

Tick Tock the Purim Clock

Among the many interesting aspects of Megilas Esther is the story of how an orphan becomes a leader of the Jewish people. The process by which Esther becomes a queen and leads Am Yisrael was a gradual one. The Megilla (4:11) points out Esther's fear and hesitation to lead and save the Jewish people from this crisis. After what seems to be a long struggle, Mordechai, however, successfully convinces Esther to forge ahead with a plan to save the Jewish people. He does this by striking a chord and appealing to Esther's judgment. This prompts Esther to request that all the Jews fast for three days prior to her approaching the King.

לך כגוס את כל היהודים הנמצאים בשושן וצומו עלי ואל תאכלו ואל תשתו שלשת ימים לילה ויום.

Go and gather all of the Jews who are found in Shushan and fast for me. Don't eat or drink for three days night and day.

Esther 4:16

The Jewish people were facing an extremely dangerous and precarious situation, which called for an extreme response. Nevertheless, the wording of Esther's instruction is a bit odd. Why did she need to phrase it as "three days night and day"? The Jewish people were aware that three days translates into night and day. In most areas of halacha, the night precedes the day.



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Isn't the emphasis on "*laila v'yom*" obvious?

I believe Esther was introducing something profound to the Jewish people with this peculiar statement. The key to this puzzle is found in an idea developed by Rav Meir Simcha from Dvinsk. At the end of the Megilla, the verse states

לָקִים אֶת יְמֵי הַפְּרִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּזִמְנֵיהֶם

To fulfill these days of Purim in their times.

Esther 9:31

After the Jews were saved, the holiday of Purim was publicized to all of the Jews who were told to keep this holiday "in their times." What does this phrase in "their time" mean?

Rav Meir Simcha, *Meshech Chochma*, Esther 9:31 explains that the story of Purim emanated from Haman's lottery which landed on the thirteenth of Adar. The Gemara, *Megilla* 13b, states that Haman was excited about this date since it was the month in which Moshe Rabbeinu died, and this must be a bad month for the Jewish people. He therefore became confident in

the success of his mission to destroy the Jewish people. The Gemara notes that Haman was unaware that Moshe Rabbeinu was born on the very same day, and therefore this month represents the beginning of the salvation of the Jewish people from exile. If Haman was so knowledgeable about Jewish history and he knew the day of Moshe's yahrtzeit, why did he neglect to realize that Moshe was born on the same day of the year? What was it about that event that escaped Haman's attention when studying the history of the Jewish people?

The Gemara, *Sotah* 12a, tells us that when Moshe was born, the house filled up with light. This must have been an indication that Moshe was born at night, at a time when illumination would have a significant impact. By contrast, the verse in Devarim (32:48) states that Moshe died "*be'etzem hayom*," in the middle of the day. Thus, even though the two events occurred on the same calendar day, Haman miscalculated and thought that these two events occurred on different days. The



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**Rabbi Meir
Simcha
Hakohen of
Dvinsk
(1843-1926)**

R. Meir Simcha was born in Butrimonys, Lithuania, to Samson Kalonymus, a local wealthy merchant. After marrying at age 17, he settled in Bialystok, Poland, where he was supported by his wife, who opened a business to support him while he continued his Talmudic studies. After 23 years in Bialystok, during which time he rejected many offers to become the rabbi of a city, he finally accepted the rabbinate of the Mitnagdim in the Latvian town of Dvinsk, now known as Daugavpils. He served in that position for 39 years until his death.

In Dvinsk, his counterpart was the Hasidic Rabbi Yosef Rosen, known as the Rogatchover Gaon or by his work *Tzofnath Paneach*. The two had a great respect for each other, despite the Rogatchover's legendary fiery temper, and on occasions referred questions in Jewish law to each other.

In 1906, a certain Shlomo Friedlander claimed to have discovered, and then published two tractates of the Jerusalem Talmud that had been considered to have been lost for hundreds of years. Rabbi Meir Simcha was one of the prominent rabbis who discovered that the work was a very clever forgery, and denounced it as such.

In Dvinsk, he received visitors from the whole region, and was frequently consulted on issues affecting the community at large, including Poland and Lithuania. He reputedly turned down offers for the rabbinate in various large cities, including Jerusalem, New York and Kovno.

Source: Wikipedia

non-Jewish calendar considers the night as part of the previous day. Therefore, according to Haman's calculation, Moshe was born at night on the sixth of Adar as opposed to the seventh. This is why the Gemara states that Haman didn't know that the date of Moshe's death was the very same day Moshe was born.

Rav Meir Simcha explains that the month of Moshe's death would have been a month of bad mazal if he had died on any day other than the date of his birth. However, if he died on his birthday, that would indicate that it wasn't a function of bad mazal, but rather a function of Moshe's righteousness. Haman's miscalculation led him to believe that Moshe was born on the sixth and therefore, Adar was a month of bad mazal for the Jews.

Haman's error was all based on the configuration of the day. Perhaps this is much more meaningful than simply a way of calculating dates on the calendar. There is a fundamental difference between the Jewish approach to the calculation of days and the secular approach. It reflects a major difference in the Jewish outlook on life. We as Jews have gone through many periods of struggle and persecution. Even on Purim, we refrain from reciting Hallel. The Gemara, *Megilla* 14a, explains that we are still slaves of Achashveirosh. Our salvation is incomplete, we still go through our lives with many moments of night and darkness, and endure much pain and suffering. Nevertheless, we continue on our mission and know that daybreak and the ultimate illumination following this difficult time is approaching. We look ahead toward the light of the future of

yimos hamashiach (redemption) that will be the daylight following this dark night. The purpose of our lives is not now but in the future.

לְהַגִּיד בְּבֹקֶר חֶסֶדְךָ וְאַמּוּנָתְךָ בְּלַיְלוֹת.
To speak of Your kindness in the morning and your faith in the nights.
Tehillim 92:3

We believe at night and we will ultimately praise with clarity in the morning. Therefore, our days reflect this philosophy and demonstrate that the darkness of night is only the beginning; ultimately the light of day will follow in our glorious *yimos hamashiach*.

Esther is emphasizing this point to the Jewish people as she asks them to join her on a mission to save Am Yisroel from the terrible darkness of Haman. Her initial speech is a call to action and a declaration that demands a transformation in the way the Jewish people of her time look at life. Esther explains that we need to transform our mindset from that of the people around us. It is not sufficient to just fast for three days; instead, we need to do so according to a Jewish calendar day — with the clear understanding that by fasting we are helping to bring the daylight to follow this horrible darkness. Esther is also highlighting to her people that teshuva only assists us if it is done by totally detaching oneself from the hashkafa of the world around us. It must include an absolute commitment to Judaism. It is insufficient to fast and make a few changes; we must reprogram our clocks and change our entire outlook on the world. After the miracle of Purim, Esther and Mordechai sent word to all the Jewish people to mark the celebration of Purim every

year. The commemoration of our salvation must be *bizmanei hem*, in the right times according to the right calendar; otherwise we are not commemorating the miracle appropriately. If we keep the day on Haman's clock then we are missing the entire reason for our salvation.

Perhaps this explains another catastrophic episode in Jewish history. Our most disgraceful point in history was the cheit haegel. Klal Yisrael were instructed to wait for Moshe at Mount Sinai for 40 days. Chazal tell us that Klal Yisrael listened to Moshe, yet miscalculated the fortieth day. Chazal explain that Klal Yisrael included the day that Moshe ascended onto Mount Sinai. They were mistaken because Moshe meant 40 complete days, with each 24 hour period starting from the night. Therefore the first day, because it was already the daytime when Moshe ascended, could not be included. The first half of the day, which began the night before, was already over. Klal Yisrael were under the impression that the 40 days were complete based on their erroneous calculation, and impatiently began building the egel. How could this happen? Klal Yisrael were using the clocks of the world around them: the day begins during daytime and the night follows. However, Moshe Rabbeinu's instructions followed Jewish calendar days, which begin at nightfall. Therefore the 40-day period was not over. Adopting the clocks and the perspective of the world around us was the cause of the cheit haegel. With a shift in perspective and looking toward a better future, the cheit haegel could have been avoided. Thousands of years later, our nation is struggling with terrible darkness and significant challenges. The message of Esther is that in order to achieve daylight and salvation, we must distinguish ourselves as a nation, and change the way in which we view our world. We must view and approach the world through the Torah's perspective of looking for the light of the morning. All calculations and perspectives must be guided through the prism of Torah. This will ultimately bring about a Purim miracle in our time.



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Meet Shlomo Anapolle of Edison, New Jersey. When it comes to a love of Israel, few college students can match the Sabra passion of this Yeshiva University junior. A pre-med, biology major with plans to attend an Israeli medical school, Shlomo balances his time between neo-natal diagnostic research, intensive shiurim and a commitment to Israel advocacy.

Whether it's planning lobbying missions to Washington, D.C. with YUPAC or teaching English to teens in the Negev through Counterpoint Israel, Shlomo brings to bear his leadership skills for the sake of the Jewish people and homeland. He is proud to invite Israeli diplomats to YU to help his peers contextualize current events. Shlomo chose YU because, to him, Torah Umadda isn't merely the convergence of science and our mesorah—at Yeshiva University, it is the formula for a values-driven preparation for life. This is the essence of Torah Umadda and what sets YU apart.

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