

UNRAVELING MEGILLAS ESTHER

Parshas Tetzaveh discusses the *bigdei kehunah*, the special garments worn by the *Kohen*. The Torah says that these *bigdei kehunah* were worn “*l’kavod, u’litiferes*”, “for honor and splendor”. We find that clothing has two uses - a lower use, and a higher use. As soon as Adam and Chavah ate from the *Eitz HaDaas* and realized that they went against Hashem, they became ashamed and they felt a need for clothing to cover themselves. This is the lower use of clothing, for the purpose of being covered because of being ashamed, which was all a result of the *cheit*. In contrast to this, there is a higher use of clothing which is beyond the purpose of simply covering the body. The prime example of this is the special garments worn by the *Kohen*, which were not merely worn to cover the body, but to be worn *l’kavod u’litiferes*, “for honor and splendor.” Special clothing worn would also be worn by kings, dignitaries and wealthy people, as a sign of honorable, dignified status. The Gemara also says that the clothing of a *Talmid Chochom* must be honorable looking (not too fancy looking, but honorable and dignified looking), in honor of the Torah. The higher use of clothing is that it serves to reveal the honor of the person wearing it. What is true honor of a person? His *neshamah* (Divine soul). The *neshamah* is referred to as *kavod* (honor), as we see from the possuk, “*So that honor will sing to You*”, למען יזמר כבוד, meaning that the “honor”, the *neshamah*, sings praises to Hashem.

So clothing is either worn to cover the body and to protect a person from shame (its lower use) and it is also worn to reveal the honor and dignified status of a person (its higher use). It is either being worn to cover something - or to reveal something. We also find these two aspects (covering and revealing) in the story of the *Megillas Esther*. The word *megillah* is from the word “*giluy*”, to “reveal”, whereas the word “*Esther*” is from the word “*hester*”, covering. In the events of the Purim story, one can see both how there was both concealment [*hester panim* of Hashem, where it was harder to perceive how Hashem was running everything], as well as revelation [*giluy panim*, where Hashem reveals Himself and makes it more obvious that He is in the picture]. Many people may learn the story of the entire *Megillas Esther*, yet they only see the *hester* that was in it, without seeing the *giluy* that was in it. But the truth is that one can see both *hester*, as well as *giluy*, in the same story. Hashem has created His world in a way that we can see either the *hester* or the *giluy*, in each thing. They are two different viewpoints, and a person will either see *giluy* in something or the *hester* in something. The inner way to view reality, however, is not to see only *hester* or only *giluy*. There is *giluy* and *hester* in everything, and

therefore, if we see *hester*, we should also look to see the *giluy* in it, and if we see *giluy*, we should also see how there was a previous *hester* which led to *giluy*. Just as Hashem created light and darkness which originally served together as mixture, so did He create everything as a mixture of *giluy* and *hester* mixed together in it.

If we look at each part of the story in the *Megillah* separately, all we will see is *hester panim* in each part of the story. It is clear and understandable why we need to see *giluy* amidst the *hester*, because this brings us closer to reaching purpose of Creation, which is to see the revelation of Hashem upon the world and how He is running it. But why should we see how there is also *hester*? The more and more *giluy* that we uncover, more we can see how the *giluy* we saw until now was *hester* compared to the new *giluy* we discover, and that reveals us to a greater level of *giluy*.

An example of seeing both *giluy* and *hester* in the events of the *Megillah* is when we examine what happened with Vashti. The Gemara says that since Vashti forced the Jewish women to work on Shabbos immodestly, and she was punished *middah k’neged middah* (“measure for measure”) by Hashem, and she was led to her death immodestly. If we only consider the aspect that Vashti forced the Jewish women to work on Shabbos in this undignified manner, we see this as nothing but an event of *hester*. If we only think about her eventual punishment for this, we see how it led to *giluy*. But there is also a deeper way to look at it: This event is only a detail within a greater picture. When Vashti forced the women to work on Shabbos, it was a *hester* within *giluy*, because it was an event which led to all of the rest of the events in the *Megillah*. All of the *giluy* in the *Megillas Esther* contains aspects of *hester*, but each of these events of *hester* are all parts of the *giluy*.

When one has this perspective, his entire life becomes a living revelation of Hashem on this world. He lives and reflects, on his own level, how Hashem is revealed in each thing. One can do this by contemplating intellectually how Hashem is found in something, and even more so, to reflect how it is a *giluy* (revelation) of Hashem, and how it is also a *hester* in relation to a higher level of *giluy*. Without reflecting like this, a person goes through his whole life and may he only see how there is *middah k’neged middah* in Creation, but with that perspective alone, Hashem will deal with the person according to how the person is judging the world, and as Chazal said, מודדן לו, “In the measurement that a person measures, he is measured.” *Middah k’neged middah* is only part of a greater picture. The more inner perspective is [*hanhagas hayichud*]: The fact that Hashem is running the world in order to benefit His peo-

ple, Yisrael, and that He chose us from all the nations, out His desire for us. Hashem created the world in order to bestow His kindness, but He especially desires to bestow His good and kindness upon *Klal Yisrael*, who found favor by Him. Hashem's desire is to reveal Himself to all of Creation, but especially to the Jewish people, who declare His oneness and omnipotence every day in "*Shema Yisrael*", where we say, "*Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*", "Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is one." In our times, Hashem is called "*Elokeinu*" (Our G-d), and in the future, Hashem will be called "*echad*" (One). The Ramchal explains in *Daas Tevunos* that this is the deeper mode of how Hashem conducts the world – a deeper way of running the world through His way of *middah k'neged middah*. In this higher mode of conduct ["*echad*", or "*hanhagas hayichud*"], Hashem awakens His compassion on the Jewish people even when they are undeserving. [This is also called *matnas chinam*].

In the times of Purim, if Hashem would have used His conduct of *middah k'neged middah*, it is possible that Vashti would have still received her due punishment, but that would not necessarily save the Jewish people from destruction. Chazal said that the generation then was deserving of destruction, "for enjoying the feast of that wicked man" (Achashveirosh). If Hashem would have acted towards the generation with His mode of conduct of *middah k'neged middah*, then just as Vashti was punished with death, so would the Jewish people have deserved death. But from the events of the story in the *Megillah*, we see that Hashem revealed a higher mode of conduct than *middah k'neged middah*. By saving the Jewish people from death in the times of Mordechai and Esther, Hashem was using a more inner mode of conduct than the usual way. Therefore, whatever *middah k'neged middah* we see in the *Megillah* [such as Vashti's punishment] was only a *hester*, in relation to the main *giluy*, which was the fact that Hashem was using His higher mode of conduct. Haman's decree to destroy all of the Jewish people was Hashem's way of speaking to them through *middah k'neged middah*, for the generation was deserving of death. But this was all a *hester* which led to a greater level of *giluy*.

This is what the story of the *Megillas Esther* reveals. From the great *giluy*, that revelation in which Hashem saved the Jewish people from Haman's decree, we see that all of the *middah k'neged middah* beforehand was really a form of *hester panim* when compared to the *giluy* that followed.

All of the festivals will cease in the future, except for Purim (and some say Chanukah). One of the reasons behind this is because all of the other festivals are under the category of *middah k'neged middah*, because they are all "in remembrance of the exodus from Egypt", whereas Purim was a deeper mode of conduct. Purim was the mode of conduct of the future, where Hashem will not run the world with *middah k'neged middah*, but with the mode of conduct known as *matnas chinam*, (lit. "free gift"), where we receive from goodness from Hashem regardless if we are deserving or not.

The Gemara says that the generation in the times of Mordechai (after the miracles of Purim) accepted the Torah again, and *Rashi* explains that this was out of love for Hashem, from the miracles they had witnessed. Purim was therefore a time of receiving the Torah. What was the difference between this new acceptance of the Torah, with the original acceptance of the Torah that was on the festival of Shavuot? When it came to preparing for the Torah on Shavuot, the people purified themselves for 49 days. By purifying their *middos*, they could then be ready to receive the Torah. This was really *middah k'neged middah*, for they could only become deserving of the Torah if they purified their *middos*. This was also a state of *yirah* (fear of Hashem). In the times of Purim, however, they received the Torah out of a love for Hashem, from the miracles they witnessed. They were in a state of *ahavah*, and now they could receive the Torah on a higher level than *middah k'neged middah* – now they could receive the Torah as a *matnas chinam*.

The *ohr* that was revealed on Purim, this new acceptance of the Torah that came to them as a *matnas chinam* due to their newfound love of Hashem, was really a glimmer of the *ohr*, the revelation of Hashem, which will come in the future, when Hashem will run the world with the mode of *matnas chinam* and not through the mode of *middah k'neged middah*. When one takes a look at the events in the Purim story in *Megillas Esther* and he simply sees how everything was *middah k'neged middah*, all he sees in the Purim story is *hester*. He is found within the *hester* in the story, and not in the actual revelation of the "*megillah*" that is in the *Megillah*. In contrast to this, when one views the Purim story with the understanding that it was all a *matnas chinam* from Hashem, he sees the *giluy* within all of the *hester*.

We have so far seen how one can see *matnas chinam* in the Purim story, which corresponds to the reading of the *Megillas Esther*. The other *mitzvos* of the day include *matanos l'evyonim* and *mishloach manos*, which are clear examples of *matnas chinam*, for they are acts of giving free gifts to others. As for the *mitzvah* of *ad d'lo yoda*, how does this correspond to the concept of *matnas chinam*? The depth of *ad d'lo yoda*, of not differentiating between the good of Mordechai and the evil of Haman, is to realize that even the worst things are turned into something good, for even evil will ultimately become repaired by Hashem, for reasons unknown to us which we cannot comprehend. An example of this is what Chazal say, that "the descendants of Haman learned Torah in Bnei Brak" (*Gittin 57b*). From here we see that even people who descend from the most evil nation whom we must erase, Amalek, are able to become better and reach a *tikkun*. How does evil become repaired? It can only be due to the *matnas chinam* of Hashem, which one does not have to be deserving or meritorious for.

The celebration and joy of Purim reveals this *matnas chinam*. The *mitzvos* of Purim – *mikra megillah*, *matanos l'evyonim*, *mishloach manos*, and *ad d'lo yoda* – are only possible to keep

because of the unique revelation that is on Purim, where “When wine enters, secrets come out” (*Sanhedrin 70b*). When something remains a secret, it is in the category of *hester*, it is concealed and covered over, but through Purim we are able to see how everything which appears as *hester* can all be a *giluy*. This is the depth of the story of the *Megillas Esther*, and this is the deeper meaning of how “When wine enters, secrets are revealed”.

This was the root of Purim. In the story of Purim, Mordechai is donned with five royal garments, “for honor and splendor”, which is a hint that all “garments”, all forms of *hester* (concealment) in all their many different colors, are really a form of *giluy*. In terms that apply to us personally, in whatever stage of life we are at, in any part of our life, we need to see the *giluy* amidst the *hester*. One can keep uncovering more and more *giluy* amidst his life, until he reaches the Root of all revelations.

We find that the name of *havayah* may not be written or pronounced. Thus, even the name of *havayah*, which is the deepest revelation and the root from which all of Creation comes from, is concealed to us. This is the depth of how there is revelation amidst concealment, and concealment amidst revelation. “*Hashem is close to anyone who calls out to Him*”, and there is no greater way to call out to Hashem than by saying His name of *havayah*, yet, we are not allowed to pronounce the name of *havayah* as it is, and we may only say His name of *adnus*. On one hand, the greatest revelation in His Name *havayah* because it is the revelation of Hashem’s Name upon the world, and it is the root of everything, it is the greatest revelation we can know of. But at the same time, it is also concealed to us, because it is currently forbidden to pronounce His Name of *havayah* as it is. As the Gemara says, “His Name and His throne are not complete until Amalek is erased.”

On Purim, which is when the “Wine enters, secrets come out”, what is the real secret that can come out on Purim and be revealed? It reveals Hashem’s name of *havayah*. The wine of Purim which reveals a person’s secrets does not merely refer to revealing one’s private secrets because he is drunk and losing control of his mind [that is simply *katnus mochin*, when the mind loosens up and loses its normal rational power of maturity and control]. Rather, it means that the real secrets of the *neshamah* come out, and the deepest secret that can come out and be revealed on Purim is the truest secret of all: The secret of *Ain Od Milvado*. This is what personifies the day of Purim.

May the day of Purim which is soon coming upon us be true days of celebration of joy, a complete *giluy* for us, in which all *hester* will be turned into *giluy*, until we reach the most complete revelation of all, which is when Hashem and His Name will be one again, when we will all point with our finger and express “*This is Hashem, we hoped for Him*”, the complete revelation of *Ain Od Milvado*.

PURIM, ACHARIS HAYOMIM & MESIRUS NEFESH

QUESTION What is the connection between Purim and *Acharis HaYomim* (the End of Days)?

ANSWER In the times of Purim, the people fell into the general “50th level of impurity” [from enjoying the party of Achashverosh] and as a hint, Haman built a gallows that was 50 *amos* high. The 50th level of *tumah* itself also contains another 50 levels of *tumah* within it. In the *Acharis HaYomim*, we are surrounded by the 50th level within the 50th level of *tumah*, which is the innermost level within the 50th level of *tumah* [‘rock bottom’].

QUESTION Last year I threw away my *treif* phone and decided that I will not use a *treif* phone, and especially not to look at bad things on them. I tried fixing my past *aveiros* in this area, I enrolled in a yeshiva to learn Torah and accepted upon myself to do *teshuvah* and commit myself only to Torah. Ever since then, though, I encountered even more difficulties and failure. I had some good periods, where I was happier and I felt more connected to my *davening* and learning. But shortly after any good period I experienced, I fell again and... now I can’t focus on my *davening* and learning as much as I used to, and I can’t feel relaxed because I’m always in a perpetual state of war with thoughts of *aveirah* that don’t leave me alone, and because of this I become sad and depressed, which makes me fall into *aveiros*. I kept buying many different *treif* phones throughout the year so that I could satisfy the curiosity of my eyes, and then as soon as I would fall in, I got rid of the phone, until the next time when my *yetzer hora* came back. Each time, I resolved never to fall in again, and I go back to my learning and *davening*, crying to Hashem from my heart that I shouldn’t fall again. But the same vicious cycle keeps getting repeated – resolving to be better, then falling in again, then going back to learning and *davening* and resolving not to fall in again, etc. I wish I could understand what the source of the issue here is, how to fix it, and how I can totally separate from all *treif* devices. I really want to be someone who is genuine *oived Hashem*!!

ANSWER On one hand, you need to build up your *nefesh* (soul) and attain a balance between your different abilities, so that you will have inner stability in yourself. A large part of these kinds of struggles stem from a lack of inner stability. At the same time, you also need to know what to do when the *taavos* are burning intensely. The way to overpower it is through revealing the *ohr* (light) of *mesirus nefesh* (to be willing to give yourself up for Hashem’s will). Live throughout the day with thoughts of *mesirus nefesh*, as in *possuk*, **כִּי עָלֶיךָ הוּרָגְנוּ כָּל הַיּוֹם** “*For over You we are killed, all day*”. To counter all of the terrible *tumah* (immorality and

depravity) of today which dominates in our generation, *Rachmana Litzlan*, which is the “50th gate within the 50th gate of *tumah* itself, one needs the powerful light of *mesirus nefesh*, which is the corresponding force in the side of *kedushah* which is able to counter the level of *tumah* in today’s generation. It involves giving up your *ratzon* (will), and also a power of *bittul*, surrendering your whole existence to Hashem, as if “you” don’t exist at all, with the understanding that the only thing that truly exists is Hashem’s will. This very perception is the *ohr* that shines strongly in the *Acharis HaYomim*, and it is the inner way to be saved from all of the *tumah* today.

MIDDOS!

QUESTION What should a person do if he suspects that someone is jealous of him? Or if he thinks that someone else thinks negatively of him? Does he need to flatter the other person or try to find *chein* (charisma) in the other’s eyes? Should he humble himself in front of the other? Or should he *daven* and have *bitachon* in Hashem? Is there anything else a person can do to get rid of an enemy (besides for *davening* and *bitachon*)?

ANSWER The main thing to do is to increase a deep feeling of love for the other, even if the other isn’t aware of this at all. This will cause him to like you back, because **כמים הפנים אל הפנים כן לב האדם אל האדם** “Just as water reflects a face to another, so does the heart of man to a man”, his heart will be turned in your favor when you increase your feeling of love towards him.

QUESTION What is the root of intense jealousy, and how can I fix it? If jealousy causes me to feel angry at the person

I am jealous of and I find myself cursing him under my breath, what can I do about this?

ANSWER 1) Jealousy is the result of a distance from one’s own true, inner self. The more one becomes connected to his true, inner self, the less he will become jealous. 2) Build your own inner, truthful world (*olam pnimi*), reach the unique quality that you have, and become more connected with it. Also, identify your greatest weakness and repair it. Through this, your *nefesh* will become more balanced. On a practical level, work on loving other people, with the belief that every person has their own individual quality. 3) Each day, give a *berachah* (blessing) to another person, from a deep and loving place in your heart.

QUESTION If a person has an affinity for *chessed*, what kind of *chessed* should he be involved with? And how much should he be involved, with doing *chessed*?

ANSWER (1) Generally a person should be aware that often there is certain mistaken notion about *chessed* is to do “big things”, like creating/organizing a very big organization, whether it is communal, national, or international. But we need to know that there are not a small amount of cases, where being involved with these great big organizations actually has a costly price on the purity of one’s *ruchniyus* – enough said. And it comes along with many other issues as well. (2) Therefore, if one really desires to do *chessed*, he first needs to figure out what he is drawn towards. He should know: “What am I good at? Where does my uniqueness lay?” One should figure out what his general uniqueness is, and then he should figure out if his uniqueness lays in *chessed* in particular. He should *dav-*

en to Hashem to give him his appropriate *cheilek* (portion) when it comes to doing *chessed*. For just as a person has a special part in Torah, so does a person have a special part in *chessed*. If a person didn’t purify himself enough and he isn’t *zocheh*, he becomes involved in *chessed* even though it isn’t really for him to do. (3) But in any case, until a person figures out what his personal portion in *chessed* is, it would be proper that one should do *chessed* only when it is requested of him to do *chessed*, and he should do it discreetly, and with devotion to what he is doing. Besides for this, one can offer his help to do *chessed* for others, but it would be better to wait, amidst *tefillah* and *emunah* that Hashem will show him to the area in *chessed* that’s appropriate for him personally to do. 4) One should always clarify what his motivation in doing *chessed* is. Is it coming from a desire to be good to others? From a love for another person? From loving Hashem? From wanting to do the will of Hashem? All of those are pure motivations, but there can also be ulterior motivations, such as the desire to be honored, finding self-fulfillment and personal satisfaction, being able to be in charge or in control, or a desire to fill an empty void in himself, either because he is bored or because he feels inwardly empty. (5) Even when one is involved in *chessed*, he will always need to stay balanced between *chessed* and learning Torah. One has to be immersed in learning, and if he wants to do *chessed* also then he can do so, but he has to mainly be immersed in his Torah learning. Never should being one’s *chessed* cause him to be taken away from being immersed in his Torah learning. One needs the inward balance between the three main pillars of our *avodah*, which are Torah, *tefillah*, and *chessed*.