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## PURIM—THE HOLIDAY OF EMUNAT CHACHAMIM

by Rabbi Sarel Malitzky

There is a powerful message in the Purim story which might shed some light and help shape our perspective on our approach to Gedolim (great Torah scholars).

During the third year of his reign, Achashveirosh threw a party for everyone in Shushan (Esther 1:3). The Jews did not know what to do. On the one hand, they suspected that it was not the ideal environment for religiously committed Jews. However, on the other hand, they felt a responsibility to go because it is possible the king would kill them for not attending. Additionally, this party was the biggest party that the kingdom had held. The Megillah (Ester 1:4-8 and Gemara Megillah 12a) describes in vivid the details just how lavish, elaborate and extravagant every facet of this party was.

Mordechai was one of the rulers of the Jewish people at the time. According to the Midrash, the Jews asked him if they should attend the party. Mordechai understood that the lewd conduct would not be healthy for a Jew and advised against it. Mordechai was also aware of the fact that Achashveirosh would be celebrating what he thought was the end of the seventy years of the Jews' exile from Israel, thus signaling Hashem forsaking his people and not rebuilding the Temple.

As we know, the Jews went to the party and on the surface all was well. After nine years, the twelfth year of Achashveirosh's kingship (Esther 3:7), Haman is furious that one Jew, Mordechai, would not bow down to him. Haman urges Achashveirosh to be allowed to destroy the Jewish people in its entirety. When Achashveirosh acquiesces and the letters are sent out, the Jewish nation is distraught.

One might think that it was the extreme zealotry of Mordechai that precipitated this decree of extermination. It seems from the Megillah that Mordechai purposely scorns and mocks Haman in his refusal to bow to him. In fact, some commentators (see Tosafot Sanhedrin 61b s.v Rava Amar Patur) argue that it was in fact permitted for Mordechai to bow to Haman as it did not constitute idol worship. Regarding Mitzvot, the Torah (VaYikra 18:5:) states, "*VeChay BaHem,*" "And live by them," meaning one should live by the Mitzvot and not die for them. Mordechai decided on his own to be extra stringent and refrain from bowing even though it did not constitute idol worship (the Nimukei Yosef, Sanhedrin 18a, posits that the Gadol HaDor has the right to be stringent and sacrifice his life even for a sin which does not obligate us to sacrifice our life).

Imagine what people were saying at the time: "His stubbornness is surely what is bringing our destruction!"

In fact, the Gemara (Megillah 12b-13a) records that the Jews at the time strove to disassociate from Mordechai for unnecessarily provoking and instigating Haman. The Midrash records that the people complained to Mordechai saying, "Your refusal to bow to Haman is going to kill us."

Weren't Mordechai's critics correct? Was it not Mordechai's defiance and insolence towards Haman and his ignoring the plight of his fellow Jews that created the problem in the first place?

The Alter from Kelm (Rav Simchah Zissel Ziv Broida wrote (in a letter published in the writing of the Saba MiKelm) explains that the reality was in fact far from the way people perceived it.

The Gemara (Megillah 12a) records that students asked Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai what they Jews did to deserve a punishment of annihilation. He responded to them (like any good educator would) that they should suggest an answer. They answered that it was because they went to and befitted from the part of Achashveirosh.

The Alter pointed out (similar to Rav Dessler's Michtav Meeliyahu vol. 1 page 75) that the Jews attended the party during year three and all went well for the next nine years. Because of this, they failed to recognize that Mordechai was correct. They thought they knew better. It was their lack of Emunat Chachamim (belief and trust in our leaders and scholars) that led to the decree of annihilation. They compounded the problem by thinking and claiming that they knew better than Mordechai. Mordechai correctly identified the spiritual danger involved in bowing to Haman. Had the Gadol HaDor engaged in this Persian behavior it would have accelerated the assimilation of Jews into the Persian culture leading to their spiritual demise. Far from endangering us, Mordechai rescued us from a spiritual abyss.

Perhaps we too can learn a similar lesson from the story of Purim. Let us listen a little more carefully to the words of our Gedolim (whomever we view as our Gedolim) and heed to their advice. Let us not instinctively think that they don't get it or even worse, that we know better.

# KOL TORAH PARASHAT TETZAVEH-PURIM 5775

VEAfILU BEHASTARAH

by Matthew Wexler ('15)

Parashat Tetzaveh is famously known as the only Parashah in which Moshe's name is absent (aside from Parshiyot Eikev, Re'eih, Shofetim, Ki Teitzei and Netzavim) from the time that he was born. The traditional explanation for Moshe's absence is given by the Ba'al HaTurim (Shemot 27:20 s.v. VeAtah Tetzaveh) who states that because Moshe says in Parashat Ki Tisa following the Cheit HaEigel, "Mecheini Na MiSifrecha Asher Katavta," "Erase me now from Your book that You have written" (Shemot 32:32), Hashem did not allow Moshe's name to be mentioned in the previous Parashah, Tetzaveh.

In Parashat Ki Tisa, due to Moshe's delayed return from Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael were worried that they had lost their leader and requested from Aharon to establish a new leader, which resulted in the construction of the Eigel HaZahav (see Ramban Shemot 32:1 s.v. Asher Yeilchu Lefaneinu). In Moshe's fight to save Bnei Yisrael from Hashem's wrath, he offers his name to be erased from the Torah, completely removing the Torah's record of his impact on Bnei Yisrael. Hashem fulfills this wish to an extent by erasing Moshe's name from Parashat Tetzaveh and, in doing so, attempts to teach Bnei Yisrael that they can serve Him fully without any direct intermediary. It is for this reason that Tetzaveh begins with the instruction to Bnei Yisrael to take, "Shemen Zayit Zach Katit LaMaor LeHa'alot Neir Tamid," "pure olive oil, pressed for illumination, to kindle a lamp continually" (Shemot 27:20). Shlomo HaMelech writes, "Ki Neir Mitzvah VeTorah Or," "For the Mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is a light" (Mishlei 6:23). It is specifically in this Parashah, in Moshe's absence, where Hashem instructs Bnei Yisrael regarding the Menorah, its lamps and its continuous illumination. Hashem is teaching Bnei Yisrael that in the absence of Moshe—their leader and guide—they can still serve Hashem through his Mitzvot and Torah.

Another notable absence of a major character in Tanach is Hashem from Megillat Ester. Megillat Ester has become known as the Sefer HaGalut—the book of Exile—as it occurs entirely outside of Eretz Yisrael. The Gemara (Chulin 139b) asks for a hint to Ester in the Torah and answers that it can be found in the Pasuk, "VaAnochi Hasteir Astir Panai," "And I will surely conceal My face" (Devarim 31:18). Yoyli Klein states in the name of Rabi Nachman: "DeRebbe Zugt, 'VeAfile BeHastureh SheBesoych HaHustureh BeVadai Gam Shum Nimtzu Hashaym Yisburaych,'" "The Rebbe says, 'Even in a concealment within a concealment, Hashem, may He be blessed, can surely be found'" (Likutei Moharan 56:4). As the Gemara suggests, this is the essence of Purim. We must try to find Hashem even when we're in Galut and it seems as if He cannot be found. Although it may be difficult to see Him, Hashem never abandons us. Masechet Megillah highlights examples of hints towards Hashem's name throughout Megillat Ester in a concealed fashion. Just as we must peer closely to see His name in the Megillah, we must similarly peer closely throughout our hardships in life to see that He is still present.

It is no coincidence that the reading of the Megillah on Purim usually coincides with the week in which Parashat Tetzaveh is read. The absence of Moshe and Hashem are intrinsically connected (as their names suggest: Moshe is Hashem spelled backwards [VeNahafochu]) and serve to teach us a lesson regarding our overall outlook on Torah and our connection to Hashem. The Gemara (Shabbat 88a) states that at Har Sinai, Hashem over-

turned the mountain upon Bnei Yisrael and threatened them with death if they did not accept the Torah. Even so, Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah once again when the story of Purim occurred. The Netivot Shalom (known as the Nesivos Shalom or Slonimer Rebbe) states that Bnei Yisrael did not merely reaccept the Torah during the Purim story; their acceptance was qualitatively different than when they originally accepted it at Har Sinai, since the acceptance during Purim was by their own free will and out of love, rather than fear. He explains that the Jews were trying to show that although they were enslaved to Achashverosh in a sense, they still understood that Hashem was with them and that he would save them. No matter how dark it was or how concealed Hashem seemed, the Jews during Purim saw that the light of the Torah would be constant and would reveal to them that Hashem still cared for them. Through Moshe's absence in Tetzaveh and Hashem's absence in the Megillah, Hashem is teaching us that our belief in Him and constant service towards him should not be contingent upon leaders, intermediaries, or good times. We must constantly serve Hashem despite His absence or the absence of our leaders, and through the Neir Tamid that He has given us, we must never lose our hope in Him.

## COSTLY DAMAGE TO PROPERTY IN THE COURSE OF CELEBRATION

by Gavriel Epstein ('15)

It is customary on Purim to dress up and rejoice in a comical fashion, often by acting in a manner which would be unusual or even taboo were it to occur at any other point during the year. Many attribute the source of such merrymaking to the fact that, "Lo Higidah Ester Et Amah VeEt Moladeta," "Ester did not reveal her nationality or her lineage" (Ester 2:10); we hide our identity in the same way that Ester does. Alternatively, a possible source could be the fact that Purim should be, "Yemei Mishteh VeSimchah," "days of feasting and joy" (Ester 9:22). However, the question arises every year of the degree to which this merrymaking is permitted. Can the celebration still be accredited to Purim if it comes at the expense of another's property?

Regarding the general license to damage another's property in the midst of the merriment for a Mitzvah, there is precedent in a Mishnah (Sukkah 4:7) which states that adults would seize and eat the Etrogim of children, which, as explained by Rabeinu Ovadyah MiBartenura (ad loc. s.v. VeOchlim): "VeEin BaDavar Mishum Gezel SheKach Nahagu Mishum Simchah," "is not considered theft since it was customary for the sake of merriment." If one is not liable for an action in conjunction with the merriment of a Mitzvah which would otherwise be considered theft, one should certainly not be liable for a similar action which would otherwise be considered merely damaging, at least unintentionally.

However, the Mishnah Berurah (695:13 s.v. DeIm Hizik) qualifies the degree to which such damage is permitted. He explains that while minor damage is generally accepted, major damage is not, due to the fact that, "DiBeHezeik Gadol Makpidin," "[people are] concerned by major damage," and are unwilling to condone such damage to their own property, even within the framework of celebration. Therefore, costly actions such as throwing food on the floor—especially food which tends to crumble, like Oreo cookies—should be avoided at all costs. Such actions could cause permanent damage to a classroom environment, and squander valuable education the students would have otherwise gained (this is, of course, a mere example and in no way a realistic portrayal of events). When celebrating

Purim, it is important to keep in mind that the rejoicing should not come at another's expense. Before engaging in questionably destructive behavior, one should consider whether the victim of the damage would, twenty years later, still consider the merry-making a worthy reimbursement for, in the example given above, the priceless education he was forced to relinquish or, more generally, the anguish he caused to his friend.

## THE DANGEROUS ACHASHVEIROSH—THEN AND NOW

by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

### Introduction

Chazal debate (Megillah 12a) as to whether Achashveirosh was evil and shrewd or simply a fool. In other words, a major question facing readers of Megillat Ester is whether Haman was manipulating Achashveirosh or vice versa. Unlike Ester and Mordechai who clearly are Tzaddikim, and Haman is undoubtedly a Rasha, we are unsure regarding Achashveirosh (Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik is quoted as suggesting a third possibility, namely, that Achashveirosh was both shrewd and a fool). In this essay, we will explore both possibilities which raise some vitally important contemporary ramifications.

### Achashveirosh as a Fool

The Gemara (Megillah 13b) cites Rava, who states that, "No one was as skilled at Lashon Hara (slander) as was Haman," meaning that Haman was a master manipulator. Rava interprets Haman's speech to Achashveirosh (Ester 3:8) as convincing him to view the Jews as a threat to his kingdom who could be eliminated with no cost to his rule. This passage provides a fascinating behind the scenes look at the conspiracies and thought processes of our enemies. The conversation that Rava describes between Haman and Achashveirosh seems, regrettably, to have occurred on many occasions throughout our turbulent history.

Haman begins the conversation saying, "let's eliminate them (the Jews)." Achashveirosh responds, "I am afraid of their God," for he knew that the enemies of the Jews are severely punished. Haman, in turn, says, "They neglect the Mitzvot," and their God will not save them. Achashveirosh responds that their Rabbis, though, observe the Mitzvot faithfully. Haman responds, "They are one nation," and their Rabbis will not save them

(this teaches that each Jew must assume spiritual responsibility and not assume that others will perform Mitzvot on his or her behalf). Haman then tells Achashveirosh (because, according to this view, Achashveirosh is too simple to perceive these threats) that he should not be concerned that eliminating the Jews will create a "bald spot" in his kingdom, meaning that a vacuum will not be created by eliminating the inhabitants of a portion of his kingdom, which would cause instability and a major disruption in the empire. Haman explains that since the Jews are scattered throughout the empire, their elimination will not create a vacuum.

Haman continues that Achashveirosh should not be concerned that the empire benefits from the Jews, because they are comparable

to mules that do not produce any offspring. (We Jews have understood throughout the generations that we must benefit the national weal, in order for our presence to be tolerated; similarly, the State of Israel must contribute to the world economy lest its existence not be tolerated.) Haman then tells Achashveirosh not to be concerned about an entire area in which there is a large concentration of Jews (who could effectively resist an extermination plan), since they are spread out throughout the kingdom (this teaches us that Jews should live in close proximity to each other; see the Netziv's comments to Shemot 1:7).

Haman then tells Achashveirosh that the Jews' rules differ from everyone else's, as the Jews do not eat with the Persians nor intermarry with them (this teaches that Kashrut preserves our cultural identity; similarly, Chazal forbade us to consume non-Jews' wine and cheese as a bulwark against intermarriage). Haman adds that the Jews do not honor the king's rules, as they always have some sort of excuse for why that they cannot work, such as by claiming that "today is Shabbat" or "today is Pesach." This is a typical technique of a slanderer; they make a claim that contains a minor resemblance to the truth, which is removed from its proper context and proportion (see Rashi to BeMidbar 13:27).

This continues to be a tactic of current anti-Israel

slanders as well, who claim there were Israeli massacres in Jenin in 2002, Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in 2014.

Rashi here adds that Haman claimed that Jews did not pay their taxes. This teaches that paying taxes is not only Halachically required (see Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 369) but is also quite a threat to our safety if ignored.

## Ode to Purim

by Moshe Pahmer ('15)

We all know the feeling, the patience we need  
As we sit there, so quietly, during the Megillah read,  
Waiting for the ending, so we can finally go,  
Geta candy, show costumes, or play in the snow.  
And we do this not once, but two times in a day:  
One at night, and one under the sun's rays.  
Why did the RYB'L (Megillah 4a) mandate this?  
If we heard it but once, would we really be remiss?  
Tosafot says the main reading's the second  
So why do we even need the night one, do you reckon?  
To answer this we must understand  
Purim is even greater than it seems in this land,  
For it is considered Kaballah number two (Shabbat 88a)  
Of our Torah—an acceptance on each one of you.  
And even though we did this many years past  
We're doing it again, to add to the last.  
This double acceptance, from before and from now,  
Shows the world that we've made a double vow:  
To do two things "Kimu VeKiblu"—  
And this is the responsibility of each Jew.  
So too with Purim, the point of repeating  
Is to make the second Kriat HaMegilah the "vow" that's completing  
Our reaffirmation of "Kimu VeKiblu"  
And that's why on Purim we read it—times two.

קול תורה פרשת תצוה-פורים תשע"ה

Haman's concludes his speech to Achashveirosh in a most dramatic and effective manner (we must recognize that many of our enemies are effective speakers who have the ability to sway audiences with their words; Hitler, Yemach Shemo VeZichro, unfortunately, was a mesmerizing speaker). Haman told Achashveirosh that he should destroy the Jews because they eat, drink and disgrace the king. Haman explained, "If a fly falls into a Jew's wine, he removes the fly and drink the remaining liquid. If, however, the king would touch the wine of a Jew, the Jew would stamp the goblet into the ground and not drink the wine." This is yet another example of the deceptive exaggerations of the anti-Semite.

Rava presents for us a portrait of Achashveirosh as a fool who was manipulated by Haman to annihilate the Jews. A basis for this approach is that in the first chapter of Megillat Ester, Achashveirosh is manipulated by one of his advisors (whom Chazal, not surprisingly, identify as Haman; see Megillah 12b and Tosafot s.v. Memuchan for an alternate identification) to kill his own queen. We should note that even according to this approach, Achashveirosh is not an individual of strong moral character who was overtaken by Haman. In addition, he harbors negative feelings towards Jews and needed only a Haman to overcome his inhibitions to express them.

#### *Achashveirosh as a Manipulator*

The Gemara (Megillah 13b-14a) continues, citing Rabi Abba's alternative analysis of Achashveirosh. He presents a Mashal (analogy) that illuminates Achashveirosh's thinking and tactics. He tells a story of two field owners, one who had a big mound of dirt in his field and one who had a big ditch in his field (this Mashal is alluded to in the Selichot recited by Ashkenazim on Ta'anit Esther). The one who had the ditch admired the big mound of dirt and wished he could purchase the mound of dirt to fill his ditch. The one who had the mound of dirt wished to purchase the ditch in order to dispose of his dirt. One day the two field owners met and the ditch owner asked if he could purchase the mound of dirt. The individual who owned the mound, in turn, enthusiastically urged the ditch owner to take the mound free of charge.

Haman is analogous to the ditch owner and Achashveirosh can be compared to the individual who owned the mound, as Haman was missing something and Achashveirosh had something he wanted to dispose. Haman wished to eliminate us, but he lacked the legislative authority that would permit him to do so. Achashveirosh, on the other hand, wished to do away with the Jews but was unwilling to do so himself. He feared profoundly negative consequences if his plan backfired. When Haman offered to annihilate the Jews, Achashveirosh was willing to give him the authority to execute his plan. If the plan backfired, Haman would take the blame and serve as the "scapegoat", and Achashveirosh could emerge, politically speaking, unscathed. A proof to this approach is Achashveirosh's decline of Haman's offer of 10,000 silver pieces as compensation for destroying the Jews (Ester 3:11), which demonstrates Achashveirosh's eagerness to destroy us. According to Rabi Abba, Achashveirosh is an evil individual who brilliantly manipulated Haman.

#### *Practical Lessons*

Both approaches to Achashveirosh teach very sobering lessons for today's less than ideal circumstances. The opinion that he was a fool is quite frightening, as it teaches that at times foolish individuals assume positions of great responsibility. Such leaders can be easily manipulated by corrupt advisors who guide the leader solely with the aim of advancing their own personal agendas.

On the other hand, the opinion that Achashveirosh was shrewd presents an even more sobering message. The Megillah ends with Achashveirosh still in power. Thus, a powerful individual who desires to destroy us remains on the throne of the Persian Empire. Moreover, it teaches that we need be concerned for not only the Hamans of this world, but of the Achashveiroshes as well. Unfortunately, there are many Achashveiroshes in the world who wish for the Jews to be eliminated but do not want to assume the risk entailed in doing so. They do not actively seek to harm us, but if another assumes the risk in doing so, they support him and might even cooperate with him if they feel it is safe.

A poignant example of this phenomenon would be the many Germans, Poles, Lithuanians and other Europeans who quietly harbored their hatred of Bnei Yisrael for many years but did not act on that hatred due to fear of severe negative consequences. However, when Hitler, Yemach Shemo VeZichro, assumed power, many Europeans eagerly served as accomplices to the Nazis' crimes. Unfortunately, the ambiguity regarding the character of Achashveirosh is, much to our chagrin, quite relevant today.

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