing – read the Megillah [and celebrate Purim] on the 15th of Adar [while the rest of the world celebrates on the 14th of Adar].

Mishnah Berurah:

[This difference is because of the way in which

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תרפח סעיף א
המוקפים חומה מימות יהושע בן נון, אפילו אינן
מוקפין עכשיו, קורין בט"ו...

משנה ברורה סימן תרפח ס"ק א
כי בזמן מרדכי בעת הנס כתיב שהיהודים שבכל מקום

the miracle occurred.] The Jews in all towns [throughout the 127 provinces of the Persian Kingdom] defended their lives and waged war on the 13th of Adar, and rested on the 14th of Adar [Esther 9:17]. But in the capital, Shushan [which was a walled city], the fighting continued on the 14th of Adar [at the request of Esther], and the 15th of Adar became a day of rejoicing [ibid. 9:18].

Since the events occurred on two different days, Mordechai, Esther, and the Men of the Great Assembly instituted that Purim be celebrated on two different days. It might have been appropriate to institute that all walled cities from the time of Shushan celebrate on the 15th of Adar ... however, to accord honor to the Land of Israel, it was instituted that walled cities from the time of Yehoshua should celebrate on the 15th, and everywhere else on the 14th of Adar.

נלחמו ביום י"ג ונחו ביום י"ד, ועשו אותו משתה
ושמחה. ובשושן ניתן ליהודים להלחם עם העכו"ם גם
ביום י"ד ולא עשו יו"ט עד ט"ו,

וכיון שבאותו זמן נחלקו לשני ימים, ולכן כשקבע
מרדכי ואסתר בהסכמת אנשי כנסת הגדולה לקבוע
פורים לדורות חלקו ג"כ אותו לשני ימים. והיה ראוי
לתקן שכל עיר שהיא מוקפת חומה כמו שושן יהיה
דומה לשושן לעשות בט"ו ... ועל כן תקנו לכבוד ארץ
ישראל, שכל עיר שהיא מוקפת מימות יהושע בן נון
יקראו בט"ו אף על פי שאין מוקפות עכשיו, והשאר
בי"ד.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION V:

- ☞ In most of the world, Purim is celebrated on the 14th of Adar, but in Jerusalem and Jaffa (and other cities that have a wall from the times of Yehoshua, 1244 BCE) it is celebrated on the 15th of Adar, since the fighting against the Persians continued in the walled capital city of Shushan, Persia, for an extra day.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

SECTION II, PART F. EATING A FESTIVE MEAL WITH OTHERS – CREATING UNITY

Talmud Bavli, Megillah 7b

Maharsha, *ibid.*, s.v. *kam Rabbah*

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, *Sifsei Chaim*, Vol II, p. 242

Additional Sources

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