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Purim: The Hidden Miracle

by Rav Yitzchak Breitowitz

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov used to tell the story of a poor man who once dreamt that if he would travel to a certain bridge in Vienna, he would discover a great treasure.

After having the same dream two or three times in a row, he began the long trek by foot. Arriving in Vienna after many months, he noted that the bridge was patrolled by foot-guards and as a result he could dig at the base of the bridge only for a few hours in the middle of the night and had to laboriously cover up his work before the morning.

After digging for months, he was finally apprehended. When the guard accused him of espionage, the Jew responded that he was simply following the dream he had in Warsaw. The guard laughed derisively: "How stupid you are to follow your dream. I too had a dream that under a pauper's hut in Warsaw I would find a buried treasure. Do you think I would ever bother to make such a foolish trip?"

And lo and behold, the pauper went home to his own town, his own house, his own bed, and discovered that the treasure was there all the time. He didn't have to go anywhere. All he had to do was look and he would find.

Rav Nachman commonly offered no explicit moral for his parables. He used to say that even if you learn nothing from the story, at least you enjoy the story. Here, however, the moral here is clear.

We spend our lives and energies looking for excitement, fulfillment, happiness and closeness to Hashem. We somehow dream that it exists

elsewhere, wherever we are not! If we only had another job, another family, another community, then.... This story reminds us that happiness and fulfillment must come from within, that Hashem is close to us in whatever situation we find ourselves, and if all we do is look – we will find. If we don't look, however, the wealth that is literally at our feet will never be discovered. We will live and we will die never realizing who we were and never discovering who we could have been.

And, as Rabbi Zusha taught us long ago that although there is no tragedy in our not being as great as our forefather Avraham, how infinitely sad it is if we never become our essential selves.

The message of this story is important the entire year but has special connection to Purim. We often seek the Hand of Hashem in the flamboyant, the dramatic, the miraculous or the supernatural – that which is far removed from the mundane experiences of our daily lives. Purim, which is a *nes nistar* (a hidden, non-supernatural miracle, which could be misunderstood as a series of coincidences) occurring in *galut* (a time of concealment), through a heroine whose very name connotes concealment (Esther), teaches us to see Hashem and feel His loving embrace in whatever place we are.

And by reminding us that surface appearances do not correspond with inner realities, ultimate purposes, and final meanings, Purim should impel all of us to search for that hidden treasure within, the core reality that underlies the superficial. And if we search, we shall surely find.

Q & A - TETZAVEH

Questions

1. What two precautions were taken to assure the purity of the oil for the *menorah*?
2. How was Aharon commanded to kindle the *menorah*?
3. What does *tamid* mean in reference to the *menorah*?
4. What does *kehuna* mean?
5. Name the eight garments worn by the *Kohen Gadol*.
6. To what does Rashi compare the *ephod*?
7. In which order were the names of the Tribes inscribed on the *ephod*?
8. The stones of the *ephod* bore the inscription of the names of the sons of Yaakov. Why?
9. For what sins did the *choshen mishpat* atone?
10. What are three meanings of the word *mishpat*?
11. What was lacking in the *bigdei kehuna* in the second *Beit Hamikdash*?
12. Which garment's fabric was woven of only one material?
13. When the *Kohen Gadol* wore all his priestly garments, where on his head was the *tefillin* situated?
14. What does the word *tamid* mean in reference to the *tzitzit*? (two answers)
15. Which garments were worn by a *kohen hediot*?
16. During the inauguration of the *kohanim*, a bullock was brought as a sin offering. For what sin did this offering atone?
17. Moshe was commanded to wash Aharon and his sons to prepare them to serve as *kohanim* (29:4). How were they washed?
18. What was unique about the bull sin-offering brought during the inauguration of the *kohanim*?
19. How did the oil used for the meal-offering differ from the oil used for the *menorah*?
20. What does the crown on the *mizbeach haketoret* symbolize?

Answers

1. 27:20 - The olives were pressed and not ground; and only the first drop was used.
2. 27:20 - He was commanded to kindle it until the flame ascended by itself.
3. 27:20 - It means that it should be kindled every night.
4. 28:3 - Service.
5. 28:4,36,42
- *Choshen*, *ephod*, *me'il*, *ketonet*, *mitznefet*, *avnet*, *tzitzit*, and *michnasayim*.
6. 28:6 - A woman's riding garment.
7. 28:10 - In order of birth.
8. 28:12 - So that G-d would see their names and recall their righteousness.
9. 28:15 - For judicial errors.
10. 28:15 -
 - (a) The claims of the litigants
 - (b) The court's ruling
 - (c) The court's punishment.
11. 28:30 - The *Urim V'Tumim* - the "*Shem Ha'meforash*" placed in the folds of the *choshen*.
12. 28:31 - The fabric of the *me'il* was made only of *techelet*.
13. 28:37 - Between the *tzitzit* and the *mitznefet*.
14. 28:38 -
 - (a) It always atones, even when not being worn.
 - (b) The *Kohen Gadol* must always be aware that he is wearing it.
15. 28:40,42 - *Ketonet*, *avnet*, *migba'at* and *michnasayim*.
16. 29:1 - The sin of the golden calf.
17. 29:4 - They immersed in a *mikveh*.
18. 29:14 - It is the only external sin-offering that was completely burned.
19. 29:40 - Oil for the *menorah* comes only from beaten olives. Oil for meal-offerings may come from either beaten olives or from ground-up olives.
20. 30:3 - The crown of *kehuna*.

Q & A - KI TISA

Questions

1. How many "geira" are in a shekel?
2. What was the minimum age of military service in the Jewish army?
3. What were the three different types of *terumah* donated?
4. The Jews were counted after Yom Kippur and again after Pesach. Both times they numbered the same amount. How can this be? Didn't some 19-year olds turn 20 during that six month period?
5. How many ingredients comprise the incense of the *Mishkan*?
6. According to Rashi, why are sailors called "malachim" ?
7. What is the difference between between *chochma* (wisdom), *bina* understanding), and *da'at* (knowledge)?
8. Shabbat is a "sign." What does it signify?
9. When did the Jewish People begin to give contributions for the building of the *Mishkan*?
10. How many books are there in Tanach?
11. From where did the men take the earrings that they donated to make the calf?
12. Why did Aharon build the altar for the golden calf by himself?
13. Why did Moshe break the Tablets?
14. How can two brothers belong to two different tribes?
15. Why did Moshe ask that his name be erased from the Torah?
16. How has the sin of the golden calf affected the Jewish People throughout history?
17. In verse 33:2, G-d says that the inhabitants of *Eretz Canaan* would be driven out of the Land. In that verse, only six of the seven Canaanite nations are mentioned. What happened to the seventh?
18. How did G-d show that He forgave the Jewish People?
19. How did Moshe become wealthy?
20. How do the light rays shining from Moshe's face show us the powerful effect of sin?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 30:13 - Twenty.
2. 30:14 - Twenty.
3. 30:15 - For the *adanim* (sockets), for the purchase of communal sacrifices, and for the building of the *Mishkan*.
4. 30:16 - Their ages were calculated based on Rosh Hashana, not based on their individual birthdays.
5. 30:34 - Eleven ingredients were used making the incense.
6. 30:35 - Because they stir (*malach*) the water with their oars.
7. 31:3 - *Chochma* is knowledge acquired from others. *Bina* is the deduction of new knowledge from what one has already learned. *Da'at* is holy inspiration.
8. 31:13 - It is a sign between G-d and the Jewish People that He has chosen them and a sign to the nations of the world that He has sanctified the Jewish People.
9. 31:18 - The 11th of Tishrei.
10. 31:18 - 24.
11. 32:2,3 - From their ears.
12. 32:5 - He hoped that by building it by himself it would take longer and in the interim Moshe would return.
13. 32:19 - Moshe reasoned: If the Torah forbids those who have estranged themselves from the Torah to partake in even a single commandment (Pesach sacrifice), surely the entire Torah cannot be given to a whole nation which has estranged itself from G-d!
14. 32:27 - Half-brothers, sharing the same mother.
15. 32:32 - So people shouldn't say "Moshe was unworthy to plead for mercy on behalf of the Jewish people."
16. 32:34 - Whenever G-d punishes the Jewish People, part of that punishment comes as payment for the sin of the golden calf.
17. 33:2 - The seventh nation, the Girgashites, voluntarily emigrated.
18. 33:14 - He agreed to let His *Shechina* dwell among them.
19. 34:1 - Moshe carved the Tablets out of precious stone. G-d commanded Moshe to keep the leftover fragments.
20. 34:35 - Before the sin of the golden calf, the people would not have been afraid to look at the light rays, but after the sin they were afraid.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Speedy Horsepower (part 2 of 2)

Towards the end of the Story of Purim, the Persian king Achashverosh overturned his awful decree against the Jews, sending out messages throughout his kingdom to announce that the Jews had permission to fight back against their enemies. As the Bible reports, “and he sent scrolls in the hands of the runners with susim, the riders of the rechesh, the achashtranim, sons of the remachim” (Esther 8:10). Last week, in Part One of this essay we focused on the words sus and rechesh, which both mean “horse.” This second installation is dedicated to the words achashtranim and remachim, which also seemingly mean “horse.” After discussing those words, we still have one more matter related to the word rechesh that we spoke about last week, and with that we will conclude this two part essay.

When it comes to the phrase “the achashtranim, sons of the remachim,” the Talmud (Megillah 18a) already comments that “we do not know” what this means. That comment itself actually implies that we do know what rechesh means, hence the above-mentioned commentators offered their respective takes on the meaning of rechesh. But does the Talmud’s comment mean that there is no known way of understanding achashtranim and remachim?

Rabbeinu Nissim of Gerona (1320-1380) explains that the Talmud only meant that the masses do not know what these terms mean, but that the Torah Scholars do know, or at least could know what these words mean (Teshuvot HaRan 79, also cited in Teshuvot Rivash 390-391).

Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-970), Yonah Ibn Janach (990-1050), and Radak (1160-1234) all trace the word achashtranim to the six-letter root ALEPH-CHET-SHIN-TAV-REISH-NUN. Actually, Ibn Janach asserts that the NUN is extraneous to the root, and elsewhere implies that the ALPEH is also extraneous, so for him the real root of achashtranim is only four or five letters, not six. Ibn Ezra writes

that in general four- (quadrilateral) or five- (pentaliteral) letter roots in Hebrew are typically either compound roots comprised of multiple roots fused together, or are loanwords borrowed from a language other than Hebrew. Both of these approaches are taken by various scholars with it comes to achashtranim.

Many commentators explain that achashtranim refer to “mules” that were born from the union of male donkeys and female horses (as opposed to hinnies, which are born to male horses and female donkeys, and are typically weaker beasts). This explanation is offered by Rabbi Saadia Gaon (to Esther 8:10), Ibn Ezra (to Esther 8:10), Radak (Sefer Shorashim), Rabbi Moshe ben Yitzchak Ibn Chalava (to Esther 8:10), and Ralbag (to Esther 8:10). In line with this, Rabbi Yosef Kimchi (1105-1170) in Sefer HaGalui cites Rabbi Saadia Gaon as explaining the etymology of achashtranim as derived from a portmanteau of the Persian word achash (“big”) and the Aramaic word trein (“two”), alluding to the fact that the achashtranim were large beasts born out of the merger of two species. According to this, achashtranim are not actually “horses,” but rather “half-horses.” As an aside, Rabbi Yosef Kimchi’s son Radak (to I Kings 5:8) writes that the word rechesh (also?) refers to these mules. Indeed, Ibn Janach writes that it is not too farfetched to presume that achashtranim refer to the same thing as rechashim.

Rabbi Tuviah ben Eliezer (an 11th century exegete) writes in Midrash Lekach Tov (also known as Pesikta Zutrata) that rechesh means “horses” (like we saw earlier), and achashtranim is an adjective that describes the type of horses in question. He parses the word achashtranim as related to CHET-SHIN (“speed/quickness”) and TAV-REISH (“spying/scouting”), as these animals were able to travel quickly and were used by international spies to scout out other lands. Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) similarly sees the word

achashtranim as a portmanteau of the biliteral CHET-SHIN and TAV-REISH ("jumping"). According to him, the very name of this animal tells us that its swift abilities stem from its ability to jump

(as opposed to its ability to run very fast). For information more about TAV-REISH as "spying," see my earlier essay "Spy versus Spy" (June 2017).

*To read the rest of this first installment in the two part essay, please visit us at:
http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

The Song of the Donkey

The Donkey says:

"Yours, Hashem, is the greatness, the might, the splendor, the triumph, and the majesty; for in all of the heavens and the earth, Yours, Hashem, is the kingship and the raising of all heads."

(Divrei HaYamim 1, 29:11)

The donkey is the classical beast of burden. The Zohar remarks that it "is not arrogant and it does not kick out against its master." It willingly carries encumbering loads, and it is not fussy about the comfortableness of its sleeping quarters, nor about the cleanliness of its food. It represents the virtue of subjugation to the Master of the world, and it sings, "Yours, Hashem, is the greatness..."

Although the Sages refer to the donkey as "the stupidest amongst domestic animals," there is what to learn from it. No matter what load Hashem places on our backs, we should have faith that He knows how much we can carry. Even if we do not understand why He wants us to undergo certain challenges, we must carry on with loyal obedience. Hashem understands more than we do.

Following the example of the donkey, we should realize that we ourselves are insignificant and that our only true greatness is our privilege to serve Hashem. It is lowly and shameful to stoop before another human being, but when one buckles to the will of the Master of the world, he emits not a whimper but a song of majesty. Not for naught will the Mashiach come riding on a donkey.

Sources: Shabbos 141a and Zohar, cited in Otzar HaYedios; Knesses Yaakov; Midrash Tanchuma (Balak §9)

A mule, the hybrid offspring of a horse and a donkey, is the product of the transgression of crossbreeding. Hashem chose specific designs for each of His creatures, and the mixture of species contradicts His will.

The Midrash teaches that when non-Jewish kings heard that Hashem commanded us in the Ten Commandments to respect parents like Himself, they acknowledged the utter correctness of all Hashem's mitzvahs, unlike the selfish decrees of human kings, which are often unreasonable and unfair. The mule is a

stark example of the correctness of Hashem's mitzvahs. Although its breeder succeeded in creating a useful beast of burden, it is also clearly defective, as mules are sterile. They are also known to be harmful to people. Only when the world follows the natural order set by its Creator, and the Jewish people fulfill His commandments, does the world function successfully. The mule is thus a living song of the kings' acknowledgment.

The Torah is the indispensable manual for life. It has stood the test of time throughout ever-changing world history, despite relentless assault from opposing theologies, and has emerged unchanged. At times, new philosophies confuse the masses to believe that another lifestyle is superior. So may it appear in one or two aspects – like the mule. However, it eventually falls on the roadside of history and does not bear fruits of true success – like the mule. By living according to the Torah in its purest form, passed down through an unbroken tradition from Sinai, our every step echoes the song of the mule.

Sources: Bamidbar Rabbah 8:4; Perek B'Shir based on Yerushalmi Berachos 8:5; Tzitzal Knafayim

*In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib

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PARSHA OVERVIEW - TETZAVEH

Hashem tells Moshe to command the Jewish People to supply pure olive oil for the Menorah in the Mishkan (Tent of Meeting). He also tells Moshe to organize the making of the *Bigdei Kehuna* (priestly garments): A breastplate, an *ephod*, a robe, a checkered tunic, a turban, a sash, a forehead-plate, and linen trousers. Upon their completion, Moshe is to perform a ceremony for seven days to consecrate Aharon and his sons. This includes offering sacrifices, dressing Aharon and his sons in their respective garments, and anointing Aharon with oil.

Hashem commands that every morning and afternoon a sheep be offered on the Altar in the Mishkan. This offering should be accompanied by a meal-offering and libations of wine and oil. Hashem commands that another Altar for incense be built from acacia wood and covered with gold. Aharon and his descendants should burn incense on this Altar each day.

PARSHA OVERVIEW – KI TISA

Moshe conducts a census by counting each silver half-shekel donated by all men age twenty and over. Moshe is commanded to make a copper laver for the Mishkan. The women donate the necessary metal. The formula of the anointing oil is specified, and G-d instructs Moshe to use this oil only for dedicating the Mishkan, its vessels and Aharon and his sons. G-d selects Betzalel and Oholiav as master craftsmen for the Mishkan and its vessels.

The Jewish People are commanded to keep the Shabbat, an eternal sign that G-d made the world. Moshe receives the two Tablets of Testimony on which are written the Ten Commandments.

The mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Jewish People panic when Moshe's descent seems to be delayed, and so they force Aharon to make a golden calf for them to worship. Aharon stalls, trying to delay them. Hashem tells Moshe to return to the people immediately, threatening to destroy everyone and build a new nation from Moshe. When Moshe sees the camp of idol-worship, he smashes the Tablets and destroys the golden calf. The sons of Levi volunteer to punish the transgressors, executing 3,000 men.

Moshe ascends the mountain again to pray for forgiveness for the people, and G-d accepts his prayer. Moshe sets up the Mishkan and G-d's clouds of glory return. Moshe asks G-d to show him the rules by which he conducts the world, but he is granted only a small portion of this request. G-d tells Moshe to hew new Tablets, and reveals to him the text of the prayer that will invoke Divine mercy.

Idol worship, intermarriage and the combination of milk and meat are prohibited. The laws of Pesach, the first-born, the first-fruits, Shabbat, Shavuot and Succot are taught. When Moshe descends with the second set of Tablets, his face is luminous as a result of contact with the Divine.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Nazir 23-36

Torah and Mitzvahs for Personal Motives

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav, “One should always be involved in learning Torah and fulfilling mitzvot even if not for the purest reasons, because this will lead to learning and fulfilling for pure reasons.”

An important caveat: This encouragement applies to motives of personal gain; but one who learns Torah as a means to gain knowledge to try to refute or degrade it is “better off unborn”. (Tosefot)

“In the reward of the forty-two sacrifices that the wicked Balak offered, he merited that Ruth would be descended from him.”

This is an example of the ruling of Rav Yehuda in the name of Rav that it is a positive measure to fulfill a mitzvah even if it is only for personal motive. The gemara explains Ruth’s lineage from the king of Moav as follows: Rabbi Yossi the son of Rabbi Chanina said, “Ruth was the daughter of the son of Eglon, the king of Moav”.

Nazir 23b

Argument about a Mistake

“Beit Shammi says, ‘Hekdesh made in error is indeed hekdesh’; and Beit Hillel says ‘It is not hekdesh’.”

This mackloket is taught in our mishna, and Tosefot explains why it is taught in this masechet about Nazir and not about hekdesh. One reason offered is that a later mishna teaches about “nezirut made in error.”

One example of “hekdesh made in error” is if a person vows that the black ox that goes out from his house in the morning first will be hekdesh – and a white ox goes out first. The white ox is hekdesh according to Beit Shammai but not according to Beit Hillel. A different way to explain their dispute is that Beit Shammai holds that the first black ox that goes out after the white one is hekdesh, but not the white one that actually went out first.

Nazir 30b, 31a

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

From Luxury to Light

The story of a Purim is a story that would repeat itself many times in our history. During the flowering of the Persian Empire, the Jews came into close contact with the political and cultural life of their host country and were exposed to all the temptations of the grandeur and splendor of this alien empire. Even amidst these influences, the Jewish People was expected to remain aware of its own light and joy, of its own salvation and dignity, and to find its light only in Torah and its joy in service of Hashem.

The Persian Empire, as it is described in the Book of Esther, was marked by elegance, culture and refinement. Its state, with its complex hierarchy of officials, its provincial governments and its sophisticated semi-global network of communications, appears as a well-organized entity. No attempt was made to eliminate ethnic differences, and every province was generously granted the right to preserve its individuality and language.

Achashverosh himself does not appear all that evil. While he has a penchant for luxury, he is gracious and affable, inviting all of the people – or least the entire population of his capital – to feast in an open banquet, entertaining them with truly royal hospitality. Whenever he celebrates a joyous occasion in his personal household, he grants his people tax remissions and he gives them royal gifts so they may share in his happiness. He is careful to observe the forms of law in whatever he does. He surrounds himself with advisers and experts of history and law. His choice of queen might indicate that he is free of all racial and social prejudice. It seems that it could not get any better.

And yet, all this culture and refinement has one denominator: the craving for worldly delights. All the culture and refinement are completely subservient to the objects of sensuality.

If the whim rules, there can be no security in any law and judgment – no matter how faithfully the letter of the law is adhered to. The laws are reduced to meaningless rules that give way to the feelings and moods of the king. So, while the case of the queen's breach is heard by jurists and wise men, an ordinary human being, having incurred the displeasure of one of the king's favorites, would be hanged as a matter of course. A simple decree, signed and sealed in the name of the king, is sufficient to permit the slaughter of an entire population, including women and children, for "political reasons."

And for Achashverosh, all that stands between his good-natured, gracious temperament and raving fury is a strong drink. Everything hinges on his mood and temper. So much so that if the queen should wish to plead with him, in the name of justice and humanity, she must first give a banquet and wait for the moment when the king is in a good mood before she may dare state her request.

The Jewish nation was taught an unforgettable lesson in the Purim story. They basked in royal splendor, tasted its delights and blossomed in its goodwill – so much so that a Jewish woman was queen, a Jew was the king's minister, and the Jews were given entrance into the inner circles of royal politics. But, they soon experienced the full impact of the misery that lies in store whenever the weal and woe of men depend on the pleasure or displeasure of a whimsical ruler.

At that time, the Jews came to know the unchanging faithfulness of the King in Heaven who protects them. They learned to rejoice in the light of their own truths, in the Torah and its laws. They rediscovered the joy in their own festivals. This was a lesson for the ages. Even in the darkest periods of history, the Jew can and will find this light: "The Jews had light and joy, and gladness and honor."

Sources: Collected Writings, Vol. II, pp. 401-404

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS – PURIM SPECIAL

By Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

PURIM AND THE INNER CHILD

As a child I adored Purim. I waited for it all year. Dressing up in a wacky costume and the never-ending nosh was the most amazing combination. Watching the adults behave in a way that they never, ever did during the rest of the year was pretty exciting too. Unfortunately, as I got older I seemed to lose some of that sense of childlike wonder and enthusiasm. It is not that I am not excited about things, but the excitement seems to be more restrained than it used to be when I was younger.

One of the most exciting parts of Purim is the reading of the Megillah. The Megillah tells the narrative of what happened before, during and just after the story of Purim. It tells how we, the Jewish People, found ourselves in such critical danger, and how Hashem protected us throughout. In fact, the Megillah is such a roller-coaster of a story that it is hard to keep track of all the details, of all the twists and turns until the final outcome. Towards the end of the Megillah there is a delightful verse that describes how the Jewish People felt when they finally realized that they were no longer in danger of annihilation and did not have to live in terror of their lives: “LaYehudim haytah orah v’simcha v’sasson viy’kar – the Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor.” (Esther 8:16) This seems to be a simple and poignant portrayal of their feelings at that moment, and yet our Sages teach (Tractate Megillah 16b) that each one of those four expressions of emotion is actually alluding to one of four different commandments that we are obligated in. Orach – light – alludes to the learning of Torah, Simcha – gladness – alludes to keeping the Festivals, Sasson – joy – alludes to the obligation to perform Brit Mila, and Yekar – honor – alludes to wearing Tefillin.

One of the great Chassidic Rabbis, the Sefat Emet, questions why the Megillah is being so ambiguous. If the verse is referring to these commandments, why doesn’t it simply state that the Jewish nation had Torah, the Festivals, Brit Milah and Tefillin? Why does the verse use expressions of emotion to describe the commandments? The Sefat Emet provides a most insightful explanation. It wasn’t the commandments that were being restored. Rather, it was the emotion and feeling towards those commandments that was reignited within each individual. The Sefat Emet teaches that throughout the story of Purim the Jewish People never stopped learning Torah, but the light of Torah was missing from their lives. They also never stopped celebrating the Festivals, but, understandably, gladness was absent from their celebrations. So, too, there was never a moment when they stopped performing Brit Milah on their newborn babies, but how could they do so with joy under such a threat? And they always continued to put on Tefillin, but the incredible sense of honor that wearing Tefillin carries with it was missing when they did so.

However, once the enormous peril was removed from them, once they understood as clearly as can be that Hashem had wrought for them the most astonishing miracle, they were able once more to serve Hashem with true, unbridled emotion.

One of the most brilliant scholars in America before the Second World War was Rabbi Shlomo Heiman. He was one of the greatest authorities in Jewish Law in his generation and he was also the head of one of the flagship Torah academies in New York. Rabbi Heiman would give an in-depth Talmud lecture almost every day to his students, and, despite ill health, his enthusiasm and passion for Torah were legendary. One day there was a very

heavy snowstorm and the city ground to a halt. Traffic was blocked and people stayed home to wait out the storm in comfort. On that day, only three people arrived for the lecture even though they were virtually certain it would be cancelled. Yet, to their enormous surprise, Rabbi Heiman arrived to deliver the lecture as usual. In his characteristic way he began teaching them with fiery enthusiasm, just as if he was teaching hundreds of people in that room and not just three. Those three students saw that he was physically pushing himself to his limits, and, knowing that he was not in the best of health, they beseeched him, “Rabbi, there are only three of us here. Please don't exert yourself so much!”

“It's not true that you are only three,” he replied. “Yes, of course I am speaking to the three of you, and trying my best to show you the beauty and wisdom of the Torah. But I am also hoping to influence not just you, but also your families, your children and grandchildren, your future students, and your students' students. I see them all before me!”

Not one of those three students would ever forget their Rebbe, his passion and his innocent enthusiasm. And neither would their families and students forget all this either.

Regarding the Ten Plagues that preceded the Exodus from Egypt, our Sages teach that each plague actually took a month from beginning to end. There were three weeks of warnings before the plague began, and then one week of the actual plague. The last plague was on Seder Night, the fifteenth of the Hebrew month of Nissan. One of the great Chassidic leaders points out that this means that the Plague of Darkness, which was the ninth plague, started on the fifteenth of the previous month of Adar – The exact same date on which the events of Purim would take place almost one thousand years later! On exactly the same date when we are celebrating Purim and the return of the true light of Torah, and joy to the world, the Egyptians were plunged into complete and absolute darkness.

This time of the year is truly a time of light, gladness, joy and honor for the Jewish nation.

There is an old adage that resonates within me: “We never really grow up; we only learn how to act in public.” I think that there is a lot of truth to that. And I also think that perhaps Purim is the perfect time to really learn how to act in public. It is the time to learn how to let everyone see how excited we are about keeping the commandments. It is the time to show the world how passionate we are about being able to keep the commandments. It is the time to approach our relationship with Hashem with childlike enthusiasm and innocence, so powerful that it does not wane throughout the rest of the year.

And if we do so, we will truly merit living and feeling exactly what the Megillah describes: “LaYehudim haytah orah v'simcha v'sasson viy'kar” – that we will also be blessed with lives that are full-to-bursting with light, gladness, joy and honor!

“משוננים אדר
מרבין בשמחה”