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מועצת הרבנים דשיקגו

# Divrei Torah for Purim 5782



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# Purim: The Holiday of *Achdut*

Rabbi Yona Reiss  
*Av Beth Din*



**P**urim is unique among Jewish holidays, as noted by Rav Yerucham Olshin in his *sefer Yareach L'Moadim* (Purim – *Ma'amar* 31), in terms of including *mitzvot* which are *bein adam l'chavero* (interpersonal *mitzvot*) as an intrinsic part of the observance of the holiday. On all the other holidays, the *mitzvot* of the day are exclusively in the category of *bein adam l'makom* (*mitzvot* between us and Hashem), such as eating in a Sukkah or waving the four species on Sukkot, eating *Matzoh* and refraining from *Chametz* on Pesach, or lighting candles on Chanukah. On the other hand, among the four *mitzvot* that characterize the rabbinic holiday of Purim are the *mitzvah* of *mishloach manot* (sending food portions to at least one other individual) and *matanot l'veyonim* (proving charitable gifts to at least two needy people).

Rav Olshin explains that the reason there is a focus upon interpersonal *mitzvot* in connection with Purim is because these *mitzvot* serve as the antidote to our state of spiritual vulnerability that enabled Haman to

hatch his evil plan against the Jewish people in the first place. Haman noted to Achashverosh that we were “*mefuzar u'meforad bein ha'amim*” (*Esther* 3:8; see *Megillah* 13b) – scattered amongst the various nations. The Shelah (*Tezaveh – Derasha* for *Parshat Zachur*) explains that Haman was commenting not only about our geographical separation, but also our lack of unity. In fact, the *Midrash Rabbah* (*Esther* 7:25) links the evil decree of Haman to the sin of the sale of Yosef Hatzadik many generations earlier, at which time the other tribes turned against their own flesh and blood, leading to the Egyptian exile. This explains why the salvation from this sorrowful state of separateness needed to come about through Esther and Mordechai, both scions of the tribe of Binyamin who did not participate in any way in the sale of Yosef.

Esther the Queen was able to bring about the salvation of the Jewish people precisely through her resolve to unite the Jewish people as she proclaimed “*lech kenos es kol hayehudim*” (*Esther* 4:15) – “go

and gather all the Jewish people together,” as she brought the nation together in fasting and prayer. In unity, there was strength. This renewed sense of togetherness, of *achdut*, enabled us to defeat Haman and his sinister plan. Therefore, the way in which we celebrate this victory spurred by unity is to unite through “*mishloach manot ish l’reehu*” (*Esther* 9:19, 22) – sending portions of food to each other to demonstrate our care and concern for the welfare of others.

The same care and concern for each other is reflected in the *mitzvah* of *matanot l’evyonim* (*Esther* 9:22) – taking care of the needs of our needy brethren on Purim day. There is a special requirement on Purim day of giving to all people who outstretch their hand, without discrimination (*Shulchan Aruch*, OC 694:3). This is a day that we are required to be non-judgmental towards our fellow Jews. We can suggest that this is also a reversal of the judgementalism demonstrated by Yosef’s brothers towards him, in which they allowed their sense of righteousness to cloud their ability to listen to the cries of a poor victim pleading for mercy (see *Bereishit* 42:21).

As noted by Rav Olshin, the theme of *achdut* expresses itself in a famous dispute regarding the *raison d’etre* behind the *mitzvah* of *mishloach*

*manot*. According to the *Terumat Hadeshen* (111), the purpose of *mishloach manot* is to provide a sufficient portion of food or drink to the recipient for the Purim meal. However, according to Rav Shlomo Alkabetz in his commentary to *Megillat Esther* entitled *Manot HaLevi* (to *Esther* 9:19), the purpose of *mishloach manot* is to bring about a closer connection between fellow Jews, to create a bond of love and friendship in contrast to Haman’s description of the Jewish nation as *mefuzar u’meforad* – scattered and separate (see also *Bach*, OC 695, for a similar explanation). Based on the explanation of the *Manot HaLevi*, we can understand the opinion of some commentators who say that it is a higher form of fulfillment of the *mitzvah* to send *mishloach manot* to somebody with whom a person does not already enjoy a close relationship (see *Pele Yoetz*, *Erech Purim*; *Kobetz Halachot*, *Purim* 15:33).

Another apparent distinction between the two views, as noted by the *Chatam Sofer* (1:196), would be if the recipient declines to accept the *mishloach manot*. According to the reasoning of the *Terumat Hadeshen*, the sender has not fulfilled the *mitzvah* because the recipient did not ultimately receive the requisite food portions. However, according to the *Manot HaLevi*, the *mitzvah* would be fulfilled because the mere

gesture of sending the food portions should suffice to create a stronger bond of friendship between the sender and the intended recipient. Since the Rema (OC 695:4) explicitly rules that one does fulfill the *mitzvah* of *mishloach manot* in such a case, it seems that the Rema rules according to the reasoning of the *Manot HaLevi*, rather than that of the *Terumat Hadeshen*.

Additionally, the *Ketav Sofer* (OC 141) notes a reverse distinction as well. According to the *Terumat Hadeshen*, the sender can fulfill his or her *mishloach manot* obligation even if the recipient is unaware of the sender's identity since the sender has still received the requisite food portions. However, according to the *Manot HaLevi*, there would be no fulfillment of the *mitzvah*, since there is a lack of a bond established in such a case between the sender and the recipient.

Other possible distinctions between the reasons of the *Terumat Hadeshen* and the *Manot HaLevi* include whether one can fulfill the *mitzvah* of *mishloach manot* by sending it by mail courier prior to Purim in order to arrive on Purim (according to the *Terumat Hadeshen*, this should arguably be sufficient, since the portions for the meal arrived on Purim day, while according to the *Manot HaLevi*, this may not be valid, because

the act of gladdening the hearts was not performed by the sender on Purim itself – see Rav Olshin, *Shiurim on Purim*, chapter 34), and whether one can fulfill the obligation by sending food that the sender is stringent not to eat (such as *chodosh* outside of Israel) but the recipient is lenient about eating (according to the *Terumat Hadeshen*, this should be good because the recipient has received usable food portions, but according to the *Manot HaLevi* the sender has not established a bond of friendship since the food that was sent was not of value from the standpoint of the sender – see *Nitei Gavriel, Purim* 57:14, n. 15). Additionally, if the recipient is away and is unaware of the *mishloach manot* until after Purim, the sender would not fulfill the *mitzvah* if its purpose is to create a bond between the parties on Purim, while the *mitzvah* would be fulfilled according to the reason of the *Terumat Hadeshen* since food was made available to the recipient at his or her home on Purim day (see *Kobetz Halachot, Purim* 15:24, n. 30).

Within the context of the *mitzvah* of *matanot l'evyonim*, there is a query of the *Pri Megadim* (*Mishbetzot Zahav* 694:1) whether one can fulfill the *mitzvah* of *matanot l'evyonim* through a “temporary” gift that is meant to be returned to the giver

(*matanah al me'nat l'hachzir*). Rav Olshin (Shiurim on *Purim*, chapter 37) initially explains that this query may depend on whether the purpose of *matanot l'evyonim* is to provide *tzedakah* - a charitable gift, in which case even a temporary gift should qualify, or whether the purpose is to create a sense of joy for the charitable recipient, in which case there is no abiding joy with respect to a gift that needs to be returned. However, he concludes, based on a comment of the *Shach* (YD 258:25), that one cannot satisfy a *tzedakah* obligation in this fashion. Rather, the *Pri Megadim's* question assumes that even the *mitzvah* of *matanot l'evyonim* is predicated upon enhancing a sense of communal joy, and the question is simply whether the gifts of *matanot l'evyonim*, which do not need to be food (unlike *mishloach manot*), can provide the requisite quotient of happiness even if they need to be returned.

However, it is noteworthy that the *Pri Megadim* (ibid) assumed as a matter of course that with respect to *mishloach manot*, it is certain that a temporary gift would be no good. This would seem to be true both according to the reasoning of the *Terumat Hadeshen*, since the gifts must be in the form of food that can be consumed by the recipient for purposes of the Purim meal, as well as according to the *Manot HaLevi*,

since a temporary gift is unlikely to create a bond of friendship between the sender and the recipient. In fact, whether one embraces the opinion of the *Terumat Hadeshen* or that of the *Manot HaLevi*, there is no doubt that Purim requires an interpersonal connection, both in terms of *mishloach manot* and *matanot l'evyonim*.

When we read the *Megillah* on Purim morning, it is common for the *Gabbai* to announce that the blessing of *Shehecheyanu* covers not only the *mitzvah* of reading the *Megillah*, but the other *mitzvot* of the day, including *mishloach manot* and *matanot l'evyonim* (see *Pri Megadim*, *Eshel Avrohom*, 692:1). Even the *bein adam l'makom* aspect of reading the *Megillah* is inextricably linked to the interpersonal *mitzvot* of the day, which are meticulously described in the *Megillah* itself. Amidst the revelry of Purim, we must bear in mind that the most important aspect of its celebration is a restoration of love and respect for every Jew. Through this sense of togetherness, we will be well-equipped, just like our forebears during the days of Mordechai and *Esther*, to defeat all our enemies and challenges. A *freilichen* Purim!

# Speculations On G-d's Holiday Scheduling

Rabbi Akiva Males  
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**E**ach year, as she cleans up from the holiday of Purim, and starts preparing for the festival of Pesach, a relative of ours declares: “Far be it from me to question G-d’s infinite wisdom. But why did He schedule Purim and Pesach so close to one another?” After all, leftover Hamantashen does not exactly facilitate Pesach cleaning. My wife Layala and I always laugh about our relative’s deep theological question. While G-d has not yet decided to explain His ways to me, I did come across something which may shed some light on His choice in holiday scheduling (bearing in mind that even the scheduling of a rabbinic holiday is part of G-d’s master plan).

The main theme of Purim is that with G-d in charge, anything is possible. G-d is involved in the running of our world, and if He so chooses, any Earthly circumstance can be transformed. For example, G-d changed a date which should have been full of sorrow and mourning for the Jewish people into one of great gladness and joy (*Esther*

9:22). Similarly, the very gallows which Haman had set for Mordechai became the instrument through which he would meet his own end (*ibid.* 7:9-10).

This same theme can be found in the story of our Exodus from Egypt as well. In his commentary to the Pesach Haggadah, the great Rabbi Naftali Z.Y. Berlin (1817-1893) of Volozhin, Lithuania finds this very lesson in the splitting of the sea. In *Shemos* 14:9, we read that the Egyptian army, in trying to capture the runaway slave nation of Israel, pursued and trapped the Jews against the sea. Our ancestors cried out in despair. One can imagine how they must have cursed the sea that blocked their escape and seemed to deliver them into the hands of their oppressors.

Yet they soon saw “G-d’s Hand” (*Shemos* 14:31). The sea, which they had perceived as the instrument of their capture, became the source of their rescue, and the means through which their pursuers met their doom.

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# Without Limits

Rabbi Yosef Posner

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**T**he story near the beginning of the *Megilla* is so familiar to us that we may not notice some of the oddity. King Achashverosh makes a party, orders Queen Vashti to appear, and she refuses to come – publicly humiliating the king. He summons his advisors, who also are flummoxed except for the least of them, (see *Megillah* 12b), Memuchan. Instead of focusing on how to deal with such blatant disregard of direct orders from the king, Memuchan is concerned about the precedent this will set for the populace at large, and therefore Vashti must be punished and an order must be issued that every man is a ruler in his own home.

Isn't it obvious that defying a direct order from the king, even if by a queen, is punishable by death? Later on in the *Megilla* we read of Esther's message to Mordechai that if she, as queen, would so much as enter the King's chamber unbidden, the law is that she must die. Certainly a queen who defies the king's orders must die.

Furthermore, the mere fact that

Memuchan ignores Vashti's disrespect for the king and instead worries about every "Joe Sixpack" being respected by his wife, is itself the height of disrespect for the king. How could Memuchan even say such a thing to the king?

And, why does the *Megilla* tell us all this, when all we need to know is that the king sought a new queen which led to Esther being chosen?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe (*Likutei Sichos* vol. 36) explains that the answer lies in understanding the nature of this party. At this feast for the residents of Shushan, the king established as a guiding principle that everything was supposed to be done according to the wishes of each guest. No one was to be forced to drink if he did not want to, even though the norm at such feasts was to drink a large cup of wine in honor of the king, host of the feast.

If the guiding principle of the party was to give freedom to choose to each participant, perhaps this freedom extended to Vashti as well. She, too, was free to do as



she desired despite what the king ordered. Achashverosh was unhappy with Vashti's defiance and wanted to punish her. However, he had granted license to everyone to do exactly as they pleased and therefore was unsure whether Vashti's refusal was punishable. On the one hand, she was defying a direct order from the king, but on the other hand, she was acting within the guidelines which the king himself had established.

Achachverosh, therefore, summoned the council of advisors to determine whether Vashti's refusal was included in the freedom he had granted to everyone, or perhaps defying a direct order from the king still was considered an act of rebellion. Alternatively, maybe they could find some other reason to justify punishing Vashti. One can understand the advisors not having a ready answer.

Memuchan rose to the challenge. Sidestepping the issue of Vashti defying the king's order, he focused on how this would affect society. Freedom had been granted at the party, but this was not meant to be permanent. Therefore, while Vashti may not be accountable for defying the king, there were grounds to oust her due the effect of her action on society in general.

Achashverosh had created such a free and open atmosphere at the

party that he was unable to enforce his own wishes. What prompted him to throw such a wild party? By Achashverosh's calculations, the prophesied seventy years of Babylonian exile had elapsed, and seeing that the Jews were still in *Golus* and the *Bais Hamikdash* was not being rebuilt, he decided it was time to celebrate and to feature the captured utensils of the *Bais Hamikdash* at his feast. Achashverosh felt free and secure for the first time and celebrated by declaring that "anything goes."

In contrast to this unfettered freedom from constraints, the salvation of the Jewish people comes from their expression of choosing freely, but in a totally different context. The *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 88a) says that when the Jewish people accepted the Torah, Hashem held the mountain over them and they accepted the Torah under duress. Then, in the time of Purim, the Jewish people accepted the Torah again, this time of their own free will without being forced to do so. The Alter Rebbe says that this is referring to the fact that every single Jew remained steadfast in their Jewish identity for nearly an entire year despite Haman's decree hanging over anyone who identified as a Jew.

This explains why on Purim there is the obligation to imbibe beyond

the usual limitations (of course, any drinking must be safe and legal). This is in contrast to Yom Tov when *Bais Din* is actually obligated to monitor the drinking (*Shulchan Aruch OC 529:4*) and keep it within bounds. The Jewish people's absolute steadfastness beyond the bounds of what might have been seen as prudent, brought about their salvation, and is cause for celebration without bounds.

It is known that every time "the king" is mentioned in the *Megilla*, it is also

an allusion to Hashem. Thus the first part of the *Megilla* teaches that Hashem has established as a guiding principle that we are granted the freedom to freely choose to adhere to Hashem and to Torah. And even if the modern day Achashveroshes and Hamans of the world around us seem to be opposed to that, that is only to appearances (see *Gemara Megilla 12a*). By disregarding those appearances we merit to ונהפוך הוא, the transformation of the hindrances of *Golus* into *Geulah* with the coming of Moshiach NOW!

## Speculations On G-d's Holiday Scheduling

**Rabbi Akiva Males**  
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Thus, both Purim and Pesach share a common theme: with G-d at the helm, our destiny is anything but fixed. Dates which our people once dreaded can be transformed into ones we eagerly anticipate. Agents of devastation can become the means of triumph. Perhaps G-d wanted us

to celebrate Pesach on the heels of Purim so this reality would not go unnoticed.

I hope this theory makes it a bit easier to clean up all of our Hamantashen crumbs and prepare for a most enjoyable Pesach!



# Coming Soon: **The eighth issue of the cRc Shemittah Newsletter**



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