

PURIM 5781 MOOR LANE



Congratulations to everyone who studied Megillat Esther in our joint learning:

R' Mord Maman, R' Namir, Daniel Tichbi, R' Shmuel Livshin, Rafi Marshall, R' Stamler, Antony Hodari, R' Aharon Gillis, Dr Yehuda Marshall, R' David Shasha, Ben Hassan, R' Moshe Wieder, Yaakov Dozetas, Eric Sievers, R' David Schlama, Fabian Borocin.
Chazak ve'ematz!

Here are some Divrei Torah on the megilla, inspired by our learning.

Mord Maman, Uprooting the Ideology of Amalek though the Purim Mitzvot

The threat of Haman had been removed but there was still work to be done, the original edict was still in place. Esther once again beseeched the King for the opportunity for the Jews to defend themselves against those who wished to destroy them. Her wish was granted and the Jews mustered and fought for their lives on the 13th (and 14th) of Adar and celebrated on the following day. A celebration of מְשֻׁלָּחִים וּמְשֻׁמָּעִים. Mordechai then sent out letters charging his fellow Jews to celebrate the 14th and 15th of every year as Purim, days of feasting and merrymaking, sending מְשֻׁלָּחִים, gifts to one another and מְתָנוּת לְאֲבִיּוֹנִים, presents to the poor.

We are all familiar with the four mitzvot of Purim, the megillah is where we recount the story and the feast celebrates another successful survival against an existential threat. Why are the other two mitzvot part of the obligations of the day, of course it's nice to send presents to friends, and we all know the centrality of tzedaka in our communities but why do we make a point of these on Purim?

Purim was another chapter in the battle between the people of Israel and Amalek. Amalek as a nation and an ideology has engaged in battle with the nation of Israel ever since we emerged from Egypt. The initial attack en route to Sinai came when we "were famished and weary" and he "cut down all the stragglers in your rear" as Rashi explains in Devarim 25:18 that Amalek capitalised on the divide in the camp, when there was a weak spot in our defences. A breach was exposed between God and His people and among the people themselves. Amalek jumped at the opportunity in the wilderness and Haman used the same play in Shushan too as he accused the Jewish people of being a nation "scattered and divided amongst the nations". The whole process of the Purim story brought the people together, in fact the immediate response of Esther was "Go, assemble all the Jews who live in

Shushan" the beginning of a time of reconciliation for the people. By the end of the ordeal the Jewish people united once more, a vital precursor to their return to the land of Israel to rebuild the Bet HaMikdash,

As we look towards celebrating Purim in a time of Covid-19 we have had a year to ponder how many of the things we took for granted have been denied to us for so long. We may have never given a second thought to turning up to Bet Kneset and seeing our friends and close ones daily or weekly, never realised just how much we would miss our weekly kiddush. We haven't been able to invite our friends or family over for a Shabbat meal for a while now. These are simple things we have always done that have helped communities to thrive. We have persevered through these times, attending the Bet Kneset in the numbers we can, keeping in touch via Zoom. Purim is a reminder of the importance and value of community, and these two mitzvot will help keep the flame of community burning this year. Purim celebrates the community. Purim was a time not when an individual was targeted but the entire community. There was no way to escape the destiny of the collective and when the redemption came it came for all. We do not celebrate Purim alone, in normal years we read the Megillah together, have Purim parties together and

send the gifts of food and money to each other. This year various aspects will be curtailed but we must not fully disengage and withdraw, we can still show we believe in the community when we give each other gifts of food or better still when we reach into our pockets and give gifts to the poor.

Amalek saw life as arbitrary and random, they believed everything is random and meaningless. Nothing has meaning, including people. A worldview that would think nothing of dooming a nation to destruction with the throw of a dice and certainly not a worldview that would think of welfare systems to better the lives of those in need. The mitzvot of Purim stand in stark contrast, a day which demonstrates the providence of the Almighty, showing that there is rhyme and reason to the universe. Therefore, a day of community, a day of gifts of to our friends and to the poor. The antidote to Amalek.



Rafi Marshall Esther's Altruism

Mordechai has sent a message to Esther explaining to her about the decree hovering over the Jewish people.

In 4.11 Esther sends a response to Mordechai arguing the case against going to the king. 'All the king's servants and the people in the king's provinces know that any man or woman who comes to the king without being called, there is a standard rule of death....' The Malbim asks four questions and answers them by weaving an elaborate answer which gives us much insight into the many subtleties of the situation.

1. Why does Esther stress "the king's servants" and also "the people in the king's provinces"?
2. Why does she use the phrase "there is a standard rule of death", rather than more simply, "shall die"?
3. Why was she so unwilling (on her lofty level) to give up her own life to save the whole Jewish nation?
4. Why did she add the apparently irrelevant fact that she had not been called to the king for thirty days?

Esther was claiming that since the rule against entering the king was so well known, and since there was "a standard rule of death" with no

exceptions whatsoever that entering the King's chambers without being summoned results in an automatic death penalty, this meant the king had little room for manoeuvre to overlook her illegal entry. Therefore, if the King then decided to stretch out his golden sceptre, this would not show that all was well and that he had overlooked the entering without permission. Rather, the death penalty had been decreed, and his signal with the sceptre would be a sign that the decree had been revoked.

Esther was arguing, that in such a circumstance, when the king has just actively pardoned her from execution, how could she be in a position to begin an argument to save the lives of all of her people, having used up all her 'credit' to save herself!?

Furthermore, the fact that Esther had not been summoned to the King for so long, was a reason to wait. For it was inevitable that very soon she would be invited and would then be able to argue the case to Achashverosh on much firmer ground.

It was clear from all the above that Esther was intent solely on the best outcome for saving the people and was not in the slightest focused on her own personal situation.



R' Aharon Gillis Enemies and Haters

9.1 On the day when the **enemies** of the Jews hoped to overcome them, it was turned around so the Jews overcame their **haters**. 12.16. They rested from their **enemies** and killed their **haters**. Note the two terms 'enemies' and 'haters' and the change from 'rested from' to 'killed'.

Based on comments of the Gaon of Vilna we can explain that the haters were the anti-Semites stirring up the common people to be enemies and actively attack us. The Purim miracle promoted the prestige of Mordechai and Esther; this overcame and discouraged the haters who would have stirred up the enmity. So, the Jews rested from their enemies because these enemies simply melted away once the haters were no longer inciting them, and so the Jews were able to kill the haters who instigated the enmity.

R' Moishe Wieder A Royal Ego Battle

The passuk says "hamalka Vashti" when describing her refusal to attend the party. Previously it was always Vashti hamalka.

According to the Malbim this change represents a power struggle between the king and the queen. Achashverosh wanted to show she was queen because of him. She refused to come because – being

descended from royalty as opposed to her husband - she was intrinsically a queen: 'Hamalka Vashti'.

This was Achashverosh's plan: to eradicate the status quo and announce himself as supreme leader with no "establishment" to question his power. Always a bad omen for the Jews...

R' Shmuel Oppenheimer Spiritual or Physical Decree?

Queen Esther said to King Achashverosh: "For how can I manage to look on at the bad which will befall my people and how can I manage to witness the loss of my birthplace".

Esther seems to be repeating herself here. What is the difference between the 'bad' which will befall them and the 'loss' of her birthplace? The Bet Halevi explains that the decree was only applicable to those who were determined to stick to keeping Torah and Mitzvot. If a person would have forsaken his religion and joined the Persians, he would have been spared. *L'abed* [loss] he explains, means lost to their religion. So, Esther was bemoaning: how can I withstand looking on at the evil which will befall those of my people who refuse to forsake their religion - here she used the word *Ami* – my people - since she was referring to those who wouldn't

abandon their religion. And if King Achashverosh would say to her that there is a way for them to be saved – by forsaking their religion – then she added – how can I witness the loss of my birthplace.... because they would be lost to the Jewish Nation.

The Bet Halevi is seemingly of the opinion that the threat to the Jews at that time was primarily a spiritual Holocaust. By contrast, the Levush Mordechai explains that the reason why on Chanukah the Sages fixed *Hallel V'Hodaah* (Praise and Thanksgiving) and on Purim *Mishteh V'Simcha* (Feasting and Joy) was because on Chanukah the threat was only a spiritual one against serving Hashem, so we commemorate the salvation with *Hallel V'Hodaah*. Purim however, he explains, was a threat to our physical existence, where forsaking our religion would not have helped us, and so we commemorate it with the physical action of *Mishteh V'simcha*. The Levush is clearly of the opinion that the threat was an entirely physical one.

The Megillat S'tarim, in his commentary on Megillat Esther, also explains *L'abed* to mean lost from their religion. He writes that King Achashverosh wanted to achieve this through enticement and persuasion by means of the large series of parties which he hosted;

however, Haman wanted to achieve this forcibly, decreeing that one would be killed unless he would forsake his religion.

Rabbi Stamler Hoist by his own Petard

Haman's plans all rebounded on him. He built tall gallows to broadcast his enemy's death – hence these same gallows were visible from the palace, so when Harbona pointed them out to the angry king, Haman's death penalty was immediately pronounced. He tried to kill the Jews and destroy their property – his estate was transferred to Esther. He sought to terrorise the Jews with his authority and encourage their enemies to pogroms – his authority was given to Mordechai [without any request from Esther] - the fear of whom prevented any pogroms.

Everyone has to do their part in sanctifying G-d's name. Some do it by accomplishing good things; others only by the demonstration of G-d's power when He destroys that person through his own actions.

