

Words That Build: Purim Shpiels

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Beinish Ginsburg

The Chofetz Chaim, quoting the Rambam, writes that the prohibition of *loshon hara* applies even if one doesn't mean to degrade others and even if it is said in a joking manner. This is very relevant to the issue of *Purim shpiels* (comedy skits). It is common in many *yeshivot* for the boys to put on a skit for Purim poking fun at their teachers. The Rema discusses two very fascinating laws related to Purim. If someone becomes a bit tipsy and damages his friend's property, if his intent was to damage, he is obligated to pay. If it was done out of merrymaking, he's

exempt. Likewise, the Rema notes that taking things from others on Purim in jest, is not considered stealing. Rav Kaufman quotes the Gra that since it's Purim and there's an atmosphere of merrymaking, people are likely to forgive. But one cannot apply this laxity to *loshon hara*. If one causes a person emotional anguish and pain one can't assume he will forgive. He might look away about a few dollars, but embarrassment in public is more severe. It follows that the only way to stage a *Purim shpiel* in a permitted way is to make sure the people involved completely forgive

beforehand. If not, it is prohibited according to the Torah. It's certainly preferable when you start the *shpiel*, to let everyone know you asked the relevant people in advance. If not, you can mislead the audience to think you're committing a serious sin. I once was at a *Purim shpiel* which poked fun at a school administrator who was known to be exceedingly careful with the *yeshiva's* money. The boys asked the administrator in advance if they could do a skit about him and he agreed. You can have funny, creative, *shpiels*, but be sure that it's in the spirit of Torah law.

Lottery of Life

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Why is Purim called Purim? What is it about the name that reflects the essence of the day? The Sifsei Chaim explains that the root word of Purim is *pur*, a lottery, which connotes chance. It can also mean *goral*, a sign or an extension of Hashem's personal intervention. Purim draws our attention to these conflicting ideas which are also reflected in *Megilat Esther*.

The Torah tells us about Amalek, "*Asher korcha b'derech.*" They met us on the way. *Korcha* shares the same letters as *mikra* (coincidence). This is Amalek's ideology. What may appear to be evidence of Hashem's involvement is only coincidence. On a deeper level, this is the battle we were fighting throughout the Purim story. Amalek whose outlook is *pur*, that everything is up to chance, was manifested in Haman who said, "*Hipil pur.*" I will leave it up to chance. The Sifsei Chaim notes that the Jewish view of *mikra* radically differs. There are two fundamental aspects in creation. That which we do with our own free choice, with direct intervention from above, and that which is directed from above unrelated to free choice. This is what we call *mazal* which comes from the root word *nozel*, that which flows from above. *Mikra* according to the Torah view, refers to moments of life which weren't directed by the person, but by Hashem. The events may have been unexpected but they were intentional messages sent by the One Above who directs and brings about all things.

Hashem gives us all the tools necessary to do our job. Each of us is an actor on the stage of life. The props, backdrop, and costumes are all set up and then the spotlight is on us. The script is our *bechira* (free choice) where we are given the ability to choose based on our circumstances. Our goal should be to hone in on what Hashem has in mind for us and then invest our all. Rav Wachtfogel notes, there is a general universal *megilah* and a private *megilah*, which is every Jew's individual story and specific mission. Rav Yerucham brings the Midrash which says, "You should follow after Hashem." The Sifri says this is a *mitzvah* for all generations and it refers to the clouds of glory. But weren't the clouds only around for 40 years in the desert? He explains, it's a *mitzvah*, "*Lalechet acharei hashgacha,*" to discern the Divine Providence in one's life. Every individual has their personal *amud ha'anan* leading them. If one searches for Hashem in one's day to day life, one will find Him.

The Kedushas Levi points out that on Purim we say the *bracha*, "*Sheasa nissim... b'yamim hahem bazman haze.*" (You did miracles for us in those days in our times.) The unique aspect of Purim is that the miracles were woven into nature. A king got drunk, a queen was killed, a new queen was chosen. There was no blood oozing out of water or frogs jumping from the ceiling. Open miracles may arouse one time inspiration but it doesn't last.

In contrast, if a person trains himself to discern the hidden hand of Hashem in every step of his life, it changes him. The *Megilah* is referred to as, "*Igeret sheogeret b'socho,*" it connects together all events. The challenge of *Megilat Esther* is the challenge of life, finding Hashem in the seemingly minor coincidences of life. Chazal say that the word *Hamelech* in the *Megilah* is a reference to Hashem, as is *Achashveirosh*, which can be read as a conjunction of *acharit* and *reishit*- beginning and end. If we look at the *Megilah* at its end and trace it back to its beginning we can see a picture unfolding. Our challenge is to read our personal *megilot* in life and find the picture. *Purim* is written in plural form. The double lot contains the secret of the hidden miracles. Haman cast a lot to destroy Israel, but in reality it was for his own downfall. What appeared to be random was directed by Hashem. *Megilah* comes from the root word *gilui* to reveal. The *Megilah* reveals to us the hand of Hashem in every stage of the story.

After the reading of the *Megilah*, it is an opportune time to pray. The gates are open. We can ask Hashem for help, clarity, and direction in understanding our personal mission and fulfilling it with *simcha*. On Purim, our *tefilot* can go much higher than they normally can. May we merit that our prayers be answered *l'tova*, that we reveal Hashem's constant Presence, and that we serve Him with joy.

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Megilat Esther: Returning From The Depths

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The *Megilah* tells us, "And Mordechai knew all that had occurred." He not only knew the events, but all the factors in the chain that led to it. His eyes could see all the way back to the era of the First Temple, to the Jews bowing down to the idol of Nevuchadnezzar, and to his ancestor Binyamin who didn't bow to Esav. He understood how each link fit and that he was destined to help the Jews rectify where they had failed. "And Mordechai tore his clothing." We tear clothing in mourning because just as when you tear a garment and then sew it up it's not the same, so too when there is loss, there may be healing, but it's not the same. The Jews were never closer to absolute destruction than they were before the Purim miracle. Desire and pleasure drove them to take part in the feast of Achash-veirosh. They chose to have an identity tied to the body instead of the soul. Therefore Mordechai donned sack cloth and ashes to awaken a sense of mortality and humbleness. He wanted to bring the Jews to the realization of what they had become and where it could lead them.

The *Megilah* says about Mordechai, "He cried a great and bitter outcry." The same language is used regarding Esav when he realized Yaakov had taken the blessings. There was something of Yaakov within Esav that longed for meaning and focus and that is why he wept. The desire to rule the world is the trace of Esav within us. However it can be a means to an end, to raise the world to holiness, so that the point of dominance becomes sanctified. Esav's crying for the part of him that was Yaakov that couldn't be expressed, was paralleled by Mordechai's crying for the

Jews' continuity, for their ability to rectify the world that was now in jeopardy.

The *Megilah* writes how Mordechai came till the gate of the king but could not go further because he was clad in mourning. Likewise, prayer has the ability to pass the heavenly gates and ascend to the divine throne, but only if there is joy and respect accompanying it. "In every state, in every place where the king's written word and law reached there was great mourning." The Jews realized that they were at the brink of annihilation and they reacted accordingly. They didn't go into denial or engage in political or economic schemes to save the situation. They responded with fasting and repentance. They were mourning not only their individual fate but the fate of the nation. They realized if they would be destroyed, it would leave a gaping void that would be impossible to fill.

Mordechai tells Hasach to tell Esther to go to the king and plead for mercy. Esther was a master of *tzniut* and *tefilah*. *Tzniut* is about having an identity that's not externalized. It's about tapping into the true internal self. The deeper a person is, the fewer the hurdles they have to jump over for their *tefilah* to work. Many of us have trouble focusing in on *tefilah*. Material thoughts grab us because our identity is to a large degree external. If we would work on developing a stronger inner self, our minds wouldn't wander that way. Esther was the perfect emissary. Even so, she told Mordechai to gather the Jews and pray. She said, my prayers alone won't do it. She knew that collective *tefilah* and *teshuva* have enormous power over an individual's efforts.

Purim is *yom k'Purim*, like Yom Kippur. It's about forgiveness, wiping away sins, erasing the ugliness, and revealing what's beautiful. The ugliness was the banquet which wasn't technically forbidden but was disastrous to their inner identity. Esther demanded a three day fast. She needed them to get to the very edge and to do so in a committed way. In that place of longing and redefining and saying, "I know who I want to be, not who I don't want to be," something greater than Yom Kippur came forth. The vision Mordechai and Esther had was almost completely future oriented. They guided the Jews to return to Hashem with love. True repentance is not just a matter of looking back and saying, "This wasn't right," but a matter of looking forward and saying, "This is who I want to be and can be." At the Splitting of the Sea Hashem silenced the angels, "My handiwork is perishing and you're singing." If Hashem mourned the lost potential of cruel Egyptians, imagine how much He mourns the loss of a single Jew. Imagine how much He rejoices when we come back and validate the world's purpose. We have to look at each other through Hashem's eyes. We have to be able to say what Esther said, "Gather all the Jews" not just the *tzadikim* but everyone, because we all have limitless potential. The more we recognize our inherent greatness, the more we can tap into the place where *teshuva m'ahava* stems from. At Sinai, the Jews accepted the Torah out of fear but on Purim they reached a higher level with love. *Teshuva m'ahava* tells Hashem, "I want *deveikut* with you. I don't want anything to stand in the way, not sin, desire, or exile. May we merit to return to Him with love and joy.