



Drink

IS THE



LINK

A man is obligated to imbibe on Purim until he can no longer distinguish between "Cursed is Haman" and "Blessed is Mordechai."

Purim is a veritable cornucopia of paradoxes which ignite the imagination of both scholar and layman. But perhaps the greatest

challenge of all is posed by this requirement to indulge in drink to the point of losing the faculty of discernment. How, ask the commentaries throughout the generations, can we be commanded to invite that very intoxication which is so roundly reviled in both Scripture and Talmud? And why such a puzzling standard of non-discernment?

Just to set the record straight as regards the halacha, it is the consensus of the authorities that literal fulfillment of this requirement is limited only to

those who are capable of doing so without impairing their ability to fulfill all of the *mitzvos* connected with the festive Purim meal, (washing hands, blessings before and after, etc.) or inciting them to improper conduct. For most people it is sufficient to drink more than is their custom and to achieve the level of fuzziness suggested by the Talmud through a drink-induced nap.

But our original problem still remains. Why encourage excess drinking altogether and why set a goal of such enigmatic nature?

The answers, of course, lie in an analysis of the Purim story as recorded in *Megillas Esther*. The events chronicled in this divinely inspired document cover a decade of history, from the grand banquet in which Queen Vashti meets her downfall until the miraculous turnabout of a Jewish



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nation threatened with genocide overcoming its enemies thanks to the intervention of Queen Esther. From the perspective of historians and political analysts it is virtually impossible to see any link between the events separated by so many years and so many political developments. What connection can possibly be surmised between the drunken domestic quarrel between Achashverosh and Vashti in the third year of his reign and the same king's submitting to Esther's entreaties in his twelfth year? Chapters, if not volumes, could probably be written about how Haman's meteoric rise to power and the geopolitical upheavals of a mighty Persian Empire on the threshold of a challenge from the ascendant Macedonians affected the fickle monarch's decision-making process in first sanctioning genocide and then rejecting it.

But historians are capable of dealing only with tangible links. The Divine Author of history, however, reveals to His chosen people in *Megillas Esther* that there is a powerful connection between events separated by so much time - that the Divine Healer prepared the cure before the illness by removing Vashti in favor of Esther even before He sent the plague of Haman's genocidal decree to alarm His sinful people into repentance. The clue to this linkage is **wine** - the wine which brought a king to a drunken rage against a rebellious queen and the wine which another queen, concealing her Jewish identity, served both husband and enemy at the climactic banquet where she successfully pleaded for her people's salvation.

If the link is wine then it is wine which we must indulge in beyond our habit in order to remember and reflect upon this invisible thread which weaves such disparate events into a miraculous tapestry of divine intervention. And the level of our indulgence must be one that rejects the normal approaches of discernment, that abandons the logic of

social and political analysts and seeks the divine hand in the workings of history.

Until he can no longer distinguish between “Cursed is Haman” and “Blessed is Mordechai.” Many interpretations have been offered as to why this particular criterion has been chosen for determining the desired level of inebriation. On the simplest level it is a reference to a song of praise we sing after the reading of the *Megillah* and which we repeat in our festive meals, and it is a challenge to the drinker to keep the lyrics in order when his spirits are so high.



In a deeper sense, however, we may suggest that there are two levels of thanksgiving when a man is saved from disaster by divine intervention. One is *hodaah* - thanks - and the other is *hallel* - praise. The visceral reaction of the survivor is to thank Heaven. But if asked whether he would have preferred to never have been

exposed to the danger, his response would invariably be “Yes!” He would prefer to completely forget that it ever existed. Only after serious reflection does he realize that the danger he faced was a gift from Heaven to wake him up and redirect him. It is then that he sings the praises of Hashem for having provided him with such an educational experience.

On Chanukah we offer both *hodaah* in the form of the *Al Hanissim* prayer and *hallel* in the recital of *Hallel* for eight days. On Purim the reading of the *Megillah* is our *hallel*, for it teaches us to appreciate the value of the danger as well as the salvation.

“Cursed is Haman” refers to the danger, “Blessed is Mordechai” to the salvation. When one drinks enough wine to link all the events in the *hallel* of our *Megillah* he no longer discerns between the values of the two.



**הג
פורים
שמח!**