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## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PURIM**

Purim is a Rabbinic holiday celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Adar to commemorate the survival of the Jewish people against the decree of Haman around 2500 years ago after the destruction of the first temple. It is important to keep in mind that at the time almost the entire Jewish population was under the rule of Achashverosh. This meant that the decree would have wiped out world Jewry altogether; hence the significance of Purim.

Lets try to look at Purim from a deeper perspective:

Purim is the holiday in which Hashem's hand is revealed through seemingly natural means. Let's look at this more deeply. There is an idea in Jewish thought that whatever word is not in the Torah, that word is only an illusion and not a reality in and of itself. Incidentally the word "teva" which means nature does not exist in the Torah. This should not be misunderstood. Nature does exist but not as an independent power in and of itself. When a leaf falls from a tree we tend to think nature did it. However, from a Jewish perspective even the smallest happening in the world is guided by Hashem. It is interesting that one of the pre-requisites for a person to be able to do miracles is that he should not see nature. What does this mean? It means that if you drop something from your hand and it goes up instead of down you shouldn't be the least bit surprised because it is Hashem who runs the world and not nature. This is the kind of person who is able to perform miracles. Of course none of us today are on this level however we should try our best to train our mind to see Hashem's hand in everything.

How does this relate to Purim? Well if one reads the Megillah carefully he/she will realize that Hashem's name is not mentioned! Not even once! Why is this so? To teach us to look for Hashem where He is not so easy to find. One can read the Megillah and say it all happened by chance. However, if one calculates the chances of so many things falling into place then he/she would be foolish to conclude that it was a coincidence. Seeing through nature and through coincidences is what the Megillah is all about. In fact the word Megillah comes from the word "megaleh" which means to reveal and the name Ester comes from the word "nistar" which means hidden; hence Megillat Ester literally means revealing that which is hidden! Incidentally this is why the balle musarim say that everyone should write a megilla of their own life. The reason for this is that if we look at different events of our lives independently then we can not see the hand of Hashem at work, however, once we look at the picture as a whole then we can see that none of it was by chance and that everything that happened in our lives was to lead us in the particular direction that Hashem wants us to be in.

### **Wearing Costumes**

With that background we can begin to understand the deeper meaning for why we wear costumes on Purim. A mask covers the identity and hence the existence of the other person. It is only when we lift the mask that we can see who is behind it. Our costumes are symbolic of Hashem's costume (nature) which is the world itself. In fact the Hebrew word for world which is "olam" comes from the word "elem" meaning hidden. We say in our prayers "melech Haolam" king of universe, it can also be read "melech Haelem" king of hiddenness. Words such a luck, coincidence and nature hide the presence of Hashem and it is our job to see through the mask and reveal Hashem's presence in the world.

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In the Shema prayer which says “Hear Israel Hashem our G-d is one” the letters “ayin” and “daled” are written in large fonts. This is not only in the siddur it is also written this way in the Torah. The reason is because those two letters spell the word “ed” which means witness in Hebrew. When is a witness needed? It is only when something is not revealed. And in the case of Hashem we as Jewish people have to be witnesses to his existence, hence the large “ayin” and Daled”. That is a Jewish person’s role in this world. We have to reveal Hashem in a world that hides him. Being the only nation who was “witness” to a mass revelation of Hashem the Jewish people are by definition witnesses who need to reveal the hidden name of Hashem in this world.

## **Amalek**

As we all know for every good there is a bad. And in the case of coincidences and doubt Amalek is that force. How do we know this? Well there is an idea in Jewish thought that the first time something is mentioned in the Torah it tells us its specific role in the world. When is Amalek first mentioned in the Torah? In the Torah after the people complained to Moshe about water, hence showing their DOUBT in Hashem it says “and Amalek happened upon you” What does it mean happened upon you? Why doesn’t the verse say Amalek attacked you? The reason is that Hashem relates to the world as the world relates to it. Therefore, just as the people doubted Hashem after seeing all those miracles, hence saying it may all have been by chance, Hashem says in the verse and Amalek happened upon you meaning happened by chance. Amalek is the force in the world that creates doubt in the existence of Hashem. We know that in Hebrew any two words that have the same numerical value have to be related in some way. The words “Amalek and “safek” (meaning doubt) have the same numerical value.

Amalek creates doubt and doubt causes confusion which leads to all kinds of problems. After Adam ate from the tree it says that he hid. He was so confused that he thought he can hide from Hashem. What did Hashem do? Hashem played along ( as we said before Hashem relates to the world as the world relates to Him) Hashem asked “Ayeka” which means where are you? (Incidentally this is the first word of the megillah we read on tisha beav, hinting that the only way the temple will be rebuilt is by increasing faith and dscreasing doubt). Then Hashem asks “Hamin Haetz”? Which means did you eat from the tree? Remarkably we see Hamans name here. “Hamin” meaning did u and Haman are spelled the same and being that the Torah has no vowels, it can be read either way. Again we see a connection with Amalek (Haman) and doubt (hamin? Did you?).

The Gemara (Chullin 139b) goes on to look for Esters name in the Torah. The Pasuk says “Astir Hastir panim” on that day I shall hide my face (Devarim 31:18). We see Esters name here. It can not be more clear than this. Ester’s name comes from the Hebrew word nastir which means to hide. On Purim Hashems name is hidden ( it is not even mentioned in the Megillah). And the Pasuk in the Torah which mentions Esters names says Hashem says “on that day I shall hide my face”. In fact this is another reference to Hashems hiddenness on Purim and our one of the reasons why we have the custom of wearing costumes on purim.

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## Drinking on Purim

Another custom of Purim is to drink. In fact it says in the Gemara that one should drink until he can't tell the difference between blessed be Mordachai and cursed be Haman. The idea is that it is not enough to reveal Hashem on Purim. It is our job to show that everything comes from him. If we read the beginning of the Megilah Ester we might ask why is Hashem letting this happen to his people? However if we keep on reading and see the ending we can see that every curse turned into a blessing for us and Ester married Achashverosh from whom came Cyrus who rebuilt the Temple! Everything happens for good. Unless we have a chance to do something about it we must accept the bad as it comes. In the Torah the Parasha where Yosef asks the brothers to leave Benyamin with them is separated from the parasha where yosef reveals himself by a few verses. The Chafetz Chaim asks why did the Rabbis separate the two Parshiyot? Couldn't they have combined them? He answers that the Rabbis separated the two parshiyot to show us that the end result is not always seen immediately. When yosef said that Benyamin is staying with him until they bring his father the brothers must have thought to themselves "what did we do to deserve this? Why is Hashem doing this to us?". However with just two words "ani yosef" ( I am yosef) it all made sense. Similarly when Moshiach comes all the troubles of the world will make sense when Hashem reveals himself and says "ani hashem" ( I am Hashem).

How does this relate to drinking on Purim? When a person drinks the same thing happens. You forget the troubles and the depression. The challenge is to use that as a standard in everyday life and feel that way without drinking as well. Drinking wine has other deep meanings as well. Why is it that we always start a spiritual holiday with Kiddush over wine? Well a Holiday such as Shabbat is a mix of physical and spiritual entities. The point of holidays are to lift our physical activities to the level of the spiritual. A persons spiritual level gets better with time (if he/she works on his/herself), however all physical things get worse with time. The only exception is wine. Wine is a physical entity which gets better with time thus symbolizing the mixture of the physical and spiritual. The saying is you are what you eat. In this case it is also you are what you drink. Physically what you eat or drink becomes a part of you and we hope that by keeping this in mind the unique characteristic of wine being able to mix the physical with the spiritual will become a part of us as well.

Another unique characteristic of wine is that it can not be stored in gold or silver. That will ruin both the wine and the vessel! Thus wine teaches us the lesson that it is what is on the inside that counts. And if the vessel (gold) is more precious than its content (wine) then both the vessel and the content become ruined. The Talmud tells the following story: adapted from the writings of Rabbi Yehuda Appel:

The great sage Rabbi Yehoshua was the **epitome of wisdom and kindness**. Which is why a Roman countess was so stunned when she met him and found that he was **so physically unattractive**. The countess commented on the tremendous contrast between his inside and outside. In response, Rabbi Yehoshua suggested that she pour some of her most precious wine into gold containers. She did this, and a few days later discovered (to her horror) that the wine had spoiled.

Rabbi Yehoshua explained that he meant to demonstrate how oftentimes a **beautiful external appearance can ruin a more important internal aspect**. The countess replied in protest that she knew many handsome men who were also good and wise! Rabbi Yehoshua responded that had these men not been so handsome, they might have been even more wise and kind!

This is once again related to Purim and our custom of wearing costumes. A costume hides the outside and the vessel (which is our body and our material belongings) and it forces us to look through

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the body and the material belongs to the inside of others and begin to value what the person really is on the inside instead of what he/she possesses or what they look like. This is why the vessel of choice for wine is glass; a vessel which reveals what is inside it.

The Arizal says that on Purim there is a special power to our tefilot. Just like we don't turn away the poor on Purim Hashem also does not turn away our prayers. In fact the Arizal says that Purim is even more primary than yom kippur to the extent that he goes on to say that yom hakippurim literally means the day that resembles purim.

During matan Torah Hashem held the mountain over the Jewish peoples heads and asked them to accept the Torah. However, we know that there is a problem with an agreement that was forced by either party. Our tradition tells us that on Purim the Jewish people finalized their covenant with Hashem by accepting the Torah voluntarily thereby connecting Purim to matan Torah as well.

The special powers of this day are self evident and although it is a day of rejoicing one should certainly not waste the opportunities presented by this special day and rather utilize every second of it according to his/her own level of understanding.

*Comments can be made to Chaviv Danesh by email: [ndanesh100@yahoo.com](mailto:ndanesh100@yahoo.com)*

### **The Famous "Code" in Megillat Esther**

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*(Also from Torah.org article by Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld)*

We have a tradition that everything in human history is contained in the Torah, which Hashem used as a "blueprint" for the creation of the universe. The Midrash states, "Just as a king wishing to build a palace does not do so arbitrarily, but rather he consults an architect's plans, so too G-d looked into the Torah and created the world."

If the Torah is a blueprint for the world, then everything in the world should be found in it. The Vilna Gaon, an 18th century scholar, wrote in his "all that was, is, and will be until the end of time is included in the Torah...not just in the general sense, but... (even) the most minute details."

For centuries, Jewish sages have been uncovering hidden secrets in the Torah. Following is a famous example, reflecting events in the twentieth century, which is found not in the *Chumash* (Five Books of Moses), but in *Megilla Esther*.

In Megillas Esther (the Scroll of Esther), towards the end of the story, King Ahasuerus allows the Jews to avenge themselves of their enemies on the 13th day of Adar. In Shushan, the capital, the Jews kill 500 men and hang Haman's ten sons on a gallows. Queen Esther then approaches the King with an additional request: "...allow the Jews who are in Shushan to do tomorrow as they did today, and let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows" (Esther 9:13). It's curious that she would request the hanging of Haman's already slain sons. Nevertheless, the King complies.

Now, the Hebrew word for "tomorrow" ("machar") occasionally refers to the distant future. Further, the Sages tell us that whenever the word "king" appears in the Megillah it alludes to the King of kings as well. Thus, the verse could be understood as a request by Esther to G-d to again hang the ten sons of Haman at some point in the distant future. Now, when the Megillah lists the ten sons Haman

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during their hanging (9:7-9) there are a number of unusually-sized letters. (We have a tradition to write certain letters in the Torah larger or smaller than the standard size.) According to the most accepted tradition, there is a large 'vuv' (numerical value = 6) and a small 'tuv' (400), 'shin' (300) and 'zayin' (7). The following suggestion has been made: The large vuv refers to the sixth millennium (of the Hebrew calendar); the small letters refer to year 707 of that millennium. The meaning, then, is that G-d agreed to hang Haman's ten sons again in the year 5707 = 1946-7.

When listing the ten sons of Haman who were hanged (Esther 9:6-10), three letters, namely *Taf*, *Shin*, and *Zayin*, are written smaller than the rest (most printed texts reflect this; if yours doesn't, look in another). The commentaries offer no explanation for this other than that it is a prophecy. The letters "*Taf-Shin-Zayin*" represent the Hebrew year **5707**, corresponding to the secular year 1946-47.

On October 16, 1946 (21 Tishrei, **5707**) ten convicted Nazi war criminals were hanged in Nuremberg. (An eleventh, Hermann Goering, a transvestite, committed suicide in his cell. The Midrash tells us that Haman also had a daughter who committed suicide.) As if the parallel were not obvious enough without further corroboration, Nazi Julius Streicher's last words were, "Purimfest 1946."

(In case you question the accuracy of Streicher's last words, they are well-documented; they appeared in *Newsweek*, October 28, 1946.)

It is fairly safe to assume that (a) Streicher did not know about the three small letters in the *Megilla*, (b) he did not know that these letters corresponded to the year in which he was being hanged, and (c) even had he known, he would have had no motivation to reinforce the validity of Jewish texts, traditions, or prophecies. One could not ask for a more independent confirmation of the all-encompassing knowledge to be found in the *Sifrei Tanach*.

Rabbi Weissmandl who was a great Hungarian scholar and holocaust survivor made a number of findings concerning Megillas Esther using skip distances of 12,111 letters, the exact number of letters in Megillas Esther. If one starts with the first regular mem (as opposed to "final mem" ) in Bereishis 4:14, where the name Esther (vocalized differently) appears for the only time in the Torah, and counts at intervals of 12,111 letters, one finds spelled out the phrase "Megillas Esther." Coincidence? I think not.

Happy Purim! And don't forget to perform the special mitzvot pertaining to Purim: mishloach manot (giving two kinds of ready to eat foods to two people), matanot laevyonim (giving charity to two poor people), having a seuda (special meal), and listening to the reading of the megilla.