

The Winning Ticket

As a *mechanech* (educator) for many years, I often ask myself what message a midrash or other statement of Chazal might have that is relevant to chinuch.

While there is an expression “chinuch begins in the home,” this does not, of course, minimize the importance of the rebbe or morah. In fact, one can say that in many ways, a student’s home is, in part, in the yeshiva. With parents forced to be preoccupied with mundane tasks, there is more reliance on the yeshiva to be a primary source of chinuch. The key then to the very survival of Am Yisroel, in the face of so many challenges from technology and other social pressures, is the bastion of spirituality — the yeshiva.

Purim is the one holiday that is based on the most credible threat of total annihilation of the Jewish People that we ever faced. It follows that Purim should relate to the *mechanech*, since chinuch is the key to the continuity of Am Yisroel. The following then is a thought that focuses on this hypothesis, and one which I hope and pray that I can live up to.

The Talmud in *Megillah* (13b) tells us a fascinating fact regarding the thought process of Haman in his plan to destroy Am Yisroel. The Talmud finds deep significance in the lottery that Haman made in order to establish the date on which he would execute his plan to destroy Am Yisroel. It says in *Megillat Esther* (3:7) “*hu chodesh Adar*” — that it, the lottery fell on the month of Adar. This would be the month to establish the date for Haman’s evil plan. On these words, the Talmud informs us that Haman



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was filled with joy when the lottery fell on the month of Adar. The reason for Haman’s “simcha” was the fact that this was the month that Moshe Rabbeinu passed away. Even Haman knew of the great Moshe Rabbeinu, the great leader of Am Yisroel, and who Am Yisroel referred to as their rebbe. It was through Moshe that we left Egypt and built a Mishkan — a tabernacle. If the leader that was so integral to the birth of Am Yisroel was taken away in Adar, then Adar is, indeed, the ideal month to annihilate Am Yisroel. Thus, Haman rejoiced over the apparent success of the lottery foretelling the success of his mission.



The Talmud then proceeds to belittle Haman’s excitement. The Talmud explains that Moshe Rabbeinu was born on the seventh of Adar. At first glance, the Talmud appears to be saying that Adar is not an unlucky month, for Moshe Rabbeinu was also born in this month. The birth of a

baby is a cause for great celebration; thus, the fact Moshe was born in this month proves that Adar is actually a “positive” month for Am Yisroel. However, there are several difficulties with this interpretation.

Let us for a moment imagine that we were present at the time that Moshe Rabbeinu was *niftar* (departed this world). Would we be comforted on any level by the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu was born in the month that he died? If we look at the end of the Chumash in Parashat V’zot Habrachah, we only see the Torah’s description of Am Yisroel’s deep mourning for Moshe. There is no mention of anyone taking comfort from the fact that Moshe was also born in that month. Accordingly, Haman seems to be correct in his assessment that Adar is a difficult month for Am Yisroel. We lost Moshe’s merit, his leadership, his humility, and his unwavering devotion to us. Where is the consolation in the fact that he was born in this month?

A second question comes from the fact that as much of a rasha as Haman was, he was an equally brilliant politician and strategist. And with all his detailed research and planning, how could he have not known when Moshe Rabbeinu was born?

Perhaps we can answer these questions with a fascinating comment

made by Rashi in Chumash Devarim 31:29. In that context, Moshe tells Bnei Yisroel that he is being so diligent in committing them to remain faithful to Hashem and His Torah because Am Yisroel will, in fact, turn away from Torah and mitzvot after he dies. Thus Moshe's goal is to minimize this effect by imbuing Am Yisroel with enough fervor to ultimately return to Hashem after they fail. Rashi notes that Moshe seems to be prophesizing about an event that never took place. The Navi clearly tells us that the Jews remained loyal to the Torah as long as Yehoshuah, Moshe's primary student and his successor, was alive. What, then, is the meaning of Moshe's prophecy?

Rashi answers that we see from here that Moshe considered his student, Yehoshuah, an extension of himself. In other words, Moshe loved and appreciated Yehoshuah so much that his devotion to Yehoshuah made Yehoshuah's leadership a part of Moshe's! Rashi explains that Moshe considered himself alive through Yehoshuah even after he physically died. It seems that the Torah can state something that is not true physically because of a spiritual bond between two people. Moshe, because of his close connection to Yehoshuah, has a right to say that after he dies, Am Yisroel will begin to sin even though in reality this did not occur until after the death of Yehoshuah!

There is a message here that is very relevant to educating our children. Moshe is teaching us that his relationship with Yehoshuah is the reason that Am Yisroel will stay on the path of Torah and mitzvot even after he dies. The legacy of Moshe Rabbeinu continued in Am Yisroel because of Yehoshuah's loyalty and

devotion to Moshe. Because of this loyalty, the Jews also remained loyal to Hashem and His messenger, Moshe. Moshe knew that Am Yisroel would eventually falter because he knew that the special rebbe-talmid relationship would not continue in the same way after Yehoshuah. The lesson is clear: a rebbe must see his talmid as an actual extension of himself. This seems to go beyond the usual mitzvah of *ve'ahavta l'arayacha kamocha*, for it is not simply loving another like oneself, but as one entity — as oneself.

Recently, I read an article in *Hamodia* on the life of Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zt'l, who recently passed away. They interviewed Rabbi Yisroel Friedman, the editor-in-chief of the *Yated Neeman* newspaper, who was frequently in the presence of Rav Shteinman for over twenty years. Rabbi Friedman was asked what advice he had for parents whose children had “gone off the derech.” Rabbi Friedman replied, “in general, the only *kinyan* (acquisition) that works with this generation is *meshichah* — drawing them close. Nothing else works. He (Rav Shteinman) would say you must love the child, love the child, love the child. Love your children.” In a later paragraph, Rabbi Friedman explained that when it came to kiruv, Rav Shteinman emphasized never giving up and seeking to bring them back with “*meshichah*” — drawing close with relatively unconditional love. This is the same message that we learn from the relationship between Moshe and Yehoshuah.

This message helps us understand Haman's mistake. Moshe did not pass away in Adar. Moshe lived on through Yehoshuah. True, Adar is the month that Moshe died physically. Haman

was correct that Moshe died in Adar and he likely knew that Moshe was also born in Adar. However, Haman looked at the superficial result, which was that Moshe was taken from us physically in Adar. He saw this as a good omen for the success of his plan. The Talmud states that he was wrong because Moshe was born in this month. Perhaps this can be interpreted in a homiletical and metaphysical sense. Moshe did not “die,” for Yehoshuah lived on as an extension of Moshe. Perhaps the Talmud then can mean that Moshe was actually reborn in Adar as it says “*vezarach hashemesh uva hashemesh*” — the sun rises and the sun sets (Kohelet 1:5). It follows that Adar has no negative implications at all, for Moshe in fact did not die in this month.

True, at the time Moshe “died,” we took no comfort in the fact that Moshe was born in that month. However, as Am Yisroel continued the legacy of Moshe through Yehoshuah, we look back and see that Moshe still lived in Adar, and that was Haman's mistake.

Purim is a celebration of the tremendous power of the rebbe-talmid relationship. With all of his brilliant plots and machinations, Haman lacked the ability to comprehend the message that a rebbe can live on through his student. This miscalculation led to his downfall. *Venahafoch hu* — Moshe was turned into Yehoshuah and was and is alive in our hearts and minds. Those who are blessed to be in the field of chinuch have a tremendous responsibility as they hold the future of their talmidim in their hands. This is *avodat hakodesh* and we must treat it with the utmost care and devotion.