**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT TZAV - PURIM**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

**Dedicated in memory of Staff Sgt. Gal Keidan and Rav Achiad Ettinger HY"D.**

Motzaei Shabbat

The opening Mishna of Masekhet Megilla famously establishes that cities that were walled at the time *Benei Yisrael* first settled the Land of Israel celebrate Purim on the 15th of Adar, as opposed to other communities, which celebrate Purim on the 14th. And thus in Jerusalem, Purim is celebrated a day later than in other towns and cities.

Later (19a), the Mishna addresses the situation of a person who lives in one kind of city but happens to find himself on Purim in a different kind of city. The Mishna rules that if the visit is temporary, then an individual’s status is determined by his place of residence, not where he happens to be on Purim. For example, if a Jerusalemite is in a different city on Purim, but plans on returning to his home in Jerusalem, he observes Purim on the 15th, just as he would back home.

However, the Gemara cites Rava as drastically limiting the scope of the Mishna’s ruling, claiming that it refers only to somebody who plans to return home during the night of Purim. If a Jerusalemite is somewhere else on the night of the 14th of Adar, and remains there until daybreak, he must observe Purim on the 14th, even though he lives in Jerusalem and is visiting a different town only temporarily. Rava formulates this rule by saying, “*Paruz ben yomo nikra paruz*” – somebody who is in a “*paruz*” – a regular city, that was not walled at the time of the Israelite conquest of *Eretz Yisrael* – even for just one day is considered a resident of that city, and must celebrate Purim on that day.

Rava derives this principle from the verse in *Megilat Ester* (9:19) which refers to those living in regular cities as “*ha-Yehudim ha-perazim ha-yoshevim be-arei ha-perazot*” – “the Jews of the unwalled cities, who reside in the unwalled cities.” This verse is repetitious, Rava explained, to emphasize that even those who “reside” in an unwalled city for just the day of Purim are considered “residents” with respect to the Purim obligation, despite the fact that they plan on then returning to their home in a walled city.

It has been noted that the Purim observance differs in this regard from other *halakhot*, which depend on a person’s place of permanent residence. For example, a resident of Israel who temporarily visits the Diaspora during Yom Tov does not celebrate the additional day of Yom Tov observed in the Diaspora (although he must refrain from *melakha* in deference to the community he is visiting), and, according to the majority of *poskim* (notable exceptions notwithstanding), a Diaspora Jew who visits Israel on Yom Tov must observe both days, as he would back home in the Diaspora. (See *Shulchan Arukh*, O.C. 496:3, and *Mishna Berura*.) When it comes to Purim, however, even a temporary, one-day visit lends the visitor the status of a permanent resident.

Some have suggested that this *halakha* reflects one of the important themes of Purim, the notion that nothing is coincidental, that every situation we find ourselves in has great significance. Mordekhai expressed this idea to Ester in insisting that she approach Achashveirosh to appeal on the Jews’ behalf, rhetorically asking, “Who knows if you reached royalty for this very moment?” (4:14). More generally, the entire story of Purim is a series of seemingly coincidental events that we are to perceive as the workings of the mysterious Hand of Providence. And thus specifically on Purim, “*paruz ben yomo nikra paruz*” – wherever we happen to find ourselves is considered our “residence,” the precise place and circumstance where we belong. On Purim, we are to reinforce our belief that everything situation unfolds for a purpose, that we are meant to be in every circumstance we happen to find ourselves at any given moment. The place we happen to be on Purim is considered our “residence” – the exact location and situation that is right for us.

Like Ester, we occasionally end up in places and in settings that we never wanted and which we would have much preferred to avoid. One of the messages of the Purim story is that “you reached royalty for this very moment,” there is something we can achieve and accomplish under all circumstances, even those which we never planned and never imagined.

Sunday

The Gemara in Masekhet Megilla (7b), amidst its discussion of *mishloach manot* – the obligation to give gifts of food to one’s fellow on Purim – tells that two *Amoraim* – Abayei bar Avin and Rabbi Chanina bar Avin (who seem to have been brothers) – would “exchange their meals” on Purim. Rashi explains this to mean that they took turns hosting – one would host the other one Purim, and then the second would host the first the following year. (The Rambam, in *Hilkhot Megilla* (2:15), appears to have understood this account differently.)

A number of *Acharonim* noted that this practice – at least as understood by Rashi – might compel us to redefine the obligation of *mishloach manot*. While the *mitzva* is conventionally understood as giving gifts, the practice of these rabbis (as Rashi describes it) seems to reflect a more liberal definition of this halakhic requirement. Indeed, the *Bach* (O.C. 695) explains that the purpose of *mishloach manot* is for us to celebrate together with other people, raising the level of friendship and camaraderie among Jews. This goal is certainly achieved by people joining together to celebrate Purim at least as much as (and perhaps more than) exchanging gifts of food, and thus (in Rashi’s view) the obligation can be fulfilled by people enjoying the Purim feast together.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz concluded on the basis of the *Bach*’s comments that the primary obligation of *mishloach manot* is to give gifts to those towards whom one harbors feelings of resentment. As the purpose (or part of the purpose) of *mishloach manot* is to increase friendship and harmony among the Jewish Nation, it stands to reason that the best of way of fulfilling this *mitzva* is by giving gifts to those against whom we might have some grievance, or who might have some grievance against us. Giving *mishloach manot* to such people can go a long way in reducing tensions and increasing friendship and goodwill among *Am Yisrael*.

If so, then we might view the *mitzva* of *mishloach manot* as an example of the intriguing parallel that exists between Purim and Yom Kippur. An oft-quoted passage in the *Tikkunei Zohar* remarks that the term “Yom Kippurim” may be read as “Yom Ke-Purim” – the “day like Purim” – thus establishing these two days as contrasting parallels of one another. Much has been written about this startling association between what are likely the two most extreme days on the Jewish calendar – a day of extreme solemnity, and a day of extreme merriment. But Rav Yerucham’s insight perhaps points to one particular point of comparison between these two occasions – both include a requirement to make amends and to quell tensions among people. The *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 606) states explicitly that one must seek forgiveness before Yom Kippur from those whom he had wronged, and on Purim, as we have seen, we exchange gifts for the purpose of increasing peace, harmony and friendship.

Developing this point one step further, we might point to a parallel between the significance of these occasions in terms of our relationship to the Almighty, and their significance in terms of our relationship to our fellowman. Yom Kippur, of course, is the day of repentance, when we experience and express our genuine remorse, tearfully ask for forgiveness, and make a firm resolution to improve. On Purim, by contrast, we celebrate our close, unshakable connection to God that exists even before we repent. We indulge in food and merrymaking to commemorate the experience of the Jews in the Persian exile, who were reawakened to their bond with God that remained even as they were submerged in the decadence and vanity of Persian society. We show that we always retain our inner connection to our Creator, even when we appear very distant from Him. This same contrast applies to the interpersonal element of these two special occasions. On Yom Kippur, we draw close to our fellowman through the uncomfortable process of expressing regret and requesting forgiveness. On Purim, however, we raise the level of peace and friendship among *Am Yisrael* by celebrating the bond that unites us all even when it is marred by tension and strife. We give gifts even to those towards whom we harbor negative feelings, to show that even when such feelings exist, deep down, we remain forever and unconditionally devoted to one another and concerned for one another. Although we at times quarrel and have unkind feelings towards our fellow Jews, we are all, in truth, bound together eternally with genuine love and fierce commitment. On Purim, we show that beneath the “mask” of distance from our Creator and from our fellowman lies a deep and unbreakable bond which we forever cherish and which we festively celebrate each year on this unique day.

Monday

Yesterday, we noted the Gemara’s brief account in Masekhet Megilla (7b) of two *Amoraim* who would fulfill the *mishloach manot* obligation on Purim by “exchanging meals.” Rashi, as we saw, explained this to mean that they celebrate the Purim feast together every year, each hosting on alternating years. The Rambam, however, in *Hilkhot Megilla* (2:15), appears to have understood the Gemara’s account differently. He writes that if a person is poor and cannot afford food for *mishloach manot*, he can fulfill the *mitzva* by sending his meal to another person, who then sends his own food to the first individual. This way, they both give somebody else food – as required by the *mishloach manot* obligation – in a way that ensures their having what to eat. The Rambam’s ruling is likely based on the Gemara’s account of the two sages who would “exchange meals,” which he seems to have understood to mean not they alternated hosting, but that they literally exchanged their meals on Purim, as this was the only way they could fulfill the obligation of *mishloach manot*. This is, indeed, how the Ran (Megilla 3b in the Rif) interpreted the Gemara’s account.

These different readings of the Gemara’s remark become relevant in the context of the discussion among the *poskim* as to whether one must send *mishloach manot* via a messenger. The expression “*mishloach manot*,” which is used by the *Megilla* itself in establishing this requirement (9:22), means “sending portions [of food],” which appears to indicate a requirement to specifically send food to somebody, as opposed to bringing it oneself. The question as to whether this is indeed the case was raised by Rav Yaakov Ettlinger, in his *Binyan Tziyon* (44). After expressing his amazement at the silence of earlier scholars regarding this question, Rav Ettlinger concludes that one fulfills the obligation by personally bringing *mishloach manot* to one’s fellow, though he raises the possibility that there might be a halakhic preference to sending it with a third party.

A number of writers noted that according to Rashi’s interpretation of the account of the sages who would “exchange meals,” it seems clear that in his view, one does not have to send food to fulfill the *mishloach manot* obligation. After all, Rashi understood that these rabbis fulfilled the *mitzva* by sharing their food with each other, and eating it together. No food was sent with a third party (or at all), and so necessarily, in Rashi’s view, one does not have to send the *mishloach manot* via a messenger. The Rambam, however, writes of the practice of two people “sending” their food to one another, which would imply that the food must, in fact, be sent, and not delivered personally.

Different theories have been advanced to explain why the *mishloach manot* obligation would not require sending the food, as suggested by the word “*mishloach*.” Rav Ettlinger proposes that the obligation was formulated in this manner to indicate that one fulfills the obligation even if his fellow does not accept the gift. Had the *Megilla* written that one must “give” food to his fellow, this would imply that the food must be accepted for the obligation to be fulfilled. It therefore formulated the obligation as a requirement to “send” food, establishing that one satisfies the obligation by sending or bringing the food, regardless of whether the intended recipient actually agrees to receive it.

Another approach was suggested by Rav Yehuda Assad (*Yehuda Ya’aleh*, vol. 1, O.C. 207), who writes that if the obligation was formulated as a requirement to “give” food, one might have concluded that it is preferable to bring the gift oneself. The famous halakhic principle of “*mitzva bo yoter mi-bi-shlucho*” establishes a preference for personally performing a *mitzva*, even a *mitzva* which can be fulfilled via an agent. Rav Yehuda Assad claims that the *Megilla* formulated the *mishloach manot* obligation with the term “*mishloach*” to instruct that sending a gift is equivalent to personally bringing a gift, as both achieve the same purpose of sharing food with one’s fellow, and thus there is no preference to personally bringing the gift over sending it via a messenger.

According to both these theories, the word “*mishloach*” should not be understood as requiring one to specifically send *mishloach manot*, as opposed to bringing it personally.

Tuesday

*Chatam Sofer*, in his commentary to Masekhet Gittin (22b), amidst his discussion of the laws governing *shelichut* (the halakhic mechanism whereby certain requirements can be discharged through an agent), asserts that the *mitzva* of *mishloach manot* on Purim is not governed by these laws. Generally, when one seeks to perform an action through an agent, this is allowed only if the agent meets certain criteria – specifically, the agent must be a Jewish adult. Gentiles and minors cannot function as an agent for satisfying halakhic requirements, even those requirements which can be fulfilled via agency, because they themselves are not bound by the requirement in question. *Chatam Sofer* clarifies that this rule applies only to situations which demand formal *shelichut* – meaning, when one seeks to fulfill a requirement involving an action which fundamentally only he can perform, and *shelichut* enables him to empower the agent to act on his behalf, as his representative. But when a halakhic requirement does not need to be satisfied by a particular action, one does not need to resort to formal *shelichut*, and therefore anybody can perform the action. In the case of *mishloach manot*, *Chatam Sofer* writes, the Torah does not require personally giving a gift, and in fact the *Megilla* specifically refers to the obligation with the term “*mishloach*” – sending. This formulation certainly indicates that one is not required to personally give the gifts, and so, *Chatam Sofer* rules, this *mitzva* is not subject to the rules that govern formal *shelichut*. And thus, he writes, one may send *mishloach manot* “even through a monkey and all those disqualified [from *shelichut*].”

Apropos to *Chatam Sofer*’s ruling – and in the jovial spirit of Purim – Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein tells in this context (in *Chashukei Chemed* – Megilla, 7a) the humorous story of a rabbi to whom somebody once sent *mishloach manot* with a child who – like most children on Purim – was in costume. Specifically, this child was dressed as a guerrilla. The rabbi later expressed to the Satmar Rebbe his dismay over this incident, claiming that it is disrespectful to send *mishloach manot* to a rabbi in this fashion. The Rebbe responded, “This shouldn’t bother you. After all, even if that person had sent you *mishloach manot* with an actual guerrilla, he would have fulfilled the *mitzva*!” The Rebbe referred the rabbi to the aforementioned comments of *Chatam Sofer*, stating explicitly that one fulfills the obligation by sending *mishloach manot* with anybody – even a monkey… (However, Rav Zilberstein notes that according to those who explain the *mishloach manot* as intended to enhance the feelings of friendship among *Am Yisrael*, sending *mishloach manot* in a manner that the recipient finds insulting perhaps does not fulfill the obligation, as it accomplishes the precise opposite of the intended goal of *mishloach manot*.)

On a more serious note, there is some discussion among later writers as to whether *Chatam Sofer*’s comments should be understood to mean that the *mishloach manot* obligation requires specifically sending food to one’s fellow through a messenger. As we saw yesterday, the term “*mishloach*” appears to refer to sending through a third party, as opposed to personally giving a gift, and this led some *poskim* to ask whether *Halakha* requires sending the food via a messenger. Some inferred this conclusion from *Chatam Sofer*’s comments, as he noted the implication of the term “*mishloach*” that the obligation is not to personally give a gift, such that the formal institution of *shelichut* would be needed if one wished to send it with somebody else. Seemingly, *Chatam Sofer* understood the obligation of *mishloach manot* as requiring sending, and not bringing, a gift. However, Rav Eliezer Waldenberg, in *Tzitz Eliezer* (9:33:4), disputes this reading of *Chatam Sofer*’s remarks. He asserts that *Chatam Sofer* inferred from the word “*mishloach*” that the food **may even** be given via third party, not that it **must** be given by a third party, and, as such, one does not need to employ the formal institution of *shelichut* if he wants to send the food package with a messenger.

(See also Rav Zvi Ryzman’s comprehensive [essay on this topic](http://beinenu.com/sites/default/files/alonim/181_58_79.pdf).)

Wednesday

The Gemara in Masekhet Sanhedrin (64b), amidst its discussion of the prohibition against performing the *molekh* ritual (the ancient pagan practice to bring one’s child through fire), cites different views as to what specific ritual transgresses this prohibition. Rava is cited as describing the *molekh* ritual as something resembling “*mashvarta de-puria*.” Rashi explains this expression as referring to a practice which was observed by youngsters on Purim, whereby they would jump over fire. The youths would dig a trench of some sort in the ground, light a fire inside the trench, and then playfully jump over the fire. According to Rava, the *molekh* ritual which the Torah prohibits resembled this act of jumping over a fire (while holding one’s child).

How might we understand this unusual Purim custom? Should we view it as just an arbitrarily chosen form of silly merriment in the comical spirit of the day, or should we perhaps expect to find some symbolic connection between this practice and the Purim celebration?

[Rav Asher Weiss](http://beinenu.com/sites/default/files/alonim/148_24_58_79.pdf) creatively suggested that this practice perhaps alludes to the fire that raged upon Mount Sinai at the time *Benei Yisrael* received the Torah. In Sefer Devarim (4:11), Moshe describes how the mountain was engulfed by fire that burned “until the heart of the sky,” and a thick cloud of smoke covered the area. This was a frightening and intimidating scene to behold, and yet, Moshe says, “You approached and stood underneath the mountain.” Normally, people flee from raging flames of fire. But at Mount Sinai, the people joyfully answered God’s call summoning them to the mountain, eager and enthusiastic to hear His word and receive the Torah, and so despite the fire, they approached the mountain.

In the aftermath of the Purim miracle, as the Gemara (Shabbat 88a) famously teaches, the Jews reaffirmed their acceptance of the Torah at Mount Sinai. And it is perhaps this aspect of the Purim story, Rav Weiss explained, that was commemorated through the seemingly strange practice of jumping over fire on Purim. This was done to reenact the people’s fervent desire to approach the Almighty and accept His commands despite the fire, to show that our quest for closeness with God supersedes even the instinctive fear of fire.

Oftentimes, Torah commitment strikes us as intimidating. The “fire” – the purity and loftiness of Torah seems too remote and beyond the limits of our human capabilities. Accepting the challenging requirements and restrictions of the Torah can be overwhelming. This is especially so in circumstances such as those of the Jews in the Persian exile, who lived and participated in a foreign culture characterized by decadence, indulgence and vanity, as graphically and even humorously described in *Megillat Ester*. While living such a lifestyle, the demands of the Torah might appear as frightening as a wildfire – something that threatens to destroy and ruin all that one enjoys and is familiar with in his life. However, as Rashi writes in his commentary to Masekhet Shabbat, the “*ahavat ha-neis*” – thelove for God aroused by the great Purim miracle – inspired the Jews of the time to reaffirm their Torah commitment. After having fallen into spiritual indifference borne out of intimidation, their joy and love of God triumphed over their fears and inhibitions. Aroused and inspired by the extraordinary events they had just experienced, the people raced towards the fire of Sinai, eager to recommit themselves to the Torah and observe it as best they could under their far-from-ideal circumstances.

“A person is obligated to become inebriated on Purim until he does not know the difference between ‘cursed is Haman’ and ‘blessed is Mordekhai’” (Megilla 7b). One of the effects of inebriation is the loss of inhibition. The drinking and merriment of Purim are perhaps intended, at least in part, to break our natural feelings of ambivalence and intimidation surrounding our relationship with the Almighty. Just as Ester overcame her initial reluctance to approach Achashveirosh, so did the Jews overcome their feelings of distance from God, and they renewed their relationship with him – and we, too, experience this renewal through the unique joy and festivity of Purim. We break our innate inhibitions and recognize that no matter what we have done or haven’t done, no matter what our current religious standing might be, the King is eager for us to approach Him and joyously serve Him to the best of our ability. And thus even when Torah observance seems intimidating as a wildfire, we run towards it, enthusiastic and energized by our awareness of God’s eternal, everlasting love for His people.

Thursday

The Gemara in Masekhet Megilla (13a) associates the name “Hadassa” – Ester’s other name (Ester 2:7) – with the Hebrew word *hadas* (myrtle), and explains that she was given this name because the righteous are compared to fragrant *hadasim*.  This comparison is deduced from a verse in Sefer Zekharya (1:8), in which the prophet described his vision of a man “standing among the myrtles,” which the Gemara apparently understood as an allusion to the righteous.

Interestingly, the Gemara elsewhere, in Masekhet Sanhedrin (93a), makes the precise opposite inference.  The Gemara there cites this verse from Zekharya and interprets the word “*hadasim*” as an allusion to righteous people (specifically, to Chananya, Mishael and Azarya), proving that the righteous are called “*hadasim*” from the fact that Ester was called “Hadassa.”  According to the Gemara’s discussion in Sanhedrin, then, Ester is seen, in a sense, as the prototype of a *tzadik* (righteous person).  The fact that she is referred to as “Hadassa” allows us to conclude that all *tzadikim* are comparable to *hadasim* – seemingly, because she serves as the paradigm of a righteous individual.

In what way can we regard Ester as the model of piety?  Why is she the quintessential “*tzadik*”?

The answer, it has been suggested, can be found in the dramatic point of transition in the *Megilla*, when Ester instantly undergoes a complete transformation from a timid, fearful young woman, into a bold, courageous initiator and leader.  When we are first introduced to Ester, she takes no initiative whatsoever.  She is the only girl brought before Achashveirosh who doesn’t request any makeup or perfume (2:15), and she is described as completely subservient to Mordekhai, doing everything he instructs (2:20).  This all changes after Ester initially refuses Mordekhai’s command to approach Achashveirosh to intercede on the Jews’ behalf, and Mordekhai sharply reprimands her.  He ends by saying, “…and who knows if you reached royalty for this very moment?” (4:14). Once she hears Mordekhai’s message, Ester completely changes.  She now gives Mordekhai instructions, commanding him to assemble the Jews of Shushan for prayer, and she musters the courage and strength to approach the king and devise a plan.

This might be the quality that makes Ester the paradigmatic “*tzadik*” – the realization that “you have reached royalty for this very moment,” that we are here in this world, in this particular time and place, for a purpose.  A righteous person lives each day with this mindset and perspective, with the understanding that every moment and every circumstance is an opportunity and a mission.

Of course, the primary message and theme of the *Megilla* is the mysterious hand of Providence which governs events, and God’s ongoing love and care for *Am Yisrael* which exists even when it cannot be seen.  Importantly, however, the miracle of Purim required the bold initiative taken by Ester, the paradigmatic “*tzadik*,” who teaches us that once we view every moment of our lives as a vitally important mission to complete, we will overcome our hesitations and insecurities and achieve far more than we would have imagined.

Friday

Concluding its discussion of the *mincha* offering (which consisted of flour, as opposed to an animal), the Torah in Parashat Tzav (7:10) emphasizes that the offering is eaten by the *kohanim* regardless of whether it is “mixed with oil” or “dry.” Once a handful of the *mincha* sacrifice is placed on the altar, the rest is given to the *kohanim* to eat, and the Torah found it necessary to stress that this is true of all *mincha* offerings – those which are offered together with oil, and those which are brought without oil. As Rashi explains, *mincha* offerings which are brought voluntarily require oil – a requirement explicitly mentioned earlier (2:1) – whereas *mincha* offerings which the Torah obligates one to bring to atone for a misdeed are specifically not mixed with oil (5:11). The Torah here clarifies that both types of sacrifices are given to the *kohanim* to eat (after a handful has been placed on the altar).

Rav Shlomo of Radomsk, in *Tiferet Shelomo*, suggests that underlying this emphasis is a message to the *kohanim* about the nature of their role as the nation’s spiritual leaders. The *kohanim* might have assumed that as they had been designated for the sacred, exclusive role of serving God in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, they are to associate only with the righteous members of the nation. Their exalted level of sanctity, they might have thought, requires selectivity in building their circle of influence and affiliation, and that they work only with those who are pure and devoted. The Torah therefore emphasizes that all *mincha* offerings – even those that offered by sinners seeking atonement – are given to the *kohanim* to eat, just like the voluntary *mincha* offerings. The *kohanim* are told not to draw any distinction between the different spiritual classes, to devote the same amount of time and effort to inspiring and associating with those on the lower religious rungs as they devote to the elite.

All of us are, in a sense, “*kohanim*,” in that we are all in a position to influence and impact upon other people, in one way or another, and to one degree or another. The *Tiferet Shelomo* here instructs that in our role as “*kohanim*,” we must not limit ourselves to one group of people. We should strive to help and influence anybody we can, and not restrict ourselves to only one certain type. Anyone should be welcomed into our sphere of influence, and included in our effort to do what we can to make the world just a little bit better.

**THE FIRST DECADE OF SALT ARCHIVES CAN BE FOUND AT:**

[www.etzion.org.il/en/salt-archives.html](http://etzion.org.il/en/salt-surf-little-torah-archives)

**MORE RECENT INSTALLMENTS OF SALT DIVREI TORAH CAN BE FOUND AT:**

[www.etzion.org.il/en/topics/salt-surf-little-torah-weekly-files](http://www.etzion.org.il/en/topics/salt-surf-little-torah-weekly-files)