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Esther's Choice

Nicole Landau

At a glance, the story of Purim is fantastical, whimsical even, a coincidence-ridden fanciful tale that one really wants to believe. The king kills his queen. Esther ascends to the throne. Her cousin Mordechai overhears a scheme to kill the king, saves him, and in the end Esther and Mordechai together save the Jewish people. On the surface, these seem like disconnected, random events. And where, we ask, is G-d in all of this?

Learning a little about Esther may help us answer this question. The verses tell us of what happened when Esther was first brought before the king as a candidate for becoming the new queen:

Now when the turn came for Esther, the daughter of Avichayil uncle of Mordechai, to come before the king, she requested nothing. (Esther 2:15)

This refers to Esther's refusal to use the cosmetics provided to every candidate for queen. The commentator known as the Menos Halevi asks why she did this and why her family is mentioned at this point. He explains that instead of being seduced by the material wealth and glory attendant on becoming queen, Esther focused on her spiritual treasure, her heritage. As a result, she did not request makeup in the hope that she would be rejected and sent

home to her family. Physical pleasure was not what she sought. To Esther, the deeper, hidden world was far more real.

The very name of the book we read on Purim hints at this idea: *Megillat Esther*, the Scroll of Esther. In Hebrew, the word Esther is related to the word *nistar*, meaning hidden, and the word *megillah* is related to the word *megaleh*, meaning to reveal. Thus the *Megillah* of Esther can be literally translated as the revelation of that which is hidden. Esther's name and essence are one. She focused on what is important and meaningful, even though it might be hidden from the eye.

Then and now, G-d's Presence is not readily visible. In fact, G-d's Name is not mentioned once throughout the entire *megillah*. Yet Esther makes her choice. She does not perceive the honor of becoming queen as real. She calls on that which is inner, deeper, and hidden.

She prays to the G-d Whom she knows is present. In the face of a decree of extinction hanging over the Jewish people, she calls for a three-day fast, for Esther understands that by temporarily suspending the physical aspects of reality (such as eating), the deeper spiritual world is brought within reach. By initially evading the role of queen by refusing makeup, and later, by risking her position in the palace and her life by approaching the king without being summoned, Esther reaches past the physical and dedicates herself to her Jewish identity, inspiring the entire Jewish people, then and now, to do the same.

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Megillah Questions For The Younger Ones

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 tried 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. Where did Mordechai live after Haman was hung by Achashverosh?

Answers:

1. 127 (1:1)
2. 180 (1:4)
3. Bigtan and Teresh (2:21)
4. With a lottery (3:7)
5. Two: Achashverosh and Haman (5:4 & 5:8)
6. In Haman's House (8:2)

Megillah Questions For The 'Older' Ones

(A Working Knowledge of Hebrew and a Copy of Megillat Esther Required!)

1. How many beds did Achashverosh have?
2. How many mothers did Vashti have?
3. What position did Mordechai play in the Shushan Soccer Team?
4. What job did Haman have in the Sushan Dairy Company?
5. How old was Achashverosh when Haman came to power?
6. What did Haman think was strange about Esther's face?

Answers:

1. 61 (1:6)
2. Two! (1:9)
3. Goal Keeper! (2:21)
4. He made butter! (3:5)
5. 121 (3:7)
6. She had no nose! (5:12)



THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

Published by
OHR SOMAYACH
 TANENBAUM COLLEGE
 POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • 02-581-0315

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Produced and Designed by the Office of Communications
Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro, Director

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YIDDLE RIDDLE

Question: When is the same *haftara* read two weeks in a row? (Without anyone making any mistakes either week or travelling in the meantime.)

Answer: When *Shushan Purim*, Purim celebrated in Jerusalem and other walled cities, is on Shabbat. Because it is Purim in these places, the *haftara* that is read is the same *haftara* that was read everywhere the previous Shabbat — *Shabbat Zachor*. This *haftara* describes King Shaul's encounter with Amalek. (See *Haftara* on page 5.)



THE NO-JACKPOT LOTTERY

Rav Mendel Weinbach

“Lotto” of Israel’s *Mifal Hapayis*. The New York State Lottery. The Irish Sweepstakes. The Football Pools.

These are just a few of the famous lotteries which regularly offer jackpots of small fortunes to a hopeful public dreaming of becoming overnight millionaires with a small investment.

But the most important lottery of all time was one with no jackpot of money. Its prize was the fate of an entire people. This was the lottery of the wicked Haman which endows the holiday of Purim with its name — the Feast of Lots.

Haman cast lots to determine an appropriate date for his final solution to the Jewish problem some two and a half millennia ago. The Divine intervention which foiled his genocidal plot is what is remembered and celebrated by Jews each year on that very date.

What is the significance of Haman’s casting of lots which entitles it to such a central role in recalling Jewry’s deliverance from its enemies?

On the Shabbat before Purim we perform the once-a-year mitzvah of recalling what Amalek did to us. We read in the Synagogue a section of the Torah (*Devarim 25:17-19*) which describes the vicious ambush which the Amalekite nation perpetrated against our weary and thirsty ancestors on their way out of Egyptian bondage. The term used by the Torah to describe this vicious aggression is “*asher karcha baderech*,” which is interpreted either as “he cooled you off” or “he happened upon you.”

Amalek, the sworn enemy of G-d and His chosen people, was determined to challenge the aura of Israel’s invincibility created by the miracles of the ten plagues and the splitting of the Sea of Reeds. Amalek is compared by our Sages to the fellow who dives into a boiling hot bath which all others are afraid to enter. Although he emerges badly scalded, he succeeds in cooling off the water for those who may follow. All nations who heard of the Divinely orchestrated miracles which rescued Israel from the Egyptians shuddered at the thought of any military action against G-d’s people. But Amalek recklessly plunged into this steaming bath. He was indeed battered by a Jewish army looking at Moshe’s upraised hands as a signal to rely on Heavenly help. But he succeeded in cooling off Israel’s reputation.

Amalek’s purpose in this interpretation of “*asher karcha*” can be understood by applying the complementary interpretation of “he happened upon you.” Miracles can be seen either as an expression of a Divine force in control of worldly affairs or as the random manifestation of coincidence. When the Prophet Elyahu prayed for fire to

come down from heaven in order to discredit the idolatrous prophets on Mount Carmel, he cried out “Answer me, Hashem, answer me!” The double entreaty, explain our Sages, was for fire to miraculously rain down from heaven, and for the assembled onlookers to accept it as a Divine miracle and not the work of human magic.

The non-believer is so determined to resist the responsibility of subservience to a Divine ruler that he will stretch his imagination to unbelievable lengths to discredit miracles as either magic or coincidence. This is why the great miracles of history and the minor ones of today still leave so many people unconvinced of Divine providence.

Amalek “happened upon you” because Amalek’s entire approach to earthly affairs is one of things “just happening” and not Divinely determined. This is what he set out to prove with his military challenge to Israel. And this is what the descendant of Amalek, Haman, wished to express with his casting of lots. As he plans to carry out the genocidal mission initiated by his ancestors, he refuses to attribute the failure of that first effort to Divine intervention. Things like that “just happen” and he will cast lots to see what date coincidence will indicate as a suitable one for another attempt at a final solution.

But it is not only Amalekites who fail to see the Hand of Hashem in everything. Many of us also fall prey to the temptation of attributing things to coincidence. When Jewry demonstrates a particular spiritual weakness, our scholars point out, Hashem sends a nation personifying that characteristic to shock us into a realization of where we went wrong. Immediately after the Jews suffering from thirst in the desert raise the question “Is Hashem amongst us or not?” (*Shmot 17:7*), Amalek, the personification of coincidence, arrives on the scene to bring home a Divine lesson.

When this weakness emerges again in the exile twilight between the two *Beit Hamikdash* periods, it is the descendant of Amalek who is delegated by Heaven to shock Jewry into abandoning its inclination towards seeing the world through the warped lenses of coincidence.

This is why the holiday celebrating the Divine redemption resulting from our repentance from that sin is called Purim. It is our way of triumphantly declaring to the world that there is no coincidence, and that the real jackpot in Haman’s lottery was this dramatic demonstration of Divine Providence.

ON THE ROAD

“Remember what Amalek did to you, on the road when you were leaving Egypt...” (Devarim 25:17-18)

Learning Modern Hebrew is a daunting task for many a new immigrant, but there is one Hebrew phrase that can be picked up as soon as you get off the plane. It requires no glottal stops or verbal contortions. In fact you don't even have to use your mouth or your lips to form this expression at all — because you say it with your fingertips.

Israeli sign-language for “*Rega!*” (“*Wait!*”) consists of lightly clapping the upward-pointing fingertips together with the thumb and pulling the hand downward a little. This is repeated several times. It helps to communicate your insistence that the other party wait if you also angle your chin down and look at him through narrowed, upturned eyes.

We live in an impatient world.

This Shabbat is a special Shabbat, Shabbat Zachor. Zachor means remember. Shabbat Zachor is about remembering something which strikes at the very center of our existence, at our fundamental view of the world.

“Remember what Amalek did to you, on the road when you were leaving Egypt...”

When the Jewish People were leaving Egypt, there was a nation who came out and attacked them. That nation knew of all the miracles that G-d had done for the Jewish People in Egypt but it didn't faze them. They still attacked. Their name is Amalek. They are the incarnation of atheism in the world. They are the scoffer who says nothing is important. Nothing is real. There is no law. No Judge. No

judgment. Nothing. The world stood in awe as the sea divided for the Jewish People. But Amalek merely smirks. One good sneer can banish a million miracles.

Amalek attacked the Jewish People when they were “on the road.” What is the significance of the road? A road connects. There is no road in the world which leads nowhere. Every road connects here with there. Amalek waits in ambush beside the road from the head to the heart. Deep inside every Jew there is a primordial sense-memory of standing at Sinai. We are believers who are the children of believers. Why is it then, that so many of us feel so far from G-d? Why is it that so many of us wonder if there is a G-d? Enter the clown. Amalek stops that sense-memory on the highway from the head to the heart. His very name spells out his mission. The *gematria* (numerical equivalent) of *Amalek* is 240. The *gematria* of *safeq* — “doubt” — is also 240. Amalek is the power of doubt in the world that tries to sever the Jewish heart from its Source.

But there's another road on which Amalek awaits in ambush. A road symbolizes purpose. And where there is purpose, there is hope. This world is a road, sometimes a dark and lonely road, but it leads to a great palace of light. Amalek says there is no road. There are only moments. There is only *this* moment.

In the United States, psychologists have identified a frightening new phenomenon they call *road rage*. Road rage is when someone is driving too slowly in front of the Road Rager. So he puts his foot on the gas, overtakes the “rage-ee” and deliberately tries to kill the person who's driving too slowly, either by forcing him over the

side of a precipice, or if there's no convenient precipice, he'll make the innocent victim pull off the road, take out a gun and pump him full of bullets.

We live in a world where impatience has reached homicidal proportions. Why? Because there is nothing more than the moment. That is my life. If you steal this moment, you are stealing my life; in other words — you are killing me. Therefore you deserve to die.

Bilaam prophesied (*Bamidbar* 24:20) “*Reishit goyim Amalek*” — “*Amalek is the first among nations.*” If you take the first letters of each of these three words, “*reish*,” “*gimmel*” and “*ayin*,” they spell *rega* — which means “moment.” Amalek's message is that the moment, the *rega*, is all there is. All I have is the moment. Quick! I must cram my life with moments. For there is nothing else. There is no purpose. No road. No destination. Just the moment. And then extinction.

On this Shabbat, Shabbat Zachor, the Torah gives the Jewish People a mitzvah to remember what Amalek did to us during the Exodus and to eradicate the name of Amalek. Why is it that we fulfill this mitzvah specifically on Shabbat?

Shabbat is referred to as “last in action; in thought, the first.” When G-d created the world, His ultimate purpose was Shabbat. Shabbat shows us that this world is not just a machine which runs for no purpose other than to continue running. Shabbat is the most distant whisper of a world beyond. A world where we harvest everything we have sown in this world. Shabbat is the ultimate expression of purpose. It stands in ultimate opposition to a world which is obsessed by the moment.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hashem commands Moshe to build a *Mishkan* (Sanctuary) and supplies him with detailed instructions. *Bnei Yisrael* are asked to contribute precious metals and stones, fabrics, skins, oil and spices. In the *Mishkan's* outer courtyard is an altar for the burnt offerings and a laver for washing. The Tent of Meeting is divided by a curtain into two chambers. The outer chamber is accessible only to the *kohanim*, the descendants of Aharon. This

contains the table of showbreads, the *menorah*, and the golden altar for incense. The innermost chamber, the Holy of Holies, may be entered only by the *kohen gadol*, and only once a year, on Yom Kippur. Here is the ark that held the Ten Commandments inscribed on the two tablets of stone which Hashem gave to the Jewish nation on Mount Sinai. All of the utensils and vessels, as well as the construction of the *Mishkan*, are described in great detail.

THE LAST OF THE AMALEKI

Parshat Zachor is always read the week before Purim, because on Purim we celebrate our deliverance from Amalek's most notorious descendent — Haman.

The *haftara* of Parshat Zachor depicts another encounter

with the descendants of Amalek: King Shaul was commanded to annihilate Amalek, but he failed to kill their king Agag. While in captivity, the last of the Amaleki, Agag, managed to sire a child, and it was from this child that Haman was descended.

PARSHA Q&A?

TERUMAH

- How many types of items were the Jews to donate?
- The donation of silver for the *Mishkan* differed from the donation of the other items. How?
- What property do *techelet* and *argaman* share that *orot eilim m'adamim* do not share?
- What property do the above three share that *shesh* and *orot techashim* do not share?
- Onkelos translates "*tachash*" as "*sasgona*." Why?
- What kind of trees did Yaakov plant in Egypt?
- Describe two uses of: a) oil; b) spices; c) jewels.
- The *aron* was made with three boxes, one inside the other. Exactly how tall was the outer box?
- Why is the Torah referred to as "testimony"?
- What did the faces of the *keruvim* resemble?
- On what day of the week was the *lechem hapanim* baked?
- What does *miksha* mean?
- What was the purpose of the *menorah's* *gevi'im* (cups)?
- How did Moshe know the shape of the *menorah*?
- What designs were embroidered into the tapestries of the *Mishkan*?
- What is meant by "standing wood"?
- How long was the *Mishkan*?
- How wide was the interior of the *mishkan*?
- Why was the altar coated with *nechoshet*?
- Which function did the copper *yeteidot* serve?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions

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

- 25:2 - 13.
- 25:3 - No fixed amount of the other items was required. The silver was given as a fixed amount: A half shekel.
- 25:4,5 - They are wool, *orot eilim* are not.
- 25:4,5 - They are dyed; *shesh* and *orot techashim* are not.
- 25:5 - The *tachash* delights (*sas*) in its multi-colors (*g'vanim*).
- 25:5 - *Arazim* — cedars.
- 25:6-7 - a) The oil was lit in the *menorah* and used for anointing. b) The spices were used in the anointing oil and for the incense. c) The precious stones were for the *ephod* and the *choshen*.
- 25:11 - The outer box was one and a half *amot* plus a *tefach* plus a little bit, because it rose a little bit above the *kaporet*. (The *kaporet* was a *tefach* thick — see 25:17).
- 25:16 - It testifies that Hashem commanded us to keep the *mitzvot*.
- 25:18 - The faces of children.
- 25:29 - Friday.
- 25:31 - Hammered.
- 25:31 - Purely ornamental.
- 25:40 - Hashem showed Moshe a *menorah* of fire.
- 26:1 - On one side a lion; on the other side an eagle.
- 26:15 - The wooden beams were to be upright and not stacked one upon the other.
- 26:16 - 30 *amot*.
- 26:23 - 10 *amot*.
- 27:2 - To atone for brazenness.
- 27:19 - They secured the curtains against the wind.

KASHA! Kasha means Question!

"Two sockets underneath each beam" (26:19)

I can understand the purpose of everything in the *Mishkan* except for the silver sockets. The wooden beams were carved out on the bottom with just two wooden prongs left sticking down, and the empty space was filled with the silver sockets. What purpose did this serve? It couldn't have been just decorative, because a silver coating would have sufficed. For the same reason it couldn't have been to keep out moisture; plus, the sil-

ver didn't cover the bottom of the wood where moisture from the ground would be the worst. And it didn't connect the beams to each other in any way. So, what purpose did it serve?

• Submitted by an Ohrnet reader

Answer: It added weight to the beams, as silver is denser than *sheetim*-wood. This added stability.

• Moznaim L'Torah

TAKING AND GIVING

A challenge to the validity of every get was proposed by Rabbi Chisda. Since the Torah insisted that the man who wishes to divorce his wife must arrange for the writing of the get, it would seem that if the wife paid the scribe to write the divorce document it would not be effective for ending their marriage. The *mishna* (Gittin 22b), however, clearly states that it is the woman who traditionally takes responsibility for paying to have the get written.

The response to this challenge provided by the Sage Rava is that the Sages utilized their power of eminent domain — “*hefker Beit Din hefker*” — to transfer ownership of the money intended for the scribe’s expenses from the woman to her husband so that he is in fact paying for the writing and he is indeed giving her his get.

Some of the commentaries raise the question as to how far this power of the Sages extends. The source for this power is mentioned later in our Mesechta (Gittin 35b) as a passage in the Book of Ezra (10:18). This leader of the return from Babylonian exile to Eretz Yisrael summoned all the returnees to Jerusalem to strengthen them in Torah observance. “And whoever shall not come within three days at the behest of the leaders and elders,” said the proclamation, “shall have all his property confiscated and he shall be cut off from the community which returned from exile.” This only indicates, however, that the Sages have the power to deprive a trespasser of ownership. It does not show that they can also transfer that ownership to someone else at their discretion although he has no claim to that property.

Rashba on that *gemara* solves the mystery for us by calling attention to a second passage quoted by the *gemara*. Summing up the division of Eretz Yisrael to the tribes, we are told “These are the inheritances distributed by Elazar Hakohen and Yehoshua bin Nun and the heads of the fathers of the Tribes of Israel” (Yehoshua 19:51). What is the connection between “heads” and “fathers” asks Rabbi Elazar. This teaches us that just as fathers have the power to give away their assets to whomever of their children they choose, so too can the heads of the people — the Sages who form the *Beit Din* — give any property to the recipient of their choice. This second source, concludes Rashba, is cited to demonstrate that not only can the sages of the *Beit Din* deprive someone of property when they see a need for doing so but can also make someone else its new owner. This is why the money paid by the wife for get writing is considered her husband’s and the get stands unchallenged.

• Gittin 20a

ANOTHER KIND OF AGUNAH

The term *agunah* — a woman restrained from the freedom to remarry — is classically used in Talmudic and rabbinic literature in regard to a woman whose

husband has disappeared and there is no reliable testimony or evidence that he is dead. In our own times it is commonly applied as well to those tragic cases in which a husband refuses to divorce with a get unless his demands are met.

In our *gemara* we are introduced to a different category of *agunah*. The *mishna* tells us that a scribe who prepares standard forms for get documents must leave blank the spaces reserved for the names of husband and wife and the date of the divorce. The reason given for these instructions to the scribe is that it is a “*takanah*” — a rabbinical decree to set things right. One explanation of this is that our *gemara* is in accordance with the view of Rabbi Elazar who insists that the vital information of a get — the “*toref*” — must be written “*lishmah*” — specifically for the purpose of this divorce and not prepared in advance to have on hand. Even though this Torah requirement applies only to the names, dates and the phrase “you are permitted to every man” which make up the “*toref*,” there seems to be a good reason for the sages extending it as well to the “*tofes*” — the standard text which makes up the rest of the get — in order to eliminate the danger that once a scribe prepares one part he may forget himself and prepare it all. The reason that the sages did not forbid this preparation of the *tofes* is that of the *takanah* of *agunah*. A situation may arise in which the husband who wishes to divorce his wife is in a rush to go abroad and if he doesn’t find a scribe with a prepared standard text he will leave without granting her freedom to remarry, never to return.

Here we have an *agunah* whose husband has not vanished and who is ready to divorce her but circumstances could cause her to be prevented from remarrying. Our sages made the *takanah* of allowing pre-written standard texts in order to eliminate such a problem.

Tosefot (Gittin 33a) draws a parallel from this *gemara* to the *takanah* which the Sage Reish Lakish said that the older Rabban Gamliel instituted. He made it difficult for a husband to nullify the get he has sent his wife through an agent by denying him the opportunity to do so before the *beit din* of three without himself or his agent personally nullifying it before her or before the agent delivering the get. Even though it is assumed that she will hear about the nullification and refrain from remarrying, this is termed an *agunah* consideration because it results in her not being able to gain the freedom she desires.

• Gittin 26b

DOWNPLAYING THE DESENTER

Rabbi Huna and Rabbi Chisda were sitting together when a Torah scholar named Ganeva passed by. One of these sages turned to the other and suggested that they stand up to show respect for him as a Torah scholar. “Stand up for a dissenter?” challenged the other.

Rashi supplies the background for the challenge on the basis of an earlier *gemara* (Mesechta Gittin 7a) where the

WHAT BECAME OF ESTHER?

From: Name@Withheld

Dear Rabbi,

Are there any sources regarding what happened to Queen Esther after the traditional story ended? What became of her? Did she have children? Etc.? Thanks.

Dear Name@Withheld,

While we do not know a lot about what happened to Esther one thing that we do know is that she had a son, Darius, who became King Darius II. She brought him up to be favorable to the Jews and he eventually lifted the ban against the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple), which led to the building of the Second Temple.

THE LOST SCROLL OF ESTHER

From: Rachael Shields
<rachaelfri@juno.com>

Dear Rabbi,

We are trying to do the *mitzvah* of "hashavas aveidah" (returning a lost object) and I hope you can help. My brother-in-law's father was renting a condo in Florida and he stumbled across a *megillah* (Scroll of Esther) in a silver case. The lady he was renting from said it belonged to an old Jewish man who had rented the condo previously. All we know about him is that his first name is David and his last name is either *Bezbovodko* or *Bezdborosko* (these spellings were found on some old mail found in the house). We know he was about 97 when he died 3 years ago and he was probably from Ohio and may have had some ties to *Lubavitch*. If you can help us, we are trying to get this *megillah* to his family by *Purim*, if possible. Thanks for your help. *Tizku l'mitzvos!*

Dear Rachael Shields,

Thanks for letting us help in this *mitzvah*! Have you done the basics, like call telephone information in Ohio and asked for this name? I have sent you a list of some of our Ohio contacts for you to contact, and we're posting this message here in our weekly "Ask the Rabbi" column. We ask any of our readers who have information about David *Bezbovodko*, or *Bezdborosko*, to email you at <rachaelfri@juno.com>.

TIME FOR GENOCIDE

From: Josh in Durham, NC
<jrd5@duke.edu>

Dear Rabbi,

Regarding *Purim*, it struck me as somewhat strange that the decree to kill the Jews would be issued almost an entire year before it was to be carried out...wouldn't this have given the Jews time to escape or ready themselves, regardless of a counter-order?

Dear Josh,

Haman made two decrees. The first was to destroy the entire Jewish People. The second was that everyone should be ready and prepared for something special on the 13th of *Adar*. The decree that the Jews should be killed was secret. The *Vilna Gaon* explains that the reason that Haman kept the first decree secret was in order to prevent the Jews from escaping in any way.

Sources:

- *Esther 3:13,14*
- *Vilna Gaon, commentary to Megillat Esther*

POPPY SEED PURIM

From: Rose Hill in Manchester, UK
<rose.p.hill@stud.man.ac.uk>

Dear Rabbi,

What is the issue of eating seeds (as in poppy seeds) on *Purim*? I read there was such a thing on an *Ohr Somayach* web site. Thanks.

Dear Rose Hill,

The role that "seeds" played in the story of Esther is that in the king's palace, Esther ate seeds in order to observe the *Torah's* command to eat only kosher food. This way, she was able to have a healthy, caloric diet while avoiding the royal yet unkosher meat and wine fed to the other queen candidates.

MORDECHAI'S WIFE

Delores Elliott in Courtenay, British Columbia
<James_Elliott@bc.sympatico.ca>

Dear Rabbi,

We are confused. Some *Rabbis* contend that Esther was *Mordecai's* wife and if she was, that raises a lot of legal questions and yet in *Holy Scriptures* we cannot find anything except that she was raised by him and that she was like his daughter! Help! Am I missing something here? Thank you so much. We enjoy your answers and have been collecting them in a notebook to refer back to for answers.

Mama Lashoni's



Pasta

Now under the personal supervision of
Rav E. Oli

ASK THE RABBI

Dear Delores Elliott,

The Book of Esther says, “And he adopted Haddasah, i.e., Esther...and when her mother and father died, Mordechai took her to him as a daughter.” (*Esther 2*)

There are three apparent snags in this verse. First, since the verse says that Mordechai “adopted Haddasah,” why does it seem to repeat the fact that he “took her to him as a daughter?” Isn’t that the same thing? Second, there is no *legal status* of “adoptive parent” in Judaism; that is, you *raise* an orphan girl in your home, but you don’t “take her as a daughter.” Finally and most notably, “took her to him” is always used in the Torah to refer to marriage.

Literally, then, the verse is saying that he married her.

Why does it use the term “daughter?” The terms “sister” and “daughter” are common expressions of endearment, as we see in other places in the Torah (e.g., *Ruth 2:8*, *Shir Hashirim 4:9*) and Talmud (e.g., *Shabbat 13b*). The idea is that a husband and wife should develop a loving and giving relationship as one naturally has with one’s child and sibling.

So, it’s not hard to see how the Talmudic Sages saw in this verse support for the oral tradition that says Mordechai, Esther’s cousin, was also her husband.

“DA’AT TORAH”

From: Mr. Anon in the UK
<Email @Withheld>

Dear Rabbi,

How would you explain the dynamics of “da’at torah” to a secular audience, many of them being total beginners as far as Jewish learning is concerned? By da’as torah I mean the special insight that sincere and intense Torah study imparts to the leaders of the Torah community. Looking forwards to hearing from you as soon as possible. Many thanks in advance.

Dear Mr. Anon,

I would start with some examples that most people know and perhaps can relate to. Take Mordechai, for example. He appeared to do everything wrong, against the common wisdom, but was right in the end.

Shushan’s Jews, politically-correctly, attended Achashverosh’s feast. (It’s not PC to refuse a king’s invitation to his victory celebration.) Mordechai, however, warned against it (spoil-sport, not cool, old-fashioned).

Later, when it was time for everyone to bow to Haman, again Mordechai “just doesn’t get it.” By his refusal to bow, he seems to be the one who brings a death decree on all the Jews.

Indeed, however, as the Talmud says, it was attending the feast, given in celebration of the non-rebuilding of Jerusalem, which brought about the decree. Listening to Mordechai could have saved a lot of trouble!

Let’s go on in the story. After Haman’s decree became known, the Jews said to themselves: “We have a sister in the palace, Esther. Queen Esther will work to annul this bad decree.” What would common wisdom say? “Let Esther tell the king that she’s Jewish and we Jews will get favorable treatment.” But again, Mordechai seems to miss the boat, instructing Esther to remain silent about her background. What could possibly have been his motive for this bizarre move?

We all know the end of the story. Precisely *because* Esther did not reveal her Jewishness, the Jews gave up on her and turned their eyes toward Heaven alone, fasting and repenting. This was precisely Mordechai’s intent and is the only thing that saved us.

We see that basically everything Mordechai did — although sometimes seeming to run against common sense — in the end brought good to the Jewish People. From where did Mordechai get this special insight and ability? From his sincere and total immersion in Torah study; Mordechai, as one of the outstanding Torah scholars of the generation, sat among the foremost of the Sanhedrin, Israel’s Supreme Torah court.

Another example is Moshe: When he went to Pharaoh the first time — at G-d’s command, no less — things got worse(!) for the Jews. Obviously, Moshe was imbued with supernatural insight, and the imperative to follow him was not lessened by the immediate result of his actions. Of course we all know the end of that story and that Moshe eventually succeeded in a big way.

Note that, according to the *midrash*, 80 percent of the Jewish People were not willing to leave fertile Egypt for the uncharted dessert. Because these millions of people were not ready to follow Moshe, they were forever lost to the Jewish People.

I think these examples show fairly clearly the importance of following the guidance of our Torah leaders, and that such allegiance should not hinge on our short-term perception of the immediate result of that leadership.

FASTERS OF ESTHER UNITE!!

Most years in most places, Jews wait until after the Megillah reading to break the Fast of Esther. However, this year *all* Jews will wait until after the Megillah reading.

When Shushan Purim — Purim celebrated in Jerusalem and other walled cites — is not on Shabbat, the Megillah is not read there on the night after the fast, and therefore there is no reason to wait to break the fast. However, this year, because Shushan Purim is on Shabbat, everybody everywhere will read the Megillah on Thursday night and break their fast only afterwards!

• Submitted by an Ohrnet employee

MEGILLAH MUST!

Megillat Esther for sale. Mint condition. Used only one day a year.

Written by the famous scribe The Ta’ut Sofer

Price: Just 127 Golden Crowns

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Alaska Rabbi

THE FOLLOWING ARE ACTUAL QUESTIONS SENT TO OHR.EDU'S "ASK THE RABBI" SERVICE AND ACTUAL REPLIES SENT DIRECTLY TO THE QUESTIONERS.

.....

WARNING!! The following questions, answers, or both, are extremely funny. Do not read if you are not physically able to endure uncontrollable spasmodic laughter, or if you are over 95 years old. Do not read while driving a car or operating heavy machinery. Do not read near an open flame or window.

Polish Joke

From: "Alan" in Lublin, Poland
<Withheld@poczta.onet.pl>

Dear Rabbi,
I'm sure You speak Polish. If not ask your father or mother for help: Dlaczego wobec ydów stosowana jest odpowiedzialnoœæ indywidualna a wobec innych narodów zbiorowa? Czy dlatego, że nie stali pod gór Synaj i nie oddawali czci zotemu cielcowi?

Dear Alan,
Sorry. Neither I nor my parents speak Polish.

Proper Etiquette

From: Tova in Kansas City, MO
<tovanipo@aol.com>

Dear Rabbi,
I am a non-Jew. Recently, I was told by a friend of a Jewish custom in which during a visit to another's home for a meal, the dinner napkin is folded in a certain way by the guest at the end of the meal. This supposedly signifies that the guest will return in the future. If not, the napkin will be folded or crumpled in another way. Can you tell me anything about this?

Dear Tova,
No, I can't! It sounds quite interesting, if not a bit bizarre, yet I've never heard of it.
I doubt that it has any Jewish roots. According to tradition, we don't use napkins, but rather wipe our hands on our beards. (Just kidding of course.)

En Garde!

From: Harry K.
<kharry@netscape.com>

Dear Rabbi,
What were some popular weapons in Africa during the medieval ages?

Dear Harry K.,
Weapons are never popular. Did you ever throw a party and invite a weapon?

Cup Fardreih

From: R. Cudoff in Georgia
<rcudoff@aol.com>

Dear Rabbi,
I am looking for a reading to accompany Miriam's Cup, which I plan to introduce to our Seder this year. Can you direct me to an appropriate reading for this new tradition? And where during the Seder service should we include this reading?

Dear R. Cudoff,
Miriam's cup should be drunk after Zelda's Matzo Balls but before Sara Lee's Pesach Strudel.

Just kidding. The truth is, there is no such "custom." It's wrong to have a symbol at the Passover Seder to commemorate any human. Miriam was one of the leaders during the Exodus, the other two being Aharon and Moshe. Aharon and Moshe are not commemorated at the Seder by any symbol, and similarly it is wrong to have a symbol commemorating Miriam. The Seder is for giving thanks to G-d alone, and not to any human leader, even as great a spiritual giant as Miriam.

I Didn't Live in This Century

From: Chantelle
<martom@msn.com>

Dear Rabbi,
"Every person is commanded to bring children into the world, at least a son and daughter." How far do you think this should be observed by Jews in the 21st century?

Dear Chantelle,
I'm not sure I understand the direction of your question; What does being in the 21st century have to do with it? Besides, for Jews this isn't the 21st century, it's the 58th century (we're way ahead of everyone else).

As for the Torah applying in our "modern" age: The commandments apply as much (if not more) today as they did on the day the Torah was given over three millennia ago. The Torah is Divine, and G-d knows the future; so, the Torah is unchanging and applies equally in every age as decided by the greatest Torah scholars of the age.

You Need it When?

From: Withheld in Philadelphia, PA
<Withheld@psu.edu>

Dear Rabbi,
Shalom! I am a student at Pennsylvania State University and I am doing a project on 20th century Jewish Poets. I am having

.....

trouble finding information about a poet or poets that made some kind of contribution to Jewish civilization or culture. Somebody that would be regarded as not only a poet but also a leader. Somebody that would represent the Jewish people and continue publishing poems dealing with Jewish life, religion or family. It would be really great if you can give me some names of 20th century Jewish poets that fit the criteria.

Thank you for your time,
(signature withheld)

PS Would you be so kind as to reply to this as soon as possible; my project is due tomorrow.

No More Joking Around

From: Yocheved Nitsun
<yochev@juno.com>

Dear Rabbi,
I was wondering why there are no jokes anymore at the end of your "Ask the Rabbi" columns. I really liked them!

Dear Yocheved Nitsun,

As a Jew, I must answer your question with a question. What did the mountain climber call his son?

But seriously, either despite or because of their great humor, we decided to tone down the jokes in Ask the Rabbi. However, we are taking your comment very seriously, and if some appropriate jokes come our way, we will hold an administrative policy meeting to decide if we should return to our earlier, funnier format.

So, what did the mountain climber call his son? Cliff!

How Long is a Rabbi's Vacation?

From: Malky Fontek
<malkyf@versaware.com>

Dear Rabbi,
I enjoy your website very much! But I see it says that "the Rabbi is still on summer vacation." Just wondering, why is the Rabbi still on summer vacation?

Dear Malky Fontek,
Because it's not yet time for spring vacation!

That Does Not Compute

From: Gianfranco Di Segni in Italy
<gdisegni@ibc.rm.cnr.it>

Dear Rabbi,
Thanks for your personal response to my question. It's good to see that "the Rabbi" is a real person, and not just an anonymous institution! Kol tuv! David Di Segni

Dear David Di Segni,
Yes, it's depressing to get a computerized
get a computerized
get a computerized
get a computerized
response to an email!

All the Best!
All the Best!
All the Best!
The Rabbi

De Agony of De Feet

From: Sheryl Williams
<Sherylw@nc.freei.net>

Dear Rabbi,
Should we wash feet at Passover? If not when is the proper time?

Dear Sheryl Williams,
Yes, if they are dirty! But seriously, today, we do not observe any foot-washing ritual.

Message in a Mezuzah

From: Norma Kitson
<kitson@mweb.co.zw>

Dear Rabbi,
In a previous Ask the Rabbi column you answered the question "What is written inside a mezuzah?" And you wrote something about "shema." No! No! Inside the mezuzah is a note reading: "Help! help! I am a prisoner in a mezuzah factory."

Fondly, Norma Kitson,

Dear Norma Kitson,
You've got all the Rabbis here laughing. All, that is, except for our chief comedy writer; he kindly requests that you please let him crack the jokes

THE FAR SIDE OF THE STORY

GIVING OTHERS THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

When others do outrageous, horrible things to us, we should realize that they may not be aware of the full effects of their actions. Take the following story for example, where a little mistake led to...

A BIG MOOSE-STEAK

Two guys, Joe and Bob, went moose hunting. To camouflage themselves, they each wear a moose costume. After hunting for a while with no luck, they decided to split up and hunt separately. Soon, Joe finds himself sitting on a log waiting quietly for a moose to come by.

Not long after, Joe hears behind him the "click" of a rifle loading; he whirls around to see Bob's gun pointed straight at him.

"I'm not a moose!" he shouts. "I'm not a moose."
Bang! Bob pulls the trigger and Joe falls to the ground.
"Why? Why did you do it?" Joe cries out. "I said I'm not a moose."
"Ooohhh!" says Bob, a sudden look of realization crossing his face, "I'm so sorry! I thought you said 'I am a moose.'"

• Submitted by Mr. "Ayn Ani Moose" <bullwinkle@anonymoose.com>

Some Awful Purim Jokes

Yankele: "Look at that bunch of cows!"
 Moshele: "Not bunch, herd!"
 Yankele: "Herd what?"
 Moshele: "Of cows."
 Yankele: "Heard of cows? Of course I've heard of cows!!"



Abba: "Shmuli, please can you have a look at the left turn signal on the car and tell me if it is working or not?"
 Shmuli: "Of course I can, Abba. Yes ... no ... yes ... no ... yes ..."



Avraham: "Waiter, waiter! I'm in a hurry, will my Matzah be long?"
 Waiter: "No sir, it will be square!!"



Chaim: "Doctor, doctor I think I'm shrinking!"
 Doctor: "Well, you'll just have to be a little patient!!"



Shimon: "Rebbe, I've finished the exam."
 Rebbe: "Good. Did the questions give you any trouble?"
 Shimon: "No. But some of the answers did!!"

WITH TODAY'S RAPID ADVANCE IN TECHNOLOGY, WE THOUGHT IT IMPORTANT TO BRING TO OUR READERS' ATTENTION SOME NEW ENGINEERING CONVERSIONS:

Ratio of an igloo's circumference to its diameter: **Eskimo Pi**
 2000 pounds of Chinese soup: **Won ton**
 1 millionth of a mouthwash: **1 microscope**
 Time between slipping on a peel and smacking the pavement: **1 bananosecond**
 Time it takes to sail 220 yards at 1 nautical mile per hour: **Knot-furlong**
 365.25 days of drinking low-calorie beer: **1 lite-year**
 Half of a large intestine: **1 semicolon**
 Shortest distance between two jokes: **A straight line.**
 (think about it for a moment)
 1000 aches: **1 kilohurtz**

Basic unit of laryngitis: **1 hoarsepower**
 453.6 graham crackers: **1 pound cake**
 1 million microphones: **1 megaphone**
 10 cards: **1 decacards**
 1 kilogram of falling figs: **1 Fig Newton**
 1000 cubic centimeters of wet socks: **1 literhosen**
 2 monograms: **1 diagram**
 8 nickels: **2 paradigms**
 3 statute miles of intravenous surgical tubing at Yale University Hospital: **1 I.V. League**
 2000 mockingbirds: **2 kilomockingbird**

Thanks to Charles Plost <plost.charles@epamail.epa.gov>

Dot 2 Dot

JOIN THE DOTS TO FIND
 A PURIM SURPRISE!

Q 1
14

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12

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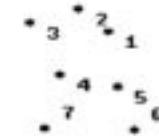
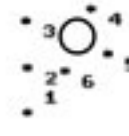
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BILLING

“And now, you shall command the Children of Israel...” (27:20)

It always amazes me how many people’s names roll down at the end of a movie. There’s the “third assistant grip...” “Poodle manicure services by...” “Beers chilled by...” A vast and determined army has come together to create two and a half hours of arm-chair illusion. And that’s only the end titles. The opening titles are usually a showbiz lawyer’s nightmare — (or dream really when he has to bill his client). Who goes first? The Director? Or the Star? Is it “Seldon Shmendrick presents Rock Jaw” or should it be “Starring Rock Jaw in a Seldon Shmendrick production.” What about the pecking order of the lesser actors? And then of course there are the TV trailers and the print ads. Have you ever seen so many names in so many typefaces in so many different point sizes grace a piece of printed material as the average Hollywood blockbuster poster?

If Hollywood is about anything, it’s about prestige. Or as it’s called in Hebrew *kavod*. Judaism sees honor-seeking as one of the things that “removes” a person from this world. It puts him into a non-real world where he becomes a legend in his own lunchtime. *Kavod* is something that a Jew runs a million miles from.

There’s a fascinating section of the Talmud which describes a conversation between the Almighty and Yerovam ben Navat. Yerovam was a Jewish King, a great and brilliant schol-

ar, who was ultimately responsible for turning the Jewish People to idol worship. It was he who caused the division of the twelve tribes into the Kingdoms of *Yisrael* (the ten tribes) and *Yehuda* (the two tribes). Those ten lost tribes, the vast majority of the Jewish People, are now vanished, invisible and lost as Jews. That was Yerovam.

What caused someone so great to fall so far? There’s a fascinating character insight that the Talmud gives us in Sanhedrin (102a): “Rebbe Abba said — the Holy One, Blessed is He, grabbed Yerovam by his garment and said to him ‘Return to your former self and I and you and the son of Yishai (King David) will walk in *Gan Eden*. He (Yerovam) said: ‘Who’s going to be at the head?’ ‘The son of Yishai will be at the head.’ ‘If so, I don’t want.’”

Why did Yerovam ask the Almighty who would be first? G-d already said that “I and you and the son of Yishai will walk in *Gan Eden*.” G-d mentioned Yerovam first, indicating that Yerovam would be before King David. If so, why then did Yerovam ask who would be first?

Yerovam wanted a billboard two stories high with his name in lights. He wanted G-d to spell it out. This was the granddaddy of disputes over billing. It wasn’t enough that he would go first. He wanted his billing locked into the contract.

If *kavod* — honor-seeking — is something so despicable and lowly, its reverse is the greatest treasure available to man. Humility is the greatest prize that one can aspire to. The praise of the greatest Jew who ever

lived was that he was the humblest of people. That man was Moshe, our teacher.

From his birth until *Sefer Devarim* (Deuteronomy), Moshe’s name appears in every *parsha*, except one — this week’s *parsha*. The Vilna Gaon explains that Moshe died on the seventh of Adar. As this date usually falls in the week of *Parshat Tetzave*, so just as Moshe was removed from the world during this week, so his name was “removed” from the *parsha* of this week.

The words of the *tzaddik* can have a power beyond their immediate context. When G-d wanted to destroy the Jewish People after their infidelity at the golden calf, Moshe pleaded with Hashem to “Erase me from Your Book that you have written.” Moshe asked that he, rather than the Jewish People, be eradicated. Even though Moshe spoke out of total self-sacrifice, nevertheless, his words made an impression, and it is for this reason that his name was “erased” from this week’s *parsha*.

The question remains, why this week’s *parsha*? Moshe’s name could have been omitted from any of the other *parshiot* in the Torah. The answer is the Hashem “delayed” omitting Moshe from the Torah “as long as He could.” For next week’s *parsha*, *Parshat Ki Tisa*, deals with the golden calf and it is there that Moshe makes the statement “Erase me from your Book.” So this *parsha* was G-d’s “last chance” to leave out Moshe’s “billing” from the Torah.

Sources:

Ba'al HaTurim, *Nachal Kadmonim*,
Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz

PARSHA OVERVIEW

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 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.

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EAT, DRINK, AND BE HOLY!

“Tell the House of Israel of the Beit Hamikdash and they will be ashamed of their sins.” (43:10)

The table at which a Jew eats is compared to the Holy Altar in the Temple. This is never more true than on Shabbat, when our eating takes on a greater spiritual dimension.

Part of the significance of the Purim meal is that it atones for another meal some 2,353 years ago.

Achashverosh, the King of Persia, invited the Jews to an extravagant banquet to celebrate his coronation. In spite of Mordechai's protests, the Jews attended this banquet. At the banquet, Achashverosh brought out and used the vessels from the Holy Temple which was destroyed by Nevuchadnetzar, a previous king of Babylon.

Achashverosh knew of the prophecy that the Holy Temple

would be rebuilt, but he miscalculated the date of its rebuilding. When that date passed, he mistakenly thought the prophecy was not true. However, after his death, the Second Beit Hamikdash was rebuilt by his son Darius, whose mother was Queen Esther.

Yechezkel's vision of the Third Beit Hamikdash, the ultimate incarnation of the Mishkan, is the subject of this week's haftara.

Hashem says to Yechezkel: “Tell the House of Israel of the Beit Hamikdash.” Tell them that you have already seen the Third Beit Hamikdash ready and finished down to its finest detail. Tell them that only their sins are preventing the revelation of Hashem's House. Tell Israel what you have seen “and they will be ashamed of their sins” and return to Me.

• Malbim

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?
16. 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 this Week'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 Hashem 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*.