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The Holiday of
PURIM

A READER



The Story of Purim with
COMMENTARY, INTERPRETATIONS AND KABBALISTIC INSIGHT

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Purim

The story

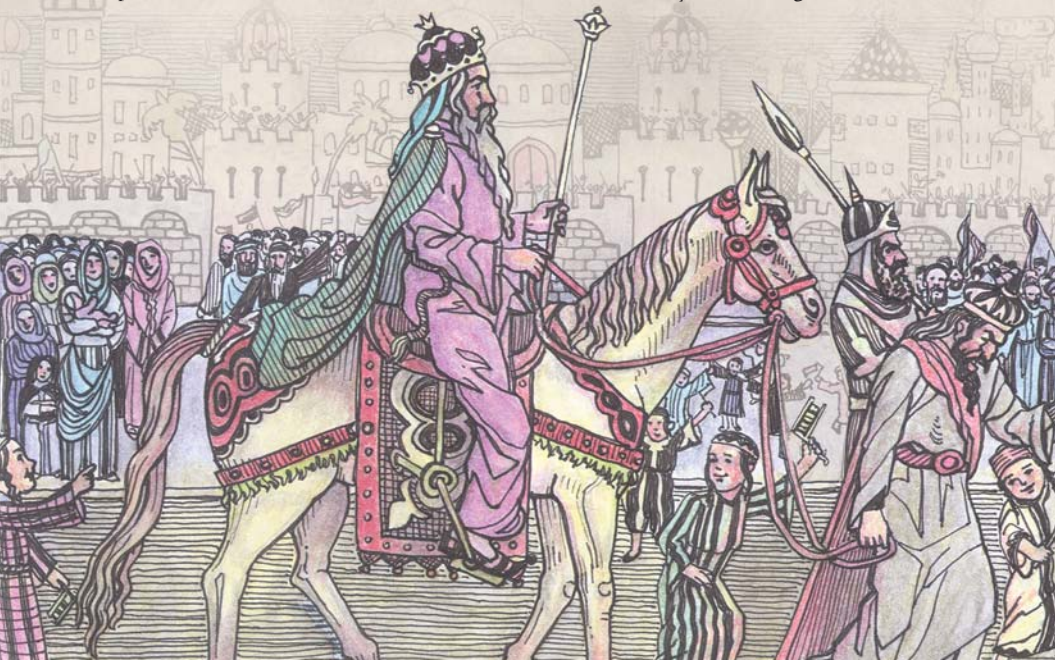
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In the years between the destruction of the First Temple and the rebuilding of the Second, the Jewish people were almost annihilated by a plan devised by a wicked minister with the consent of a foolish non-opinionated yet powerful ruler.

The mighty ruler of Persia was King Achashverosh otherwise known as Ahasuerus, or Xerxes. Achashverosh ruled over one hundred and twenty seven lands, and was considered the supreme ruler of the ancient world.

The story opens with King Achashverosh entertaining his guests at a royal feast in the capital city of Shushan, or Susa. In the midst of displaying his wealth and riches the king desired to show off his wife, Vashti, but Vashti refused and chose not to appear. Angered, the king listens to his advisors and she is put to death.

A proclamation is announced, a competition to become the king's new wife is in place, and all the eligible women are invited to attend. From among thousands of applicants, Esther, the cousin and surrogate daughter of Mordechai, the court Jew, is chosen. Upon Mordechai's advice Esther never reveals her nationality to the king.



King Achashverosh loves Esther more than all the other women of his harem and makes Esther the queen of Persia.

Some time later, by 'chance' occurrence Mordechai overhears two co-conspirators, servants of the king, who plan to overthrow Achashverosh by poisoning him. Apparently, they felt overworked since the king married Esther. Mordechai immediately reports them to Esther who in turn tells the King, in the name of Mordechai, and the king is saved. The episode is recorded in the official Book of Remembrances.

During Esther's reign, the King's Prime Minister was a devilish and power-hungry individual named Haman. Haman desires full honor and when Mordechai, the Jew, does not bow to him as he deems necessary he becomes angry and chooses to seek his annihilation, along with the annihilation of the entire Jewish community. And so he - easily - convinces King Achashverosh that the Jews do not respect the royal decrees, and perhaps are a people who might rebel. In a dialogue that seems all too familiar, Haman tells the king:

There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your realm. Their laws are different from those of every other people's, and they do not observe the king's laws; therefore it is not befitting the king to tolerate them.

Thus Haman implores Achashverosh to issue an edict which orders the destruction of all Jews in the land.

To determine the date of their destruction, Haman employs the method of throwing a lot, the day fell on the fourteenth of the month of Adar; Adar is the final and twelfth month of the Jewish calendar.

When Mordecai hears of this devastating decree he rips his clothes, puts on a sack and some ashes and begins to wail. He then sends a message to Esther, pleading with her to save the Jewish people by speaking to the king. After being convinced, Esther requests that Mordechai gather all the Jews and fast together with her for three successive days. After fasting for three days, Esther risks her own life by appearing before the King without being summoned and asks that he attend a party in her chambers. Her invitation is for the King and his trusted Prime Minister, Haman.

During the first party, Achashverosh turns to Esther and says, "what is your request and I will give it to you, and what are your wants and I will fulfill them, anything, until half my kingdom." Esther replies if you really want to fulfill my desires than you with Haman should come back the next day for another party and at that party I will reveal my desires to you.

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Haman leaves the feast in great spirits, but when he sees Mordechai and again Mordechai does not bow to him he is filled with anger. When Haman returns home, he tells his wife Zeresh of his glorious day, a day in which he attended a party with the king and queen, but he says, that that the day lost its glory when he encountered Mordechai. His wife and his trusted friends advise him to take a tree fifty feet high and tell the king to hang Mordechai on the tree; he thinks it's a great idea.

That night, on the eve of the second party, Achashverosh could not fall asleep. As he tosses and turns, he orders the Book of Remembrances to be read to him. When the tale of Mordechai and the two conspirators were recounted he recalls that he never appropriately rewarded Mordechai for saving his life, and so he summoned Haman to seek his counsel as to how he can reward such an upright and noble person. Without knowing to whom the king is referring to and assuming that it must be himself, Haman suggests that this noble man should be honored by being dressed in royal garments, while driven through the streets in the royal chariot with the proclamation, "Thus shall be done to the man whom the King desires to honor!" Much to his surprise the king orders Haman to do what was suggested to Mordechai, and that he himself should be the bearer of the news to the citizenry of Persia, walking in front of the chariot and declaring, "Thus shall be done to the man whom the King desires to honor!"

Greatly humiliated by the experience, Haman returns home dejected and mortified. When his wife hears what had occurred, she meekly tells him that he has no chance to stand up against Mordechai.

Haman makes his way to Esther's feast. At the party wine is served and in mood is quite joyous when again Achashverosh asks Esther if there is anything she desires. To everyone's surprise, Esther reveals her Jewish identity and reveals Haman's malicious plans to destroy her own people. Achashverosh is angered and orders Haman to be removed from office, and by the King's decree Haman is made victim of his own infamous plot and is sentenced to death while Mordechai becomes prime minister and inherits his position and possessions.

Purim is celebrated as a day when the Jews were spared, and the day that was set for their demise was transformed into a festival of happiness and sharing.

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The Name Purim

A MEDITATION ON DUALITY VS. TRANSCENDENCE & DUALITY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF TRANSCENDENCE

THE SIMPLE MEANING OF THE NAME PURIM:

When we offer a name for an object or subject we are trying to convey in the least possible words the function, utility or description of this object or subject. Clearly, to fully grasp the power and unpack the spiritual significance of this holiday we need to explore its name; *Purim*.

What does the word Purim mean? Purim is a Persian, and more precisely Akkadian word for lotteries. In the account, Haman threw a lottery to determine the date to implement his malicious plan and as such “they called these days Purim on the name pur – lot.” (*Ester 9:26*) But why name a holiday, a time for celebration, with a word that implicitly reminds us of the plot to harm us?

MORDECHAI VS. HAMAN:

Let us delve deeply and journey into the heart of the issue. Two of the main characters of the story are *Mordechai* and *Haman*. The unfolding tale of Purim pins the hero Mordechai against the villain Haman, one embodying all the goodness and *kedusha*/holiness the other all the negative and *kelipa*/the concealed energy. Each one aspired to achieve the diametric opposite, one willed destruction the other redemption, one wanted to harm and destroy while the other wanted life and salvation.

The question is, from where does the power of destruction come from? Being that everything within creation is a manifestation of the Divine from where does a person access such diabolical powers? What gives strength and rise to *kelipa*? While we may have the freedom to choose as we desire, the question remains; what is the root of this choice? What aspect within the creator’s interaction with creation leaves room for us to freely choose, and choose, if so willed, personal destruction or the destruction of another?

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THE INTERNAL & THE TRANSCENDENT LIGHT:

To fully wrap our minds around the issue we need to contemplate the creator/created relationship.

As the macro is reflected into the micro, a parallel can be drawn between the human being and creation as a whole. Just as our souls, our transcendent spirit permeates and simultaneously transcends our everyday existence, the same is with the Creator's light which gives, raises, sustains, and animates creation. There is an *obr makif* – a surrounding light and there is an *obr penimi* – measured and internal light.

One is the energy manifested as immanent and the all pervasive, the palpable presence of the divine, the other is a divine energy that we sense is transcendent of all details of creation. These two are also referred to as, *obr memale kol almin* - energy that fills creation, and *obr sovev kol almin* - the energy that encompasses and hovers above, a light that cannot be grasped or fully assimilated.

The world of law and order is a reality of *memale*. In this paradigm everything is properly defined and appropriately placed. *Memale* is the world of duality and the binary, up –down, right-left, good –evil.

The relatively observed orderly fashion of the universe which allows for scientific probing is a product of *memale*. The energy that prods organism toward their particular advancement and towards more intricate measures of complexity and diversity is *memale*. *Sovev* does not get involved in the intricateness of creation, yet it is *sovev* that gives rise to the essence of existence. *Sovev* is the creator aspect of the divine creating, but reality on the level of *sovev* is still mere 'potential' not distinct in image or form. Formation and articulation occurs on *memale*.

One creates substance and the others fashions form. It is extremely difficult to fathom substance without form, yet in the process of creation from of divine nothingness a somethingness appears, a something that is not individuated nor particularized, raw substance and only later in the progressive process does substance take on full form.

BEYOND THE BINARY, THE SOURCE OF CONCEALMENT:

Being is utterly transcendent of all distinctions and subjective evaluations in the world of *sovev*; "darkness is as light." Speaking of the primordial light of *sovev* a Chassidic teacher once said in Yiddish, "*Dart vu eidelkeit iz kein kli nit, iz gerabkeit kein setira nit*" - where refinement is not a vessel coarseness is not a contradiction" Negativity can

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exist because there is a grade of light that is detached from any perception or subjective definition. In the world of *sovev* there are no contradictions or conflicts as there is no evaluation or interpretation, everything simply “is.”

From the vantage point of *memale*, a world of order, a universe of cause and affect, righteousness breeds goodness and negativity generates its ilk. Haman, who represents the archetype of evil, the embodiment of *kelipa* intuitively knew on a deep sub or super-conscious level that if he wanted to bring destruction upon the Jew he needed to evoke and harness a power that is beyond *memale* or *penimi*, beyond distinctions, beyond good or evil. He knew that he needed to penetrate a *makif* space which – apparently - is not interested in the details of the created reality.

RANDOM LOTS:

Haman aspired for *makif*. From this detached space everything simply “is” and so even the righteous can suffer, and nothing ought to follow a deterministic inevitability of cause breeds the appropriate effect. It’s a world where everything is equal and nothing matters more than the other. Throwing a lottery bespeaks of this very same concept, in a lottery all pieces are equal, otherwise why involve a lottery and not make a conscious decision. The mechanism of a lot transcends predictability and rationality. Before a lot is cast in a lottery it could go either way; we cannot, apparently suppose that one person is more fit to win than the other.

Haman threw a lottery, a random act of throwing dice to determine the day of their demise. By casting a lottery he was hoping to hook into the transcendent that is ‘above good and evil.’ A spiritual place where he imagined everything is possible and there are no distinctions between good or evil.

Haman intuited that there is a super-rational plane from where good and evil can draw equally. A sphere where no moral strings are attached, and good and evil are equally capable of receiving and being nourished. He wished to tap into a spiritual space that exists outside the context of creation, and a place where “*As for your many sins-can they harm Him?...and if you acted righteously-will it benefit Him?*” (Job 35:6-7). That is why – perhaps unbeknown to his conscious mind he cast a lot.

TREE FIFTY FEET HIGH:

Appropriately, as a means to obliterate the righteous he anchored a fifty feet high

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tree which he desired to use to hang Mordechai. Seven is the number connected with the natural order, as in the seven day cycles of creation, which themselves are rooted in the seven lower *sefirotic* influences. Each of the seven within them contains seven. Principally up until the number forty nine represents realms within the natural order of creation, and since Haman wanted to reach the *makif*, that which is beyond all comprehension he erected a fifty foot tree.

EXILE:

Generally speaking, being in exile, physically, emotionally or spiritually is rooted in *makif*. In an exile frame of mind, where one is estranged and disaligned, nothing is clear, and everything is blurry thus allowing good and evil to reign. Exile is like a dream-state, where opposite emotions or events occur simultaneously or in rapid succession. Psychologically in a condition of exile one moment one can feel on a high and everything will make sense, while the next experience is a devastating low, or visa versa.

KING ACHASHVEIROSH:

In the unfolding tale the king, Achashveirosh seems to be a character that is the most impartial. He does what is told to him. First he kills his wife on the advice of his advisor then kills the advisor on the advice of his wife. The king Achashveirosh also represents the King of the world, the one upon who we can say "*achris ve'reishis shelo*"- "the end and the beginning is His." The King represents *makif*, *keser*- crown above head, a spiritual space where everything is possible, as everything simply "is" without subjective evaluation.

When Haman, referring to the Jewish people says to the King; "*There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed.*" (3:8.) The phrase "there is" in Hebrew is *yeshna*, which can also be read as to sleep. Haman is alluding to the fact that exile is a sleeping state. The people are asleep and he is simultaneously appealing to the King who is asleep, to the level of *keser*, of indifference, beyond caring, and thus everything and anything is possible.

Yet, the same force of *makif* that Haman desired to imply to render insignificant order and 'law', to disregard a universe where results are in direct consequence to actions and where righteous breeds blessings, was turned against him. *Makif* is unrelated to forms, but that means transcendent of all forms both old ones and new ones. His decree came about through *makif* and it was also through *makif* that the decree was annulled.

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FROM FORM TO FORMLESS TO FORM:

As mentioned, first an idea exists in *makif* and then individuates as a distinct shape and form in *penimi*. On a physical plane, which the physical mirrors the spiritual if there is a desire to alter or change an image or form, the way to do it is to first un-create the shape and then shape a new one. Say you want to change a silver plate to a cup first you need to flatten it out the old form and then create the new one.

On a spiritual level it works much the same. To alter reality, to change that which is, one needs to 'elevate' the object/subject to the state of potential, and then rearrange and manipulate the energy thus engendering a new manifestation to emerge.

When Esther tells the king, that he together with Haman are invited to the feast she has prepared, by equating the king with his minister, "and the King and Haman" what she is doing is shaking them out of their 'forms' and perceiving them in their potential state. Doing so, she evokes their formless condition and consequently causes the powerful negative form of the wicked Haman to dissolve. He went to *makif* to cause harm but in *makif* everything and nothing occurs.

AYIN & YESH – NONBEING & BEING:

Esther journeyed inward and upward into the *ayin* – the nothingness that precedes the *yesh* – somethingness, and through that manipulated a new reality into being. On a surface, external level we call ourselves 'ani' - 'I' and yet, this 'separate' I is but a mirage, a transient image that labors under the notion of separateness and detachment, and the only genuine I there is, is the creator, the essence of existence, the true 'I' which becomes manifest in all individuated 'i's of people. To connect with the essential I, the Ultimate *yesh*, we need to first deconstruct, dismantle the false 'ani'- I and make from the ani an ain, a nothingness, and then we can reemerge as a divine expression, as the real *ani*- I, as in *Ani Hasbem* – I am God.

When Esther beheld the bleak situation they found themselves in, she saw that in the manifested reality of *yesh* everything seemed hopeless and gloomy she says that she will go to the king though uninvited "and if I perish I perish." (4:16.) Although the consequence of appearing uninvited in front of the king typically meant death she decided to go nonetheless. Doing so, substituting in the most dramatic of ways the ego/*ani*, for the *ain*/ egolessness she empowered a miracle to occur, and what a miracle. In her egoless state, literally putting herself on the side, the ultimate *yesh* was able to be revealed.

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THE CURSE BECOMES THE SOURCE OF BLESSING:

Indeed, a radical transformation of events occurred. The negative itself became the source of blessings. The *Pur* – the lot that was thrown became the source and the reason for their joy. The old forms crumbled, as the word '*pur*' from the root '*porer*' – to crumble connotes, and a new reality was birthed, as in Purim from the root word '*pru*' – to be fruitful, as in *pru u'revu* - 'be fruitful and multiply' which is the injunction to procreate. Haman wanted to wipe them out, and make an end to them, and what occurred instead was *pru u'revu* – they multiplied, proliferated and became even stronger. This set into motion an even greater redemption with the return of many to Israel from the Babylonian exile and the construction of the second temple in Jerusalem.

BEYOND BEING BEYOND GOOD & EVIL:

On a most profound level Haman failed to understand that on the deepest realities, that which is beyond being 'beyond', beyond *makif*, beyond the infinite, Essence chooses "the souls of the righteous" over the unrighteous. This choosing is not because righteousness impinges on or colors the Infinites bias, rather because there is a 'desire' to chose this way. The Divine choice of light as the path of righteousness was not a conscious, deliberate one, rather a spontaneous choice.

It is a choice that is rooted in the essence of the divine, a free unforced condition, and not because the actions below inevitably affect the position above and impel a direct correlative reaction. Why is there choice? Radical choosing, just because.

DUALITY WITHIN A CONTEXT OF ONENESS:

Sovev is the Infinite light, *Memale* the finite, whereas these are two manifestations of the creator, they are both not the divine itself. The 'essence' is termed *etzem* or *atzmus* – pure essence, that which is beyond finite, but also beyond infinite, and even beyond the definition as the source of the infinite light. Clearly, any form of speaking of or conceptualizing *atzmus* is itself a definition. And still, *atzmus* elects to desire "the souls of the righteous," why? Just because it so desired. In fact, "Why" is not a valid question, why only exists in a universe of causality, separation and the binary.

Now it becomes clear why the Persian name of *Purim* was chosen, and why a name that apparently bespeaks of the negative captures the essence of the holiday. Purim celebrates the ultimate form of transformation, positively manipulating a life affirming consequence, going to the root of *makif* instead of the pulling down of negativity. To choose within a place of duality and the possibility of opposites the path of light and life.

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CELEBRATING THE PAST IN THE PRESENT:

Life is lived in the eternal present. When we celebrate a holiday we are not merely celebrating past events having nostalgic commemorations, and feel good ruminations, rather we are celebrating the reoccurring events in the now.

These are days, as the scroll of Ester declares that are *nezzarim v'naasim* - remembered and performed. By remembering them they are actually being re-performed. Through remembering the very same divine force that existed back then and empowered the miraculous exists now, and in an even more powerful form, since "matters of holiness are only in the motion of increase."

All the holidays are called Yom Tov's literally good days. On the holiday we experience an extra measure of blessings, sourced in the ultimate source of all goodness.

WITH BLESSINGS FOR A HAPPY, JOYOUS AND UPLIFTING PURIM,

Rabbi DovBer and Rochie Pinson

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The Observances of Purim

Seudat Purim— Eat the Festive Meal of Purim

We celebrate Purim with a special festive meal on Purim Day, Tuesday, March 14, when family and friends gather together to rejoice in the Purim spirit.

Mishloach Manot— Send Gifts of Food

On Purim we emphasize the importance of Jewish unity and friendship by sending portions of food as gifts to friends. Send a gift of at least two kinds of ready-to-eat foods to at least one friend on Purim day.

Matanot L'Evyonim Give Gifts to the Needy

On Purim it is a special mitzvah to remember the poor, and we fulfill it by giving charitable gifts to at least two needy individuals on Purim day. The best way to fulfill this mitzvah is to give directly to the needy.

Megillat Esther— Listen to the Megillah

To re-live the miraculous events of Purim, we listen to the reading of the Megillah (the Scroll of Esther) on Purim Eve and again on Purim Day.

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