

Tree's Treason

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

Our Sages point to a verse at the very beginning of human existence that hints to Haman. When Adam and Chava ate of the forbidden fruit, Hashem asks "*Hamin haetz ... achalta?* Did you eat...of the tree?" By changing the vocalization of the consonants, we can read the words as *Haman haetz*. Eating the forbidden fruit was the beginning of sin, explains Rabbi Schwab. It was the first instance of man following his own desires. The Shvilei Pinchas points out that Haman used the first sin as his model. If Adam and Chava could be faulted for eating inappropriately from the King's bounty, so Bnei Yisroel could be faulted for eating inappropriately at the Persian king's feast. Just as the fate of all humankind was sealed by inappropriate eating, the fate of the Jewish nation would be sealed by inappropriate eating.

But something happened on the seventh day, when the king's heart was glad with wine. It was Shabbat and His people sanctified it with *kiddush*. The Shvilei Pinchas explains that according to many commentators, the prohibited fruit was the grape. Had Adam waited just a few short hours, he could have used it for *kiddush*. But instead of obeying God's command, he succumbed to the allure of his own ego and caused the primal light to be hidden. Every week when we recite the *kiddush* and use the wine as Hashem willed it, we are rectifying the sin of Adam. Eating the fruit of the tree mixed good and evil so that the element of certainty of Hashem and His word would now be unclear. This was what the serpent, Amalek, and Haman all wanted Bnei Yisroel to feel. Even though it appeared as if they had severed their connection with Hashem, when they made *kiddush* they affirmed that they were still connected to Hashem. This eventually paved the way for their redemption.

Sichot Ba'avodat Hashem points out that in commemoration of the role that food and drink played in the Purim saga, we use food and drink in positive ways on Purim. We share our food by sending *shalach manot*, we have a Purim *seudah*, we drink wine, and we teach our children that food's purpose is not to satisfy gluttonous appetites, but to elevate it to Hashem's service.

The Tallelei Chaim compares the process by which Adam and Chava were created to the history of Bnei Yisroel. At the first stage, Adam and Chava were fashioned back to back. But Hashem wanted them to choose to be together of their own free will so He created an intermediate phase. Adam was put to sleep while his rib was removed and reformed into a separate entity. Only then could Hashem bring Chava back to Adam and they could choose to unite on their own. This desired outcome, although probable, (given that no one else existed) was not guaranteed. It is comparable to the process of raising children. In the first stage, the child has little choice but to follow the dictates of his parents. When he enters adolescence he begins a stage of questioning and searching for his own identity. As he reaches adulthood and freely chooses to follow the path of his parents, his relationship with his parents becomes one of face to face, of understanding and gratitude.

Similarly, Bnei Yisroel were in a state of childhood from the time of the Exodus until the Persian exile. Everything was given to them without effort on their part. They were redeemed from Egypt with great miracles, they were presented with the written Torah, they built the Temple in which ten miracles took place on a daily basis. But Hashem wanted Bnei Yisroel to grow up, to accept the Torah of their own free will. This required the stage of "sleep" and uncertainty which unfolded with the Purim episode. Hashem, the parent,

stepped back, hid His face, and hoped that His children would choose to come back to Him.

Haman grasped this perilous phase. He told Achashveirosh, "*Yeshno am echad* – one nation is asleep." They no longer observe the *mitzvot*; they are no longer connected to their God. Let us grab this opportunity to destroy them. But when Bnei Yisroel returned with fasting and prayers, Hashem lovingly embraced them and saved them. They now accepted the Torah by choice and their relationship with Hashem became one of face to face. This was the ultimate "turn about" alluded to in the *Megilah*.

When Adam sinned he hid from Hashem. Did he think he could run away from the Creator? Doubt had entered the picture, and God now played by man's rules. He asked, "Where are you?" and then, "*Hamin haetz ... achalta* – did you eat of the tree?" Certainly Hashem knew the answers, but suddenly Adam wasn't so sure. The serpent had accomplished its mission. That doubt is personified nationally in Amalek whose numerical equivalent is *safek*, doubt (240), and individually in Haman. We proved that we wanted an intimate relationship with Hashem, and He paved the way to rebuild the Temple.

Today, without the Temple, we still have to opportunity to approach God "face to face" through our prayers. On Purim every Jew's *tefilah* is as powerful as that of a *tzadik*, particularly after the Megilah reading. Let us grasp the opportunity and use it wisely.



The Month of Adar

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshie Nssenbaum

The Sefer Hayetzira teaches that Adar represents the letter *kuf*. *Kuf* resembles the word *kof*, a monkey. Monkeys imitate whatever they see. In the Hebrew alphabet there are the only two letters with parts that are separate from their source, *kuf* and *hei*. These letters symbolize two aspects of the soul. The soul is a part of Hashem. Yet it comes down into this world into what we perceive as a separate entity in order to fulfill its mission. The Arizal teaches that there are there are souls associated with *kuf* and *hei* represented by the first children born into this world, *Kayin* (*kuf*) and *Hevel* (*hei*). *Kayin* symbolizes *adama*, rooted stability associated with lower wisdom, while *Hevel* represents upper wisdom. He was philosophical and

theoretical, a nomadic shepherd wandering from place to place. There are people who embody *machshava* (thought) and those who personify *maaseh* (action). Both of these elements of the soul can be used to bond with Hashem and to help others connect to Him.

The Gemara says *kuf* also represents *kedusha* (holiness). It follows that the letter *kuf* can imitate the essence or can be the essence itself. *Adar* is the month of masks. It's a time when things are blurred. You don't know if the person is dressed up or if he is the real McCoy. A person can imitate something or he could actually be it. One of the *tikunim* of Adar is to take a close look at our *avodat Hashem*. Is it holy, or is it a mask imitating *kedusha*? Is it

for real or is it superficial?

At the giving of the Torah, Klal Yisrael said, "We will do and we will hear." Yet we find the Midrash that says that Hashem lifted the mountain over their heads and compelled them to receive it. Was it an acceptance of love or of force? The Gemara explains that although the Jews wanted to fully commit, they weren't there yet. Therefore, Hashem had to hold the mountain over their head to bring forth their true inner will. It was on Purim that *Klal Yisrael* re-accepted the Torah out of love. This is our *avodah* in Adar, to progress from the superficial acceptance at *Har Sinai* to the level of *kimu v'kiblu* (acceptance out of love) on Purim.

Eternal Struggle: Mordechai & Haman #2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

"*Ish Yehudi haya b'Shushan habira.*" There was a Jew in the capital of Shushan and his name was Mordechai. Whenever the word *ish* is used in Tanach it connotes a person of importance. It is also sometimes used to describe certain categories of angels. *Ish* is made up of the word *eish* (fire) and the letter *yud* in the center. Fire can create energy and warmth or destruction and chaos. The soul is compared to fire because its nature is to rise. It too can energize or destroy. The *yud* symbolizes spirituality and the future world. *Ish* is one who has succeeded in elevating his physicality for *kedusha* (holiness).

"*U'shemo Mordechai ben Yair...ish yemini.*" His name was Mordechai. Mordechai was called *ish yehudi*, from the root word *hodaah*, to thank. Similarly, the Jews are collectively called *Yehudim*, which teaches us that gratitude is a central aspect of Judaism. The Maharal explains that *yehudi* can be read as *yechudi* – the one who sees uniqueness and unity in the world where others might see randomness and separation. Mordechai was a man of great spiritual stature. He had the fierceness and single-mindedness of Binyamin, who wasn't born yet when Yaakov bowed down to Esav and therefore felt no subservience to the forces of evil. He also had the singularity and unity of Yehuda.

Yair connotes one who brings light. *Ish yemini*

hints to *Eretz Yisrael* which is called *Eretz Hayemin*. Mordechai was a great lover of the land. He was expelled three times. First with the royal people, then the important people, and then the common people. Yet he kept coming back. *Eretz Yisrael* is the spiritual center of the world and Mordechai had enormous spiritual yearning. His name is a contraction of the phrase *mor d'ror* (myrrh), a scent used in the ketoret offering. *Ketoret* was the most spiritual of all the offerings. It had no animal elements tying it down to this world. This was Mordechai.

The Gemara depicts Esther as green. Green is a medium color. It has the coolness of blue and the heat of yellow. *Hadassim* are inconspicuous plants. Esther viewed herself as ordinary. The Gemara quotes a hint to Esther in the Torah, "*Anochi haster astir panai ba'yom hahu.*" Esther saw Hashem in every person and every situation, even in a time of divine concealment. The level of connection most people have to Hashem is through the way their parents treated them. If they were compassionate and caring they can model that relationship with Hashem. Esther never knew her parents. Yet she achieved a level of bonding with Hashem that was very deep.

"*U'vezeh hanara b'ah el hamelech...b'erev hi ba'ah u'vaboker hi shava.* Thus the girl went to the king...in the evening she would come and

in the morning she would return." Hashem gives us exactly what we need to accomplish our mission on this world. The reason why a person might fail is not because he didn't have what he needed, but because he didn't use it. When man goes from the place of mortals in this world to the palace of the King in the next world he will have to give an accounting. He will experience the *boker* and the *erev*. He will see his failings, the darkness, and his successes, the morning light. Then he will be sentenced to either *gan eden* or *gehinom*. Unless he is called by the King to be sent back down to this world, he will go through *tikun* in the next world.

"*Vatasa chen v'chesed l'fanav.*" She found grace and kindness in the eyes of the king. The way you view someone is how they will see you, as the verse says, "*K'mayim panim el panim kein lev ha'adam.*" Just being in the presence of Esther awakened within people a sense of their own significance, grace, compassion, and goodness. *Chen* is analogous to the pupil of the eye, the part that lets in light. *Chesed* is compared to the iris which contracts and expands and is unique to every person. Hashem favored Esther because of the kindness and goodness that she exuded and because of the way she faced her formidable challenges with faith and equanimity.