

Pardes Yehuda

Weekly Torah insights translated and revised by Duvud Pinchas Rose, based on the Yiddish יהודה פארדיס by Yehuda Zvulun Klitnick

פרשת תצוה
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Tetzaveh Purim

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לעילוי נשמת אביו מרדכי בן ראובן ואמו שרה לאה בת אביגדור ע"ה

This Shabbos as a prelude to Purim

ואתה תצוה את בני ישראל: (כ"ז כ)

Now you shall command the children of Israel ... (27:20)

Apart from its most transparent meaning of "command", תצוה can have the extended meaning of "connect, join", such as in the expression צוותא חדה, "a unified group", pointing to unity and love among brethren. There are many themes of Purim which counteract Homon's accusatory ומפוזר ומפורד "ישנו עם אחד מפוזר ומפורד ומפוזר ומפורד" – reflecting the יתרון לבבות/ quarrelsome hearts among the Yidden of that time – and which need rectification throughout all generations, זה לאומת זה. The active mitzvos of mishloach manos, matonos le'evyonim, and tzedakah are obvious catalysts for unity among Yidden. Reading the Megilla, in a community joyously assembled, echoes and promotes the unity proclaimed by Esther as prelude to salvation: לך כנוס את כל היהודים "Go and gather all the Jews." Now we know that Shabbos Kodesh has a direct bearing on the ensuing week, particularly should there be a Yomtov coming then. So for this Shabbos, תצוה can mean "You shall bind Klal Yisroel together in unity" and that intention will herald Purim and prime us for the great day. The reading for Parshas Zochor (also this Shabbos) dovetails perfectly: Amalek's strategy was אשר קרך בדרך "he tried to cool down Klal Yisroel" (literally he happened upon you on the way, but the root קר means "cold"), that is: cooling one Yid's feeling for another, making a gulf between them. The unity and Simcha of Purim are the perfect antidotes for Amalek's fractious poison. (שמח זבולון)

Torah compared to Kehuna: not a contest

ואתה תקרב אליך את אחיך: (כ"ח א)

And you bring near to yourself your brother Aaron [to hold the Kehuna/Priesthood](28:1)

Medrash Rabbah (Shemos 37:4) records this dialogue between Moshe and Hashem: Moshe was distressed that Aharon would "own" the Priesthood. "I had my Torah and transmitted it to you, for if not for the Torah, my world would be destroyed." The commentators wonder why Hashem did not allow the Priesthood to also rest in Moshe's hands, alongside the Torah. We must understand that Hashem gave two fundamentals to the world: the Torah HaKedosha and the Eternal Priesthood. Torah had to be Moshe's domain, since he was the humblest of men and we are bidden to "remember the Torah of Moshe my servant" (מלאכי ג כ"ב). Pirkei Avos, at its very inception, teaches "Moshe received the Torah at/from Sinai" – from Sinai specifically, because Mount Sinai exemplified the trait of humility through its low height, the humility perfectly matched with Moshe, the Torah's recipient and conveyor. Our Medrash states: "I have given it to you, because of your unmatched humility." As a result, Aharon was the recipient of Priesthood. And yet withal, the Oibershter assured Moshe that his portion was superior, as Pirkei Avos (6:6) elaborates: Torah is greater than the priesthood ... for... the priesthood is acquired with twenty-four qualities, and Torah is acquired with forty-eight. These are: study, listening, verbalizing... [see Mishna text for details]. By this yardstick, Torah surpassed Priesthood by a factor of two, and Moshe had no reason to be perturbed.

לקוטי אמרי אל- מועלם, תלמיד הבן איש חי

Presenting four toyrehs from Sefer השחר זאב, of הגאון ר' זאב וואלף טננבוים אב"ד ווערפאלט [The common thread running through them all is that just as the Purim events were not attributable

mere "chance", likewise every word in the Megilla is there for a purpose, and none are mere "rhetoric." [DPR]]

1. Two Achashveirosh's?

ונהי בימי אחשורוש הוא אחשורוש המלך מהדו ועד-כוש שבע ועשרים ומאה מדינה: (א א)

Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus -- he was the Ahasuerus who reigned from Hodu to Cush, one hundred twenty-seven provinces (Esther 1:1)

It may be surprising to learn that there were two different rulers named Achashveirosh, but that is the Ibn Ezra's discovery. One ruled over only Persia and Medea, but then a second one arose politically who vanquished a much more far-reaching dominion of 127 provinces. So we see why the Megilla text reads the "days" (plural) of Achashveirosh – there were two potentates with that name. But then the text specifies which one of them we are discussing: the one who ruled 127 provinces.

2. Two Shushans?

בימים ההם כשבת המלך אחשורוש על כסא מלכותו אשר בשושן הביירה: (א ב)
In those days, when King Achashveirosh sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the capital. (1:2)

Achashveirosh located his seat of power in the city of Shushan. The celebratory seuda was in his third year of rulership, when the city became known as Shushan the Capital. But we note that it was not called that in every instance. True, Mordechai hailed from "Shushan the Capital" (איש יהודי היה בשושן הביירה). But then we see three occurrences without the Capital city honourific:

1. וינקלו היהודיים אשר-בשושן 2. גם ביום ארבעה 3. ויבשר להודש אדר ויהרגו בשושן

We have a fascinating, but little-known geopolitical explanation. Shushan was divided into two boroughs. One borough was the "Palace District" [not unlike the American national-capital District of Columbia [DPR]], which bore the honourific title "Shushan the Capital." Apart from Mordechai, Jews were barred from residing there. His identification by the Megilla reflects his exceptional status. The other borough, which housed the Jewish population, was called simply "Shushan."

3. Making everybody happy

בהראתו את עשר כבוד מלכותו ואת יקר תפארת גדולתו ימים רבים שמונים ומאת יום ובמלאות הימים האלה עשה המלך לכל העם הנמצאים בשושן הביירה למגדול ועד קטן משתה שבעת ימים לעשות פרצון איש ואיש

When he showed ...the splendor of his excellent majesty, many days, yea one hundred and eighty days. When these days were over, the king made for all the people present in Shushan the capital, for [everyone] both great and small, a banquet for seven days to do according to every man's wish....

Why is the separate seven-day feast described as being served according to every man's wish, and not the more grandiose 180-day extravaganza? We must remember that the 180-day carnival included a huge number of participants – civil and military officials from across 127 locales. Ascertaining the precise dietary preferences of such a vast multitude seems to have been a logistical impossibility even for a "big spender" like Achashveirosh. The seven-day feast served only Shushanites, smaller in number and concentrated in one place, and hence with their preferences easier to gauge.

4. All work and no play ...?

בְּהִרְאֹתוֹ אֶת-עֶשֶׂר כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ וְאֶת-יִקְרַת תַּפְאֵרַת גְּדוּלְתוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים שְׂמוֹנִים וְאַמָּת יוֹם:
(7 א)

When he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the splendor of his excellent majesty, many days, yea one hundred and eighty days. (1:4)

We read about a corrupt banquet lasting 180 days – surely “many days” by anyone’s reckoning. Why then does the Megilla tell us that this was protracted over “many days”? The reason is that if the days followed one after the other, continuously, Achashveirosh would scarcely have been able to attend to the administration of his sprawling kingdom of 127 provinces. The feasting days must have been interspersed with working days for public administration. Hence, the combination of working and feasting together stretched out over “many days.”

With Reb Meir'l reading, the Megilla saves Yiddishe parnasa

לְהִיוֹדִים הַיְתֵה אֹרְחָה וְשִׂמְחָה וְשֵׁשׁ וְיִקְרַ: (ח טו)

The Jews had light and joy, and gladness and honour (8:16)

One Purim, two Jewish investors strode into Rav Meir Premishlaner’s chamber bearing large amounts of fine wines. They had sunk large sums in an inventory of sheepskins to sell in Premishlan, only to watch the price of sheepskins take a nosedive, which could have threatened their entire livelihood. The tsaddik calmly instructed his gabbai to ply the men with wine to the point of inebriation and merriment. He took hold of a Megilla and said “Your salvation lies in the holy words on this scroll” and proceeded to parse a familiar posuk in a very novel way, custom-tailored for his two supplicants: לְהִיוֹדִים הַיְתֵה עוֹרָה ("The Jews had skins" [‘skins’ and ‘light’ (אֹרְחָה and עוֹרָה) are homonyms in Ashkenazic pronunciation], but the price has fallen sharply. The only thing to do is to respond with high-level וְשִׂמְחָה וְשֵׁשׁ וְיִקְרַ. Since you’re now וְשֵׁשׁ וְיִקְרַ ‘joyful’, וְשֵׁשׁ וְיִקְרַ will prevail [the root יקר means ‘dear’ or ‘expensive’] and the market price for sheepskins will rise again.” The next day, that’s precisely what happened and the two business partners were back in the black – thanks to Rav Meir’s intervention, catalyzed by Purim intoxication.

At the end of the First World War in 1917, Czar Nikolai II still sat on his throne in Russia. He was a wicked monarch and ruled oppressively with an iron hand, hated by Jews and gentiles alike. In that fateful year, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin launched what was later to be known as the October Revolution, which overthrew the Czar, and established the USSR, the Soviet Union. There was an earlier failed attempt at revolution in 1905, with Lenin’s active participation. He fled and hid in Switzerland but returned to Russia, where he became a hunted target of the Czar. The Holy Chofetz Chaim related what happened next. Word of Lenin’s hiding place reached the Czar, who dispatched a squad of crack soldiers to arrest

him. On horseback, Lenin managed to give them

the slip and wound up in a Jewish village, where he begged a householder to conceal and rescue him. When the soldiers started searching house-to-house, the man suggested an extreme disguise to Lenin: put on this tallis and tefillin and pretend to daven like a Jew! The ruse worked and the soldiers were fooled. When they finally left town, Lenin

told his benefactor, “I’m on the verge of deposing the Czar and taking control of all Russia. Rest assured that I won’t forget how you helped me”, and took down the Yid’s name. Shortly thereafter, the Revolution succeeded in ousting and gruesomely executing the Czar and his entire family and putting power in Bolshevik hands, with Lenin at the helm of a new Communist state. One day, an official emissary arrived at the Yid’s cottage with a summons to meet with Lenin in his office in Peterburg, but with the assurance that he had nothing to fear. When he was ushered into the leader’s office, Lenin received him warmly. “I called you here for one reason – to thank you again for saving me from the Czar’s men. But note well: you may think that you rescued one fugitive. But I tell you that you actually rescued the entire country of Russia. I’m giving you a letter which will guarantee access to me, and any time you need a favour from me, you can ask directly and I promise to help you.”

A few years passed, and a group of eighteen bochurim were caught trying to sneak across the border from Lithuania into Russia without proper papers. They were seeking to find an environment more conducive to learning Torah than what they had in Vilna. The boys were apprehended and jailed. At that time, violating immigration laws was a capital offence, and their lives truly hung in the balance. As gadol hador, Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky became personally involved and remembered hearing the Chofetz Chaim’s description of the village Yid to whom Lenin owed a favour. He was able to locate the man and begged him to travel posthaste to Peterburg and ask Lenin personally to have the bochurim released and permitted to remain in Russia. Lenin, the ruthless Communist, was good to his word and signed an order for the bochurim’s release, which was followed to the “T”. When Rav Chaim Ozer met the Yid again, his words were: “You may think that you rescued one non-Jew, but in truth, you rescued an entire generation of Torah scholars.” Reviewing this story, the late maggid Rav Yaakov Galinsky ZT”L provided one gripping detail: One of the bochurim was named Yaakov Yisroel Kanievsky, the future Kehillas Yaakov, known as the Steipler Gaon, and father of the famed Rav Chaim Kanievsky of Benei Beraq, Eretz Yisroel, עמרי”ש who is universally recognized as a ba’al mofes and one who knows kol haTorah kuloh.

STORIES OF THE WEEK:

- 1. Reb Meir'l interprets a posuk
- 2. The Steipler Gaon saved by the evil Lenin

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