

Lots of Luck: Purim

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

As it is with names in general, the name of a holiday reveals its inner essence. Why then is the upcoming holiday called Purim, since the actual lottery comprises only a small part of the miracle? Further, why wasn't it called *Pur*/lottery in the singular, rather than *Purim*/lotteries in the plural.

The Sifsei Chaim notes that every year as part of the *Yom Kippur* service, the fate of two goats was determined by lottery, one to be sacrificed on the altar and the other to be sent to Azazel, where it would be thrown off one of the cliffs. Secondly, when Joshua led *Bnei Yisroel* into the Promised Land, the division of the land among the tribes was also carried out through lottery. We see that the lottery is a matter of faith, a method through which God can point us in the appropriate direction according to His plan. In contrast, a non-believer views the lottery as a matter of coincidence. Amalek, of whom Haman is a descendant, is the paradigmatic advocate of chance, of instilling doubt into the belief that Hashem runs the world.

The Torah writes that we must destroy Amalek, "*Asher korcha baderech, who happened upon you on your way, by chance.*" Amalek instilled doubt into us about God's protection and sovereignty. The Megillah uses the same root word. Mordechai informs Esther of everything *asher korohu*, that happened to him with regard to the decree against the Jews, using the *Torah* words about Amalek to help her understand both the physical and the spiritual danger inherent in the situation. Haman uses the exact same phrase to tell Zeresh of the calamities *asher korohu*, that happened to him regarding giving honor to his enemy Mordechai. However, Mordechai understood that the decrees were not just chance happenings, but presented a path to approach Hashem in faith, knowing that His will would be done. Haman, on the other hand, viewed the current reversal of honor between himself and Mordechai as simply a matter of bad luck and unfortunate

coincidence. In actuality, there were two lotteries being cast at this time, one was Haman's lottery and the other was Hashem's lottery, writes Rabbi Strickoff. He quotes the *Bnei Yissachar* that the verse states that the lottery was cast before Haman, but does not state who cast it. Although Haman believed he was in control of the chances, it was really Hashem Who was deciding the outcome and Who caused the date to fall in the month of Adar.

Rabbi Aharon of Karlin quoting the *Bnei Yissachar* and the Arizal explains that each month of the year is paired with a different part of the human head. *Adar* is matched with the nose and the sense of smell. Even the names of the heroes of Purim reflect this, Mordechai being derived from myrrh and Hadassah, the sweet smelling myrtle. What is the significance of the sense of smell to our redemption? All the senses were involved in the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, except for the sense of smell. Hashem therefore caused the lottery to fall in the month untainted by sin and more providential for salvation. The message for us is that we are always to recognize Hashem's hidden hand in everything. Although it seemed that Haman was casting the lots, it was actually Hashem determining the outcome in His own lottery for *Bnei Yisroel*. Hence, two parallel lotteries were being run, and the holiday is named in the plural, *Purim*.

We must remember that since Hashem is the one controlling every situation, even that which appears challenging is being orchestrated for our ultimate benefit. Although the events of the lotteries appeared traumatic, they were instrumental in bringing us closer to Hashem and reaccepting the Torah with joy. Therefore, when our Sages say we should not be able to distinguish between "blessed is Mordechai" and "cursed is Haman", they are implying that what may appear to be challenging to us now, may be Hashem's way of granting us great blessings in the future. Rabbi G. Eisman writes, what greater joy can there be to

understand that Hashem is always with us, especially in the times of our greatest trials. Therefore, Hashem is especially receptive to our prayers on this day.

Asufat Maarachot points out that we most appreciate something when we have invested ourselves into acquiring it. Because the lottery was the catalyst and the medium for our *teshuvah*, the holiday was called Purim.

Building on the comment of Be'er Yosef, that the entire *Megilla* has to be understood for its hidden implications, we can suggest that we call the holiday Purim to remind us of Yom Hakipurim. Rabbi Strickoff notes that both holidays involved the casting of lots, on both holidays we fast and feast, although in reverse order, and both holidays are set aside for atonement. Yet Purim is even greater as *Yom Kippur* atones only for those who do *teshuvah*, while *Purim* atones for all sinners. Hashem's clemency is a reflection of our clemency on *Purim* when we are obligated to extend our hand to all who request our help regardless of their worthiness. Similarly, on *Purim*, Hashem does not question our sincerity but charitably forgives us our sins. Likewise, the Sefas Emes notes that just as Esther approached the king without the proper protocol, so too, may we approach the King on Purim outside the proper protocol and ask Him for help.

The Netivot Sholom notes that Hashem is so close to us on Purim that we are afraid His presence will be apparent, and the Satan will try to steal this precious "crown" from our midst. To confuse the Satan, we engage in revelry. But, cautions the Netivot Shalom, don't become so involved in the revelry that you forget the sanctity of the day and lose the opportunity to approach Hashem. The gate is open. Pray fervently, recite *Tehillim* for those in need. Demonstrate your love for others through *mishloach manot* and gifts to the poor, and your heart will open up to greater love for Hashem.



The Power of Women to Partner with Hashem Serach Bas Asher Part IV

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Chazal describe the discussion between the different tribes before the splitting of the sea right before Nachson ben Aminadav jumped in. They were a nation united like one person with one heart. So too, when the Jewish people re-accepted the Torah at the time of Mordechai and Esther they had to be one. Our goal is to be able to experience the understanding, knowledge, and clarity of Torah and connection with Hashem that is higher than *Matan Torah* and Purim. This is the ultimate connection at the time of *Mashiach*. We have to work on being unique but at the same time we must remain united. In this way we can accomplish more than as an individual. The problem of dissension is

still something we struggle with. This is why the Chofetz Chaim placed such emphasis on guarding one's tongue and seeing the good in others because that is the key to redemption. The way to correct this sin is *ahavat chinam*, loving people for no reason than that Hashem created them for a specific purpose.

There was a certain strength to Serach's words when she said, "I witnessed it." It teaches us that there are moments of revelation that connect us to Hashem. And there are times that are difficult such as when Yaakov and his children were forced to go down to Egypt. The years of suffering in exile that ensued made us forget that the exile in fact

was an expression of mercy that would lead us to purification and rebirth. Serach is testimony that Hashem is with us, interested in us, and will ultimately bring us to redemption. She calls herself *eim*, a mother, one who gives life to the future by bringing children into the world and raising them. She says she is with the Jewish nation to help them achieve *emunah* and *shalom*. Our mission at all times is hidden but it includes faith in Hashem and peace. We don't have prophecy, but Hashem sends us messengers in all generations to help us attain the truth. He sends us what we need to accomplish our mission on this world. May we merit to achieve it.

Agonut Part III

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dayan Shlomo Cohen

The following are cases where the issue of *agonot* arose. When the Titanic ship went down, there were a lot of Jewish people on board. Most of the bodies were never recovered. Can we presume the husbands died? When the World Trade Center fell on 9/11, not all the bodies were recovered. Anyone in the building above the floors where the planes hit, we assume died. But what about those who were on lower floors?

A British businessman was in Manhattan on the morning of 9/11 and someone told him to visit the WTC. He was never heard from again. There were people who lost their memory and were found months afterwards in hospitals on the other side of New York. How can we know if the husband is still alive somewhere? Just the fact that we haven't heard from him, is that enough of a proof to allow the wife to remarry? How long can we wait before we allow the wife to remarry?

In the Yom Kippur War, many soldiers disappeared. How do we know if they died or

were captured? Although the Egyptians may have given over lists of captives, the fact that someone's name wasn't on the list doesn't mean he died. Until there is a peace treaty, you can't trust any information you get from the enemy. If someone fell on the battlefield, those around him cannot testify that he died. Perhaps they were confused and did not understand clearly what was going on.

Determining the status of an *agonah* is a serious matter. If the wife thinks her husband is dead and remarries, and then the first husband comes back, any children she has with the second husband are considered *mamzerim* on a *d'royasa* level. It's a tragic situation as they cannot marry anyone apart from another *mamzer*. If she goes back to her first husband and has children, they too are *mamzeirim* but on a *d'rabanun* level. A *mamzer d'orayasa* cannot marry a *mamzer d'orayasa* and cannot marry anyone else because any offspring would be considered *mamzeirim*. The woman loses her *ketuba* from both husbands because she did what she

shouldn't have done.

The Shulchan Aruch writes, based on the Gemara, that if you see someone drown in an open sea, you cannot testify that the person is dead. The fact that you saw him go down, doesn't mean he didn't come up. If it was a lake where you can see the land all around and you didn't see him come up, you can be sure he's dead and you can testify to that. *Beit din* would then allow his wife to get married. The Gemara brings a case of a person that went under water in a lake in a place where one could see the land. For three days he didn't come up, but then he did. He may have been caught in an air pocket that allowed him to survive. The Gemara learns that before deciding if a person in fact died, one should wait a little while. If the vast majority of people in that situation would have died, it is still not enough proof to allow the wife to get remarried. Although usually in *halacha* we go after majority, in the case of the *agonah*, *trei ruba*, two majorities are needed.