



JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES

PURIM: THE SECRET OF OUR SALVATION

SOURCE AND DISCUSSION SHEET



SOURCE 1: *Scroll of Esther 9:20-22 – On the 14th or 15th of Adar, we send gifts to friends and to the poor, and enjoy a festive meal.*

And Mordechai recorded these events [the miracles of Purim], and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Achashverosh, both near and far, [charging them] to observe annually the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and the fifteenth day, as the day on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and the month which had been turned about for them from one of sorrow to joy, and from mourning to festival; to observe them as **(1) days of feasting and gladness, and (2) sending gifts of food to one another [mishloach manot], and (3) gifts to the poor [matanot l'evyonim].**

וַיִּכְתֹּב מֶרְדֳּכָי אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים אֶל כָּל הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֵׁרוֹשׁ הַקְּרוֹבִים וְהַרְחֹקִים. לֵקֹּם עֲלֵיהֶם לִהְיוֹת עֹשִׂים אֶת יוֹם אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר וְאֶת יוֹם חֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ בְּכָל שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה. כִּי־יָמִים אֲשֶׁר נָחַו בָּהֶם הַיְּהוּדִים מֵאִיְבֵיהֶם וְהִחְדָּשׁ אֲשֶׁר נִהְפָּךְ לָהֶם מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׂמְחָה וּמֵאֲבֵל לְיוֹם טוֹב לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם יְמֵי מִשְׁתֵּה וּשְׂמֵחָה וּמְשָׁלַח מְנוֹת אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ וּמִתְּנוֹת לְאִבְיָנִים.

In addition to retelling the story of Purim and mentioning it in our prayers, three other mitzvos which are listed above were instituted by Mordechai and Esther. Commemorating these days as times of “feasting and gladness” is certainly understandable. However, “gifts of food” (mishloach manos) and “gifts to the poor” (matanos l'evyonim), seemingly have nothing to do with the holiday. The Rabbis could have mandated these on any holiday really. (Or on none of them)

Q: Why do you think these practices were instituted specifically as integral parts of the Festival of Purim? After discussing the question, consider the following sources:

Consider the following source:

SOURCE 2a: *Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol II, p. 204-205 – “Sending Gifts of Food”*

The reason why the Sages instituted the mitzvah of **sending food gifts** to one another, was to increase mutual feelings of closeness between people. And once people feel close to each other, then love between them develops ...

This is the purpose of the mitzvah of mishloach manot: **to create mutual love, and thus awaken the power of unity** in our times, as we had in previous generations.

זֶה הַטַּעַם לְתַקְנַת חֲזַל מְשֻׁלָּח מְנוֹת אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ, שֶׁיִּי זֶה יִבֹּאוּ לְקִרְבּוֹ הַדְּדִית, וְעַיִ קִירָב הַלְּבָבוֹת בֵּין אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ תִּגְדֹּל הָאֲהָבָה ... וְזוֹ הַתְּכִלִּית בְּקִיּוֹם מִצְוַת מְשֻׁלָּח מְנוֹת - לִיצוֹר אֲהָבָה הַדְּדִית, וְעַיִ כֵּךְ לַעֲוֹר אֶת כַּח הָאֲחֻדוֹת לְדוֹרוֹת - בְּזִמָּן הַזֶּה.

SOURCE 2B: *Sifsei Chaim, Cont. Vol II, p. 205 – “Gifts to the Poor ”*

The reason for the mitzvah of giving gifts to the poor on Purim is to help us feel responsible for others, through which we eradicate our own desires.

מתנות לאביונים - להרגיש את עצמו כאחראי
לזולת, וכתוצאה מכך מבטל את רצונותיו
הפרטיים.

The festive meal is also a way to create love and unity within the Jewish People:

SOURCE 2C: *Sifsei Chaim, Cont. Vol II, p. 205 – “Gather People Together”*

The Purim meal, as it is referred to in the verse: “And these days should be remembered and celebrated by every generation [and] every family (Esther 9:28).” Rashi explains that the celebration is by means of: **“people gathering together, and eating and drinking together ...”**

The aim of the Purim meal is to unify everyone present, and for everyone in the group to bring happiness to his friend. Through this we pass on to future generations the unique re-acceptance of the Torah that occurred in those days of Purim when: **“[the nation was] like one man, with one heart” [Rashi, Shemos 19:2, referring to the nation’s acceptance of the Written Torah on Har Sinai].**

סעודת פורים - כמבואר בפסוק
“ואתה ט, כח” והימים האלה
נזכרים ונעשים בכל דור ודור
משפחה ומשפחה “ וגו' מבאר רש"י
“מתאספים יחד ואוכלים ושותים
יחד...”

סעודת פורים מטרתה לאחד את
כולם ולשמוח בצוותא איש עם רעהו,
וע"ז מנחילים לדורות את הקבלה
המחודשת בימים ההם - כאיש אחד
בלב אחד.

So, we see that these mitzvos were all sourced in creating Jewish Unity.

Q: Unity has always been important to Jewish survival, that’s nothing new. Yet, the Rabbis seem to go out of their way to highlight unity as a crucial takeaway of the holiday. Why?

(Perhaps a hint is contained in source 2c)

The Beginning of the End: Haman’s accusation against the Jews:

SOURCE 3: *Scroll of Esther – 3:8-9: “Scattered and Divided/Separated”*

Haman then said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people, **scattered and separated** among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king’s laws; and it is not in Your Majesty’s interest to tolerate them. If it please Your Majesty, let an edict be drawn for their destruction.

יאמר המן למלך אחשוורוש ישנו עם אחד מפזר ומפחד בין
העמים בכל מדינות מלכותך ודתיהם
שנות מקל-עם ואת-דתי המלך אינם עשים ולמלך
אין-שׁוה להניחם
אם-על-המלך טוב יכתב לאבדם

In addition to other classic antisemitic tropes, Haman described the Jewish people as a **“scattered and separated nation” (Esther 3:8).**

According to the Midrash, he did not only mean that they were geographically dispersed, but that they were divided, and would thus be easy prey for their enemies. **The Jewish people lacked the spiritual protection that comes as a result of a loving unity between them (Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra 26:2)**

Are we really so vulnerable when we aren't unified?

SOURCE 4: Midrash Rabba Devarim (5:10) – The Unity Response

Said R. Shmuel Bar Nachmani, the generation of Achav worshiped idols, but whenever they went out to war they were victorious. Why? Since **between them there was no discord, so they went out to victory.** When Jezebel (the evil queen) sought to kill the prophet (Ovadia), he hid in a cave. (Since he knew they would be successful). However, in the times of the (righteous) King Saul, **they spoke slander,** and know that Saul went after David (the next King Israel) because of this slander.

דָּאָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחֲמָן דּוֹרוֹ שֶׁל אַחָאב עוֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים הָיוּ וְהָיוּ יוֹצְאִין לַמִּלְחָמָה וְנוֹצְחִין, וְלָמָּה כֵּן, שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה בֵּינֵיהֶן דִּילְטוּרִין, לְפִיכָךְ הָיוּ יוֹצְאִין לַמִּלְחָמָה וְנוֹצְחִין, תִּדְעַ לָךְ כְּשֶׁבִקְשָׁה אִיזְבֵּל לְהָרֵג כָּל נְבִיאֵי ה', מָה עָשָׂה עֲבֹדָהּ הַטָּמִין אוֹתָן בַּמַּעְרוֹת, שְׁנֶאֱמַר (מְלָכִים א יח, יג): וְאַחָאב מִנְבִיאֵי ה' מָאָה אִישׁ חֲמָשִׁים חֲמָשִׁים אִישׁ בַּמַּעְרָה, וְלֹא הָיָה אָדָם שֶׁאֱמַר לְאַחָאב כָּךְ וְכָךְ עָשָׂה עֲבֹדָהּ, אֲבָל דּוֹרוֹ שֶׁל שָׁאוּל כָּלָן הָיוּ דִילְטוּרִין, תִּדְעַ לָךְ כְּשֶׁהָיָה שָׁאוּל רוֹדֵף אַחֵר דָּוִד הָיוּ הַכֹּל אוֹמְרִים עָלָיו לְשׁוֹן הָרַע

The Rabbis are teaching us that although a generation may be righteous and possess a lot of mitzvos, a unified generation is protected from its enemies, even if they are evil!?

Q: This is certainly hard to fathom, that unity should trump righteousness! Why do you think this might be so?

Let's take a deeper look at this idea:

SOURCE 5: R. Gedalia Schorr - Ohr Gedalyahu p. 153 – “Separation” from G-d

Esav is the root of evil in this world and his essence is separation. He himself was **“scattered and separated”**; his powers were scattered and not unified. The power to defeat Esav is **unity.** (Vayikra Raba 4)

Rav Gedalia Schorr is sharing with us that Esav, who is the ancestor of Haman, possesses as his main trait and principal tactic “sowing disunity” in the world and among the Jewish People.

SOURCE 6: Talmud Chullin (139b) - Haman's Name in the Torah

Where is Haman alluded to in the Torah?
“From the Tree” (Breishis 3:11)

הַמֵּן מִן הַתּוֹרָה מִנִּין (בראשית ג, יא) הַמֵּן הָעֵץ

Ha Min (from the tree) and Haman are spelled the same way. The name Haman is connected to the Tree of Good and Evil in Gan Eden, the very vehicle which separated G-d from man, and remained the philosophical gateway to sin for all time.

Q: We see that Esav and Haman's main drive is separation. Why do you suppose that "separation and scattering" is the launching pad for evil in this world? On its face it seems somewhat benign.

- G-d is One, and where there is unity, peace, meaning and truth (all aspects of unity) there is G-d.
- Separation, discord, randomness, fractured relationships, dispute and sin all drive G-d out of this world. (Hides His presence in the world)

Q: It's interesting to note that Amalek, the nation that produced Haman is also known for "sowing doubt" (gematria of Amalek = Sufek (doubt)), giving rise to philosophies like Atheism.) Do you see a connection of these characteristics to a drive for "separation and disunity"?

Q: What is the rectification for a world that has sent G-d into hiding via the tools of Esav – "separation and scatteredness"—and their unholy derivatives?

You guessed it! Unity, and all its holy derivatives – love, peace, harmony, meaning and truth.

In fact, Esther's call to unite the People with her instructions to Mordechai "Go "assemble" all the Jews in Shushan, and fast for me", led to their salvation. (Esther 4:16)

Consider the beautiful words of Rabbi Shimshon Pincus as he discusses the rationale for why there are no names of G-d mentioned in the Megillas Esther:

SOURCE 7: *Rabbi Shimshon Pinkus, Purim, Ch. 2 – Discovering G-d in the natural world*

This is also the reason for which none of the names of G-d are mentioned in Megillas Esther. Since if His name would be written explicitly, this would constitute a departure from the natural into the supernatural – which is applicable to Passover.

Purim, however, reveals that each aspect within nature is imbued with the love of G-d ...

Where does one find more intense love: in Passover or in Purim? On Passover G-d raised us over the entire world, but **on Purim we discover G-d in every nook and cranny of the natural world.**

עמוד (כי) זהו גם הסיבה לכך שלא מוזכר בכל המגילה אף שם משמות הש"י, כיון שאם היה כתוב בגלוי שמו של הקב"ה היתה זו יציאה מגדר הטבע למעל הטבע, וזה כבר נוגע לפסח. אך פורים מגלה לנו שכל דבר בתוך הטבע החשוק זהו פיסגת האהבה.

היכן רואים יותר אהבה בפורים או בפסח? בחג הפסח הרים אותנו הקב"ה מעל העולם, אבל בפורים אנו מגלים את הקב"ה בכל נקודה ונקודה של טבע.

Purim teaches us that G-d's fingerprints are all over our lives if we would just look and connect the dots. (Unity again!)

Let's take a look at one last source:

First, a little background. The way the war unfolded against Haman's Amalekite brethren, was that outside of Shushan the Jews fought (and defeated their enemy) on the 13th of Adar, and they celebrated on the 14th, while the Jews of Shushan continued to fight on the 14th and celebrated on the 15th.

This staggered victory and celebration became the basis for the observance of the holiday:

SOURCE 8: *Scroll of Esther (9:16-19)*

The rest of the Jews, those in the king's provinces(outside of Shushan), likewise fought for their lives. They disposed of their enemies, killing seventy-five thousand of their foes; but they did not lay hands on the spoil.

That was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar; and they rested on the fourteenth day and made it a day of feasting and merrymaking. But the Jews in Shushan fought on both the thirteenth and fourteenth days, and so rested on the fifteenth, and made it a day of feasting and merrymaking.)

Mordecai recorded these events. And he sent dispatches to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus, near and far, charging them to observe the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar, every year—

וְשָׂאֵר הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּמַדִּינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ נִקְהְלוּ וַעֲמַד
עַל־נַפְשָׁם וְנוֹחַ מֵאִיְבֵיהֶם וְהָרוּג בְּשִׁנְאֵיהֶם חֲמִשָּׁה
וְשִׁבְעִים אֶלֶף וּבִבְזָה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם:

בְּיוֹם־שְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר וְנוֹחַ בְּאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר בּו
וַעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מְשֻׁתָּה וְשִׁמְחָה:

וְהַיְּהוּדִים) (וְהַיְּהוּדִים) אֲשֶׁר־בְּשׁוּשָׁן נִקְהְלוּ בְּשְׁלוֹשָׁה
עָשָׂר בּו וּבְאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר בּו וְנוֹחַ בְּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בּו
וַעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מְשֻׁתָּה וְשִׁמְחָה:

וַיִּכְתֹּב מֶרְדֳּכָי אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים
אֶל־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֻׁרוּשׁ
הַקְּרוֹבִים וְהָרְחוֹקִים:

לֵקֶחַם עֲלֵיהֶם לִהְיוֹת עֹשִׂים אֶת יוֹם אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ
אָדָר וְאֶת יוֹם־חֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בּו בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה

Q: Based upon what we have learned so far about the primacy of unity among the Jewish People, a big question should arise from reading this source. What do you think that is?

Q: If they were truly unified, how could it be that the Jews outside of Shushan celebrated while their brethren in Shushan were still fighting, and why would Mordechai and Esther set up the holiday in this divisive way forevermore? What are they trying to teach us?

SOURCE 9: *Rabbi Yaacov Weinberg – Rosh HaYeshiva Ner Yisroel (related to me by a student of his from a lecture)*

Instituting two days of Purim actually teaches us a profound lesson about unity. Unity is not uniformity, where we all must do the same thing, think and act the same way; That's communism. True unity is all of us working towards the same ultimate goal, but each from our own perspective, with our own unique talents and through the prism of our own life circumstances, with mutual respect and love for those who do it differently. Unity is born, not when we all do the same job, but rather when each of us, in our own unique way offers a contribution to the collective undertaking of the Jewish People.

Unity actually depends on each one of us taking our life circumstances and serving G-d in the best way we know how. If we all do this in good faith, we will achieve true Unity and merit G-d's blessing and protection.

APPENDIX - PURIM STORY AT A GLANCE

Historical Context-

The miracle of Purim occurred while the Jewish people were undergoing the first of two exiles that were foretold by the prophets. It was a seventy-year exile that was not characterized by great persecution until Haman's decree. Nevertheless, a spiritual decline began that was the catalyst to that frightful decree.

1. Vashti is deposed as queen and Esther is chosen in her place.

King Achashverosh of Persia rules the entire civilized world, including 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. He holds a huge feast for all his subjects in the capital city of Shushan. At the feast, Achashverosh asks Queen Vashti to parade undressed in front of his guests. She refuses. He gets angry and has her killed.

Against her will, our heroine Esther is chosen in a royal beauty contest to be the new queen. She is taken to the palace, but keeps her Jewish identity secret. Providentially, Mordechai overhears two guards planning to assassinate the king. He tells Esther, and the plot fails. Mordechai's act is recorded in the royal chronicles, yet the king does not know anything about it.

2. Haman enters the scene.

The evil Haman becomes the king's Prime Minister and decrees that everyone must bow to him. Mordechai refuses to bow; and Haman is enraged. Furthermore, when Haman finds out that Mordechai is a Jew, he seeks to destroy the entire Jewish people. Haman complains to the king: "The Jews keep their own laws and refuse to be like everyone else." Haman bribes the king, who is happy to take the money and let Haman issue a decree to destroy the Jews.

On hearing the news of the impending destruction of the entire Jewish people, Mordechai fasts and prays, trying to inspire them to repent. He informs Esther of the evil plan and urges her to plead to the king for mercy. Esther fears approaching the king without being called, for it is well known that one could be killed for doing so. Mordechai explains the seriousness of the situation and how it may be that G-d put Esther in this position just for this purpose. Esther agrees to risk her life and approach the king. She tells Mordechai to have the Jewish people fast and pray for three days. Esther is received favorably by the king, who agrees to join her at a special banquet, at which she asks if he will come to a second banquet. The night following the first banquet, the king is unable to sleep, and spends the time reviewing the "royal chronicles," and for the first time becomes aware that Mordechai saved his life.

3. The fall of Haman.

Haman enters the palace area to talk to the king. Before he can speak, the king asks Haman: "What should I do in order to give someone great honor?" Assuming the king means him, Haman suggests having the person put on royal clothing, ride the king's white horse, and be led through the city in great glory. Achashverosh likes the idea, and tells Haman to do everything he said ... for Mordechai! Mordechai is then paraded on horseback through the streets of Shushan, with Haman leading the way. At the next banquet, Esther tells the king of her identity and the genocide plan. Outraged, the king demands to know who would dare threaten her people. Esther points to Haman! Haman is aghast. Realizing all is lost, he "falls all over" Esther, pleading for mercy. The king thinks Haman is accosting the queen and Haman is hanged on the same gallows he had prepared for Mordechai.

4. The great victory of the Jews and the establishment of Purim as a festival.

Since the original decree to annihilate the Jews was sealed by the king, by Persian law it cannot be withdrawn. Instead, the king issues a new decree, giving the Jews the right to defend themselves. The Jews defend themselves, and their enemies cower in terror.

In the capital city of Shushan, the fighting requires two days to defeat their enemies. Outside of Shushan, throughout the kingdom, the enemies are defeated in one day. Purim is celebrated on the day they were victorious: in Shushan and in all other ancient walled cities (seventy-six in all, including Jerusalem today) they celebrated on the 15th of Adar. In all other places Purim was celebrated on the 14th of Adar. Mordechai and Esther enact an annual holiday with feasting, giving gifts to the poor and food to friends, and reading the Megillah.