

CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

הב

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 14 March 2014 - 12 Adar II 5774
Sedra Tzav - Purim

THE MEGILLA IN THE PRESENT

THIS SHABBAT LEADS STRAIGHT INTO PURIM AND IS “THE SHABBAT OF REMEMBERING” when we read in a second Torah Scroll the command¹ to remember Amalek, the tribe of Haman. Hence this Shabbat is a preparation for the festival, when we can ask: what do we learn from Purim?

The idea that we have to do more than enjoy Purim, that we also have to learn something from it, is emphasised by the Baal Shem Tov in a comment on a point in the Code of Jewish Law. This states, based on the Mishnah², that one must read the scroll of the Megilla in the correct order; if one reads some of its paragraphs “in reverse” one has not fulfilled the duty to read the Megilla. How might this happen in normal life? Let us imagine a place where two Megilla readings are scheduled. If a person comes late to the first Megilla reading, missing the first part, they may think they can hear the rest of the Megilla now and then the first part in the later Megilla reading. This is not correct. One has to hear the whole Megilla in the right order, from beginning to end. So the person in our example will have to wait for the second Megilla reading and listen all the way through.

The Baal Shem Tov provides a deeper level of understanding this law. If one reads the Megilla “in reverse”, meaning as if it only has relevance to the past, if it is seen as a mere history book, then one has missed the point. All Torah in general and the Megilla in particular is a living dynamic lesson in life; always meaningful, always fresh, always

JUDAISM FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD
www.chabadresearch.net - cru@lubavitchuk.com

of immediate relevance to the daily life of every single Jew.

As we know, the Jewish people were in exile under the Persian King, Ahasuerus. His Prime Minister, the evil Haman, plotted to destroy our people. Through the intervention of Mordechai and Esther the plot was thwarted and Haman suffered the fate he had planned for the Jews.

How did Haman describe the Jewish people to King Ahasuerus? “There is one people, scattered and divided up amongst the peoples, and their laws are different from those of other nations..”³

His words are revealing. How was it possible for this evil man to contemplate the destruction of a whole nation? The Rabbis explain: Yes, we are *one* people. But when we are scattered and divided, not so much amongst other nations, but amongst *ourselves*; when unity is lacking and Jew attacks Jew, then we are in danger of being prey to the forces that seek to destroy us. What is the antidote?

Togetherness and unity. We see this in Esther’s instruction to Mordechai: “Go and gather all the Jews!”⁴ In ancient Persia our determination to stand up far being Jewish in the face of Haman’s decree revealed a profound level of our inner being: the point at which we are united with G-d and also united with each other. This evoked the miraculous response from G-d which saved us.

The Sages point out that the laws of Purim have the effect of recreating that feeling of unity. We *gather together* to hear the reading of the Megilla evening and morning, and on Purim day (Sunday 16 March) we send food gifts to friends⁵, give charity to the needy⁶, and we make a Purim Meal and invite others to share it with us.

Through these laws we remind ourselves to strengthen our unity together as a people, which will give us the power to stand against the Hamans of any time, including our own. Through this unity there was, and will be again for the Jewish people, in the words of the Megillah: “...light, joy, rejoicing and glory.”⁷

1. Deuteronomy 25:17-19. 2. Tractate Megilla 2:1. 3. Esther 3:8. 4. Esther 4:16. 5. At least two kinds of food as a gift to at least one person. 6. Charity should be given to two needy people, or donations to two charity boxes. 6. Esther 8:16.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

SPONSORED BY DR REUVEN JOEL



53

SEDRA TZAV - PURIM

LIKE MORDECHAI

'I have a Falafel and a coke, please' said David to the man serving at the counter. He and his friend, Samuel, were at the local kosher Take-Away having a bite to eat. They were actually in the middle of shopping for their parents in order to help get everything ready for Purim, which was going to be that coming Sunday.

'Mmm... This stuff looks delicious!' Samuel said to David as they carried their plates to the table nearby. 'It does' said David eyeing the food hungrily, 'he put in extra paprika for me - my favourite!'

They had just sat down at the table and begun eating when an old man sat down right next to them. He had white hair and wrinkles on his face; he looked old enough to be their grandfather.

'Hello' said the old man in a friendly tone, 'do you mind if I sit next to you?' 'Sure!' said David smiling, 'sit right here'.

The man sat down and he told them his name was Maurice, and the boys told him their names. 'So are you two out helping your mother prepare for Purim?' he asked, looking at the full shopping bags they had next to them. 'Yes, and we decided to stop for some food'.

'Hmm...', Maurice mused to himself, 'Purim has always been my favourite festival, you know'. 'Why is that?' asked Samuel. 'Well because it reminds me of my youth when I lived

in Russia', said the old man.

'When I was a young man, Russia was called the Soviet Union, a communist country, and I used to work for the government. They didn't know that I was religious. I kept as much Jewish law as I could, but in secret. At that time religion was against the law and you could lose your job or even get thrown into jail just for keeping Shabbat or a festival or for giving a baby boy Brit Milah. I used to try to help out religious Jews who were having difficulties in all kinds of ways because of the government.

'If a Jew got arrested, I would try to help their family from behind the scenes. I also helped parents get someone to do a secret Brit Milah for their baby boy, or helping their older boy have a Bar Mitzvah, or get kosher food, or Matzah for Pesach, or a Mezuzah or Tefilin. But it was all very difficult, and it could have got me into serious trouble.'

'So how does that remind you of Purim?' asked David. Both of the boys were very interested in Maurice's story.

'Well,' said Maurice, 'because Mordechai, the hero of the Purim story, used to work for the government as well. He was a guard at the gate. And when it was decreed by Haman that the Jews were to be killed he worked very hard to save the Jews, together with his niece Esther. In the end, G-d helped them in a wonderful way and they were successful. Also Mordechai helped the Jews stand up for being Jewish despite Haman's terrible decree. So Mordechai was my hero, because I felt that what I doing was in some way similar.'

David and Samuel were quite fascinated by Maurice's story. Then after a moment's silence Samuel asked, 'So, Maurice, tell me, what is your Jewish name?' The old man chuckled. 'Funny you should ask that. My Jewish name is Mordechai....'

***Torah teachings are holy –
please treat this page with care***