

# KNOWING WHY AND WHEN TO SAY WHEN

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

Purim, the holiday on which we celebrate the salvation of the Jewish people from the hands of the evil Haman, this year begins at sunset, March 1, 1999. (See I: 66-77 for additional information.)

The commandment to drink on Purim (discussed in the last post, IV:19) contains an odd measure for when to say when: "Until he cannot tell the difference between cursed be Haman' and blessed be Mordechai'." The Vilna Gaon explains this to mean "until one can no longer tell the difference between the vengeance taken out on Haman and the rise in fortune of Mordechai." This standard of measure is clearly unique. The explanation of the Vilna Gaon adds to the uniqueness of this quantity. This amount can better be understood when one studies a concept that the Gaon wrote about. In Psalms (92:5) we find the following: "For you, Lord, have gladdened me with Your deeds; I sing glad songs at the works of your hands." The Gaon explains that the Zohar writes that the expression "deeds" to describe the actions of G-d is used for those actions that are not clearly evident. A discerning eye is needed to see the hand of G-d at work. The term "works" is used in conjunction with those actions of G-d that are blatant, and clear to all who see them. When one sees a "deed" of G-d, a hidden miracle, he rejoices. However, upon witnessing a "work," an outright miracle, one breaks out in song and praise.

Punishments, downfalls, and failures tend to stand out in the public eye. People take note when someone who had been so successful, so politically savvy, so wealthy, fails miserably. The punishment, the "vengeance" of G-d taken against those who dare to defy Him, is noticed when it occurs. However, when the righteous live in tranquility, when the upright succeed, it rarely makes the headlines. Those who understand how G-d works recognize that in such situations, the success is G-d's way of rewarding those who listen to Him. However, the reward is often not appreciated for what it truly is: the hand of G-d in action.

The truth of the matter is that on Purim, we should rejoice more on the downfall of Haman than on the rise of Mordechai. Because downfalls are readily recognized and make people take notice, when one occurs, people more readily acknowledge the hand of G-d. When we celebrate the salvation resulting from the downfall of Haman, we celebrate because we acknowledge the "works" of G-d. G-d's hand is revealed, and we exalt in the sanctification of His name in the world. However, the rise of Mordechai appeared to be in the realm of being in the right place at the right time. While those who appreciate G-d's "deeds" realize that Mordechai achieved his success because of G-d, most do not appreciate that it was a miracle, just as Haman's downfall was. Haman's decline resulted in a greater

recognition of the existence and power of G-d than Mordechai's rise, and therefore it is to be celebrated at a higher level. If a person does indeed celebrate, by feasting and drinking, keeping these two events in their proper perspective, they are feasting properly, "for the sake of heaven." However, as soon as one begins to celebrate Mordechai's success more than Haman's decline, they have reached a point where they have lost the proper perspective. This rejoicing can no longer be categorized as being solely for the sake of heaven.

For this reason, the Vilna Gaon tells us that we should drink only until the point where we won't be able to differentiate between the revenge exacted on Haman and the rise of Mordechai. Once we have blurred events and their corresponding significance, we are no longer acting in the true spirit of Purim. We are told we should drink \_until\_ that point. We may drink as long as we rejoice with the proper mindset. However, we cannot cross that line. We should not reach the level where we can no longer differentiate between the significance of the two occurrences. That is the instruction, the warning of the Talmud.

May we all celebrate Purim in the proper spirit (and with the proper spirits)! A very happy Purim to all!

(Adapted from Sefer Kimu V' Kiblu)

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For questions, comments, and topic requests, please write to [Rabbi Yehudah Prero](#).

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