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The Grand Maestro Orchestrates His Symphony

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1. The Scroll of Esther is one of the Scriptures.
2. The only scripture that does not contain the name of G-d.
3. It is a narrative of Haman the Amalekite rising to power to become the Viceroy Of the Persian Empire.
4. The Amalek People, from Time immemorial, cannot tolerate the existence of a Jewish People.
5. Haman, with the consent of Achashveirosh the Persian King who ruled the word supreme, decreed to annihilate the Jewish People.
6. G-d intervened, behind the scene; the decree was annulled and Haman and his 10 sons were hanged.
7. On the 13th of the month of Adar, Jews throughout the Empire were given permission to kill their enemies.
8. They celebrated through feasting on the 14th.
9. In Shushan, capital city of the Persian Empire, they were given an additional day, the 14th to kill their enemies, and celebrated on the 15th.
10. All walled cities from the time of Joshua the son of Nun celebrate Purim on the 15th.
11. G-d said, when the Jews will go into exile, "I will conceal my countenance."
12. The miracle of Purim was a concealed one, cloaked in nature.
13. To emphasize this point, Mordechai and Esther, the authors of the Megillah, omitted the name of G-d.

The Confluence of Happenstance Establishes a Pattern

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Stripping the Facade to Reveal the True Essence

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Weekly Torah Commentaries Series: Parshas Tzav / Purim



Concealed & Cloaked In Nature

G-d's Extreme Reaction to Deprecation

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Megillah* states, “Rava says, “There was no one who spoke *loshan hara* (evil speech) like *Haman* the evil one.” *Haman* was the expert in evil speech. He approached *Achashverosh* (the king of Persia) to annihilate the Jewish people. *Achashverosh* however had several reservations. He was afraid that the G-d of the Jews would do to him what He had done to others who had previously attempted to destroy the Jews. Additionally, he was concerned that if he eliminated the Jewish people, who were his subjects, it would diminish his kingdom and leave wide-open gaps or “bald spots.” *Haman* reassured him by saying that the Jews were dispersed throughout the empire and their elimination would not be noticed.

Haman's final convincing argument to *Achashverosh* was “If a fly were to fall into the wine of a Jew, he would simply remove the fly and drink the wine. However if the

king (*Achashverosh*) were to touch the wine of a Jew he would pour it out and not drink it. Therefore they deserve to be destroyed because they do not revere the king.”

Haman was the expert in *loshan hara* because he could focus on the negative aspect of something and communicate it in a way that other aspects of that subject no longer existed. When he slandered the Jews, he negated their value to such a degree that they were perceived in the eyes of *Achashverosh* as a people with no merit. *Loshan hara* thus renders the subject worthless.

Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon) writes in *Mishlei* (Proverbs), “The deprecator you shall smite. The fool will be wisened.” The *Midrash* tells us that “the deprecator you shall smite” is *Amalek* who was the ancestor of *Haman*. The Amalekites, rather than understanding and internalizing the awesome supernatural events of the splitting of the Sea and thus submitting to G-d, attacked the Jewish people and tried to destroy them.

They had no capacity to appreciate the profound aura surrounding the Jewish people that the rest of the world had seen and understood.

Despite the fact that G-d had traumatized the world for the sake of the Jew, the Amalekites were not moved. The deprecator focuses only on what he chooses to see. Thus, *loshan hara* is a behavior pattern that mimics the deprecating characteristic of the Amalekites. When one speaks *loshan hara* he eliminates the total value of the individual regardless of his positive qualities and only pinpoints the negative.

An individual once came to see *Reb Aryeh Levin z'tl* (the world renown *tzaddik* of Jerusalem) to communicate something negative about the *Satmar Rebbe z'tl* because of his position vis-à-vis the State of Israel. *Rabbi Levin*, who had a sense of what the person was about to say, preempted him by saying, "Before you begin to speak to me about the *Satmar Rebbe*, I would like you to answer a few questions... Do you feel that the *Satmar Rebbe* is a *tzaddik* (righteous person)?" The person responded in the affirmative. He asked him another question, "Do you think the *Satmar Rebbe* is one of a kind when it comes to being charitable and doing acts of loving kindness?" Once again, the individual responded in the affirmative.

Rabbi Levin continued asking questions of this nature and received affirmative responses to all of them. After this give and take was completed *Rabbi Levin* asked him, "So what is it that you wanted to tell me about the *Satmar Rebbe*?" The person responded by saying, "I have nothing to say." This story illustrates the basis for one's desire to express negativity about a fellow Jew or any other human being. When one focuses exclusively on the negative that they wish to see (like the deprecator *Amalek*) one's expression becomes lethal. However, if one is able to see the total person, he no longer sees him in a negative light.

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Yomah* tells us that *sinas chinam* (unwarranted hatred) is more serious than the three cardinal sins. The First *Bais HaMikdash* (Temple) was destroyed because the Jewish people violated the three cardinal sins (idolatry, murder, and incestuous and adulterous relations). The Second *Bais HaMikdash* was destroyed because of *sinas chinam* (unwarranted hatred), which expressed itself through *loshan hara*. The *Gemara* tells us that *Hashem* is willing to look away from our failings, even if they are as serious as the three

cardinal sins, with the exception of *loshan hara*. How do we understand this?

As we explained, speaking *loshan hara* is imitating the negative characteristic of the Amalekites. It is imitating the behavior of the deprecator par excellence (*Amalek*). The *Midrash* tells us that *Hashem* said, "My throne is not complete until the Amalekites are obliterated from the world." Therefore, the Jew who speaks *loshan hara* is assuming the detestable characteristic of *Amalek* and therefore it is something that *Hashem* will not tolerate.

Two *mitzvos* on *Purim* are intended to encourage and strengthen friendship and brotherhood among Jewish people. The *mitzvah* of *mishloach manos* is the giving of two types of food items another Jew. In addition, one has the obligation to give charity to two needy Jews so that they are able to purchase food for their *Purim Seudah* (festive meal). On *Purim*, one must go beyond himself and give value to his fellow. It is the characteristic of valuing another person that will counteract the deprecation of *Amalek* in the world.

What are We Naturally Inclined to do?

The *Torah* states, "*Hashem* spoke to *Moshe* saying: Urge (Command) *Aaron* and his sons saying: This is the law of the elevation-offering: It is the elevation-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Altar, all night until morning..." Why did *Aaron* and his sons need to be "urged" more than any other *mitzvah* in the case of the elevation offering?

Rashi cites *Chazal* who explain that if there is a situation in which there is a loss of money, one needs to be urged to participate. In the case of the elevation offering, the limbs and the fats are burnt throughout the night, which requires the presence of the *Kohen* (Priest). The *Kohen* does not receive a portion of the elevation offering (unlike other offerings) because it is totally consumed on the Altar. Thus, the *Kohen* might feel that it is not worth his while to be awake all night to ensure that the limbs and the fats are burnt. Even though the *Kohen's* compensation is the merit of having performed the *mitzvah*, nevertheless, the *Torah* tells us that *Hashem* had to tell *Moshe* to "urge" *Aaron* and his sons to do so. How do we understand this?

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Megillah* tells us that because the Jewish people were not motivated regarding their performance of *mitzvos*. They remained in their natural

state of inertia and thus did not sufficiently engage in *Torah* Study. It was because of the lack of *Torah* study that they did not merit the protection of *Hashem* and were subject to the decree that was issued by *Haman* to annihilate the Jewish people.

What is the cause of one's lack of motivation? When one appreciates the value of a deed, he will be motivated and can easily overcome the natural state of inertia. However, if one does not perceive the value, he will not engage in that activity and will therefore need to be urged to act.

The *Torah* states, "This is the law of the elevation-offering..." The *Baal HaTurim* explains in his commentary that if one studies the verses pertaining to the elevation offering it is valued by G-d as if he brought that offering. The *Gemara* in Tractate *Menachos* tells us that if one studies and fervently recites the portion of the *Torah* pertaining to any offering, it is valued as if the person had brought that offering.

The *Baal HaTurim* explains that there is a commonality between the *Torah* and the elevation offering. The *Torah* is referred to as "fire" just as the elevation offering is burnt in fire. In addition, offerings are referred to in the verse as "bread" and a verse in *Mishlei* refers to the *Torah* as "bread." Just as the world cannot survive without bread, which is the staple of life, it cannot survive without *Torah*.

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Berachos* tells us that one cannot acquire *Torah* without personal sacrifice for its own sake. However, if when one truly appreciates the value of this endeavor, then he does not perceive it as a sacrifice, even if he did so initially. *Aaron* and his sons needed to be "urged" to perform the elevation offering because its true value was not perceived. So too, initially one needs to be "urged" to study *Torah* because its value is not understood. The Prophet tells us that all existence is sustained through *Torah* study. There is no *mitzvah* that has greater value than the study of *Torah* itself. As our *Rabbis* teach us, "*Talmud Torah Keneged Kulam* - the study of *Torah* is equivalent to all the *mitzvos* combined."

When one brings an offering, it is referred to as a "sacrifice." The sacrifice itself is a process that rehabilitates spirituality when it has been diminished because of inadvertent sin. If this is the case, why is it considered a sacrifice? When one pays a doctor for a remedy that heals, it is not considered a "sacrifice." How do we understand this?

Evidently, the *Torah* is teaching us that recognizing one's failing and feeling remorse is the sacrifice of the individual. Bringing an offering is an expression of that sacrifice. Similarly, *Torah* study can only come about through sacrifice. Since one naturally values the material more than the spiritual, if one overcomes that predisposition and recognizes *Torah* study to be primary, then that is true sacrifice. Therefore, regarding *Torah* study and the elevation offering, one needs to be "urged" to make these sacrifices.

The Consequences of Our Actions

The *Torah* tells us that the same sin, which is transgressed by two individuals, will have different ramifications based on the status of the person. For example, if an ordinary Jew sins, the blood of the sin offering is sprinkled on the outer Altar (which was located in the courtyard). However, if the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) transgresses the same sin, the blood of the sin offering is sprinkled in the direction of the *Paroches* (curtain), which was located in the inner sanctuary (covered sanctuary). The level of sanctity in the *Bais HaMikdash* (Temple) intensifies as one approaches the Holy of Holies, which was located in the far end of the covered sanctuary. Thus, the service performed in the covered sanctuary has greater spiritual ramifications.

The *Chofetz Chaim* writes in his work *Shmiras HaLoshan* (Guarding One's Tongue) that the spiritual state of the person transgressing the sin will determine the magnitude of the consequence. He explains that everything in this world is a reflection of the spiritual world. Just as there is the city of Jerusalem on the terrestrial level, there is a Jerusalem on the spiritual level. Just as there is an outer courtyard in the *Bais HaMikdash*, which was a location of holiness, so too there is a courtyard on a spiritual level, reflecting the physical one. Just as there is an inner covered sanctuary in the *Bais HaMikdash*, which was considered holier than the outer sanctuary (courtyard), identically there is a spiritual inner sanctuary reflecting the physical.

When the ordinary Jew sins, he causes a diminishment in the outer spiritual sanctuary, which corresponds to the courtyard of the *Bais HaMikdash*. Thus, the sprinkling of the blood that is required to bring about the required spiritual correction must only be done in the outer courtyard. The spiritual failing of the *Kohen Gadol*, whose dimension of spirituality is greater than that of

the ordinary Jew, has a more far-reaching consequence which even diminishes the spirituality of the inner sanctuary. Therefore, in order to effect rehabilitation for the *Kohen Gadol*, the blood of his sin offering must be sprinkled in the direction of the *Paroches*.

The *Chofetz Chaim* tells us that on *Yom Kippur* when the *Kohen Gadol* enters the Holy of Holies, the first service that he performs is that of the incense offering, which is referred to as the “cloud of the *Ketores* (Incense).” The *Gemara* explains that the incense offering atones for *loshan hara* (evil speech). The spiritual ramifications are so severe and profound that it detracts from and undermines the most advanced realms of spirituality. Thus, the atonement that is needed for its correction, takes place in the Holy of Holies. Therefore, the *Chofetz Chaim* explains that when one wishes to engage in the *teshuvah* (atonement) process, one should first repent for the sin of *loshan hara* – (unproductive negative speech). If one has violated this sin he must first attend to what is most serious, followed by the other issues that need to be corrected.

The *Kli Yakar* cites the *Midrash*, which states that a person who is arrogant and haughty deserves to be judged by fire. The *Kli Yakar* explains that this does not mean that the person deserves to be burnt for his arrogance (G-d forbid), but rather the burnt offering atones for arrogance. The *Torah* refers to the burnt offering as an elevated offering, which is consumed by fire. When the offering is burnt, the smoke rises and is similar to the one who is arrogant and has an elevated self-image.

The *Kli Yakar* points out that *Torah* juxtaposes the removal of the ash from the Altar to the law of the burnt offering. What is the significance of this juxtaposition? He explains that the correction for arrogance is humility. Only when one humbles himself is the atonement complete. *Avraham*, our Patriarch, was one of the most humble people to ever live. He referred to himself, as “I am only dust and ash.” Thus, the juxtaposition of the removal of the ash to the burnt offering indicates that in order for one to be truly atoned for arrogance, he needs to be humbled. However if after one brings the offering he remains arrogant, his offering has little value.

The *Gemara* tells us that the arrogant person undermines G-d’s place in the world. The person, who believes that he is the cause of his own success and everything that surrounds his life, is actually denying the existence of G-d. In his mind, G-d exists only to do his own bidding.

Thus, based on what the *Chofetz Chaim* had said, the behavior of this type of person decreases the spirituality of all existence. Therefore, the fire of the elevation offering moves upward towards heaven in order to correct the diminishment that was brought about through arrogance. In order for the burnt offering to be fully effective, one needs to internalize the seriousness of the failing and change one’s behavior.

How Does One Recognize Truth?

The *Torah* tells us that *Moshe* installed *Aaron* as the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) and his sons as *Kohanim* (Priests) before the entire assembly of the Jewish people. The *Torah* states, “*Hashem* spoke to *Moshe* saying: Take *Aaron* and his sons with him, and the garments...Gather the entire assembly to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. *Moshe* did as *Hashem* commanded him; and the assembly was gathered to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. *Moshe* said to the assembly, “This is what *Hashem* commanded to be done...”

It is important to note that the assembly of Jewish people was comprised of several million people. How is it possible that all of these people were able to gather in a relatively small space at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting? *Rashi* cites *Chazal* who explain that this was one of the few instances in Jewish history that G-d performed the miracle that gave a limited location an unlimited capacity thus enabling the entire Jewish people to stand before the entrance to the Tent. Because of this miracle the entire Jewish people was able to witness the installation of *Aaron* and his sons as *Kohanim*.

After the Jewish people assembled at the entrance to the Tent, *Moshe* spoke to them saying, “This is the thing that *Hashem* commanded to be done (to initiate *Aaron* and his sons)...” Why did *Moshe* need to tell the Jewish people that he was acting in accordance with the commandment of *Hashem*? Was it not obvious since they all witnessed the miracle of the entire Jewish people being contained in a limited location? Nevertheless, *Moshe* needed to tell the Jewish people, “This is what *Hashem* commanded to be done.” How do we understand this?

The Jewish people witnessed many supernatural events. Some of them, as miraculous as they may have been, caused the Jews to be misled and to succumb to idolatry. For example, when *Moshe* ascended to receive

the *Torah* in heaven, the Jewish people were told that he would return after forty days and forty nights. However due to a misunderstanding of the calculation, *Satan* caused the Jews to believe that *Moshe* had passed away and would never return to them.

Rashi cites *Chazal* who say that *Satan* blackened the sky (during the daytime period) and caused the Jewish people to see in it the image of *Moshe* lying on his funeral bier. It was the first time in history that the sky blackened in the middle of the day, which indicated to the Jewish people that *Moshe* had actually died. This event caused them to feel abandoned because their leader was no longer with them. Thus, they were vulnerable to the influence of idolatry (sin of the Golden Calf).

Therefore, the fact that the entire Jewish people experienced the miracle of being gathered in a limited location was not sufficient proof that the communication to them was in fact the Word of *Hashem*. It was only after *Moshe* told them explicitly "This is what *Hashem* commanded to be done" that the Jews believed that the installation of *Aaron* and his children was the Word of G-d. It is possible to witness many miraculous events that may seem to emanate from the Word of G-d; however, this may not be the case.

Two of the thirteen tenets of Jewish faith state, "I believe with absolute faith that the *Torah* in its entirety was given by *Hashem* to *Moshe Rabbeinu*. I believe with absolute faith that the *Torah* is immutable and it will not be exchanged or altered in any way." Every letter of the Written *Torah* and the entire Oral Law is the Word of *Hashem*, which was transmitted by *Moshe* to the Jewish people.

If something was not transmitted by *Moshe*, who was the appointed spokesman for G-d, then it should not be accepted. Regardless of the magnitude of miracle, or whether the world becomes dark and an image of *Moshe's* remains appears it has no meaning whatsoever vis-à-vis the Word of *Hashem*. The limited location before the Tent assumed an unlimited capacity, yet until *Moshe* told the Jewish people that it was the command of G-d, it was not to be taken as such.

Clarity is Achieved Through Torah Study

The *Torah* states, "This is the law of the elevation-offering, the meal offering..." The *Yalkut* cites the opinion of *Raish Lakish* who interprets this verse to mean, "One who engages in *Torah* study, it is as if he brought the

elevation offering, meal offering, as well as the other offerings." *Rava* poses a question to *Raish Lakish*, "How can you extrapolate from the verse that *Torah* study is the equivalent of bringing offerings when the verse itself is needed to teach us the laws pertaining to these offerings."

Rava explains that the *Torah* is communicating to us, "One who engages in *Torah* study does not need to bring any of the offerings." If each specific offering (such as the elevation offering, meal offering, and sin offering) are intended to correct a specific spiritual failing, how is it possible that one who engages in *Torah* study is not in need of them? Additionally it is difficult because *Shlomo HaMelech* (King Solomon) tells us, "There is no *tzaddik* in the land who does good and does not sin."

The statement of *Shlomo HaMelech* that there is no *tzaddik* who is perfect, means that the *tzaddik* has some degree of spiritual failing. However, it does not mean to say that the *tzaddik* has violated an area of *Torah* that would require him to bring an offering to rehabilitate his spirituality. Such a transgression would be the result of inadvertently violating the *Shabbos* or inadvertently benefiting from something that was consecrated. Rather, *Shlomo HaMelech's* statement is referring to the *tzaddik* whose service to *Hashem* could have been performed at a more advanced level and it was not. Thus, *Rava's* statement that one who engages in *Torah* study does not need to bring an offering is not speaking about a person who had transgressed; rather, a person who engages in *Torah* study is given a level of clarity through the *Torah*, which does not allow him to fail - even inadvertently.

Spiritual failure emanates from a lack of clarity. If a person truly appreciated and internalized the reality of sin, one would not fail- just as one understands the destructive effect of fire and does not put his hand in it. A person who understands that he is walking through a minefield will be especially careful with every step not to accidentally step on a mine (realizing its consequences). Similarly, through the study of *Torah*, one achieves a level of clarity to appreciate the wrong at a depth that will not allow him to transgress. Thus, *Rava* explains that a person who engages in *Torah* study will not be in need of the offering because he will not require spiritual rehabilitation.

During the period of the First *Bais HaMikdash* (Temple), the Jewish people violated the three cardinal sins of adultery/incest, idolatry, and murder. The introduction to

the *Midrash Eicha* tells us that *Hashem* had said at the time of the First Temple, "I wish that they (the Jewish people) would have abandoned Me but kept My *Torah*. Because the innate illumination in *Torah* would have ultimately led the Jews back to the good." Even if a person falls to a level where he transgresses the three cardinal sins, the study of *Torah* has the innate ability to give him clarity to appreciate the wrong that he had perpetrated – thus causing him to repent. What would be considered proper and sufficient study of *Torah* to bring this about?

Ramchal explains that the level of *Torah* study referred to in the *Midrash* is when one's time and mind are completely occupied with *Torah* study. A person, who is infused with *Torah* thoughts continuously, will ultimately be impacted in a way that despite his behavior, he will be given a level of clarity that will cause him to do *teshuvah* (repentance). *Torah* is inherently enlightening.

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Taanis* tells us that if one sees a *Talmud Chacham* (Torah Scholar) angered because of a *halachic* issue (Jewish law), one should understand his vantage point. *Torah* is referred to in the verse as "fire." The *Talmud Chacham*, who is a repository of that *Torah*, contains something comparable to fire. *Rashi* explains this statement to mean that because of the *Torah* that the *Talmud Chacham* possesses he has a greater capacity to sense the wrong of the transgression than the one who did not study *Torah*. His reaction is only because he has difficulty tolerating the wrong. It does not emanate from the negative characteristic of anger.

Torah study causes one to have a greater capacity to be sensitive to spirituality. It brings about a level of clarity, which protects the person from doing wrong and gives him a greater appreciation for spiritual opportunity (*mitzvos*). This is what *Rava* means when he says that one who is engaged in *Torah* study does not need to bring an offering.

The Purification of the Jewish People

The *Torah* states regarding the first of the Ten Commandments, "I am *Hashem*, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery." *Rashi* cites *Chazal* who explain, "G-d said, 'It was worthwhile for Me to take you (the Jewish people) out of the land of Egypt so that you should be My servants.'" Regardless of what G-d needed to do, i.e. reveal miracles, it was worthwhile for the sake of taking the Jewish people as His subjects.

There is nothing that is difficult for G-d to do. The miracles in Egypt and the Splitting of the Sea are no less miraculous than the orderly function of nature. *Ramban* explains that nature itself is a concealed miracle. The only difference between the sun rising and setting each day and the Splitting of the Sea is that the sun rises and sets every day whereas the Splitting of the Sea was a unique occurrence. In either case, they both happen because G-d Will's it to be so.

The *Torah* states at the beginning of the Portion of *Yisro*, "*Yisro*, the minister of *Midian*...heard everything that G-d did to *Moshe* and to Israel...-that *Hashem* had taken Israel out of Egypt." *Rashi* cites the *Mechilta* which explains, "the greatest miracle that G-d performed was taking of the Jewish people out of Egypt." At the time of the exodus, Egypt was physically decimated. Egypt had been destroyed by the ten plagues. Why is the taking out of the Jewish people out of Egypt considered the greatest of all the miracles that had transpired? If the walls of the prison are destroyed and the warden and all the prison guards are killed, would it be considered a great miracle when the prisoners flee the prison?

As a result of being in Egypt for 210 years, the Jewish people were so infected with spiritual impurity and acculturated with Egypt that they were completely shut down on a spiritual level. They had no capacity to internalize or process anything that was spiritual in nature. Within the context of reality, it was virtually impossible for them to ever be purged/cleansed of their impurity to become receptive to spirituality. They had fallen to the lowest level of impurity, which is the 49th level.

Despite all of this, after experiencing the ten plagues and leaving Egypt, the Jewish people were able to recognize and internalize the revelation of G-d at the splitting of the Sea. This was demonstrated by the declaration of the Jew, "This is My G-d." The level of revelation of G-d at the splitting of the Sea that the maidservant experienced was at a greater level than that of *Yechezkel* the Prophet.

Chazal tell us that *Yisro* had worshiped every deity in existence. Thus, he understood the effect of being completely immersed in impurity. It was because of this appreciation that he was so impressed when he had heard that G-d had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt – meaning that He had purged them of that impurity. This was the greatest miracle of the exodus.

Now we are able to understand in a different light the *Chazal* that is cited by *Rashi* regarding the First Commandment – “G-d said, ‘It was worthwhile for Me to take you (the Jewish people) out of the land of Egypt so that you should be My servants.’” The Torah is specifically addressing the purging process that G-d had performed for the Jewish people to cleanse them from their spiritual impurity so that they should have the capacity to be His servants. Ultimately this would enable the Jewish people to stand at *Sinai* and receive G-d’s Torah.

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Megillah* tells us that there was a discussion between *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* and his students regarding why the Jewish people were deserving of annihilation during the period of *Purim*. The students of *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* were of the opinion that the Jewish people deserved annihilation because they had partaken in the feast of the rasha (evil one) – *Achashverosh* (the Emperor of Persia).

Reb Shimon Bar Yochai rejected their explanation because if that were the case, then only the Jews in *Shushan* (the capital city of the Persian Empire) who participated in the feast should have been liable for punishment and not the entire Jewish people. The reason he offered for the Jews deserving annihilation was that they had bowed to the image of *Nebuchadnezzar* (Babylonian Emperor, who had destroyed the First Temple). *Nebuchadnezzar* had ordered all of his subjects to bow to his image or be subject to death. The only Jews who did not bow were *Chananyia*, *Meshael*, and *Azarya*. Thus, since the Jewish people bowed to the image of *Nebuchadnezzar*, they deserved annihilation.

The students of *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* asked him, “If in fact the Jewish people did bow to the idol and thus deserved to be destroyed then why were they not?” He answered them, “Because their bowing was only an external action with no substance. They only bowed because they were compelled to do so. Consequently, the decree against the Jewish people manifested itself in a similar manner – it only appeared as if they were to be annihilated but it was not meant to be.”

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Avodah Zorah* tells us that if one were a true heretic he is classified as a “minheretic.” Even if that person were to gain a level of clarity and do *teshuvah* (repent) for his heretical beliefs, G-d will cause him to die. The reason for this is that heresy is something that is so deeply rooted in a person that even if he were

to do *teshuvah* it would be only on a temporary basis. He will ultimately return to his heretical beliefs. G-d prefers that the individual should die as a righteous person. Thus, He will take him after he does *teshuvah* so that he should die as a *tzaddik* (righteous) before he reverts back to his heresy.

Reb Yonasan Eibshitz z’tl explains that when the students of *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* asked him “If in fact the Jewish people deserved to be destroyed then why were they not?” They were alluding to the fact that even if the Jewish people had done *teshuvah*, because they had bowed to the idol they should be classified as “minim-heretics.” Their difficulty was that G-d should have taken them in their state of *teshuvah* before they would revert back to their heretical ways. Yet He did not. To this, *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* responded that their bowing was only an external act. They did not actually believe in what they had done. In essence they did not assume pagan beliefs. Therefore their *teshuvah* had fully reinstated them since they were never “*minim*.”

The Jewish people in Egypt became idolaters assuming the classification of “*minim*.” Although the Jews had come to a level of clarity through the Ten Plagues, they were destined to return to their idolatrous beliefs. Despite their status as “*minim*,” G-d purged them of their impurity so that they would not revert back to their idolatrous ways. This was worthwhile for G-d to do in order for the Jewish people to become His servants.

The Commentators ask- why does G-d identify Himself as “*Hashem* who had taken Israel out of Egypt” and not “the G-d who created the world?” With our understanding, we are able to explain that it is only because the Jewish people were spiritually purged did they have relevance to G-d. Had G-d not performed the greatest miracle of all by cleansing them, there would have never been a Jewish people or a *Sinai* event. Thus, G-d identifies Himself as the One who took Israel out of Egypt.

The Importance of Reflecting on Life’s Experiences

The *Torah* states, “*Moshe* stretched out his hand over the Sea... and *Hashem* churned Egypt in the midst of the Sea. The water came back and covered the chariots and the horseman of the entire army of Pharaoh...there remained not one of them...The Children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the Sea; the water was a wall (*choma*) for them, on their right and on their left.”

Chazal tell us that the word “*choma-wall*,” which refers to the water of the Sea surrounding the Jewish people is written with the letter “*vav*” deleted. Thus, the word can be read as “*chaima-wrath*.” The *Midrash* tells us that as the Jewish people walked through the Sea, surrounded on each side by walls of water, the angels began prosecuting them before Hashem. The angels said to G-d, “Why are you sparing the Jewish people and destroying the Egyptians? These are idolaters and these are idolaters.” The angels were saying, since the Jewish people were idolaters no less than the Egyptians, why were the Egyptians more culpable? The Jewish people should be destroyed as well as the Egyptians. Hashem responded and thus quelled the prosecution. Therefore the Jewish people were able to survive the event unscathed.

As a result of surviving the Splitting of the Sea and witnessing the destruction of the Egyptian armies, the *Torah* states, “Israel saw the great Hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt; and the people revered Hashem, and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.” *Ramban* in his commentary explains that the Jewish people at this moment ascended to a level of faith that was unequalled in any time in history with the exception of the *Sinai* event.

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos* tells us that the greatest level of prosecution comes upon a person when he is in a state of danger. It is only when the individual needs an exceptional and out of the ordinary level of Mercy does *satan* prosecute. This is because when a person needs to be accommodated on a special level, one requires a greater degree of worthiness. Thus, he is open for prosecution, which determines if his spiritual record allows for special treatment.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk z’tl asks how come “The Jewish people were exposed, prior to the Splitting of the Sea, to many events that were life-threatening (such as the Ten Plagues) and the angels did not prosecute. They did not say at that time – These are idolaters and these are idolaters. Why are the Egyptians more culpable than the Jews?” Why were the Jews protected from prosecution prior to the Splitting of the Sea?

Reb Meir Simcha z’tl answers that until the Jewish people entered into the Sea they were unified at an exceptional level. Therefore they were protected from prosecution. However, the *Midrash* tells us that when they entered into the sea they became fractionalized

because they divided into twelve groups – each one taking another path through the Sea. Each Tribe believed that their pedigree was better than that of his fellow. It was because of this lack of unity that the Jewish people were vulnerable to prosecution at the Sea. However it is possible to answer *Reb Meir Simcha’s* question differently.

As explained in the *Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*, when one finds himself experiencing a life-threatening situation he is subject to prosecution and requires an enormous degree of *Rachamim* (Mercy). As they walked through the Sea, the Jewish people were continuously in a state of danger. They were experiencing a miracle every moment that the walls of water did not come crashing down upon them. However, while in Egypt, they lived separately from the Egyptian community. Thus, one could say that because they were not exposed to the Plagues, they were not in need of the unusual level of *Rachamim*. The Plagues could have spread to the Jewish area but this was not the Will of G-d. However in the Sea, the Jew was in the same context of danger as the Egyptian.

When the Jewish people crossed to safety and witnessed the destruction of the Egyptians they had “...faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.” This level of faith was attained because the Jewish people understood that they were the direct beneficiaries of Hashem’s Mercy – despite their own lack of worthiness. They understood that although they were idolaters in Egypt (as the Egyptians were), and seemingly undeserving of this level of Mercy; nevertheless, they were spared by Hashem because of His love for them.

Chazal tell us, “*Yom Kippur* is *K’Purim* - *Yom Kippur* is like *Purim*.” In Hebrew the letter “*kof*” denotes similarity. Seemingly, the words of *Chazal* are difficult. The holiday of *Purim* and the day of *Yom Kippur* are diametrically opposite. On *Purim* one must indulge in feasting and drinking, while, conversely, on *Yom Kippur* one is completely detached from physicality. The basic necessities of the human being are denied to him on *Yom Kippur* (the five areas of affliction). *Yom Kippur* is the most somber and spiritual holiday of the year – a day of atonement and purity. Nevertheless *Chazal* tell us that there is a commonality between these two holidays. How do we understand this?

On *Purim*, we celebrate our physical existence. *Haman* had decreed that every Jewish man, woman, and child should be annihilated. *Haman* was the viceroy of the

Persian Empire. *Achashverosh*, the king of Persia ruled the world supreme. As it is stated in the *Megillah*, "His kingdom spanned the world from India to Ethiopia – one hundred and twenty seven countries. After the decree of *Haman* against the Jewish people was issued, the Jew had nowhere to flee.

The reason G-d allowed this to take place was because the Jewish people had neglected the *Torah* and adherence to its principles. At the last moment, through Queen *Esther*, the decree was miraculously rescinded and overturned-allowing the Jew to destroy his enemy. After experiencing this miracle, the Jewish people throughout the world reaffirmed their acceptance of *Torah* with love, which was qualitatively a greater level of acceptance than at *Sinai*. At *Sinai*, the Jewish people were compelled to accept the *Torah* out of fear of destruction. G-d held the mountain over their head and told them, "Either accept the *Torah* or there you will be buried."

Maharal of Prague z'tl in his work concerning the *Megillah* of *Esther* explains that the reason the Jewish people reaffirmed their acceptance of *Torah* out of love on *Purim* was because they came to a level of understanding of G-d's unceasing love for them. They could not have been spared at the last moment without G-d's intervention. Because the Jewish people realized to what degree *Hashem* loved them, they accepted the *Torah* out of love. Now we are able to understand the commonality between *Yom Kippur* and *Purim*.

On *Yom Kippur*- the Day of Atonement, when one is totally divorced from the material realm and is focused on introspection and repentance to achieve forgiveness, the Jew attains a level of clarity to understand the importance of his relationship to G-d. *Yom Kippur* is a day that allows the Jew, regardless of his past, to atone and be spiritually cleansed. Thus, *Yom Kippur* is a day that the Jew understands that he is loved and valued by G-d.

We learn from this that whenever the Jew is in a precarious or life-threatening situation and is miraculously spared, he is able to come to a new level of understanding and appreciation of G-d's love for him. Thus, at the Splitting of the Sea, the Jewish people "had faith in *Hashem* and in *Moshe*, His servant." They understood that despite the prosecution against them (that they were no different than the Egyptians) *Hashem* saved them. The objective of the experience of the Sea was to bring the Jewish people to a more advanced level of faith by demonstrating to them their special value to G-d.

Often in life we do not appreciate and recognize that we are beneficiaries of G-d's Kindness and Mercy. However, if one reflects on these matters one can come to a more profound level of spirituality because he understands G-d's love for the Jew.



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