

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of  
Miryom *bas* Dovid HaLevi *a”h*  
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

## Haman’s “Favor”

## PARSHAS TETZAVEH 5778

(The following is based on a discourse of the Nesivos Shalom’s volume, “Ma’amarei Purim.”)

One of the most intriguing aspects of Purim is, of course, the unique mitzvah we refer to as “*Ad d’lo yada.*” On any given Purim, it is fairly difficult to miss the masses’ embrace of this particular mitzvah, whereby we are enjoined to drink wine and reach the following level of intoxication: **עַד דְּלֹא יָדַע בֵּין אָרוּר הֵמָּן לְבָרוּךְ מְרֻדְכַי** – “To the point that he cannot discern between ‘cursed is Haman’ and ‘blessed is Mordechai’” (*Megillah 7b*).

The commentators throughout the ages have grappled with this almost unprecedented form of observance, as they strive to clarify both the *halachic* parameters of this practice, as well as account for its place in *avodas Hashem* (service of Hashem). Given the complexity of the matter and the constraints of this particular forum, we will focus here on the latter. As such, we attempt to present here one approach to this most interesting observance, based on the Nesivos Shalom’s exposition of its underlying significance.

### An Unlikely Source of Outreach

As we traverse the paths of This World and observe its workings, many are challenged to make sense of the events around them. The sentiment of confusion experienced by many is actually expressed by a *passuk* in Tehillim (73:12), which states: **הִנֵּה-אֵלֶּה רָשָׁעִים וְשָׁלוֹם עִוְלָם** – “Behold, these are wicked people; yet they are at peace in This World and have accumulated vast wealth.” Now, of course, the Jewish People are often referred to as “*ma’aminim b’nei ma’aminim* – believers, children of believers” (*Shabbos 97a*), and thus we know that there is a Judge, and there is justice. The issues arises, however, from our extremely limited capacity to grasp the concealed and intricate workings that form the underpinnings of the Divine Plan. But as we shall see, the Purim episode can be instrumental in providing us with a clear perspective on these matters that may initially appear so perplexing.

For further insight on the issue, it is worthwhile to hearken back to an even earlier example, provided by none other than Pharaoh, the wicked Egyptian monarch and head slave master of the Jewish People. Now, it goes without saying that Pharaoh’s level of evil was quite substantial, and he was deservedly held to account. But a quite intriguing notion regarding his exploits emerges from an exposition of Chazal. This teaching relates to the episode of Pharaoh’s pursuit of Yisrael as they stood by the Sea, striking terror into their hearts. The *passuk* states: **וַיִּרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם אַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁגּוּ אוֹתָם חֲנִים עַל-הַיָּם... וַפְרָעָה הַקָּרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל** – “And Mitzrayim pursued them, and they overtook them while they were encamping by the Sea... And Pharaoh drew near, and B’nei Yisrael lifted their eyes, and behold – Mitzrayim was travelling behind them; and they were greatly afraid, and B’nei Yisrael cried out to Hashem” (*Shemos 14:9,10*).

The Medrash (*Shemos Rabbah 21:5*) picks up on a grammatical irregularity in the wording of this *passuk*. In referring to Pharaoh’s approach, the *passuk* seemingly should have used the more direct form of the word, stating: “*Pharaoh karav*” which means, “Pharaoh drew near.” Instead, it states: “*Pharaoh hikriv*”, which literally means “Pharaoh caused to draw near.”

The *medrash* extrapolates from here that, in fact, a great benefit was accrued to Yisrael on account of the threat posed by Pharaoh's approach, as he indeed "caused to draw near" their hearts to Hashem. The *medrash* thus concludes with the surprising statement that "Pharaoh's act of bringing close was a more effective agent for Yisrael than a hundred fasts and prayers... For once they pursued (Yisrael), and (the latter) saw them, they were greatly afraid and directed their eyes Heavenward; they repented, and prayed (to Hashem). As it says: 'And B'nei Yisrael cried out to Hashem'."

### Only Good

A similar "accomplishment" was wrought at the hands of Haman, the arch-villain of the Purim episode. Of course, the wickedness of this scion of Amalek was unparalleled, and he received due recompense in both This World and the Next. At the same time, the colossal peril into which he thrust Yisrael did, in the end, have beneficial consequences of tremendous proportions. For on the heels of his downfall and the miraculous delivery from his hands, Yisrael reached a spiritual pinnacle never before attained. The Gemara states that in the wake of these monumental events, Yisrael actually re-accepted the Torah (*Shabbos 88a*). But this was done on a level that, in some respects, even surpassed that of the Revelation at Sinai; for whereas in that instance they accepted the Torah from a sense of awe and fear, it was now – for the first time – that they did so out of love for Hashem.

What emerges, then, is that the episode of Purim goes a long way in clarifying and reinforcing our knowledge that, indeed, כָּל דְּעָבִיד רַחֲמָנָא לְטָב עָבִיד – "All that the Merciful One does is for good" (*Berachos 60b*). And this is the message driven home by the attainment of a state of "ad d'lo yada," whereby a Jew can't discern between "cursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai." The sentiment is quite similar to that expressed by the Mishnah (*Berachos 9:5*), which states:

חַיֵּב אָדָם לְבָרֵךְ עַל הַרְעָה כְּשֶׁם שֶׁהוּא מְבָרֵךְ עַל הַטּוֹבָה.

"A person is obligated to bless (Hashem) on misfortune just as he blesses on fortune."

The Divine calculations behind any given event may indeed be hidden from us for the meanwhile. But the lesson underscored by Purim is that – the current limited scope of our vision notwithstanding – there is inherently no difference between apparently severe tribulations ("arur Haman") and more obvious acts of beneficence ("baruch Mordechai"). Just as the latter reflects pure benevolence, so, indeed, does the former. While we may not be able to discern the details just yet, we may still utilize the grand opportunity of Purim to reinforce and fortify our belief in the fact that it is so.

And so, the essence of this curious practice is actually quite clear and straightforward: it entails the internalization of this vital principle, whereby we recognize that all matters of our lives and the world in general are, at their core, pure goodness.

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