

# OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT TERUMAH • 8 ADAR 5781 FEBRUARY 20, 2021 • VOL 28 NO.17  
SHABBAT PARSHAT TETZAVEH • 15 ADAR 5781 FEBRUARY 27, 2021

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Terumah and Purim

#### Throw Away Your Mask!

*"You shall place in the Ark the Testimonial-tablets that I shall give you." (25:16)*

**T**he holiday of Purim is about throwing away your mask.

There is an ancient custom for us to wear masks on Purim. Queen Esther masked her Jewishness. Her husband, King Achashverosh, did not know that she was Jewish. But at the crucial moment, when the Jewish People were threatened by Haman's genocide, she removed her mask and counted herself as a Jew. By doing this, she saved the Jews of Persia and everywhere from annihilation. By being proud of her Jewishness, she saved her nation.

Do not think that our enemies will be persuaded that we are good by listing the vast contributions that Jews have made to civilization. The hatred of the anti-Semite is illogical, and something that defies logic cannot be reasoned with. The Jew-hater hates us because we are "the filthy rich and the filthy poor, the bastions of the bourgeoisie and rootless cosmopolitans, the communist and the capitalist. The only thing that the Jew-haters of the world can agree upon is their hate.

We will never ingratiate ourselves among the nations by aping them. Never was the cause of assimilation stronger than at the turn of the nineteenth century in Germany. The more the Jew pushes to be like everyone else, the more everyone else will turn around and remind us that we are different – sometimes with murderous results.

Do not expect the love of the Nations of the world – but we will earn their respect by being what we are supposed to be. The Midrash says that when Hashem was giving us the Torah, everything stopped. Everything was silent. The nations of the world, fearing another giant flood, sent for Bilaam, their prophet, to ask him what was happening. Bilaam replied with the words of Psalm 29, that Hashem was not bringing a flood or destruction, but "Hashem was giving "Oz" – the Torah – to His People. To which the Nations replied, "May Hashem bless His people with peace."

When we, as proud Jews, throw away our masks and sanctify the name of the Torah, the whole world will proclaim, "May Hashem bless His people with peace."

# Tetzaveh

## A Drop in the Ocean?

“...to kindle the lamp continually” (27:20)

**W**e never know how a kind word can change a life. Often we think that a little drop of encouragement is no more than that – a drop in the ocean. How wrong! Sometimes the smallest smile can be a lifesaver to someone who may be sinking invisibly before our eyes.

The Midrash Tanchuma tells of Rabbi Chanina, the deputy *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest), speaking of his tenure in the Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple):

*“I served in the Beit Hamikdash, and miraculous things happened with the Menorah. From the time we lit the Menorah on Rosh Hashana, until the following Rosh Hashana, it never went out.”*

The Gerrer Rebbe, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai, once asked Rabbi Chaim Brisker about this Midrash: “The Torah mandates ‘...the Children of Israel shall take for you pure, pressed oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually.’ There is a mitzvah here to light the Menorah every day. If so, how could Rabbi Chanina report that the Menorah was never lit from one year to the next?”

Rabbi Chaim answered that the Rambam writes that someone who puts oil into an already-lit oil lamp on Shabbat is breaking the prohibition of kindling fire on Shabbat. If so, similarly, in the Beit Hamikdash – every day when they put a little drop of oil into the Menorah, it was considered as though they lit it.

Sometimes, just pouring a little of the oil of encouragement into someone’s life is enough to light up their entire world.

- Sources: Based on *Peninim Yekarim in Iturei Torah*

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions  
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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Pesachim 100-106

### Making a Big Kiddush

“Please say *Kiddusha Rabbah* for us.”

When Rav Ashi stayed at a place named Machuza for Shabbat, he was asked by the congregation to make Kiddush for them after the Shabbat morning services. They gave him a cup of wine and said to him, “Please say *Kiddusha Rabbah* for us.” This term — *Kiddusha Rabbah* — was unfamiliar to him.

What did he do? He thought to himself, “All the blessings on a cup of wine begin with the *beracha* of *Borei pri hagafen*.” So, he decided to say that *beracha* first, pause afterwards, and see what the elderly, wise people do. If, immediately after this *beracha*, he would see an important person start drinking from his own cup, Rav Ashi would understand that the *Kiddusha Rabbah* was completed and there was not need to say the additional *beracha* that is part of the Kiddush recited on Friday nights.

Indeed, drinking commenced after *Borei pri hagafen*. In effect, saying this one *beracha* is the accepted halachic definition of the term *Kiddusha Rabbah*. True, many communities have the custom to add a brief introduction to this *beracha* with a verse or verses from the Torah — such as “Remember the Shabbat day to sanctify it” (Shemot 28:11) and “And the Bnei Yisrael will keep the Shabbat... (Shemot 31:16-17). But the *Kiddusha Rabbah* is essentially the *beracha* of *Borei pri hagafen* (or *hagefen* for *Bnei Sfarad*, since the reply of *Amen* at the end is halachically considered as part of the *beracha*, which, as matter of grammar in *Lashon Hakodesh*, determines the *segol* vowel for the first syllable in the previous word - Rav Ovadia Yosef, *zatzal*).

But, why did *Chazal* call this *kiddush*, which consists of a single blessing, by the seemingly

paradoxical name of *Kiddusha Rabbah* — “the great Kiddush”?

The Rashbam (Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir, a grandson of Rashi, and whose commentary is printed on the *daf* here in a typical *Shas*) explains that this *Kiddush* of a single blessing is accorded a special and seemingly grandiose title because it is the *universal opening* for every *Kiddush* on any Shabbat or *Chag*.

Another explanation for this special name is to distinguish the shorter text of the day *Kiddush* from the longer text of the night *Kiddush*. The word *Rabbah* — great or large — is meant as a euphemism, which is used in order not to draw attention to its relative brevity. Calling it “the *small* Kiddush” would be disrespectful. Instead, euphemistically, it is called the “great” Kiddush. (*Rabbeinu Nissim*)

Euphemisms are found in many places in Judaism. In fact, the very term for “euphemism” is *sagi nahor*, which literally means “much light” and refers a blind person. However, I learned from my revered teacher, HaRav Moshe Shapiro, *zatzal*, that every euphemism must also be true on some level. Otherwise, there would appear to be a violation of the Torah’s tenet to “Distance yourself from a matter of falsehood.” (*Shemot 23:7*) The Rav explained: Although a blind person is usually thought of as being in the dark and not having light, it is also possible for a person to be blind and not able to see due to too much light!

In the same manner, we can understand the “hidden” truthfulness in referring to the day Kiddush as *Kiddusha Rabbah*. The afternoon prayer service is called *Mincha*, and there is *Mincha*

*Gedola* which is what the service is called when praying in the early afternoon, whereas *Mincha Ketana* is later in the afternoon (based on the “*Mincha*” time when the daily afternoon offering was brought in the Beit Hamikdash, from nine-and-a half hours of the daytime onwards.) Commentaries explain that the earlier portion of the afternoon is called *Mincha Gedola* – the “greater” *Mincha* – because the greater portion of the afternoon remains (*Perishah, Orach Chaim* 232:5), and the latter portion of the afternoon is known as *Mincha Ketana*, the “lesser” *Mincha* because only a small portion of the afternoon remains. Likewise, when the *Kiddush* is said after the morning prayers on Shabbat, a relatively greater, larger part of the day lies ahead. Therefore, there is “truth in advertising” this *Kiddush* as *Kiddusha Rabbah*.

On a related note, we have friends in Israel who are originally from Holland (one from Amsterdam and one from The Hague), whose custom is to make *Kiddush* before the third meal of Shabbat as well. They would say *Kiddush* before each meal of Shabbat. According to our discussion above of the nomenclature for the various parts of the afternoon, perhaps it might be appropriate to refer to this third *Kiddush* as *Kiddusha Ketana* or *Kiddusha Zutrata* (in Aramaic). Admittedly, I do not recall learning anything on this topic, and the reader is warmly invited to share any thoughts and sources with me.

- *Pesachim 106a*

*The Ohr Somayach Family wishes you and your family a joyous and safe Purim, as we say in the Havdalah service: “The Jewish People had light and happiness and joy and honor (Esther 8:16) — So may it be with us!” Purim Somayach!*

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# Q & A

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## TERUMAH

### Questions

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

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

### Answers

1. 25:2 - 13.
2. 25:3 - No fixed amount of the other items was required. The silver was given as a fixed amount: a half-shekel.
3. 25:4,5 - They are wool; *orot eilim* are not.
4. 25:4,5 - They are dyed; *shesh* and *orot techashim* are not.
5. 25:5 - The *tachash* delights (*sas*) in its multi-colors (*g'vanim*).
6. 25:5 - *Arazim* - cedars.
7. 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*.
8. 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)
9. 25:16 - It testifies that G-d commanded us to keep the *mitzvot*.
10. 25:18 - The faces of children.
11. 25:29 - Friday.
12. 25:31 - Hammered.
13. 25:31 - Purely ornamental.
14. 25:40 - G-d showed Moshe a *menorah* of fire.
15. 26:1 - On one side a lion; on the other side an eagle.
16. 26:15 - The wooden beams were to be upright and not stacked one upon the other.
17. 26:16 - 30 *amot*.
18. 26:23 - 10 *amot*.
19. 27:2 - To atone for brazenness.
20. 27:19 - They secured the curtains against the wind.

## TETZAVEH

### Questions

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

### Answers

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

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## INFINITE POTENTIAL (PART 2)

“These are the precepts that have no prescribed measure to them: the corner of the field, the first-fruit offerings, making a pilgrimage to the Holy Temple, acts of kindness and the study of Torah.” (*Tractate Peah 1:1*)

Notwithstanding the Rambam’s remarkable insight into the Mishna about pushing ourselves beyond our natural instincts to earn more spiritual reward, there still remains an uncertainty as to why it is that these particular commandments have no prescribed measure to them.

Sefer HaChinuch, a timeless classic work of deceptive simplicity, written anonymously in the thirteenth century, catalogs the 613 commandments according to where they appear in the Torah, adding a brief legal and philosophical description to each commandment. With his customary dazzling brilliance, the author explains that the commandments found in our Mishna are deliberately left undefined, because each one represents a concept that is far greater than merely the action we are obligated to do according to the commandment. Specifically, each one carries with it a message that is supposed to remain with us constantly throughout our lives.

The Torah instructs us that a person who owns a field must leave over a *corner* of the field unharvested when harvesting his crop. The crop in that part of the field is not even considered to be the property of the owner. Rather, it belongs to the poor and the needy. They may enter the field and take whatever is growing there – in the section that has been set aside for them – without permission. The message to the owner is that everything comes from G-d. Even when a person toils arduously to make his field productive, he is always dependent on G-d for success. Leaving over a part of the field teaches the owner, and us, that G-d’s bountiful blessings must be shared with those less fortunate. And it instills within us sensitivity to the needs of others.

The first-fruit offerings carry a similar lesson. Farming is an extremely labor-intensive occupation. After many months of hard work and sleepless nights worrying whether the elements and roaming creatures might ruin his harvest, the farmer is thrilled

to finally see his trees beginning to bud. The fruit begins to appear on the tree, slowly but surely, and the farmer’s anticipation is palpable. Very soon, the yield will be ready to be picked and he will literally eat the “fruits of his labor.” His sense of achievement is acute and it is very easy for a successful farmer to mistakenly imagine that his talents alone were the reason for his accomplishments. This would be tragic, as it would cause him to ignore the real Source of his success – G-d. Therefore, he is commanded to set aside the very first delectable fruits in his vineyards and orchards; not to eat them himself, but to bring them to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Because we must never lose sight of the One Who truly sustains us.

The Mishna also teaches us about the centrality of the Holy Temple and the obligation to spend time there. Why was travelling to the Holy Temple so incredibly significant that it, too, had no defined limits? During its existence, the Holy Temple served as a magnet for Jews from far and wide. It was the location that demonstrated the eternal and enduring connection that exists between G-d and His nation. Regardless of whether a person stayed for a fleeting amount of time or for an extended period, the Holy Temple was always the spiritual epicenter of one’s life. In effect, the Holy Temple connected each individual to the Jewish Nation and to G-d. And, now that we have no Temple, our obligation is to remain permanently committed to G-d and His Torah through our actions and thoughts.

“Acts of kindness” is the fourth item on the list. Why are acts of kindness also unlimited? The Mishna is teaching us a fundamental lesson. When we are not involved in other pursuits, there is an obligation to be involved in thinking of others and helping them. Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz (1878-1953), referred to universally as the “*Chazon Ish*,” the title of his magnum opus, was one of the most brilliant and discerning Torah scholars from the previous century. He points out the essential

difference between *charity* – whose limits *are* defined within Jewish law – and *kind deeds*, whose limits are not. The *Chazon Ish* explains that the commandment to give charity can only be fulfilled when it is given to a person in need, whereas kind deeds can be done to anyone at any time. The Mishna is teaching us that there are no limitations whatsoever to whom one can perform kind deeds, and when they can be done.

In the same way, Torah, the last of the five mentioned in the Mishna, has no limits. For one person, learning just a few minutes a day may be sufficient to fulfill his obligation, while for another it may require many hours of intense study. It all depends on the “standing” of the person. On being asked if he learned Torah by someone who did not know him, the *Chazon Ish*, whose diligence while learning was legendary, famously replied that when he had free time, he studied Torah. And, in truth,

that is exactly what the *Chazon Ish* did. It is just that the *Chazon Ish*'s “free time” occupied almost the entirety of his day. In fact, the *Chazon Ish* was known to invest so much intellectual energy into learning Torah that he was often completely exhausted and would fall asleep on the floor next to his bed because he was physically incapable of finding any extra strength to climb into it!

Each one of the five commandments that appear in our Mishna carries a variation of the same message – the imperative to build a healthy and permanent bond with G-d. And, perhaps even more crucially, the importance of constantly toiling to strengthen that relationship so that it is always in a perpetual state of growth. And, for this reason this specific Mishna was chosen as representing the Oral Torah within the blessings. Its underlying theme is that we must open up our hearts to allow G-d's Presence to saturate every aspect of our lives.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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### Terumah

Hashem commands Moshe to build a Mishkan (Sanctuary) and supplies him with detailed instructions. The Jewish People are asked to contribute precious metals and stones, fabrics, skins, oil and spices. In the Mishkan's outer courtyard there 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. Entrance to the innermost chamber, the Holy of Holies, was permitted only for 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 instructions for the construction of the Mishkan, are described in great detail.

### Tetzaveh

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

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



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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

## Terumah

### Bread of Brotherhood

In the Mishkan, the Table served the purpose of bearing the *lechem hapanim*, the “bread of the Countenance.” Bread obviously represents nourishment, and our Sages referred to the table as a symbol and source of prosperity.

In this context, several features of the Table’s construction impart powerful messages about the pursuit of and use of prosperity. First, the Table is constructed of wood, which symbolizes vigorous, continuous development. These are the necessary traits to create prosperous growth.

However, a basis of solidity and purity must be established for this prosperity – this is represented by the gold coating. Of all metals, gold represents the most genuine, most perfect form of goodness and purity. It is usually found in unalloyed form and can withstand the most rigorous tests of durability, and hence is a most fitting symbol of our moral commitment. Not only is the Table coated in gold, but it bears a gold rim around its entire border. This reinforces the directive that holiness and purity of material aspirations are fundamental conditions for prosperity. Precisely because material and sensual aspirations hold the greatest danger of defilement and desecration, we are taught that these pursuits must be “surrounded” by a rim of moral purity.

Second, the shape of the molds which held the bread instruct as to the use of prosperity, so that the purity with which it was attained is maintained. The structure of the stacked metal

loaves was a flat surface with two upright sides, like this |\_\_\_\_\_|, such that the dimensions of the upstanding sides together equaled, or nearly equaled, the length of the base. By virtue of this shape, each loaf offers for the support of the loaf immediately above it as much, or nearly as much, space as it occupies with its own base.

This symbolizes the devotion of one person to another. This devotion is the basic condition for prosperity. Each person is to acquire and possess wealth for the sake of his fellow no less than for his own sake, and provide for another person’s table as much, or almost as much, as he provides for his own.

Finally, the trait of brotherhood is represented in other aspects of the bread. Each loaf was made of two *esronim* of flour, which volume represents the daily requirement of nourishment, not for one, but for two individuals. Furthermore, the loaves are baked in pairs. A total of twelve loaves, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, are prepared and then arranged on the Table in two equal stacks, side by side.

Thus, the measure, the shape, the preparation and the arrangement of the loaves all clearly bear the imprint of brotherhood.

- Sources: *Commentary, Shemot 25:23-29*

## SPECIAL PURIM FEATURE

From Luxury to Light – based on the writings of Rav S. R. Hirsch

by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Purim: Fake Faces

Long before the novel coronavirus made masks a fashionable part of respectable wardrobe, the custom developed to wear masks on the holiday of Purim. Jewish mask-wearing even predates the establishment of Purim, as the Bible reports that when Moses descended from Mount Sinai, his face shone with a strong light, and he covered his face with a “mask” (see Ex. 34:29-35). The Hebrew word used to denote Moses’ mask is *masveh*. In this essay we will explore the etymology of the Biblical Hebrew word *masveh*, as well as the Modern Hebrew word *masechah*, which also means “mask.” But first, let’s explore the word originally used in connection with the custom of wearing masks on Purim.

The earliest halachic authorities who mention the custom of wearing a mask on Purim refer to the practice as wearing *partzufim*, wearing “faces.” This wording is found in the response of *Mahari Mintz* 17, the *Rema* to *Orach Chaim* 696:8, and in Rabbi Yuzpa Shamash’s account of the old traditions of the Jewish community in Worms.

The Hebrew word *partzuf* – which appears once in the Mishnah (*Yevamot* 16:3), plus numerous other times throughout the Talmud and Midrashim – and the Aramaic word *partzufa* are actually Greek loanwords. The original Greek word, *prosopon*, literally means “facing the eyes,” as *pros* means “toward” and *ops* means “eye” (think of optometry or optical). Thus, the originally custom was for people “to wear ‘faces’ on their faces” on Purim. Interestingly, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the Latin *persona* (“mask used by an actor”) also derives from the Greek word *prosopon*, and is the etymological ancestor of the English word *person*.

Now we can talk about the Biblical Hebrew word for “mask.” *Masveh* appears only three times in the entire Bible – all of these in the verses mentioning the “mask” that Moses used to cover his face. Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Parchon (the 12th century compiler of the *Machberet HeAruch* lexicon) more specifically defines *masveh* as a fabric placed over the face that has holes for the eyes, nose and mouth. He follows early grammarians like Rabbi Yehuda Chayyuj (945-1000), Rabbi Yonah Ibn Janach (990-1055), and Radak (1160-1235) in understanding *masveh* as the only word derived from the triliteral root SAMECH-VAV-HEY. However, Rashi suggests that the word *masveh* comes from Aramaic, as he finds apparent cognates of this word in the Talmud (*Ketuvot* 60a, 62b).

That said, other commentators find that there is another Biblical word derived from the same root as *masveh*. When Jacob blessed his son Judah, he said: “...he shall launder his garments in wine, and his clothing (*suto*), in the blood of grapes” (Gen. 49:11). Rashbam (to Ex. 34:33), Ibn Ezra (to Gen. 49:69, Ex. 34:33) and Chizkuni (there) all write that the word *suto* cognates with *masveh*. In fact, Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-970) in *Machberet Menachem* classifies both *suto* and *masveh* as derivatives of the monoliteral root SAMECH. Thus, the

literal meaning of *masveh* is actually “clothing” or “fabric.” (The word *sutot* in the sense of “fabric” appears in the Mishna (*Keilim* 16:7), and Maimonides (in his commentary to the Mishna there) connects that word to the Biblical *suto*. Interestingly, Menachem’s famous interlocutor, named Donash Ibn Labrat (920-990), argues that *suto* means *kesuto* – “his covering” – with the letter KAF missing for some odd reason.)

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Brelsau (1740-1814) writes that the words *masveh/suto* are related to the Hebrew word *stav* (“autumn” or “fall”) and refer to soft, spongy fabrics worn to insulate oneself from the cold weather. Alternatively, he explains that those two words refer to fabrics placed on top of one’s clothes so that they do not get dirty (something commonly done during the season of *stav*).

When Rabbi Ephraim Lenchitz (1550-1619) discusses the Ashkenazi custom of wearing masks on Purim, he actually uses the word *masveh*, while Rabbi Zerach Eidlitz (1725-1780) uses both the words *partzuf* and *masveh*.

The Modern Hebrew word *masechah* (“mask”) actually appears in the Bible, but means something totally different. The Biblical term *masechah* refers to molten metal that was fashioned into a certain shape. For example, the Bible uses the term *egel masechah* (literally, “molten calf”) when referring to the Golden Calf (Ex. 32:4, 32:8, Deut. 9:16, and Nechemia 9:18). According to Ibn Janach and the Radak, the root of this word is NUN-SAMECH-KAF (*nesech*), which primarily refers to “pouring,” since metal heated to high temperatures becomes ‘liquid,’ and therefore pourable. Other meanings derived from this root include “hiding” or “covering,” and those meanings seem to be the semantic basis for *masechah* in the sense of “mask” – as a mask covers or hides one’s face.

Another way of understanding the etymology of *masechah* is by tying it to the Biblical root MEM-SAMECH-KAF, which means “mixture,” both in the sense of mixing liquids (e.g., Isa. 5:22, Prov. 9:2, 9:5) and in the sense of mixing threads to create a fabric (as in *masach*, “curtain” or *masechet* in Judges 16:13-14). The Mishnaic Hebrew word *masechet* similarly refers to the woof threads that run across a woven fabric (see Rabbeinu Chananel to *Shabbat* 59b, Maimonides to *Keilim* 21:1, and the *Rash* to *Negaim* 11:9). If the etymology of *masechah* as “mask” lies in this root, then *masechah* and *masveh* closely resemble each other. (MEM-SAMECH-KAF seems to be congruent with the more familiar root that means “to mix” or “dilute,” MEM-ZAYIN-GIMMEL. That congruency is based on the interchangeability of the letters SAMECH with ZAYIN, and KAF with GIMMEL.)

Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899-1983) and Avraham Even-Shoshan (1906-1984) add that the Modern Hebrew *masechah* as “mask” also developed from phonetically-similar words in foreign languages, namely, *mask* in English, *masque* in French, and *maskhara* in Arabic.

Another related word is *masechet* in the sense of a “tractate” (like tractates of the Mishna or within the halachic Midrashim). *Sefer Chassidim* (929) writes that *masechet* in this sense derives from the Biblical word *masechet* (Judges 16:13-14), which means “interwoven fabric,” because a *masechet* refers to the tapestry of rabbinic rulings on a given topic that are culled together into one work. In his introduction to *Tosefot Yom Tov*, Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Heller (1579-1617) writes that the word *masechet* is related to the Biblical phrase *maschah yeynah* (“she mixed her wine”) that appears in Proverbs 9:2, as a *masechet* comprises a

“mixture” of various laws. Interestingly, Rabbi Binyamin Mussafia (1606-1675) suggests that the root of the word *masechet* is SAMECH-KAF, which means “to listen” (as in *hasket*, Deut. 27:9), since “listening” is the core mechanism by which the Oral Torah – typified by the Mishna – is transmitted.

The Talmud (*Megillah* 12a) explains that the Jews in the time of Ahasuerus deserved to be destroyed because they had previously bowed down to Nebuchadnezzar’s idol. However, the Talmud clarifies that since the Jewish People did not actually forsake G-d by bowing to those idols, but rather did so out of fear, they did not really deserve to be destroyed. Instead, just as they only *superficially* worshipped idolatry, while on the inside remained loyal to G-d, so too did they deserve to undergo an ordeal whereby they would *appear* to be doomed to destruction on the surface, while in practice they would not end up being destroyed. Indeed, the Talmud elsewhere (*Chullin* 139b) characterizes the story of Purim as G-d hiding “His face” (Deut. 31:18) from the Jewish People, as though He wore a mask that concealed His true plans.

Based on this explanation, Rabbi Moshe Chagiz (1671-1750) writes that the custom of wearing masks on Purim (which he calls *partzufim*) mimics the way G-d treated the Jewish People in the story of Purim: He put up a façade of planning to the destroy the Jewish People, while really, on the inside, He had no such intentions.

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# Special Purim Feature!

## Insights Into Halacha

### Purim: To Drink or Not To Drink?

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Can you feel Purim just around the corner? Who isn't eagerly anticipating this annual Yom Tov extravaganza, featuring joyous dancing, *Mishloach Manot*, colorful costumes, and of course the Megillah reading? However, for many, it is the unique mitzvah to get drunk that they are eagerly awaiting. Since Purim is described in the Megillah as "a day of *Mishteh*" (referring to a wine feast), and the Purim turnabout miracle occurred at wine feasts, there is a rare dispensation from the norm, such that there is an apparent obligation to drink wine. Hopefully, the wine will enable one to experience a sublime, spiritual Purim. Yet, uninhibited drinking may also unfortunately result in catastrophic consequences. If so, what exactly is the mitzvah of drinking on Purim?

#### *"Chayav Inish Livesumei"*

The *gemara* in Megillah (7b) famously rules that "M'chayav inish l'visumei b'Puriya ad d'lo yada bein arur Haman l'baruch Mordechai" – a person is obligated to drink and get intoxicated on Purim until he cannot tell the difference between "Cursed is Haman" and "Blessed is Mordechai." The simple meaning of this is that we must get exceedingly drunk on Purim.

Yet, as we will soon see, this assertion is anything but simple.

The very next line in the *gemara* tells a fascinating story of Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira, who got excessively drunk together on Purim. In his drunken stupor, Rabba proceeded to kill ('slaughter') Rabbi Zeira. When he sobered up and realized what he had done, he *davened* that Rabbi Zeira would be brought back to life. His prayers were answered, and Rabbi Zeira rejoined the world of the living. The very next year,

Rabbi Zeira refused to join Rabbah for his Purim meal, duly noting that a miracle is not a common occurrence and one may not rely on a miracle.

Although there are different interpretations of this story, with several commentaries explaining that it is not to be understood literally, positing that Rabbah *did not* actually kill Rabbi Zeira, nevertheless, many commentaries are bothered by the *gemara's* choice of words. If the ruling is that one must get drunk on Purim, then why is this story showcasing the potential drastic and tragic consequences of such drinking? What message is the *gemara* trying to impart to us? Additionally, what exactly does it mean that one must drink until "*ad d'lo yada bein arur Haman l'baruch Mordechai*"? What does this enigmatic turn of phrase actually mean?

#### *"Ad D'lo Yada"*

As with many other issues in halacha, the answers to these questions are not as simple as they seem. Several authorities, including the *Rif* and the *Tur*, when codifying this mitzvah, indeed use the basic understanding of the *gemara's* ruling, that one is *required* to get so drunk on Purim that he cannot tell the difference between "Cursed is Haman" and "Blessed is Mordechai" – implying getting quite drunk.

Yet, the ruling of *Rabbeinu Efraim*, as cited by the *Ran* and the *Ba'al HaMa'or*, is the exact opposite. He maintains that since the *gemara* tells the story of Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira *after* the ruling of getting drunk, it is not meant exclusively as a cautionary tale detailing the evils of excessive alcohol. Rather, it is coming to negate the ruling. According to this understanding, it is *forbidden* to get drunk on Purim.

## “*V'lo Ad B'Chlal*”

A different explanation of the *gemara* is that drinking “*ad d'lo yada bein arur Haman l'baruch Mordechai*” does not actually mean getting stone-cold drunk. In fact, most commentaries offer many different understandings of the *gemara's* intent with this phrase.

Some say it means drinking until one can no longer perform the mental acrobatics necessary to calculate the gematrias of *Arur Haman* and *Baruch Mordechai* (hint: they both equal 502). Accordingly, this is a much lesser degree of drunkenness. Others explain it means drinking until one can no longer discern the greater miracle: the downfall of Haman or Mordechai's meteoric rise in prominence. Another interpretation is to drink enough to no longer be able to recite a lengthy Purim-themed, *Alef-Beit* acrostic poem, in the proper order. An additional understanding is that one must get inebriated just enough to no longer be able to properly thank Hashem for the many miracles of our salvation in the Purim story. It is clear that many authorities throughout the generations felt uncomfortable with the literal interpretation of the *gemara's* teaching to get drunk on Purim, and each one interprets the instruction as such that it does not imply getting fully drunk.

Rav Manoach Hendel of Prague, a contemporary of the Maharshal (mid 1500s), cites many of these explanations to elucidate the *gemara's* intent. Interestingly, what they all have in common is that not a single one of them understands the *gemara* to mean actually getting drunk. Utilizing any of these aforementioned opinions would mean that one should definitely not “get plastered.” Rather, one should drink only a bit, somewhat more than he usually would, until he fulfills one of these understandings of the dictum of *ad d'lo yada*.

In fact, although the *Shulchan Aruch* seems to imply that he agrees with the *Tur's* interpretation that one must get drunk, it must be noted that in his *Beit Yosef* commentary he completely rejects this approach. He exclusively cites *Rabbeinu Efraim* and the *Orchos Chaim*, who refer to getting drunk on Purim as ‘*ain lecha aveirah gedolah mi'zu*’ – the worst of transgressions. And he concludes that one should merely drink a tad more than he is accustomed to.

This apparently means that when he codified the halacha in the *Shulchan Aruch* as drinking until “*ad d'lo yada*,” this should be understood in the light of his writing in the *Beit Yosef*, and not as ‘getting wasted,’ as many mistakenly believe.

## Just Sleep It Off

The *Rambam* offers an alternate approach. He maintains that one must drink until he falls asleep. Meaning, if one drinks and then falls asleep, he has fulfilled his mitzvah of drinking on Purim “*ad d'lo yada*” – without actually getting drunk. When asleep, one certainly cannot distinguish between *Arur Haman* and *Baruch Mordechai*! This also fits well with his famous ruling in *Hilchot Dei'ot* about one who gets drunk being a “sinner and a disgrace.”

The *Rema*, when codifying the proper amount to drink on Purim, combines both of the latter approaches: drinking somewhat more than one is accustomed to regularly, and then going to sleep.

## What Is the Halacha?

Many contemporary *Gedolim* personally followed the *Rema's* ruling, including the *Chofetz Chaim*, the *Steipler Gaon*, and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach.

It should be noted that several prominent authorities who do rule that one should actually get drunk, including the *Ya'avetz*, *Sha'arei Teshuva*, *Chayei Adam*, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, and *Kaf Hachaim*, add an important caveat. If one might come to be lax in the performance of even one other mitzvah, such as *netilat yadaim*, *birkat hamazon* or *tefillah* while drunk, they all maintain that it is preferable *not to drink at all*, to ensure that all of one's actions remain for the sake of Heaven.

The *Pri Chadash* cites several opinions regarding drinking on Purim, and concludes that already, in his time, several hundred years ago (late 1600s), with society's decline over the generations, it was proper to follow the opinion of *Rabbeinu Efraim* and drink only a small amount more than usual. In this way one will be certain not to, G-d forbid, unwittingly transgress any prohibitions. This path will result in

receiving blessings from Hashem. This is not only his view – the *Pri Megadim*, *Aruch Hashulchan*, and *Mishna Berura* all rule like the *Pri Chadash* as the halacha to be followed.

If this was the case several centuries ago, how much more relevant are the *Pri Chadash's* prophetic words nowadays, with teen alcoholism on the rise and not a year going by without our hearing horror stories about the tragic results of excessive drinking on Purim? In fact, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *zatzal*,

decried the unseemly levity and poor mitzvah performance that unfortunately has replaced the joy of the mitzvahs of Purim, and has become the norm among many as a result of extreme intoxication. And, more recently, Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky has publicly stated that “it is a transgression to get drunk on Purim.”

In the final analysis, whichever opinion one follows, it seems that *Iggud Hatzolah* has gotten it right with their annual Purim message: “Don’t get carried away this Purim!”

*The author wishes to acknowledge excellent articles on this topic by Rabbi Moshe Brody, Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer, and Rabbi Binyomin Radner.*

*This article was written L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh Yeshiva Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben yechezkel Shraga, R' Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben Dovid Tzvi, L'Refuah Sheleimah for R' Shlomo Yoel ben Chaya Leah, Henna Rasha bas Yitta Ratza and Rochel Miriam bas Dreiza Liba, and l'zechus Yaacov Tzvi ben Rivka and Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad!*

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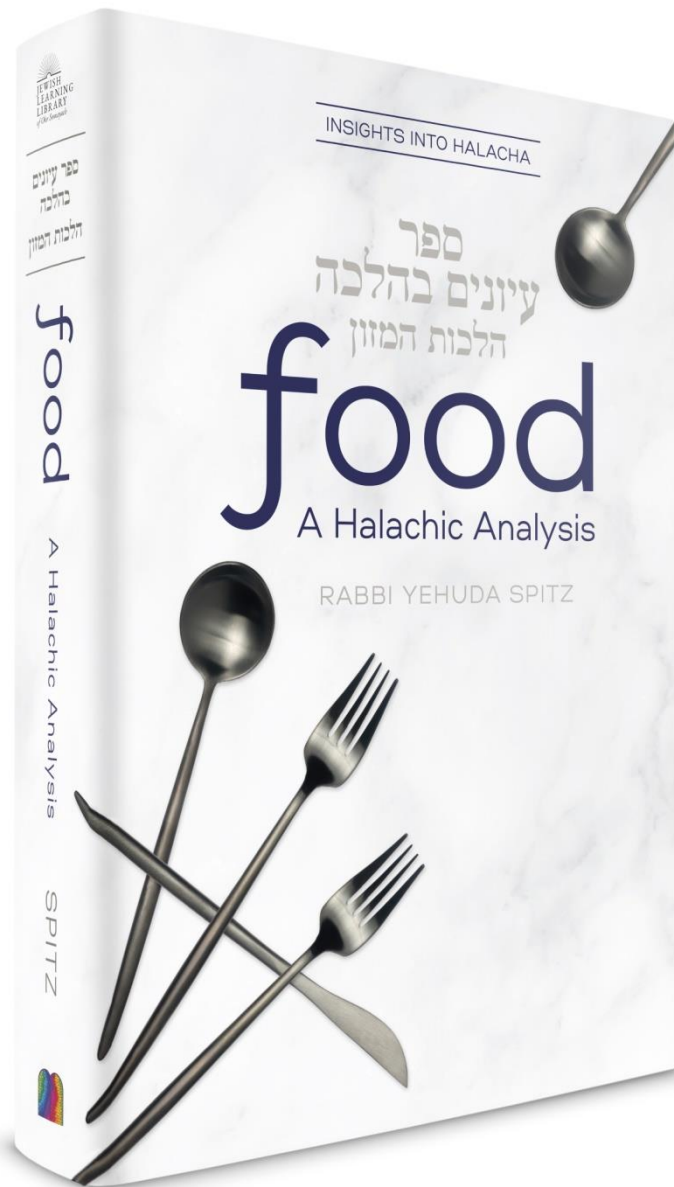
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