

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Special Purim Edition

In Loving Memory of Chayndel Bas Reb Chaim Tzvi o'h

May Her Neshama Have An Aliyah

March 8, 2009

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Yad Avraham Institute
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B"H

Purim

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. The Significance of the Holy Tongue

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah cites a verse from Isaiah, "I will come upon them (the Babylonians) and I will cut from them..." Nebuchadnezzar (Babylonian Emperor) had destroyed the First Temple. G'd had said through His prophet Isaiah, that because of what the Babylonians had done, the Babylonian alphabet would come to an end. The Babylonian language would be forgotten and the Babylonian Empire and the Emperor's line of progeny would come to an end. Vashti, the queen of Persia, was a granddaughter of Nebuchadnezzar. She was killed by her husband Achashverosh- thus ending the line of Nebuchadnezzar. Tosafos asks, "How could the verse state that the Babylonian language will come to an end if in fact the Babylonian language is spoken even today?" Tosafos answers, "The language that is referred to in the verse from Isaiah was a dialect of Babylonian that was spoken by the royal family. That dialect came to an end."

Maharal of Prague z'tl in his work on the Megillah of Esther answers the question of Tosafos differently. He explains that language is an expression of ideas and concepts of a particular culture and society. The 70 root languages that exist are expressions of those cultures and perspectives. However, when a Greek speaks Babylonian, the language is only a vehicle for him to express his Greek ideas and culture. Regardless of his mode of communication, the perspective is that of a Greek. Thus, when G'd said that the Babylonian language will come to an end, it does not mean that people will no longer speak Babylonian; but rather that language would no longer be a medium for the transmission/expression of Babylonian culture/perspective.

The Torah tells us that all the families of existence participated in the building of the Tower of Babel to wage a battle against G'd. The Torah states, "**The whole earth was of one language and of common purpose.**" Rashi explains that that the one language spoken by all mankind

was Hebrew (the Holy Tongue). Seemingly, the reason everyone was able to unite and have a common cause was because they had a common language that enabled them to communicate with one another. The Torah continues, "**Behold, they are one people with one language for all...Come, let us (G'd) descend and there confuse their language, that they should not understand one another...**" G'd confused their language. The original 70 families that were united against G'd were no longer able to communicate with one another. Each of them was given their own language. This disruption of communication brought the revolt against G'd to a standstill.

If the disruption of communication was rooted only in their inability to understand one another, one would think that the 70 nations would be able to communicate their initiatives and goals through some other common medium. However, as Maharal explains that language is an expression of one's perspective, when G'd had given each of the 70 nations their own language, in fact they each had their own perspective. Thus, they could no longer reach a consensus. Therefore their unity was disrupted.

The original language that was spoken by all humanity was the Holy Tongue, Hebrew, which is the language of G'd. Since language is an expression of one's essence and perspective, when Hebrew was the spoken language it was an indication that all humanity still had relevance to G'd. The Midrash tells us that one of the reasons that the Jewish people merited redemption from Egypt was that they did not change their language. Despite the fact that they had become pagans, they continued to speak Hebrew, which was a confirmation that they still had a spiritual essence. This was an indication that they still had relevance to G'd. Had the Jewish people ceased to speak Hebrew it would have indicated that their spiritual essence had been extinguished.

It is interesting to note that although G'd had decreed that the Babylonian language should come to an end, the Talmud (Oral Law) was written in Aramaic, which was the language of Babylon. Why was Aramaic chosen to be the language for the Oral Law?

Ramban in his commentary on the Torah writes that initially the months of the year were referred to as "the first month (chodesh ha rishon)," "the second month (chodesh ha sheini), etc." The first month was designated to be the month that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt. Each subsequent month is calculated based on its proximity to the month of redemption. This identification of months to commemorate the redemption from Egypt. However, based on words of the Prophet, after the Jewish people returned from the Babylonian exile, they would no longer count the months in commemoration of their redemption from Egypt but rather their counting would have significance to the redemption from Babylon to rebuild the Second Temple. The names of the months that we use are in fact Persian and not Hebrew.

The Gemara tells us that although the original acceptance of the Torah at Sinai was under duress, G'd had held a mountain over the Jewish people, there was a reaffirmation/reacceptance of the Torah on Purim that was on a more qualitatively advanced level. They had reaffirmed their commitment out of love. This is based on two words in the Megillah of Esther "K'mu v'kiblu" "Which is interpreted to mean that they had "fulfilled what they had received (previously)." In order to make known the location and time period of this unique ascension, Ravina and Rav Ashi authors of the Babylonian Talmud, chose to record it in Aramaic. The Oral Law, in its entirety until the end of time, will be transmitted through this language.

2. Clarity Through Contrast

We read in the Megillah that there was a royal decree that was issued to annihilate every Jewish man, woman, and child. This decree was initiated by Haman, who epitomized evil and was a descendant of Agog, the king of the Amalekites. Haman was the personification of Amalek. At the bleakest moment in the history of the Jewish people, when their destruction was imminent, their predicament was miraculously reversed. Haman was hanged on the gallows together with his sons. Esther, the queen of Persia was revealed to be a Jew. Mordechai, the uncle of Esther the Queen, was appointed by

Achashverosh (the King) to assume the position of Haman. The decree to annihilate every Jewish man, woman, and child was rescinded through a proclamation that was sent throughout the Empire. The Jewish people were given permission by the king to kill their enemies who had planned their destruction.

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah cites a verse from Psalms, "G'd remembered His Kindness and Faith in the Jewish People. All the ends of the earth had seen the salvation of G'd..." The verse in the Megillah of Esther tells us that Achashverosh had ruled over 127 provinces. The Gemara tells us that he was one of the monarchs in history that had ruled the world supreme. Therefore, the initial decree to annihilate the Jewish people was to be implemented throughout the world. When the second royal declaration was issued to rescind the initial decree and to give permission to the Jewish people to kill their enemy, it was also received in every corner of existence. Thus, the entire world witnessed the salvation of G'd. They had seen that the Jewish people were miraculously rescued from the clutches of death. This miracle was appreciated by all humanity because they had understood firsthand that the Jewish people were on the brink of extinction and were suddenly rescued. It was this contrast of events that made the miracle so impactful.

The Torah tells us that at Sinai, G'd had held the mountain over the Jewish people. He had given them an ultimatum saying, "If you accept the Torah it will be good for you. If you do not, there you will be buried." The Jewish people were thus coerced to accept the Torah. However, on Purim, after the Jewish people were spared by G'd through miraculous events, they reaffirmed their acceptance of the Torah out of love. Maharal of Prague in his work on the Megillah explains that the reason they had reaffirmed their acceptance of Torah out of love was because they came to a level of understanding of G'd's unlimited love for them. They understood that G'd would not forsake them under any circumstance. We see that the darkest moment in the history of the Jewish people brought about the most advanced spiritual result. When they had embraced the Torah out of love, the Jewish people had ascended to a new spiritual level.

Before the coming of Moshiach, Chazal tell us that the Jewish people will experience many difficulties and tragedies. This period of time will be one of the most painful moments in Jewish history. These times are referred to by the Gemara as "the birth pangs of Moshiach." Ramchal explains that the value of experiencing these difficult moments/"birth pangs" is so that when Moshiach will come, his presence and affect

will be appreciated and internalized on a most profound level. By experiencing two contrasting settings, one of intense darkness and hopelessness and the other of redemption and illumination, the Jewish people would be able to truly appreciate the value of the coming of Moshiach. We see this pattern of contrast continuously repeating itself.

If the Jewish people had not been enslaved for hundreds of years by the most advanced and powerful civilization, the Ten Plagues would have never occurred. The world would not have witnessed the revealed miracles that G'd had brought upon the Egyptians. When G'd had split the Sea, the entire world was aware of that event. The redemption of the Jewish people and the destruction of the most powerful civilization was precipitated because of the bondage and the embitterment of their lives. The Egyptians were perceived by the world to be invincible. In a relatively short period of time, less than one year, the masters were decimated and their slaves (the Jewish people) were seen as the victors. They were revered and awed as G'd's people.

We see that the only way that one can truly appreciate the light is to first experience and understand the darkness. The difficult times in which we find ourselves is to be able to appreciate the ultimate redemption with the coming of Moshiach speedily in our day.

3. Understanding the Cause of the Decree

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that there was a discussion between Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai and his students regarding why the Jewish people were deserving of annihilation during the period of Purim. The students of Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai were of the opinion that the Jewish people deserved annihilation because they had partaken in the feast of the rasha (evil one) – Achashverosh (the Emperor of Persia). Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai rejected their position because if that were the case, then only the Jews in Shushan who participated in the feast should have been liable for punishment and not the entire Jewish people. The reason he posed for their deserving of annihilation was that they had bowed to the image of Nebuchadnezzar (Babylonian Emperor, who had destroyed the First Temple). Nebuchadnezzar had ordered all of his subjects to bow to his image or be subject to death. The only Jews who did not bow were Chananyia, Meshael, and Azarya. Because they refused to bow they were cast into a kiln and emerged miraculously unharmed.

Thus, since the Jewish people bowed to the image of Nebuchadnezzar, they deserved annihilation.

The students of Reb Shimon Bar Yochai asked him, “If in fact the Jewish people deserved to be destroyed then why were they not?” He answered, “Because their bowing was only an external act without intent, because they did not believe that Nebuchadnezzar was a deity. Thus the decree against the Jewish people manifested itself in a similar vein –it presented itself as if it was going to take place. G-d never intended to destroy them measure for measure.

Chazal tell us that the feast in which the Jewish people had participated adhered strictly to Kosher and other kosher criteria. If so, why did the students of Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai, believe that this was the basis for their deserving of annihilation? One may say that perhaps it was because the setting of the feast was inappropriate. However, that would have not warranted the destruction of the Jewish people.

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah explains why Achashverosh had celebrated his coronation in the third year of his reign. Under normal circumstances a king would celebrate his coronation at the beginning of his reign. Why did Achashverosh postpone it until the third year? The Gemara explains that the Prophet had said in the Name of G'd that after 70 years of exile, the Jewish people would return to the Land of Israel. According to Achashverosh's calculation the 70-year period was not complete until the third year of his reign. His position as emperor was secure only after he was assured that the Jews were not returning to the Land of Israel. When the anniversary of the 70th year had come, and the Jews were still in exile, Achashverosh believed that G'd had abandoned and forsaken His people. G'd had reneged on His promise

The essence of the feast given by Achashverosh was the celebration of the abandonment of the Jewish people by G'd. Thus, this banquet was the celebration of a Chilul Hashem (Desecration of G'd's Name). Although the feast was Kosher, the event itself was a desecration of G'd's Name. This is why Mordechai was vehemently opposed to the Jews participating in the banquet. However, Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai responded: why should all of the Jewish people be held accountable for the actions of the Jews in Shushan?

There is a principle in the Torah that every Jew is responsible for his fellow – “kol Yisroel areivim zeh

l'zeh.” Since Jews have communal responsibility even those who did not participate in the feast in Shushan were held accountable for the actions of their fellows. Reb Shimon Bar Yochai rejected the position of his students. He believed that it was because of idolatry that the Jewish people were punished. Tosfos in Tractate Sanhedrin explains that the image that was made by Nebuchadnezzar was not an idol. It was only to honor him. If this is so, then why would their bowing to the image have such grave consequences? If this is so why did Chananyia, Meshael, and Azarya be willing to give their lives not to bow?

Tosafos in Tractate Sanhedrin explains that Nebuchadnezzar intended to deify himself. He therefore made the image to impose himself upon the people. He had believed that through their bowing it would initiate the process of his deification.

Although bowing to the image is not considered an act of idolatry, since it can be perceived as such – it is thus a Chilul Hashem. Since the Emperor intended that bowing to his image would establish his deification, any participation in that process would be a Chilul Hashem. Chananyia, Meshael, and Azarya were willing to give their lives rather than commit a Chilul Hashem. Their being thrown into the kiln was a Kiddush Hashem (Sanctification of G'd's Name).

The Jewish people were not annihilated because their actions were not what they appeared to be. However they did deserve punishment because their behavior was perceived as worship – thus causing it to be a Chilul Hashem. The Jewish people needed to repent and be atoned. The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that when Achashverosh removed his signet ring to be given to Haman in order to seal the fate of the Jewish people, its effect was greater than all the rebuke of our 48 Prophets and 7 Prophetesses. It motivated the Jewish people to repent because they understood that their predicament was bleak.

4. Mordechai's Unique Ability

The Torah states regarding the anointing oil (*shemen hamishcha*), “**Now you (Moshe), take for yourself choice spices): five hundred shekel-weights of pure myrrh (mor dror), fragrant cinnamon...**” The anointing oil was necessary to inaugurate the Mishkan (Tabernacle) with all its vessels. Despite the fact that Bezalel had overseen the building of the Mishkan and infused every aspect of it with the proper spiritual intent to bring about the desired effect, the Mishkan with its vessels were not spiritually activated until they were anointed with

the anointing oil. It was only after the Mishkan and its vessels were anointed did they assume their special status allowing them to be capable of accommodating the Shechina (Divine Presence). G'd had commanded Moshe to personally anoint the Mishkan and its vessels. Moshe, because of his spiritual dimension and relationship with G'd, was the only one who was qualified to anoint it.

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah asks, “Where do we find Mordechai alluded to in the Torah?” The Gemara answers, “The first ingredient in the spices that was needed to produce the anointing oil was “Mor dror – pure myrrh.” Targum explains, ‘Mor dror’ as ‘mori dachya.’” Thus, the Torah alludes to Mordechai through one of the essential ingredients of the anointing oil. What commonality or relevance does Mordechai have with the anointing oil?

When the Jewish people were initially invited to the feast of Achashverosh, Mordechai vehemently discouraged them from attending. However, because the Jews believed that if they did not attend the Emperor's feast, there would be grave consequences, they participated, contrary to Mordechai's wishes. This was the beginning of a series of events which led to the decree against the Jewish people – that every Jewish man, woman, and child should be annihilated.

It was Mordechai who orchestrated all the elements which ultimately brought about the miracle of Purim. At the final moment, the decree was annulled. Rather than the Jewish people being destroyed, they brought destruction upon their enemies. Mordechai had instructed Esther to conceal her true identity until the appropriate moment.

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that Rachel, our Matriarch, is identified by the characteristic of “*Shteeka* – silence.” She had given the code words needed to identify her Rachel to her sister Leah. At the time of the wedding, Rachel remained silent as Yaakov married Leah, despite the fact that she was the intended bride. Esther, descending from Rachel, demonstrated the same characteristic of silence when she did not reveal her pedigree, thus her true identity remained hidden. Mordechai the one who had instructed Esther to conceal her identity, was also a descendent of Rachel, our Matriarch. The Torah focuses on the exceptional beauty of Rachel, our Matriarch. Despite the fact that she is identified as such, her true dimension of being stemmed from her spirituality. Her essence was truly concealed.

It is interesting to note that it was Mordechai who galvanized the Jewish people and motivated them to do

teshuvah (repentance) to nullify the decree that was issued against them. It was through Mordechai's initiative that the Jewish people rose to a level that they should merit the miracle of Purim. Just as the anointing oil was the element that initiated the Mishkan and elevated it to a level that could accommodate the Divine Presence, so too did Mordechai elevate the Jewish people to a level that they should merit G'd's intervention.

Amalek represents darkness and confusion. In fact the numerical value of "Amalek" is the equivalent numerical value of "safaik – doubt." When confusion exists, truth becomes concealed. After the Splitting of the Sea and the destruction of the mightiest army (Egypt) the world stood in awe of the Jewish people. They were perceived as being invincible. However, after they were attacked by the Amalekites, it dispelled that special aura and reverence, which came upon the world. The awe was replaced by confusion and doubt. The world was no longer certain whether the Jews were as awesome and special as they had thought.

The numerical value of 'Mor' in 'mor dror – pure myrrh' is the equivalent numerical value of 'Amalek.' Just as Amalek represents confusion and concealment of truth, Mordechai also represents concealment. The true greatness of Mordechai and his initiative to save the Jewish people was concealed. Although he appeared to be no different than any other Torah Sage, he had the ability to bring about a change of events that would set in motion the destruction of Amalek – the enemy of the Jewish people. Mordechai, whose true ability was concealed, was the counterforce to Amalek – who conceals truth through confusion.

5. The Ultimate Sanctification

The Torah states, "**He (G'd) called to Moshe from the Meeting Tent...**" Sfora explains, "Moshe was not able to enter into the tent as long as the Divine Presence was there. This was the day that Moshe had completed erecting the Mishkan. The Torah tells us that the Divine Presence descended from heaven and sanctified the location of the Mishkan as well as its officiants."

The Torah tells us that G'd had designated the Aaron and his sons to be His officiants in the place of the first born (*bechorim*). The Torah states, "**Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, Behold! I have taken the Levites from among the Children of Israel, in place of every firstborn, the first issue of every womb among the Children of Israel; and the Levites shall be Mine.**" The

first born were originally designated by G'd to be His officiants; however, because they were involved with the sin of the Golden Calf they were disqualified. Since the Levites did not participate in the sin of the Golden Calf, they were not spiritually tainted and were thus qualified to be officiants of G'd. Aaron and his children were installed as Kohanim through the anointing oil and priestly vestments. One would think that this would be sufficient to qualify them to officiate. However, based on Sfora, we see that it was necessary for G'd's Presence to descend upon the Mishkan and sanctify it as well as the Kohanim in order to qualify them as His officiants.

Ramban explains in his commentary that the Mishkan itself was a replication of Sinai. At Sinai, G'd had brought heaven to earth and His Divine Presence dwelt on the mountain. His Presence dwelt in the Mishkan at the same level as Sinai. Ramban cites many verses that illustrate the correlation between Sinai and the Mishkan. The Jewish people at Sinai had risen to the level of Adam before the sin of the Tree of Knowledge. As a result of the sin of the Golden Calf, they reverted back to the impure state. The Kohanim, despite the fact that they were anointed, were not sufficiently qualified to be His officiants unless they were sanctified through His Presence.

The Torah tells us that every Jewish soul that is meant to come into existence until the end of time was present at Sinai. In addition, the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that the soul of every convert that would ever come to be part of the Jewish people also was present at Sinai. In order for one to be qualified to be part of the "Holy nation" one needed to be exposed to the Divine Presence at the time of the giving of the Torah. When the Divine Presence descended upon Sinai, the Jewish people were sanctified because of G'd's proximity to them. However, because of the sin of the Golden Calf, they were distanced from Him, causing a diminishment in their sanctity. They were reinstated through the giving of the second set of Tablets, which was a confirmation that they were forgiven for the sin. Prior to the sin, the Jewish people did not require a medium for the Divine Presence to dwell in their midst; however, after they had sinned, although they were reinstated, the Mishkan was needed to be the medium for their relationship. They did not ascend to their original level that they had assumed at Sinai.

The first-born were sanctified at Sinai to be the officiants of G'd. However after the sin of the Golden Calf, they were replaced by Aaron and his sons. Although they were anointed with the anointing oil to be Kohanim,

they needed to be sanctified with the Divine Presence to have a similar status as the first born had pre-sin.

The Torah tells us that due to the zealotry of Pinchas, G'd did not destroy the Jewish people. As it states, "***B'kino es kinahsee, when he (Pinchas) zealously avenged My Vengeance...***" Through Pinchas' unique level of Sanctification of G'd's Name he ascended to the level of a Priest. Although he was born a Levite and was not anointed with the anointing oil, his avenging of G'd's Honor caused him to ascend to priesthood. His selfless act of Sanctification had created a closeness and bond between him and G'd that was the equivalent of the Divine Presence descending upon him.

When one engages in the Sanctification of G'd's Name, which is a fulfillment of a Positive Commandment, it creates a great degree of sanctity. However, Pinchas' act of zealotry was seen by G'd to be of special dimension because it had saved the entire Jewish people from destruction. In fact, Pinchas' act of zealotry is responsible for the world to have a continued purpose, because there is a Jewish people.