

**LIGHT
FROM
THE
FUTURE
PURIM**

**BY
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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE-PURIM

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE ESSAYS ON PURIM

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE-PURIM

**Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who,
more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us
for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE-PURIM

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *Purim* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

“The time of your Redemption has arrived.”

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

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In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus/exile* mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

Purim is counted as Holidays that will survive the test of time. It is prominent now and will even be prominent in the Messianic Age, when the luster of other major Holidays will fade. The joy of Purim will still reach levels of *lo yada*-higher than knowledge.

ESSAY ONE

L'CHAIM

ESSAY ONE

L'CHAIM

On Purim the sounds of the “L’chaim-to life” will reverberate throughout the Jewish world. The Rebbe once explained that the word *chaim* is in the plural form because life is only worthy of its name if it is a life that is shared with others.

Haman wanted to destroy the Jewish nation arguing to Achashveirosh that they are a fragmented people. Why would they deserve the opposite of *chaim* just because they are a discordant nation? Of course, our question is not about Haman but about the Almighty who allowed this decree to hover over their heads for almost a year.

When the Jewish people are divided they no longer enjoy the deeper dimension of *chaim*, life in the plural. By having this decree in effect, G-d wished to alert the Jewish people about the importance of unity as the source of true life.

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Indeed, one of the reasons we send Shallach Manos/food gifts to our friends and Matanos l'evyonim/gifts to the poor is to refute Haman's accusation. These gifts demonstrate that the Jewish people are one people who feel each other's pain and celebrate each other's joyous events.

Let it be known that in the spirit of Purim the entire Jewish world stands in solidarity with our brethren in Israel, and especially the Fogel family whose lives were so brutally destroyed by the Amaleks and Hamans of our generation. May Hashem avenge their blood. Unfortunately, since the writing of this essay, there have been many other brutal murders of Jews in Israel by these modern day Hamans.

In the upcoming Holiday of Purim, we should show the Hamans of the world that we are one people. When we lift our cups of wine to say L'Chaim on Purim, we have in mind, as the Chabad Rebbeim-Leaders would say, "L'Chaim with **all** of its interpretations." Included in those interpretations is certainly the one about true life; life that is permeated with Ahavas [love of] and Achdus [Unity] of Yisrael-Israel].

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In these last moments of Galus, we lift our cups of wine and say to the Almighty, "L'Chaim." We want to see the end of the suffering of our/Your people. Bring us life in all of its meanings, particularly the **new** dimension of life we will enjoy with the imminent redemption through our righteous Redeemer, Amen!

L'Chaim!

ESSAY-TWO

SLEEPLESS IN

SHUSHAN

ESSAY-TWO

SLEEPLESS IN SHUSHAN

The turning point in the story of Purim comes with the opening verse of Chapter Six in the Book of Esther: "That night, the king's sleep was disturbed...." Achashveirosh's sleepless night set in motion a series of events that led to Mordechai's rise, Haman's downfall, and the salvation of the people of Israel. Thus it is customary that in the public reading of the Book of Esther on Purim the reader raises his voice when he comes to this verse to indicate that this point marks the beginning of the miracle of Purim.

The Torah is more than a chronicler of events and a legislator of laws. Within the external meaning of its verses lie layer upon layer of significance, describing the essence of

the human soul, of creation and reality, and of G-d's relationship with our existence.

In the words of Nachmanides, the Torah discusses the ephemeral reality and alludes to the supernal reality. The same is true of the events recounted in the Book of Esther: in the supernal version, King Achashveirosh is the King Who “the End and Beginning are His,” [since his name contains the key letters of the Hebrew words for beginning (Reishis) and end (Acharis)] and Esther is His bride, the people of Israel.

The state of Galus (exile), in which G-d's chosen people are subject to alien powers and exposed to danger and persecution in which the righteous suffer and the wicked prevail is a state of sleep of the supernal King.

Physical sleep brings about a distortion of the bond between body and soul and a topsy-turvy state of affairs within the human being: the sleeper's higher faculties, such as his intellect and sensory tools, are fuzzy and incoherent, while his lower faculties are

unaffected; some of them (e.g., the digestive system) even function better during sleep.

Sleep is thus the metaphor for a state of affairs in which the connection between the Soul of the World and the body of creation is likewise distorted. G-d grants existence and life to His creations in a manner that is much like the soul/body relationship during sleep: the good inherent in man is unfocused and obscured, while the baser elements of man and humanity flourish.

But that night, the King's sleep was disturbed. That night the Almighty woke from His slumber restored His true priorities vis-a-vis the various components of creation.

From a discourse delivered by the Rebbe on Purim 5743 (1983)

ESSAY THREE
SLEEPLESS IN
SHUSHAN (2)

ESSAY THREE

SLEEPLESS IN SHUSHAN (2)

Miracles Cloaked within Nature

Purim is known for the miracles that are cloaked within nature. G-d did not reveal His power then in the manner of Passover with its ten plagues and the splitting of the Red Sea. Neither was there a phenomenal military victory of the few against the many, or the burning of a lone cruse of oil for eight days instead of one, as in the miraculous events of Chanukah.

Instead, the miracle of Purim was the confluence of many fortuitous events that led to the salvation of the Jews from certain annihilation.

The Miracle of Sleeplessness

According to our sages, there was one event, among many, that stood out as representing "*Tokfo shel nes*-the major force of the

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miracle.” This event was the sleeplessness of King Achashveirosh. The fateful night that Haman approached the king for permission to hang Mordechai, the king could not fall asleep and asked for his book of chronicles be read to him. In these chronicles he read about how Mordechai saved his life.

The question may be asked, granted that the sleeplessness of the king and his reading of the chronicles was one obvious, positive twist and turn, why is this event singled out from all the other twists and turns of the Purim saga, as the most forceful aspect of the miracle?

The answer lies in a deeper understanding of the sleeplessness of the king. Our sages understand this mention of the king allegorically as a reference to the Supreme King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed be He. And the sleeplessness of the king refers to the negation of the state of exile that is characterized by the term sleep.

What is meant by G-d’s “sleeplessness,” and how does it relate to the miracle of Purim?

Divine Slumber

The psalmist declares: “Wake up! Why do you sleep, O G-d?”

What is meant by G-d’s sleep? How can one apply the corporeal state of sleep to the non-corporeal G-d?

In truth, sleep is a metaphor for the state of G-d’s withdrawal from the world. When the world does not feel G-d’s presence in all aspects of life; when it appears that the world is on “automatic pilot,” this is what the Torah refers to as sleep. Just as in the human sleep experience, the soul’s presence in the body is not visible; similarly, when it is said that G-d is “asleep” it means that His presence within His world is not palpable.

Furthermore, when one is asleep their level of understanding is severely limited; their thoughts are not coherent. During sleep one can imagine contradictory events occurring, or, being in two different places at the same time. This occurs because the person’s soul is not clearly manifested within the conscious mind.

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Similarly, after the destruction of the Temple, when the Jews were under the domination of the Persian Empire, they were not only in a geographic state of exile, but, they were also in a spiritual state of alienation. G-d's presence was not obvious to them, accounting for all the inconsistencies that characterized their lives.

The Alarm Clock

How does one “awaken” G-d from His “sleep?” This is when **we** wake up from **our** lethargy and state of sleep when it comes to matters of Torah and Jewish observance.

Indeed, our sages relate that when the Jews realized the danger they were in, they could have saved themselves by abandoning their faith. But, in fact, not one Jew – during the entire harrowing year, from the time Haman's decree was issued to the day of Purim – even entertained such a thought.

The self-sacrifice exhibited by the Jewish people, represented the awakening from their spiritual state of sleep and brought about the “most forceful aspect of the miracle” by

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causing G-d to “awaken” from His state of “sleep,” and to show His hand in the affairs of the Persian Empire and thereby transform all the negative occurrences into totally positive ones.

Open Our Eyes!

We are likewise presently in a state of exile characterized by our lack of awareness of G-d’s presence, but we are on the threshold of a new age of Redemption. The Rebbe exhorted us to open our eyes to see the new reality.

What did he mean by opening our eyes?

Obviously, he meant our eyes should be that of a person who is not asleep; a person who is able to see the reality of our unique and unprecedented situation clearly.

When we begin to see the changes in the world as manifestations, not only of G-d’s hand, but of our proximity to the time of Redemption, we will see it unfold before our very eyes.

It is interesting to note that the Rebbe did not say to awaken; rather to open our eyes.

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Perhaps awakening does not suffice because in the Purim saga they did awaken but they still remained in exile as subjects of the Persian monarch Achashveirosh without a Bais Hamikdash.

To merely awaken to the reality that G-d is involved in our life does not suffice in the present day and age, for we too live freely as Jews throughout the world.

Even the Soviet Union has collapsed peacefully and there is no place where Jews live in the world that stands in the way of Torah study and Mitzvah observance.

What are we missing? The true and **complete** Redemption that will allow us to build the Bais Hamikdash and bring G-d's presence into this world forever.

To accomplish that, the Rebbe taught us we need not only to be awake but to open our eyes to the new reality that we are standing on the very threshold of Redemption. Nay, even more than that; the Redemption is right in front of us and all we have to do is recognize that reality and it will materialize before our very eyes.

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By awakening our own Jewish spirit, and by opening our eyes to the new realities that are pervading our lives, we become the catalysts to bring about the final and complete Redemption, about which it will be said, “The Jews had light, joy, happiness and glory,” as in the days of old.

ESSAY FOUR

TRANSFORMATION

ESSAY FOUR

TRANSFORMATION

Increased Joy

As we enter into the joyous month of Adar, it is appropriate for us to reflect on the concept of joy as it pertains to this month specifically. This is the month—and the only month—about which it is stated in the Talmud: “When we enter into the month of Adar we increase our joy.”

This statement implies that even before we enter into this month we have a need to be joyous. In the month of Adar when we celebrate the joyous holiday of Purim, we are obliged to “increase” our joy.

Now the reason why the entire month is a joyous month, although the miracle of Purim occurred in one or two days, is because the Megillah (the Book of Esther) describes this month as, “the month in which their sorrow was transformed into joy etc.”

Why is this Month Different from All Other Months?

But here again the question returns, why did the Megillah designate the entire month as a month of joy?

To paraphrase the Passover Haggadah: “Why is this month different from all the other months?” Why don’t we say the same about the month of Nissan, for example, when we observe the festival of Passover, or the month of Tishrei, in which we celebrate the joyous holiday of Sukkos and Simchas Torah?

One answer to the question is based on the Talmudic narrative that when Haman decided to annihilate all the Jews he cast lots (hence the name of the holiday, Purim, which means lots) to determine in which month he should implement his nefarious plan. When the lots determined that it would be the month of Adar, Haman rejoiced because he thought it was an unlucky month for the Jewish people since Moses passed away in the month of Adar. Little did he realize that this was also the month in which Moses was born. Hence

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it was truly a fortuitous month for the Jewish people.

From this story it is evident that the choice of the month of Adar by Haman was the catalyst that made the miracle of Purim happen.

Moreover, it symbolized the way G-d took the very basis for the plot against the Jews (i.e., Haman's belief that Adar was an unlucky month for the Jewish people) and transformed it into a blessing.

Thus the selection of Adar as a joyous month is based on the theme of transforming darkness into light and curses into blessings that punctuated the month of Adar then and we pray will occur now as well.

Joy beyond limits

We can now also shed light on the fact that the festival of Purim is unique in yet another respect. On this day we must take our joy beyond the normal limits.

The Talmud states that we are supposed to drink on Purim to the extent that we no

longer know the difference between “cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai.” And while there are many interpretations of this statement (no commentator interprets it literally to curse Mordechai and bless Haman, G-d forbid), the common denominator in all of the interpretations is that on Purim our joy must be unconventional, out of the box.

And here at least two questions arise. Why is this holiday so unique with regards to joy?

Second, why this strange way of expressing boundless joy, that we no longer know the difference between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai?

However, in this statement lies the uniqueness of Purim. It is the holiday that takes the curses (Haman) and transforms them into blessings (Mordechai). And therefore our joy must also be so great that it expresses the notion of this transformation of darkness into light.

This also explains why it is such an unconventional holiday.

Besides the psychological basis for the enhanced joy that we experience when it is

preceded with and converted from sorrow, there is also a profound spiritual reason for this unparalleled joy.

Evil: Testimony to G-d's Power

In the teachings of Kabbalah we are told that the existence of evil is testimony to G-d's infinite power to create something so remote from Himself. In other words, evil contains a spark of G-dly energy that is simultaneously singularly powerful and utterly concealed. When evil is thus transformed into goodness, it does more than just add more good to the world; it adds a new and infinite dimension of goodness and light that leads to unbounded joy.

This new dimension of goodness and joy is the one that we will all experience in the Messianic Age when all of the past sorrows and pain, darkness and evil, will be transformed into "light, joy, happiness and glory."

ESSAY FIVE

WHAT'S THE POINT?

ESSAY FIVE

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Why Remind Ourselves of the Wicked Haman?

Hamantashen are the staple of Purim, yet as Purim itself has been relegated, incorrectly, to the status of a minor holiday, so too are Hamantashen misunderstood and frequently maligned.

On the surface, a Hamantash is simply a piece of pastry—about 300 calories worth for the average size and recipe, give or take a few hundred calories—that is supposed to remind us of Haman, the wicked Prime Minister of Persia, who unsuccessfully tried to annihilate all the Jews.

However, the question begs itself: What does this innocuous piece of pastry have to do with Haman? And second, how does the hapless Hamantash relate to our own lives, in the modern day and age?

The “traditional” explanation that the Hamantash represents the pockets, hat or ears of Haman is hardly satisfying. Where did the notion that Haman had triangular ears, hat or pockets come from? And besides, who cares about Haman? Don’t we want to blot out his name instead of naming a delicacy after him?

A Plausible Theory

A more plausible theory about Hamantashen is that they are actually “poppy seed pockets,” and have nothing to do with Haman (unless it is a plot of our enemies to get us to ingest tons of more calories, carbs and cholesterol). In Yiddish, the word for poppy seeds is *mon* and pockets are *tashen*.

However, the question persists, why do we eat poppy seed pockets on Purim?

According to the Midrash, Esther maintained her kosher diet in the palace of the King Achashveirosh, by eating seeds. Hence, it is customary to eat seeds on Purim. Since seeds are not the most appetizing and holiday food, someone took those tasteless poppy seeds

and converted it into a delectable pastry. Hence, eating Hamantashen is our way of remembering Esther's devotion to her religion even as she served as Queen of the Persian Empire.

Shape and Filling

However, since everything happens by Divine Providence, even the little, insignificant details of a custom conveys meaning and has symbolic significance. Two of the minor details of the Hamantash involve its shape.

First, a Hamantash is supposed to have a filling (whether it is poppy seed or fruit jam etc.).

Second, the Hamantash must be triangular, containing three points. What is the significance of these two seemingly insignificant details?

The entire miracle of Purim, many have pointed out (pun intended) was one that was hidden within the natural order of events. A King marries Esther, a Jewish woman, who is related to Mordechai, the leader of the Jewish

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community at that time. She is in the right place at the right time and the Jews are saved.

We know, of course, that the confluence of all these events was part of a Divine plan to save the Jews that was couched and concealed within the natural order.

To symbolize the hidden nature of G-d's presence during that period it is customary to eat foods wherein the main ingredient is contained and concealed within another ingredient. This is represented by the Hamantash that conceals the presence of its filling. So as we eat our Hamantashen we should reflect on the mysterious way G-d works within the confines of nature.

Indeed, some have a custom of eating Kreplach as well on Purim because they too conceal their meat content.

I heard a "solid scientific" theory from my colleague Rabbi Yisroel Rubin on the relationship between Kreplach and Hamantashen.

Originally, all pastry filled foods were relegated to the sea of chicken soup and were

considered to be Kreplach. But after millions of years of evolution, the sea creatures called Kreplach emerged onto dry land and morphed into Hamantashen...

The Patriarchs

But what about the three points?

Traditionally, commentators have explained that the three points represent the three Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

But why would we allude to our forefathers at a time like Purim?

The conventional answer is that whenever a miracle occurs we attribute it to the merit of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs.

However, there is a deeper way of looking at the role of our Patriarchs. To be sure, our Patriarchs were historical figures whom we revere and look towards as our role models. However, they are also figures of the present and are—as Kabbalah teaches us—present in the soul of each and every Jew. Legendary Jewish kindness and philanthropy we “inherited” from Abraham; Jewish reverence

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and devotion we inherited from Isaac, and Jewish compassion was bequeathed to us by Jacob. The three Patriarchs are truly the stuff that fills our being even if it is not visible on the surface.

And here is where the two salient features of the Hamantash (its three corners and its concealed filling) come together: The power concealed within us—the traits we inherited from our Patriarchs— is what enables us to reenact the Purim miracle in our own day and age and usher in the Age of Redemption.

The Hamantash with its concealed filling and three points teaches us that the secret of our survival is the connection we have to the traits of our ancestors that are embedded within our psyche.

A Novel Reason for the Triangular Hamantashen

There is another reason for the three pointed Hamantashen offered by a contemporary scholar Rabbi Mordechai Zaks in his work Mili D'Mordechai.

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According to Jewish law one is forbidden to plant two kinds of grain together unless there is sufficient distance between them. One exception to this rule is when the grain of one species is planted in a triangular fashion into the area of the other species, there is a clear demarcation between them. This formation is called *rosh tor*. According to Rambam this word actually refers to a triangular earring.

This, Rabbi Zaks states is the secret of Purim and our survival as a people:

No matter how much we are part of society we always remain separated from it. We never lose our connection to our forebears (the three Patriarchs, the other symbol of the three corners of the Hamantash) If we do not maintain that separation on our own by adhering to our Torah, the anti-Semites impose it on us.

Thus, the innocent Hamantash is the symbol of Jewish inner power, continuity and immortality that will lead us to the Messianic Age to be ushered in by Moshiach.

Moshiach's distinction is that he contains the

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ultimate soul, the Yechidah, which is like the filling and core of the Hamantash. Moshiach is also the most connected to, and incorporates the virtues of, the Patriarchs. And Moshiach is one who stands apart from the rest of the world even though he is well versed in every aspect of society. Moshiach, like the Hamantash which intrudes but remains apart, is the ultimate outsider even as he is paradoxically the ultimate insider

ESSAY SIX

**BEAUTY IS IN THE
EYES OF THE
BEHOLDER**

ESSAY SIX

BEAUTY IS IN THE EYES OF THE BEHOLDER

Queen Esther Bland?

Queen Esther, we all think, was a most beautiful woman and that that was the reason she was chosen by the Persian King Achashveirosh as his queen. Our Sages, however, inform us that Esther was, in fact, quite bland. It was her charm rather that landed her the top position in the Persian Empire.

Our Sages also tell us that in addition to the historical Queen Esther, Esther also serves as a metaphor for the state of the Jewish people through their existence in exile. The word Esther is related to the Hebrew word *hester* (not to be confused with the street), which means “concealed.”

Esther thus represents the state of the Jewish nation in times when their spiritual beauty

was concealed. But, despite the apparent lack of our spiritual beauty as a result of the hardships we've endured and the effects of assimilation on us, the King (a metaphor for G-d) is still in love with us because of the charm we possess.

There is something about us that is mysterious and enigmatic that makes us even more appealing to the King.

The Aura of Mystery is Our Charm

The Book of Esther relates that Esther did not divulge the identity of her nation and her ancestry. The aura of mystery that surrounded her appears to have actually enhanced her status in the eyes of the king.

How can we apply this concept to the relationship that exists between G-d (the King) and the Jewish people in times of exile (Esther)? How can it be said that the King's (G-d) love for us is enhanced because we too, do not divulge our ancestry to Him? How can we hide anything from G-d?

The answer lies in the uncanny ability of the

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Jewish people to remain loyal to G-d despite the fact that it has lost its ties with the past. The Jewish people possess a remarkable ability to rediscover their connection to G-d and His Torah.

Our Sages tell us that at that time, when G-d's presence was concealed and the Jewish people were very much assimilated into Persian culture — they were all “Esthers,” lacking external beauty — they, nevertheless, exhibited unprecedented self-sacrifice for their Jewishness. Had they abandoned their Judaism, they would not have been subjected to the threat of annihilation. And yet, they all remained loyal to G-d.

What was true then is even more accurate in contemporary society, where there is not just a generation gap, but a century gap. It is already several generations since the assimilation process has affected the state of Jewish existence.

Yet, Jews have still demonstrated an uncanny ability to rediscover their identity and connect with G-d. Even when there is no direct link to the past, Jews from all

backgrounds have mysteriously and enigmatically discovered their roots and have come back to Judaism.

Just as Esther exhibited unusual charm, so too, the Jewish people in times of exile and spiritual alienation, often exhibit unpredictable loyalty to Judaism that actually transcends the beauty and spirituality that we displayed in the more majestic days of the Temple.

Beauty and Blessed is Mordechai and Cursed is Haman

According To Chassidic literature the Biblical expression “היפה בנשים” *Hayafeh Banashim*– “The most beautiful of women” - a metaphor for the ideal state of Jewish existence, is the same numerical value (Gemaria) as “ארוך המן” - “Cursed is Haman” and “מרדכי ברוך” - “Blessed is Mordechai.”

This means that true beauty is characterized by the degree to which we repudiate evil (“cursed is Haman”) and embrace goodness (“blessed is Mordechai”). When the Jewish

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people, however, are stripped of their beauty as a result of exile conditions, they still possess an inner charm that actually transcends the beauty they possessed in earlier more spiritual times.

We can now explain the rather enigmatic statement of the Talmud that on Purim “we are to drink until we **do not know** the difference between “Cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai.”

This can be interpreted as follows: As great as is the beauty that is associated with repudiating evil and embracing goodness, there is something even more endearing about the unknowable, unpredictable and enigmatic inner charm — the Esther quality — that we possess and reveal on Purim.

It is this “do not know” aspect of our Judaism that is associated with the hidden G-dly revelation that will unfold with the coming of Moshiach.

Hence our Sages tell us that in the Messianic Age, Purim alone will remain a vibrant holiday, because its message is the revealing of the secret spiritual powers of the Jewish

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people that is connected with the revelation of G-d's hidden light.

The Messianic Age will bring out our mystique and charm, which the entire world will recognize and appreciate.

HAPPY PURIM!

ESSAY SEVEN

FIGHTING THE

MODERN HAMANS

ESSAY SEVEN

FIGHTING THE MODERN HAMANS

Parshas Zachor

The Shabbos before Purim is known as Parshas Zachor, the Sabbath of Remembrance because during this Shabbos we read the selection of the Torah—in addition to the regular weekly parsha—that commands us to remember the evil nation Amalek.

This nation, from its very genesis, harbored genocidal ambitions directed against the Jewish nation. We are therefore commanded to never forget what this evil nation attempted to do to our ancestors.

The reason we read this selection this Shabbos in particular is because it is the Shabbos that precedes the Holiday of Purim. Purim is the day the genocidal plan of Haman, the Persian Prime Minister, was thwarted. And since Haman was a descendent

of the nation Amalek, it is therefore appropriate to read about the ancestors and root of his evil—the nation Amalek.

Why Obsession with the Past?

The question can be asked, of what value is the realization that Haman was an Amalekite? And why is it important to remember what a wicked nation and wicked Prime Minister wanted to do to us thousands of years ago? Why are we so obsessed with the past?

The simple answer to this question is that the new “Hamans” and “Amaleks” do not let us forget. With their words, threats and actions they constantly refresh our collective memories of the tyrants and despots of the past.

In truth, this is not an adequate answer to the question as to why we are commanded to constantly remember the evil nation Amalek and their most famous representative Haman. If there are modern-day Hamans, shouldn't we focus our attention on the modern day threats to our existence? Why harp on the past?

Do we Learn Lessons from History?

Simplistically, many have suggested that the reason we remember the past is to make sure that history doesn't repeat itself.

The truth is closer to another maxim that "the only lesson that we learn from history is that we don't learn any lessons from history."

For example, had the international community understood the nature of evil represented by Amalek and Haman, then they would have taken Hitler seriously before he had a chance to implement what he said he wanted to implement. Today's international community is no more astute to the peril that comes from the modern day Persian tyrant. So, why do we focus so much on the past when in reality it does so little to protect us from the threats that we suffer from today?

Two Approaches to History

To answer this question we must preface that there are two ways to view history. The first is to look at each event in a vacuum,

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disregarding its connection to an earlier historical event. And the second approach is to view each historical event as part of a historical continuum.

In the context of the modern-day threats to our existence, we can view the twentieth century pogroms of Tsarist Russia, the Leninist-Stalinist attempts at destroying the Jewish people and Judaism in the former Soviet Union, the Holocaust, and Arab/Islamic genocidal attacks against Israel as disparate and disconnected events.

However, the Mitzvah to remember Amalek and Haman now, implies that all these attacks against share one common root that branches out into different directions of evil. And when we fight evil in one place it has an effect on weakening evil in other places.

And there are also two ways of fighting evil. We can engage in a physical battle with our enemies, such as the wars Israel has fought in the past. But, as important as it is for us as individuals and as a people to be able to defend ourselves militarily, it cannot be the only strategy and tactic in defeating evil. If all

of the manifestations and incarnations of genocidal evil are connected, then a broader strategy is called for: a strategy that combines the physical as well as the spiritual approach.

Part of the spiritual approach is to remember the root source of evil and recognize that when we attack evil—external or internal—at any point it will weaken and ultimately eliminate evil at all points.

The Internal Amalek

But the spiritual approach goes beyond just remembering the events of the past. Our Sages taught us that the external evil of Amalek is related to the internal spiritual weaknesses of each and every one of us.

For example: Amalek attacked us soon after we left Egypt. Their objective was to cool off the ardor and fear the nations of the world had for the liberated Israelites when they heard of the Ten Plagues and the Splitting of the Sea of Reeds. By attacking us, Amalek removed some of the mystique that surrounded the Jewish nation and made it

psychologically possible for other nations to attack us.

Translating this aspect of Amalek into our own lives, our Sages defined the internal Amalek as the “cooling off” mentality towards matters of Torah and its commandments. When we lack life, spirit and enthusiasm for Judaism, this is a sign that the evil Amalek introduced into the world has affected us, albeit in a subtle way.

Recreating the Events of the Past

When we overcome the doubts (in Hebrew the word for doubt “*safelek*” has the numerical value of the word Amalek) that cool off our excitement for Jewish observance, that helps us generate the energies that brought about the defeat of Amalek and Haman in the past.

This is what our Sages had in mind when they said, that when we properly remember the events of the past, we help to recreate and regenerate the energies of the past that defeated the evil and saved us.

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By reading and reflecting on the section in the Torah about Amalek, by reading the Megillah and reflecting on its message, we are provided with the energy to attack the internal Amalek. And when we attack the internal Amalek, the external one is also weakened.

Our Sages inform us that the defeat of Amalek is closely connected to the coming of Moshiach and the ultimate Redemption. Rashi, Talmudic and Midrashic sources, states that G-d's very name and His throne are incomplete until the evil of Amalek is obliterated in the Messianic Age.

Our efforts at remembering and uprooting our internal Amalek will hasten the elimination of the arch evil forces of all the Amalekites and G-d's name and throne will be made perfect.

This realization should motivate us to hear the reading of the Torah this week and hear the reading of the Megillah this Purim night and Purim day and internalize its message.

ESSAY EIGHT
TO DRINK OR NOT TO
DRINK

ESSAY EIGHT

TO DRINK OR NOT TO DRINK

Purim and Shemini:

The joyous Festival of Purim occurs, in some years in the week that we read the parsha of Shemini.

(Leap Years, in which an additional month of Adar is inserted into the calendar, occur 7 times within every 19 year cycle. Hence, in these years Purim will occur several weeks later than in normal years.)

Shaloh (seventeenth century authority on Talmud and Kabbalah) stresses the connection between a weekly parsha and the holiday with which it intersects, even when, on the surface, it seems that they have nothing in common. What connections can we find between Shemini and Purim?

Perpetual Partying

One obvious connection is the reference to a Kohain not drinking wine before entering into the Holy Temple to perform the service there. Aaron's sons, we are told by our Sages, perished on the day the Mishkan (the portable Sanctuary in the desert) was dedicated precisely because they did not anticipate that command and entered these holy precincts in an intoxicated state.

Purim, too, is all about drinking. It begins—as recounted in the Megillah, the Book of Esther—with the detailed description of the Persian monarch's orgiastic party that lasted for 180 days! And this was then followed by another really wild party that lasted for another seven days at which time the King Achashveriosh, lost his head, figuratively speaking, and his queen, Vashti, lost her head, quite literally.

For the Jews these parties were also tragic. Our Sages reveal to us that Jewish participation at this party was the reason G-d threatened them with annihilation.

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According to the Talmud this threat was due to the fact that the Jewish people “enjoyed the party of that evil man” (King Achashveirosh).

According to some interpretations that party was thrown by the King to celebrate what he thought was the total dashing of the Jewish people’s hopes that were based on Biblical prophecies that the Holy Temple would be rebuilt.

The Talmud explains that Achashveirosh miscalculated the end of the seventy years that was prophesied as the length of time it would take for the Temple to be rebuilt after the destruction of the first Temple. When the seventy years passed—according to his miscalculation—and the Temple was still not rebuilt, Achashveirosh was convinced that these prophecies would not materialize, and thus he celebrated.

That celebration was therefore, essentially, a celebration of the defeat of the Jewish nation and their hopes for the restoration of their most cherished institution, the Beit Hamikdash. For Jews to join in this

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celebration was so egregiously insensitive and sacrilegious that G-d sought to jolt them out of their, figuratively speaking, unken stupor, reflected in, and exemplified by, their physical state of intoxication which occurred at that infamous party.

On Purim, in accordance with Talmudic fiat, we therefore have the obligation to drink more than usual. By engaging in drinking and still remaining faithful to our Jewish identities and hopes for the rebuilding of the Temple we correct the negative consequences of the drinking that precipitated the threat of Haman in those days.

Until You No Longer Know the Difference Between Cursed is Haman and Blessed is Mordechai

The Talmud makes an incredible statement with respect to the obligation to drink on Purim:

“One is obligated to become intoxicated on Purim until one no longer knows the difference between

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cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai!"

There are literally hundreds of interpretations of this cryptic statement, all of which insist that it cannot be taken literally.

Based on the foregoing analysis we might suggest a new interpretation:

The Book of Esther relates that the feast hosted by the King was in accordance to the will of "*ish v'ish*," which means to comply with each man's will. The Talmud states that the expression *ish v'ish*, which when translated literally means "man and man," refers to two of the people who were placed in charge of this feast: Mordechai and Haman.

Now we all know that Haman's intentions and involvement in supervising this feast were not favorable to the spirit of the Jewish people. He certainly did not intend for them to come out of the feast inspired to go out and build the Holy Temple, and for that we certainly should not hesitate to repudiate Haman in the harshest of terms: "Cursed is Haman".

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However, we must try to understand Mordechai's role at that feast. He certainly could not have wanted the Jewish people to participate in this blasphemous orgy of a banquet.

But Mordechai was still in Galus/exile. Even after the miracle of Purim, Mordechai was bound by Persian authority and so still could not build the Holy Temple as long as—in the words of the Talmud—“We are still subjects of Achashveirosh.” So Mordechai had to limit his influence to that of one who was put in charge of the party in order to minimize the damage to the Jewish spirit (no pun intended). And for that he should certainly be blessed.

However, both Mordechai (unwillingly) and Haman (more than happy to oblige) were involved in this party that had at its goal the continued subjugation of the Jews to a Persian monarch in a world without complete Redemption as exemplified by the lack of progress in the building of the Beit Hamikdash.

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So on Purim, we must rectify the negative aspect of the drinking party that celebrated Galus. And to that end it does not suffice to rejoice through drinking in a way that reviles Haman because he wanted to denigrate the Jews and, on the other hand, to extol the virtue of Mordechai because he tried to salvage some of their spirituality. That would not be a complete reversal of the harm done to the Jewish people at that party.

In order to rectify that party we must also recognize that even Mordechai's role at that time (though, of course, due to no fault of his own) fell short of the mark. Because even after the miracle of Purim, let alone at the time of the feast that he supervised, there was no Beis Hamikdash; the Jewish people still remained in Galus.

Hence on Purim we no longer are satisfied with cursing and repudiating Haman and blessing Mordechai for salvaging and preserving some portion of our Jewish spirit and dignity. We want much more than that; we want Purim to get rid of the Galut entirely—with the imminent coming of Moshiach and the building of the Third and

final Beit Hamikdash, that is, a complete and total Redemption.

Amalek and Kosher Food

Another connection between the parsha of Shemini and Purim is the subject of Kashrut, the Jewish dietary laws, specifically which animals we may consume and which are forbidden to us.

According to one Midrashic opinion, the banquet that Achashveirosh threw for the citizens—including the Jews— of Shushan was not entirely kosher. And it was that transgression of partaking of non-kosher food and wine that precipitated the heavenly decree that would threaten these Jews with annihilation.

What is the conceptual basis for the connection between Kashrut and the events surrounding Purim?

One way of explaining the connection pertains to the integrity of the Jewish people as a people that does not shed its identity. While Judaism includes many signs that

identify us as Jews such as the Mezuzah on our doorposts, the Tefillin we wear on our heads and arms, the Shabbos and Jewish holidays, etc. there is always the threat that we may still assimilate into foreign cultures that will adulterate or even negate our Judaism.

What Mitzvah has the capacity to prevent us from such acculturation? It is Kashrut which counters that threat because it compels us to dine together with those who share the same dietary restrictions and whose way of life is similar. The greatest bulwark against assimilation is the observance of these laws of Kashrut. Likewise on a spiritual level, the eating of kosher food generates the requisite spiritual energies that line our souls and bodies with the resistance to the infiltration of attitudes and beliefs that are anathema to Judaism.

Historically, when Jews lose their commitment to Kashrut and begin the process of assimilation into non-Jewish society, many ultimately choose to return to the Jewish fold as a result of their encounter with anti-Semitism. When they discover the

degree to which they were rejected by those very people they sought to join, and when they realize how these people even seek their destruction as we've seen in Germany during the era of the Holocaust, the Jews then return to their own people and their own religious life.

Thus, there are two diametrically opposite ways that the Jewish people have historically countered the forces of assimilation:

The first is through their observance of the Torah in general and Kashrut in particular. The second is through the diabolically evil forces of the very nations into whose culture they wished to enter.

We can now understand a most cryptic statement of our Talmudic Sages:

“The most righteous of the animal slaughterers is the partner of Amalek!”

Amalek is identified in the Torah as representing the most wicked of nations and the arch enemy of the Jewish people. How can anyone think there is even the remotest connection between any notion of a Jewish

profession, let alone one who provides us with both kosher food and Amalek?

My grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Aryeh Halevi Grossman of blessed memory, provides an ingenious explanation of such a connection in his work *Darkei Yaakov*:

Both Amalek and the providers of kosher food have become strange bedfellows because they share one thing in common, albeit for opposite reasons. Both serve the interests of Jewish unity and fidelity to their traditions. Kahsrus, as we have explained, is the strongest fortification against the intrusion of alien ideas into the Jewish community and to the Jew remaining within the Jewish fold.

And, paradoxically, Amalek, too, in his own diabolical way shocks us into realizing the necessity of our remaining Jewish. The threat from the Hamans of the world serves to jolt us out of our reverie and delusion that we are welcome in other societies and that we can graze in foreign pastures. Thus, ironically, the providers of kosher food (“The most righteous of animal slaughterers”) and Amalek are indeed partners!

“Until You No Longer Know the Difference Between Cursed is Haman and Blessed is Mordechai”—Revisited

We can now find a second novel interpretation of the enigmatic passage in the Talmud that people should drink on Purim until they no longer know the difference between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai.

However, in light of the above we might suggest the following explanation:

Haman, the descendant of Amalek, is the most reviled figure in all of Biblical literature. And Mordechai, the hero of Purim, is obviously one of its most beloved figures. Yet when Purim comes we can realize that Haman was actually, in a most bizarre way, Mordechai's partner in bringing the Jewish people to their senses. Mordechai did it by inspiring them to be faithful to the Torah, particularly the laws of Kashrus. And Haman accomplished the same—and perhaps even more—when he unleashed his diabolical plan to annihilate them.

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So on Purim we no longer are to know the difference between these two opposite personalities. Both became partners in the Divine drama that brought the Jews back to their roots.

There is also a flip side to this lack of distinction between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai. For so much of our existence and especially in the last century—and continuing today through the likes of the contemporary Persian Haman and others—we have had our fill of Amalek and his attempts at destroying us. We have had ample opportunity to return to our own people and Torah as a result of these Haman-like threats. Historically, many will argue, anti-Semitism (“Cursed is Haman”) did as much—if not more—to unite the Jewish people as did the positive inspiration we derived from the “Blessed Mordechais” of the world.

However, now we are situated on the very threshold of Redemption. And, as foretold by our Prophets and Sages, we are therefore on the verge of eliminating the Hamans as well. It therefore behooves us to reverse the

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equation in favor of accentuating “Blessed is Mordechai.” Previously, we would get our jolt of inspiration from the Hamans and would equate it with the inspiration we used to get from Mordechai. Now we are to shift gears and give preference to the inspiration we get from the Mordechais and equate that with the shock value of the Hamans.

In simple terms this means that no longer should we have to resort to negative stimuli to restore our Jewish consciousness. Instead let us unite as Jews through the positive influences and under the banner of the Rebbe, the Mordechai of our generation, and his campaign to strengthen our observance of Kashrut, one of the main themes of this week’s parsha.

ESSAY NINE

IN YOUR FACE

ESSAY NINE

IN YOUR FACE

Anti-Jewish Identity?

Everyone is familiar with the story of Purim. The wicked Haman was offended by Mordechai's refusal to bow down to him. So Haman decides to have a decree issued by the Persian Emperor Achashveirosh to have all the Jews annihilated. Enter Queen Esther—the Jewish woman, whose Jewish identity she did not divulge to the king—who saved the Jewish people by interceding on their behalf.

A superficial reading of the Purim story would yield a rather anti-Jewish identity message.

The Jews got into trouble because Mordechai had to stand out as a Jew. If only Mordechai had hidden his Jewish identity; or, at the very least, if he did not have the “in-your-face” attitude towards Haman, the entire threat to

the Jewish people would not have materialized.

Furthermore, if Esther had revealed her Jewish identity, the king might not have tolerated her either. Her ability to save the Jewish people seemed to be directly related to her ability to conceal her Jewishness.

Are we to suggest that Purim is the holiday of assimilation? Does the story of Purim convey a message that we are to keep our Jewishness under wraps?

Obviously, the message of Purim could not possibly be one of the benefits of keeping our Jewishness low key. Yet, the events that precipitated the crisis and the efforts that brought about the salvation appear to be linked to precisely that—hiding one's Jewishness.

A more thorough and beneath-the-surface analysis of the story of Purim yields a totally contrary conclusion.

The Facade

The Talmud and Midrash—which contain the background information about the narrative of Purim—introduces us to another picture.

Before presenting the Talmudic analysis, a few words of introduction are in order. Throughout our history, we were exposed to threats to our existence. But there was no other time in history when we came so close to total extinction, and that, in the end, we came out totally unscathed. In all other periods of history either we did not come close to total annihilation, or, that, conversely, when we were threatened, we did not fare so well.

This ironic situation—the most dire threat on the one side, and the most positive outcome on the other hand—is explained by our Sages thus:

When the Jewish people were compelled by government decree, prior to the Purim saga, to bow down to a pagan deity, they complied. Since their lack of faithfulness to G-d was only on the outside, but in their hearts they

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remained loyal to G-d, they were, therefore subjected by G-d to an outward threat, while, beneath the surface, G-d never intended to have the threat to their lives materialize.

And, incidentally, this is the reason given for the custom of masquerading on Purim. The external appearance of both the Jewish people and G-d belied their true inner feelings. The Jews did not really mean to worship the other gods, and G-d did not really intend to let Haman realize his murderous objectives. Their true intentions were masked.

In effect, it was the hiding of their Jewish faith that precipitated the crises in the first place, and not Mordechai's flaunting his Jewishness as it might have appeared superficially.

Not One Defection!

And when we see how the plot was ultimately neutralized, we discover another interesting observation pointed out by our Sages.

During the eleven months, from the time the decree to annihilate the Jews was issued to the day that it was to be implemented, not one Jew changed his religion. By converting to religion of the Persians, they could have been spared from the fate that awaited all of the other Jews. As a result of their refusal to hide their Judaism, not one Jew was harmed on that fateful day.

The Name Yehudi” Rejection of Other Faiths

This fact is underscored by the way the Jews are described in the Book of Esther. Despite the fact that they were a mixture of several tribes, they are nevertheless characterized as Yehudim (Jews), denoting that they were members of the tribe of Judah.

Why were all the Jews named after the tribe of Judah, when, in fact, most were not.?

The Talmud explains that the name Yehudi, connotes one who acknowledges only one G-d and rejects all others. It was this trait of proudly announcing their unwillingness to

change their identity and to remain openly loyal to G-d and His Torah that shattered the decree and brought about salvation.

In other words, when the Jewish people at that time allowed their true inner Jewishness — that was previously suppressed — to surface, G-d reciprocated by unleashing His true love for the Jewish people that resulted in the shattering of the decree that loomed over them.

Jewish Pride: Messianic Force

We are living in Messianic times, eagerly awaiting the future Redemption. The key difference between Galus-exile and the period of Geulah-Redemption is that in exile our presence has been tolerated at best. In the time of Geulah, the nations of the world will be proud to be associated with the Jewish people. And although, it has never been the ambition of the Jewish people to dominate others, we will still be placed on a pedestal and our Jewish pride will be welcomed.

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Our road to salvation is not by hiding or compromising our Jewish uniqueness. Moshiach, who must be a descendent of Yehudah personifies the trait of unabashed Jewish identity and pride. And it is this trait that we must awaken in every Jew. And when it is aroused, all the external negative forces will be shattered and the pure goodness will be revealed.

ESSAY TEN
INTOXICATED WITH
LOVE

ESSAY TEN

INTOXICATED WITH LOVE

The Half-Shekel and Haman's Decree Thwarted

This week's Torah portion discusses the Half-Shekel contribution Jews had to make upon building the Mishkan (portable sanctuary) in the desert. This obligation continued throughout the duration of the Temple in Jerusalem. Even today – with the absence of the Temple – there is a custom to give a symbolic half shekel by giving a half-dollar to charity on the day before Purim.

Our sages tell us that nothing happens by coincidence. The fact that we read about the obligation to give a half-shekel right after the holiday of Purim indicates that there is a close relationship between the two.

Indeed the Talmud (Megillah 13b) discusses the connection between the giving of the half-shekel and the Holiday of Purim by first

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quoting the words used by the wicked Haman to King Achashveirosh:

“If it pleases the king let it be written that they be destroyed, and I shall pay ten thousand talents of silver.”(Esther 3:9)

Resh Lakish said: It was well known beforehand to G-d that Haman would one day pay shekels for [the destruction of] Israel. Therefore G-d anticipated his shekels with those of Israel.

And so we have learnt [in the Mishnah]: ‘On the first day of [the Hebrew month of] Adar a proclamation is made regarding the [giving of the] shekalim...’

This last statement concerning the proclamation is based on the fact that the new season for the Temple begins in the month of Nissan, the very next month following Adar. This is the simple reason why they would make the announcement in the beginning of Adar to make sure that the contributions for the Temple’s functions

would be given before the new season would commence.

In this passage, the Talmud suggests that there is a deeper connection between the announcement concerning the half-shekel and the month of Adar. These half-shekels that we gave actually neutralized the power of Haman's silver that he offered to the king.

We are All Halves

The obvious question here is, how did the half-shekels the Jews gave to the Temple have the power to neutralize the money Haman offered?

The half-shekel is a reminder that every Jew is merely a half and is incomplete without every other Jew. When Jews are united they form one impregnable force that can never be vanquished.

Haman's argument was that the Jews are a fragmented people and are thus vulnerable. This act of giving the half-shekel was a repudiation of that contention.

We are Different but the Same

There is yet a deeper lesson. The fact that every one of us gives only one half-shekel, not more and not less, implies that our relationship to one another transcends our value based on an external evaluation.

Logic dictates that each one of us possesses a different value and that we are not all equal. When we transcend logic and view each other from the vantage point of the essence of our soul that transcends our mind, we are all indeed equal.

Intoxicated with Love

There is thus one more connection between the half-shekel and Purim. One of the obligations of Purim is to get intoxicated. Even those Talmudic authorities who take this statement literally agree that it contains deeper symbolic meaning as well.

Purim is when we become “intoxicated” with respect and love for one another. Even if logic dictates that the other person is inferior to us, or does not deserve to be loved, we must

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exhibit unconditional love to that person. This unconditional acceptance of the other Jew is based on the realization that we are utterly dependent on one another and that we are truly equal.

A person who is physically intoxicated loses his power of reason.

Becoming intoxicated on Purim means, among other things, that we are to transcend the limits our mind puts on our appreciation for our fellow Jew.

Purim will Never be Abolished

Our sages tell us that in the Messianic Age when all other Holidays will lose their significance, Purim's importance will not change.

Why is Purim so unique?

The simple answer is that all Holidays are designed to get us to understand G-d's ways. Passover is when we ask question. Shavuot is when we received the Torah which must be studied and comprehended. Sukkot is when

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we are commanded to “know that we were we were protected in Sukkos.”

On Purim we are enjoined to not know; to transcend our knowledge. This is precisely the level we will reach in the Messianic Age.

Then all the limits that we impose on ourselves that divide us will be removed. Purim with its message of trans-rational love and acceptance of each other will be more pronounced.

ESSAY ELEVEN
BUILDING BRIDGES

ESSAY ELEVEN

BUILDING BRIDGES

Thinking about Passover on Purim

Whenever we find ourselves in an in-between period I cannot help but to reflect on our own “in between” place in history – in between Golus and Geulah.

I am referring to the period between Purim and Pesach. The fact that according to Halacha we are obligated to inquire into and study the laws of Pesach thirty days before the festival, commencing with Purim, is the first indication that the period we are in – in the annual cycle of events – is what makes the connection between Purim and Pesach.

What exactly is the connection between the two holidays of joy and how does this relate to our place in history?

There are several approaches that come to mind, but in this article I would like to emphasize the Purim angle first.

Which Adar

In a leap year (which occurs 7 times in a 19 year cycle) an extra month of Adar is added to the year to balance the difference between the lunar and solar calendars.

The existence of two months of Adar precipitated a legal question in the Talmud: (Megilah 6b): Which one of the two Adars is one to celebrate the holiday of Purim? The Talmud presents an argument for both the first Adar as well as for the second Adar. In the end the final decision, the halacha, has been decided that the festival of Purim should be celebrated in the second Adar.

The argument for the first Adar is based on a halachic principle that one should not pass over (no pun intended) the opportunity to do a mitzvah. This principle, for example, is the reason for many laws, among them putting is: if one inadvertently took out their Tefillin from their case on Tefillin before the Talis. He should put on the Tefillin first, contrary to the requirement of putting on the Talis first. The rationale being, if one were to put away the Tefillin and put on the Talis – as is

the usual procedure – it would be an affront to the Tefillin.

Similarly, the Gemara argues, to postpone the reading of the Megillah for the next Adar, would be a violation of this principle that one does not pass over an opportunity to do a mitzvah.

Juxtaposing one Redemption to the Other Redemption.

On the other hand, the Gemara continues, there is an overriding argument to observe Purim on the second Adar. The argument is *mismach geulah ligeulah*, we should juxtapose one redemption to the other redemption. By observing Purim in the second Adar we bring the two festivals of liberation as close together as possible.

The Halacha, or final decision, is that we celebrate Purim in the **second** Adar. Obviously, the argument of keeping the two holidays of liberation together overrides the halachic imperative of not passing over an opportunity to do a mitzvah.

Offhand, this halachic decision appears problematic. To not pass over an opportunity to do a mitzvah is an explicit law that applies to many other areas of Jewish practice. Ironically, the basis of this halachic principle is the law concerning Matza for Pesach.

“And you shall guard the matzos (Shemos 12:17): Do not read it this way, but rather read it, “you shall guard the Mitzvos. Just as one may not allow the matzah to be delayed (lit. become leavened) similarly, one may not delay the observance of a mitzvah. As soon as the mitzvah comes to your hand, do it immediately. (Mechilta and Rashi ad loc.)

Is it not strange that the very laws of Passover dictate that one should not pass over the opportunity to do a Mitzvah? And yet we do precisely that when there are two Adar’s and we observe Purim in the second one?

How can the “mere” preference for linkage of the two holidays (which is not a known Halachic imperative) override the preference

for the first Adar? How can our desire to place Purim as close to Pesach as possible allow us to ignore a known and pervasive legal requirement?

Transcending Purim, for Purim's Sake

It appears that the answer lies in the realization that to keep Purim separated by more than thirty days from Pesach would detract from the observance of Purim. In other words, when is Purim complete when it is followed by and is juxtaposed to the festival of Passover. There is an inextricable link between these two joyous holidays.

To better appreciate why Purim depends on Passover for its integrity, let us go to the last and perhaps defining verse of the Megillah:

“For Mordechai the Jew was next to Achashveirosh, and great among the Jews, accepted by most of his brothers...”

Why was Mordechai accepted only by most of his brothers? What happened with the rest?

Rashi's comment is well known. Some of his Sanhedrin colleagues became his detractors because he got involved in politics and was not as assiduous in his Torah study.

The Rebbe's commentary on this point is well known. Most of Mordechai's colleagues supported him, because what he was doing was *pikuach nefesh*, saving Jewish lives. His detractors were a minority of sages whose Torah study could not tolerate any distractions whatsoever. There is always a need for a select few who cannot tolerate any distraction from Torah.

The question still needs to be asked. Why would the Megillah – which is primarily a chronicle of the great miracle of Purim – conclude on a note that is somewhat critical of Mordechai who literally saved the entire Jewish nation from total annihilation?

Incomplete Miracle

Perhaps it could be said that the authors of the Megillah – Mordechai's colleagues – who

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wrote the Megillah with Divine inspiration, wanted to tell us that as great as the miracle of Purim was, it was an incomplete miracle. The purpose of this notification was not to G-d forbid diminish the importance of the festival of Purim, but, on the contrary. It was intended to preserve the miracle of Purim by making a statement that Purim by itself is incomplete. To properly celebrate Purim, one must transcend its limitation

As we all know, Purim was a miracle that came in a hidden form. We also know that we do not say Hallel because – among other related reasons – even after the miracle of Purim we remained “subjects of Achashveirosh.” In addition, the Bais Hamikdash could not be completed, because of Achashveirosh’s edict, notwithstanding his Jewish Queen and the role that Mordechai played as Prime-Minister.

Status Quo Intolerable

Purim, or the miracle of Jewish survival in the Diaspora, is incomplete without the

realization that the status quo is just intolerable. Only when we recognize that the miracle of Jewish survival in exile is a taste of and prelude to a much greater miracle, the miracle of a complete Redemption, can we appreciate the limited miracle of survival.

Perhaps the divinely inspired authors of the Megillah deliberately ended the text by saying that there was a protest vote; not against Mordechai, but against the misguided conception that the situation the way it was in the end was acceptable. The fact that Mordechai had to interrupt his Torah studies to spend time in the court of Achashveirosh in the interests of the Jewish people was a sign that things were not ideal. Something was sorely missing.

As long as Achashveirosh is king and he is the one who calls the shots, and Mordechai has no choice but to devote his time and energy to dealing with him, it places a demand on us that we work tirelessly to change that. When we do that, then the Megillah is complete and we can truly savor the taste of salvation in the fullest measure. If

we finish reading the Megillah thinking that things are fine and dandy the way they are, we missed the whole point of Purim.

No Passing the Fifteenth

We can see this idea expressed in yet another fashion. According to Halacha, there are several times allotted for reading of the Megillah. The primary two days for reading are on the fourteenth and fifteenth, Purim and Shushan Purim respectively. In ancient times, the Mishnah provided alternate days, on the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth days of Adar. In the event that one would not be able to hear the Megillah on one of those days, the Talmud rules that one can read the Megillah the entire month, from the first of Adar through the fifteenth. What about the sixteenth and onward? The Talmud says no.

Now the allowance to read the megillah the first two weeks of the month is based on the megillah's statement that Purim represents "the month that anguish was transformed into joy." This indicates that the entire month

is one of joy. Nevertheless, the Megillah negates the second half of the month for the reading of the Megillah by stating, "And it shall not pass." This is interpreted to mean that one should not delay the reading of the Megillah beyond the fifteenth.

We have before us an interesting spectacle. On the one hand, the Talmud prefers reading the Megillah in the second Adar to keep it closer to Passover. Nevertheless, while the entire month of Adar is designated as a month of transformation, and the second half of the month is obviously closer to Pesach than the first half, one is not permitted to read the Megillah then?

In light of the previous analysis however, it is obvious that the law that denies the second half of the month its right to have the Megillah read is not due to the inferiority of the second half of the month. On the contrary, it is due to its preeminence.

Precisely because it is closer to Pesach, we must rise above the "*Acatl avdi d'achashveirosh anan*, we are still subjects of Achashveirosh," mode that we are in until the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE-PURIM

end of Purim. If we want Purim to be complete it must be followed by a protest vote, if only by a minority, that we cannot tolerate the status quo of a Galus life, no matter how much power the Jewish Queen Esther and the Jewish Prime Minister Mordechai have.

In the Rebbe's words, there is a need for a few *akshanim* (stubborn and persistent individuals) who will not rest until the Geulah is complete.

ESSAY TWELVE
WHO COMES TO
WHOM?

ESSAY TWELVE

WHO COMES TO WHOM?

Citizenship

By Divine providence, the sixteenth of Adar, the first day after Shushan Purim, introduced a revolutionary phenomenon. That is when in 5709, (the last Purim of the Previous Rebbe in this physical world), the Previous Rebbe became a citizen of the United States.

What was unique about the Previous Rebbe's citizenship was that in order to accommodate the Rebbe's needs, the congress legislated a law that permitted the government to come to the Rebbe, rather than the existing norm of the applicant going to the government.

The Rebbe at the time commented that when a Nasi Hador, the leader of a generation, needs to become a citizen, the government will legislate a law to accommodate him.

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If we reflect, just briefly, on what had transpired the day after Shushan Purim of that year, it is clear that it related to the process of Redemption.

Even when the Chabad Rebbes had influence over government legislation, they were in the Galus tradition of *shtadlanim* who “lobbied” the governments to help the plight of the Jewish people. The Rebbes had to employ their power of *mesiras nefesh*-self-sacrifice to approach, engage and even confront the government. True, they never lost the Gaon Ya’akov (Jewish pride and dignity) even when their lives were in jeopardy. Nevertheless, the fact that they went **to** the government was an indication that the state of exile was still strong. In Talmudic parlance: We were still subjects of Achashveirosh.”

When the government legislated and especially when they carried out for the first time in history the conferring of citizenship on the Previous Rebbe by coming to him, this was a reversal (perhaps the first such reversal in a revealed sense) of the pre-eminence of the rule of Achashveirosh.

Of course, we know that the Rebbees were always the ones who “called the shots.” The Rebbe spoke many times of how the Tzemach Tzedek (the third Lubavitcher Rebbe), by way of his *avodah*, spiritual service, on Rosh Hashanah, would determine the outcome of major affairs in Petersburg as they pertained to Jews. But, nevertheless, it was not revealed to all. Certainly the Tsarist regime did not publicly express the notion that the Rebbe was in charge.

Three Weeks before “Anointing” of Rebbe

It should be noted that the sixteenth of Adar, of the year 5709 was just three weeks before the Previous Rebbe delivered an historic talk to the Rebbe on the Rebbe’s birthday, *Yud-aleph* – the 11th of – *Nissan*. That talk was about the giving over of the cruse of oil, from one Rebbe to the next, for anointing purposes! In that enigmatic talk, many Chassidim saw a clear indication that the Previous Rebbe was giving over the “cruse of oil of leadership” that he received from his

predecessors going back to the Ba'al Shem Tov, to the Rebbe.

That the event of the Previous Rebbe's citizenship and the giving over of the *pach hashemen*-cruse of oil occurred during the same period – between Purim and Pesach of that year – was perhaps an indication of the new tone that was set for the leadership of the Rebbe.

From now on the notion of Nesi Doreinu-Leader of our generation was being promulgated. By contrast to earlier generations where the title *Nesi Doreinu* was rarely used, the Rebbe employed it almost always when he spoke of the Previous Rebbe. This is the generation when the whole world is allowed to and required to know who its true leader is, albeit a leader without an army and weapons. A leader who leads by virtue, piety, unconditional love and devotion to all.

The historic events that followed in subsequent years where the president and the congress would honor the Rebbe, was a further step in the process of the Rebbe dismantling the *acati avdi d'Achashveirosh*

anan state of affairs and introducing the notion that Moshiach is the one who is really in control..

The World Goes *to* Lubavitch

It is well known that when president Shazar of Israel came to see the Rebbe there was an uproar in higher Israeli circles. Shazar asked the Rebbe whether he would consent to visit him in his hotel room. The Rebbe's response after consulting with the Previous Rebbe at the Ohel [the resting place of the Previous Rebbe] was, "One travels to Lubavitch, not from Lubavitch." The Rebbe's statement was made despite of the fact that in the past, the Rebbe's predecessors did in fact travel from Lubavitch to visit dignitaries.

Perhaps what the Rebbe was saying is that in truth, the Rebbes never left Lubavitch, for wherever they went they took Lubavitch along with them. When the Rebbe would visit someone, the truth was that his or her soul was traveling to the Rebbe. The world around, however, was not yet ready to see that. Now, the Rebbe revealed to Shazar and

the entire world that it would be clear for all to behold that the president of Israel would travel to the Rebbe. Now, the time has come, that the world will see that one goes to Lubavitch; that the Rebbe is the one in charge.

We are in an Historical Bridge Period

As we stand in a time that bridges the two periods of Purim and Pesach, we cannot help but to reflect on the fact that we are standing on the bridge between the Purim and Pesach of world history. We are now situated between the world in which Achashveirosh was recognized as the supreme leader and the world of Pesach, the *geulah sheleimah*, the complete Redemption, where Moses dictates the terms to Pharaoh. (Since it was before Mattan Torah-the Giving of the Torah and the thousands of years of efforts, Moses had to physically go to Pharaoh to deliver G-d's ultimatum.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE-PURIM

Only the last plague did Pharaoh run to see Moses. That was a preview of what happens in the end of days.

The Rebbe told us to “open our eyes” to see the Geulah around us. The Rebbe told us to view the events that are occurring in their proper context. In light of this, it would serve us well to see how from the demise of the Soviet Union, the evil empire, we have been exposed to a follow up event. While it may not be as startling and earth shattering, it is no less of a major shift in the way the world views its secular leaders. The president of the only remaining superpower has been subjected to a barrage of unprecedented criticism for his lack of morality.

(While it would have been preferable for us to learn of the president’s commitment to the seven Mitzvos of Bnei Noach under the overt influence of Moshiach, nevertheless, the events of the past few months have clearly demonstrated the bankruptcy of the secular realm.)

Even the highest official of the sole superpower has lost credibility. If anyone had

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a question as to whether one can be content with a Purim existence, where we are still subjects of the modern day Achashveirosh, this event would dispel any doubt.

In the days of Purim, there were but a minority of detractors, who could not accept the status quo, but the majority did, that was because they were living before the two thousand year period of golus. They were living before the Nasi Hador-the leader of our generation and the Navi Hador-the prophet of our generation declared "Higia Zman Geulaschem-the Time of your Redemption has arrived." Now it behooves every Jew to say that they are fed up with the status quo, no matter how much power we might wield in exile. We must emphatically and sincerely cry out: We want Moshiach now!

ESSAY THIRTEEN

PURIM, REDEMPTION

AND TRANSCENDENCE

ESSAY THIRTEEN

PURIM, REDEMPTION AND TRANSCENDENCE

The Supremacy of Study

Judaism is all about knowledge. We are enjoined to know G-d, to study Torah, to ask questions and to find answers. In no other culture does learning occupy as exalted a position as it does in Judaism.

This focus on knowledge is echoed in all of the Jewish Holidays:

The Passover Seder revolves around the children whom we encourage to ask questions and a father who is prepared to give answers.

Shavuot is when we celebrate the giving of the Torah – the source of Jewish knowledge.

The night before we relive the experience at Sinai we stay awake learning.

Dwelling in the *Sukkah* during the Holiday of *Sukkos*, the Torah tells us, is in order that we **know** that we were housed in *Sukkos*. The focus of so many Mitzvos is to remember, probe, learn and know.

Purim and Moshiach the Exceptions

Purim, surprisingly, by contrast, is when we are told that we should drink to the point that we **no longer know** the difference between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai! No matter how we interpret this controversial requirement – literally, figuratively or both – it is clear that our objective on Purim is not knowledge, but the need to transcend knowledge.

There is a parallel between the transcendence of knowledge associated with Purim and the transcendence of knowledge associated with the future Redemption. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 97a) states that Moshiach is one of three things which come when one's mind is distracted from it.

Simply put this means that certain things happen when we do not expect them to happen -- such as the discovery of a lost object. Similarly, Moshiach's coming, no matter how much we prepare for it and anticipate it, will be a surprise.

On a deeper level, the Talmud has revealed to us that there is something about Moshiach that goes beyond knowledge. There is something about Moshiach and the future Redemption that does not fit the conventional mold, just as Purim does not fit into the mold of the conventional Holidays we celebrate throughout the year.

Reconciliation

What does it mean to transcend knowledge? And how do we reconcile this idea with Judaism's obsession with learning and the acquisition of knowledge?

The truth of the matter is that, on the contrary, this exhortation to transcend knowledge does not negate understanding and study, it deepens it.

To go beyond something, one must first reach that something and then overtake it. To go beyond knowledge means to understand as much as is possible to grasp of a subject and then to recognize that there is something about it that cannot be fathomed with conventional tools. At that point we are “compelled” to bring forth new resources from within our soul to access the unknowable. This new resource is the inner faith we all possess that enables us to connect to those spiritual elements of Judaism that are beyond knowledge.

Purim does not negate the conventional values of Judaism. It demands that we should not be satisfied with blessing or embracing Mordechai-good and cursing or repudiating Haman-evil, based on conventional knowledge. We must embrace good and reject evil on a more profound and super-rational dimension as well.

In the present day and age, with all of the hype about the level of knowledge we have achieved in all spheres of life, we do not realize even a fraction of our intellectual potential. To say that in the Messianic Age

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we will transcend knowledge is to say that we will, first of all, realize all that we can in terms of understanding and then some more. Transcending knowledge in Judaism thus means two things.

First, it demands that we learn, probe and reach the heights of knowledge.

Second, that we then recognize that there is something about G-d and His Torah that is beyond us that can only be grasped with pure faith.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

**THE TREE OF
KNOWLEDGE: HAMAN'S
TREE**

ESSAY FOURTEEN

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE: HAMAN'S TREE

Where is Haman Mentioned in the Torah?

When Adam and Eve were confronted by G-d for having eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, the expression G-d used was: "Have you eaten of the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?"

The Hebrew word that translates into "Have [you eaten] of" is "*hamin*." When written without vowels—as is the case with any kosher Torah scroll—the word "*hamin*" is written precisely the same as the word Haman, the wicked Persian Prime Minister whose plot to annihilate all the Jews and his eventual downfall and salvation for the Jews gave us the joyous holiday of Purim.

The connection to Haman can be extended. The juxtaposition of the word *hamin* (read: Haman) to the word "tree" portended the

way Haman would eventually hang on the tree on which he planned to hang Mordechai.

Now, one might think that the association between Adam and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit and the wicked Haman is far-fetched. In fact, the Talmud (*Chullin* 139b) makes precisely this association when it asks rhetorically: "Where is Haman hinted in the Torah?" And it answers that it is derived from this verse that expresses G-d's outrage at Adam and Eve's violation of His command not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge.

This clearly begs for an explanation. How are these two disparate themes—G-d's outrage with eating of the Tree of Knowledge and Haman—related?

The Heavenly Voice

One explanation is that Haman is both an evil historical figure and a heavenly voice that comes to us and demands of us: "What have you done? Why have you gone in the wrong direction? Why have you misused your G-d given talents? Why have you squandered an opportunity to do the right thing?"

When we see the Hamans of the world rear their ugly heads it is obvious that we must do whatever we can to fight that evil. However, it is also a time for us to look inwards and ask ourselves, what is missing in our lives that we can correct.

In other words, while the historical Hamans were nothing less than vile and evil creatures, their appearance demands of us to look inward and remove the subtle forms of Haman that lurk beneath the surface of our being. This is one of G-d's ways to remind us that we have to change.

The Sophisticated Haman

There is a deeper and more mystical way of understanding the association between Haman and the Tree of Knowledge. The fact that Haman was enamored with the idea of hanging Mordechai on a tree—not just any tree, but a tree that was fifty cubits high—suggests that Haman was into the symbolic nature of the tree.

There are two approaches to evil tyrants and their nefarious ways. There are those who are despicable low-lives, who possess the

characteristics of animals. They do not find a need to justify their actions, for their rule is the rule of the jungle. They trample everything that stands in their way, and a human life has no more value to them than an annoying mosquito.

There is, however, a second type of tyrant, one who seeks justification for his actions. Frequently, these despots will use the most sophisticated philosophical arguments to support their evil actions. They can even be formidable intellectuals.

By discovering Haman's name alluded to in the narrative concerning the Tree of Knowledge, our Sages sought to place Haman in the second category. Haman was a sophisticated spiritualist who built his evil ideology of genocide on the top of a tree. In Kabbalah the number fifty—the height of the tree—is associated with the highest levels of understanding.

In our own age, the accursed Nazis and communists used their philosophy to justify unprecedented and unspeakable cruelty and destruction.

What's Wrong with Knowledge

This sheds light on what was the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. At first glance one is puzzled why the Tree of Knowledge was considered so evil. What can possibly be wrong with knowledge?

However, it is not the knowledge itself that is evil; it is the attitude of arrogance that people acquire when their advanced knowledge is not prefaced by G-dly foundations that put G-d ahead of their knowledge and desires.

According to the Midrash, had Adam waited a few hours until the onset of the Shabbos, he would have been permitted to partake of the “forbidden” fruit. It was not the fruit that was evil. Nor was it the knowledge one received from the fruit. Rather it was the placement of this acquisition of knowledge ahead of the principles of G-dly authority and commitment to eternal values. Glorifying one's own ideology is the first step down a slippery slope that leads to depravity and destruction.

The Seventh Millennium

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE-PURIM

The first seven days of creation serve as a model for the seven millennia of our universe's existence. Moreover, there is a principle of Kabbalah that "the end is wedged in the beginning." In other words, what happened at the beginning of creation is somehow related to that which will happen in the end.

In the beginning the challenge was for Adam not to allow his thirst for knowledge take precedence over his respect for G-d's authority. Unfortunately he failed.

In the end of days—the seventh millennium, when we will finally have dealt evil a fatal blow—we will readily appreciate the preeminent role of G-d over intellect; the challenge that Adam failed will be met.

Before that becomes a universal reality, however, one has to be vigilant about those whose ideology comes ahead of their reverence for G-d. One must be wary of those whose morality is based on human ingenuity or on secular values.

Similarly, one must be careful not to take Torah ideals and use them for one's own selfish goals. While one might reach high—to the top of the fifty-cubit tree—one must

never use that lofty view as a way of hanging Mordechai.

Only by fusing knowledge with humility, can we benefit from the acquisition of knowledge that will ultimately lead to the Messianic age when, in Maimonides' words at the end of his Mishneh Torah:

“[T]here will be no famine or war, no jealousy and rivalry, for good will flow in great abundance and all the delights will be as plentiful as dust. The entire world will be preoccupied with the knowledge of G-d exclusively. Therefore, Israel will be great sages and will know the hidden matters, and will grasp the knowledge of their Creator to the full extent of human capacity, as it is stated: ‘the knowledge of G-d shall fill the earth as the sea is covered with water.’”

ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE MIRACLE OF

PURIM

ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE MIRACLE OF PURIM

Natural or Miraculous?

When we analyze the story of Purim we come to the conclusion that it was a rather natural event.

A New York Times reporter who would have been at the scene of the Purim saga might have issued the following report:

“Queen saves Jews. Some fanatical Jews think it was a miracle.”

In truth, even nature is from G-d. A sunrise or sunset, birth of a child, some of the most natural phenomena are Divine.

But Purim was more than “just” natural, it was a miracle hidden within nature. While it wasn’t an overt miracle where the laws of nature were suspended, it was not your ordinary natural phenomenon either. It was a

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE-PURIM

clear miracle that was cloaked and couched in natural events.

Because of its hidden nature, the heroine of the story was called Esther which means hidden.

We eat *Hamantashen* where the fruit is hidden. Children wear masks to hint that the miracle was disguised.

However, any objective person could see that it was nothing short of a miracle. If one piece of the puzzle would be missing the outcome would be different.

That G-d was intimately involved in the miraculous deliverance from Haman's evil plan is clearly seen from Esther's behavior in response to Mordechai's request of her to plead with the king.

Mordechai tells her to go straight to the king, the natural and diplomatic approach, but Esther tells him to fast 3 days and she herself would also fast, which could only make her look deteriorate. That was against the natural way of doing things.

In truth, although the miracle was couched in natural events, Chassidus teaches us that a miracle that is hidden in nature is actually higher than an open miracle

Higher than an Overt Miracle

The rationale for this counterintuitive premise is that nature is an expression of G-d's finite power. A miracle, expresses G-d's supernatural and infinite power. A miracle that is cloaked within nature is to take something infinite and put it into something finite. It's like putting a gallon of water in a small whiskey glass.

But G-d is not confined to the supernatural just as He is not confined to the finite. G-d has the power to allow the supernatural to manifest itself within nature.

To do this G-d reveals His essence, which transcends both the infinite and the finite synthesizes them.

ESSAY SIXTEEN
THE MISFORTUNE OF
PURIM

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE MISFORTUNE OF PURIM

Woe: We have Tzorus!

The Talmud makes an observation. Wherever the Torah uses the word *vayehi*-and it was it is an expression of misfortune or pain. It is compounded when it is followed by the word *bimei*-in the days of.

One of the prime examples of this is the opening two words of the Megillah. Scroll of Esther: “*Vayehi bimei*.”

Presumably, the misfortune the Megillah is alluding to is the decree of annihilation of the Jewish people, but that does not appear until much later. Why would that misfortune be hinted at the very outset? And if we are basing it on what happened much latter, why stop there? The end of the Megillah is rather positive.

Celebrating at the Wrong Party

One simple answer: The party that Achashveirosh threw was a *tzoro*, because the Jews “had pleasure in the party of that wicked man.” The Jews were faulted for attending and enjoying that party because it marked the celebration of their defeat.

To better understand this point we have to go back to Achashveirosh’s predecessor, Cyrus who allowed the building of the Second Temple. When Achashveirosh assumed leadership he stopped the building of *Bais Hamikdosh*. He was apprehensive that it would undermine his sovereignty.

This, our Sages reveal, is why he told Esther “I will give you up to half of my kingdom,” implying not the whole. He thought Esther might be asking for the Jews to get permission to continue building the Temple.

When 70 years past, according to his calculations, and the Temple had not been restored he was confident that the predictions to its restoration were not going to materialize.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE-PURIM

At that point Achashveirosh threw the two parties that celebrated his triumph over Israel. Because of the smug feeling he had, he was brazen enough to use the vessels of the Temple that were in captivity.

The fact that the Jewish people came to the party and enjoyed being there was a Chilul Hashem, a desecration of G-d's name. To enjoy a party that celebrated their defeat and the "defeat" of G-d's plan was a horrible degradation.

And it was this transgression that precipitated Haman's decree.

That is what the Talmud was referring to when it says that the Megillah begins with misfortune; it is the misfortune of the party the Jews happily attended.

The Problem is the need for a Hint!

However, the Rebbe asked that this still does not fully satisfy the question where is the misfortune at the beginning of the Megillah.

The premise for the question is a Midrashic interpretation that the word Achashveirosh—

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE-PURIM

the first word after the words “and it was in the days of” is a composite of the words, “*Mi sheacharis v’reishis shelo*—the One to whom the beginning and end belongs.” This word alludes to G-d Himself who transcends time and space.

Why then, the Rebbe asks, is this considered a misfortune, if G-d Himself is hinted in the very first word that follows the opening words that usually suggest misfortune?

The Rebbe answered that the misfortune is that G-d was only present in a hint. The fact that G-d’s presence was concealed is the greatest misfortune that led to all the others.

This is the rationale, the Talmud gives for not reciting the *Hallel* psalms on Purim to extol G-d for His miracles because even after the miracle we remained subjects of Achashveirosh. This means that G-d remained in a hint even after the miracle of Purim. That is the great misfortune that we pray will end with the true and complete Redemption!

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

**PURIM THE
GREATEST HOLIDAY**

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

PURIM THE GREATEST HOLIDAY

Like Yom Kippur

The myth is that Purim is a minor, minor holiday; a fun time. It certainly is not a serious or major Holiday. It has even been compared to the pagan Halloween.

To the initiates in Kabbalah Purim is known as the most important Holiday. Indeed, the Zohar, the principal work of Kabbalah states that the Holiday of Yom Kippur is almost as holy as Purim. This assertion is based on the full name in the Torah for Yom Kippur which is Yom Kippurim,, which can be read as “a day like Purim.”

Whatever we can accomplish on Yom Kippur we can also accomplish on Purim, with one caveat: We do it with feasting instead of fasting. We do it with joy and not with somberness.

More than Shavuos

If this is not enough to convince the skeptics who do not take mystical literature that seriously, the Talmud compares Purim to the Holiday of Shavuos, when we received the Torah at Mount Sinai. Purim is like Shavuos, but even more profound. The Talmud states that on Purim the Jewish people truly accepted the Torah without any compulsion, in contrast to the way they received the Torah at Mount Sinai

On Shavuos, our Sages tell us, : *Kafa aleihem har c'gigis*, G-d suspended the mountain over our heads and “forced” us to accept the Torah.

Chassidus explains that they really had no choice because G-d showered them with such love, they couldn't say no.

By contrast, during the time of Purim, Jews did not see G-d's love; He was utterly concealed as the name Esther indicates. And yet, they had *Mesiras Nefesh*-self-sacrifice and did not give up their Judaism to save their lives.

This was the true acceptance of Torah.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE-PURIM

This profound acceptance of the Torah was epitomized by Mordechai who is given the sobriquet Yehudi-even though he was from the tribe of Benjamin because he acknowledged one G-d and would not bow to anything.

We saw this refusal to bow in more recent times in the tragic and brutal murder of Daniel Perl, whose last words were: "I am a Jew." This encapsulated the *Shema* Yisroel, affirming defiantly his belief in one G-d.

Story of Rabbi Hershberg who did not bow: Rebbe: "Don't lose your *gaon yaakov*." His name was Avraham Mordechai.

The Holiday of the Future

If comparing Purim favorably with Yom Kippur and Shavuot is not enough, the Midrash tells us that Purim is the only Holiday (some versions include Chanukah and Yom Kippur) that will be around in the Messianic Age. Its message is so powerful that it will still be prominent in the glorious future.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

THE ELEPHANT HAT

A Purim Parady

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

THE ELEPHANT HAT

A Purim Parady

One of the costumes worn here for Purim is an elephant hat. Why an Elephant hat?

Of course, we know that the Syrian Greek enemy used elephants in their battles against us. So to commemorate the miracle of Chanukah we wear elephant hats.

Oops wrong holiday!

Yes, it is the wrong Holiday, but Chanukah and Purim are related. They are both rabbinical holidays. Kabbalists describe them as possessing the twin Divine attributes of Netzach-victory and Hod-submission or gratitude. And Maimonides discusses them in the same section of his Mishneh Torah.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE-PURIM

Well it might have to do with Gematria. You see that the Hebrew word for elephant is Pil, which adds up to 120. And we also know that Moses, who lived to 120 took us out of Egypt and liberated us from slavery. Also elephants are like slaves when they are forced to appear in a circus and they are mistreated. So we dress up in elephant hats to remind us of the Exodus.

Oh no, I still focusing on the wrong holiday!

Not entirely wrong. The Talmud states that we always celebrate Purim a month before Passover because we want to connect these two holidays of salvation. They are inextricably bound together.

I know Elephants have tusks which resembles a shofar, which we use to usher in the new year on Rosh Hashanah.

One second. Rosh Hashanah is in the fall and now it's almost spring. so I think I still have the wrong holiday. I'm so confused!

Yes, you are confused. Yet, the events that preceded the salvation of Purim were indeed

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE-PURIM

intended by G-d as a wakeup call – a Shofar of sorts—to wake them from their spiritual reverie.

Now, I got it! The elephant's ears are big and wide and they spread out just like the protective covering of the Sukkah. This is to remind us of how G-d provided us with protection when we were in the desert.

Again, the wrong Holiday? What am I going to do?

[There is also a connection to the Holiday of Sukkos, which ends with Simchas Torah in which we also celebrate in ways that transcend our understanding of Torah. The extreme joy of Simchas Torah is likely modeled after the joy of Purim.]

Should I give up trying to figure out the connection between elephants and

You never give up no matter how many times you get it wrong.

I think, I got it now.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE-PURIM

The worst thing that can happen to you is for an elephant to sit on you. Well when we stood at Mount Sinai to get the Torah, G-d raised the mountain over their heads and said “if you don’t accept the Torah I will throw the mountain on you.” Elephants’ imposing presence remind us of how G-d raised the mountain over us on Shavuos.

For the last time, I am confused with other holidays.

[No, you’re not drunk yet. The Talmud connects Purim to Shavuos by saying that while they received the Torah on Shavuos through coercion, they truly and sincerely accepted the Torah of their own volition during the saga of Purim.]

What Holiday is it?

It is Purim and there is a connection to an elephant.

Pil is related to the word *peleh*-wonders. Purim, although a Holiday in which the miracles were hidden, was nonetheless a

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wonder and is mentioned as such in our prayers.

Pil is 120, which is three times 40. The number 40 in Hebrew is represented by the letter Mem. When you have three letters Mem (40) it stands for the three Mitzvos of Purim that begin with a Mem = Megillah, *mishloach manos* (sending two food kinds as gifts to a friend) and *matanos lo'evyonim* (Gifts to two poor people) that begin with a Mem.

The tree Mems also can refer to the three individuals who saved and will save the Jewish people: Moshe, Mordechai and Moshiach.

The Mem, which is like a pool, represents the world in its ultimate state of perfection as the Rambam (whose name Moshe begins with a Mem and likewise his father's name, Maimon, which has two Mems) in his very last paragraph says that the world will be "filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea." These last three words in Hebrew kamayim layom mechasim, all end with a Mem.

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And the message here is that while Purim (which ends with a Mem) kept us together because of crises, now what will unite us is the future; the world changing for good.

Let's hasten the coming of Moshiach by being Jewish in an **elephant** way.

PURIM QUIZ

PURIM QUIZ

1) The children (and adults) use noisemakers (gragers) on Purim to:

(a) drown out the sound of the wicked Haman (b) drive their parents crazy (c) get their parents to buy them something for the Holiday (d) provide musical accompaniment to the reading of the Megillah.

2) Jewish Children wear masks on Purim because:

(a) they are envious of those who masquerade on Halloween (b) the Lone Ranger was born on Purim (maybe it was Tonto) (c) the miracle of Purim and G-d's presence was "masked" within the cloak of nature (d) they plan to go skiing after reading the Megillah

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3) Haman was hanged on the:

- (a) 13th day of Adar (b) 14th day of Adar (c) 15th day of Adar (d) 16th day of Nissan

4) Esther knew when it was Shabbos in the palace by:

- (a) consulting her Jewish Discovery Center Art Calendar (b) having seven servants, one for each day of the week (c) Mordechai sending her hand signals before the onset of the Shabbos (d) Divine inspiration

5) The Fast of Esther commemorates: (two correct answers)

- (a) Esther's fasting to avoid becoming queen.
(b) the three days Esther asked everyone to fast before she would go to the king (c) the fasting of the Jews so that they would get permission to build the Temple in Jerusalem
(d) the fasting of the Jewish people as they went to defend themselves against those who plotted to kill them

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6) The Fast of Esther is observed on the:

(a) 11th day of Adar (b) 12th of Adar (c) 13th day of Adar (d) 16th day of Adar

7) When Purim occurs on a Sunday, the Fast of Esther is:

(a) canceled (b) observed on the next day (c) observed the Friday before (d) observed the Thursday before

8) On Purim we are required to hear the reading of the megillah:

(a) once (b) twice (c) three times (d) as often as possible

9) Shushan Purim is observed by Jews living in: (two correct answers)

(a) Shushan (b) any city in Israel that had a wall surrounding it in the days of Joshua (c)

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any walled city in the world (d) places where they cannot get to the synagogue on Purim

10) Of which month does the Talmud state that when we enter into it “we are to increase our joy?”

(a) Tishrei (b) Kislev (c) Adar (d) Sivan

11) Haman was a descendant of the evil:

(a) Pharaoh (b) Amalek (c) Nebuchadnetzar
(d) Sancherev

12) According to the Midrash, Haman was once Mordechai's

(a) barber (b) tailor (c) carpenter (d) butler

13) On Purim we are required to drink:

(a) four cups of wine (b) 613 cups of wine
(c) the number of cups equivalent to the

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word Mordechai (274) (d) to the point that we no longer know the difference between Cursed is Haman and Blessed is Mordechai

14) The obligation of Mishloach Manos (The exchanging of gifts during Purim) involves giving, at least:

(a) one edible to one friend (b) one edible each to two friends (c) two edibles to one friend (d) two edibles each to two friends

15) The obligation of Matanos L'Evyonim (giving gifts during Purim to the poor) involves giving, at least:

(a) one cent to one poor person (b) one cent each to two poor people (c) two cents to one poor person (d) two cents each to two poor people

16) The following section of the Megillah must be said in one breath:

(a) The description of Mordechai's triumph over Haman (b) The description of Esther's plea to the king (c) The description of the

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victory of the Jews (d) the names of the ten sons of Haman

17) Haman was hanged on a tree that was:

(a) 10 cubits high (b) 40 cubits high (c) 50 cubits high (d) 100 cubits high

18) The man who told King Achashveirosh that Haman prepared the gallows for Mordechai was:

(a) Charvonah (b) Hatach (c) Bigtan (d) Terresh (e) Michael Jordan

19) Haman's daughter:

(a) was hanged together with her brothers
(b) converted to Judaism (c) committed suicide (d) became Esther's servant

20) The youngest of Haman's ten son's was:

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(a) Parshandata (b) Alfred E. Newman (c) Hamanson (d) Vayizata

21) The Book of Esther is referred to as a Megillah (scroll) and also as a:

(a) paper (b) thesis (c) tractate (d) letter

22) On Purim we do not recite the traditional Hallel Psalms as we do on other holidays because: (two correct answers)

(a) The service would be too long (b) we're too drunk to say it properly (c) the Megillah is in place of the recitation of Hallel (d) the miracle of Purim was incomplete because after the miracle they were still subjects of the Persian king.

23) The children play a special role on Purim because:

(a) Purim is not a serious holiday and it's only for little children or for adults who act

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like children (b) When Mordechai heard of Haman's plot, he gathered 22,000 Jewish children and taught them Torah (c) we need them to deliver the gifts to our friends on Purim (d) queen Esther was a child when she became Queen

24) King Achashveirosh and Queen Esther reigned over:

(a) 127 provinces (b) 50 States (c) 18 countries (d) 4 continents

25) According to the Zohar (the most important book of Kabbalah), the following holiday is compared to Purim:

(a) Tu Bishvat (b) President's Day (c) Rosh Hashanah (d) Yom Kippur

26) The name Purim means:

(a) frivolity (b) drinking (c) victory (d) lots