

SYLLABUS

Rabbi Allen Schwartz

5 MEGILLOT

Goals of Course To analyze the 5 Megillot and gain insight to the style of Chazal and Medieval commentaries, to analyze wisdom literature, allegorical interpretation and historical Biblical accounts.

Kohellet

List of specific verses and commentaries throughout the book. Such general topics as biblical canonitzation, biblical wisdom literature, Good and evil are discussed.

Esther

Brief overview of the entire book. 2 articles on Esther are assigned.

Shir Hashirim

Brief overview of the entire book. Review sections of Da'at Mikrah are assigned. General topics of exile and redemption and approach of Chazal, Rashi and Ibn Ezra are discussed.

Ruth

Textual analysis of entire book with commentary.

Eicha

Overview of entire book, textual analysis of Chapter 3. Also, Jeremiah Chapter 20.

Needed for every class: 5 Megillot Mikraot Gedolot; full Tanach. Handout sheets when necessary.

Requirements:

Optional paper must be handed in on day of review class.

BOOK OF RUTH: AN OVERVIEW

- I Narrative style of Ruth
- II Compare beginning of the book to the end
- III Gemillut Chasadim in Ruth
- IV Doresh shemot
- V Reason for writing the book
- VI How do Hebrews feel about Moabites
- VII What type of person is Boaz? Boaz - Yehuda Ruth - Tamar
- VIII What exactly happened in the Goren?
- IX What is Boaz's obligation to Ruth? to Naomi?
- X Notice the Hashgacha Pratit that pervades the entire story,
and compare to Megillat Esther
- XI Ramban's "Sod Nistar V'nifla" in Ber: 38:8 and Iyyov 33:30

RUTH REVIEW

11-9

Background - (A) Gen 18-19 Birth of Amon and Moav who owe their existence to Abraham.

- (B) Num 22-24 Balak King of Moav hires Balaam to curse Israel.
- (C) Deut. 23: 4-8 Moav may not join the congregation of G-d.
- (D) Judg 3: 12-30 Israel subjugated by Moav.
- (E) Sam I 17: 55-57 David's genealogy tested.

Purpose of Book (A) Justify David's lineage.

- (B) To teach the power of gemilus chasadim.

Style of Book (A) Every verse but 8 beginning with "ל" (vuv).

- (B) Compare style to Parshat Vayeshev.
- (C) Cause and effect of events.

10 Famines - Targum to 1st verse. Ruth has a messianic theme of people thirsting for the word of G-d. (The tenth famine - Amos 8:11).

Responsibility - Elimelech shirks his responsibility as do his sons, and they are all punished.

Naomi survives but surely endures much pain herself. Verse 1 - ל גו ר
Verse 2 - ג י ה י ו ש ו.

Drashot of Names - More than in any other Biblical story.

Elimelech	- kingdom tame
Naomi	- pleasantness
Mara	- bitterness
Machlon	- disease
Chilyon	- destruction
Ruth	- appease
Orpa	- neck turned
Boaz	- strength
P'loni Almoni	- John Doe

Syntax - Number and gender; various derashot.

Keri Uketiv - עֵשָׂה יְשַׁׂעְיָה

A lesson in what to expect from G-d. Concept of Keri Uketiv.

Marriage as Menucha - מִשְׁרָךְ וּמִשְׁעָנָה

Husbands and wives meeting at wells.

RUTH REVIEW

1:10-22

Regarding Conversion

- (1) Ibn Ezra - Conversion takes place in Moav. Otherwise no obligation of Yibum.
- (2) Chazal - Conversion takes place at 1:10-18.
 - (A) Refuse three times, convert insists three times 1:10; 14; 16-17.
 - (B) - Teach laws of Shabbos, sexual conduct, relating to of K'lal Yisrael, relationship to HASHEM, the stringency of the court system and philosophical issues.

Ruth's Hope in Israel

Only for a son of Naomi's
(v.13) וְלֹא תַּמְתַּחֲנֵן לִפְנֵי הָעָם לְאֶלְקָנָה might imply that others would marry her, only she is מִצְרָא קָדָשָׁה לִבְנָה, an obligation that is difficult to find.

Ruth's and Orpa's Progeny - David and Goliath.

Formal Conversion (v. 16-17)

Ruth Follows With Usage of G-d's Name (v.17)

Compare to Paraoh and Yosef at Gen. 41.

Morah Matshut Bach Shel Aron - Vilna Gaon: פָּרָשָׁת אַרְבָּה.

Naomi and Mara - נָרָה with an N.

נָרָה; נ in a woman's name.

Barley Harvest - Between Pesach and Shavuos.

RUTH REVIEW

2:1-14

Elimelech's Family: Salmon, Elimelech, Ploni Almoni and Naomi's father were all brothers.

She'elat Shalom B'shem: Boaz's rapport with his workers.

Boaz Notices Ruth: Tzniut and knowledge of halakha.

Na'ars Reply: Chazal's approach.

Boaz's Care of Ruth: (vv. 8-9): D'rashot Chazal.

Boaz's Prophecy: (v.12)

Ruth and Boaz's Handmaids: (v.13) Targum, Rashi, Ib'n Ezra, and Ruth Rabbah.

Boaz Tests Ruth: Laws of Conversion. See 2 Kings 4:43.

Ruth is Satisfied: S'forno on Yoseph's Frugality.

2:15-23

Boaz's Generosity: (vv.15-16) Halakhic implications.

Esfah of Barley: Symbolism and Ib'n Ezra! See also Ib'n Ezra Gen. 14:14, Zech. 3:8.

A Message of צדקה: (v.19)

Once Again, Chesed To כהן וכהן: (v.20)

בְּעֵדִים-בְּעָרֹת: (v.21-22)

Barley and Wheat: Pesach and Shavuot.

RUTH REVIEW

CHAPTER 3

ללו - See above 1:9.

Boaz's Personality and Disposition

Naomi's Plan: Compare to Tamar at Gen. 38.

Women and Men in Deciding Fate of the Family

יכן: Connotations of יכן.

1st and 2nd Person Interchanging

Images of Feet: Chalitza, Kinyan.

Who Will Tell Whom What To Do?: (v.4;11)

Keri V'lo Ketib; Ketib V'lo Keri: Nedarim 38, Radak 2 Sam. 15:21.

מראשו חין and תרגלה חין

בפְּרַשֶּׁת כָּנְפִידָה: Badeken.

יבם גאל

פלוני אלמוני ערב and עקב

6 Se'orim

Why Didn't Naomi Recognize Ruth?

Boaz Knows Whom To Impress

RUTH REVIEW
CHAPTER 4

Images of Sanhendrin

Why is the Closer Goel Called ? פלון אלון?

Mitzva of Geulat Sadeh: Lev.25

Bircat Chattanim - 10 Men (v.2)

Geulah and Yibbum (v.5)

What is the Reason For X. י Refusal?

Kinyan, Marriage and Yibbum

Why is Rachel 1st?

Reference to Tamar

Unusual Conception

Seven Sons 1S 2:5

Naomi's Son Sanh.19

Davidic Lineage

Purpose of Book

Review of 2-6 P.M.

TIME	3-2 P.M.
Free time - TIME AS A SERVANT OF IN AGAINST SUN WORSHIP	28 min

refuted & refuted
prose & prose &

1-15? per sec 1st

Dear this content last? - sec 1st) 1st

How can there be no?

1-15? 1st
1-15?

and the sign in 2nd from ① see 1st even in the 2nd
[2nd from]

for 1-15? 1st of first part
for 1-15? 1st of first part

for 1-15? 1st of first part
1-15? 1st of first part

why does sun & heat to us
heat in 1st part

→ 16.2!
→ 16.2!
→ 16.2!

sections ending with
prose under 1st
and

introduction of heat even sun / the
systems of achieving happiness

① 1-15? 1st - 1-15? sun C
1-15? 1st

enough is fine

R. 60

see how

leads to skill - C:5

experience

12:4 - 22:26

contrary

on learning

learning

ideas for

repetition

of a job

CSC = 222

advice of

experts

what does every job

in IT lead to?

1) Necessity
2) Quality
3) Quantity
4) Price
5) Time
6) Delivery
7) Customer
8) Profit

1) Quality
2) Delivery
3) Price
4) Time
5) Customer
6) Profit

message of experts who do more

point out
1) CSC - C:5
2) Quality
3) Delivery
4) Price
5) Profit

how can we explain
1) CSC - C:5
2) Quality
3) Delivery
4) Price
5) Profit

Self - CSC - C:5
1) CSC - C:5
2) Quality
3) Delivery
4) Price
5) Profit

1) CSC - C:5
2) Quality
3) Delivery
4) Price
5) Profit

1) CSC - C:5
2) Quality
3) Delivery
4) Price
5) Profit

1) CSC - C:5
2) Quality
3) Delivery
4) Price
5) Profit

therefore weep for and bewail what he has done to his soul . . . it behooves us to return in a spirit of repentance . . . for we have the power to do so (Hil. Teshuvah 5:1, 2).¹

Even as we emphasize man's free will, we are also aware that so much of what happens in life is not of man's making. He does not choose the family into which he is born and reared nor the society whose values will have such an impact upon him. He makes choices, yet major aspects of his life seem to be governed by capricious, chance events and circumstances beyond his control. He is a vulnerable creature whose serenity may suddenly be jarred by overpowering temptations, peculiar turns of events, unexpected political coups, an economic collapse, a terminal illness, or traumatic shocks. The Book of Kohelet portrays this unnerving uncertainty of man's life in these words: "For man also knows not his time; as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, even so are the sons of man snared in an evil time when it falls suddenly upon them" (Eccles. 9:12).² The key word above, *pitor* ("suddenly"), characterizes the vulnerability of man to events which befall him and which are not of his choosing.

This tension between man as chooser and man as victim of circumstances affects him in many ways. It is the basis of his plea for forgiveness on Yom Kippur for, otherwise, why should God give him a second chance? It is also an inducement to him to be humble, since fortune is fickle and can suddenly change. Finally, the uncertainty of man's life is the motivation for many Biblical precepts and Rabbinic enactments and is the primary motive for prayer, as man seeks assurance and sustenance from the Almighty.

...the human species had become unique in the world—there being no other species like it in this respect, namely, that man, of himself and by the exercise of his own intelligence and reason, knows what is good and what is evil and there is none who can prevent him from doing that which is good or that which is evil . . . Let not the notion, expressed by the foolish gentiles and most of the senseless among Israelites, pass through your mind that, at the beginning of a person's existence, the Almighty decrees that he is to be either righteous or wicked . . . wise or foolish, niggardly or generous, and so with all other qualities . . . There is no one that coerces him or decrees what he is to do . . . Accordingly, it follows that it is the sinner who has inflicted injury on himself; and he should

Why Does God Forgive Sinners?

How does God relate Himself to the sinner who has knowingly defied the *mitzvot* of the Torah but now earnestly regrets his

rebelliousness? Judaism teaches the doctrine of *reshuvalah*, repentance, whereby the sinner is granted forgiveness and the chance to rebuild his life on a higher spiritual plane. This is an act of *hesed*, lovingkindness, on the part of God, who seeks not man's punishment but his rehabilitation. Yom Kippur is particularly propitious for the achievement of atonement, especially for grievous sins.³ In the days of the Temple, a dramatic ritual prescribed by the Torah, called the *Avodah*, constituted the climactic moment of the Yom Kippur day.

To the uninformed the *Avodah* must have appeared a very strange ritual. The Talmud classified it as a *luikkah*, a Divine imperative, which the Jew is bidden to observe, even though it defies his human comprehension.⁴ On the other hand, multitudes of worshippers filling the Temple courts were deeply stirred by this ritual. It reflected their state of mind and their desperate yearning for forgiveness. Accordingly, we will suggest an explanation of the *Avodah*, in terms of its impact on the participants, by contrasting the awesome observance of Yom Kippur with the joyful celebration of Purim, as prescribed by Rabbinic enactment.

The Yom Kippur Avodah

For the Yom Kippur sacrificial Temple service (*Avodah*) two male goats were required. "And Aaron shall place lots upon the two goats; one marked for the Eternal and the other marked for Azazel"⁵ (Lev. 16:8). The word *Azazel* is defined by the Gemara (Yoma 67b), the Septuagint, and Rashi as a precipitous and flinty rock, a towering peak, from which the goat was hurled to its destruction.⁶ The goat marked for *Azazel* means, then, "the one that is sent away, dismissed, or entirely removed." The Talmud elaborates: "The two male goats for Yom Kippur are required to be alike in appearance, in size, and in value and were to have been bought at the same time."

(Mishnah, Yoma 5, 1; Gemara, 62a). Though they resembled each other in every respect like identical twins, their destinies were antithetically dissimilar; one was "unto the Lord" (*Lashem*) and was sacrificed on the altar, the other was sent away to Azazel.

How were their destinies decided? Rashi describes the ceremonious casting of lots:

He placed one goat at his right and the other at his left. He then put both his hands into an urn and took one lot in his right hand and the other in his left. These he placed on them (one on each of them). The goat upon which fell the lot bearing the inscription "*Lashem*" was for the Lord and that bearing "for Azazel" was later sent forth to Azazel (Rashi, Lev. 16:8).⁸

Analogy to Purim

The *Ba'ale Hakkabbalah* (Kabbalah exponents) discovered mystical associations between *Purim* and *Yom Kippurim*, the only difference between the two in the Hebrew spelling being the initial *kaf* in *Kippurim*. *Yom Kippurim*, then, would signify "a day like Purim." A strange association! To suggest that Yom Kippur is like Purim, to compare the boisterous Purim to the awesome Yom Kippur, a raucous celebration to a solemn observance! In what way, then, does Yom Kippur resemble Purim?

The Dual Character of Purim

We usually think of Purim in terms of indulgence and merrymaking, to the point of forgetfulness and the dulling of the senses. Actually, Purim is also a day of introspection and prayerful meditation. The Megillah is both a Book of Thanks-

giving and a Book of Distress and Petition. The narrative relates two stories, of a people in a terrifying predicament and also of their great exhilaration at their sudden deliverance.

Since it is impossible to juxtapose contradictory moods into one day, our Sages instituted the Fast of Esther for the thirteenth of Adar in anticipation of Purim. They advanced the supplication aspect of Purim to the preceding day, when *selihot* (penitential prayers) and *Avinu Malkenu* ("Our Father, Our King, we have sinned before Thee") are recited and a mood of solemn penitence prevails. The Fast of Esther and Purim are integrally connected—unlike Passover and *T'a'anit Bekhorim* (Fast of the First Born), where the latter does not form part of the festival and is an extraneous addendum. The Fast of Esther, however, is a genuine Purim day; it reflects the foreboding fear and prayer of the Jews on the thirteenth of Adar as they gave battle to their enemies. Purim day itself celebrates the victory which followed, the sudden miraculous salvation of the people. The joining of a fast day and a feast day bespeaks the dual character of Purim.

Perhaps the feature common to both Purim and Yom Kippur is that aspect of Purim which is a call for Divine compassion and intercession, a mood of petition arising out of great distress. While the Fast of Esther reflects the terror of the threatening physical extinction of the people, the prayerful mood of Yom Kippur emerges out of a sense of spiritual anxiety and the desperate need for reconciliation with God.

Casting of Lots Signifies Uncertainty

Purim and Yom Kippur are also alike in another respect. Both involve the casting of lots (*goral*), a characteristic of games of chance. As for the Purim *goral*, it determined the date chosen by Haman for the destruction of the Jews (Esther 3:7, 9:24, 26). Indeed, the very name *Purim* means "lots." What, we may

ask, is so significant about the method that Haman employed to choose a date? Why should the holiday itself be so named? It seems only a tangential and insignificant detail of the Purim story.

The Megillah is a book of contradictions. It is filled with events that are unreasonable, even absurd, coincidental, pure chance. At one moment the Jews live in security in Persia; at the next, they face destruction. Mordecai is threatened with execution; then, suddenly, he is the Prime Minister. Irrational events and moods transform fear into festivity; and entire situations are suddenly reversed. Purim, therefore, epitomizes the instability, uncertainty, and vulnerability which characterize human life generally but particularly govern the destiny of the Jews. Thus, the name *Purim* (*goral*) expresses the erratic capriciousness of events. It alerts the Jew to the sudden turns of fortune, lurking dangers, the fickleness of life, even as the *goral* itself seems to operate through blind chance.

Theologically, God forgives man's sinfulness precisely because He acknowledges human vulnerability to changing fortunes, presssing circumstances, and the intrusion of the unexpected. Otherwise, sinful man would always stand condemned before his Maker. As Eliphaz said to Job, "Can mortal man be just before God; can a man be pure before his Maker?" (Job 4:17).⁹ Similarly, we read, "If You, O Lord, should note iniquities, O Lord, who shall remain standing?" (Ps. 130:3).¹⁰ The mitigation of His judgment is due to God's recognition that man is subject to pressures and temptations, and is gullible, easily persuaded. Man can be brainwashed by a society which is intellectually agnostic, by the lure of intoxicating pleasures and by the appeal of political and social ideologies which disguise themselves as redemptive (liberating). Such was the overpowering appeal of communism to many idealists, who saw in it the messianic utopia for mankind.

One individual may be saintly because he was reared in

noble surroundings; another succumbs to evil because his home background lacked moral instruction and inspiration. The two may be as alike as twins, with similar dispositions, but the difference in their environments has affected their personalities. Should all sinners, then, be deemed equally guilty? Is not much of man's waywardness due to his susceptibility to external pressures? He finds himself almost overwhelmed by situations not of his own making, and by chance circumstances which propel him in various directions. It is because of this that man can stand before the Heavenly Bar of Justice, hoping for compassion and forgiveness. Despite his free will and his accountability for his deeds, man enters his plea before the Almighty, claiming that he is not the author and designer of the worldly pressures that were too powerful for him to resist. These subverting temptations were thrust upon him by *goral* circumstances.

The Goral Significance of the Avodah

The two male goats were identical, as we previously explained, but their fates led them in opposite directions, as determined by chance (*goral*) decisions, entirely beyond their control. The casting of lots decreed which was to go *Lashem*, to be sacrificed within the Temple, and which to *Azazel*, to be cast out of the camp of Israel, ignominiously to be destroyed. The secret of atonement is thus indicated in the ceremonious casting of the lots. It reflects the basis for the penitent's claim to forgiveness, that his moral directions were similarly influenced by forces beyond his control, that his sinning was not entirely a free and voluntary choice. Only the Almighty can evaluate the extent of human culpability in situations which are not entirely of man's making. Only God knows to what extent a man was a free agent in making his decisions. The *Avodah* is thus a psychodramatic representation of the penitent's state

of mind and his emotional need. Only by entering such a plea can man be declared "not guilty."

Yom Kippur is in this respect like Purim, both involving a *goral*. The compelling intrusion of the unknown and irrational is basic to man's existential condition and it is precisely this weakness which qualifies him to receive God's compassionate forgiveness on Yom Kippur.

Awareness of Uncertainty Leads to Humility

Man's susceptibility to accidental turns of fortune is not necessarily a tragic condition. It can also be the source of ethical virtues and nobility of human character. An awareness of one's vulnerability induces humility, which dispels arrogance and pride. We become aware of the instability of our condition. Maimonides regarded humility as the highest ethical quality of man. Though he consistently counseled the golden mean, *sheviv hazahav*, with respect to other human characteristics, he suspended this balance of moderation when speaking of humility, citing the dictum in *Avot* 4:4, "be humble exceedingly" ¹¹ (Hil. De'ot 2:3).

How is this humility achieved and why should one seek to be self-effacing, especially in the case of people who have obviously succeeded where others have failed? How honest can the profession or practice of such humility be? Why does a successful man not have a right to pride? The answer is that personal triumph and success lead to arrogance, aggressiveness, and ethical insensitivity. But the awareness of one's vulnerability, the knowledge that fortune is fickle, that there ever lurks a hovering threat which can transform our condition —these considerations induce us to be humble and enhance our ethical character. Thus, from an ethical standpoint, vulnerability can cleanse, purify, and ennoble man; it is a spur towards better conduct.

There Are No Accidents

We have spoken of an irrational *goral*, random events in nature and human life. This can easily be misunderstood. Actually, Judaism rejects any belief in a deterministic *mazal* or in a blind *goral*. We do not believe in fate as did the Greeks, who saw everything affected by absurd, unalterable, and ruthless decrees which emanated from the remote unknown. Such fate often clashes with the yearnings of man and crushes his hopes and aspirations, irrespective of his ethical behavior. This, to the Greeks, was the source of human tragedy. Man becomes a helpless pawn in the hands of inexorable forces which cannot be thwarted, even by the gods.

Judaism, even as it knew and tried to comprehend catastrophic events which cruelly destroy man's dreams and hopes, could not accept the existence of the ultimately irrational in human life. Events which we label as accidents belong to a higher Divine order into which man has not been initiated. Not decrees of fate, but rather reasons beyond our comprehension, operate in such instances. We have been granted the opportunity of gaining insights and of accumulating scientific knowledge about the regular course of events and physical nature, but we are excluded from the realm of *goral* understanding. The relationship between the individual and his environment eludes our grasp. To God there are no accidents, though they often appear so to us. Essentially, this is the reply which God gave to Job, who sought to reconcile his painful plight with his faith in God's justice. There is no deterministic fate; all operates on a trans-dimensional plane which is beyond the grasp of man's finite mind.

Vulnerability in Halakhah

There are numerous religious laws, *halakhot*, which seek to minimize the dangers to life. For example, "When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, so that

you do not cause blood to be shed, if any man fall therefrom" (Deut. 22:8).¹² The Talmud extends this regulation to include all uncovered pits and other obstacles which can cause accidental injury to others. Man's vulnerability also extends into the spiritual realm, where he is continually susceptible to subversion. In areas of religious observance our Sages prescribed, "And make a [protective] hedge for the Torah" (Avot 1:1),¹³ thus indicating that regulatory "fences," precautionary restrictions, be enacted around basic religious laws because man's attention is often distracted by temptation.

According to *Hazal*, the primary motivation for prayer is derived from man's feeling of *tzarah*, distress or desperation, and of *tzorekh*, need.¹⁴ Abraham and Isaac prayed for children (Gen. 15:2, 25:31); Jacob prayed for protection from his brother Esau (*ibid.*, 32:11 ff); Moses prayed for Miriam's restoration to health (Num. 12:13). The fragile state of one's condition is a stimulant to prayer. Our *Amida* is filled primarily with petitions reflecting life's menacing uncertainties. Even if one is rich, one prays for material sustenance, *parnassah*; even if one enjoys robust health, one pleads for healing *refu'ah*. Why? The answer is that man is vulnerable and his present blessings may be transformed a few moments later. Complacent satisfaction about one's good fortune is unrealistic; there lurks in the shadows the possibility of sudden reversal. "In the evening one retires with tears, but joy comes in the morning" (Ps. 30:6),¹⁵ and the reverse is equally possible. There can be no wholehearted praise and thanksgiving, *shevah vehodayah*, without an awareness that we may suddenly be reduced to petition, *tehilah*. There can be no sense of need, *tzorekh*, no matter how desperate one's plight, without *shevah vehodayah* for God's blessings and our faith in His eventual redemption.

The existential vulnerability of man, we have shown, is the theological foundation of repentance and atonement, as expressed through the *Avodah* of Yom Kippur. It also induces

IN THE DAYS OF MORDECAI AND ESTHER

Prepared by Rabbi Abraham R. Besdin

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(What follows is a reconstruction from notes taken during a lecture by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik at Yeshiva University in 1973. It is not a literal reproduction. Wherever possible, original phraseology has been retained. Weaknesses are to be ascribed solely to our faulty transmission.)

I. SUBJECTS IN THIS LECTURE

- A) The Megillah story initiated the non-prophetic era in Jewish history.
- B) What kind of people become **נָזְרִים** in both the prophetic and non-prophetic eras?
- C) The differing roles of Mordecai and Esther reflect basic differences between man and woman. Their collaboration effectuated the miracle.
- D) Men and women differ psychically and spiritually. Women are more richly endowed in some crucial areas.

II. THE NON PROPHETIC ERA

A. G-d Stopped Speaking - The prophetic era, which started with Abraham, involving direct and precise communication between G-d and man, had now terminated. G-d stopped speaking to His people; a twilight of silence and fear commenced. A non-prophetic era was now beginning and the Jewish historical experience was changed considerably. Of course, G-d continued His communication with man but its nature was drastically different. In the prophetic era, the message was clear, commanding and specific. Moses, for example, didn't have freedom of action or decision. He was told **בְּכָל־עַמּוֹד**. His role was almost mechanical. He was a messenger of Hashem in a very pronounced sense.

In the non-prophetic era, which the Megillah period initiated, Mordecai received no clearly defined instructions and neither did Esther. Both felt divinely-mandated to act as **נָזְרִים**, but each had to interpret this mandate, consider various

alternative methods of implementation and feel free to exercise one's judgment. G-d here, too, summons men to act, but He gives them no formulation, as if to say, "Act wisely but freely." Added dimensions of resourcefulness, initiative, character and judgment are, therefore, needed. But, the events of the Megillah assure us that G-d does not forsake man; He still intercedes, but differently, in the unfolding of history.

B. Egypt and Persia Contrasted - The redeemer roles of Moses in Egypt and of Mordecai in Persia differed in two respects: a) the events in Egypt were meta-historical, metaphysical; they partook of the obviously miraculous; these were out-of-the ordinary events.¹² In Persia, events seem to fit into normal historical causality; there is nothing which obviously suggests a divine intercession. b) In both cases we have ה' בְּרֵית מִצְרַיִם . In Egypt, however, it is solely G-d who wills and plans, using man only passively. -- הָלֶא כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח מֶלֶךְ עַבְדָיו וְלֹא חִשְׁבָּה . Mordecai, however, has a divine-role awareness which impels him to say to Esther הַנְּתָנוּ לְעֵמֶךָ מִזְמָרָת מִתְּחִילָה וְלֹא כִּי אַתְּ מִתְּחִילָה . The initiative and the form of action are his own.

C. An Enigmatic Era - The non-prophetic era is mystifying; G-d's message is cryptic, enigmatic, with vague hints, suggestive flashes and mysterious intimations, all shrouded in a frightening silence. The Talmud (**תְּבוּלָה קָלָת :**) asks ? תְּמִימָה מִתְּהִלָּה מִכְּלָת : (**דְּבָרִים ל"א :**) **וְאָנֹכִי נֹתֵן סְתִיר פְּנֵי** . What is the meaning of the query and the answer? Our sages are asking, is there any suggestion in the Torah, any vague hint about a future non-prophetic era when G-d's specific revelations will cease? Can we find in the text a suggestion, an allusion to a future confrontation between a wicked prime minister of an august empire and a lonely Jewish girl who bears a heavy load on her shoulders as a messenger of G-d, acting without precise instructions from G-d? The 'בְּמָה' is asking,--how can a Jew act or triumph if messages are unclear? The Talmud replies that even in the non-prophetic era which is characterized by **תְּמִימָה**, man is elected to act courageously,--a superhuman feat in our case for a young girl. The Megillah story records the first major event in the non-prophetic era (in

which we still find ourselves today), with a message that G-d continues to function through selected 'נְזִקָּנִים', even in the Diaspora.

III. THE "HISTORY-MAKERS"

• Both Sexes Are Called By G-d - The Purim נִצָּחָה was achieved by two נְזִקָּנִים, man and a woman. History-making is the foremost role of any person; in this area Judaism never discriminated against women; she cannot make the tenth of a minyan for other reasons but she can make history and shape its destiny. In times of crisis, both may be summoned--(in the critical problem with Yishmael, G-d told Abraham-- בְּכַל אֲשֶׁר תִּחְמֹל) ((Gen. 21:12) אֵלֶיךָ שָׁרֵךְ שָׁמָע בְּקוֹלֶךָ); both sexes are metaphysically worthy of representing G-d in moments of threatening disaster.

The sexes differ, not only physiologically, but also psychically and spiritually. The historical specific role of man cannot be assigned to the woman, and neither the reverse. Despite their distinctive roles, Mordecai and Esther collaborated and we always say בְּכַל מְרֻדְכָּי וְאֶسְתֵּר. Both must be mentioned.

How do their nature's differ? Man, in the role of a teacher, grasps broad truths in the abstract. Woman, in the manner of a disciple, perceives their practicality in terms of implementation. He initiates, being the theoretician; but, he is often clumsy and naive. She completes the task in terms of feasibility, using a 'cunning' (not in the sense of "slyness", but in a positive sense, the craftiness of statesmanship). He is impatient, moving frontally upon an obstacle; she wisely waits for the propitious moment. Together, they brought about the miracle of Purim. In a word, we have no sex role here! We will later illustrate how these distinctive endowments functioned in the Megillah.

Who Are The History Makers? Who are these נְזִקָּנִים whom G-d chooses to implement His will in both the prophetic and non-prophetic eras? These are not simple people; a charismatic quality differentiates them; they humbly and self-sacrificingly play their role and then withdraw from the scene. Such were Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Akiba, Maimonides, the Ari, the Besht and also Mordecai and Esther.

A history-maker somehow transcends his individuality; a mysterious bond relates him to the people; he becomes more than a simple person; he embodies an entire community within himself. Judaism thinks highly of the individual but not as an end in himself but, moreso, as an integral part of the community. In the philosophy of Marx, the individual is nothing; he is submerged underneath social imperatives; to Carlyle, the individual is glorified; to us, man has an "individual-community" dimension.

Such people become the **לב** of the community, in the same manner as Yehudah Halevi in the Kuzari called Israel -- **ישראל בארומת כמו לב באיכרים**. The heart is the barometer which records the condition of the larger organism, its illnesses, its fears, its vacillating emotional life; its constitution changes, depending on the vigor of the body. Similarly, the Jewish heart was commissioned to share the travail of the world, to be involved in the changing fortunes of humanity. The Jewish historical experience is a universal experience; Jewish prayers embrace the entire world. The Jewish people, though outwardly but one nation, embodies within itself, the destiny of the entire world. Similarly, a **נשלה**, **שליח**, is the **לב** of his entire people.

Mordecai Exemplifies This Endowment -- Mordecai was an elderly Jew at this time, an immigrant or the son of a poor immigrant, having been exiled from Judaea. No one knew of his existence; this **איש חרוד** lived in anonymity. Yet, when Mordecai let out a loud and bitter cry -- **ויזעק עזקה בדולח ממלחה** -- all Jews throughout the empire also cried and the city of Shushan was **אבל גדור ליהודי וצום ובקב** -- **נכוכה**. Later on, when Mordecai was elevated to royalty, the whole city rejoiced -- **ומרדי כי מלפני המלך בלבוש מלכות** ... A mysterious, empathetic bond seemed to join Mordecai and his people. The **עקת** of Mordecai was loud, not because a prayer is more efficacious if its volume is louder but because it echoed throughout the community. Similarly so with Esther, when she fasted, all fasted.

At strange idea, indeed!! -- that an individual can embody a people. G-d's interest in Abraham is simultaneously an interest in **עם ישראל**; Moses was **שׂkol כבבָד** **משה רבינו**, -- a truly frightening equation; Millions of people abided within their

ולא ידע איש אם קבורתו psyche, Such individuals do not die,--neither Moses -- or בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל or יַעֲקֹב לא מֵת or יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל חַזְקִים mortality; they continue to resound in the community experience. With such people G-d makes covenants, as He did with Abraham or His commissioning Moses to וְהַצֵּא אֶת עַמִּי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם. The basic premise is that if they can accommodate G-d in the recesses of their personality, in the sense of וְשִׁכְנָתִי בְּתוֹכֶם , they can also absorb the heart-throb of their people as well.

Mordecai, therefore, was not simply an individual; Haman wouldn't have cared about the lack of deference of one elderly Jew. Rather, Haman recognized the larger dimensions of Mordecai: וְיכֹז בְּעִינָיו לְשָׁלָח יָד בְּמַרְדְּכָי לְכֹדֵן, בְּיַהֲבִידָה לְלֹא אָתָה . He saw in Mordecai a hyphenated identity, a "Mordecai-people" equation.

IV. THE DIFFERENT ROLES OF MORDECAI AND ESTHER

A. The Role of Mordecai: We read: וְכֹל יוֹם וְלֹיּוֹם מַרְדְּכָי מִתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי חֶזֶר אֲכִיחַתְּנָשִׁים At first, Mordecai was bewildered, trying to understand the mysterious events preceding and succeeding the elevation of Esther. Impelled by a sense of responsibility, he waited; he refused to leave the palace--; וּמַרְדְּכָי יֹשֵׁב בַּשְׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ -- he didn't leave to pray in the synagogue, lest something monstrous occur in his absence, so psychologically intertwined was he with the situation. Suddenly וּמַרְדְּכָי רָא עֲדָע אֲחֵה בְּקַרְבָּן עַשְׂרֵה he understood what was portending and what Esther's destined role was.

Mordecai, in the "male-teacher" role, now understood why Vashti had refused to come to the king, why the king punished her so, why Esther was so elevated; previously inexplicable events suddenly became unravelled.

"מַרְדְּכָי מִתְהַלֵּךְ" - שניצחן רַمְזָן חַשְׁמִים. אמר -- וּכְיַי אָפֵשׁ לְצַדְקָת זוֹ שָׁחַנָּא לְעַרְלָל... אֶלָּא שְׁעִיר יְדָכֶר בְּגַדּוֹל שְׁפָרָעָעַל... וְשָׁאַל וְעַתִּידָא לְחַנְצָז עַל גַּדְעָן (מִיר) The sibboleth had selected her, not him, to be the redeemer of the Jewish people. His role was a) to apprise Esther of his interpretation of events and b) more significantly, to make her realize that only she and no one

else was charged by the Almighty with a "mission-impossible"; indeed, this was the raison de'etre of her very queenship. ... **ונגד לו מרדכי אמר כל אשר קרהנו אה לא מילכוה**.

Thus, Mordecai was the initiator, the teacher; he knew first and conveyed the news to her; he now stimulated her to act. At this point, the role of leadership moved over to Esther; the leader figure, at this point is Esther who became the master, giving orders -- **לך כנום אתה כל ההורדים**, with Mordecai becoming obedient, a subordinate -- **ויעש ככל אשר צוחה עליך אמורה**. The Megillah clearly indicates this shift in the central role, from Mordecai to Esther; the spotlight shifted to her who, employing her **בינה יתרה נחנה לאשה נחנה**, moved forward, seeking a proper course to follow. Why the need for the change from male to female in the achievement of the **גָד**? It is their different natures. The truth came to him but he was helpless without her.

B. Why Esther Rejects Mordecai's Strategy - Mordecai demands of Esther immediate action, intercession, to plead, protest -- **לכוא אל המלך ולחתה נזן** -- to risk everything, to cry hysterically. Esther rejected this counsel of her teacher; as a woman, she possessed her own native insights. Instead, she procrastinated; she asked for one **מה בקשתך עד חצי הלכבות** and then another. Even when the king said **she still delayed, What was she waiting for?**

To understand her hesitation, we must reconstruct the basics of the situation which existed in Persia at that time, using **מדרשים**, reading between the textual lines and also allowing ourselves some imaginative interpretation. Who was Ahashverus? According to the Talmud, Ahashverus was not a legitimate heir to the throne; **دلא הו**. His father was the steward in charge of the horses of Balshazar; he became king through the sword, as did Napoleon, by destroying his opponents and by marrying Vashti, who was the daughter of Balshazar and the granddaughter of Nebuchadnezer. There was, consequently, an underground resistance movement to this upstart which apparently had even reached into the palace, witness the conspiracy of the two eunuchs, **בבון ותרון**, who had sought to poison the king.

The "H" (מלכ) says that the feast was due to Ahashverus' sense of illegitimacy, his desire to reinforce his status by dazzling his guests with his strength and wealth, to impress and to intimidate. **ובעת שכבש כל הממלכות האלה, למען תקין המלכות** בידך, לך את ושתי שהיתה מזרע נבוכדנצר ליר לאשה, והיה איזורשת עזז, זרמיזז. **חיה המלכות מביע לו גם בירושה.** **עפ"ז חיה המלכות בכון בידך.** This is the reason that he wished to display Vashti, as the validation of the legitimacy of his reign. Vashti, a true blue-blood, looked upon her husband with contempt and hate. According to the "H", she reminded him of his lowly lineage, "son of my father's horse-steward", "my father ruled mightily and never got drunk and you are riotous and boorish" -- **כטוב לך חמץ** -- you nouveau riche. The hate was mutual but he was afraid to kill her; he needed her; he, therefore consulted the **חכמים, ידוע**, **ההעתקים**; he realized that precipitous action on his own can cause a revolution. He was, therefore, ready to be lenient.

Memuchan (**חטן**), however, counselled that not punishing her was even more bound to stimulate revolts. Many of the nobility also had legitimizing captive women; other wives, as well, will join the underground, exploiting the king's weakness. Thus, Haman's promotion was due to the king's paranoid fears. Like Beria to Stalin, so Haman had to keep the king tense, exaggerating the dangers of conspiracy and revolt and suggesting that only he, Haman, can control the situation. That's why **חטן** was appointed immediately after the **בתו ותור** episode. New security measures were set up -- **וכל עבד מלך אשר בקש רוחם** to guard the palace grounds; loyalty tests were implicit; **ברכים ומשתווים להם**; Similarly, Beria was appointed after the governor of Petersberg was killed, even as Haman was designated after Vashti's execution. Otherwise, no sane monarch would tolerate brutes like Haman or Beria; only a sick, terrified king desperately needs such imaginary protection.

At this point, Haman aroused suspicions about the Jews, suggesting that they could join the underground and were capable of dethroning the king. With incisive intelligence, Esther knew of the king's paranoid obsession and that no direct plea, as Mordecai had urged, would produce results. Haman had brainwashed the king; he had

nightmares of imaginary foes; Stalin too, refused all pleas to stay the execution of all his old-time favorite friends. Only one method would work, Esther decided, -- if she could turn the tables on Haman and, somehow, show that he was the real plotter, that loyalty and devotion in him were lacking. Esther assumed a great risk; her plan could boomerang; she, therefore, waited and procrastinated.

C. Haman's Indictment of The Jews -- He made three accusations: a) יְשִׁבָּה עַם אֶתְלָה -- they are a unique and united people. b) מִפְּדָר וּמִפְּדָר בֵּין הָעָמִים -- they are scattered and dispersed amongst all the people. c) וְדֹחַיָּה שָׂנוּנָה -- their ways are different. Actually what is inherently disloyal about any of these charges? All of Persia was pluralistic, composed of diverse ethnic groups!! Weren't all of the king's letters מִדְנָה וּמִדְנָה כְּכָבֶת, וְעַם רַעַם בְּלִשְׁוֹן? Haman was saying -- "you can't guess their attitude; they are unpredictable and, therefore unreliable; we can't gauge their psychology; and if they choose to act, they will do so with unity, discipline; because of their dispersion, they will carry the message of rebellion throughout the empire; we simply can't keep such a group under surveillance; today, the Jew is loyal but we can't be sure about tomorrow; he is a stranger to our ways. I, therefore, recommend annihilation!" The paranoid Ahashverus asked no questions; he immediately gave his assent: if threatened, destroy!! Exactly as Stalin acted. Ahashverus acted the same way later on when Esther accused Haman of disloyalty. Here, too, the king responded בְּמִזְרָחָה תְּאַלְּזֵה קָרְבָּן -- and he gave orders to hang him without hesitation. We see here a consistent mentality of a frightened and brutal despot.

D. Esther Senses The Right Moment -- This was the longest 24 hours in Jewish history, waiting from the first משורה to the second. Suddenly, something happened which the Talmud calls the real נס of Purim. -- בְּלִילָה חֲתוֹא בְּדָדָה שְׁנָה הַמֶּלֶךְ -- שְׁנָה מִלְכֹו (The verse refers to הַמֶּלֶךְ who intervenes for his people.) That night, there was a sudden loss of confidence in Haman; the king had expected him to reward his benefactors; this was his duty as the Prime Minister; how come he didn't do it; why is he loitering around in the courtyard at this hour?; could Haman secretly be harboring sympathy for the

plotters; could he himself be part of the conspiracy? There is obvious haste and irritation in the king's voice and manner as he says -- מהר, קמ אַת חָלֹכֶשׁ וְכֹה -- wanting some reassuring proof of Haman's loyalty; he insists, as if he had lingering doubts, דְּבָרָ מְכֻלָּא שֶׁר דְּבָרָתִי. Being paranoid, Ahashverus' attitude changed totally. This explains the reason for this entire episode at this particular point in the Megillah.

Now Esther can accuse him of high treason. כי נִמְכַרְנוּ אַנְיָ וְעַמִּי לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהַרְבֵּב וְלְאַכְלֵד וְאַלְוֵל לְעַבְדִּים וְלִשְׁפָחוֹת נִמְכַרְנוּ חֲדָשָׂה -- כי אַיִן חַצְרָ שְׂרָה בְּנֵקְחַמְלָא. What was she saying? Haman wasn't concerned with the king; if he were, he would have made slaves labor out of the Jews, not kill them; then, the supposed menace would have been eliminated and the slave labor would have brought riches to your reign. Had he done this, it would have kept quiet. Actually, it is all a plot. To kill Jews the way Haman had suggested -- that the people everywhere will do it -- means that the king's armories would have to be opened and arms be distributed to the people. When this happens, the enemies will take over; איש צָר וְאוֹרֵךְ -- he's an adversary, not only of my people but of my king. The widespread distribution of arms terrified the king. A support for the above interpretation is found in the next verse: כי אמר המלך חָבֵם לְכַבּוֹשׁ אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ עַמִּיכְבִּיחָ -- you want to lead the rebellion and to take over my queen (as Absalom did, in rebellion against David). This accusation only makes sense in the context of this explanation. Thus, did Esther outwit Haman.

V. THE GREATER ENDOWMENTS OF WOMEN

A. The Charismatic Woman -- We had previously indicated that in the Purim miracle, Mordecai was the initiator; he conceived the mission; he sparked Esther into action. Esther, the disciple, used her patient "cunning" to achieve the desired implementation.

As we have seen, both were guided by רוח הקודש. We are now suggesting that a charismatic woman is actually superior to the charismatic man. In the Megillah, we find Esther's initiative in two areas: 1) Prayer -- תפילה -- She declared a three day period of public prayer (חזרת הש"ג). Previously, it was חנוך who had taught

how to pray -- תפלת היחי' -- the private, silent prayer. Our sages tell us -- במתה תילכאראי, כר' -- that many חפלות were derived from the verses of Hannah's prayer. Though women can't be counted in the Minyan, they taught נבון ראלא how to confront G-d in prayer, how to pour out one's soul to Hashem. In addition, (2) Esther's practical craftsmanship, (cunning) was superior to Mordecai's which we explained previously. Both these areas, "Prayer" and "Cunning", are opposite aspects of the human personality, which are reconciled only in the woman.

B) The Emotional Side (expressed in prayer). We are summoned to pray out of extremes of emotion, either of despondency, despair, depression, self-negation -- or -- out of delirious joy and ecstasy. Both are absorbing emotions. Only a child's emotional experience is total, all-embracing, spontaneous and complete. A child's joy or sorrow is a complete submersion. It is unfragmented; not intruded upon or detracted by the intellect. Mature adults are skeptics and cynics, tough, intellectual, quantitative in their thinking; age ennobles a person but it also corrupts his naturalness. The adult protects himself from total emotions. Being overpowered, sensing total disintegration or delirium, joy or sorrow, resignation or ecstasy,--these become lost to the adult. Only a child truly knows a ממעמידו לה' (prayers of fervent despair and praise).

C) Practical "Cunning" -- Only a mature adult, toughened by experience, has the ability to plan schemes, details, to choose an indirect, slower but more effective method. Teenagers can do effective creative thinking in isolated areas; application of brilliant energy in specific subjects; these involve bursts of intellectual energy. Maturity, however, involves emotional strength, broader and integrated thinking and the capacity for restrained and channelized movement. One would not consider appointing a genius teenager to the position of Ambassador to Moscow.

D) Integration of Both Endowments -- To be the ideal נבון שליש, we must combine both the adult (maturity, judgment, craftsmanship), and the child (the emotional, enthusiasm, prayer). The Torah wants the Jew to be an echo of the child, to be a "child-adult", to grow up but not too much, to be mature when called upon to be an historical figure and to shed one's maturity (intellectual rigidity) when it is time to pray. The woman

she expert in achieving this ambivalent personality integration; she retains an emotional, child-like capacity for a total immersion in an experience, for tenderness and spontaneity. At the same time, she excels as a practical adult. Man, however, much too readily becomes the total adult, intellectual, hard and, therefore, fragmented.

This explains why we speak of מרים מרים מרים and חענין מרים. Her's was the more complete achievement.

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THE MEGILLAH IS BOTH PRAISE AND PETITION!

(What follows is a journalistic reconstruction of a lecture-Shiyur delivered by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik in 1974 at the Yeshiva University. It is not a literal reproduction; weaknesses are to be ascribed solely to our faulty transmission.)

Prepared by Rabbi Abraham R. Besdin

NO. 11

A. TWO ASPECTS OF PURIM

The Talmudic Texts

In Megillah 4A, the Talmud sets forth the requirement to hear the Megillah reading both at night and on the following day. However, two different and contradictory verses are cited as the source of this requirement. R. Joshua ben Levi said: One is required to read the Megillah at night and to repeat it during the day as (suggested) in the verse "O, my G-d, I call by day but Thou answerest not, and at night and there is no surcease for me" (Psalm 22:3). אמר ר' יהושע ב' לוי: חיביך אדם לקרוא את מגילה אט לילה ולשכורתה ביום שנאמר, "אלקי, אקרא יומם ולא חעבה, ולילה ולשכורתה ביום שנאמר לבי". (תהלים כב:ג)

A second source for this requirement is also cited: R. Chelbo quoted Ulla of the city B'yira: One is required to read the Megillah at night and to repeat it during the day as (suggested) in the verse: "So that my glory may sing praise to thee and not be silent; O, Lord, my G-d, I will give thanks unto Thee forever" (Psalm 30). אמר ר' חלבו אמר עולא ביראה: חיביך אדם לקרוא את המבילה בלילה ולשכורתה ביום שנאמר, "למען זומרך בכבוד ולא ים", ה' אלקי, לעולם אודד". (תהליל)

Both evening and morning are indicated.

Two Contradictory Moods Are Indicated

Psalm 22, source of the first verse, speaks of an individual who is distressed and totally forsaken. It suggests the shriek of a frightened lonely child who has discovered that his mother had abandoned him. This mood is poignantly reflected by an earlier verse in this Psalm, "My G-d, my G-d, why hast Thou forsaken me" (v. 2). קלי, קלי, למה עזחני (כב:ב). According to tradition, Esther recited this Psalm as she was going to visit the king, filled with foreboding and overflowing with prayerful petition to G-d. (Megillah 15b). If the Megillah reading is derived from Psalm 22, it represents a prayer and petition out of the depths of fear and agony. This is the opinion of R. Joshua ben Levi.

Ulla, however, author of the second citation, referred to the "Song at the Dedication of the House of David", Psalm 30, (לא) ב' חנכה הבית לדוד which is a jubilant song of triumph and fulfillment. It is a hymn of thanksgiving by an individual who was miraculously cured and saved from death. "O Lord, my G-d, I cried to Thee and Thou didst heal me" (לא) ב'. אלקי שועחי אליך ותרפאני (לא) ב'. We have here more than a perfunctory "thank you", but, rather, a persistent and incessant hymn of praise. Ulla literally equates the Megillah reading with the recitation of Hallel (Psalms of Praise) which accords with the sentiment of R. Nachman that "Its reading is truly a Hallel fulfillment" (Meg. 14a). רב נחמן: קדריתא זו הלילא (מגילה ג' ד). This Psalm, too, is ascribed by tradition to Mordecai and Esther.

Combining Both Moods

Actually, both characterizations of the Megillah are correct. It is a Book of Glory and Thanksgiving and also a Book of Human Distress and Petition. The narrative of the Megillah relates two stories, of a people in a terrifying predicament and also of their great exhilaration at being suddenly spared. Generally, Purim is only thought

of in terms of indulgence and merrymaking to the point of self-forgetfulness and the dulling of one's senses. As the Talmud says: "It is the duty of a man to dull his awareness with wine on Purim until he cannot tell the difference between the phrases "cursed be Haman" and "blessed be Mordechai". מִתְחַיֵּב אִינִישׁ לְכָסֹומִי כִּפּוֹרִיאָעַד שְׁלָא ('מִבְּאָרֶב') יְדַע כִּין אֲרוֹר הַמָּן לְכַדּוֹךְ מְדַכְּי (מִבְּאָרֶב'). To most people this mood exhausts the total content of Purim.

Actually, Purim is also a day of introspection and prayerful meditation. Since it is impossible to juxtapose contradictory moods into one day, our sages established the Fast of Esther to precede it on the thirteenth of Adar. They advanced the shriek and supplication of Purim a day earlier when selichos (penitential prayers), Avinu Malkenu (Our Father, Our King, we have sinned before Thee) and a mood of solemn repentance would be appropriate. The Fast of Esther and Purim are integrally related to each other, unlike Passover and Taanis B'chorim (Fast of the First Born) where the latter is not part of the festival and is solely an extraneous addendum. The Fast of Esther, however, is a genuine Purim day which gives literal expression to the verse, "O, my G-d, I call by day and Thou answerest not, etc" which was cited as the origin of the requirement to render the Megillah on Purim both evenings and mornings. The joining of a fast day and a feast day, bespeaks the dual character of Purim.

The Baalay Hakaballah noted mystical connections between Purim and Yom Kipurim, the only difference in spelling between the two is the letter Kaf. This is, rather, a strange association, to relate the hilarious Purim with the awesome Yom Kippur, a raucous celebration with a solemn observance. Perhaps, their common denomination is that aspect of Purim which is a call for divine compassion and intercession, a mood of petition derived out of feelings of great distress. It is, therefore, no surprise to us that many Geonim advised that Tachnun (petitionary prayer) not be omitted on Purim day.

B. DUALITY IN HUMAN CONDITION

The two moods of celebration and desperation implicit in the Megillah more truly reflect the existential human condition. Man is a frightened being; not emotionally or psychologically but ontologically. He is anxious because he is endowed with superior faculties which, though they are the source of his greatness, are also contributory to his fears. Man's unique greatness is that he lives simultaneously in three time-realities; the past-memory, which is a melancholy awareness of people and events long gone; the present - his perceptual reality in which he is now involved; and the future - his hopes, aspirations and anticipations. This three dimensional awareness, that time is continually unfolding, fills him with fears of the frightening unknown, of the sudden absurd accident which can transform his life and bring even death. The beast has a briefer life-span but it has no anticipatory fears; it has no consciousness of standing on the threshold of changing time; it is, therefore, not unhappy, insecure and frightened.

Man, however, is a vulnerable being, always aware that he may fall into an abyss, that the next moment can be tragic. The Book of Koheles (also the Psalms, to some extent) portrays this unnerving uncertainty-aspect of man's life. "For man also knoweth not his time; as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, even so are the sons of man snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them" (Ecclesiastes 9:12). בַּיּוּם לֹא יְדַע הָאָדָם אֲתִיעַ בְּדִגִּים שָׁנָאָחוּם כִּמְזֻודָה רָעה וּכְצִפְרִים הָאָחָזוּת. (קָהָלָת ט:ט) בַּפַּח, כַּה יְזַקְשִׁים בְּנֵי הָאָדָם לְעַת רָעַ כְּשַׁחֲפוֹל עַלְיָהָם פָּהָמָם. The key word above is Pis-ohm (suddenly), the unexpected political coup, an economic collapse, a terminal illness, the loss of a child and other unexpected catastrophes. This is the reality of the human condition and the sensitive man is ever aware of this fearful uncertainty.

Basis of Tefilah (Prayer)

This condition of vulnerability is, according to our Chazal, the real motivation for man to pray. Man prays because of a sense of Tzarah, a feeling of desperation and Tzorech, a condition of need. Even if one is rich, he prays for Parnassah (material sustenance); even if he is in robust health, he pleads for Refuah (healing). Why? -- because man is vulnerable; the present fulfillment may be transformed a few moments

later. Smug satisfaction about one's good fortune is unrealistic; there lurks in the shadows the possibility of sudden reversal. "In the evening one retires with tears but joy cometh in the morning" and the reverse is equally possible. There can be no wholehearted Shevach V'hoda-ya (praise and thanksgiving) without an awareness of techina. There can also be no Techina, no matter how desperate one's plight, without Shevach V'hoda-ya, for G-d's blessings and our faith in his redemption.

Prayers for Tzurchay Odom, of petition, may seem selfish prayers and are denigrated by other faiths. But the Halacha caters to it, though Jewish mysticism tends to emphasize praise and thanksgiving primarily. Human need is the stimulant to prayer and our Amida is filled primarily with petitions. Even the Hallel, which is our most exalted song of joy, reflects two moods. In Be-tzays Yisroel Mi-Mitzrayim and Halilu Avday Hashem we have a glorious song of victory; in Lo Lonus and especially Ana Hashem Hoshi-yah Nah, we hear the anguished cry of the forsaken. To recite Hallel halachically is to sing and cry simultaneously. This is the paradox of the human condition and our liturgy responds realistically to man's situation.

Duality in Purim Experience

Purim reflects a dual character because nowhere did Jews experience such absurd vulnerability as they did in Shushan. Mordecai suddenly found himself saved from the gallows and is elevated to the august post of Prime Minister. A doomed people finds itself overnight dramatically triumphant over its enemies. But, even as we celebrate, we are aware that the pendulum can swing in reverse. Didn't Haman previously have the king's trust and, suddenly, he is being executed. Why delude ourselves that Mordecai will find himself more secure as Prime Minister? Weren't Jews previously confident of their secure station and, without prior warning, they found themselves facing annihilation. What if Esther were suddenly deposed because of some irrational provocation, as was Vashti previously?

Who is clairvoyant enough to assure us that such absurd changes of men and moods will not repeat themselves? The Megillah, therefore, is a Book of Vulnerability which characterizes human life generally but which, particularly governs the destiny of the Jew. The king signs away the life of a people, without even inquiring about their identity. Three days later, he can't recall doing so and he blames Haman for the edict. Can such a monarch be relied upon to maintain stability for the Jews of Persia? Purim, therefore, epitomizes instability, uncertainty and vulnerability.

Vulnerability Awareness Leads to Humility

Man's vulnerability is not necessarily a tragic condition. It can also be the source of many ethical virtues in human character. Primarily, an awareness of vulnerability induces humility which is the opposite of arrogance, pride and impudence. Maimonides regarded humility as the highest ethical quality of man. Though he consistently counselled the Shvil Hazahav (golden mean) rule as regards other emotions, he suspended this balance of moderation when speaking of humility. "Be humble exceedingly", (הַלְכֹת דָרֶךְ שְׁפֵל דָרֶךְ) he prescribed.

How is this humility achieved and why should one seek to be shy and humble, especially with people who have obviously succeeded where others have failed totally? How honest can the outward practice of such humility be? Why doesn't a successful man have the right to pride? The answer is that personal triumph and success leads to arrogance, aggressiveness and ethical insensitivity. But, the awareness of one's vulnerability, the knowledge that our fortune is fickle, that there ever lurks a hovering threat which could transform our condition, these considerations are powerfully humbling. Thus, from an ethical standpoint, vulnerability can cleanse, purge and ennoble man; it is a spur towards better character.

Mordecai's Humility

After Esther was crowned, Mordecai maintained a vigil on the palace grounds because of his great concern about her. (2:11, 19). He didn't reveal his identity, that he was related to the queen which would have brought him status and privileges;

he didn't boast of his connections. Instead he was cautious, self-effacing and silent. This reticence was due to his realization that life is fickle, that vulnerability is proportionate to one's status, that Esther's high position can suddenly be reversed. Capricious uncertainty and instability increases with one's greatness; anonymity, in this instance, could serve one better. If Mordecai had succumbed to pride and vanity, the nes of Purim would have been lost. Through his concealed identity, he overheard the plot of Bigsan and Seresh. Later on, the king realized during a sleepless night that Mordechai had not been duly honored and this was the beginning of the king's loss of faith in Haman. Esther's later denunciation of Haman succeeded only because the paranoid king already had begun to question Haman's loyalty. Thus, Mordechai's humility which was rooted in his realization of life's vulnerability, became the basis of the later salvation.

The Vulnerability of Israel

Vulnerability is a universal condition but, more particularly, characterizes the condition of the Jew. It is applicable to individuals in their private lives, to communities and to States as well. It governs the Jew in the Diaspora, as in the Purim narrative, and also in his homeland, in Israel. The State of Israel, prior to the Yom Kippur War, lived in an illusion of invincibility and invulnerability; this inevitably generated arrogance and pride which, in turn, contributed to a lessening of caution, an unvigilant complacency. Consequently, horrible mistakes ensued. The Israelis, even in their highest echelons of government, felt certain that their privileged status of success will not be reversed. The consequent traumatic shock and ensuing depression of public morale was directly a result of the sudden awareness of Israel's vulnerability. Such an awareness will, hopefully, lead to humility which will induce caution, which, in turn, will lead to success. A sense of one's vulnerability is a quality, therefore, that is highly to be desired.

Vulnerability In Halacha

We previously indicated that the awareness of one's vulnerability makes prayer possible. There are also numerous halachot (religious Laws) which seek to minimize the precarious dangers of life which are due to man's vulnerability, to so-called accidents. For example, "when thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a fence for thy roof, that thou cause not blood to be shed, if any man fall therefrom" (Deut. 22:8). **כִּי תָבִנְתָּ בֵּית חָדֶשׁ וְעַשֵּׂת מַעֲקָה לֹבוּג וְלֹא תָשִׂים דְמִים בְּכִתְךָ (דברים ככ:ח)**. Also, the Talmud elaborately prescribes regarding uncovered pits and other possible pitfalls which can cause accidental injury to others.

Not only is man physically vulnerable but his soul is equally susceptible to being subverted. The principle, "And make a hedge for the Torah" (Abot 1:1) **וְעַשֵּׂן סִיג לְתֹורָה (אַכְזָה אַזָּה)** urges our sages to enact regulatory "fences" around basic religious laws because man's attention and character is vulnerable to distractions and temptations.

Theologically, G-d is forgiving of man's sinfulness precisely because He acknowledges man's vulnerability. Otherwise, sinful man would always stand condemned before his Maker. As Eliphaz said to Job: "Shall mortal man be just before G-d; shall a man

be pure before his Maker" (Job 4:17) **הָאֲנוֹשׁ מְאֻלוֹג יָצָד, אֵם מְעַשְׂהוּ יִתְהַרְגֵּבּ (אייוב ז:ז)**; similarly in Psalms, "If Thou, O Lord, shouldst note iniquities, O Lord, who shall remain standing" (Ps. 130:3). **אֵם עֲוֹנוֹת הַשְׁמָר קָה, חָסָם, מֵי יַעֲמֹד אֵם חַהְלִים דָלָבָבּ).** The mitigation of His judgment is due to G-d's recognition that man is subject to pressures and temptations and is gullibly persuaded. Man may be brainwashed by a society which is intellectually agnostic, by the lure of intoxicating pleasures, by the appeal of political and social ideologies which disguise themselves as redemptive. Some people are saints because they were reared in saintly surroundings; others may be evil because their home setting lacked refinement and norms. Should, then, all wicked be found guilty? Isn't much of man's waywardness due to his vulnerability? He stands defeated by a seeming fate, by factors not completely of his making. This is how man stands before the Heavenly bar of Judgment, hopeful for compassionate understanding.

The Casting of Lots

The Yom Kippur temple service involved two he-goats: "And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel" (the latter to be sent away to destruction in the desert) (Lev. 16:8). **ונחן אחרין על שפֶּת השעירים** ברלotta בורל אחר לה' ובבורל אחר לעזאזל (ויקרא טז:ח). The Talmud tells us: "The two he-goats of the Day of Atonement are required to be alike in appearance, in size, in value, to have been bought at the same time" (Yuma 62a). **שנִי שְׂעִירִי יוֹם הַכְּפָרִים** מצוחן שיחיו שניהם שוין במרקחה ובכומחה ובכרים ובליקחתן כאחד (יומה טב). They were exactly alike, identical twins; yet, their destinies were antithetically dissimilar; one was "unto the Lord" (Lashem) and the other to Azazel. How were their differing destinies decided? The Talmud describes the ceremonious casting of lots. "The goat upon which there fell the lot bearing the inscription 'for the Lord', was destined for the Lord, and that upon which there fell that lot bearing the inscription 'for Azazel', was afterwards sent forth to Azazel" (Rashi, Lev. 16:8 - **את שבתוכ כו לשם, והוא לשם, ואות שבתוכ כו לעזאזל משתקלה לעזאזל (רשי ויקרא טז:ח-יומה לט)**). The secret of atonement is hidden in the ceremonial casting of lots. An element of uncertainty, of chance or accident, seems implicit in the ritual. This manner of atonement suggests that man, too, is frequently committed to the Lord or to Azazel under duress, buffeted by hostile pressures which are not of his choosing. Therefore, man, standing in judgment before G-d is often found, "not guilty".

The name Purim means "the casting of lots" because the entire event involved the unreasonable, the absurd, seeming accidents which brought about the edict and its later suspension. The sudden intrusion of the unexpected and the irrational is basic to man's condition and it is precisely this vulnerability which qualifies him to receive G-d's compassionate forgiveness on Yom Kippur. Once again, Purim finds itself related to Yom Kippur.

There Are No Accidents

We have spoken of irrational, goral accidents in nature and in human life. This can be misunderstood. Actually, Judaism doesn't believe in a deterministic Maazel or in a blind goral. The Greeks regarded fate as absurd, unalterable and ruthless, governing man and history, totally oblivious of man's hopes and aspirations. In the clash between the yearnings of man and the inexorability of fate, between intelligence and inert matter, man was always the loser while matter was always the winner. This, according to the Greeks, is the source of human tragedy.

Judaism, even as it knew and tried to comprehend catastrophic events which viciously destroy man's dreams and hopes, could not accept the existence of the irrational in human life. Events which we label as fateful or accidents belong to a higher divine order into which man has not been initiated. Man has been granted the opportunity of gaining insights and of accumulating scientific knowledge about regular events and physical nature but he is excluded from the realm of goral understanding. The relationship between the individual and his environment eludes man's grasp. To G-d, there are no accidents, though they often so appear to us.

Yet, even inexplicable events, may later on, begin to show structural patterns in retrospection. Many alleged unreasonable events when viewed in the context of the experiences which followed them, lose their freakishness and appear to us as regular events. In hindsight, many events become intelligible. In answer to Moses' plea, "Show me, I pray thee, thy glory", G-d replied, "Thou canst not see My face, for no man shall see Me and live. And I will take away My hand, and thou shalt see My back; But My face shall not be seen" (Ex. 33:18). **ויאמר, הראני נא אתה בכדר. ויאמר, אני... לא תוכל לראות את פניך... וראית את אחורי ובפני עכבר כל תוכבי על פניו... ויאמר, לא יכול לראות את פניכי... וראית את אחורי ובפני (שמות לב:יה)**. Moses was told that G-d's glory on earth is not always discernable during the event; when His glory passeth by, it is as if His hand obscures our understanding. But, in retrospect, after the event, when G-d has already passed by, hindsight interpretation became credible and understanding is frequently possible.

C. LESSONS OF THE PURIM EXPERIENCE

Why was the Purim experience necessary for the Jewish people or, posed more properly, what is the message of Purim? What has this experience formulated for the Jew? The Chazal ascribed great significance to it and regarded it as a second affirmation of the acceptance of the covenant. On the phrase, "the Jews ordained and took upon themselves" (Esther 9:27), our sages add, "Rava said: -- they reaffirmed their commitment to the Torah as they had done previously at Sinai" (Shab. 88a). אמר רバ.. מה שקבעו כבר. (שבת פ"ג)

The Megilla insists that, "these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; And these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the remembrance of them perish from their descendants" (9:28). והימים האלה נזכרים וננשימים בכל דור ודור..., וימי הפורים. האלה לא יעבור מוחץ היהודים וזכרם לא יסוף מזדעם. (א.ט.מ.ב.ח.) Apparently G-d wanted Jews, of all generations, to derive a unique and crucially important message from the Megillah, a book whose dominant mood suggests the basic vulnerability of the Jew.

Lesson One -- Man Can Become Satan

Our faith in man should not blind us to the potential demonic in man. Seemingly "civilized" man can suddenly become the personification of Satan, the incarnation of evil. Man can be a Godly personality but he can also be a devilish personality. Man can, from time to time go beserk, turning into a monster. This was a traumatic discovery for the Jews of Persia. "And the city of Shushan was cast into bewilderment" (3:15). זה עיר שושן נבוכה (ב:ט). The Jew believes in man, that a divine spark inhabits every man, even the habitual sinner and criminal. This is the basis of Teshuva, that the kernel of man's soul ever remains uncontaminated, from which a moral regeneration may emerge.

In Haman, the Jews of Persia met a descendant of Amalek. Who is Amalek? He is the personification of total evil, to whom immorality had become a norm. The Torah says: "The Lord will wage war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Ex. 17:16). מלחתה להשם בעמלק מדור דר (שמורה זצ"ז). Does it not seem undignified for the Lord to declare eternal war on a Bedouin tribute? Rashi adds that, "G-d swore that there will be an incompleteness in His Name and in His throne until the name of Amalek will be obliterated". נשבע ה' קכ"ה שאין שם ואין כסאו שלם, עד שימתח שם. Also, the final triumph over Amalek will take place in the days of the Messiah.

Amalek, obviously, is more than Bedouin nomads; he isn't a particular tribe, nationality or people. It is everyman who has gone beserk, who has replaced his divine image with a Satan-image. Any group which declares its policy to destroy the Jewish people is Amalek, for it has emblazoned on its banner the slogan of impassioned hatred, "Come, and let us destroy them as a nation, that the name Israel may become no more than a memory" (Ps. 83:5). אמרו, לך ובכחידם מבוי, ולא יזכר שם ישראל. עד (תהלים פג:ח). This is the persistent villainy that the Lord bids us to combat and against whom He has sworn eternal enmity. In our generation, Hitler and Stalin clearly represented Amalek.

The Purim experience, therefore, alerts the Jew that his faith in man should not blind him to the evil which can suddenly become triumphant. The Jew is especially naive about such possibilities.

Lesson Two -- The Particular Danger to the Jew

Monster men, though an enemy and threat to all mankind, somehow specialize in their hatred of Jews. They may be proponents of particular ideologies of the left or of the right, of agnostic secularists or reactionary religious clericalists. Yet, they become preoccupied with the Jew and derive particular pleasure in tormenting him. This hatred of the Jew emerges out of any economic or political spectrum. The Jew is caught in the thicket of events which are completely unrelated to him, as in the case of the Nazis and Communists. At times, great empires vie with each other, and the Jew is forced to cast his lot with the less objectionable, thus, unwillingly becoming involved.

It was a rude awakening for the Jews of Persia to discover that the primary pre-occupation of the new Prime Minister was to annihilate them. He was even willing to bribe the king in order to win his approval. Suddenly, the Persian Jew discovered that he is hated. No one hates the United States or France, though particular policies may be vehemently decried. The mere existence of the Jew, however, irritates Amalek and this hatred can erupt suddenly and violently and be translated into mass murder. Why is this so? There is no answer; it is an absurd situation. The very presence of a Mordecai arouses the animal in Haman; he just can't bear him as Haman clearly declared: "Yet all this (honor) availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai, the Jew, sitting at the king's gate" (5:13). *וכל זה איננו שורה לי, בכל עת אשר אן*.

Thus, the Jew must learn a second area of vulnerability, that Satan-men, such as Hitler or Stalin, will, irrespective of their other interests, somehow implicate the Jew in their destructive activities.

Lesson Three -- Common-Destiny

The third lesson is that this hatred of the Jew is a group animosity. It is not necessarily confined to religious or ethnically-conscious Jews who are more conspicuous in their separateness. The hatred of Haman is commodious enough to embrace the Jew with a Mezuza on his door post and the Jew whose home is divested of all Jewishness. The assimilated and the nationalist Jew both evoke the same ire of the tyrant. At Ahashverus' banquet, many thousands of assimilated Jews attended, who undoubtedly regarded themselves as secure. Yet, when the decree was promulgated, it found all Jews subject to a common destiny; no one was exempted.

The Talmud tells -- "And the king removed his ring" -- (giving it to Haman): This removal of the ring was more efficacious than 48 prophets and seven prophesesses; who prophesied to Israel, for all these were not able to turn Israel towards a better course, but the removal of the ring did achieve this". — *ר' יוסר מלך אה טכעחו ר' יוסר מלך אה טכעחו יוזר מארכעים ושמונה נכיאים ושבע נכיאות, שנחנכוaro לחן בישראל, שכולן לא החזירתן למוטב ואיילו הסרת טכעת החזירתן למוטב (בגילה ז.ט)*. During the period of the First Commonwealth, the Jews were divided into two kingdoms, Yisroel and Yehudah, who, at times, even warred with each other. G-d now wished a united people. Who united them? -- Haman!! The concept of a common inescapable destiny became clear to them. Haman's hatred was primarily against the people and not towards particular Jews. He sought to spare no one, neither did he single out others for special treatment. He said -- "there is a certain people, scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of thy kingdom" (3:9). *ישנו עם אחד מפזר ומפזר בין העמים בכל מדיניות מלכותך (בגלה ז.ט)*. They are one people despite their differing stations in life, their outward dissimilarities and their scattered habitations. It is Haman who imposed a oneness, a cohesiveness upon the Jewish people.

For the Second Commonwealth, G-d wished a united people and this the Purim experience achieved. When Mordecai said to Esther, who was hesitant about acting, "Think not that you will escape in the royal house, more than all Jews" (4:13), *אל תדרי בנסיך, להמלט בית מלך כל היהודים.* Esther replied with the directive, "Go, gather together all the Jews". *לך כולם אה כל היהודים (ד:טו)*. Inform them that a common threat embraces all of Jewry.

These, therefore, are the three lessons of the Persian experience: a) Our faith in man must not blind us to the demonic in man. The question, "Can it happen here, must be faced soberly, not naively. b) Every upheaval, every major movement and event has dire possibilities for the Jew. This is the irrational destiny of the Jew, somehow to irritate monster-tyrants, merely by his existence. c) A common destiny unites all Jews.

D. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT LESSON OF PURIM

We had previously spoken of three lessons of Purim which somberly alert us to the fearful possibilities which ever confront the Jew. There is a fourth lesson which is

reassuring and inspiring and may very well be the primary purpose of the Purim experience.

In Persia, the Jews rediscovered a basic existential condition which protects the Jew whenever he is threatened by a man-Satan. That is, that confronted by the imminent danger of annihilation, G-d always sends His messenger(s), (Sheliach Ha-kel), to save the people. This Mordecai and Esther represented in Persia and this Moses was mandated to do as well in Egypt. G-d said, "Come now, therefore, and I will send thee (make you a sheliach) to Pharoah, that thou mayest bring forth My people, the children of Israel out of Egypt" (Ex. 30:10).

The key word, "sheliach" (messenger) has two possible meanings. It could be understood juridically, where someone is empowered to act in behalf of another; he is given a "power of attorney". Legally, this is significant. There is a "Meshalayach" (sender) and a "sheliach" (messenger) and one acts through the agency of another. In Talmudic terminology, however, we say, "sheliach shel odom kemoso", the messengers assumes the identity of the sender; both merge into one personality. In effect, it is the Meshalayach who acts, even though he does so through the Sheliach.

A Sheliach, according to Halacha, may propose marriage to a woman in behalf of a Meshalayach, reciting the required formula and presenting her with a ring or other gift of value. She becomes betrothed to the Meshalayach. The Sheliach is, therefore, regarded as having assumed the identity of the intended husband; he wasn't merely carrying out an errand. His personal identity was subsumed under the identity of the Meshalayach.

If a man, however, is asked to become a Sheliach of Ha-kel, as Moses was, how is this to be understood? How can mortal man become G-d, act with His identity? A prophet ordinarily transmits a divine message or performs acts dictated by G-d but he doesn't represent G-d. Isn't the term Sheliach Ha-kel, therefore, inherently paradoxical? Yes it is, but this nevertheless is a basic Jewish concept, that G-d functions primarily through man. (The term Sheliach Ha-kel is first found in Maimonides, Hil. Chagiga 3:6.)

Geulah, the redemption of the Jew, is always achieved through a Sheliach Ha-kel. In the Messianic redemption this will be through the agency of a human being, the melech Moshiach. In Sanhedrin 99a, we read that R. Hillel (This is not the Tanna Hillel, the founder of the dynasty of N'sirim) said that there will not be an individual Moshiach in the future but that G-d, Himself, will bring about the Messianic era. R. Yosef criticized this view harshly, declaring it as bordering on heresy. Apparently, the belief in a human agency in the geulah process is an article of faith. Geulah is an event in which both a Meshalayach and Sheliach must act as one.

In the "Ani Maamin... B'vias Hamoshiach" (I believe... in the coming of the Messiah), we emphasize the human messiah; we don't say Ani Maamin... Big'ulah Ha'asidah, (I believe... in the future redemption), depersonalizing the manner of the Messianic achievement. In Ex. 2:23, we note that G-d had heard the cries of the suffering Israelites and in one verse after another (23-25) it is clear that G-d was ready for the geulah. What delayed it? The next verse indicates "Now Moses was a shepherd of sheep for his father-in-law, Yisro"(3:1) -- Moses wasn't ready and G-d only works through a Sheliach. It took seven days of arguments, our sages say, before Moses accepted the assignment. Similarly in Shushan, an old man, Mordecai and his young niece, Esther, had to work out their sense of mandate and strategy before the geulah process could commence.

The Jews in Persia, thus, learned this fourth vital lesson, that whenever a Man-Satan threatens a Final Solution, G-d sends a Sheliach Ha-kel to confront him. This messenger of G-d will emerge victorious, in this confrontation between total evil and total good. The future Messianic geulah will similarly involve this Sheliach-Meshalayach relationship.

E. THE LESSONS OF THE EGYPTIAN EXPERIENCE

It is true that G-d sent Shelichay Ha-kel to save the Jews in Egypt and Persia. But why was it necessary at all to subject them to the suffering and fright? We don't really know the motivation of these two galus experiences. In retrospect, however, we do see certain vital lessons, certain character imprints which they have left on the historical Jewish personality. The four lessons which Purim suggests have already been explained. But what has the Egyptian experience signified for the Jew? In a word, it is the fountainhead and the moral inspiration of the compassionate emphasis so pervasive in the Halacha. It taught the Jew ethical sensitivity and moral tenderness. Again and again, the moral laws of our Torah are explained, "Ki Gerim he'yisem B'eretz Mitzraim", because ye were strangers in Egypt. Ours is a singularly ethical culture; it expresses itself in a heightened sense of "Kavod Habriyos" -- human dignity, which is basically derived from our "Tzelem Elokim" concept, -- that man possesses aspects of divinity. This empathy for "bayn adam l'chavero", was derived from the Egyptian experience, where the Jewish people suffered the privations of the helpless underdog, subject to the whim and caprice of cruel masters.

To this day, Jews who are even alienated from religious practice seem more responsive to causes which affect mankind. There are crimes which come harder to a Jew than to others. This may sound chauvinistic, but it is statistically true. Murder and physical violence were unheard amongst Jews and is still practically absent amongst those with any rooting in their heritage. Stealing, cheating, perhaps, may ensnare and subvert some who are vulnerable in character, but not killing, which in other cultures comes so easily. Of course, the totally dejudaized Jew will not necessarily reflect this sensitivity. The Halacha has many regulations to prevent hurting others by word or by deed, wittingly or unwittingly. This is illustrated in its abhorrence of Rechilos (slander) and Lashon Harah (evil gossip); the prohibition, "lifnay evare lo sitane michshol" (do not place pitfalls before the blind) is interpreted broadly as proscribing contributory acts which are hurtful to others. The Torah expects us to remove situations of negligence, such as unfenced roofs (maakeh) and uncovered pits. This moral obligation, to be sensitive about the welfare of others, is not as developed in other legal systems as it is in our own.

But why was the Egyptian experience necessary? Don't all human beings have the same capacity for compassion? Isn't mercy a natural expression of our Tzelem Elokim, an endowment which all mankind possesses? The answer is that Tzelem Elokim only signifies a capacity to love, not a necessity for loving. A capacity can be suppressed as we so frequently see amongst many people; a necessity, however, cannot be suppressed. It flows naturally. The Egyptian experience sought to transform the Jew into a people to whom compassion will be a necessity, not merely a capacity. We will explain.

There are two words which are often used interchangeably but which are not synonymous. The words are מְרַחָמֵה and רָחוּמָה; the word Merachame comes from Rachmim; the word Rachmun is derived from Rachmonus. A Merachame has a capacity for compassion; a Rachmun feels the necessity to love. The Egyptian experience sought to make the Jew a Rachmun; otherwise, he would simply remain a Merachame, such as abound amongst other peoples and cultures.

A "Merachame" is a person who performs merciful acts. He may at times be rigid and unyielding but he does manage, however, to perform many deeds of compassion. In each instance, the "Merachame" has to choose between alternatives, whether to act compassionately or otherwise. He comes through nobly quite often. The word "Merachame", therefore, describes his deeds, not his person. He performs compassionate acts but one cannot call him a compassionate person. He is, however, a worthy personage.

A "Rachmun", however, describes the temperament and character-bent of a person. A "Rachmun" has only one choice,--to act compassionately. It is a natural unvolitional flow from his personality; he can't act differently. He can only love. We don't say, for example, that the Chofetz Chaim performed acts of "Tzidkus" (righteousness); rather, the Chofetz Chaim was a Tzadik; his righteousness was inseparably bound up with his character; he couldn't act otherwise. Thus, a "Rachmun" is a superior type; it characterizes the person, rather than his deeds.

Just as we have distinguished between a "Merachame" and a "Rachmun", we can also differentiate between "Solayach" (forgiver) and "Sulchan"; or between "Mochel" (pardon) and "Muchlan". In our High Holy day prayers we say *כִּי אַתָּה סְלַחֵן לִיְשָׂרָאֵל וּמַחְלֵן* *לְשָׁכְטִי שָׁוֹרְגֵן בְּכָל דָּור וְדָרֶךְ* *מֶלֶךְ מַחְלֵן אֵין לוֹגֵן וּמַבְלָעֵדִיךְ אֵין לוֹגֵן* "For Thou art the Forgiver (Sulchan) of Israel, the Pardoner (Muchlan) of the tribes of Yeshurun in every generation; besides Thee, we have no king who pardons (Mochel) and forgives (Solayach)". We speak of G-d as a "Sulchan" and a "Muchlan" but when we refer to a king of flesh and blood, we say "Mochel" and "Solayach".

Basically, we are saying to G-d, that it is His nature to forgive and pardon; He can't deny it to us because it's the only response that's consistent with His Being. This is, of course, chutzpah on our part to address Him so boldly but such prayers are not infrequent in our liturgy or in Hassidic lore. We insist that the very idea of G-d contains the element of love. But, we add, "Umimaladecha", apart from Thee, amongst monarchs of flesh and blood, one can't even find an occasional "Mochel V'Solayach". Thus, a "Rachmun" like a "Sulchan" comes from an "Ayn Brayra" source; (he can't act differently) a "Merachame", like a "Solayach", however, must continually overcome his Yetzer Harah in the performance of compassionate deeds.

The Jewish people has been ideally described as Rachmonim b'nai Rachmonim, a people from whom compassion flows naturally. The Halacha is the embodiment of this sensitivity. When a man has to ponder whether and how he should react in a situation of human need, he may readily hesitate, rationalize and be diverted by peripheral considerations. But a Rachmun responds spontaneously. In retrospect, this seems to be the dominant lesson derived from the Egyptian experience.

The Egyptian galus taught the Jew ethical sensitivity while the Persian galus provided lessons how to survive as a people. The former made an imprint upon the character of the Jew; the latter was concerned in perpetuating the physical entity of the people. The First Commonwealth, until the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C.E., was nourished by the Egyptian sojourn; for the Second Commonwealth, an additional inspirational experience was necessary, in face of the ravaging dangers threatening the survival of the people.

These two major galus experiences of the Jewish people were unique. They were the only instances where the entire Jewish people was gathered under the dominion of a threatening tyrant. If their nefarious plans had prevailed, Jewish history would have terminated at that point. In both cases, G-d saved the people through Shelichay Ha-kel. Both left indelible impressions upon the Jewish personality. Both, our tradition tells us, will never be forgotten. Their message is for all generations.

F. SUMMARY OF THEMES

A. The Megillah has a dual character. It is a joyous song of thanksgiving for the miracle; it is also a fervent prayer of petition because the condition of the Jew is ever vulnerable to sudden changes. The Megillah, therefore, is both Hallel (a song of praise) and Techinah (a prayer of petition).

B. Human life, generally, has this duality. No matter what our attainments, vulnerability always threatens a change in our fortune. Prayer, itself, is motivated by a recognition of the fragility of man's status, the possibilities of poverty, illness and death.

C. Vulnerability also has positive values. It inspires humility which is the opposite of arrogance and pride. This induces vigilance and, therefore, greater chances of avoiding pitfalls. Also, G-d is more forgiving of man's sins because He recognizes our vulnerability to temptations and sin.

D. Two galus experiences, Egypt and Persia, have enduring lessons for the Jewish people. We are told to hold both vivid in our national memories.

Insights Into M'gillat Esther

To an unusually large crowd, Rabbi Soloveitchik delivered this 1973 annual *Yahrzeit lecture*. Titled "Insights Into M'gillat Esther," the lecture was given in Lamport Auditorium on March 14.

The M'gillah and the story of Purim occurred at the sunset of the glorious day of prophecy. The nation as a whole was facing the sad reality of a non-prophetic future. During the Passover story which happened during the prophetic era, Moses, the messenger of God, received clear, exact instructions how and what to do in fulfilling his mission. But Mordechai and Esther, also messengers of God, living in a non-prophetic age, had no clear guidelines how to implement their goal. They had to use their own initiative, imagination, and ingenuity to carry out their divinely ordained mission-impossible: to save the nation from annihilation. This period of Esther is described as *Hester Panim*, where God seems to have hidden His Presence. All it really means is that He directs the action from the sidelines, from the shadows, without the glaring spotlights to pinpoint His involvement. In every generation there are people whom God chooses to be His messengers, to become history makers. In the non-prophetic existence, they have to use much imagination and ingenuity to fulfill their mission. Whom does God choose? People who aren't simply individuals, but those in whom a multitude abides; individuals who contain within them a whole nation. Their role within Israel is that of the heart among the organs of the body. The heart is affected by anxiety, joy, fear, anger, and any other stresses to the body, yet it remains the hardest and strongest of all the organs. The individuals whom God chooses are those who see themselves affected by whatever happens to the nation, who cry with the pain of Israel, and rejoice at its happy moments. (By extrapolation, this is also the role of Israel among the nations according to the Kuzari.) Such individuals are more than single persons; they personify a whole nation within themselves. This is the concept of *shakul k'neged shishim ribo*, of one person being equal to the whole of Israel. Just as a nation doesn't die, so these unique individuals who represent the whole nation, never really die. As long as *Am Yisrael Chai*, then *David Melekh Yisrael Chai V'Kayam*. Haman realized that Mordechai was such a person, and that it would be futile to kill Mordechai alone (3:6), for Mordechai is the embodiment of the nation Israel and the nation is the extension of Mordechai, so only total eradication of the whole nation could erase the power of Mordechai. Such is the stuff from which Jewish leaders are made.

In the story of Purim, both Mordechai and Esther were chosen by God to play crucial roles in saving the nation. From the time of Sarah onward, women have been on equal

or even superior, footing with men in the history-making process. However, though both play equally important roles, they are different roles. A man cannot assume a woman's role and neither should a woman play a man's role. According to Judaism, men and women are spiritually and physically different, and though their complementary roles are of equal importance, they are fundamentally unique positions. Man initiates action while woman completes it. He is the theoretician while she put it in practise. He thinks in the abstract, she in pragmatic realistic plans. Man is often a "schlemiel"; fortunately woman is crafty.

Mordechai was to initiate the salvation of the Jewish nation. When the evil proclamations were posted he didn't panic. Instead, he carefully analyzed the historical developments, and came to the conclusion that Esther had been selected by God to save the nation. This "theory" made all the strange facts about Vashti, and the feasts, and Esther's glorious rise to royalty, fit into a coherent scheme. He knew that he was to initiate the rescue, but that Esther was the one to fulfill it. He had two tasks ahead of him:

- 1) To inform Esther of the events that had transpired (4:29);
2) To make her realize that she was charged by the Almighty for this task (4:13-14). His task as a teacher and educator was to inspire Esther to accept the responsibility. Up until this point, Mordechai was the hero, the central figure, the leader who was giving orders, and attempting to inspire Esther to follow his ideas. As soon as Esther agrees to take the challenge, we notice a sudden reversal of roles, Esther becomes the more prominent character and Mordechai is assigned a less important role. She is now the master, giving instruction (4:16) which Mordechai obeys submissively (4:17). After he fulfilled his task as initiator of the salvation, Esther, the woman, gains prominence as the one to actually implement the plan, and use her own ingenuity to bring it to fruition. This is the cunning, the *binah y'teirah* (*Nidah* 45b) which was endowed to womankind. In fact, Mordechai had his own ideas about how to implement the rescue of the Jews. But it was the plan of the woman Esther that prevailed. Mordechai wanted Esther to go immediately to the king and plead for the nation (4:8). Esther disagreed, feeling that slow, diplomatic channels were to be preferred. She made one wine party and then another, procrastinating for some seemingly unfathomable reason. However, if we delve into the personality of Achashverosh we will understand why Esther acted the way she did, and how the realities of the situation totally excluded the possibility of following Mordechai's plan.

The king had a paranoid fear of an insurrection against the throne. The Talmud relates that he was not the legitimate heir to the kingdom, rather the son of the steward of the royal stables. His only connection with royalty was through his wife Vashti, daughter of Belshazzar. She obviously despised him as a social climber, who lacked any royal grace and dignity. There was an underground movement to overthrow the government and restore the old order, as evidenced by the Bigtan and Seresh assassination attempt. Achashverosh tried to "buy" the country's loyalty by making those lavish parties and inviting everyone to eat and drink and view his wealth and women. But this is all clearly the workings of a mind that feels very insecure and fears revolt. The absurd law (4:11) proclaiming death to anyone who entered the throne-room without an appointment, seems also to be an

outgrowth of his paranoid fear of revolt or assassination. When Vashki publicly insults him, he was worried that if he should kill her this would inspire a revolution. M'mukhan (1:16-20) gave him the following brilliant analysis: "True, if you kill Vashki you may trigger off a revolt, but if you allow her to survive after publicly 'insulting the king, then she will serve as a model for all the women of royal blood to insult their husbands." It was the custom in antiquity for the victor to marry the widow or daughter of the vanquished power. Thus, many of Achashverosh's officers had married women of the old order. "If they saw that the queen was not punished for her insolence, they too would start fighting their husbands and join the underground movement to restore the old order. The way to nip that in the bud is to execute Vashki." Thus M'mukhan, whom the Talmud tells us was Haman, gained the confidence of the paranoic king, as being someone who loyally defended the throne. Immediately following the assassination attempt by Bigtan and Seresh we find that Haman was appointed Prime Minister. The king was really scared, and in his paranoia he turned to the person who had proven his loyalty—M'mukhan (Haman), and placed his faith in him.

Feeling slighted by Mordechai, Haman decides to destroy the Jews. He plays on the king's paranoia by casting suspicion on the loyalty of the Jews. He tells the king (3:8) that the Jews are a unified nation, widely dispersed in the kingdom with queer laws and customs. Being a strange nation, no one can guess whether they are planning a revolt. Should they decide to join the underground, their unity as well as their dispersion geographically could make the insurrection very successful. The king fell for this ploy, and agreed to kill the Jews. When a paranoid lives in fear of an imaginary monster, all moral controls are abandoned. He has only one irresistible urge—to destroy. Esther understood all this very well, and therefore could not agree to Mordechai's plan of immediate action. Once Haman had succeeded to arouse in the king fear of Jewish revolt, no human power or pleading could dissuade him from destroying his imaginary enemies. In grappling with the realities of the situation it was a woman's mind, not a man's ideas, that was needed. Esther decided that the only way out would be to turn the tables on Haman, and accuse him of plotting against the king. She procrastinated day after day, waiting to find a possible opening, a possible way to shatter the king's faith in his trusted Prime Minister. It seemed that only a miracle could weaken his trust and indeed a miracle happened: *Balaila ha-hu nad'dah shmat ha-melekh.* (6:1) This is the turning point in the whole story, the prime miracle. The most significant aspect of that night was not so much the king's new respect for Mordechai, but his loss of confidence in Haman. You feel the king's malicious joy in taunting Haman while ordering him to honor "Mordechai the Jew" (6:10). Whether it was Haman's mention of the royal crown (6:8) that made the king suspect his loyalty, or his failure to reward the king's benefactor Mordechai, or the shifting perception of the universe in the mind of this paranoic king, it was time for Esther to plant the seeds of distrust in his mind. This is the kind of subtle *Hester Panim* miracle, a change of mood in the mind of a deranged king, for which we give thanks to God on Purim. The next day, when Esther charges Haman with treason, the king willingly accepts the accusation. She explains to the king that had Haman really felt concern for the better interest of the king, he would have placed the Jews in forced labor camps, thereby keeping them under surveillance in a profitable set up. "But the villain is not

concerned about the threat to the king" (7:4). By proposing to arm the country side with weapons to kill the Jews, he was really making it much easier for the revolutionary elements of the population to organize their revolution. Esther made the king believe that Haman was plotting against the throne. The king's paranoia took over where Esther's words ceased. Upon returning from the garden to find Haman on the couch where Esther was lying he screams, "Do you even plan to seduce the queen while I am in the house?" (7:8). He was convinced of Haman's treachery that everything he did was viewed through paranoid lenses. He not only "saw" Haman planning the revolt, but even trying to steal the queen! This was the ultimate sign of revolt. Haman's fate was sealed. The very strategy and the fate planned for the Jews now backfired on Haman and his associates.

This was exactly what Esther had planned. Notwithstanding the end of the Prophetic era, the young girl managed to fulfill the impossible mission given her by God. Mordechai was the initiator, inspiring her to act, but she worked out the strategy herself and, with the help of God's miracle, brought it to fruition. God's spirit descended upon her and subtly directed her actions (5:1—Rashi). It was the Divine Spirit from its hiding place of *Hester Panim* that really engineered the whole product—not by direct instructions as in the prophetic era, but through the more delicate and subtle channels of the human mind. Esther taught the Jewish people how to fast and how to pray (4:16). The inspired charismatic woman is superior to man in two ways: a) applied practical action and b) prayer. Chanah, the mother of Samuel, taught us all how to pray (B'rakhot 31). Though she herself can never be counted to a "trinyan," she is responsible for showing us how to confront God. While Chanah taught the individual person how to pray in a time of stress, Esther taught us how we should pray together as a nation at times of peril. It is strange that these two traits, pragmatic cunning and the ability to pray, are really opposite, and yet women excel in both. Cunning is to be found only in adults whose years of experience with life mature them to be able to correlate all the possible factors and devise a scheme of action. Immature people may be brilliant, but they cannot be policymakers. Prayer, on the other hand, is an art in which the child excels. An adult is too realistic, too cynical, too hardened by life. To truly pray you must believe the unbelievable, and hope for the impossible. True prayer is also that which swells up from either total despair or complete ecstasy. The adult moderates his emotions and doesn't allow himself to "let loose" and go to the extremes of feeling. But a child gives free reign to the feelings of anger, happiness, disappointment, and joy. The child knows how to pray "mimaamakim" (out of the depths of despair), and also how to sing a "shir chadash" (a new song of rejoicing). The Jew is asked to be an adult and a child at the same time. When called upon to act as a history-maker, as a messenger of God, one must act with maturity and cunning. But when one prays, he should shed his mature sophistication and let his overwhelming enthusiasm or unlimited grief pour out to God. One must hope for the impossible, or know that nothing is impossible for God. These two opposing character traits find their most perfect reconciliation in womankind, symbolized to us by Queen Esther.