

BILVAVI

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TAANIS ESTHER: DOING TESHUVAH BEFORE PURIM

Practically speaking, our *avodah* for Purim begins the day before Purim: with *Taanis Esther*. It is not only the time to remember that there was once a decree of genocide on our entire people. Rather, it is about realizing with our very souls that we need to personally avoid that decree which returns every year, and that is by becoming like Mordechai, the individual *tzaddik* who separated from the generation, who knew all along that he would be spared from the decree because he did not consider himself to be part of the generation, by forever remaining connected to the truth, to Hashem. (*Purim_060_Avoiding The Decree*)

THE DEPTH OF MISHLOACH MANOS

What does the mitzvah of *mishloach manos* sending gifts to our friends have to do with the miracle of Purim, which is that we were saved from genocide? The purpose of the mitzvah of *mishloach manos*

is to increase love and friendship between our fellow Jews. This is accomplished in the best way by finding someone whom we are not on the best of terms with and giving that person *mishloach manos*. But there is more depth to this mitzvah. Our inner *avodah* on Purim is: to reveal our true essence! “*Megillas Esther*”- to reveal the hidden! To reveal the inner dimension, and who we really are. Part of our inner essence is that we all contain a deep, internal love for every Jew. That is the real intension why Chazal commanded us with the mitzvah of sending Mishloach Manos on Purim.

Mishloach Manos must be sent “*ish l’re’ei-hu*”, which implies that if you think there’s someone who you didn’t think was your friend yesterday, he’s really your friend! This is what Purim reveals – our inherent love with each other. *Mishloach Manos* is not just about giving to our friends - the main point of it is to give to those whom we aren’t friendly with, and to discover that they, too, are really our friends.

HAMAN & ACHASHVEIROSH TODAY

What did Haman want to do to us, and what did Achashveirosh want to do to us? They didn’t just hate the Jewish people. According to our deeper teachings, they were really at war with Hashem and His Torah. “Three ties are bound together:

Hashem, the Torah, and *Yisrael* (the Jewish people)”. The enemies who fight to destroy the Jewish people are essentially attempting to rebel against Hashem, and His Torah, for Hashem, the Torah, and *Yisrael* are all intertwined as *echad* (one). [Being that there is an ongoing war between holiness and evil in Creation], the *echad* on the side of holiness (*echad d'kedushah*) is opposed by the *echad* on the side of evil (*echad d'kilkul*).

There are two ways how *echad d'kedushah* (holy oneness, which includes the oneness of Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people) is opposed – either through the ‘*echad d'kilkul*’, the evil manifestation of oneness, or, it is countered through the concept known as ‘*pirud*’, disparity.

Achashveirosh represents the evil power of *echad* that fights Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people. He was the *echad d'kilkul*. The Gemara says that he was one of the kings who ruled the entire world, from Hodu until Kush. The depth of this is that he represents an evil kind of *echad*: to unify the entire world, under his dominion. Just as Hashem is One in the side of holiness, and He rules over all, and unifies the entire Creation, so did He allow this power to exist in the side of evil: Achashveirosh ruled the entire world. The festive meal that he made which spanned 180 days included all of the nations of the world, which further brings out this concept of evil oneness. Thus, Achashveirosh was the “one king” in the side of evil, to oppose the holy One.

Haman was all about causing *pirud* (disparity). Haman said that the Jewish people are “one nation, scattered and apart between the nations.” His words represent his entire agenda: to cause disparity amongst the “one” nation” that he’s trying to bring disparity into. Haman descended from Amalek, the root of evil, whose role is to cause dissension in Creation, and in particular, amongst *Klal Yisrael*.

Just as the future redemption will last forever, so will “the days of Purim never cease.” This also means that the union of ‘Achashveirosh’ and ‘Haman’ will come back in the End of Days, for their union created an evil that continues until this day. It will emerge in its full power again in the End of Days, and from that very situation, we will be redeemed. In the *Gemara*, there is an argument if we will be deserving of the redemption, depending on if we do *teshuvah* or not. According to one opinion in the *Gemara*, we will get ‘a king as harsh as Haman’ which will spur us on to do *teshuvah*. Haman was not a king, though - so what does this mean? Since Achashveirosh and Haman will unite again in the future, in that sense Haman will be like a “king”. In the End of Days, the war fought on Purim will return! But, the final *Geulah* will come from there.

Achashveirosh and Haman have returned in our times, on an inner level. Nowadays, we are a very scattered nation - there is so much *machlokes* (dissension) taking place. We have become scattered apart within our own nation. **In the times we live in, there**

is no community free from *machlokes*. Chazal said that idol worship was so rampant in the era of the *Beis HaMikdash* to the point that it was in every corner. In a similar vein, it can be said that in our times, there is no corner which does not contain *machlokes*. **This is all the concept of Haman**, which is to create *pirud* (disparity) in *Klal Yisrael*, for that is the role of Amalek, to break the unity of the Jewish people. But there is also a different evil today, the **modern-day “Achashveirosh”** - the concept of *echad* (oneness) on the side of evil. **In our generation, a person has one single device** [i.e. smartphones, laptops, tablets, and other devices] **which connects him to the entire world, all at once, to all of the 49 levels of *tum'ah*** (spiritual impurity)! And Chazal said that “Achashveirosh” was worse than “Haman”....

Anyone with eyes that are sensitive to *ruchniyus* can see it, and it is clear. **‘Achashveirosh’ and ‘Haman’ have banded together in our times, to destroy *Klal Yisrael*, the same way they tried to in the times of Purim. History is repeating itself, and the war is now being fought on an inner level, with *tumah* trying with all its power to undermine *kedushah***. Of course, we don't see Achashveirosh and Haman today, but the evil which they embodied is present in our times. **Modern-day “Haman” is present in all of the *machlokes*** that has ripped apart communities and individuals in *Klal Yisrael* and caused untold damage, and **modern-day “Achashveirosh”** is manifest in the evil power of *echad* (oneness) which is embodied by that ‘one’ de-

vice, **the smartphone, which unifies every possible form of *tumah* together into the palm of a person's hand**. And these two evils together are coming to uproot the foundation of the Jewish people.

Currently, Amalek hasn't yet been erased, so we are still suffering from modern-day Haman. And the Gemara says that “We are still the slaves of Achashveirosh.” But in the *Geulah*, may it come very soon, both Haman and Achashveirosh will be erased forever. It will then be revealed the complete understanding of *La'Yehudim haysah orah*, “To the Jews, there was light” – the very *ohr* of Hashem at its most complete level.

Q&A – SIMCHAH

QUESTION I am brokenhearted. Nothing makes me happy, as if I'm inconsolable. What can I do to uplift myself?

ANSWER Search for the place of *simchah* (joy) that you have deep down in your *nefesh*, the most pleasant space in yourself that you identify, and make sure to regularly access this deep, calm and pleasant place of *simchah* in yourself. From that, you will be able to keep growing higher. Even if this joyous place in you is very covered over, it is there. A spark of the deep place of *simchah* in your *nefesh* can always be accessed by you, and though it may be very small, it is already somewhat revealed – you just need to connect further to it. *Hisnaari m'af-ar kumi*, “Shake off the dust, arise”! Arise, arise, arise, holy *neshamah* – with splendor, joy, and pride.

Q&A – HOW TO HAVE A GOOD PURIM

QUESTION Every year Purim, I am not sure how I am supposed to act, with regards to becoming intoxicated on Purim. I have never gotten completely drunk, I just drink a little more than the usual and afterwards I rest, as stated in the *Rema (Orach Chaim 696:1)*. But every year when Purim is over, I feel that I didn't experience true *simchah* on Purim, and that I didn't succeed in coming out of my *yesod ha'afar* (element of earth), whereas everyone else seems to be happy and enjoying themselves. It is one day of the year which all of the year depends on [spiritually], and especially because I wouldn't want to fall into the "doubts" of "Amalek" on Purim, of all days. Much thanks to the Rav, and a tremendous *yasher koach*.

ANSWER It is written, "*To the Jews there was orah (light) and simchah (joy)*." We should understand that *simchah* (joy) comes from "*orah*", from "light". There are two levels to this: the illumination (*ohr*) itself of this special spiritual light that's on Purim, and there are "sparks" (*nitzotzos*) of this illumination, which is a "partial" level of the light.

For most people, the joy and laughter that they have on Purim is at the level of the *nefesh habehaimis*, the "animal" level of the soul, the basest part of our nature.

In the worst scenarios, some people do actual *aveiros* on Purim, by engaging in *leitzanus*, by insulting others, etc. These people are becoming attached with *sim-*

chah (joy) on the side of the *kelipah* (impurity).

In other cases, people will not do *aveiros* on Purim, but their *simchah* that they express of Purim still does not go beyond the level of the *nefesh habehaimis*. They get joy from things that speaks to their physical side, through eating dishes of meat, imbibing different wines and beverages, and different forms of entertainment and humor. There can sometimes be mere "sparks" (*nitzotzos*) of true joy that are contained in this, but not more than that. So their joy is superficial, mixed with some sparks of true joy. When people have this kind of joy on Purim, getting intoxicated on Purim helps them express what's on their heart. They will speak about what they aspire for and what they really want. However, in almost all cases, this is all a *simchah* that doesn't go beyond the level of their *nefesh habehaimis*. At best, it is just "sparks" of true joy, but not more than that.

However, we need to find a deeper *simchah* than that, on Purim. Of Purim it is said "*To the Jews, there was light and joy*", and this means that *simchah* (joy) comes from *orah* (spiritual light). So, even though you claim that "Everyone around me is happy" on Purim, that doesn't mean anything they are really happy. Because their *simchah* is very likely only on a very superficial level.

When you find it hard to be rejoice on Purim, it is either because you have a strong amount of *yesod ha'afar* (element of earth) which weighs you down and makes you feel heavy and lethargic. Or, it might just

be coming from a subtle, inner recognition you have, that the *simchah* which you are witnessing on Purim is not genuine, and deep down, your *neshamah* isn't interested in the superficial joy you are seeing in others on this day. Your *neshamah* only wants “*orah v'simchah*”, the joy that comes from real *orah*, the special light that's shining on Purim. Your *neshamah* connects only to the calmness which others are experiencing on Purim [but not to their joy, because you sense that their joy isn't real].

For most people, it is appropriate to drink a little more than what they are used to, and in a way that will not cause them to lose their *daas* (objective thinking), to get to the point of “inner expansion”, where their heart become gladdened. This opens the heart, and it then becomes possible for a person to express positive emotions which he normally doesn't express during the rest of the year. However, as mentioned, this should not happen from [becoming intoxicated to the point that one has] loss of *daas*, nor should it come from a desire to unleash one's pent-up feelings that are stored in his heart. Rather, one should let himself drink until he feels that his heart and mind are beginning to open. This is the depth of the verse, “*For the heart of the king is good, with wine.*” It is a fine line to reach, and most people should make sure not to go beyond that point, so that they can stay in that positive state.

There is also a subtler approach to take: One can drink and allow himself to “lose” his normal *daas*, so that he can instead

become attached with the *ohr makif* (the surrounding illumination) of Purim, the special *daas* that is available on Purim. The 14th of Adar, which is Purim for un-walled cities, represents the level of nullifying one's *daas*. The 15th of Adar, which was for the walled cities since the times of Yehoshua, represents the expanded level of *daas*, which is called the *ohr makif*.

One needs to clarify the definitions of *halachah* of getting intoxicated on Purim and what the parameters of this are, by studying all of the opinions of the *Poskim*, and then one should clarify what his current *madreigah* is and if it's appropriate for him or not to get drunk. One should think about the possible pros and cons of getting drunk on Purim. If one feels that he will gain from getting drunk, he needs to clarify exactly what he will gain, as well as any detrimental results that may come because of it. This is the proper, clear approach to take, and it is *halachah l'maaseh*.

One should not draw any conclusions from great *tzaddikim* who became intoxicated on Purim. Nor should one conclude that he needs to be like most people on Purim who aren't careful with *halachah* when they become drunk. One needs to be very sensible about this, since we are dealing here with elements of the *nefesh habehaimis* of a person which seeks laughter, frivolity, lawlessness, and all other undesirable elements. The *nefesh habehaimis* within a person is animalistic, and it acts very much like an animal, by observing animalistic behavior in others in order to learn how to be happy

- either by observing what animals do, or by observing *goyim* who become very intoxicated on their holidays, and during the rest of their lives in general. So, it is upon each person to act according to his *madreigah*, as mentioned above, by first clarifying the parameters of this *halachah*, and then seeing if the *halachah* of intoxication on Purim applies to him or not, and to what extent.

The *avodah* of every person on this day [Purim] is to reach the innermost point of our *nefesh*, at our current level. That is where once can find the “*orah*” (spiritual light) on Purim, to whatever extent one has reached it from during the year. That is where one can draw forth a deep level of *simchah*.

There is nothing worse on Purim than simply copying what others are doing, because that is what totally ignores a person’s individual uniqueness. Although there is a custom to dress up in costumes on Purim, that is really because we are showing that the way we appear during the rest of the year is actually a “costume” [for during the rest of the year we are not revealing our true self]. That is how we reveal our true self. How pitiful is it, then, when a person has to completely imitate the behavior of others around him, on Purim [because he doesn’t get to be “himself”].

The day of Purim is the day to reach one’s very core, which is above one’s *daas*. From that inner place, one will be able to sense the reality of the Creator, Whom there is nothing else besides. It is a day where “the King” is totally revealed, where the “King

of kings” can be revealed even in the most mundane aspects. It is the revelation that the true “king” is really the King of all kings. On the day of Purim, the King is revealed in every place.

So the *avodah* on the day of Purim is for one to “divest” himself from all of his outer externalities. This is the deeper implication of the word “*Megillah*”, which means to “reveal”. Through this, one can touch upon the very essence of his *neshamah*, and from reaching that place, one can genuinely unify with others, to send *mishloach manos* to others in order to increase love and friendship with others, and to give *matanos l’evyonim* to others out of a deep, inner *simchah* that one reaches within. One finds the joy within himself and then he can make others happy. From there, one can find a deeper level of Torah, a level of Torah that is called “*megillah*”, where all is revealed and nothing is concealed from him. This is the meaning of what the Sages taught that the “light” revealed on Purim - the *orah* - is referring to Torah. It is referring to a revealed level of Torah, which brings one to have genuine, deep, inner *simchah*.... That is the true *simchah* on this day, and nothing else compares to it. This is the complete *simchah*, joy at its root, a joy in the Creator: “*The righteous will rejoice in Hashem.*”

QUESTION What is the *avodah* for both men and women and Purim, and how can everyone make Purim more meaningful and really take advantage of this great day?

ANSWER There are a lot of aspects to Pu-

rim. The *halachah* of drinking on Purim applies only to men, and the parameters of this *halachah* is explained by the *Poskim*. But there are many other aspects of Purim as well which apply to both men and women. Here are some of those points to think about, and each person should try to do them on his or her own level, according to his or her personal capabilities – and not based on any reasons influenced by factors that are either social, or emotional, or family-based, because there are many times where people act based solely on “what’s normal”, and this uproots any serenity and joy that they could have on Purim.

1) Consider the aspect of reading the *Megillah* on Purim. Both men and women are obligated to hear the *Megillah* on Purim. And on a more inner level, both men and women can reflect on the events in the *Megillah* and see how there was Divine Providence laced throughout this story, because the word “*Megillas Esther*” means to “reveal” the “hidden”, to turn the concealment (*hester*) into *giluy* (revelation of Hashem’s Divine Providence). A person can go through all of the details in the Purim story, from beginning until end, and he can see how it was all an unfolding process of Hashem’s Divine Providence - as opposed to a bunch of random details that have no connection to each other.

On an even deeper level, each person, whether a man or woman, on his or her own level, can see Hashem’s inner mode of conduct hidden in the Creation, as explained in sefer *Daas Tevunos*, and how ev-

ery event in the world can be seen through the lens of Hashem’s carefully planned Divine Providence, His goodness, and the revelation of His Oneness.

2) Consider the mitzvah of sending *Mishloach Manos* on Purim. The purpose of this *mitzvah* is to increase love and friendship. On the obligatory level, everyone is obligated to send two portions of food to someone. On an inner level, one should also think about whom he will make happy by giving *Mishloach Manos* to. Then one should think, “What can I put into this *Mishloach Manos* package which will make the other person happy? What would that person really enjoy?” One should put thought into how much *Mishloach Manos* to send, what the quality of it should be like, how nice it should look & what kind of nice messages he can send with it. Everyone should do this only according to her personal capabilities, and not over-do it.

Even more so, when giving *Mishloach Manos*, it should not just be an act of giving motivated by logic alone, but it should be given from the depth of one’s heart, with love and joy, to make the other person happy.

Included in this aspect (gladdening other people on Purim) is to make the children happy, with costumes and the like. But again, one should do this only within her actual capabilities, and only if she can do it with joy.

3) Consider also the *mitzvah* to give *Matanos L’Evyonim* (gifts to the poor) on Purim.

One should look for a person who needs it the most, and who would be the happiest to receive it – and one should strive to give *Matanos L'Evyonim* specifically to this kind of person. A woman usually needs to ask her husband about whom she may give *Matanos L'Evyonim* to, mainly so that her husband should agree with her decision.

4) Regarding the *seudah* of Purim, [if you are hosting a *seudah*], try to serve dishes that each person there will enjoy, catered to his or her particular tastes. **The main point of the *seudah* on Purim, of course, is to think about and discuss Purim-related matters and what Purim is all about,** and to stay away from any words that can be insulting to others, which only serve to bring out the most unrefined and impure elements in one's nature.

5) The purpose of the day of Purim is to reach a deep place in ourselves that is above one's *daas* (logical reasoning and understanding). For men, whose main *mitzvah* is to learn Torah, their main work on this world is to develop the power of their logic throughout the year, by studying Torah. That is why men need the intoxicating effects of wine (or the dulling effect of sleep) in order to “nullify” their logical understanding and reach a place that goes beyond logical understanding. Women, who are exempt from Torah study, are therefore closer to the concept of nullifying their understanding and to more easily reach a place that goes beyond logical understanding. This is the point known as *temimus*

(non-intellectual simplicity or earnestness).

Thus the main *avodah* of the day of Purim is: “*Be wholesome with Hashem your G-d*”, to walk with Him in *temimus* (simplicity), without any intellectual thinking. It is about **sensing His unlimited love for us**, just as the people in the time of Achashveirosh re-accepted the Torah out of their great love of Hashem that they saw through the miracles of Purim. It is about **feeling how He always gives of His kindnesses to us**, out of His great love for us, by saving us from trouble, and by bestowing good upon us. From this understanding, **we can come to feel the sweetness and pleasantness of being close to Him.** This is the root of true *simchah* on Purim, because by feeling close to Hashem a person feels physically lighter, in the body in general and specifically in the feet. That is why one can easily sing and dance on Purim, just as by the song of Miriam, when the joy of the women made them feel lighter, causing them to quickly sing and dance.

And that is why the miracles on Purim happened precisely through women [Esther]. It is because women are closer to this *temimus* (simplicity and earnestness). Men need to drink on Purim as a means to reach this place of *temimus*, whereas women are closer to reaching it, without the means of drinking. It only requires a little bit of reflecting and calm silence, to enter into the deepest place within oneself – and each person on his or her own level can do it. (from the Bilvavi Q & A archive.)

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