

# OHR NET

SHABBAT PARSHAT TEZAVE-KI TISA-PURIM · 9-16 ADAR 5775 - FEB. 28-MAR. 7, 2015 · VOL. 22 NO. 20

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

Tetzave

### FANCY DRESS

“For glory and for splendor” (28:2)

In light of the economic situation here in Israel, the government has been cutting back on renewing visas for foreign workers and sometimes deporting those who are here illegally.

Some years ago we had a cleaning lady from Romania called Valerica. Her mode of dress was the standard Romanian generic stonewashed Levis topped with a T-shirt that proclaimed the megatour of some Heavy Metal Band like Blind Widow or some other denizen of the musical illiterati.

Recently, my wife happened to be walking down Shmuel Hanavi Street when she saw a lady who bore a striking resemblance to Valerica. However, this lady was dressed in a long skirt, a modest blouse and her hair was covered with a beret. My wife looked again and said, “Valerica? Is it you?” “Yes, it’s me” she replied. My wife’s curiosity was piqued, “But what? What happened? Did you become Jewish?” With a malignant snort she replied, “Of course not! It’s only for show. If I don’t dress up like this, the police will spot me and kick me out of the country!”

I couldn’t help but be struck by the irony: Some seventy years ago Jews were afraid to walk the streets of Bucharest unless they were dressed as conspicuous Romanians, and some seventy years later this Romanian was afraid to walk the streets of Jerusalem (obviously with far more benign consequences) unless she was dressed like a Jew.

Clothes conceal, but they also reveal.

This week’s Torah portion starts with a description of the clothes of the *kohanim*. The Torah uses two abstract nouns to define the purpose of these garments: “for *glory* and for *splendor*.”

The Malbim says that the *glory* of the garments of the *kohanim* was that they revealed the innate holiness that G-d had given to the *kohanim*. However, these clothes were also for the *splendor* that

would come from the efforts of the *kohanim*.

“Glory” refers to the gifts G-d gives man. “Splendor” refers to what we can achieve by ourselves.

The reading of this week’s Torah portion comes just before Purim. On Purim there is a widespread custom to dress up in masquerade costumes. What is the connection between Purim and costumes?

In Tractate Megillah (12a), the students of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai asked him why the Jews of Persia at the time of Purim were judged to be worthy of destruction. He said to them, “You tell me.” They said, “Because they had pleasure from the feast of that evil man (Achashverosh).” He replied, “If that was true, only the Jews of Shushan who participated in the feast should have been culpable, not every Jew in Persia.” So they said back to Rabbi Shimon, “You tell us.” He said, “Because they bowed to the idol of Nevuchadnetzar.”

The *gemara* concludes, “But they only did it for show.” They only bowed out of fear of being put to death, not because they were really worshipping idols. Therefore, “G-d also only did it for show” — meaning that G-d allowed Haman’s genocide plan to proceed as far as it did only in order to frighten the Jews into repenting and mending their ways.

Our dressing up on Purim is to remind us that this whole world, in a sense, is “just a show”. That this whole world is a mask that hides the existence of G-d. The word for “world” in Hebrew, *olam*, has the same root as *ne’elam*, which means “hidden.”

What we “see” is not necessarily what “is”. It’s our job to pry the mask from the face of the world and reveal Who is behind it.

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

Tetzave

G-d 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. G-d 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. G-d commands that an altar for incense be built from acacia wood and covered with gold. Aharon and his descendants should burn incense on this altar every day.

## KETUVOT 30 - 43

*“Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for cold and heat.”*

We are taught this in a *beraita* on our *daf* and it is based on a verse in Proverbs (22:5), as explained in the *beraita*. “Is the discomfort of being too hot or cold the only matter in a person’s control?” asks Tosefot. *Chazal* indeed teach that we should make protective efforts to guard against dangers, such as not standing in a dangerous place or beneath a leaning wall. The difference, explains Tosefot, is that protection against heat and cold is always in the realm of human efforts. That is what is taught here. Other safeguards should be taken against possible dangers, but they will not necessarily prove successful in situations beyond a person’s control.

• Ketuvot 30a

*Rav Yosef said and likewise Rabbi Chiya taught: “Although the Sanhedrin ceased to exist, the four capital punishments did not cease.”*

The death penalty was only a possible option to be imposed by the Sanhedrin as punishment and atonement for the deserving transgressor when the Sanhedrin existed and convened before the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash (and convened in their appointed Lishkat Hagazit — “Hewn Chamber” — in the Beit Hamikdash). First the *gemara* “edits” this teaching to state that the death penalty judged by the courts did in fact cease. However, the appropriate, similar manner of capital punishment was Divinely carried out on the perpetrator. For example, a person who would have been sentenced by the Sanhedrin to receive the capital judgment of *skila* (stoning) would die by falling from a roof in the post-Sanhedrim era, receiving an equivalent capital punishment from Above.

Tosefot asks that we see that many transgressors who are deserving of the capital punishment nowadays do not receive the appropriate capital punishment from Above but rather die in their beds from “natural causes”. Tosefot answers that these people either did *teshuvah* or have some special merit and therefore are spared a type of capital punishment in this world. The Maharsha adds that in a similar way it is possible to understand the seemingly unfair, tragic and cruel deaths of extremely righteous individuals such as Rabbi Akiva. They were subject to a decree of suffering in this world in order to be cleansed from the few demerits on their record in order that they would surely receive a loftier place in the World-to-Come.

• Ketuvot 30a&b

*“This is the rule: Anyone who admits to owing more than he damaged is not obligated to pay anything based on his own admission.”*

This rule concludes the *mishna* that begins at the top of our *daf*. The basis for this rule is that a person’s word can obligate him only in true monetary remuneration (“*mamon*”), but not obligate him a “penalty payment” — “*modeh b’knas patur*” (Rashi).

The *gemara* points out that this rule is also true not only if a person admits to an amount that is *more* than he damaged, but also if a person admits to an obligation that is *less* than what he damaged — such as the damage caused by his normal ox (*tam*, for which the obligation according to halacha is only half of the damage). In both scenarios he is admitting to *knas* and not to *mamon*. So why does the *mishna* state “*more*” and not “*less*” as well?

The *gemara* poses this question and answers that the Tana who taught the *mishna* wanted to teach something that was without any exception. “*More*” is always true that he does not pay based on his admission. “*Less*”, however, is not always true. If his animal caused damage via “*tzererot*” — small stones kicked by his animal as it walked in the public domain in a normal manner — it is a “*halacha l’Moshe m’Sinai*” that he is obligated to pay half of the damage as “*mamon*”, and not “*knas*”. Due to this case of his being obligated to pay *less* than the full damage by his own admission, the Tana teaches “*more*” but not “*less*” in order to state a rule that is without exception.

• Ketuvot 41a&b

*continued on page eleven*

## PARSHA Q&A ?

### Tetzave

1. What two precautions were taken to assure the purity of 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 *tzitz*? (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?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to Tezave's Questions!

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

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*, *tzitz*, 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 - 1) The claims of the litigants, 2) The court's ruling, 3) 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 *tzitz* and the *mitznefet*.
14. 28:38 - 1) It always atones, even when not being worn. 2) 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*.

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Rav Bulman *zt"l*  
on the  
Torah Portion of the Week

# Abarbanel

## ON THE PARSHA

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

### Tetzave

This Parsha deals primarily with the special garments worn by the High Priest and the regular priests during their service in the Tabernacle. Abarbanel offers several interpretations of the symbolism of these garments. One of those interpretations is as follows:

Four of the garments were worn only by the High Priest and were considered to have greater importance: the breastplate, the apron, the robe and the headplate. The other less important garments were the turban, the sash, the trousers and the tunic. The four special garments worn by the High Priest were worn opposite the four main components of the body: the head, the heart, the digestive area and the reproductive area. The headplate signifies that all of his thoughts should be directed to G-d. The breastplate over his heart indicates that all of his prayers should be for the benefit of the entire nation, which is why twelve precious stones corresponding to the nation's twelve tribes were set in it. The apron encircled his abdomen, indicating that he should eat and digest only those foods that G-d permits. Finally, the robe covering the reproductive organs indicates that our desires must be constrained by the dictates of the Torah, both publicly and privately. The golden bells attached to the bottom of the robe remind us that we cannot hide our private behaviors. Everything eventually becomes known within the community of Israel.

These four garments also correspond to the four types of service that the High Priest performed. The garments of the head correspond to the inner sanctuary, or Holy of Holies, which the High Priest entered only on Yom Kippur. Here the intellect is represented by the ark and the tablets of the law. The second service was the lighting of the menorah, or candelabra, which was in the inner courtyard just outside the Holy of Holies. The breastplate with its twelve precious stones corresponded to the menorah since the letters engraved on the stones would prophetically light up in response to questions that the High Priest would ask of G-d. The third service was the arranging of the loaves of bread on the table, which naturally corresponds to the apron covering the digestive tract. The fourth service was the lighting of the incense on the golden altar. Just as the smoke from the altar announced the presence of the incense, so too the bells on the hem of the robe announced the presence of the High Priest.

The four garments of the regular priests were much simpler. Rather than employing the gold, silver, precious stones and expensive colorful fabrics of the High Priest's garments, these garments were made of simple linen and were much easier to make. They also corresponded to less religiously significant parts of the body: the skin, the bones, the flesh and the sinews. Finally,

although the four specialized garments worn by the High Priest were indicative of his pre-eminence among the people, the fact that he wore the four simple garments as well indicated that he still retained his humility and remained connected to the other priests as one of them. Furthermore, in times of need he was expected to perform all of the duties of the regular priests, and on Yom Kippur when he was serving on behalf of the entire nation he further demonstrated his humility and connection to all the people by wearing only the four simple white linen garments.

### Ki Tisa

After the transgression of the golden calf the Torah records a dialogue between Moshe and G-d in which Moshe pleads to come closer to G-d and gain a greater understanding of Him: "He (Moshe) said, 'Show me your glory.' He (G-d) said: 'I shall make all My goodness pass before you and shall call out with the name 'Hashem' before you; I shall show favor when I choose to show favor, and I shall show mercy when I choose to show mercy.' He (G-d) said, 'You will not be able to see My face for no human can see My face and live...Behold, there is a place near Me; you may stand on the rock. When my glory passes by, I shall place you in a cleft of the rock; I shall shield you with My hand until I have passed. Then I will remove My hand and you will see My back, but My face may not be seen.'" (Shemot 33:18-23)

This is clearly one of the most enigmatic passages in the Torah. Abarbanel cites in detail the explanations of Rambam and several other commentaries, mentions two explanations of his own and finally settles on a third interpretation as the one that fits the language of the Torah best.

In the above verses, G-d is responding to three requests posed to Him by Moshe immediately beforehand: 1) 'Make Your ways known to me'; 2) 'If Your presence does not go along, do not bring us up from here'; 3) 'Show me now Your glory.' G-d's ways are accessible to the intellect, while His glory must be shown through prophecy.

To the first request G-d responds, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you.' This refers to descriptions and characteristics of G-d that are called 'good'. Next, G-d says, 'and I shall call out with the name 'Hashem' before you'. This is a reference to His characteristic of mercy which He then expresses 'and I shall show favor when I choose to show favor....' What He means is that He will show favor and mercy to his people Israel when they deserve it.

In terms of the second request Abarbanel offers a completely different interpretation. Instead of 'if Your presence does not go along' Abarbanel interprets the words to mean 'if Your anger

*continued on page nine*

## PURIM – TO BOW OR NOT TO BOW

From: Carrie

Dear Rabbi,  
Haman was a malicious maniac who demanded homage from all – and most people obeyed. What I'm wondering is why Mordechai didn't bow as well. Aside from this being one of the venues through which the salvation occurred, what were Mordechai's reasons for not bowing down in honor of Haman as everyone else did? From their point of view, and not from retrospect, why not placate Haman instead of inciting him as Mordechai's refusal to bow did?

Dear Carrie,

This is an intriguing question. Why did Mordechai refuse to bow down to Haman arousing Haman's anger and thereby endangering his people?

The Sages explain that Haman intentionally hung an idol over his heart in order to cause the prostrating Jews to bow in front of the idol while bowing down to him and thus ensnare them in sin. Since idolatry is one of the transgressions which one may not commit even under threat of death, Mordechai refused to bow before Haman's idol.

However, there is also a deeper reason for Mordechai's refusal to bow before Haman. Mordechai descended from

Binyamin while Haman descended from Amalek who came from Esav. Since Binyamin had not yet been born at the time that Yaakov and his wives bowed in honor before Esav, he was not tainted by submission to Esav. Therefore, Binyamin's descendants, such as Mordechai, do not bow before Esav's, such as Haman.

This explanation is alluded to by the fact that the verse describing Mordechai's refusal to bow is in the future tense: Rather than saying "He did not kneel or bow", the verse actually states, "He will not kneel or bow down". This suggests that Mordechai's refusal was part of the larger meta-physical dynamic that Binyamin will not bow before Esav.

The use of the future tense in the verse suggests yet a third reason why Mordechai would not bow before Haman. As opposed to the beginning of the verse which says, "And all the king's servants who were in the king's gate kneeled and bowed down to Haman, for thus did the king command concerning him", the verse concludes, "and Mordechai will not kneel or bow down". This suggests that the entire verse is discussing the king's decree, and while others were required to bow before Haman, Mordechai was, according to the language of the decree, specifically exempt by the king from bowing.

This would explain why Haman didn't actually slander Mordechai before the king for contravening the decree: it did not apply to him. Rather, he conjured up a different pretext for complaining against the Jews.

## LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

### REMEMBERING THE LAND

*Why walled cities from the time of Yehoshua bin Nun celebrate Shushan Purim*

Purim is not celebrated on the same day everywhere. In walled cities, we are told in Megillat Esther, the celebration is on the 15th of Adar, while in cities without walls it is on the 14th.

The reason for this is that in the unwalled cities the Jews overcame their enemies on the 13th of Adar and celebrated on the 14th, while in the walled capital of Shushan the battle still raged on the 14th, and the Jews there could not celebrate their victory until the 15th. Therefore, all walled cities celebrate Purim on the 15th because of their similarity to Shushan.

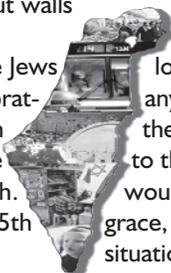
The designation "walled city" does not depend on a city's present situation, but rather on whether it had a wall at the time Joshua led the Jewish nation in the conquest of Eretz Yisrael (*Masechta Megillah 2a*). But why is Joshua's time the criterion for the designation "walled city?" Wouldn't it have been more logical to make this determination based on the time of the Purim miracle?

The answer is found in the Jerusalem Talmud where Rabbi

Yehoshua ben Levi declares that this was done in order to accord honor to Eretz Yisrael which lay desolate at the time of the Purim miracle.

Rabbi Nissan ben Reuven (Ran) explains this as follows: At the time of the Purim miracle there were hardly any cities in Eretz Yisrael with their walls still intact. Had the determination of "walled city" been made according to the situation at that time, almost all cities in Eretz Yisrael would have the status of unwalled cities. To avoid this disgrace, it was decided to base the status "walled city" on the situation of the city at the time of Joshua. This made many more cities in Eretz Yisrael eligible for this distinction.

Rabbi Yosef Karo (*Beit Yosef*) has a different approach. Our Sages wanted some memory of Eretz Yisrael in the celebration of this miracle which took place in a foreign land. In the spirit of "zecher lemikdash" — those laws and customs we follow to recall the Beit Hamikdash — the Sages linked the determination of "walled city" to Eretz Yisrael so that the Jews living abroad would not forget their holy Land.



## SHEMONEH ESREI — ELEVENTH BLESSING: PART I

**“Restore our judges as in earliest times and our counselors as in the beginning.”**

**Q**uestions: Why is it not sufficient to simply request to “restore our judges” and “counselors” without mentioning that they should be as in the beginning? Moreover, since this is a blessing for the restoration of justice, why are counselors mentioned at all?

The first judge and counselor a person will ever encounter is himself. Since a person’s reasoning can easily be manipulated it is not wise to trust one’s own judgment. Before a person makes a decision about a particular matter, for example a purchase for a new outfit or something more serious like a decision to go out on a *shidduch* date with a woman he has heard about, a dialogue within his own mind usually takes place.

This silent conversation which seems to be the expression of one’s own thoughts is in fact a debate between two different entities deep within a person. The higher spirit, which is expressed through pure intellect, feeds the subconscious with good and true advice. In direct opposition to this, man’s heart, which is the seat of his passions and desires for physical pleasure, feeds his imagination with negative and false advice.

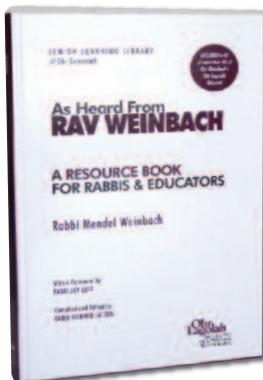
On a conscious level the average person is not aware of the two voices within; to him all of the potential ideas seem to be

his own. Only when a person is devoted to attaining inner perfection can he acquire the sensitivity to properly discern between these two voices.

According to the above we can understand how the same person can decide not to continue going out with a particular person, only to change his decision moments later. The conversation may sound something like this: “She is not the right girl for me; I need someone mature and settled.” Moments later his inner voice says something like this, “She looked so nice the other night. Maybe I’ll go out with here again, and see if she says she is ready to settle down.”

What is the source of this duality found within us? The Sages explain that before the first sin of the tree of knowledge, both body and soul functioned in perfect harmony. In this pure state, man’s intellect had a clear vision of truth. After the sin, however, body and soul separated, creating the inner battle mentioned above.

Accordingly, we can understand why we ask that our judges and advisers should be restored as in the beginning. We are asking that the clear and true advice of the soul overpower that of the tainted heart. We are asking that our decisions (judgments) be in line with the advice of only the soul and not the body. Simply put, when push comes to shove, make sure it is the soul that does the shoving.



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## RABBI GUY MATALON

**Age: 44 - Omaha, Nebraska**  
**NYU, PhD Medieval Jewish and Islamic Thought**  
**Director of the Mechina Program at Ohr Somayach**

**G**uy Matalon moved to Sherman Oaks, California from Holon, Israel with his family as an 11 year old. Growing up in a secular Israeli home in “the Valley” helped the family maintain their strong Jewish and Israeli identity in a foreign land. That identity kept him tethered to his heritage throughout his high school, college and graduate school years. He received his BA in Political Science from California State, Northridge. After post-graduate studies at UCLA and UC Berkeley, he travelled to NYU for his Masters and PhD.

His journey back to observance began with his study of the Rambam as a doctoral candidate. “The Rambam had great influence on me when I began studying Jewish thought. His logical argument, honesty and complexity drew me to study in greater depth not only the Mishna Torah code of law, but also his philosophical works. I really enjoyed his Arabic — his style was clear and beautiful.”

It continued with first teaching position at the University of Nebraska. The warmth of the Jewish community of Omaha and the family values and *menstchlichkeit* of even the non-Jews of the Midwest Corn Belt provided the perfect soil for him and his newly-married wife Elinor (also a *sabra*) to grow their attachment to the faith of their ancestors. “The Omaha Jewish community opened my eyes about the importance of belonging and learning more about my own heritage. It was an amazing place to start a family, my academic career and my communal leadership role.”

Dr. Matalon was not only hired as a professor at the university, but also to be the Executive Director of the Center for Jewish Education of Omaha. As such, he gained not only teaching skills, but important budgeting and organizational skills that he needs on a day-to-day basis as Director of the Mechina Program.



Through his study of Jewish Philosophy, like the Rambam and other *Rishonim* in the original (both Hebrew and Arabic), and having acquired the skills to learn Gemara, he delved deeper into the sources, and through self-education became proficient in the *Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi* along with various other foundational texts. He maintained personal Torah study with the local Orthodox rabbi in Omaha, Rabbi Kutner, and later with Rabbi Gross, to make sure his understanding of the texts was correct. After the birth of their two sets of twins, now 10 and 7, the family decided to make *aliyah*. Their decision to move to Israel was motivated by their desire to come home both physically and spiritually. He and his wife rented an apartment in Rechovot in 2011, where they live today. Elinor first worked for a grass roots *kiruv* organization and now does resource development for various Jewish community organizations.

Rabbi Matalon learned in the Kollel of Ohr Somayach under the tutelage of his neighbor in Rechovot, Rabbi Avraham Reisman. After a year, Rabbi Reisman told him that he was now ready to teach.

“Teaching at Ohr Somayach is a great challenge because students come from all sorts of backgrounds and are in different places in their journey. I enjoy the personal connection I am able to make with the students and the deep discussions we enter into during classes. Another great aspect of teaching at Ohr Somayach is the relationship and the camaraderie that exist between the rabbis. It strengthens me and inspires me.”

And as to the future, Rabbi Dr. Matalon has this to say: “I want to continue my learning and focus on issues of life and death. I find the topic relevant to all stages of life, and the moral dilemmas such cases present allow for greater clarity of what G-d wants from us. I also would like to continue to offer new topics for learning and create new opportunities to expose young people to the intellectual power of the Torah.”

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## PURIM AND THE REACCEPTANCE OF THE TORAH

“**A**nd Moshe brought the nation toward G-d from the camp and they stood beneath the mountain. (Shemot 19:17)

“*They stood beneath the mountain*”: Rav Avidni bar Chama said, “This comes to teach us that G-d held the mountain over them like a barrel, saying: ‘If you accept the Torah, then fine, but if not, there will be your burial place...’” Rava said, “*Nevertheless, they reaccepted it (voluntarily) during Achashverosh’s days*, as it says, ‘The Jews fulfilled and accepted’; they fulfilled that which they previously accepted”. (Tractate Shabbat 88a)

The commentaries point out a few fundamental apparent problems with the above Gemara. Firstly, how are we to understand the forceful nature of the acceptance of the Torah in light of the verse (Shemot 24:7) that says the Jewish people *voluntarily* accepted the Torah by declaring “*na’aseh v’nishma*” (“we will do and we will hear”)? Furthermore why did it take until Purim, hundreds of years later, for them to reaccept it? Finally, in what way was the period of the story of Purim the opportune time for this undertaking?

In order to answer these questions we must delve into the essence of the holiday of Purim. The Gemara says:

Where is Esther’s name mentioned in the Torah? The verse states (Devarim 31:18): “*haster astir panai bayom hahu*”... (I shall hide my face on that day) — (Tractate Chullin 139b)

Rashi: During the time of Esther there will be a “hiding of the face” (of G-d), and this will be a time of great troubles.

The above Gemara elegantly describes the period of the events of Purim as a time when G-d hid His presence from being revealed to the world. This is because at the time, the Beit Hamikdash, the place from which G-d’s presence radiates to the entire world, was in ruins and the Jewish nation was in exile. Additionally, Achashverosh, the king of the country to which they were exiled, hated everything they stood for and was throwing a party in honor of the seventieth anniversary of the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash (Tractate Megillah 11b). It was a significant anniversary celebrating (according to Achashverosh’s false calculations) the fact that Yirmiyahu’s prophecy in verse 29:10, which was that the Beit Hamikdash would be rebuilt in seventy years, wasn’t fulfilled. If that wasn’t enough there was also the decree of Haman, the second in command to the king, to kill all the Jewish men, women and children in one day. At first glance it seemed like G-d had totally lifted His providence from His chosen nation.

Even the final deliverance of the Jewish People in the story of Purim was unique in this regard. Unlike the redemption from Egypt in which G-d performed open miracles to reveal Himself to the world, the final salvation of the Jewish People in the story of Purim was seemingly through natural means. Achashverosh’s feast, Vashti’s execution, Esther’s election as queen, Haman’s rise to power, Mordechai’s act of saving the king’s life, and the victory over Amalek did not disobey the laws of nature. Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv points out that the fact the occurrences described in the *megillah* happened over a span of nine long years could have

easily led the people experiencing the events to label each event as a separate, independent coincidence. In other words, through examining the events of the story of Purim superficially, one could very well have attributed it all to chance.

Through analyzing the *megillah*, however, a person is given a glimpse behind how every single event was a piece of a puzzle put in place, ultimately depicting the guiding hand of G-d. By presenting so many unrelated and unlikely events as part of one long story, the *megillah* forces us to ask, “Who is the One orchestrating so many things to happen at precisely the perfect time?” This idea is hinted at in the name that is given to this *megillah*, Megillat Esther. The word *megillah* shares the same root as the word “*megaleh*” which means to reveal. Furthermore, the name Esther shares the same root as the word “*nistar*” which means hidden. Hence, Megillat Esther literally means “revealing that which is hidden”. Revealing the hidden hand of G-d is exactly what the *megillah* is meant to do. This is precisely why the *megillah* never explicitly mentions the name of G-d. G-d’s name was purposely left out of the *megillah* to teach us to search for the guiding hand of G-d even when it is not revealed, and thereby come to realize that G-d is not only the driving force behind open miracles but also nature as well.

With this in mind we can gain an insight into the custom of wearing costumes on Purim. A mask covers the identity and to a certain degree the existence of the one wearing it. It is only when we lift the mask that we can see who is behind it. In Hebrew the word “*olam*” (world), shares a root with the word “*ne’elam*” (hidden). This is because the consistent laws of nature “hide” the presence of G-d, as a mask hides the identity of the one behind it. It is left up to us to see through the mask and reveal G-d’s presence in the world. Purim, by the nature of its hidden miracles, is the perfect time to remind ourselves that there is more to the world than what meets the eye — hence the custom to wear costumes on this day.

We can now understand the idea behind the reacceptance of the Torah on Purim. When the Jewish People left Egypt they were on a spiritual high. The miracles, and thus G-d’s presence in the world, was so clear that all doubts disappeared. It was this clarity that the Midrash metaphorically refers to as a mountain hanging over the Jewish People. At the time, the revelations were so intense and the significance of the Torah was so apparent that it was almost as if there was no option but to accept the Torah. Therefore, even though their acceptance of the Torah was essentially voluntary, it also had an element of compulsion. On Purim however, when G-d’s presence was hidden, the Jewish People reaccepted the Torah without the coercion of the “mountain” of clarity. This is the reason why it took until Purim to reaccept the Torah. In the midst of G-d’s concealment Purim was indeed the most opportune time for the Jewish People to reaccept the Torah through exercising the full extent of their free will.

# Blessed be Mordechai the Jew

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach, *zatzal*

*“For Mordechai the Jew was accepted by most of his brethren as a seeker of good for his people and a spokesman of peace for all his posterity” (Esther 10:3).*

*“By ‘most of his brethren’ but not ‘by all’ — this teaches that some members of the Sanhedrin distanced themselves from him” (Gemara Megillah 16a).*

With all its opportunities for saving Jewish lives, Mordechai’s rise to power was not without its drawbacks. His preoccupation with communal matters forced him to spend less time learning Torah. As a result, some of his colleagues in the Sanhedrin withdrew from him.

This would seem to indicate that these Sages considered Torah study more important than saving lives. Indeed, in Sefer Ezra (2:2) Mordechai is mentioned after four other names, while in Sefer Nechemiah, concerning events that took place twenty-four years later, his name appears after five others. This demotion is interpreted as Heavenly support for the Sages’ decision to distance themselves from Mordechai after he neglected Torah for lifesaving communal work.

Yet the *poskim* (*Turei Zahav, Yoreh Deah 251:4*) state that one is obligated to put aside learning Torah in order to save lives. The same halachic principle obliges a community to take funds collected for the support of Torah study and utilize them for taxes if evasion could endanger Jewish lives. Mordechai therefore had no alternative but to assume the responsibility thrust upon him.

Nonetheless, if one Jew must sacrifice his learning in order to save lives, while another can continue his learning undisturbed, the latter is greater.

This idea, interjected into the last words of the Megillah and

in the midst of such elaborate praise for Mordechai, is the Megillah’s way of reinforcing its readers’ Torah perspective. Of course, every Jew, like Mordechai, must be prepared to put aside every personal consideration — even the greatness he can achieve through learning Torah — if Heaven has put him in a position where he alone can save Jewish lives. But what is even greater than such heroism, and is the only guarantee that dangers such as Hamanic decrees will not threaten the Jewish people? The learning of Torah.

Those members of the Sanhedrin who distanced themselves from Mordechai after he took on his new responsibilities were demonstrating for their generation and all future generations that Jewish survival is guaranteed not by Jews like Mordechai in high places in the government, but by Jews who are deeply committed to uninterrupted Torah study. Mordechai, who unshirkingly accepted the lifesaving responsibility for which Heaven had singled him out, was certainly the first to appreciate the significance of their gesture. Nevertheless, he was capable of proudly continuing as “a seeker of good for his people and a spokesman of peace for all his posterity.”

• Source: Excerpt from the sefer

“127 Insights Into Megillas Esther” by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

*Abarbanel* **ON THE PARSHA** *continued from page four*

does not go away.’ Moshe is saying that if G-d remains angry at the people he should leave them at Mt. Sinai. In G-d’s response Abarbanel substitutes the word ‘anger’ for ‘face’. He is telling Moshe that his request is impossible since no human can experience G-d’s anger and still remain alive.

To the third request, to be shown G-d’s glory, G-d answers that Moshe should stand on the rock near Him. His reference is to the rock at Horeb, from which Moshe brings forth water. This rock is a physical metaphor for the Divine Presence. G-d is telling Moshe that because of his great desire to see G-d’s glory he will be able to ‘stand on the rock’ and use his power of prophecy to deepen his experience of G-d’s glory. However, G-d tells him that standing indefinitely in the bright, pure light of the Divine Presence will blind him. There is a limitation to prophetic understanding, a boundary that should not be

crossed since it can profoundly distort the prophetic understanding. When G-d tells him ‘When My glory passes by’ He is telling him that even if he crosses this boundary G-d will protect him from damage by placing him, metaphorically, in the ‘cleft of the rock.’ G-d then tells him that He will remove his hand and ‘you will see My back’. In Hebrew, the word for ‘back’ is essentially the same as the word for ‘later on’. G-d is telling Moshe that He will remove that protection so that Moshe will still be able to apply his prophetic insights later on to other dimensions of G-d’s creation.

Finally, the word ‘face’ in the last sentence: ‘but My face may not be seen’ is again translated by Abarbanel as ‘anger’. G-d is informing Moshe that He has forgiven the transgressions of Israel and that He will go with them and He will not pour out his wrath against them, i.e. ‘but My anger may not be seen.’

## LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF PURIM

### TIMES

Purim is preceded by the Fast of Esther, which begins at dawn on the 13th of Adar and continues until nightfall. When the 13th is on Shabbat, the Fast of Esther is observed on the preceding Thursday. It is forbidden to eat and drink on this day (one may, however, wash, and wear leather shoes).

In unwallied cities, Purim is celebrated on the 14th of Adar, from night to night.

In cities with walls dating from the days of Joshua, Purim is celebrated on the 15th of Adar, as it was in Shushan, the capital of Persia; hence the name, Shushan Purim. Jerusalem is a walled city and most of its suburbs are also considered part of Jerusalem regarding this law.

### READING OF THE SCROLL OF ESTHER

*Kri'at Hamegillah*

The Scroll of Esther is read publicly in the evening and on the morning of Purim.

It must be read from a scroll written in accordance with Halacha.

The reader and the audience must have intent to fulfill the mitzvah of reading and to fulfill the obligation of the blessings before and after.

It is customary to make noise when the name of Haman is mentioned.

It is forbidden to speak from the time of the blessings before the reading, until the end of the blessings after the reading.

Ideally the scroll should be read in the presence of a *minyán*.

### PRAYER

*Tefillah*

The prayer '*al ha'nissim*' is added in the Silent Prayer (*Shmoneh Esrei*) and in Grace after Meals.

If one forgot '*al hanissim*' one does not repeat the prayer.

During the morning service (*shacharit*), the Torah is read.

The prayer of repentance, *tachanun*, is not recited, nor is the prayer *la'menatze'ach*.

### GIFTS TO FRIENDS

*Mishloach Manot*

One is obligated to give at least one gift to one fellow Jew. The more the better.

The gift must consist of at least two items of food, ready to eat.

It is preferable to send the gift via a third party.

### GIFTS TO THE POOR

*Matanot Le'evyonim*

One is obligated to give a gift of money, sufficient for one meal, to at least two poor people. The more the better.

Funds must be available on the day of Purim. (No post-dated checks.)

It is preferable to take care of this obligation early in the day.

The gift may be given to a third party in order to distribute on the day of Purim.

More should be spent on gifts to the poor than on gifts to friends (unless they are also poor).

### THE FESTIVE MEAL

*Seudat Purim*

It is obligatory to partake of a festive meal on the day of Purim.

It is customary to eat food with seeds — e.g., *Hamentashen* with poppy-seed filling.

One should drink more wine than one is accustomed to.

It is correct to invite guests, especially the needy.

The conversation should be focused on words of Torah.

### CUSTOMS

*Minhagim*

Many have a custom to dress up in costumes.

It is customary to give charity to all who ask.

Some produce amusing Purim plays.

Some also present amusing *divrei Torah*.

It is customary to visit the homes of one's Rabbis and teachers.

One should start studying the laws of Passover on Purim.

It is correct not to engage in business or work on Purim.

At the afternoon service before Purim it is customary to give three coins (preferable with the number ½ on them) to charity in memory of the three "half-shekels" given to the Temple.

## OHRNET Purim Q&A

### Questions

1. How many countries did Achashverosh rule over?
2. How many days did the first feast last?
3. What are the names of Achashverosh's two servants who plotted to kill him?
4. How did Haman choose the date that he did for killing the Jews?
5. How many people did Esther invite to her parties?
6. What did Mordechai receive with the hanging of Haman?
7. Why is this holiday called "Purim"?
8. How many different *mitzvot* do we fulfill on Purim?
9. Which two tribes are mentioned in relation to Mordechai?
10. What do we add to our regular *Shmonah Esrei* and *birkat hamazon*?
11. What portion of the Torah is read on Purim morning?
12. Why is Haman referred to as "*Ha'agagi*"?
13. How many wine banquets are mentioned in the Megillah?
14. How much should one drink in celebration of Purim?
15. In which city did all the Megillah events take place?
16. What was the proclamation made by Haman as he led Mordechai on parade?
17. Who informed the king about the gallows which Haman had prepared for Mordechai?
18. Which cities celebrate Purim on 14 Adar and which on 15 Adar?
19. What is the name of the fast day preceding Purim?
20. How many days did Esther and the Jews of Shushan fast in order to deserve a miracle?

### Answers

1. 127 (*Esther* 1:1)
2. 180 (*Esther* 1:4)
3. Bigtan and Teresh (*Esther* 2:21)
4. With a lottery (*Esther* 3:7)
5. Two: Achashverosh and Haman (*Esther* 5:4 and 5:8)
6. Haman's house (*Esther* 8:3)
7. Because of the "Pur" (lots) cast by Haman (*Esther* 9:26)
8. Four: 1) Reading of the Megillah, 2) Sending gifts to friends, 3) Giving gifts to the poor, 4) Feasting with food and drink (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 690, 695, 696)
9. Binyamin and Yehuda (*Esther* 2:5)
10. *Al ha'nissim* (*Orach Chaim* 693, 695)
11. Parshat Amalek – *Shmot* 17:1-9 (*Orach Chaim* 693)
12. He was descended from the Amalekite King Agag who was slain by the Prophet Shmuel (Book of Shmuel I 15:32-33)
13. Four (*Esther* 1:3, 1:5, 5:5, 7:1), two thrown by the king and two by Esther.
14. More than he is accustomed to drinking and, if he can maintain his sobriety, to the point where he cannot distinguish between "Cursed by Haman, blessed be Mordechai." (*Orach Chaim* 695)
15. Shushan (*Esther* 1:2 and repeated throughout the Megillah)
16. "This is what is done for the man whom the king honors." (*Esther* 7:11)
17. Charvona (*Esther* 7:9)
18. Cities that were walled from the days of Yehoshua (Yerushalayim as an example) read on the 15 Adar, others on 14 Adar. (*Orach Chaim* 685)
19. Ta'anit Esther (*Orach Chaim* 686)
20. Three days and nights (*Esther* 5:15)

## TALMUD Tips

*continued from page two*

*"This question was unresolved by the two great Sages — Rabba and Rav Yosef for 22 years, and was not resolved until after Rabba passed from this world and Rav Yosef became Rosh Yeshiva in his place and answered it."*

Rashi explains the context for this statement in our *sugya*. Originally Rabba was the Rosh Yeshiva and was called "Uprooter of Mountains" due to his especially sharp, analytical prowess. After 22 years when Rabbi passed, Rav Yosef became the Rosh Yeshiva. His reputation was one of vast and exceptional knowledge of teachings of the Oral Law, and was therefore known as "Sinai". However, his reputation was one of less "sharpness" than had been attributed to his predecessor, Rabba. Therefore, he was given a special help from Heaven to be able to answer the question that even Rabba failed to answer, in order to receive a reputation that now included great "sharpness" in order to lead the people with the appropriate respect due a Rosh Yeshiva.

• *Ketuvot* 42b

## PARSHA Q&A ?

### Ki Tisa

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 *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?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to Ki Tisa's Questions!

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

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.

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Ki Tisa

## HEADRAISER

*“When you raise the head of the Children of Yisrael” (30:12)*

**W**hy does the Torah choose the expression “raise the head” to mean that Moshe should take a census of the Jewish People?

G-d explained to Moshe that the Jewish People had placed their lives in jeopardy by worshipping the golden calf. The process of counting them by the coins they were to donate would “raise their heads,” — elevate them spiritually from the depths to which they sunk, and earn them atonement from their sin.

Moshe supposed that such atonement would require a coin of a very large denomination indeed. Perhaps it would be a *kikar* of silver, the equivalent of three thousand silver coins. If not three thousand silver coins, it might be that G-d would demand a coin worth a hundred silver pieces for each. This would be based on the penalty of one hundred silver pieces as the penalty the Torah prescribes for a man who wrongly defames his wife’s virtue. Since the Jewish People defamed G-d’s name when they proclaimed “*These are your gods, Yisrael,*” this might be the level of the atonement required.

Alternatively, if not a coin worth a hundred silver coins, Moshe surmised that the coin G-d would stipulate might be

the equivalent of fifty silver pieces. For that is the penalty that a seducer must pay, and the Jewish People had made idols in defiance of the commandment “*You shall have no other gods!*”

At the very least, Moshe conjectured, G-d would demand a coin to the value of thirty *shekalim*. The owner of a goring ox must pay thirty shekels. By worshipping a calf, the Jewish People had traded G-d’s glory for the image of a calf.

In the event, Moshe’s fears were unfounded. G-d said to him “You need not pay Me coins worth a hundred, or fifty, or even thirty silver pieces. All I ask is that you donate one small coin to the value of a half-shekel.”

G-d then took a half-shekel coin from under His Throne of Glory, showing Moshe its size and shape.

“This is the type of coin they shall give,” said G-d.

Those half-shekel coins from the census were melted down and used for the silver sockets, the “*adanim*”, that were the foundation for the walls of the Mishkan. In other words, the Mishkan literally stood on the half-*shekalim* that the Jewish People donated. They were the new basis of G-d’s residing amongst them.

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

Ki Tisa

**M**oshe 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, 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 Sabbath as 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 delayed, and force Aharon to make a golden calf for them to worship. Aharon stalls, trying to delay them. G-d 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 to pray for forgiveness for the people, and G-d accepts his prayer. Moshe sets up the Mishkan and G-d’s cloud of glory returns. Moshe asks G-d to show him the rules by which he conducts the world, but 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.

# Until the Last Lap

BY RABBI YITZCHAK BOTTON

*Rabbi Akiva was sitting and expounding on the Purim story. Seeing that the congregation was dozing off, He wished to awaken them from their slumber, so he said: How did Esther merit reigning over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces? G-d said (i.e. decreed), “Let Esther, the granddaughter of Sarah, who lived one hundred and twenty-seven years, come and reign over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces (Midrash Rabba, Esther 1:8)*

It is well known that the Sages of the Mishna instilled their holy words with endless depth through meriting a level of Divine communication called “*Ruach Hakodesh*”. As such, we must work to uncover the hidden wisdom within this intriguing episode recorded in our oral tradition.

Questions: Why does the Midrash refer to the listeners as a ‘congregation’ instead of ‘students’, and what is the deeper meaning behind the fact that they were sleeping? Since many generations separated Sarah from Esther, Why is she referred to as Sarah’s granddaughter? What possible connection could there be between the years of Sarah’s life, and the number of provinces that Esther ruled over? Finally, what is the significance that the author of this teaching is Rabbi Akiva?

The story of Purim teaches us to have faith in the darkest moments, to find the hidden hand of G-d that protects us in the most difficult of times.

The Talmud teaches us that just as Moshe, the Faithful Shephard of the Jewish People, led the Jews, nourishing them with *emunah* (faith) in his time (Zohar), so too, in all generations the Jewish leaders help guide and strengthen the people of their generation, in accordance with the verse, “We have only the *Kohen* (priest) in our day.”

Rabbi Akiva was the Jewish leader in one of the most difficult times for the Jewish People. After the destruction of the Holy Temple and subsequent exile it appeared as though G-d was no longer protecting His people. In the face of such tragedy and suffering it was Rabbi Akiva who sought to ensure that his generation would live on to father the next one.

Rabbi Akiva saw that the people of his generation were

“dozing off”. With weakened faith they were becoming disconnected. Just as a head directs the body, as their leader he was responsible to awaken them — i.e., strengthen their faith in G-d. Drawing a parallel to a similar time in Jewish history, the Persian exile, when it also seemed as though the Jews had lost their protection, he began to explain:

In Esther’s time things seemed dark and helpless, as though G-d had abandoned His people. With a price on the head of every man woman and child, it seemed that the fate of the Jewish People was at its end. Surely a simple orphan girl like Esther had nothing in common with the Matriarch Sarah, whose life was constantly surrounded with miracles, indicating that G-d’s presence was always with her.

This idea can be understood in the Torah’s calculation of Sarah’s life. Rashi comments on the double reference to Sarah’s life in the verse. He explains that the Torah intended to teach us that all of the years of Sarah’s life were equal in a good and positive way. The reason for this is seemingly obvious: since throughout all her days she remained connected to G-d in perfect faith, meriting seeing the Divine presence in her daily life, therefore all her years were “good”, as there can be no greater good than experiencing life bound up with one’s Maker.

Although in the time of Purim, as in Rabbi Akiva’s time, the Jewish People did not merit to see G-d’s presence or His providence, he wanted to show them that G-d was still with them, controlling things, albeit in a hidden way, as He was in the days of Purim. This was his intent in pointing out the connection between the years of Sarah’s life and the number of provinces Esther ruled over. Just as Sarah’s life was totally under G-d’s supervision from beginning to end, so too every detail of Esther’s life, including what was seemingly an insignificant detail in the Purim story, was under G-d’s absolute supervision.

Most importantly, Rabbi Akiva wanted to teach his generation that the same applied to his time, and we must know that this lesson remains true in our time too. By calling Esther “Sarah’s granddaughter” he emphasized the strong connection between the continued generations of the Jewish People and their ancestors. As the Talmud states, “As long as the descendants of Yaakov are alive, he remains alive.” Just as in a relay race, only when someone is still running are all of the previous runners still in the race.