

INSPIRE

TETZAVEH- ZACHOR 11TH ADAR - 7TH MARCH 2020 PURIM EDITION

The High Priest Needs You!

In the portion of Tetzaveh, we read about the garments of the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest. One of them was the me'il. It was a turquoise robe that had golden bells and pomegranate-shaped balls on its hem. When the Kohen Gadol did the Divine Temple service, he had to be wearing the me'il. "Its sound should be heard when he came to the Holy before G-d, and when he exits, and he won't die."¹What was the me'il all about? Why was it so important that if he was not wearing it, he would die?

The me'il had two additional vestments that went over it. In front was the choshen, the breastplate, which represented the righteous. Around the back was the eifod, the apron, which represented those who found their way back to Torah observance. The me'il had pomegranates on bottom. Pomegranates represent those who are at the lowest possible level of observance. Concerning these people, our sages say that even "they are full of mitzvahs like a pomegranate [is filled with seeds]." It has noisy bells, because unlike the righteous and the returnees who find themselves content and comfortable in spiritual bliss, the pomegranate realises his lowly state and clamors to reach higher. Aside for the bells and pomegranates, it was entirely turquoise, which reminds us of heaven and represents the unbreakable bond even the pomegranate Jew has with G-d. When the Kohen Gadol entered the Holies to do the Temple service, he was representing every Jew. If he did not, his service was found lacking. Being the spiritual leader of the Jewish people, the Heavenly Court held him to a higher standard. If he chose not to represent even one Jew—even the pomegranate Jew—he could die. This shows you the value and significance of every individual, without whom no service could be done in the Temple. This also tells us that everyone is close to G-d. No matter where you feel you are spiritually and religiously right now, look up to Heaven. G-d wants you, loves you and welcomes you home. The lesson to us is to recognise the significance of every single person and to include everyone in our service to G-d. We are whole when we are united. When we are whole, our service is most powerful; when we are not, our service is lacking. Through our efforts to be united, we will once again merit to see the Kohen Gadol wearing the me'il doing the service in the Third Temple, with the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon!



LOUGHTONSHUL
MORE THAN A SHUL

Shabbos Times

CANDLE LIGHTING 5:33PM
SHABBAT ENDS 6:41PM

FRIDAY NIGHT SERVICE
AT 7PM

SHABBOS MORNING DRINKING IN
JUDAISM & A MEANINGFUL
PURIM

SERVICE STARTS 9:30AM
FOLLOWED BY KIDDISH

PURIM
MONDAY EVENING MAARIV 6:20
MEGILLAH 6:30
FOLLOWED BY PARTY
TUESDAY MORNING 8:30AM

CHEDER SUNDAY OPEN
TUESDAY CLOSED

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- WISHING ALL THOSE WITH YARTZEIT THIS WEEK - CHAYIM ARUCHIM**
 CONWAY NIGEL STEP-MOTHER DINKA BAS 12 ADAR
 FREEDMAN LOUISE MOTHER RIVKA BAS MOSHE 13 ADAR
 LAVENDER SHARON FATHER KOPPEL BEN CHAIM 14 ADAR
 CAPAL HAZEL UNCLE SIMCHA BEN YITZCHAK HA'COHEN 15 ADAR
 ALLEN DAWN FATHER LEIB BEN YITZCHOK 15 ADAR
 CURTIS MARSHA FATHER WOLF BEN AVRAHAM AVINU 15 ADAR
 GOODMAN VINCENT FATHER YITZCHAK MENDEL BEN GERSHON 15 ADAR
 CURTIS NATALIE FATHER FARVEL BEN YITZCHOK 16 ADAR
 FREEDMAN BERNARD DAUGHTER IDDEL BAS BARUCH DAVID 18 ADAR

Artscroll 464-1214 Living Torah 414-1274

Hamantashen-what's it all about!?

One of the oldest mentions of a Purim treat referred to as oznei Haman is in a Purim comedy skit written by Yehudah Sommo (1527- 1592) of Italy.

Literally translated as "Haman's ears," this name led to the myth that the pastries celebrate the cutting off of the wicked man's ears before he was hanged.

However, "oznayim" can sometimes refer to non-Purim pastries. In fact, in describing the manna which fell from heaven while the Jews were in the desert, both Rabbi Yosef ibn Kaspi (1279-1340) and Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abarbanel (1437-1508) describe a pastry called oznayim, with no mention of Haman or Purim at all. (In many Eastern European cultures, there are stuffed dumplings referred to as "little ears.") Lastly, there is no documentation of any such barbaric mutilation having been carried out.

Daniel, Esther and the Real Hamantash

Although nowadays you can find hamantaschen filled with practically any type of filling (sweet or savory), the classic hamantash was always filled with poppy seeds. Indeed, the very word "haman" can either refer to the wicked Haman or poppy seeds (mohn), and the Yiddish word "tash" means pocket. Thus, "hamantaschen" means "poppy-seed-filled pockets."

This is in line with the classic explanation given in the Code of Jewish Law for eating hamantaschen on Purim:

Some say that one should eat a food made out of seeds on Purim in memory of the seeds that Daniel and his friends ate in the house of the king of Babylon, as the verse states, "And he gave them seeds."

But what in the world does Daniel eating seeds have to do with Purim?

The Talmud explains that Hatach, Queen Esther's faithful messenger and one of the lesser-known heroes of the Purim story, is a pseudonym for none other than Daniel. Furthermore, as we read in the Purim story, when Esther was in the king's palace, she kept her identity secret. The Talmud explains that since the food was unkosher, she survived on various beans and seeds.

It is in commemoration of both Daniel and Esther that there is a custom to eat beans and seeds on Purim. The way this custom is traditionally observed is by eating pastry pockets, a.k.a. taschen filled with mohn, poppy seeds.

Based on this reason for eating hamantaschen, whenever the classic halachic sources discuss this custom, specific mention is made of the hamantash being filled with poppy seeds.

In addition to the classic reason for hamantaschen, many other explanations have been offered to explain this custom. Indeed, just about every aspect of this treat is laden with symbolism. Here are some explanations given.

The Weakening of Haman

"Tash" in Hebrew means "weaken." Thus, the hamantash celebrates the weakening of Haman and our wish that G-d always save us by weakening our enemies.

Hidden Messages

During the Purim story, many Jews did not believe they were going to be completely wiped out. Mordechai convinced them of the seriousness of the threat by sending them numerous letters warning them of the impending doom. Afraid to send the letters by conventional routes lest their enemies intercept them, he sent the letters hidden inside pastries. In commemoration of this, we eat pastries with a filling

Hidden Sweetness

A well-known insight into the hamantash points to the fact that the filling is hidden inside the dough. In earlier times, our ancestors were accustomed to experiencing open miracles. In a time of exile, we don't necessarily experience openly revealed miracles anymore. Nevertheless, the Purim story shows that this does not mean that we've been abandoned (G-d forbid). On the contrary, G-d is ever present. He's just operating in a behind-the-scenes fashion, just as the filling of the hamantash is hidden within the dough

While there is an old legend that Haman wore a three-cornered hat, and to commemorate his downfall, we eat a three-cornered pastry, there is a deeper significance as well. The Midrash says that when Haman recognized (the merit of) our three forefathers, his strength immediately weakened. Because of this, we eat three-cornered pastries and call them "Haman weakeners (tashen)." Another reason for corners: The Hebrew word for "corner" in Hebrew is "keren," which literally means "horn," and can also denote "ray," "fortune," or "pride." Thus, the sages understand the verse, "And all the kerens of the wicked I shall cut down" as referring to Haman, and "Exalted will be the keren of the righteous" as referring to Mordechai.

The Mitzvot of Purim



Listen In!

"The whole Megillah" isn't just an amusing expression! On both Purim night and Purim day, try to hear the entire Megillah (Scroll of Esther) with the Purim story. Don't forget to use some graggers (noisemakers) to drown out the mention of wicked Haman's name.

Pass It Around!

Remember the importance of Jewish unity and friendship: Send a gift of at least two kinds of ready-to-eat foods (e.g.: pastry, fruit, beverage) to at least one friend on Purim day. Try to deliver via a third party. (Children, especially in Purim costume, make great messengers!).

Give it Away!

Charity is important all year long, but it is a special act on Purim. Give charity to at least two needy people on Purim day. If you can't find a real live person to give to, put some coins into two charity boxes.

Eat It Up!

Enhance your Purim celebrations with a festive meal on Purim day, and invite family and friends to join the celebration. It is customary to drink wine or other inebriating drinks at this meal. (Official sanction to indulge this one time!)

FOOD FOR THE SOUL

These things people call amazing coincidences, synchronicity, small miracles—this is the way the world is supposed to work. It is only that the world is in slumber, like a sleeping person who does not see, does not hear, does not speak—so that nothing distinguishes his head from his feet, his heart from his brain. So too, the world lies deep in a dream where anything is possible, but nothing seems to have a goal. Where only chaos reigns. It takes only one person to open his eyes, his ears, his mind and his heart, and the objects of this world fall into place and work together as a single whole. Synchronized. As they were meant to be.

G- d tells Moses to receive from the children of Israel pure olive oil to feed the “everlasting flame” of the menorah, which Aaron is to kindle each day, “from evening till morning.” The priestly garments, to be worn by the kohanim (priests) while serving in the Sanctuary, are described. All kohanim wore: 1) the ketonet—a full-length linen tunic; 2) michnasayim—linen breeches; 3) mitznefet or migba’at—a linen turban; 4) avnet—a long sash wound above the waist. In addition, the kohen gadol (high priest) wore: 5) the efod—an apron-like garment made of blue-, purple- and red-dyed wool, linen and gold thread; 6) the choshen—a breastplate containing twelve precious stones inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel; 7) the me’il—a cloak of blue wool, with gold bells and decorative pomegranates on its hem; 8) the tzitz—a golden plate worn on the forehead, bearing the inscription “Holy to G- d.” Tetzaveh also includes G- d’s detailed instructions for the seven-day initiation of Aaron and his four sons—Nadav, Avihu, Elazar and Itamar—into the priesthood, and for the making of the golden altar, on which the ketoret (incense) was burned.

This week, in addition to the regular Parsha, we read Parshas Zachor. Parshas Zachor is the 2nd of the four special Shabbosim preceding Pesach when additional portions are read from the Torah. The first special Shabbos was Parshas Shekalim. This week we read Zachor, and in a few weeks we will read Parah and Chodesh. There are set rules which determine when each of these additional Parshios is to be read. Parshas Zachor is always read on the Shabbos before Purim. On Parshas Zachor, we read the additional Parsha found in Devarim, 25:17. As a nation, we were commanded to destroy the nation of Amalek. This nation came into existence at the same time as we did. Esav’s son Elifaz had a son Amalek. Esav and Elifaz’s legacy to Amalek was an undying hatred against the children of Yakov. At the time of the exodus from Egypt, Amalek traveled hundreds of miles to ambush the newly freed nation in the hope of destroying them. We, as a nation, did not pose any threat to their sovereignty. They lived to the east of Canaan and were not among the Seven Nations occupying Eretz Yisroel. Nevertheless, their irrational hatred against Hashem and us compelled them to attack a harmless and seemingly defenseless nation. In the aftermath of their attack we were commanded to always remember the evil that is Amalek. It is the reading of this Parsha that is the fulfillment of this Biblical commandment. This mitzvah, according to most authorities, is not restricted by time and must be fulfilled by men and woman. The Rabbi’s selected the Shabbos before Purim for the fulfillment of this Mitzvah because Haman was a direct descendent of Amalek, and Mordecai was a direct descendent of King Saul. The entire story of Purim is directly linked to this Mitzvah and the missed opportunity of King Saul that we read about in the Haftorah.



WHATS IN A NAME??

Male

Ben-Tzion means "son of Zion" or "son of excellence." The name Ben-Tzion appears in the Talmud (Eydiot 8:7). **Berel** is a derivative of the word "bear." It connotes strength, and is a nickname for the Hebrew name Dov (bear). (variation: Beryl)

Female

Chaya means life & Living“ used as an amuletic name. The family name Chaikin—Heikin derives from this form. In Judaism, life is highly valued. In fact, it takes precedence over all but three commandments. The name symbolizes a prayer for longevity and is often given to a newborn after another child in the family died at a young age.



HUMOUR???

Abe Horowitz had been a salesman in the garment district all his life, but was getting tired of the constant battles with customers. So he decided to give up his job and become a policeman. Several months later, a friend asked Abe how he liked his new role. "Well," Abe replied, "the pay is terrible, the hours are too long, and I've gained 10 pounds because of all of these donuts, but the one thing I love is that the customer is always wrong."

Question: Why didn't Esther receive Mordechai's e-mail, warning her about Haman's plan to kill the Jews? Answer: She had the Achash-virus on her computer.



Riddle of the week

This belongs to you, but everyone else uses it.

Answer to last weeks Riddle by Barbara Cohen

Boxing



PARSHAT ZACHOR

Remember what Amalek did to you
Insights on Parshat Zachor

The sages explained: how he happened upon you - karcha - that is, he "cooled you off" (from the root kar) for the other nations of the world.

To what can this be compared? To a boiling basin which no one could enter. A worthless person came along and jumped into it. Even though he was scalded, he cooled it off for others.

Similarly, when Israel came out of Egypt, all of the nations of the world feared them, as the verse states: "Then the princes of Edom were confused... fear and trepidation fell upon them (Exodus, 5:15-16). But when Amalek came and engaged them in battle, though he was punished by their hands, he cooled them off, made them less awe-inspiring to the other nations of the world.

Before the sun of Abraham began to rise, the entire world was desolate. It was as if the light of the world had been extinguished and the world was destined to sink into an abyss of corruption, evil, and paganism. And then Abraham came and lit an ember. His children followed and fanned that ember into a mighty flame that gave light and warmth.

When Israel left Egypt, they did so through spectacular wonders and a miraculous revelation of the Divine Presence. All of Israel, all of Egypt, and all the peoples of the world realized that G-d alone rules and there is none beside Him.

All existence waited expectantly for that exalted occasion when G-d would descend to Mount Sinai and speak directly to man. Man's pride was about to be humbled and G-d alone would remain exalted. The false gods were about to vanish. G-d had revealed Himself to His entire people and designated them to be His emissaries to mankind, to illuminate a path for them. Would there still be a nation audacious enough to contend, Who is G-d that I should listen to Him (Shemos 5:2)?

All Israel was prepared for this occasion, and they were also prepared to bring the peoples of the world close to Him, as will be in the End of Days. And Amalek, the wicked, came and ruined everything. He leaped into the fire a fire which all others feared, and was scalded, but he cooled the fire for everyone else. And now, what did the other nations contend? They said: "The battle continues.! We have only surrendered temporarily." The rectification of the world would again be postponed for many years until the End of Days.

And as for Israel, though they saw that Amalek had been scalded, they too found that their fire and the strength of their faith was cooled, and they began to complain and quarrel with G-d. Who would have believed that there was a nation with the audacity to try to wage war with them after all that had transpired, yet Amalek came and did so!

The battle continues. Israel has not yet lost her fear of mortal man, replacing it with fear of G-d's majesty and grandeur. Amalek attacked the weak elements. He instilled fear in the minds of those whose hands were slipping as they held the yoke of Divine responsibility, and he planted anxiety in the hearts of those who were strong.

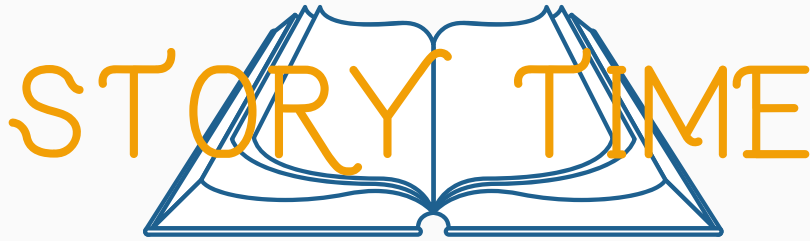
HALF SHEKEL

It is customary at minchah (the afternoon prayers) on the thirteenth of Adar to give three halves of the coins which serve as the local currency. This money is given to the poor, to do with it as they wish. This contribution is made in memory of the half shekel given by Israel when the Beit haMikdash still stood, and whose forthcoming collection was announced on Rosh Chodesh Adar. This commemorative act is performed before the reading of the Megillah, since all Israel gathers in the synagogues to hear the Megillah reading.

The donation should be given before minchah, for the diligent perform mitzvos as early as possible. Those who reside in cities which were not enclosed by walls [at the time of the conquest of the Land of Israel by Yehoshua] give their money before the Megillah reading on the evening of the fourteenth of Adar. Those who live in Jerusalem [which was enclosed by walls then] give the half shekel donation before the reading of the Megillah on the evening of the fifteenth of Adar. In a country where there is no coin which is referred to as being half of the local currency, it is customary for the synagogue officials to provide three halves of coins issued elsewhere.

These coins are acquired by the members of the congregation who use them to fulfill the custom of giving the half shekel, and are then reacquired by the gabbai'im so that others might use them as well. Those who seek to fulfill this requirement in the optimal fashion give the donation for each member of their family, including minors. If their wives are pregnant, they give it for the unborn child as well. Once a father has accepted the custom of giving a donation for each child, he should continue to do so every year. The reason for the custom of giving three half-shekels is that the Hebrew word *terumah* donation and the words "half a shekel" are mentioned three times in the Torah portion of Ki Tisa, where the mitzvah of the half shekel is recorded. The accepted practice is not to view the donation of the half-shekel as releasing one from the mitzvah of giving money to the poor, which is specifically prescribed for Purim.

STORY TIME



March, 1945.

They arrived from Auschwitz in several groups. Each group counted about 20 people. Of course, they didn't look like people. They looked more like walking skeletons. They had triangular faces with pointed chins, and sunken cheeks. Even the lips had shrunken to thin blue lines. The only prominent feature were their eyes; they were unusually large and with a strange sheen, almost luminous. They were known in concentration camp slang as "Musselman." That was usually the last stage before death. They spoke Yiddish with an accent, which to us Lithuanian Jews, sounded strange. They told us that they came from the ghetto of Lodz through Auschwitz, before they were sent to our camp. Our camp was known as the "Outer camp of Dachau, #10" and it was situated near the picturesque town of Utting, by lake Amersee.

Our camp was sitting in the middle of a small forest with surrounding green meadows and beautiful landscapes. I remember the day when we were brought there, I thought to myself, "How can anything bad happen to us among all this beauty?"

I soon found out that the beauty was in the landscape only. The Germans in charge of us were sadists and murderers. The Lodz people fell into the same deceptive trap. They thought that after Auschwitz, our camp looked like paradise. Most of them died soon after their arrival, from hard labor, beatings and starvation. But they preferred to die here than in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

It was from them that we heard the incredible stories of gas chambers and crematoriums, where thousands of our people were murdered every day.

Some of them told us that they were standing naked before the gas chambers when they were suddenly ordered to get dressed and were sent to our camp. The Germans must have been really desperate for workers to send these walking skeletons all the way from Poland.

Around March 1945, there were only a few of them left alive. One of them was known as "Chaim the Rabbi." We never found out whether he was actually a rabbi, but he always washed his hands and made a blessing before eating. He knew the dates of the Jewish calendar, and also knew all the prayers by heart. From time to time when the Germans were not looking, he would invite us to participate in the evening prayers.

Our Jewish camp commander, Burgin, heard about him and tried to get him easier jobs. Most people died when they had to carry a 100 pounds of cement sacks on their backs, or other chores of heavy labor. He wouldn't have lasted a day on a job like this. He once told me that if he would survive, he would get married and have at least a dozen children.

Around the middle of March, we were given a day off. It was a Sunday. The camp was covered with snow, but here and there the first signs of spring was in the air. We heard vague rumours of the American breakthrough into Germany and a glimmer of hope was kindled in our hearts.

After breakfast, consisting of a slice of mouldy bread, a tiny piece of margarine, and brown water known as "Ersatz Coffee," we returned to our barrack to get some extra sleep.

Suddenly we noticed "Chaim the Rabbi" standing in the snow and shouting, "Haman to the gallows! Haman to the gallows!" He had on his head a paper crown made out of a cement sack, and he was draped in a blanket that had cut out stars from the same paper attached to it.

We stood like petrified before this strange apparition, barely able to trust our eyes, while he performed a dance in the snow, singing: "I am Achashverosh, Achashverosh, the king of the Persians!"

Then he stood still, straightened himself out, chin pointed to the sky, his right arm extended in an imperial gesture and shouted: "Haman to the gallows! Haman to the gallows! And when I say 'Haman to the gallows,' we all know which Haman we are talking about!"

We were sure that he has lost his wits, as so many did in these impossible times. By now there was about 50 of us standing gaping at the "rabbi," when he said: "Yidden vos iz mit ajch! Fellow Jews, what is the matter with you?! Today is Purim! Let us make a Purim Shpiel [a Purim play]!"

Then it dawned on us that back home, a million years ago, this was the time of the year when we children were dressing up for Purim, playing and eating Hamantaschen. The "rabbi" remembered the exact date according to the Jewish calendar. We hardly knew what day it was.

Chaim then divided the roles of Queen Esther, Mordechai, Vashti and Haman among the onlookers. I was honored to receive the role of Mordechai, and we all ended up dancing in the snow. So we had our Purim Shpiel in Dachau.

But that was not the end of the story. The "rabbi" promised us that we will get today our "Mishloach Manot," our gifts of food, and we thought that it was hardly likely to happen.

But, miracle of miracles, the same afternoon, a delegation of the International Red Cross came to the camp. It was the first time that they bothered about us. Still, we welcomed them with open arms, because they brought us the "Mishloach Manot" that the "rabbi" had promised.

Each one of us received a parcel containing a tin of sweet condensed milk, a small bar of chocolate, a box of sugar cubes, and a pack of cigarettes. It is impossible to describe our joy! Here we were starving to death, and suddenly on Purim, we received these heavenly gifts. Since then, we never doubted the "rabbi."

His prediction also came true. Two months later Haman/Hitler went to the gallows, and shot himself in Berlin, while we, those of us who were still alive, were rescued by the American army, on May 2, 1945.

I lost track of "Chaim the Rabbi" on our Death March from Dachau to Tyrol, but I hope that he survived and had many children as he always wanted. I always remember him when Purim comes around, for the unforgettable Purim Shpiel in Dachau.



The coronavirus is spreading in China, the Middle East, Europe and has infected people in the United States, Latin America and a growing number of places, with thousands of deaths reported. Israel's Ministry of Health has urged citizens to reconsider non-essential travel abroad due to heightened fears over the spread of this potentially deadly disease. One of the top officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in America warned this week: "Ultimately, we expect we will see community spread in this country. It's not so much a question of if this will happen anymore, but rather more a question of exactly when this will happen and how many people in this country will have severe illness." The agency itself tweeted:

"Now is the time for US businesses, hospitals, and communities to begin preparing for the possible spread of #COVID19." Indeed, now is the time to do all we can to prepare and to stop the spread of this disease, but there is also an important lesson we can learn from it. China and the United States couldn't be further apart, not only geographically, but also in family life, social values, and religious customs. One is the model of capitalism and the other the embodiment of communism. For these reasons and others, Americans and Chinese citizens feel so different, like there is so little we have in common. And yet coronavirus reminds us just how interconnected we are, how impacted we are by one another, and how important it is to find common ground and work together for mutual benefit. Consider how coronavirus began and where we are now. On December 31, the Chinese authorities reported a case of pneumonia with an unknown cause in Wuhan, Hubei province to the World Health Organization. By January 3, 44 more similar cases were reported. Fast forward just two months and from that one case in China, there are now over 80,000 people diagnosed with the illness around the globe, including in this country. What started far away threatens us here and has impacted the economy around the world, affecting supply lines, import and export, manufacturing, banking and more. We cannot afford to ignore it or dismiss it because it didn't start here or didn't begin by impacting someone we can relate to. Humanity, the world's population, are one; we are all interconnected and impacted by the behavior, policies and precautions of one another, whether we like it or not. If we recognize what we have in common and come together to confront this deadly disease, we can isolate it, treat it, and eliminate it. Focus on our differences, deny our common destiny, fail to cooperate and communicate, and it can grow to pandemic proportions that threaten everyone. In some ways, this is the story and message of Purim. The Jewish people faced extinction and annihilation when they lived with an attitude of "am mefuzar u'meforad bein ha'amim – a nation disparate and separate, dispersed among disconnected peoples." The Jewish people found redemption and safety only when they followed Queen Esther's directive: "lech kenos et kol ha'Yehudim – gather together all the Jews" – become one and act in a unified way. We describe God as our Father in Heaven. What parent is drawn to intervene and intercede on behalf of their children who cannot and will not get along, who fail to cooperate or show loyalty to one another? On the other hand, when children come together, function as a devoted family, parents are moved to do anything they can to help. When everyone is in it for themselves, self-centered, narcissistic and concerned only for their wellbeing, they are in danger. But when we see our destiny as intertwined, when your pain hurts and threatens me and my struggles are yours, we can together endure and overcome anything. It isn't a coincidence that the mitzvot of Purim center around connecting with others, being of service to them and seeking to relieve their pain. We deliver Mishloach Manos (gifts of food) to one another to further our connections and bonds and we distribute Matanos L'Evyonim, gifts to the poor to feel the pain of those less privileged. When we are united, unified in our history and destiny, focused on what we have in common instead of what divides us, we are bigger and stronger than the sum of our parts. We are both worthy and capable of confronting, persevering and triumphing over whatever challenge or threat we face. That is the message of Purim for the Jews and perhaps that is a message of the coronavirus for humanity. The odious virus reminds us that our actions are never local; they can have cosmic implications – for bad, but equally for good. In 1963, meteorologist Edward Lorenz introduced what he called the "butterfly effect." He demonstrated that the flapping of a butterfly's wing in Australia can cause a tornado in Kansas, a monsoon in Indonesia, or a hurricane in Boca Raton. Lorenz's thesis is part of a greater theory called chaos theory that essentially postulates that small acts can have large outcomes. Chaos theory is applied in mathematics, microbiology, computer science, economics, philosophy, physics, politics and many other fields. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks has applied chaos theory in one more realm. In his book *To Heal a Fractured World*, he coined the phrase "chaos theory of virtue," demonstrating how small acts of kindness can have immeasurable consequences on the world. If one person in an isolated area can spread something that has impacted the whole world for the bad, one person, anywhere in the world, can infect the world with goodness and positivity. We are living in an increasingly polarized world and at an increasingly partisan time. There are conflicts and tensions between countries and there are divisions and discords within nations, peoples, religions, and families. In that atmosphere, coronavirus not only challenges us, but can teach us. Should we focus on our differences, fail to cooperate or come together, we will all be threatened as a result. On the other hand, if we find common ground, we can collaborate and eliminate a threat by coming together. Never underestimate the next act of virtue you do. Flap your wings and it can change the whole world. As we begin the month of Adar and count down to the celebration of Purim let us hope and pray that the only thing going viral is a spirit of cooperation, unity, and love.

The Whale

Hundreds of thousands have been butchered in Syria; ISIS beheads tortures and crucifies; Islamists blow up scores of innocents on a weekly basis; yet for many, Israel as seen as the chief obstacle for peace in the Middle East. This is beyond absurd. The Talmud addressed this anomaly some 1700 years ago. One of the great Talmudic sages, Rabbah the son of Bar Chana, related the following strange episode: Once, while on a ship, we came to what we assumed was a large island, since we saw on it sand and growing grass. We disembarked the ship, went on to the island, built a fire, and cooked our meal. Yet what we assumed to be an island was really a fish. When the fish felt the heat, he rolled over and we were plunged into the water. Had the ship not been nearby, we would have drowned.-- Talmud Bava Basra 73b. What is the meaning behind this absurd Talmudic tale, related by one of its great sages, Rabba the son of Bar Chana?

According to some of the great Talmudic commentators, this tale captures, in intriguing metaphor, one of the most essential truths about Jewish history, particularly one relating to the holiday of Purim.

The journey

From the moment they stood at Mt. Sinai more than three millennia ago, the Jewish people have been traveling on a lone and long journey. Their destination is a world healed, redeemed and reunified with its Creator; a society cleansed from ego-centricity, hatred and bloodshed; a universe permeated with moral and spiritual awareness, filled with “the knowledge of the Divine as the waters cover the sea” (in the words of the prophet Isaiah chapter 11). The Torah and its Mitzvos serve as their blueprint for this courageous voyage in a vast and seemingly endless sea. Yet the waters have often become increasingly tumultuous and the voyage discouraging, if not apparently futile. So when in the midst of their journey they observed what seemed to be an island of serenity, an oasis of tranquility, a respite from a miserable fate, many of them abandoned the “ship” of Jewish consciousness and commitment for the perceived blessings of freedom and happiness. The era in which the Purim story occurred was a classical example of this pattern. The king was married to a Jewish woman; large segments of Jewish society assimilated into Persian culture; the Jewish establishment played a pivotal role in the economical and political structures of the Persian Empire. The community had been invited to the royal feast and given status as equal citizens. In reciprocity, the Jews learned how to “behave;” how to become integrated and law abiding citizens. They did not demand kosher food or kosher wine at the feast, nor did they create any other waves that would disturb the equilibrium and make them stand out as Jews. Seventy years after being expelled from their ancient homeland, their Temple being burnt to the ground, many of them had abandoned the old ship, secure in their belief that they have reached an island of serenity; they finally “made it.”

Identity Crisis

Throughout history, the struggle of Jewish identity and our relationships with the world around us has become so challenging, that it often caused us to redefine ourselves from within. Jean-Paul Sartre claimed in his *Sur le Question Juif* that the only thing Jews had in common was that they were the victims of hate. It is not Jews who create anti-Semitism, he said, but anti-Semitism that creates Jews. Arthur Koestler wrote: “Self-hatred is the Jews patriotism.” Franz Kafka said: “What do I have in common with the Jews? I don’t even have anything in common with myself.” Time and time again we have been lured into the faith that if we abandon the “ship” of Judaism—of Torah and Mitzvos—we would gain acceptance among the brotherhood of mankind. “Be a man in the street and a Jew at home,” was the 19th century slogan by the Enlightened Jews in Western Europe. If only Jews weren’t so Jewish we would have less anti-Semitism, so went the theory. The past three centuries have produced a dazzling variety of movements, ideals and solutions to the age-old “Jewish problem,” offering islands of hope for a people tormented by persecution and targeted for abuse. The Enlightenment (Haskalah) came to “civilize” us and allow us free entry into European society; the Marxists and Socialists promised to create a utopia for us and all of mankind; Zionism’s goal was to grant us a State, a national identity, and thus cure anti-Semitism once and for all; Reform came to make us acceptable to the non-Jewish society and to inculcate us with humanistic values; secularism came to free us from the burdens of tradition which have supposedly hindered our progress and happiness. All of these attempts have been brilliantly captured in that ancient Talmudic tale: Once, while on a ship, we came to what we assumed was a large island, since we saw on it sand and growing grass. We disembarked the ship, went on to the island, built a fire, and cooked our meal.

Disillusionment

Yet, ironically, the end of the Talmudic tale also came to be: What we assumed to be an island was really a fish. When the fish felt the heat, he rolled over and we were plunged into the water. Had the ship not been nearby, we would have drowned. Each time we came to feel comfortable on the island, and we began at last to live out our latent dreams, the “fish” turned over and threw us back into the raging waters. In the days of Purim, when the Jews felt that they had successfully integrated into mainstream culture, under the very nose of a Jewish queen—the king was persuaded to issue forth a plan of genocide for the Jewish people. Assimilation never cured prejudice. Not in the days of Purim, nor at any time in the future. It didn’t even in 15th century Spain, where Jews converted to Christianity and yet still suffered from persecution under the vicious doctrine of *limpieza de sangre* (“purity of blood”), the forerunner of modern racial anti-Semitism. It didn’t in 20th century Germany where Jews were often “more German” than the Germans. It didn’t in the Modern State of Israel constructed as a secular democracy. The historical truth remains that none of the above movements achieved their stated goals. The Holocaust made mockery of Jewish integration in the general humanistic world; Zionism created the State of Israel, which we cherish deeply, but did not put to rest the problems of anti-Semitism and still struggles to provide even the most basic security for its citizens. Israel still needs to fight for its “right” to exist. Stalin “cured” us of the “paradise” of Marxism and Socialism; the Enlightenment apparently did not sufficiently civilize us; secularism has deprived generations of direction and meaning, leaving our youth thirsty for identity and purpose. Our Hope “Had the ship not been nearby, we would have drowned,” is how the Talmudic sage concludes the episode. What saved us during the time of Purim – and what has guaranteed our existence throughout our long and difficult history – was not forfeiting our identity and surrendering our truth; it was our animated relationship with the living G-d, the creator of heaven and earth, and our dedication to His Torah and Mitzvos that has allowed us to survive and thrive, till we reach the culmination of the voyage, speedily in our day



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