



HaRav Shaul Israeli zt"l  
Founder and President

# HEMDAT YAMIM

## PARASHAT HASHAVUAH

Tzav 13 Adar 5771

### The Hidden Power in the Purim Story

Rav Daniel Mann

So much having to do with Purim seems to be hidden, from the absence of Hashem's name in the *Megilla*, to the true identity of the costumed children, to the very name of Esther, which in Hebrew comes from the root for hidden. Part of the behind-the-scenes intrigue is the struggle of Haman and Mordechai. While one could have claimed (Heaven forbid, on our side) that it was about overly proud individuals, it was actually their generation's continuation of the historical struggle between ancient nations.

Haman, in planning to destroy the Jews, looked for Bnei Yisrael's "Achilles' heel." He was happy when the lot showed that the time to fight the Jews was in the month of Adar, during which Moshe died. *Chazal* (Megilla 13b) tell us that it was actually a good time because Moshe both died and was born on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Adar. My *rosh yeshiva*, Rav Chayim Yaakov Goldwicht (who died on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Adar, 15 years ago) picks up on the implication that not just Moshe's birth made Adar positive but even his death was part of the month's positive element. How could this be?

He starts his answer with some background. The *gemara* (Shabbat 88a) says that Hashem coerced Bnei Yisrael to accept the Torah but that they willingly renewed their acceptance at the time of Achashveirosh. The *midrash* (Tanchuma, Noach 3) says that "we shall do and hear" was said willingly regarding the Written Torah, and the initial reluctance was regarding the more difficult Oral Law. The difficulty of the Oral Law is felt strongly at the time of one's teacher's death, when unanswered questions fall upon students who may feel insecure. The *midrash* (Bamidar Rabba 14:4) attributes the *pasuk* that calls the words of the wise "nails that are planted" to this time of the rabbi's death, as the students know they have to internalize what they learned. Indeed, at the time of Moshe's death, many Torah ideas were initially lost but were pieced together by the brilliance and hard work of Otniel ben K'naz. Thus, Moshe's death was, at once, a tragedy but, on the other hand, was the impetus for the next generation of scholars to assume their role in the chain of tradition.

Moshe, Rav Goldwicht explains, is described as the sun, representing the immense power of the Written Torah, while Yehoshua, his prized disciple, represented the moon (Bava Batra 75a). The latter's job was to reflect Moshe's light, in the tradition of the Oral Law. Thus, the time of Moshe's death was a good time for Bnei Yisrael to display their power of Oral Law, as Moshe's death prepared them for the rededication to that element of the Torah at the time of Purim.

We can point out that the moon's reflection of the sun's light is only significant when the sun has passed on to another place. Even as the sun is then blocked from view, it continues to give light through the moon. As we pointed out, Purim is the holiday of hidden things, including the invisible hand of our ultimate Master, whose light is hidden throughout the story but is recognized only by those who know to discern it.

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# Ask the Rabbi

by Rav Daniel Mann

**Question:** On Purim, the level of levity during the *Megilla* reading seems to be ever increasing. Whereas once there were only *graggers* and stamping after the reading of “Haman”, now there seems to be a competition for the most audacious antics. Is that in keeping with the *minhag* and in line with the proper behavior in *shul*?

**Answer:** The Avudraham (cited by Darkei Moshe 690:4) is one of the earliest sources of this *minhag*, which originally had the following form. People would write Haman’s name on rocks and bang them together to demonstrate “wiping out the name of Amalek (Haman’s forefather).” Thus, it was not a matter of noise per se and certainly not of merriment. By the time the Rama codified the *minhag* and strongly argued not to question it (Orach Chayim 690:17), it apparently was closer to the current *minhag* of hitting anything to make noise.

Actually, other *minhagim* of *Megilla* do have to do with liveliness. The *minhag* to have the congregation read out loud four *p’sukim* was designed “just for happiness, to make the youngsters happy, and encourage them to ... listen to the reading” (Hagahot Maimoniot, *Megilla* 1:7). The idea of scoffing at Haman, which most people seem to have in mind (resembling the modern phenomena of booing an unpopular person or statement) seems in the mood of Purim and several statements of *Chazal*. The idea of reveling in a manner that is usually inappropriate is found in various halachot. One, of course, is drinking wine well beyond the norm. Also, one is exempt from payment for damages caused during the Purim celebration because the mayhem is part of the *mitzva* (Rama, Orach Chayim 695:2).

However, the classic time for wilder merrymaking is at and around a *seuda*. *Davening* is *davening*, and the reading of the *Megilla* is an important *mitzva* with many *halachot* and is a fulfillment of saying *Hallel* to Hashem (*Megilla* 14a). Thus, while the *minhagim* we mentioned for happiness, interest, and demonstrativeness exist (despite opposition of some *poskim*, including the Pri Megadim (OC 690, EA), on various grounds) outright levity is likely inappropriate. Thus, we would suggest to those who ask to, under normal circumstances, follow the *minhag* of making noise with lively but dignified moderation.

**However**, one needs to consider how expression of the spirit of the day has evolved and the role of *minhag* in our communal lives, as the Rama did. Let us point out two main ideas behind keeping *minhagim* and not criticizing them (see also, *Living the Halachic Process*, vol I, pp. 32-33). One is that a *minhag* is assumed to be initiated or approved by great rabbis. In this case, one could break up the matter into two. Hundreds of years ago, the *minhag* was presumably instituted by great rabbis. While we are not aware which if any leading rabbis recently initiated the latest antics, it is fair to say that the phenomenon is approved of or at least allowed by a broad cross-section of the rabbinate. We might even suggest that the original *minhag* initiators, who broke the lines of strict decorum, intended that that every generation and subsection of the religious community would find the balance appropriate for them. Indeed, a youth *minyán* or *kiruv*-oriented *minyán* for the *Megilla* is more likely enhanced by a livelier service than an established, older community.

The second element regarding *minhagim* concerns the friction that is caused when one does not fall in line with the local *minhag*. In our case, if there is a locally accepted manner of listening to the *Megilla*, including that most people make some noise and a handful are more boisterous, then taking a stand against the latter is likely to cause hard feelings. This is not an extraneous consideration but it is at the heart of the type of communal atmosphere *Chazal* wanted us to maintain. As we have seen, Purim is a day when we let people’s spirits fly more freely than normal. Of course, as usual, a local rabbi is supposed to have his finger on the community’s pulse and should be the main guide in these matters, as even on Purim we should know some limits.

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## Why to Learn Torah

(condensed from Ein Ayah, Berachot 6:37)

**Gemara:** We read the *pasuk* with the double language of “*shamoah tishma*” (Shemot 15:26) as follows: If you listen to the old, you will listen to the new, and if your heart turns away, you will subsequently not listen.

**Ein Ayah:** It is possible to have a love of Torah knowledge in two ways. One is based on valuing the Torah and the *shleimut* (completeness) it brings. The second is that some people naturally love knowledge, in general.

There is a special condition regarding Torah that one must have a special love for it based on its holy value. That is why we expect one to love even the ideas he already heard and treat them as if they were new. Only if he accomplishes that will Hashem bless him with the gift of fully understanding new information as one who learns Torah with noble intentions. This is the *gemara*'s intention: by hearing the old, out of love of Torah, he will hear the new.

In contrast if one turns away from Torah that is not new, he lacks true love and has only coarse love of knowledge in general, and he will not understand. This is because the Torah will not shine its countenance on him, and he will not be able to properly accept it. Ultimately, he will not even enjoy learning Torah intellectually, for “Hashem wants those who fear Him” (Tehillim 147:11).

## The Level of Specificity of Berachot

(condensed from Ein Ayah, Berachot 6:38)

**Gemara:** On vegetables, one recites: “*Borei pri ha'adama*” (He who creates the fruit of the land). Rabbi Yehuda says: “*Borei minei desha'im*” (He who creates the species of grasses). Rabbi Zeira or perhaps Rabbi Chanina bar Pappa said: What is the *pasuk* that supports [Rabbi Yehuda's opinion]? “Blessed is Hashem day by day” (Tehillim 68:20). Do we bless Him only in the day and not at night? Rather, it comes to say that every day we should “give” to Him according to its blessings. So too, here, for every different species we should give Him praise according to its specific blessing.

**Ein Ayah:** There is a difference between general knowledge of Hashem's kind ways and specific knowledge of it. The Zohar (Vayikra, Behar 111) compares the former to a servant of Hashem and the latter to a son of Hashem. A wise man can look discerningly at the different elements of wisdom and learn about the Creator by looking at the creations.

When one looks at the world at night, he can observe things in a general manner, as the *pasuk* (Tehillim 8:4) says: “When I see Your sky, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars that You arranged.” During the daytime, one can notice every detail of the creation and see the wisdom contained therein. For this reason, the *gemara* brought a *pasuk* that stresses that Hashem is blessed in relation to the day, as greater detail that is discerned results in the blessing of Hashem making a more significant impression. That is what the *gemara* meant when asking whether only in the daytime one blesses, as even in the night there is what to bless about. It is just that in the day one has the advantage of being able to make more specific *berachot* and indeed we can thank Hashem for His greatness as finds expression every day in its own way.

The difference between Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbanan is that Rabbi Yehuda understood that the idea of being as specific as possible about the creations is an obligation, for which reason the language of the *berachot* specifically distinguishes between different types of vegetation. Rabbanan may have reasoned that this type of detail is beyond the level of the average person. Rather, one can suffice by realizing Hashem's role as the Creator of all, Who did, does and will do everything, and by serving Him faithfully.

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## Steps Against a Uncooperative Litigant

(condensed from Shurat Hadin, vol. VII, pp. 53-58)

**Case:** A husband (=pl) demands that his wife (=def), from whom he has been separated for two years, receive a *get*, while she demands reconciliation. *Pl* claims that *def* is psychologically unstable and has been guilty of infidelity more than once. *Pl* wants *def*'s medical file to be shown to a neutral doctor for evaluation and wants to present witnesses as well as videos that were taken regarding inappropriate behavior. *Def* threatened the witnesses and those involved in the videos that she will have them prosecuted for breach of privacy (she works for the police) if they present evidence against her, and they backed down.

**Ruling:** The Rosh (Shut 107, accepted by the S'ma, 15:13 and the Shach 15:5) says that if a litigant refuses to respond to interrogation in a suspicious manner, *beit din* can view the silence as admission of the other litigant's claims. This is similar to the disqualification of witnesses who do not answer questions raised to them. Although the Rosh discusses a case where the *dayan* was a *mumcheh* (expert), who might have more authority to make such assessments, he does not seem to make it a condition, and this is the way he is cited by later *poskim*.

Since the witnesses had indicated that they had testimony about infidelity, which would have made *def* forbidden to *pl*, and she has effectively blocked access to them, she is presumed to be forbidden. Therefore, until she frees access to this evidence, she is obligated to receive a *get* and is not entitled to payment of her *ketuba* since the need for the *get* comes due to her behavior. This is analogous to the case where a woman is obligated to drink *sota* water and refuses, where the Rambam (Sota 2:1) says that she is to be divorced and not receive a *ketuba* [ed. note- one can distinguish, because regarding *sota*, witnesses testified that she was in a secluded place with a man she was warned to avoid.] The Kesef Mishneh explains that when she says she is afraid to drink, it is to be assumed that this is because she knows she is guilty. Another case where we see that a lack of cooperation is viewed as admission is where two witnesses say that a woman was divorced recently and two say she was not and she does not produce evidence. We take this as an indication that she was not divorced, and she is forbidden to remarry. It is generally easier to rely upon circumstantial evidence, such as implied admission, regarding questions of whether she should receive a *get* than regarding extracting money. In general, we say that when there is a question whether something is permitted or not and the matter can be clarified, it is treated as if it is forbidden until the clarification has been made.

Regarding witnesses who are afraid to testify, most *Rishonim* understand the *gemara* (Ketubot 27b) that the intimidating party has to bring the witnesses or suffer consequences. Even those who disagree would agree in our case where there was an explicit threat made to them in front of *beit din*.

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