

For this reason, as well, many of the traditions of Purim symbolize concealment – the masquerades, the sweet cores of the hamantashen. No matter how bleak things may appear on the outside, we can rest assured that underneath, the hand of Hashem is guiding everything with Divine wisdom and benevolence. (Rabbi Naftali Reich)

ecaeP fo ekaS eht roF

I am a *Mashgiah* in a Yeshivah. One day, someone broke a student's glasses in a way that according to *halachah* clearly made the culprit liable for the damage. The student, Eliyahu, bought himself new glasses and demanded that the anonymous culprit pay up, but the person responsible was evidently in no rush. Eliyahu's father, who paid for the new glasses, urged his son to stand up for himself and get the money back. Strife soon ensued among Eliyahu's classmates, and the atmosphere in the Yeshivah became very unpleasant and distasteful.

One morning as I entered the Yeshivah, a student I'll call Yonatan approached me with an envelope and a request.

"Please give this money to Eliyahu's father for the new glasses and ask Eliyahu to put an end to this unpleasant quarrel." Yonatan also asked me not to reveal his name.

Apparently Yonatan was the one who had broken the glasses, but found it difficult to confess publicly because of the uncomfortable feeling this situation has engendered. Therefore, I reasoned, he approached me to take care of the payment quietly and put an end to the fireworks. I promised to carry out his wishes and not reveal his identity. When I asked him where he had obtained the money, he explained that he had saved up his Hanukah money and his allowance, and his father agreed that he could spend the money as he saw fit. When I peeked inside the envelope, I saw that it was indeed a collection of small bills and coins.

The next day I left the envelope for Eliyahu's father, attaching a note to explain that the anonymous young man asked that Eliyahu please put an end to the whole affair and not attempt to single him out or humiliate him. The envelope was delivered and, soon after, the whole episode quieted down and was forgotten.

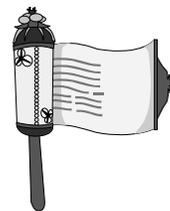
But it turned out that I was mistaken. At the end of the year, another student, whom we'll call Yosef, gave Eliyahu money for his glasses. The real argument had not been about the money at all, but a power struggle. Yosef, who had broken Eliyahu's glasses, at first had no intention of paying up, but as the year came to a close, he decided it was time he paid his debt and removed the oppressive weight from his heart.

When Eliyahu received the money, he was taken aback. "Didn't you pay already?" he asked. "My father told me he received the entire sum from you."

Yosef didn't understand. Eliyahu went to his father, who told him about the envelope he had received from the *Mashgiah*. Together, they came to me.

I was dumbfounded to realize only then how noble Yonatan's action was. He had saved, *shekel* by *shekel*, to cover damage he hadn't caused, all for the sake of peace. I remembered my promise not to reveal his name, and now I realized why he had requested that I not do so. I approached Yonatan quietly to tell him what happened, but he still insisted that I not reveal his name and I had to respect his wishes. To this day, Yonatan's real name is a secret.

After that, I called Eliyahu and Yosef to my office and told them about the very special young man in their class who had decided to end the quarrel by a noble act. Both of them looked down at the floor in shame. They finally realized how their actions had brought strife and dissension, and that someone else had taken it upon himself to teach them the meaning of *shalom* – peace. (There is no such thing as coincidence 2)



PURIM



Special Edition



Thursday, Feb. 25 - Ta'anit Esther

Fast begins: **5:28 am**

Shaharit: **6:40 am**

Minhah with *tefillin*: **5:15 pm**

Megillah Reading: **6:15 pm**

Fast ends: **6:13 pm (after Megillah)**

Ladies' Megillah Reading: **9:15 pm in Rabbi Semah's house**

Friday, Feb. 26 - Purim Day

Shaharit: **6:15 & 8:00 am**

Megillah: **Approx. 6:50 am & 8:35 am**

Late Megillah reading: **10:30 am**

Minhah & Candlelighting: **5:26 pm**

miruP fo swaL

- 1) Men and women are obligated to hear the *Megillah* reading, both in the evening and in the daytime.
- 2) If one did not read or hear every single word of the *Megillah*, he has not fulfilled his obligation. If one misses a word during the reading, he may read the word from the book he is using.
- 3) One is required to give *Mahasit Hashekel* for all members of his family. The latest time to fulfill this *misvah* is immediately before the evening *Megillah* reading.
- 4) "*Al Hanisim*" is added to the *Amidah* and *Bircat Hamazon* on Purim. If one forgets to recite it, he does not repeat the prayer.
- 5) On the day of Purim, both men and women are obligated to give charity gifts to at least two poor people (מתנות לאביונים). Be as generous as possible. For minimum requirements, consult the Rabbi.
- 6) Both men and women are obligated to send to a friend a portion of at least two different types of prepared food (משלוח מנות). This *misvah* must be done on the day of Purim.
- 7) It is a *misvah* to make an elaborate feast in honor of Purim on the day of Purim.

miruP dellaC ecalP A

There is no discrimination when it comes to giving out money on Purim, rather anyone who extends their hand to receive give to him. (*Shulchan Aruch*)

There are four basic *misvot* on Purim. 1) *Megillah* – To hear the reading of *Megillat Esther* in the evening and during the day. 2) *Matanot L'evyonim*- To give monetary gifts to two poor people. 3) *Mishloah manot ish l're'ehu*- To give two types of food to at least one person. 4) *Mishte*- To have a party with wine.

One way to approach Purim and *misvot* in general is to obediently execute and perform the *misvot* of the day. This is noble and admirable beyond description. The *Zohar* invites an alternative approach to *misvot*. It states that the 613 *misvot* are really 613 pieces of advice. How do we understand and reconcile that they are both commandments - required behaviors and yet at the same time they are some sound council that would be worthy to follow?!

The answer can be found in understanding the extreme dichotomy of the human being. We are composed of a body and a soul. Are we a body that has a soul or a soul that has a body? That is the question. To the body, *misvot* are commandments. They are directed at training and curing the uncontrolled passions of the body so that they align with the needs of the soul.

To the soul, the *misvot* are a clear map to help it come closer to its Creator. The soul knows *misvot* are a menu of opportunities. It has only to convince or coerce the body to come happily along. When that happens then the music of life awakens the feet and the dancing begins. I saw a quote, “Those who dance are considered insane by those who cannot hear music!”

Going into any Jewish time zone is just like crossing through an earthly boundary. Every country has its customs, language, currency, rules, climate, risks, and rewards. These are worthwhile to know before heading to a foreign destination. I would not want to go to the North Pole in shorts and a tee shirt. You can't pay for a cab in New York with pesos. Just as I would not want to spend a week in Paris and fail to see the Louvre, I cannot imagine visiting Jerusalem and not go to the *Kotel*. How foolish or tragic is that?!

Now we can revisit the *misvot* of Purim day and understand how they are really a rich assortment of priceless opportunities.

1) Reading the *Megillah* we become overwhelmed with *Emunah* - belief and trust that we are not alone and there is a hidden hand carefully guiding our history, like a shepherd leading his flock.

2) We have a chance to exercise and flex the spiritual muscle of giving by lifting up those in need. We begin to manifest our oneness as a people when we realize that our joy is incomplete as long as another suffers from want. We have that chance to be angels - holy agents to our fellows.

3) Giving food gifts connects us with others. “We love the ones to whom we give,” Rav Dessler says. The more we give the more we love! Relationships have a chance to be repaired and reinforced. The Jewish Nation is forged into one nation like a giant Cholent on Purim. We start out separate beans, pieces of meat, garlic, onion, spices, potatoes, and water. Add heat and each individual ingredient begins to share some particle of its essence with every other ingredient in the pot, until such time as a piece of every one of us is invested in every one of us. By the time all the food and money have passed around on Purim this is what has actually happened, locally and globally.

4) Finally in that jovial spirit of being eternally bound together with all Jews and with Hashem we can sip some wine and it will propel us in the direction we are already heading.

Finally we should not miss out on the chance to stretch out our hand to our King Who is ready to fulfill His Purim decree, “anyone who extends their hand ... give to them.” What a golden opportunity to pray for whatever we need while traveling through a place called Purim. (Rabbi Label Lam)

ksaM miruP ehT dniheB

Teenage Jewish boys dressed as gorillas or past presidents dance in the streets. Younger boys wear costumes and masks identifying them as either Mordechai or Haman or Achashverosh. And of course, every little girl is dressed up in a Queen Esther masquerade. Once again we are celebrating the supremely joyous festival of Purim – but why all the masquerades?

The very name of this festival – Purim – also leads us to ask: What does this mean, and what is its significance? The *Megillah* tells us that the name derives from Haman's

having thrown lots, *purim*, to determine the fate of the Jewish people. This seems very perplexing. Why is this festival, which celebrates the miraculous deliverance of the Jewish people from the threat of total annihilation, named for a seemingly minor detail like the casting of lots?

Further on in the *Megillah* we read, “The Jews upheld and accepted upon themselves, and on their offspring and all their adherents.” Our Sages infer from the words “the Jews upheld and accepted upon themselves” that “the Jews upheld what they had previously accepted.” The Jewish people had stood at Mount Sinai a thousand years before, and they had accepted the Torah directly from Hashem. But there had always been a small element of reservation in their commitment to the Torah. After the miracle of Purim, however, they cast all their earlier reservations to the winds and reaffirmed their acceptance of the Torah in a new spirit of love and enthusiasm. What was so significant about the miracle of Purim that it inspired such an outpouring of love for Hashem, even more so than at the spectacular revelations at Mount Sinai?

The answer lies in the very ordinariness of the miracle of Purim. There were no splitting seas, no smoking mountains, no thunder and lightning, no celestial visions or manifestations. There was only the hand of the Creator micromanaging events down to the smallest detail, manipulating the affairs of state in Persia to bring about the deliverance of His chosen people in a seemingly natural manner. The Divine Providence was concealed but exceedingly active and this inspired a spontaneous outpouring of love from the Jewish people. Why?

Let us consider for a moment the following two scenarios: A poor man knocks on a rich man's door and asks for a meal. “Come in,” says the rich man. “Have a seat. You'll have something good to eat in a few minutes.” He then calls the finest restaurant in town and orders the most expensive meal on the menu. He puts a rush on the order and tells the restaurant to charge it to American Express. Another day, the same poor man knocks on the same rich man's door and asks for a meal once again. This time, the rich man invites him into the kitchen and asks him to take a seat. He peels fresh vegetables to make a pot of soup. He puts up a steak to broil and prepares several delicious side dishes. Then he takes out a fresh loaf of warm bread and slices it. When all the preparations are done, he places the meal in front of the poor man.

In which case does the poor man feel better, more esteemed, more loved? Without question, it is in the second case. By taking the trouble to attend to all the details himself, the rich man shows his affection and concern for the poor man. And the poor man, in turn, is inspired to feel a much stronger gratitude and affection for his benefactor.

Hashem could quite easily have sent down lightning bolts from the heavens to strike down Haman and all the other oppressors of the Jewish people. But instead, He chose to take the trouble, so to speak, of manipulating ordinary events to effect their miraculous deliverance. The Jewish people were stunned by the Creator's display of transcendent love for His people, and in turn, they were inspired to respond with their own outpouring of love and a renewed acceptance of the Torah without any reservations whatsoever.

This is the significance of the *purim*, the lots. Lots represent randomness and unpredictability. They are a denial of Divine Providence in the smallest details of life. Haman's denial of Hashem was manifest in his reliance on lots, and this gave him the audacity to attempt to destroy the Jewish people. But by their miraculous deliverance, the Jewish people saw the hand of Hashem in the very smallest details, and this realization was established at the heart of the celebrations for all future time.