

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Megilah 14 - 20

Issue # 293 Succot

Week of 9 - 15 Tishrei 5760 / 20 - 26 September 1999

Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

The Hill and the Hole

When Haman offered Achashveirosh 10,000 talents of silver for permission to carry out his genocidal plot against the Jews, the king responded: "The silver is given to you as well as the people, to do with them as you see fit." (*Megillat Esther 3:11*). He then gave Haman the royal ring as power for his "final solution."

Our Sages compare this scene to a dialogue between a man who had a hill in his field which obstructed his cultivation of it and another who had a similar problem with a deep hole in his field. Each of them longed for what was in the other's field as a solution to his own problem. One day the fellow with the hole approached the hill owner with an offer to buy his hill from him so that he could fill his hole. The hill owner graciously declined the offer of money and gladly allowed him to removed the hill for the benefit of both of them.

Achashveirosh and Haman both hated the Jews, but for opposite reasons. To the haughty king, this wise and noble people represented a hill that threatened his own stature. To Haman they were lowly, contemptible creatures to look down upon as one would a hole in the ground.

In another sense, these two symbols represent two classical approaches to overcoming anti-Semitism throughout the ages. The Jews who believe they are hated because they are different have discovered that assimilation only earns them the disrespect of those they attempt to imitate, who subsequently look down on them even more than before — the hole! Other efforts to win the affection of non-Jews by reminding them how much they owe the Jews who have enriched their commerce, science and arts, only produce an irritating hill of debts which our enemies, like Achashveirosh, are glad to get rid of.

The only real solution is that indicated in the very next lines of *gemara* commenting on the king's transfer of the ring: "The transfer of this ring achieved more than all of the 48 prophets and seven prophetesses who did not succeed in causing Jews to repent, while this transfer of power did."

Megillah 14a

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

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The Greatness of Torah Study

The study of Torah, says Rabbi Yosef, is greater than even the saving of lives. As proof he calls attention to two biblical passages which describe Mordechai's return from exile to *Eretz Yisrael*. In the first one (*Ezra 2:2*), Mordechai is mentioned after four others who came together with Zerubavel after the Persian ruler Koresh granted permission to return. In the second one (*Nechemiah 7:7*) he is mentioned after five others who accompanied Zerubavel 24 years later when he returned a second time after the building of the second *Beit Hamikdash*.

Why was Mordechai thus demoted, asks Rabbi Yosef. The answer is that during this interval there occurred the Purim miracle and Mordechai became Persian prime minister. Even though this enabled him to save Jewish lives, he was lowered in his prestige among the sages because he could no longer devote himself to Torah study with the same intensity.

This ruling of Rabbi Yosef is posed by Maharshah as a challenge to a halacha in *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 251:14*. The ruling there is that if a community has collected money for the purpose of supporting Torah study, it may divert those funds to pay a tax levied upon it by a despotic ruler. Although the general rule is that property or money set aside for one sacred purpose cannot be diverted to another sacred purpose unless it is of a more exalted nature, it is sanctioned in this case because there is a danger to the lives of poor people in the community whose inability to pay the tax will bring violent action from the ruler against them.

But if the study of Torah is greater than the saving of lives, asks Maharshah, how can funds collected for this more exalted purpose be diverted to a less important cause?

An interesting answer is supplied by Turei Zahav (*ibid.* 6):

There is no doubt that if one is studying Torah and a situation of lifesaving arises he is obligated to interrupt his study in order to save the life, as "nothing stands in the way of lifesaving," say our Sages. So clearly, Torah study must be interrupted for this purpose, and funds collected for Torah study must be diverted to save the lives of the potential victims of the tax collector.

When Rabbi Yosef compares Torah study and lifesaving, he is merely measuring the *merit* of one who was able to study Torah without the interruption of emergencies to the merit of one whose study was compromised by the circumstances which compelled him, like Mordechai, to divert his time and energy to saving lives.

Megillah 16b

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