

Selected Comments of the K'tav Sofer to Megillat Esther

וְהַשְׁתִּיחַ כַּדָּת אֵין אִנֶּס כִּי־כֹן יִסַּד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל כָּל־
רַב בֵּיתוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּרִצּוֹן אִישׁ־אִישׁ:

And the drink was to each one's understanding, without any duress, for such was decreed by the king upon all the members of his household, to do the will of each and every person.

Esther 1:8

Rava said: This means that they should do according to the will of Mordechai and Haman. Mordechai [is called ish] as it is written, "A Jewish man"; and Haman, [as it is written], "A man (ish), an adversary and an enemy."

Megilla 12a

Chazal have declared (*Megilla 7b*) that on Purim one is required to drink wine until reaching the point of not recognizing the difference between the cursedness of Haman and the blessedness of Mordechai. It seems to me that the reason they established a mitzvah to get drunk is because the start of the entire story of the miracle of Purim was when Achashveirosh and Vashti became drunk at their parties. With regards to the way the Gemara describes the level to which one must drink, it is possible that Chazal decreed to actually say "blessed is Mordechai and cursed is Haman" at the Purim meal, based on the drasha that Mordechai and Haman were both giving instructions at Achashveirosh's feast. Haman was encouraging the Jews at the feast to eat and drink prohibited items, while Mordechai was admonishing them to only eat and drink permitted



Compiled by

Rabbi Robert Shur

Director, Torah Projects, Center for the Jewish Future

items. As such, when we have our feast with permitted food and drink, we bless Mordechai for what he did and curse Haman for what he tried to do. However, the halacha states that if one is in a state where one derives absolutely no benefit from eating, and is actually repulsed by it (*achilah gasah*), then there is no (biblical) prohibition against eating non-kosher items. Therefore, we drink to the point where we absolutely can't eat anything, at which point we can't really differentiate between the wickedness of Haman and the righteousness of Mordechai, since their statements wouldn't be of any consequence to us anyway.

וַיִּבְזוּ בְּעֵינָיו לְשַׁלַּח יָד בְּמֹרְדֵכָי לְבַדּוֹ כִּי־הִגִּידוּ
לוֹ אֶת־עַם מְרֹדֵכָי וַיִּבְקֹשׁ הָמָן לְהַשְׁמִיד אֶת־
כָּל־הַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְלָכוֹת אַחַשְׁוֵירוֹשׁ עִם
מְרֹדֵכָי:

And it was disgraceful [for Haman] to strike out at Mordechai alone, for he was told about the nation of Mordechai, and Haman wanted to wipe out the Jews, the nation of Mordechai, from all the lands of Achashveirosh.

Esther 3:6

The medrash describes Haman as a *bazui ben bazui* (disgraced, the son of a disgraced), similar to how the

Torah describes Esav as disgracing (*vayivez*) the birthright when he sold it to Yaakov. Why did Esav treat the birthright so lightly and declare that he had no use for it? Why didn't he care for the firstborn's portion in his father's inheritance? The Ramban, in his commentary on the Torah, explains that at that time, there was no rule of the firstborn getting a larger portion of the father's estate, and the only ramification of being a firstborn was that the younger children would need to treat the firstborn with respect. Even though it is clear that Esav had a tremendous ego, nevertheless he had no interest in getting respect from Yaakov because in his eyes, Yaakov was a disgraceful person who sat and learned Torah all day. He was not a warrior. Respect from him meant nothing, for respect is only as valuable as the worth of the person giving the respect. That is why Esav had no qualms about trading that status for a lowly bowl of lentils. The same principle applies to his spiritual son Haman. Even though it enraged Haman that Mordechai wouldn't bow to him, he couldn't react to that directly, since it would be beneath him to seek the respect of one who was so lowly in his eyes. Therefore, he had

to orchestrate a plan to wipe out the entire Jewish people in order to take his revenge on Mordechai.

Another interpretation is that Haman could have petitioned for Mordechai's death right away, but Haman in fact hated the entire Jewish people, and was looking for a way to justify killing them all. If he had killed Mordechai right away, then when he would have asked to kill the rest of the Jewish people, Achashveirosh would have accused him of only being angry at Mordechai and taking his revenge on his people. Achashveirosh would have denied his request. Therefore, he waited to strike at Mordechai until he was ready to wipe out the

The Gemara (*Megilla* 13b) writes that when the lot fell in the month that Moshe died, Haman rejoiced, but he did not know that it was also the month in which he was born. Why did he specifically rejoice that it was the month that Moshe died? Any month chosen by the lot would have commemorated the death of a tzadik.

This can be answered by recalling the episode of Moshe being told by Hashem that he wouldn't be entering the Land of Israel. This was because of the sin of the striking of the rock to produce water. Moshe prays to Hashem to be let in, and is told no. The Gemara records that Moshe's prayers took place on his final day,

him to merit entering the Land of Israel. Nevertheless, Haman assumed that Moshe was praying not to die earlier than originally determined and that his prayer was denied. Haman couldn't fathom that merit could override mazal. Therefore, Moshe's death was a sign of the negative mazal of Adar. If he had realized that Moshe was born in Adar, he would have understood that Moshe lived out the entire length of his life.

Another explanation mentioned by Chazal is that Achashveirosh was scared to attack the Jewish people because of the merit of their Torah and mitzvot, and Haman had to convince him that the Jews had lost their merit by not taking Torah and mitzvot seriously. Therefore, having the lot fall on the day that Moshe died was a good omen, because the day he died, 3,000 halachot were forgotten by the Jewish people, which Haman took as a sign that the Jews had in fact lost their merit.

Why did Haman specifically rejoice that the lot fell on the month that Moshe died? Wouldn't any month chosen by the lot commemorate the death of some tzadik in Jewish history?

entire Jewish people at once. In fact, we see that Haman's downfall came from the fact that he couldn't wait to kill Mordechai, and erected a huge gallows for Mordechai even before the time designated for the destruction of the Jewish people. When Achashveirosh heard out about that, it was the final straw that caused him to order Haman's death.

בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ נִסָּן בְּשַׁנַּת שְׁתַּיִם
עָשְׂרָה לְמֶלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵירוֹשׁ הַפִּיל פּוֹר הוּא הַגּוֹרֵל
לְפָנָי הָמֶן מִיּוֹם לְיוֹם וּמֵחֹדֶשׁ לְחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנַיִם-עָשָׂר
הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר:

In the first month, in Nissan, in the twelfth year of Achashveirosh's reign, [Haman] drew lots for the day and month, to the twelfth month, Adar.
Esther 3:7

when he reached 120 years. Clearly, Moshe was praying to be given a longer life in order to be able to enter the Land of Israel. Tosafot in *Yevamot* 50a, s.v. *Mosifin*, note that while the Gemara (*Moed Katan* 28a) writes that lifespan is based on mazal and not merit, an overwhelming merit could still be enough to be granted extra life. Therefore, even though Moshe was at the end of his life, if he had sanctified the name of Hashem in public by talking to the rock to produce water, that would have been enough merit to extend his life and enter the Land of Israel. The sin itself wasn't cutting his life short; he was dying at the proper time. However, he lost out on the opportunity that would have allowed

However, it was also the day that Moshe was born. Until that day, Pharaoh had ordered all male babies to be thrown into the Nile. Once Moshe was born, Pharaoh's diviners told him that they no longer needed to kill the baby boys. Therefore, the day of his birth is considered the very beginning of the salvation of the Jewish people in Egypt. Hashem orchestrated the lots in Shushan to fall during that month to invoke the merit of that original salvation.

That is why the Gemara records that if the year has two months of Adar, Purim should always be in the second one in order to be next to the month of Pesach. The salvation of Purim has its roots in the salvation of Pesach.

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהָמוֹן, הַכֶּסֶף נָתַן לְךָ; וְהָעָם, לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ.

And the king said to Haman: "The silver is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you."

Esther 3:11

Shouldn't Achashveirosh have said, "and you can do to the people what you like," not "do with the people"?

Also, why do we say in Al Hanissim that Haman decreed to destroy us and that our money should be plundered? Once the Jewish people are destroyed, who cares if our money would also be plundered?

My father (the Chatam Sofer) suggested that part of the decree of Haman was that anyone who killed the Jews would be allowed to keep their money. The purpose was to motivate the people to fulfill the decree.

This would also explain why Haman offered money to the king in exchange for killing the Jews. If they are really worthy of destruction, as Haman claimed, why does he need to pay money? Rather, the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 48b) says that someone who rebels against the king is killed and his money goes to the king. As such, all the money of the Jews should have gone to Achashveirosh. However, since Haman promised the money to anyone that would kill the Jews, he had to repay Achashveirosh for his losses.

Therefore, Achashveirosh replied to Haman that the people are yours to do with them as it seems good to you — the people of the kingdom are yours to help carry out your decree and you don't have to worry about the money; they can keep it.

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ חַכְמָיו וְזֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ, אִם מִזְרַע הַיְהוּדִים מְרִדְכַי אֲשֶׁר הִחְלוֹת לְנַפֵּל לְפָנָיו לֹא תוּכַל לוֹ כִּי נָפֹל תִּפּוֹל לְפָנָיו.

Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife to him: "If Mordechai, before whom you have begun to fall, be of the Jews, you shall not prevail against him, but (you) shall surely fall before him."

Esther 6:13

R' Elazar Ashkenazi has a general principle that when someone is at the apex of their mazal, that is when they will begin to fall. Therefore, normally, if someone were to experience the mazal of Mordechai — to be led on the horse of the king in fine clothing and experience such greatness — that would be the peak of their experience and usually they would then start to fall. However, Mordechai was not a regular person. He was a descendant of Yehuda, who is suited for royalty. Therefore, Haman was being told that if Mordechai was from the tribe of Yehuda, don't expect him to fall at this point but rather Haman would fall before him.

כִּי נִמְכַרְנוּ אֲנִי וְעַמִּי לְהִשָּׁמֵד לְהִרוֹג וּלְאַבֵּד ... וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה מִי הוּא זֶה וְאֵיזָה הוּא אֲשֶׁר-מָלְאוּ לְבוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן:

For we have been sold, me and my people, for destruction ... and Achashveirosh said to Queen Esther, who has done such a thing, who has the audacity?

Esther 7:4-5

Did Achashveirosh so quickly forget that he was the one who agreed to Haman's request to destroy the Jews? The answer is based on the statement of the Gemara (*Megilla* 12b) that if not for the first proclamation Achashveirosh sent out after Vashti's death, the Jewish people would not have survived the second proclamation (that called for their

destruction). The first proclamation (Esther 1:22) stated that each man should rule his house and speak the language of his nation. This implied that men should only marry women from their nation, in order to be able to speak the language of their nation in their home. Therefore, Achashveirosh assumed Esther was a member of his nation — the king would obviously adhere to the



**The K'tav Sofer:
Rabbi Abraham Samuel
Benjamin Sofer
(1815-1871)**

R. Shmuel Binyamin Sofer was a son of R. Moshe Sofer, the famed Chatam Sofer and he was also a grandson of R. Akiva Eger. After the death of his father, K'tav Sofer succeeded his father as rabbi of Pressburg, a position that he held for thirty years. His writings are titled K'tav Sofer and they include a multi-volume commentary on the Talmud, a multi-volume commentary on the Torah and multiple volumes of responsa.

proclamation as well. When she cried that someone had sold her nation to destruction, he assumed it was his nation that was being destroyed. When Esther said that it was Haman, Achashveirosh initially thought Haman wanted to destroy him and his nation. Even after he realized that Esther was from the Jewish nation, his initial anger and fury at Haman burned so strongly that he decided to kill him as a punishment, thus ending his evil decree against the Jews.

וּמִרְדֵּכַי יֵצֵא מִלְּפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ, בְּלְבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת
 תְּכֵלֶת וְחֹוּר, וְעֵטְרַת זָהָב גְּדוּלָה, וְתִכְרִיךְ בּוּץ
 וְאַרְגָּמָן; וְהָעִיר שִׁשׁוּן, צָהָלָה וְשִׂמְחָה.

And Mordechai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a robe of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan shouted and was glad.

Esther 8:15

Why does the verse say that the entire city of Shushan was glad? Shouldn't it have said that the Jews of Shushan were glad?

The Gemara (*Megilla* 12a) says that Achashveirosh was foolish and fickle. Everyone in his kingdom realized this because at first he honored the Jews by inviting them to his feast, and only a short while later he was ready to destroy them. Everyone knew Achashveirosh was being manipulated by Haman. The people were worried because they realized that today the Jews were the victims, and tomorrow it could be them.

Therefore, when Mordechai emerged as the new second-in-command, everyone was happy, not just the Jews, because everyone recognized him as a good leader who only wanted to make sure that the Jews had religious autonomy and freedom. They knew that nobody was in danger anymore.

לְיְהוּדִים, הָיְתָה אוֹרָה וְשִׂמְחָה, וְשִׁשׁוּן, וְיָקָר.
And for the Jews there was light, happiness, joy and honor.

Esther 8:16

Light refers to Torah, happiness is Yom Tov, joy is milah and honor is tefillin.

Megilla 16b

What is the relevance of these specific mitzvos? Furthermore, once we are told about Torah, why mention the other mitzvot? Doesn't Torah imply all mitzvot? With regards to Yom Tov, the Gemara (*Megilla* 13b) says that one of the tactics Haman used to slander the Jews to Achashveirosh was a claim that the Jews were always trying to get out of having to do work for the king by saying that it was Shabbos or Yom Tov, and they were forbidden to do work that day. Therefore it is logical to assume that once he made that claim, the Jews were afraid to keep Yom Tov. They did not want to validate the claims of Haman. Once Haman was defeated, they were free to keep Shabbos and Yom Tov again.

With regards to milah and tefillin, the Gemara (*Megilla* 11b) says that Achashveirosh scheduled his feast based on his own calculation that the time for Hashem to return the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael and rebuild the Beit Hamikdash had passed. He assumed that Hashem had given up on His promise and there was no danger to his rule over them. He therefore invited all the Jews to the feast in order to show them that although Hashem had given up on them (*kivyachol*), he would not. Achashveirosh treated them with the utmost respect in the hopes of getting them to completely reject the Torah and assimilate into the general society. Therefore, Hashem punished the Jews for attending the feast of

Achashveirosh. The whole point of the feast was to commemorate the fact that there would be no redemption and no rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash.

Rashi on the verse (Devarim 11:18) “you shall place these on your hearts,” — referring to tefillin and mezuzah (the second paragraph of Kriat Shema) — introduces the possibility of thinking that in the exile the Jewish people don't have to keep the mitzvot of tefillin and mezuzah. Why would one have such an assumption? Because tefillin, and by extension mezuzah, are symbols of the Jews being the chosen nation. The Gemara (*Brachos* 6a) says that the tefillin shel rosh is the glory of the Jewish people. The mezuzah is also a sign that the home is a Jewish home. Therefore, one might have thought that while in Eretz Yisrael, being a Jew is a glorious thing, but in exile it's not so glorious to be identified as a Jew. Perhaps it is even a chilul Hashem for us to so clearly identify ourselves as Jews while in exile because we are on such a low level. Therefore, the Torah tells us that even in exile we need to keep the mitzvot of tefillin and mezuzah because we need to believe that even in exile it is a glorious thing to be identified as a Jew knowing that one day, we will definitely be returned to Eretz Yisrael. The same concept can apply to the mitzvah of milah, which is the seal that identifies us as Jews.

Therefore, when the Jewish people were miraculously saved in the time of Achashveirosh, when it was abundantly clear that even in the exile, Hashem had singled us out as His nation, we were once again able to appreciate the mitzvot of milah and tefillin.

קִיְמוּ וְקִבְלוּ הַיְהוּדִים עֲלֵיהֶם וְעַל־זֶרְעָם וְעַל כָּל־הַנְּלוּיִם עֲלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר לִהְיוֹת עֲשִׂים אֶת שְׁנֵי הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה כְּכַתְּבָם וְכַזְּמָנָם בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה:
The Jews accepted and upheld upon themselves and their future generations and those that joined with them, not to fail, to keep these two days as they were written in their times in every year.

Esther 9:27

The Gemara (*Megilla* 7a) quotes Shmuel as saying this is the basis for the fact that Megillat Esther was written with Divine inspiration. The double phrasing of *kimu* and *kiblu* refers to the fact that in Heaven they fulfilled what was accepted on Earth, meaning a heavenly approbation of the establishment of Purim. Tosafot there ask: In *Masechet Shabbat* (88a), Rava says that the Torah was accepted at Sinai under duress. Hashem held a mountain over the heads of the Jewish people to force them to accept the Torah, and for a time, the Jewish people had a valid argument for not keeping the Torah. It wasn't until the time of Purim that the Torah was accepted out of joy. Rava's proof text

are the words *kimu* and *kiblu* found in our verse. How then can one use this verse to prove that Purim was accepted in Heaven? Isn't that an alternate interpretation of the verse?

As an aside, why is it that we find that after the destruction of the First Temple, the exile experience was relatively mild, with the Jews enjoying positions of power and luxury in their host countries (as we see with Esther and Mordechai), whereas the exile after the destruction of the Second Temple, including our current exile, is marked with suffering, destruction and wandering? The Rashb"a in a responsum suggests that even though the Jewish people only accepted the Torah under duress, and had a valid argument not to keep it, they were still required to keep the Torah while living in the Land of Israel because the Land itself cannot be inhabited by a nation that doesn't abide by the laws of Hashem. The Torah states that the ground would literally vomit out violators. We can only settle the Land of Israel on condition that we keep

the Torah. Therefore, when the Jews stopped observing the Torah during the period of the First Temple, they were only thrown out of the Land. There was no punishment upon them as a people. However, after the story of Purim, the Jews accepted the Torah willingly. Therefore, when there is a national laxity in Torah observance, it is no longer enough to be thrown out of the Land. The nation itself must be punished for not keeping the laws of the Torah.

Tosafot (*Shabbat* 88a) asks how it could be that the Jews had a valid argument not to keep the Torah? According to the Gemara (*Sotah* 37b) they willingly accepted it in the plains of Moab before they entered the Land of Israel at Har Grizim and Har Eval. The Mordechai (*Shabbat*, ad loc.) suggests that since the entrance to the Land of Israel was dependent on their acceptance of the Torah, it was another forced acceptance which they could rightfully argue against. The *Teshuvot Maharik* asks: in halacha, if someone forces you to sell



The Torah tells us that even in exile we need to keep the mitzvos of tefillin and mezuzah because even in exile it is a glorious thing to be identified as a Jew, knowing that one day, we will be returned to Eretz Yisrael.

something by withholding something of yours, that is considered a sale under duress, but if someone only withholds something they promised you, that is not considered a sale under duress. Therefore, this answer of the Mordechai depends on whether or not the Land of Israel had already belonged to the Jewish people like an inheritance. If so, Hashem was threatening to take away something that belonged to them if they didn't accept the Torah. However, if it was a gift that was yet to be given, then their acceptance of the Torah on these conditions was not considered duress. This is in fact a dispute in the Gemara (*Baba Batra* 119a). Shmuel is of the opinion that the Land of Israel was not like an inheritance. According to him, the acceptance of the Torah at Moab was not under duress. It is and was, in fact, a valid acceptance. Therefore he rejects Rava's interpretation of

At the time of the Purim story, when the Jewish people collectively accepted the Torah willingly, Mordechai established national feasting and rejoicing to show our joyful acceptance of the Torah.

kimu and *kiblu*. The acceptance of the Torah took place at Moab, not during the Purim story. As such, he assumes that *kimu* and *kiblu* must be a proof that the Heavens fulfilled what was accepted on Earth and Esther was in fact written with Divine inspiration.

Why did Mordechai establish days of joy and feasting in response to the miracle of Purim? Would it not have been enough to establish a requirement to thank Hashem? Perhaps the answer is based on the episode of the acceptance of the Torah in *Parshat Yitro*, where it is written that those on the mountain were eating and rejoicing. They did this to show they were accepting the Torah out of joy and not duress. The rest of the Jewish people, who did in fact accept the Torah under duress, did not eat or rejoice. Therefore, at the time of the Purim story, when the Jewish people collectively accepted the Torah willingly, Mordechai established national feasting and rejoicing to show our joyful acceptance of the Torah.

Even after the miracle of Purim, couldn't the Jewish people still argue that they only accepted the Torah at their time under duress, out of the fear of Haman? They were forced to keep the Torah to win favor in the eyes of Hashem and remove the threat that Hashem had brought to the Jewish people? Perhaps the two explanations of *kimu v'kiblu* can work together. We find that in general we are not supposed to rejoice at the fall of our enemies, so how can we establish days of rejoicing for Purim?

The joy of Pesach is not because of the destruction that befell the Egyptians, but rather to celebrate the giving of the Torah, which we recognize would not have happened if our enemies weren't wiped out. So perhaps we can rejoice at the downfall of Haman because that too allowed the Jewish people to begin keeping the mitzvot they were unable to keep under his rule of terror. However, if we were only keeping the mitzvot at that point because we were forced to, because we wanted to win Hashem's favor, it would be difficult to argue that we should rejoice at the opportunity to keep them; on the contrary, we would rather not have the opportunity and just be exempt from keeping them because of outside circumstances. The fact that we were able to establish days of rejoicing after our salvation, and that rejoicing was validated in the Heavens, proves that in fact the Jewish people were willingly committing themselves to keeping the entire Torah anew.



Find more shiurim and articles on Megillat Esther at <http://www.yutorah.org/Nach/Esther>