

# Maintaining Peace of Mind in a High-Speed World

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The story is told of a Jew, who raced down the street as the early morning sun rose behind him. As he ran, he crossed paths with the saintly R' Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov who innocently inquired if the fellow needed any assistance. "I am racing off to work to secure my *parnassah* [income]," replied the clearly irritated fellow. The *tzaddik* of Berditchov gently replied, "What makes you so certain that you are running toward your *parnassah*? Perhaps your livelihood lies in the opposite direction and with each successive step you move further away from where you need to be?"<sup>1</sup>

We live in a very fast-paced world. Fast food,<sup>2</sup> high speed technology<sup>3</sup> and quicker ways to communicate and travel<sup>4</sup> are just a few of the countless innovations that provide our lives with greater comfort and luxury. Yet while our high-speed world offers greater convenience to many aspects of our lives, the toll it takes on the Jewish mind and spirit is substantial.<sup>5</sup> Already the

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<sup>1</sup> For a similar idea, see *Eretz Tzvi* (Rav Aryeh Tzvi Fromer Hy"d), *Parshas Toldos* (pg. 39) for his parable of the swift-footed horse travelling in the wrong direction. He applies it to Esav's attitude toward the *bechorah* [birthright] and his (perhaps wise) decision to sell it lest it lead him astray.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Imrei Kodesh [HaShalem]* (pg 5.) of Rav Uri of Strelisk Zy" a to *Parshas Vayeira* (18:5) on the spiritual significance of eating slowly and with peace of mind.

<sup>3</sup> Certainly there are great spiritual gains and lessons to be culled from our modern-day technological advancements. The *Chofetz Chaim* in his work *Shem Olam [Chasimas HaSefer]* (pgs. 180-183) offers a novel explanation as to the development of devices such as the telephone and the camera in his time. In his *HaTorah ViHaOlam (Parshas Bereishis;* printed in 1955), R' Nissim Telushkin shares an important *mussar* lesson that can be derived from the invention of a television. Last, in more recent years, Rav Moshe Wolfson Shlit" a dedicates space in his *Emunas Itechah, Parshas Pekudei* (pg. 311), to explain the impact of automatic doors (!) in our understanding and approach to *tefillah*. The *Chofetz Chaim* is also quoted [see *Koveitz Maamarim vi'Iggros* (volume 1, pg. 304) of R' Elchonon Bunim Wasserman Hy"d; the newly published *Moreh Tzedek* (speeches of Rav Avraham Yaakov HaKohein Pam (pgs. 40-41); as well as the *Sefer Chakima BiRamiza* in the *Pesach Davar*, pgs. 2-3] as having explained the increasing speed of the functions of our world by comparing it to the harried "erev Shabbos preparations" as the world prepares itself for the "yom she'kulo Shabbos" with the arrival of Mashiach.

<sup>4</sup> In *The Great Chasidic Masters* by Avraham Yaakov Finkel (Pg 84) he quotes: "Rabbi Menachem Mendel [of Rimano] would complain, 'Before there were highways, you had to interrupt your journey at nightfall. You would spend the night at an inn where you could calmly recite psalms and open a holy book, and talk about Torah thoughts. Now you rush along the highways day and night, and you have no respite.'"

<sup>5</sup> The secular world has also come to question the dangers of our fast-paced society. See, for example, the opening chapter "Why is Speed so Bad" of the 2008 book by Pulitzer Prize winner Howard Rosenberg and Charles Feldman entitled *No Time to Think*. The chapter begins with a quote from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*—"They stumble that run fast"—and goes on to explain the many mishaps that arise from the absurd speed of our media. Namely, careers and more important, lives are ruined by new reports that are simply wrong, but are made available in the

wisest of men, Shlomo HaMelech, warned of the great danger that lurks in the shadows of a hasty existence:<sup>6</sup>

*Have you seen a man who is hasty in his affairs? There is more hope for the fool than for him.*

**Mishlei 29:20**

חזית איש איך בדבריו, תקוה לכסיל ממנו  
משלי כט:כ

Following the lead of Mishlei, the Piasezener Rebbe (R' Kalonymus Kalman Shapira Hy"d) cites R' Yisrael Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760, founder of the Chassidic movement) who notes that the message of Shlomo HaMelech is in fact alluded to in the Torah itself. The Baal Shem Tov uncovers an important insight by looking beyond the surface of the verses of *kerias shema*; the twice-daily acceptance and reminder of our commitment to Hashem and His Torah.

*Our Master the Baal Shem Tov explained the verse "and you shall be swiftly banished"<sup>7</sup> as implying that one must lose his hastiness. Namely, that one should operate with peace of mind and without impulsivity.*

**Hachsharas Avreichim – Chapter 9**

ומרן הבעל שם טוב זצוקל"ה איתא על הפסוק "ואבדתם מהרה", שצריך האדם לאבד את המהירות, עכ"ל. היינו שיהיה דעה מיושבת ולא במהירות...  
הכשרת אברכים - פרק ט

What exactly is the great danger that lies beneath the surface waiting to ruin he who acts with haste? Must we truly believe that the service of our Creator is threatened simply by trying to keep pace with the world around us?

## The Proper Pace for *Tefillah*, Torah Study and Mitzvos: Less Can Be More

Perhaps the answer lies in the struggle of the harried mind to properly focus and maintain concentration. Arguably the backbone in our service of Hashem is *kavanah*, the willful and meaningful intent that is expected to accompany our every action. Chazal remind us that in the World of Truth, we will not be judged solely for the quantity of our mitzvos; rather, our heavenly account will be carefully scrutinized for quality as well. The Mishna shares with us the oft-overlooked general principle (which in turn is applied in other contexts throughout *Shas*):

*The Torah uses the [same] term, "a satisfying aroma to Hashem," regarding the [expensive] animal burnt-offering,*

נאמר בעולת בהמה "אשה ריח ניחוח" (ויקרא א'), ובעולת עוף "אשה ריח

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race to be the first to "break the news." For many insightful examples and studies, see the newly published (2012) *Wait: The Art and Science of Delay* by Frank Partnoy.

<sup>6</sup> Many terms are used throughout Tanach, Chazal and in later Torah works to describe the process of "doing something quickly." Some expressions, such as *zerizus* [zeal], carry an obvious positive connotation. See Rashi to Bereishis [Vayeira] 22:3, based on Gemara, *Pesachim* (4a) regarding Avraham's praiseworthy *zerizus* in performing *akeidas Yitzchak*. Additionally, see Rashi to Shemos [Bo] 12:17, based on the *Mechilta* for our general attitude toward mitzvos being done "immediately upon reaching one's hand." Other terms imply a negative hastiness or destructive impetuosity. While a full (and proper) treatment of the many terms are beyond the scope of this essay, we will try to present, in broad terms, the negative aspects of doing things (too) quickly and the impact upon one's peace of mind.

<sup>7</sup> In context, the *pasuk* refers to the expulsion of the Jewish people from *Eretz Yisrael* for failing to follow Hashem and by straying after foreign gods.

regarding the [less costly] burnt-offering of fowl and regarding the [least costly] fine flour offering. **This teaches that [there is no difference] between the one who offers much and the one who offers little, as long as he directs his heart to Heaven.**

**Menachos – Chapter 13, Mishna 11)**

ניחוח" (ויקרא א'), ובמנחה "אשה ריה  
ניחוח" (ויקרא ב'), לומר לך: אחד  
המרבה ואחד הממעט ובלבד שיכוין  
לבו לשמים.  
מנחות – פרק יג, משנה יא

Very often, we mistakenly define success in terms of quantity while greatly disregarding and discrediting the value of quality. While the personal nature of *kavanah* may make it difficult to offer precisely-defined halachic guidelines, the *poskim* do render some halachic decisions that seek to outline an objective standard. It is interesting to note the very direct relationship between the speed with which one acts and the corresponding ability to carry out the mitzvah properly. Even a small sampling of the rulings found in *Shulchan Aruch* and its commentaries serve to sufficiently establish a clear halachic position.

When it comes to a general approach to *tefillah*, the *Shulchan Aruch's* position could not be more clearly stated:

*It is better to recite fewer supplications with intent, than to recite many without intent.*

**Shulchan Aruch – Orach Chaim, Chapter 1, Paragraph 4**

טוב מעט תחנונים בכוונה, מהרבות  
בלא כוונה.  
שולחן ערוך או"ח סימן א, סעיף ד

The *Magen Avraham* references the above mentioned Mishna (*Menachos* 13:11) as the source for this ruling.<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere (*Orach Chaim*, 51:8), *Shulchan Aruch* adds that the paragraphs of *Pesukei DiZimrah* should not be said quickly but in a gentle manner. *Mishna Berurah* (51:20) further rules that one should be mindful not to skip or swallow a single word; rather, the words should “flow (carefully) from his mouth as one who is counting money.”

One of the most practical ways to ensure that the above standards are met is simply by allotting ample time for *tefillah*. *Magen Avraham* (53:5) establishes, albeit for a different purpose, one half hour as the proper amount of time to recite the *tefillos* from *Baruch SheAmar* through *Yishtabach*. It seems that those who sought to uphold these standards were met with some opposition. In an impassioned and heartfelt letter to his chassidim, the Alter Rebbe of Lubavitch, *Iggeres HaKodesh*, Epistle 1 pleads with his followers to spend an hour and a half on Shachris.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See the *Levush* and *Sefer Chassidim* (#315) for related comments and additional *pesukim* which express this idea.

<sup>9</sup> “And now once more I put forth my hand a second time with an additional explanation and a twofold request, extended and proposed to all men of the chassidic brotherhood, those who are near and those who are far, to undertake the following: **On all weekdays, businessmen — who do not have so much time — should not step down before the Ark [to lead the congregation in prayer]. Only those who ... at the morning service are able to pray at length for at least about an hour and a half on all weekdays.** One of them should step down before the Ark, chosen by lot or by consent of the majority [of the congregants] ... [This arrangement is] **not to be changed, I beg and beseech you!**” Regarding the origin of the *Baal HaTanya's* deep appreciation for the importance of *tefillah*, see *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveichik*, by Rabbi Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff (volume 1, pgs. 145-146). Rav Soloveichik would relate the story of the *Baal haTanya's* decision to go to Mezeritch instead of Vilna. Additionally, Rav Soloveichik would lament the fact that we have lost, what he calls, “the art of prayer.” In a lecture to the Rabbinic Alumni of Yeshiva University in 1973, Rav Soloveichik stated: “Today it is no more than a mechanical performance. True prayer is

While such a lengthy weekday Shachris may seem unfathomable in relation to the standards established in many of our shuls, the Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rav Menachem Mendel Schneerson, 1902-1994), in his notes to the *Iggeres HaKodesh*, helps us to retain a more proper perspective on the matter. He reminds us that the Gemara's statement (*Berachos* 32b) that, "the early chassidim would spend a full hour in *tefillah*," refers to the Amidah (Shemoneh Esray) alone!<sup>10</sup>

Yet despite the substantial demands the halachah places upon us to increase our God awareness, it is not without a bit of sympathy and understanding. Even the early authorities were well aware of the struggles we face in maintaining concentration and focus in *tefillah*. This sentiment is clearly felt in the ruling of R' Moshe Isserles (1520-1572) with regard to concentration during Shemoneh Esray. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 101:1) rules that ideally, all *berachos* of Shemoneh Esray must be recited with *kavanah*. In fact, the first *berachah* of Shemoneh Esray is of such great significance that failure to concentrate during its recitation demands repetition. However, Rema comments that in our times the practice is not to repeat, as it is likely one will fail to have intent a second time. If Rema in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was already sensitive to the struggle of maintaining *kavanah*, we can only imagine what he would make of the myriad distractions we face today.

It is important to note that the original ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch*, which urges us to adopt a "less is more" approach, is by no means limited to *tefillah*. *Mishnah Berurah* (*Orach Chaim* 1:12) clearly states that, "the same is true for Torah study, for before Hashem, all depends (solely) upon doing that which one is capable of doing." Rav Yehuda Ashkenazi in his *Be'er Heitiv* glosses on the *Shulchan Aruch* directs us to the work *Mekor Chaim*<sup>11</sup> of R' Chaim HaKohen of Aram Tzova, student of R' Chaim Vital, who likewise expands the lesson of the *Shulchan Aruch* to include Torah study.<sup>12</sup> In *Mekor Chaim* he writes:

*Chazal explain that one will be asked [after life in this world], "did you establish set times for Torah study?" He will not be asked, "How much Torah did you study?," because better is the deliberate study of five chapters with pleasantness than ten [chapters] with pressure...*

**Mekor Chaim – Volume 1, Chapter 1, Paragraph 4**

וכבר נת' אצלי ממשחז"ל ששואלים לאדם  
קבעת עתים לתורה ואין שואלים ממנו  
כמה תורה היה למד שלכן מה טוב לאדם  
ללמוד ה' פרקים במתון ובנעימה יותר  
מעשרה בנחוצה...  
מקור חיים – חלק א, סימן א, סעיף ד

more than this. It is an attitude, a state of mind, creating a mood and temperament for the worshiper. It is an exciting experience and an adventure!" It is critical that rabbinic leadership dictate the standards and educate the masses in this matter. In the newer editions of Rav Yehonosan Eybshutz's *Yaaros Devash*, a heartfelt letter from Rav Eybshutz to the Av Beis Din of Kenigsberg appears. In it he wrote: "Often the congregation is reciting the Kaddish of Aleinu while I am still in the middle of the Amidah. While the young ones mock and laugh at me, I act as one who is mocked but does not respond, for these moment of *tefillah* is the finest portion of all of my labor."

<sup>10</sup> See the teaching of Rav Tzaddok HaKohen of Lublin in his *Tzidkas Tzaddik* (#8) where he seems to understand the Mishna (*Berachos* 30b) that the earlier generations, because of their sanctity, only required an hour to prepare for prayer—we would likely need much more time to prepare properly!

<sup>11</sup> *Elya Rabbah* (s.k. 5) refers to it as *Tur Barekes*, a name that appears on a later volume of the same work.

<sup>12</sup> Additionally, *Be'er Heitiv* directs us to similar comments made by the *Soles Belulah*. This sefer is part of a two-volume work entitled *Divrei Chachamim* by R' Yosef Leib Pochovitzzer. The first section is called *Daas Chochmah*, which contains essays on a range of Jewish philosophical topics. The second part is a halachic work entitled *Mekor Chochmah*, which is accompanied by additional notes referred to as *Soles Belulah*. The comment that the *Be'er Heitiv* referred to appears on page 19 of the 5452 edition.

To support his assertion, *Mekor Chaim* paraphrases from the *Midrash Rabbah*'s explanation of Koheles (4:6), "Better is one handful of pleasantness than two fistfuls of labor and vexation of the spirit." The Midrash<sup>13</sup> explains that, "better is the one who learns two *sedarim* [orders] and is fluent in them, than one who learns [more] and is not."<sup>14</sup>

An even broader and nearly all-encompassing application of this principle is found in the *Chayei Adam* of Rabbi Avraham Danzig (1748–1820). In his section on the laws of care and consideration in the performance of mitzvot, he expands the *Shulchan Aruch*'s concept to all mitzvot and bolsters his position by offering a glimpse through the lens of his personal experience.

"He who guards a mitzvah will know no evil," that is to say, when one intends to perform a mitzvah, he should not do so suddenly, rather he should wait and contemplate well how to perform it ... I have examined this through my personal experience: when I perform a mitzvah very suddenly, I fail to do so properly. Therefore, one must be careful about this.  
**Chayei Adam – Section 68, Paragraph 25**

"שומר מצוה לא ידע דבר רע" (קהלת פרק ה, פסוק ה), ר"ל שמחויב כשירצה לעשות איזו מצוה לא יעשה אותה בחפזון ובפתאום, רק שישמור וימתין (כמו "ואביו שמר את הדבר") ויתיישב בדבר היטב איך יעשה... ונ"ל שזהו ג"כ מש"כ "ושמרתם את המצות" ... וכבר בהנתיב בסיון שכאשר עשיתי מצוה בפתאום לא קיימתי כראוי, לכן צריך לזהר בזה.  
**חיי אדם הל' זהירות במצוות, כלל סה, ס' כה**

The essence of this principle is perhaps best captured by R' Yehudah HaChassid in his *Sefer Chassidim* (#366), which succinctly concludes a related discussion, "better [a mitzvah performed] once *lishmah* [for the sake of heaven] than one thousand [times] without intent."

## Purim: A Restoration of *Menuchas HaNefesh*

With this understanding of the need for a more slow-paced, deliberate, and contemplative existence at the core of authentic Jewish living, we can begin to explore a theme that runs throughout Megillas Esther. In its 10 short chapters consisting of a mere 167 *pesukim*, the *megillah* takes us on an absolute emotional roller-coaster ride. Tranquil moments are quickly overturned, and on more than one occasion, great heartbreak leads very suddenly to great joy.<sup>15</sup>

The *megillah* begins by introducing its reader to Achashveirosh, a king whose dominant grasp over the civilized world is hardly matched by another in history.<sup>16</sup> We encounter Achashveirosh

<sup>13</sup> See *Koheles Rabbah* (*Parsha 4*). This Midrash is even more explicit in its message in *Vayikra Rabbah* (*Parsha 3*).

<sup>14</sup> In *Perek Kinyan Torah* (*Avos 6*), "yishuv" is identified as one of the 48 qualities through which Torah is acquired. While some interpret it as a reference to "diligence in learning" (some in fact cite an alternate text "yeshiva," as taught in *Avos 2:7* — "increased *yeshivah* [leads to] increased wisdom"), Rashi defines "yishuv" as meaning "*yishuv hadaas*." *Tiferes Yisrael* (in his first of two explanations) likewise defines "yishuv" as having peace of mind and being unrushed in one's speech. See *Midrash Shmuel to Avos* as well. The list of 48 also includes the related quality of one who is "*misyashev libo bi'talmudo*." See *Midrash Vayikra Rabbah* (19:2), *Meged Givos Olam* (volume 2, pg. 11) and *Divrei Yisrael* (*Modzitz*) to *Parshas Miketz* 41:49, for some practical advice in maintaining a calm demeanor and peace of mind while studying Torah.

<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that while the full story of Purim spans many years, the *megillah*'s presentation makes it seem like it happened rather quickly. Perhaps it is to impress upon us the message we are exploring in this essay.

<sup>16</sup> *Meseches Megillah* (11a) identifies him as one of three (along with Achav and Nevuchadnezer) who ruled under the entire "arch" of the heavens (see Rashi there, as well as *Aruch* under the entry "*kaf*"). This assertion is supported

relishing in his newly acquired state of tranquility after a protracted period of great anxiety. On the opening *pesukim* (1:2-3) of the *megillah*, the Gemara comments:

*It says in the Megillah, "In those days, when the king sat..." [implying, when he first sat]. However, it is written immediately after, "In the third year of his reign." Rava said: What is the meaning of "when he sat"? After his mind was put at ease...*

### **Megillah 11b**

"בימים ההם כשבת המלך" (אסתר א, ב), וכתיב בתריה "בשנת שלוש למלכו" (א, ג)? אמר רבא: מאי כשבת - לאחר שנתיישבה דעתו. מגילה יא:

What was the source of his newly found peace of mind, a feeling that would inspire a 187-day celebration of such grand proportions? Yirmiyah the navi had foretold that the Jews would be redeemed from their Babylonian exile after a period of 70 years. However, the prophet failed to clearly delineate the precise starting point for calculating that period of time. Adding to Achashveirosh's stress was the fact that Belshatzar, the last Babylonian king, had erred in his calculation of the 70 years and it had cost him his life.<sup>17</sup> Hoping to avoid a similar fate, Achashveirosh acted cautiously and with great patience to shield himself from error. Several years into his reign, he felt that he had indeed corrected the mistake of Belshatzar and viewed his good judgment as being worthy of national celebration. With the passing of the 70 years and the Jewish people still a subject nation, Achashveirosh assumed that the Jewish God had forsaken His children and that they would never be redeemed. One can only imagine the feelings of utter despair, fear and tension pulsing throughout the broader Jewish community at that time. The promise of redemption that had likely carried their spirit throughout the Babylonian exile was, or so it appeared, shattered. This image of a gratified Achashveirosh seated peacefully upon his throne, as a despondent Jewish nation desperately clutches a dying dream, is the backdrop upon which the story of Megillas Esther unfolds.

But what served as the "cause" and what was the "effect"? One would assume, and logic dictates, that Achashveirosh's newly found confidence is what created the feelings of despair among the Jewish people. But perhaps we can suggest just the opposite. Perhaps it was the emotional state of *Klal Yisrael* that generated the good feelings that now reverberated in the heart and mind of Achashveirosh. It was their loss of faith in Hashem's promise of redemption, and the subsequent abandonment of their own tranquility, which allowed Achashveirosh to acquire his new perspective. The sacred works of Chassidus and Jewish thought teach us that failure to practice

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by the *Midrash Aggadas Esther* (1:2) but appears to be contradicted (as Radal notes in his commentary) by *Midrash Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* (chapter 11), which states that Achashveirosh ruled only half of the world. See *Midrash Tehillim*, which posits that the extent of his rule fluctuated at various points of his reign. Additionally, *Ben Yehoyada* (*Megillah 11a, d"h Hodu*) notes that his complete rule was limited to the bulk of Asia but certainly did not extend to Europe, Africa, China or the yet-to-be-discovered America. See the comments of *Chida* in *Lev Dovid* (chapter 29) regarding Jews living in Spain and Africa, which were beyond Achashveirosh's reach at that time. Rav Zalman Sorotzkin in his *Chut Shel Chesed* commentary on Megillas Esther (pg. 84) sees Achashveirosh levying taxes over the land and the sea (10:1) as further proof of his all-encompassing rule. Regarding the kingdoms and reign of Shlomo, Sancheirev, Daryavesh and Koresh, see the continuation of the *Gemara Megillah* (11b). As to the omission of Alexander of Macedonia (generally referred to as "Alexander the Great"), see Tosafos (*Megillah 11a*) who notes that the *Baraisa* only lists those who are mentioned in Tanach.

<sup>17</sup> *Meseches Megillah 11b*.

and maintain a uniquely Jewish character trait causes that very same quality to shift into the hands of our enemies.

Support for this notion, and precisely in this context, can be found in R' Shmuel Borenstein of Socatchov's work *Shem MiShmuel*.<sup>18</sup> The *Midrash Rabbah* on Esther (Parsha 1) records that the angels inquired of Hashem, "How can it be that King Achashveirosh sits peacefully and rejoices while the *Beis Hamikdash* lies in ruin?" Hashem replied by informing the angels that the Jewish people were deserving of punishment for having violated Shabbos. In explanation of the Midrash, *Shem Mishmuel* quotes from his father, the *Avnei Nezer* (R' Avraham of Socatchov), who explains that it was our failure to extract the unique spiritual qualities of *menuchah* [rest] and *oneg* [enjoyment] from the Shabbos experience that allowed the nations of the world to rob us of those qualities.

This idea is by no means limited to the Purim story. We likewise find a basis for this concept by analyzing a description of the shifting powers in Mitzrayim, the root of all exile. The *pesukim* express Pharaoh's rise to power and the increasing difficulties of *Bnei Yisrael* with the phrase, "a new king rose to power in Egypt" (*Shemos* 1:8). *Sfas Emes* (*Shemos* 5631) notes in the name of his grandfather, R' Yitzchak Meir Alter,<sup>19</sup> that Chazal in the Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 1:10) seem bothered by the inappropriate use of the word *chadash* [new]. How can the Torah describe Egypt as being graced with a *new* king and *new* decrees if the entire concept of *hischadshus* [renewal] is unique to the Jewish people? Was not our fledgling nation created and charged with the clarion call of "*hachodesh hazeh lachem*" [this month is for you] (*Shemos* 12:2) with all of its implications? Is the Jewish nation not compared to the moon, whose light traverses endless cycles of renewal, as opposed to the nations who are compared to the unvarying sun?

Rav Gedalyah Schorr in his *Ohr Gedalyahu* summarizes the *Chiddushei HaRim's* teaching:

*Bnei Yisrael lacked the proper spirit of renewal, [in that] they said, "let us be like the Egyptians." Therefore, their failure to properly use this spirit of renewal, which had descended upon the world solely for their sake, provided the Egyptians with the strength to take it from Bnei Yisrael.*

**Ohr Gedalyahu – Parshas Bo, pg 47**

כי על ידי שהיה חסר לבנ"י כח  
ההתחדשות, שאמרו נהיה כהמצריים, ולא  
השתמשו ברוח ההתחדשות שיורד לעולם  
במיוחד לבנ"י, היה בכח של המצריים  
לקחת זה ההתחדשות השייך לבנ"י...  
אור גדליהו – פרשת בא, עמ' 47

Many similar examples of this principle are found within the sacred writings of our sages.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Shem Mishmuel to Parshas Shemos*, Year 5671 (pg. 5) and *Parshas Ki Seitzei*, Year 5671 (pg. 134).

<sup>19</sup> First Gerrer Rebbe, known by the name of his works, *Chiddushei HaRim*. This insight is also found in *Chiddushei HaRim al Hatorah, Parshas shemos* (pg. 82).

<sup>20</sup> For a sampling of further examples of this principle, see (in no particular order): Footnote to *Ohr Gedalyahu, Parshas Korach* (pg 133) in explanation of Rabbi Akiva Eiger's exceptionally large portion in Torah; *Leket Amarim* of R' Yaakov Meir Schechter Shlita, Volume 1 (pg. 75) regarding fear of Heaven; Biography of Rav Baruch Ber Leibowitz (Feldheim, pg. 269) in explanation of *Mishlei* 4:2; *Chasam sofer—Drashos* (volume 1, *Drashah to Zachor* from 5554); *Eish Pinchas* (teachings of Rav Pinchas Hirschsprung, pgs. 99-100); Rav Nosson Scherman's introduction to the Artscroll Youth Illustrated *Yonah* and *Halekach Vi'Halivuv* of R' Avrohom Schorr Shlita, *Chanukah* (pg. 147).

That which is borrowed must eventually be returned, and this principle holds true in the spiritual world as it does in its physical counterpart. Achashveirosh's attempt to ease his troubled mind lasts for just a few short *pesukim* before it becomes abundantly evident that he lacks any lasting connection to true inner serenity. His true character is most accurately captured by Chazal in their explanation of the imagery of a bear, to which the Persians are compared in Daniel's dream (Daniel 7:5). The Gemara (*Megillah* 11a) highlights three comparisons, one of them being that Persians, like bears, "have no *menuchah*." Achashveirosh, their king and leader, is certainly no exception to this rule.<sup>21</sup> This becomes apparent almost immediately as Achashveirosh is so easily unnerved by Vashti's refusal to appear at his command. Achashveirosh "became very enraged" as "his wrath burned within him" (1:12), and he does not hesitate to accept the guidance of Memuchan to remove Vashti permanently. In response to this action and others, Chazal (*Megillah* 15b) very precisely label Achashveirosh as a "*melech hafachfachan*," a fickle-minded king, whose impulsive decisions are soon-after regretted (2:1).<sup>22</sup>

But who is the mysterious Memuchan and why is Achashveirosh so quick to accept his counsel? The Gemara (*Megillah* 12b) notes that despite holding the seventh and *final* spot on the list of the king's closest advisors (1:14), Memuchan is *first* to voice his opinion on how to deal with the insolent Vashti (1:16).<sup>23</sup> Chazal critique his boisterous behavior and note that a simpleton is quick to speak before those far wiser than he. But perhaps more important, Chazal identify this hasty individual as none other than the infamous Haman (*Megillah* 12b).<sup>24</sup> Having refocused our attention from Memuchan to Haman, our question still begs an answer: What lies at the root of the bond that ties the spirit of Achashveirosh to the wicked Haman?

We first encounter Haman (by that name) at the beginning of the third *perek*, where he is described as a descendant of Agag, the Amalekite king conquered by Shaul HaMelech (I Shmuel 15:9). With such an introduction to Haman's ancestry, we can immediately recognize Haman as a fitting partner for the impetuous Achashveirosh. Only a glimpse toward the history of Amalek is needed to observe a picture of anything but tranquility. Amalek appears in the Torah and writings of Chazal as *the* nation that comes to upset the status quo, particularly in times of calm. Their improbable and lowly ambush of the Jewish people, while the nations of the world were still reeling from reports of the miraculous redemption from Egypt, highlights their reckless nature. In truth, much of their outlook is perhaps drawn from Esav, the grandfather of the individual known as Amalek, whose shortsighted and quickly brokered sale of the *bechorah* speaks volumes to his unsettled soul. Haman is merely the latest and arguably most threatening spokesman of the evil empire of Amalek.

<sup>21</sup> Maharal notes in several of his works that the *melech* [king] of any nation is the all-encompassing representation of his people. Hence, *melech* backwards is *kulam*, alluding to the entirety of his people.

<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere, the Gemara (*Megillah* 12a) presents a dispute between Rav and Shmuel if Achashveirosh was generally a wise (*pike'ach*) or foolish (*tipeish*) king.

<sup>23</sup> *Gr"a* in *Divrei Eliyahu* (pg. 337) wonders how Chazal derive from here that "a boor leaps to the front." Perhaps only the opinion of Memuchan is quoted by the *megillah* because his advice was accepted by the king? *Gr"a* explains that since it is evident that he is in the presence of the other officials, the seemingly excessive "*lifnei hamelech vi'hasarim*" alludes to his boorish behavior.

<sup>24</sup> Not all agree that Haman was Memuchan. According to *Yalkut Shimoni* (Esther #1051) and *Targum* (Esther 2:1) the king executed the advisors when Achashveirosh's wrath had subsided (Esther 2:1).



Haman's sudden rise to power among the officers of Achashveirosh (3:1) should be a source of great delight, yet for Haman, peace of mind remains out of reach. Like Achashveirosh before him, Haman's great success is overshadowed by Mordechai's refusal to bow (3:5), and Haman becomes noticeably enraged. His response is a shameless plot to destroy Mordechai along with his fellow Jews—men, women and children alike. Partnering with the like-minded Achashveirosh seems all too obvious at this point and Achashveirosh is most accommodating as he hopes to relieve himself of further headache. Lots are drawn, the decree of annihilation is recorded, and copies are distributed widely. With the date of destruction nearly a full year away, it is worthwhile to note that the "couriers went forth *hurriedly* by order of the king" (3:15), implying a transfer of Achashveirosh and Haman's inner turmoil upon the already distraught Jews. It seems that Achashveirosh and Haman have finally solidified their state of internal harmony. The *perek* concludes with Achashveirosh and the sinister Haman enjoying their good fortune over a soothing glass of wine as the city of Shushan looks on in a state of total bewilderment (3:15). As the wicked relax while the Jewish nation panics, one is left with the impression that the tables have been irreversibly turned. The king and his trusted accomplice have freed themselves of their own restless nature, and have successfully captured the *menuchah* of the Jewish soul. But despite Haman's ability to bring greater tranquility upon Achashveirosh and himself, Haman can only wear the outer trappings of tranquility for so long. It will not be very long before his true character emerges and his peaceful state of mind unravels.

Already concealed within the infamous lottery scene, from which the entire holiday draws its name, are signs that even in his most powerful moments, Haman cannot achieve a deep, inner equilibrium. How, in fact, was the lottery performed? The *megillah* (3:7) offers but a single *pasuk* to describe a lot that was cast, "before Haman,<sup>25</sup> from day to day, from month to month." *Midrash Esther Rabbah* (7:11) describes the process of selection; first Haman attempted to select the day of the week, then the month and last, the heavenly constellation under which he would carry out his scheme. But a remarkable and lesser known detail of the lottery emerges from the *Midrash Talpiyos* compiled by R. Eliyahu HaKohen of Izmir. Under the entry for "Haman" we find:

*The Commentators describe the lot as being performed with cubes marked with dots on four of its (six) sides. The side with three dots had four dots on its underside, and the side with six markings had a single dot opposite it ... Haman cast the dice three times and rolled 1-3-3 corresponding to Agag (אגג, the Amalekite king). He rejoiced to see that he had come out on top. He turned over the dice to see that which was below and saw 4-6-4, corresponding to Dovid (7*

והמפרשים זכרונם לברכה, פרשו, שהגורל שהפיל היה על ידי חתיכת עצם מרבע בנקודות מארבע רוחותיו ובלע"ז דאדו, והפור היה, מן הצד שיש שלשה נקודות מהצד התחתית יש ארבע נקודות, ומן הצד שיש ששה נקודות יש בתחתית נקודה אחת, באופן, שאם תפיל שלשה פורים ויהיו למעלה בשניהם בכל אחד ארבע נקודות ובאחד ששה נקודות, אם תהפכם לראות הנקודות שיש בתחתיתם תמצא בשנים שלשה נקודות בכל אחד ונקודה אחת באחד, באופן שלמעלה שהם ארבע וארבע וששה הוא מנין דוד, ולמטה שהוא שלשה שלשה ואחד הוא מנין אגג,

<sup>25</sup> Rashi acknowledges the unidentified individual who actually cast the lots but notes that he remains unknown. *Gr"a* in his commentary to Esther explains "before Haman" as meaning that Haman knew the Jewish people are not bound by *mazal*. Therefore, he picked the month that he felt would be best for *his* strength, not their weakness. See *Talei Oros* on Megillas Esther (pgs. 130-133) for additional explanations.

7-), king of the Jewish nation) [implying that the Jews would be under his control]. Yet in doing so, he overturned his fate, leaving himself below and Dovid above.<sup>26</sup>

**Midrash Talpiyos – Entry for “Haman”**

והמן בגורל זה הפיל שלשה פורים ונפלו באופן שלמעלה יצאו מנין אגג, ושמוח כי עלה למעלה, רצה להפכם מה למטה מהם, ומצא מנין דוד, נמצא דבהופכם נשאר הוא למטה ודוד למעלה וכו'.  
מדרש תלפיות – ענה "המן"

Instead of delighting in the prediction of good fortune expressed by his lots, Haman is *still* agitated. He anxiously overturns the dice, “just to see” and confirm that which he already knows. But as the *Midrash Talpiyos* implies, his overly zealous nature is his undoing. Perhaps this serves as a defining moment for Haman; he reveals his true inner nature as he foils his own plan. Like the erratic roll of the die, Haman very quickly finds himself spinning out of control and struggling to break his downward spiral.

As the story proceeds, Haman tries desperately to maintain his calm demeanor but is constantly angered by Mordechai's refusal to bow or even stand before him (5:9). His wife and friends suggest that he build a gallows to deal with Mordechai and encourage him to present his suggestion to the king in a timely fashion (5:14). But as Haman internally senses his race against time, he cannot wait until morning and hurries to appear before Achashveirosh, who himself is in the middle of a sleepless night (6:4)! After offering advice on how to best reward one who “the king desires to honor” (6:6), Haman is told to, “**hurry**, [and] take the attire and the horse as you have said, and do all this for Mordechai the Jew who sits at the king’s gate” (6:10). After swiftly carrying out the king’s mission with a heavy heart, “Haman **hurried** home, despondent and with his head covered” (6:12). Upon arriving home, Haman’s wife begins to warn him that he is destined to fail (6:13), but can hardly finish her advice as the king’s chamberlains arrive and Haman is again “**hurried** to the banquet which Esther had prepared” (6:14). After being exposed at Esther’s banquet as an enemy of the queen and her people, it is but a matter of moments before Haman is hanged on those very same gallows he had prepared for the righteous Mordechai. As Haman’s meteoric rise and fall comes to its close, the Jewish nation’s peace of mind, which had been so suddenly lost, is quickly restored to its rightful owners.

The Jewish nation, a people whose very survival has defied all odds, would not easily relinquish a trait that is central to their very essence. They emerge as the victors in this epic battle to maintain peace of mind, overcoming the threats of annihilation mounted against them. Such hope can only be found among a nation whose every move is guided by Torah. As Dovid HaMelech wrote in Tehillim (19:8), “*Toras Hashem temimah meshivas nafesh*” — “*The Torah of Hashem is perfect, restoring the soul.*” Not only does Torah study require *yishuv hadaas*,<sup>27</sup> but connection to Torah creates a greater sense of inner tranquility. It therefore comes as no surprise, that Chazal identify a reacceptance of the Torah, as part of *Klal Yisrael’s* response to their miraculous salvation and “restoration of their soul” (see *Shabbos 88a* with Rashi).

<sup>26</sup> See R' Yosef Chaim of Baghdad's works *Ben Ish Chayil (drashos)* and *Keren Yeshua* for further explanations of the *Midrash Talpiyot* and an alternate version from the Chida.

<sup>27</sup> See the *Hakdamah* to Rav Elazar Menachem Mann Shach's *Avi Ezri* (volume 2; *Nashim* and *Kedushah*) whether Torah is best studied with “*af*” [see *Rambam Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:12*] or with peace of mind.

Lest we mistakenly believe that the *menuchah* achieved at the end of the *megillah* is merely incidental, Mordechai proclaims the message loud and clear.

*Mordechai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Achashveirosh, the near ones and the distant ones, [charging them] to observe annually the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and its fifteenth day, as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and the month which had been turned about for them from one of sorrow to gladness, and from mourning to festival; to observe them as days of feasting and gladness, and sending delicacies to one another, and gifts to the poor.*

**Esther 9:20-22**

וַיִּכְתֹּב מֶרְדֵּכַי אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה; וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים אֶל כָּל הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ הַקְּרוֹבִים וְהַרְחֹקִים. לְקַנֵּם עָלֵיהֶם לְהִיּוֹת עֲשִׂים אֶת יוֹם אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר, וְאֶת יוֹם חֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ: בְּכָל שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה. פְּיָמִים אֲשֶׁר נָחַו בָּהֶם הַיְּהוּדִים מֵאֲבִיבָהֶם, וְהַחֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר נִהְפָּךְ לָהֶם מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׂמְחָה, וּמֵאֲבֵל לְיוֹם טוֹב; לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם, יְמֵי מְשִׁתָּה וְשִׂמְחָה, וּמְשָׁלַח מְנוּחַת אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ, וּמִתְּנוּחַת לְאֲבִיבָיִם.

**אסתר ט:כ-כב**

Mordechai did not assign the physical salvation to be the focus of the Purim celebration. *Sfas Emes* draws our attention to the great emphasis Mordechai placed on the *menuchah* that was achieved in overcoming our adversaries.

*Why did Chazal establish the Yom Tov of Purim on the day the Jews rested [from battle] if the primary salvation was achieved through the military victory? Amalek's attack against Bnei Yisrael is rooted in their desire to negate tranquility ... and to prevent Bnei Yisrael from achieving tranquility. Therefore, the tranquility that emerged after the battle was a greater victory than the military battle itself.*

**Sfas Emes – Purim 5646**

מה שקבעו עיקר היו"ט ביום המנוחה ואומרים שעשה נסים בזמן הזה. הגם דלכאורה עיקר היה נצחון המלחמה. אכן תכלית מלחמת עמלק ימ"ש הוא לבטל המנוחה. כמ"ש אשר קרך בדרך. כמ"ש והיה בהניח כו' תמחה כו'. נמצא שעיקר רדיפת עמלק שלא לבוא אל המנוחה. וזה האות שבאו אל המנוחה הוא עדות על מחיית כחו של עמלק. ובזאת המנוחה מחו אותו יותר מבמלחמה. ולכן כתיב ונוח מאויביהם והרוג כו' שבמנוחה זו הרגו אותו.

**שפת אמת – פורים, שנת תרמ"ו**

The tapestry of the *megillah*, whose delicate threads appeared ready to unravel along the way, emerges finely woven together: each thread in its proper place. As we attempt to relive the Purim miracle in our times,<sup>28</sup> may we find both the time and strength to slow down just a bit. If we can find a way to absorb this timeless message into our own lives, we will undoubtedly see that good things come to those who wait...

<sup>28</sup> See the Ramchal's *Derech Hashem* – section four, chapter seven, paragraph six.