

LIKKUTEI SICHOS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

by the
Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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“5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL”

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
 Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** עי"ה
 ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד
Shagalov
 Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766
 Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** עי"ה
Ekman
 Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765
 Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** עי"ה
Marenburg
 Passed away on the second day
 of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766
 Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
 ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** עי"ה
Ekman (Santiago, Chile)
 Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769
 ת. נ. צ. ג. ה.
AND IN HONOR OF
 Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתח'ל
Shagalov
DEDICATED BY
 Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחי
Shagalov

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LIKKUTEI SICHOS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

RELATING TO THE WEEKLY SECTIONS OF THE TORAH AND
SPECIAL OCCASIONS IN THE JEWISH CALENDAR

by the
Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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Volume VII: *Shmos*

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In English rendition
by
Rabbi Eliyahu Touger

ZACHOR

THE COST OF DELAY

The *Haftorah* for *Parshas Zachor*¹ relates how King Shaul had mercy on Agag, King of Amalek, and on the choice herds and flocks of that nation. This ran contrary to G-d's will, and for this reason, G-d took the kingship away from Shaul and transferred it to David.

The Torah reading and *Haftorah* of *Parshas Zachor* are connected to Purim; this is the reason they are read on the *Shabbos* preceding that holiday. The connection is obvious. Haman is described as “the Agagite,”² which means he descended from the Agag mentioned in the *Haftorah* as king of the Amalekites, and a direct descendant of Amalek.³

This theme is also reflected in *Parshas Zachor* itself, which includes the *mitzvah* of remembering Amalek's attack on the newborn Jewish nation.

The connection is further emphasized by our Sages' statement⁴ that Haman was born because Shaul did not kill Agag immediately. Thus the decree against the Jewish people initiated by Haman was a direct product of Saul's delay.

All matters recorded in the Torah are precise. Thus not only the *Haftorah* reading as a totality, but all of its particulars teach us lessons that relate to Purim. This applies also with

1. *I Shmuel* 15:1-34.

2. *Esther* 3:1 *et al.*

3. See *Targum* and *Targum Sheni*, *Esther* 3:1.

4. See *Megillah* 13a; *Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu Rabbah*, ch. 24, *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Beshalach*, sec. 268.

regard to Shaul's explanation⁵ that he brought the sheep and herds of Amalek "to sacrifice to G-d your L-rd," and Shmuel's reply:⁶ "Obeying [G-d] is preferable to sacrifice... You have spurned the word of G-d."

REASON, AND ABOVE REASON

On the verse,⁷ "When Shaul had ruled for one year," our Sages comment:⁸ "With regard to sin, Shaul was untainted, like a child one year old." As such, we can understand that the reason he did not kill Agag and the choice herds and flocks was not because he did not want to obey G-d's word; rather, he had an explanation for his conduct which was acceptable according to logic within the realm of holiness. Indeed, when Shmuel rebuked him, Shaul replied:⁹ "I have fulfilled the word of G-d." He didn't understand that he had rejected G-d's command. On the contrary, according to his conception, he had obeyed G-d's word.

Shaul understood the spiritual dynamic involved in sacrifice, and knew that by sacrificing an animal to G-d, the darkness of material existence is transformed into light.¹⁰ And "there is an advantage to light over darkness,"¹¹ i.e., from the darkness is generated an "advantage" of light — a higher quality of light than would otherwise exist. Shaul thought this motif would find consummate fulfillment by bringing the sheep and herds of Amalek as sacrifices. For Amalek is "the first of nations,"¹² the source for all evil.¹³ Thus by sacrificing

5. *I Shmuel* 15:15.

6. *Ibid.*: 22-23.

7. *Ibid.* 13:1.

8. *Yoma* 22b.

9. *I Shmuel* 15:20.

10. See the explanation of this concept in the *sichah* of *Parshas Terumah* in this series.

11. *Koheles* 2:13.

12. *Bamidbar* 24:20.

13. See *Torah Or*, *Megillas Esther* 95a; the *maamar* entitled *Zachor*, 5665, *et al.*

animals associated with such profound spiritual darkness, it ought to be possible to tap a higher level of light.

But his failing was that “Shaul followed his reason.”¹⁴ Although his conduct could be rationalized, he lacked a complete sense of *kabbalas ol*, surrender of self to G-d’s will.¹⁵ Therefore although G-d had commanded:¹⁶ “Utterly destroy everything possessed by Amalek,” Shaul felt the matter was not clear.

This point was underscored by Shmuel’s answer: “Obeying [G-d] is preferable to a sacrifice, and hearkening [surpasses] the fat of rams.”

On the verse,¹⁷ “All the fat should be given to G-d,” our Rabbis comment¹⁸ that the word *cheilev*, “fat,” can also be rendered as “choice parts,” and thus they interpret the verse as a command to use the most choice of our possessions in G-d’s service. And if this applies with regard to our material possessions, how much more so with regard to our spiritual possessions — the powers and potentials we have been granted.

14. *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5627, p. 173; 5629, p. 283.

15. For this reason “G-d tore the kingdom of Israel” (*I Shmuel* 15:28) away from Shaul, following the principle of “measure for measure.” For kingship is based on *kabbalas ol*, giving oneself over to the king in awe of his majesty.

Similarly, it is because of the virtue of *kabbalas ol*, of which David served as the paradigm, as it is written (*Tehillim* 131:2): “I have certainly stilled and quieted myself” that the kingship was conveyed upon him. (In that verse, the word *domamti*, rendered as “quieted myself,” relates to the word *domaim*, inanimate matter. With regard to self-concern, David was like a stone; he had no feelings whatsoever.)

A further comparison of the Divine service of Shaul and David is found in *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. I, *Parshas Shemini*, and the sources mentioned there.

16. *I Shmuel* 15:3.

17. *Vayikra* 3:16. As explained in *Torah Or*, p. 29d, and *Likkutei Torah*, *Pinchas* p. 78b, this verse serves as an analogy teaching that pleasure — our deepest and most choice potential — must be dedicated to G-d.

18. See *Rambam*, *Mishneh Torah*, the conclusion of *Hilchos Issurei Mizbeach*. See also the *sichah* to *Parshas Mishpatim* in this series, where this concept is discussed.

The most refined of our spiritual potentials is intellect, and we must use it in our Divine service. It is not sufficient to serve G-d merely with *kabbalas ol*, unquestioning commitment, for this will at times result in Divine service carried out without motivation; a person will do as he is commanded, but his devotion will go no deeper.

For this reason, a person must also serve G-d with his intellect, understanding G-d's will to the full extent of his abilities, and in this way drawing close to Him. This is what is meant by "sacrifice" and "fat" in the above verse.

Nevertheless, "obeying is preferable to a sacrifice and... fat." The commitment of *kabbalas ol* surpasses that of intellect. Firstly, when one follows one's reason, one can err, as *Shaul* did. Moreover, even when one is able to appreciate what G-d wants, a decision to follow His will based on one's reason does not match the surrender of self and *bittul* that stems from *kabbalas ol*. For when a person obeys out of an intellectual imperative, his self-image remains intact; he has not put himself to one side. But when one obeys out of *kabbalas ol*, one is surrendering and nullifying his self to G-d; that is the advantage of this mode of Divine service.

Indeed, the very fact that we serve G-d through intellect should itself be an expression of *kabbalas ol*. For it is G-d's will that we serve Him with our minds. This should be our motivation in using our minds for Divine service.

THE MEANS TO COMBAT HAMAN

Kabbalas ol is described¹⁹ as "the gate to ascent," the entrance to all spiritual matters. If *kabbalas ol* is lacking, one is not a medium for holiness, and all possible forms of evil can result. It was in this way that *Shaul*, following his reason and not killing *Agag* immediately, allowed to be born the man who desired to annihilate the entire Jewish people.

19. *Zohar*, Vol. I, p. 8a.

Conversely, it was *bittul* and *kabbalas ol* which led to the nullification of Haman's decree. For in response to that decree, the Jews displayed a degree of *mesirus nefesh* which transcended logic. For that reason, throughout the *Megillah* they are referred to as *Yehudim*,²⁰ as our Sages comment:²¹ "Who is a *Yehudi*? One who denies the worship of foreign gods."²² Moreover, the name *Yehudim* alludes to the service of *hodaah*, the humble acknowledgment of G-d's sovereignty. This is the key to the redemption of Purim.

20. A term literally meaning "a descendant of *Yehudah*" and not referring to the people as a whole.

21. *Megillah* 13a.

22. As my revered father-in-law, the Rebbe, would explain, the term *avodah zarah*, "the worship of foreign gods" literally means "foreign worship," i.e., a form of devotion which is alien and inappropriate for a person. At times, it can refer to a form of worship which is acceptable for another person, or even for that person himself at a different time or place, but inappropriate for him at the moment.

When a person fails to carry out the Divine service demanded of him, and instead performs another type of Divine service, that service is "foreign worship." Moreover, there is a connection between such an error and the actual "worship of foreign gods." For since the person not doing G-d's will, he is at that moment separate from Him, and it is as if he denies G-d's oneness (see *Tanya*, ch. 24).

Reason and intellect alone are incapable of appreciating the ultimate intent of G-d's will, or knowing what is the form of Divine service demanded from one at a given time. Such awareness is a product of the humble acceptance (*hodaah*) that accompanies *kabbalas ol*.

This is the meaning of the statement: "Who is a *Yehudi*? One who denies the worship of foreign gods." For *hodaah* is the mode of Divine service which leads to the denial of even these subtle forms of *avodah zarah*.

This also enables us to understand the connection between the *Haftorah* of *Parshas Zachor* and the holiday of Purim. For the fact that Shaul "had mercy on the choice sheep and herds so that he could sacrifice them to G-d" (*I Shmuel* 15:9) in itself (were it not for G-d's command: "Utterly destroy everything [Amalek] possesses") represents an elevated plane of Divine service, the refinement of sparks of G-dliness which are found in the very depths of material existence. But at that time, G-d did not desire that the sparks of G-dliness encloded in Amalek's possession be refined. He desired that Amalek and everything connected with him be utterly destroyed. Because "Shaul followed [his] reason," he did not appreciate the ultimate intent of G-d's will. His sin was atoned for by the *bittul* and *kabbalas ol* to which Mordechai inspired the Jewish people in the time of Haman's decree.

This lets us understand the connection between the *Haftorah* of *Parshas Zachor* and the holiday of Purim. Shaul's sin arose from a lack of *kabbalas ol*. Such a lack leaves room for the existence of Agag, i.e., the *kelipah* of Amalek.²³ It may even make possible a decree to destroy the Jewish people.

Victory over the spiritual counterpart of Amalek comes from following Shmuel's approach: "Obeying [G-d] is preferable to a sacrifice, and hearkening [surpasses] the fat of rams," i.e., *mesirus nefesh* that transcends reason is the supreme approach. And this leads to a victory over Amalek on the material plane, just as the Jews wiped out Amalek's descendant, Haman, and all their enemies. Afterwards, "the Jews experienced light and joy, gladness and honor."²⁴

ABOVE THE LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE

Based on the above, we can also understand the uniqueness of the *mitzvah* which, above all other matters connected with Purim, shares a connection with the holiday. This is the obligation for "a person to become so intoxicated on Purim that he does not know the difference between 'Cursed be Haman' and 'Blessed be Mordechai.'"²⁵ The connection to

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23. The Torah states that Amalek "encountered you (קרך) on the way." The Hebrew קרך relates to the word קר meaning "cold" (*Tanchuma, Seitze*, sec. 9; *Rashi, Seitze* 25:18). Amalek's influence cools off the Jews' fire of commitment (see *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. I, p. 156, where this concept is explained). Intellect can also have a similar effect, for intellect is associated with a cool, detached approach.
24. *Esther* 8:16. The connection between the four terms mentioned in the verse and a commitment of *kabbalas ol* which transcends the limits of reason is explained in the *sichos* of Purim, 5719. Those *sichos* were adapted and published as the *sichah* for Purim in this series.
25. *Megillah* 7b. In particular, there is a slight difference in the wording with which this *Talmudic* expression is quoted. The standard printed text states ...מחייב אינש... However, many other texts — the *Maor Kattan* on the *Rif*, the *Shaar HaKavannos*, the *Sheloh*, *Parshas Tetzaveh*, and all the texts of *Chassidus* — use the wording ...חייב אינש... The latter expression is also used in the texts of *halachah* including the *Orchos Chayim* (quoted by the *Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim*, 695), the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 695:2, the *Siddur Yaabetz*, and others.

Purim as a whole is reflected by the *Megillah*'s description of the festival as “days of drinking and celebration.”²⁶

The intent of the intoxication is not confusion, but rather that a person should lift his Divine service of “turn[ing] away from evil”²⁷ (“Cursed be Haman”) and “do[ing] good” (“Blessed be Mordechai”) above the limits of knowledge.

The Purim miracle came about because the Jews displayed *mesirus nefesh* that transcended the limits of knowledge. Therefore the commemoration of the holiday is also connected with expressing faith and *mesirus nefesh* — Divine service above the limits of knowledge. The intent is, moreover, that even those concepts that *can* be understood should be approached from a foundation of faith. As implied by the verse:²⁸ “Teach me good reason and knowledge, because I have believed in Your commandments,” even “good reason and knowledge” should be based on belief and faith.

26. *Esther* 9:22.

Based on this verse, it is possible to say that the intent is that every moment of the day must be one of “drinking and celebration.” Nevertheless, by “drinking and celebrating” at the feast of Purim, one fulfills this obligation for the entire day. To cite a parallel, according to one opinion, the *lulav* and *esrog* are “set aside not only for the purpose of the *mitzvah*, but for the entire day” (*Sukkah* 46b). By taking the *lulav* and *esrog* once, however, one fulfills the obligation for the entire day. (See *Tzafnas Paneach*, by the Rogatchover Gaon, *Kuntres Hashlamah*, p. 6.)

Similarly, one is obligated to study Torah throughout the entire day. Yet by studying “one portion in the morning and one portion in the evening” (*Menachos* 99b), the study is extended over the entire day.

In contrast, the obligation to read the *Megillah* does not last all day. Instead, the obligation is to hear it once in the evening and once in the morning. Even with regard to *matanos l'evyonim*, concerning which the *Rambam* writes (*Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchos Megillah* 2:17) that it is a *mitzvah* to give extensively, it is not stated that one must give throughout the day (see *Taz* 695:1). Even with regard to the prohibition against fasting: although one is prohibited to fast the entire day, this is not relevant to the above point. For [the prohibition against] fasting [does not communicate a positive point]; it would merely negate [the spirit desired for the holiday] (*Sichos Purim*, 5718).

27. Cf. *Tehillim* 34:15.

28. *Tehillim* 119:66.

ZACHOR

And from Purim, we derive inspiration for the year to come.

(Adapted from *Sichos Purim*, 5719)



PURIM

SIGNS OF DISTINCTION

The *Megillah* describes the outcome of the Purim story with one brief phrase:¹ “And the Jews experienced light and joy, gladness and honor.” Our Sages² associate each of these terms with a *mitzvah*: “‘Light’ refers to Torah study, ‘joy’ to celebration of the festivals, ‘gladness’ to circumcision, and ‘honor’ to *tefillin*.”

What is the connection of these *mitzvos* to the Purim miracle? All four serve as signs of the Jews’ ties to G-d.³ Haman had decreed that these *mitzvos* not be observed because he could not bear the Jews’ proud display of their connection with G-d. And so, with the Purim miracle and the effacement of Haman and his decrees, “the Jews experienced light and joy, gladness and honor,” i.e., they were again able to observe these *mitzvos* without obstruction.

Obviously, when a sign is used to distinguish one entity from another, it must be unique to the chosen entity. Similarly, the signs which distinguish Jews from other nations should be associated exclusively with the Jews. Yet we find that the four *mitzvos* which serve to identify the Jewish people have parallels (albeit in a different mode of expression) among the nations.

1. *Esther* 8:16.

2. *Megillah* 16b.

3. See the *Chiddushei Aggados* of the Maharsha.

PURIM

With regard to the study of Torah, non-Jews also recognize the awesomeness of its wisdom, as reflected in the verse:⁴ “It is your wisdom and your understanding before the eyes of all the nations.”

Festivals also exist among non-Jews. And non-Jews often practice circumcision for health reasons. Even *tefillin* is not totally unique to the Jews. Our Sages relate⁵ that by wearing *tefillin*, the Jews let “all the nations of the world see that G-d’s Name is called upon [them].”⁶ Nevertheless, just as the Jews wear *tefillin* as a sign that they are G-d’s people, so too other peoples wear emblems or symbols to distinguish themselves.

Thus it is difficult to understand: Since G-d wanted signs to mark the Jews as unique, why didn’t He choose things with which non-Jews have no connection? Why did He choose identifying marks for which parallels exist among the gentiles?

WHEN DISTINCTIONS ARE NECESSARY

These questions can be resolved as follows: It is necessary to make a distinction between two entities only when they resemble each other in some manner. If there is no point of congruence, there is no need for a sign.

Thus the signs that “separate between Israel and the nations”⁷ are not intended to separate the souls of the Jewish people from the souls of the gentiles. With regard to this, there is no need for a sign; the distinction is apparent, as explained in *Tanya*.⁸

When are these signs necessary? To distinguish a Jew’s body from that of a non-Jew. There are no apparent differ-

4. *Devarim* 4:6.

5. *Berachos* 6a.

6. *Devarim* 28:10.

7. Cf. the *Havdalah* prayer, *Siddur Tehillat HaShem*, p. 234.

8. See the conclusion of ch. 1 and the beginning of chapter 2.

ences between them. For this reason, it is necessary to have signs indicating that a Jewish body is entirely different from that of a non-Jew. A Jewish body is holy.⁹

Since these signs are intended to draw attention to the holiness of a Jewish body, they must have parallels among the gentile nations, yet be practiced by Jews in an entirely unique manner. This demonstrates that even with regard to the physical activities in which a resemblance exists — both a Jew and a non-Jew eat, sleep, and do business, for example — the Jew acts in a unique way. Even his material activities are conducted in a holy manner, reflecting the directive:¹⁰ “Know Him in all your ways.”

For a Jew, holiness is not an acquired trait, or something which augments his nature; it is his *essence*. Accordingly, every aspect of a Jew’s conduct — even those physical activities in which he appears similar to a non-Jew — must be carried out in a holy fashion.

ONE TORAH, AND NOT TWO

When our Sages² identify Torah study with light, they use the feminine term *orah*. This invites a question: Generally, the Torah is associated with the masculine term for light, *or*. Why is the feminine form used here?

The Alter Rebbe explains¹¹ that the word *orah* refers to the Oral Law, *Torah Shebaal Peh*. The Oral Law “receives” from

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9. *Tanya*, ch. 49. On the contrary, a Jewish body has an advantage over a Jewish soul, for it is in the body that G-d’s choice of the Jewish people is expressed. See *Sichos Simchas Torah*, 5669 (*Toras Sholom*, p. 120ff).
 10. *Mishlei* 3:6. See the *sichah* of *Parshas Terumah* in this series, where this concept is explained.
 11. See the *maamar* entitled *L’Yehudim Hoisa Orah* (in the notes of the *Tzemach Tzedek* to *Esther* — *Or HaTorah*, *Megillas Esther*, p. 149ff.). See also the *maamar* of this name from the years 5563-5564 (*Maamarei Admur HaZaken* 5564, p. 62ff.), and the *maamar* entitled *ViKibeil* in *Shaarei Orah*, ch. 34, where a different explanation is given.

PURIM

the Written Law, and accordingly the feminine form is appropriate.

The difference between the Oral Law and the Written Law can be explained as follows: The Written Law is above our comprehension.¹² As such, we accept it with faith rather than via an intellectual approach. Everyone accepts that the Written Law was given to Moshe on Mount Sinai.

The Oral Law, by contrast, employs mortal reasoning to explain concepts that the Written Law states in seminal form. Moreover, through comparisons and analysis of the sources, the Oral Law discloses commandments which are not explicitly mentioned in the Written Law. Through the various principles of exegesis, many laws can be derived from a single point in the Written Law.

Thus the Oral Law is given over to our understanding. And yet a Jew also approaches the Oral Law with faith; he does not decide a law merely on the basis of his own intellect. Even when he has firm support for his conclusion, if there is the slightest contradiction in the works of the *Rishonim* or *Achronim*, whose decisions were universally accepted among the Jewish people, he follows the approach presented by the Sages:¹³ “If this is the *halachah*, we will accept it, (although) with regard to its rationale, there is [the possibility of] refutation.”

One could debate the validity of this approach. When it comes to the Written Law — a domain not subject to man’s intellect — no one would object to such an attitude. But when it comes to the Oral Law, which involves an intellectual approach, one might object. Seemingly the *Halachic* authorities which delivered a ruling in previous generations based their decisions on their intellectual conception of the matter. If a person has a different conception of the matter, and it

12. See *Likkutei Torah, Vayikra*, p. 5b.

13. *Yevamos* 76b.

appears to him that he can refute the earlier arguments, why should he follow the old rulings?

The answer is that even with regard to the Oral Law, a Jew's fundamental approach is one of faith and fear of heaven, as our Sages comment:¹⁴ "Whenever a person's fear of sin comes before his wisdom, his wisdom will endure." With regard to the Oral Law, a person must use his wisdom, for that is the key to this realm of Torah. But for his wisdom to be "maintained," his fear of sin must be given precedence; it should serve as the basis for his wisdom.

This was the difference between the *Tzaddukim* and the *Perushim*¹⁵ in the era of the Second *Beis HaMikdash*. With regard to the Written Law, everyone agreed that it had to be accepted whether one understood it or not, for it was given to Moshe on Mount Sinai. The differences arose over the Oral Law. The *Tzaddukim* argued that since the Oral Law is given over to mortal intellect, they could interpret it as they saw fit, without considering the Oral Tradition received by the Sages.

The *Perushim*, by contrast, maintained that just as G-d gave Moshe the Written Law, He gave him the Oral Law.¹⁶ The only difference is that one was given verbally, and the other was written down. The Written Law is not encloded in mortal reason, while the Oral Law has been so encloded. But the rational structure of the Oral Law is merely a garment. It is the same Torah, given by the same G-d, who transcends all rational limits. Therefore it too should be approached with faith.

14. *Avos* 3:9.

15. The literal meaning of these terms are "the disciples of Tzadok," and the "distinct ones," the latter term referring to the Sages who kept their distance from influences which could render them ritually impure. Commonly, they are known as Sadducees and Pharisees.

16. As the *Rambam* states in his Introduction to the *Mishneh Torah*: "All the *mitzvos* given to Moshe on Mount Sinai were given together with their explanations."

PURIM

For this reason, it is *orah*, the Oral Law, which distinguishes Jews from non-Jews.¹⁷ For the Jews are able to perceive holiness even within the Oral Law, which is encloded in mortal intellect, and their approach is governed by faith and not reason.

HAPPINESS WITH DEPTH

Similar concepts apply with regard to the second sign, festivals. Although non-Jews also have festivals, a Jewish festival is a totally different matter; it is permeated by holiness.

A festival is a time to gather together and celebrate, to eat choice foods, drink wine, and engage in other forms of material pleasure. But while involved in these activities, a Jew's approach is spiritual. Among non-Jews, such activities lead to frivolity, while among Jews the approach is totally different.¹⁸ The Jews also celebrate and drink, but this does not lead to frivolity; it leads to increased fear of G-d. Even on Purim, when there is a *mitzvah* to drink until "one can no longer distinguish between 'Cursed be Haman' and 'Blessed be Mordechai,'"¹⁹ the intent is that the drinking should add to one's fear of G-d and the holiness of one's conduct. Even when a Jew has transcended the limits of knowledge, he appreciates — albeit not intellectually — that "'Cursed be Haman' and 'Blessed be Mordechai.'"

SOURCES OF SATISFACTION

Similar concepts apply to "gladness," which is identified with circumcision. Although there are other nations who perform circumcision, the Jewish approach is different. Our

17. See *Shmos Rabbah* 47:1, which states that "the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud* separate between the Jews and the idolators."

18. See *Shibolei HaLeket*, *Arugah Shniyah*, sec. 126, in the name of *Rashi*; *Sefer HaManhig*, *Hilchos Shabbos*, sec. 60, in the name of *Midrash Tehillim*. See also *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* 292:3.

19. *Megillah* 7b; *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim* 695:2.

Sages² associate circumcision with the verse:²⁰ “I rejoice (שש) at Your word, like one who finds great spoil” — a phrase uttered by King David, who was referring to the *mitzvah* of circumcision.

This indicates that:

a) Circumcision brings about a very high level of rejoicing, for the rejoicing associated with the word שש (“gladness”) is higher than that associated with the word שמחה (“happiness”);²¹

b) The *mitzvah* of circumcision bears a resemblance to taking spoil from an enemy.

These concepts can be explained within the context of the *Rambam’s* explanation²² that circumcision weakens a person’s desire for material things.

Our material world with its pleasures and cravings is referred to²³ as “the world of *kelipah*.” This is a Jew’s greatest enemy. When a Jew weakens his desire for material things and, more significantly, when he takes the satisfaction derived from such things and expresses it in a holy fashion, it is as if he is taking spoil from an enemy.

This is reflected in the interpretation of the verse:²⁴ “All the fat [should be offered] to G-d.” Fat is an analogy for “the choice parts,” and more particularly, for our ability to feel satisfaction and pleasure. Rather than being stimulated by worldly things, this potential should put at the service of

20. *Tehillim* 119:162.

21. This is reflected by the fact that the celebrations of *Simchas Beis HaShoevah* — rejoicing of overwhelming proportions — is associated with the verse (*Yeshayahu* 12:3): “You shall draw water with gladness (שש).” See *Sukkah* 48b.

22. *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Vol. III, chs. 35 and 49.

23. *Tanya*, ch. 6, based on the *Eitz Chayim*, *Shaar* 42, ch. 4.

24. *Vayikra* 3:16; see the interpretation of this verse in the *Rambam’s Mishneh Torah*, the conclusion of *Hilchos Issurei HaMizbeach*; see also the *sichah* to *Parshas Mishpatim* in this series, where this concept is explained.

PURIM

G-dliness. This involves “plundering” the domain of worldly matters, as it were. Therefore it brings tremendous joy.

On this basis, we can understand the difference between the Jewish approach to circumcision and the approach prevalent in the world at large. In the world at large, circumcision is looked upon as a source of discomfort and pain. Moreover, the fact that, afterwards, it reduces one’s physical desires, is not considered desirable. For people at large consider physical pleasures to be their source of satisfaction, and any reduction of these pleasures is painful. Why then do they perform circumcision? For health reasons; they want to prevent even greater pain and discomfort.

For a Jew, by contrast, circumcision is a source of pleasure; he “rejoices.” Minimizing his attraction of material things brings him happiness. For a Jew’s fundamental nature does not derive pleasure from material things; his pleasure comes from the spiritual. Material entities are “his enemy,”²⁵ and taking spoil from this enemy brings him great happiness.

A JEWISH SYMBOL

This motif also applies with regard to *tefillin*. As mentioned, *tefillin* serve as a sign indicating that the person wearing them belongs to G-d, as it were, as reflected by the verse: “And all the nations of the world will see that G-d’s Name is called upon [them].” Although other nations and tribes also use symbols to distinguish themselves, the Jewish approach is unique.

To explain: *Tefillin* are made up of three elements: the passages from the Torah written on parchment, the actual boxes, and the straps. All these are made from animal hides. Also, *tefillin* are placed on the left arm and on the head with

25. Note the Baal Shem Tov’s interpretation (*HaYom Yom*, entry 28 Shvat) of the verse (*Shmos* 23:5): “When you see your enemy’s donkey....” חמור, the Hebrew for “donkey,” relates to חומריות, “material things.” A person, the Baal Shem Tov said, must regard material desires as “his enemy.”

the intent that we subjugate our hearts and minds, making them a vessel for the *tefillin*.

On the surface, what sense does it make for a man to tie leather boxes containing parchment to his arm and head? Is it just because they contain passages from the Torah? Wouldn't it be more effective for him to "write" these passages within his heart and mind — as indeed, one is obligated to concentrate on the *tefillin* while wearing them? What does the fact that they are written on parchment contribute?

Were the *mitzvah* of *tefillin* given to young children, it would be possible to understand the matter, for a child is not intellectually mature, and a physical sign is more significant for him. But children are not obligated to wear *tefillin*. When does one become obligated? At *Bar Mitzvah*,²⁶ when one becomes intellectually mature. Then one must take the hide — the most superficial and coarse aspect of an animal — and make black (a color considered the opposite of "attractive"²⁷) boxes and straps to tie on one's head and arms.

The resolution of the matter is as follows. *Tefillin* is G-d's command. He ordered that we take parchment on which is written,²⁸ "Hear Israel, G-d is our G-d, G-d is One," and subjugate our minds and hearts to it.

This represents the difference between a Jewish and a non-Jewish symbol. Non-Jews wear symbols proudly because they appreciate the refinement, beauty, or other "positive" qualities associated with the symbol itself.

Jews wear *tefillin* proudly. They are happy to distinguish themselves with these black leather boxes, because they were

26. At this point, the obligation becomes the child's. The child's *father* is obligated to train the child to wear *tefillin* from the time he is old enough to wear them in a dignified manner, as stated in *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, the conclusion of sec. 37.

27. See *Shir HaShirim* 1:5.

28. *Devarim* 6:4.

written and are worn with self-sacrifice, proclaiming “Hear Israel, G-d is our G-d, G-d is one.”

STEPPING BEYOND KNOWLEDGE

As mentioned above, these four elements: the Torah, festivals, circumcision, and *tefillin*, distinguish Jewish bodies from those of other peoples. This is why Haman opposed these *mitzvos* so forcefully. He was not bothered to the same degree by the Jews’ involvement in spiritual matters. But when it came to matters involving material concerns (as these four *mitzvos* do), Haman protested the Jews’ claim to uniqueness.²⁹

29. Haman was the one who protested this connection as a reflection of his ancestral heritage. Haman is referred to as “the Agagite,” i.e., a descendant of Agag, King of Amalek. In a spiritual sense, Amalek represents the force countering a commitment of *kabbalas ol* which transcends intellect (see the *sichah* to *Shabbos Zachor* in this series).

Intellect recognizes that there are matters beyond its ken. Therefore it accepts the existence of holiness that transcends understanding. Nevertheless, it sees holiness as being applicable only to the soul, involving the spiritual, and not the physical.

The underlying reason for this is that intellect is one of man’s powers, but it is not a person’s essence. Therefore when a person’s approach to holiness is based on intellect, it will not encompass all of the dimensions of his personality and will not affect his physical tendencies, for they are far below intellect.

Divine service following the directive of “Know Him in all your ways,” by contrast, is based on the fact that a Jew’s holiness is an expression of the essence of his being. This is who he is. For this reason, it is reflected in every aspect of his conduct.

On this basis, we can also understand why Haman made his determination by casting lots. Casting lots refers to an approach above intellect, and ultimately, above all the limits of the spiritual cosmos (*Seder HaHishlalshelus*). Haman thought that the advantage the Jews possessed over the gentiles involved only the limits of the natural order and the Jews’ revealed powers. With regard to matters which transcended the limits of the natural order, however, they did not possess any advantage.

The miracle of Purim showed that even with regard to matters which transcend the natural order, the Jews possess an advantage. This concept is so central to the holiday’s theme that the holiday is named Purim, pointing to this dimension of transcendence.

Haman's decree to forbid the four signs of holiness which distinguish Jews from non-Jews on a physical level led to his decree aimed at destroying the spiritual elements of Judaism, and ultimately to his decree to destroy the Jewish people itself. The chain of causality can be explained as follows: The fundamental nature of a Jew is holiness. Therefore, when an attempt is made to separate him from holiness at a basic level — even though expressions of holiness remain permitted at certain times and places — the very nature of a Jew is destroyed.

Therefore, when the Jews were finally free of Haman and his decrees, they established the festival of Purim,³⁰ the uniqueness of which is expressed with a physical meal at which “a person is obligated to become intoxicated... until he does not know the difference between ‘Cursed be Haman’ and ‘Blessed be Mordechai.’”³¹

This implies that in the state of consciousness *above* knowledge, Haman — i.e., all evil — remains cursed, and Mordechai — all good — remains blessed. A Jew's connection with G-d is not an acquired factor, but rather the essence of his being. It is not a result of knowledge, but is rather an integral element of his character. Accordingly, even when he

This quality is also expressed in the Jews' distinction from the gentiles with regard to material things. For this reason, the Purim miracle involved a process that encompassed the natural order of the world, the workings of the Persian royal court, reflecting how the matters which concern the lowest levels reflect the level which transcends all limitation. See note 9, which states that it is within the body that G-d's essential choice of the Jews is revealed.

30. Purim (and Chanukah) are referred to as festivals despite the fact that the Jews did not accept a prohibition against work on those days (*Megillah* 5b). See also *Likkutei Torah, Devarim* 58a. Indeed, even the 15th of Av is called a festival (the conclusion of *Taanis*).

Note also the uniqueness of, Purim as reflected in our Sages' statement (*Midrash Mishlei*, ch. 9) that “All the festivals will be nullified, with the exception of Purim.”

31. Since this *mitzvah* expresses the fundamental theme of Purim, it is possible to say that the obligation to fulfill it encompasses the entire day. See the *sichah* to *Parshas Zachor* in this series, note 26, where this concept is explained.

PURIM

is in a state of “not knowing,” it is evident that “‘Cursed be Haman’ and ‘Blessed be Mordechai.’”

(Adapted from *Sichos Purim*, 5719)



BESURAS HAGEULO

The Announcement Of The Redemption

68

Further, and this is essential, to cry to G-d about the length of the exile, "Until when"... and to beseech and entreat and do everything possible so that the true and complete Redemption through our righteous Moshiach will come imminently and immediately.

The Jewish people find themselves in exile already **more than nineteen hundred years** and our righteous Moshiach has still not come!... All the Divine service of exile has already been completed, and we have already done everything in every way possible (including in particular the rejoicing of the month of Adar for sixty days). It's unknown what else is to be done. Nevertheless, **another week, another day, another moment** has passed, and still the true and complete Redemption has not yet come in actual reality!

(From the talk of Tuesday, the eve of Shabbos Kodesh, Shabbos Kodesh Parshas Titzaveh, the 7th, 10th and 11th of Adar Rishon, 5752)

IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR DEAR FATHER
Reb Yishayahu ben Reb Avraham Nisan ע"ה Hayman
On the occasion of his 9th yahrtzeit, 7 Adar, 5783

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

*

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