



## **PURIM WITH THE SLONIMER REBBE: A PATH TO PERFECTION**

**R**abbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky, better known as the Slonimer Rebbe (1911–2000), has a magnificent approach to the day of Purim. In a stunning piece,<sup>1</sup> he manages to encapsulate the day in its entirety, weaving together the mitzvos (commandments) of the day into a single entity. According to the Slonimer Rebbe, Purim is a “path to perfection,” a day where we can reach a sense of *shleimus* (completeness) in our *avodas Hashem* (service of Hashem).

He bases his approach on a fascinating interpretation of a challenging and cryptic passage in Chazal. The Gemara (*Megillah 7b*) quotes Rava who states, “*Chayav inish l’besumei b’Puraya ad d’lo yada ben arur*



*Haman l’baruch Mordechai*,” which means, “One is obligated to become inebriated on Purim until he does not know the difference between blessed be Mordechai and cursed be Haman.” Troubled by this statement, the Slonimer Rebbe wonders how we can

make sense of it. After all, Purim is a day where we can attain great heights. It is a day of *kabbalos haTorah b’ratzon*, a day when we willingly accept the Torah, and so much more. One that requires our complete consciousness and full use of our faculties!

He suggests that if read carefully, Rava could be telling us that the object we are supposed to become inebriated with is **the day of Purim itself, not wine.** “*Chayav inish l’besumei b’Puraya*,” a person is obligated to become intoxicated “**with Purim.**” Meaning to say, the medium through which we become intoxicated is the day of Purim itself, with all its incredible revelations and opportunities. The obligation of the day is to allow ourselves to be swept

away by the experience of awesome holiness and closeness to Hashem.

With this he interprets the end of the phrase, “*ad d’lo yada ben arur Haman l’baruch Mordechai*,” to directly relate to the mitzvot of the day, namely reading the Megillah, *mishloach manos* (sending gifts), and *kabbalos haTorah b’ratzon*.

The Maharal (Rabbi Yehuda Loew, 1512–1609) notes<sup>2</sup> that there are three critical dimensions of our *avodas Hashem* that we must perfect. We must be complete in our relationship with Hashem, complete in our relationship with others, and complete in our relationship with ourselves. The mitzvos of Purim correspond to these three: 1) Reading the Megillah corresponds to our relationship with Hashem. 2) *Mishloach manos* corresponds to our relationship with others. 3) *Kabbalas haTorah b’ratzon* corresponds to our relationship with ourselves. In each of these, suggests the Slonimer Rebbe, there is a concept of *arur Haman* and *baruch Mordechai*.

### **Complete in our Relationship with Hashem**

There are times in life when we feel close to Hashem, when we keenly feel His help and guidance. In these moments, we feel our lives infused with meaning and joy. These times can be described as those of “*baruch Mordechai*.” But there are also times when we feel distant from Hashem, when He seems hidden and uninvolved. These are times of “*arur Haman*.”

On Purim, Megillas Esther allows us to realize that Hashem loves us always, regardless of our shortcomings. The Chassam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer, 1762–1839) writes<sup>3</sup> that of all the miracles in the Megillah, the greatest was the execution of Vashti. Her overthrow was essential for Esther’s rise to power and the eventual salvation she brought. Achashverosh loved Vashti deeply; she had transformed him from a stable boy to a king. His acquiescence to her execution, then, was nothing short of

a miracle. At the time of this miracle though, Bnei Yisrael were participants in Achashverosh’s debaucheries. Nonetheless, Hashem miraculously orchestrated the series of events leading up to her death. We learn from this that even when we are doing the wrong thing, we are still beloved unto Hashem, and we recognize that our connection to Hashem is not severed by our sins. We reach a state of “*ad d’lo yada ben arur Haman l’baruch Mordechai*,” when we realize “*bein kach u’bein atem keruyim banim*,”<sup>4</sup> regardless of what we have done or how far we have strayed we are always Hashem’s children.

### **Complete in our Relationship with Others**

Each and every one of us has people we feel close to, who we love and can count on. These people are the “*baruch Mordechais*” of our lives. There are also people we encounter who we don’t view in such a positive light, our “*arur Hamans*.”<sup>5</sup> On Purim, we

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fulfill the mitzvah of *mishloach manos*, sending gifts of food to one another to engender friendship. Some suggest that it is a greater mitzvah to send *mishloach manos* specifically to an enemy.<sup>6</sup> Through *mishloach manos*, we reopen lines of communication and make amends. Through this mitzvah then, we achieve “*ad d’lo yada ben arur Haman l’baruch Mordechai*,” a sense of unity where every Jew becomes cherished and loved.

### Complete in our Relationship with Ourselves

When we examine our relationship with ourselves, we also find dimensions of “*baruch Mordechai*” and “*arur Haman*.” When we engage in spiritual pursuits such as tefillah or Talmud Torah, we feel in tune with ourselves. We focus on Hashem, and we feel self-actualized. This is a time of “*baruch Mordechai*.” When we deal with the mundane, however, we may feel a disconnect between our *neshama* (soul) and *guf* (physical body). When doing business or eating, our mind is not focused on *avodas Hashem*, and we may feel as if we are not fulfilling our potential. This is a time of “*arur Haman*.” On Purim we reach a point of “*ad d’lo yada*.” We recognize that regardless of whether we are involved in the majestic or the mundane, both are *avodas Hashem* and should be conducted as such. As Rav Yitzchak Hutner (1906–1980) writes,<sup>7</sup> we must learn to live a “broad life,” a life where everything we do is seen through the perspective of *avodas Hashem*, not a “double life,” one in which we compartmentalize the parts of our day. Through *kabbalos haTorah b’ratzon* on Purim, we are not just reaccepting the commandments we need to perform, we are reaccepting

## Another Take on

### Arur Haman and Baruch Mordechai

יש מפרשים כי ארור המן עולה למנין ברוך מרדכי ... ובעל המנהגות כתב ונראה בעיני שפיוט היה שעל הבית האחד עונין ארור המן ועל הבית האחר עונין ברוך מרדכי וצריך צילתא שפעמים שאין אדם מתכוין וטועה.

אבודרהם, פורים

[What does it mean that one doesn’t know the difference between the blessing of Mordechai and curse of Haman?] Some explain that “*arur Haman*” is the same value (in gematria) as “*baruch Mordechai*.” The “*Ba’al HaMinhagot*” suggested that they used to sing a song and the refrain of one stanza was “*arur Haman*” and the refrain from the next stanza was “*baruch Mordechai*.” Reciting the proper refrain without making a mistake requires a sharp mind.

*Avudraham, Purim*

a whole new way of life. In the words of the Maggid of Mezeritch, we come to the recognition of “*m’lo kol ha’aretz kinyanecha*,”<sup>8</sup> that the entire world is full of “*kinyanecha*,” ways of acquiring and accessing You, Hashem.

### Conclusion

In life, we often find ourselves vacillating between times of confusion and times of clarity. Regarding all three dimensions, we at times feel a sense of distance and disconnect. We can feel isolated from Hashem, from our colleagues and friends, and even from our true selves. On Purim, these lines between darkness and light, between *arur Haman* and *baruch Mordechai* become blurred. It is a day where we come to the realization that we are always closely connected to Hashem, where every Jew is a beloved friend, and that every situation we encounter is one in which we can fulfill the *ratzon* (will) of the *Borei Olam* (Creator of the World). May we all merit to achieve the Slonimer Rebbe’s vision of Purim, attaining great heights and true *shleimus* in our

*avodas Hashem!*

### Endnotes

1. *Nesivos Shalom, Maamarei Purim, Maamer Chayav Inish L’besumei B’Puraya Ad D’lo Yada.*
2. *Derech Chaim chapter 1 mishna 2.*
3. *Toras Moshe, Megillat Esther pg. 373.*
4. *Gemara, Kidushin 36a.*
5. The Slonimer Rebbe offers an important psychological insight as he notes that we can view others in this manner for one of two reasons: 1) Certain people in truth are not such good people, 2) When we are in a state of depression or despair, we tend to view others as being imperfect and focus on their flaws.
6. *Kovetz Halachot Purim chapter 15 halacha 33.* See also footnote 41.
7. *Pachad Yitzchak, Igros U’ksavim pg. 184-185.*
8. *Tehillim 104:24.*