

מי שנכנס אדר מרבים בשמחה

A Halakhic Analysis

The rabbinic mandate, *מי שנכנס אדר מרבים בשמחה*, is, on the one hand, deeply familiar to all of us, and yet, at the same time, halakhically speaking, puzzling. Indeed, when one examines the source of the dictum itself, a statement of Rav located towards the end of Masekhet Ta'anit, *מי שנכנס אדר מרבים בשמחה* - כשם שמשנכנס אב ממעטין בשמחה - כך משנכנס אדר מרבים בשמחה, the difficulty is compounded. After all, the former clause, that the arrival of Av occasions a deliberate and systematic reduction of joy, is readily understandable: the city walls had already been breached, and that destruction of the Beit Ha-Mikdash was, at that point, a tragic inevitability.

Yet, the latter clause, mandating an increase in celebration with the arrival of Adar, *prima facie*, appears without the same kind of historical justification. On the contrary, the Jews of ancient Persia were in no position whatsoever to celebrate when the fateful month of Adar arrived. It was only their victory on the thirteenth of the month which enabled the celebration that would subsequently ensue. Surely, we would have imagined, the celebration ought to have been limited to the days of Purim themselves, with the first thirteen days of the month, if anything, defined as times of national distress and anxiety.

Second, even if we were to disregard the specific events of Purim itself, we do not, in the general sense, find any sort of parallel injunction concerning the rabbinic institution of Chanukah, in the spirit of, 'when Kislev arrives, we begin to increase our joy,' raising further questions concerning the source of this particular halakha. Likewise, at the Torah level, we do not find any such concept regarding Shavuot.

Finally, in his brief comment on the gemara, Rashi further complicates matters by surprisingly incorporating Pesach into the discussion, *ימי נסים היו לישראל: פורים ופסח*². It would seem, based on the simple reading of Rashi, that whichever expressions of joy are triggered by the mandate of *מי שנכנס אדר מרבים בשמחה* ought to continue through the end of the month, and into Nissan as well³. And yet, Rashi does not seem to address the fundamental question at stake, namely, the reason that these expressions of joy should commence with the arrival of Rosh Chodesh Adar⁴.

In light of these difficulties, it certainly bears mentioning that whilst Rambam codifies the first clause of Rav's statement, *משנכנס אב ממעטין בשמחה*, he pointedly omits any mention of *מי שנכנס אדר מרבים בשמחה*. Much the same can be said for Tur and Shulchan Aruch as well.

¹ תלמוד בבלי מסכת תענית כט עמוד ב

² שם

³ עיין אליה רבה אורח חיים סימן תרפ"ה, שאכן טען ש"ניסן הרי הוא כאדר" לעניין בר ישראל דאית ליה דינא בהדי נכרי.
⁴ Note, for example the Sfat Emet (Ta'anit 29a), who rejects the link between Adar and Nissan, and interprets Rav's statement to be a reference to the collection of shekalim for the upkeep of the Mikdash, much as the mourning of Av centers around the destruction of Mikdash.

It seems to me that some perspective on this question may be gained by examining the precise nature of Haman's lot. While, admittedly, the text is somewhat ambiguous⁵, it seems likely that Haman actually cast his lot only with respect to the month in which he would seek the destruction of the Jewish people. As the pasuk says, **מיום ליום ומחודש לחודש שנים עשר הוא חודש אדר**,⁶ Remarkably, the date of the intended destruction is not found in the text at all. Based on the succeeding verses in the chapter, Haman immediately approaches the king, the decree is issued, and it merely happens to be the thirteenth of the month of Nissan.

As such, one can reasonably argue that Haman only selected the month of Adar without specifying the date. The precise date, namely the thirteenth, emerged idiosyncratically, purely as a result of the fact that it happened to be the thirteenth day of the month of Nissan when the lot was cast. This reading may be confirmed by a striking passage in the gemara which relates that Haman was elated when the lot fell on the month in which Moshe died⁷. While the gemara goes on to wryly note that Haman was oblivious to the fact that Moshe was also born in the month, the entire premise of the gemara in question is sensible only if we understand that Haman was singularly focused on the month of destruction, as opposed to the date. Had Haman been focused on the date as well, his reaction should not have been elation but frustration, as he had missed out on the date of Moshe's death, 7 Adar, by a mere six days, an experience akin to having four of five correct lottery numbers.

If it is indeed the case that Haman selected the month of Adar for the destruction of the Jewish people, while the date was merely a product of the date upon which he happened to draw the lot, the expression towards the very end of the Megillah is far more understandable, **החודש**⁸ **אשר נהפך להם מיגון לשמחה ומאבל ליום טוב**. On the basis of this pasuk, the Talmud Yerushalmi⁹ derives a shocking but profoundly illuminating halakha: in theory, one may fulfill his obligation to read the Megillah at any point during the month of Adar. While the Bavli does not go quite as far as the Yerushalmi, the very institution of **ליום הכניסה**¹⁰ itself, permitting villagers to read as early as the 11th or 12th of the month, equally points in the direction of a holiday localized less to two particular calendar dates than to an entire month, **לשמחה החודש אשר נהפך להם מיגון**.

The argument that the basis for Rav's extension of the mishnaic statement, **משנכנס אב** **משנכנס אדר מרבין בשמחה**, **ממעטין בשמחה** is rooted in Haman's own lot may be strengthened by the following asymmetry between these two cases. While there are a host of halakhic

⁵ One might read the term **מיום ליום** as suggesting a lot cast for the date in addition to the month. However, one wonders, then, why the date is omitted, while the month is reported. Second, it is quite a coincidence that of thirty possible dates in the month, it happened to fall precisely on the thirteenth, the very day it happened to be in the month of Nissan.

⁶ אסתר ג:ז

⁷ תלמוד בבלי מסכת מגילה יג:

⁸ אסתר ט:כב

⁹ תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת מגילה פרק א

¹⁰ תלמוד בבלי מסכת מגילה דף ב.

expressions of the reduction of joy commencing with Rosh Chodesh Av¹¹, ranging from commercial activities, certain forms of planting and construction, and holding weddings there is only one halakhic expression concerning increasing joy in the month of Adar: that if a Jew has a matter of legal dispute with a gentile, he should feel most confident adjudicating the matter in Adar¹². Even this particular expression of *בשמחה אדר מרבין* seems patterned, albeit at far less of an existential plane, on the confrontation between Haman and the Jewish people.

And yet, even if the transformation of the month of Adar can be traced towards Haman's lot itself, one might still argue that Chazal needed a precedent that an entire month could be transformed beyond the immediate days of celebration themselves. It is in this connection that Rashi's aforementioned insertion of Pesach in his explanation of the concept of *מי שנכנס אדר בשמחה* might be particularly instructive. Indeed, if there is a model for an entire month which is transformed, beyond the immediate days of celebration contained within it, Nissan is certainly the paradigm. The monthlong restrictions on eulogies and recitation of tachanun during the entirety of the month of Nissan¹³, not limited to the days of Pesach themselves¹⁴, may be conceptualized as a halakhic precedent for the transformation of an entire month, one upon which Rav's mandate, *מי שנכנס אדר מרבין בשחמה*, may well rest.

Furthermore, R. Shimon b. Gamaliel's insistence¹⁵, contra R. Eliezer b. R. Yosi, upon reading the Megillah during a leap year in the Adar which immediately precedes Nissan certainly underscores the fundamental connection between these months. While it is certainly reasonable to interpret R. Shimon b. Gamaliel's stated reason *עדיף גאולה לגאולה*, on a more superficial plane, namely that both of these months contain redemptive moments for the Jewish people, I prefer to interpret this halakha as a reflection of a more profound bond between Adar and Nissan, namely, as the two months that have been transformed, above and beyond the specific days of celebration contained therein. In this sense, the very words employed by R. Shimon b. Gamaliel, *מסמך גאולה לגאולה* can be interpreted in a far more precise way, not merely as connoting a general proximity between Purim and Pesach, but quite literally, affixing one month of redemption directly, *סמוך*, to the other.

While the rabbinic nature of both of these institutions, the prohibition against eulogies throughout Nissan and the definition of the entire month of Adar as one of happiness, precludes a direct application of the concept *כל דתקון רבנן כעין דאורייתא תיקון*, the conception that Adar, as a month of celebration, was patterned after Nissan, is certainly an analogue of this principle. The fact that the critical events of the Megillah- the three day fast, Esther's approach to

¹¹ שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות תשעה באב ושאר תעניות סימן תקנא: א-ב

¹² תלמוד בבלי מסכת תענית כט:; מגן אברהם אורח חיים תרפ"ו:ה

¹³ שולחן ערוך אורח חיים תכט

¹⁴ In fairness, the Chanukat Ha-Mizbeach covering the first twelve days of the month is a factor in the transformation of the month of Nissan in its entirety, when, in combination with the days of Pesach, one may employ the concept of *רובו ככולו*. And yet, this makes the transformation of Adar, in which there are only two days of celebration, that much more remarkable.

¹⁵ תלמוד בבלי מסכת מגילה ו:

Achashverosh, the exposure of Haman- occurred on the days of Pesach themselves, renders this connection that much more compelling.

Whatever its origins, Rav's halakha of שמחה אדר מרבית lends itself to one final interpretation. As the celebrated passage in Masekhet Shabbat details, קימו וקבלו, the Jewish people reaffirmed their commitment to the eternity of Torah in the generation of Achashverosh, מה שקיבלו כבר.¹⁶ A nation on the verge of total assimilation, whom the Talmud pointedly notes were fully represented and engaged in the debased orgy of Achashverosh¹⁷, rediscovered its spiritual footing. A people rightly accused of being a fractious and discordant group, מפוזר ומפורד בין העמים, rediscovered its fundamental unity in three days of spiritual awakening, כנוס את כל יהודים, a unity which harkened back to the singularity of purpose originally manifested at Sinai, אחד בלב אחד.¹⁸ In as much as the Jews of Shushan reconnected to the Torah, it may not be entirely out of place to suggest that the שמחה אדר relates to the ultimate source of joy, פקודי ה' ישרים משמחי לב.

¹⁶ תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף פח.

¹⁷ תלמוד בבלי מסכת מגילה יב.

¹⁸ רשי פרשת יתרו יט:ב דיה ויחן שם ישראל.