

# YOU CAN DO IT!

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

This Shabbos, the 13th of Adar, is the 20th Yurtzeit of my Grandfather Zt'l. He was born on Adar 7, 1895 and was nifter Adar 13 1986. In honor of the Yurtzeit the following is a translation of a seminal essay published in the introduction to his sefer Darash Moshe.

"It is important to understand the name Purim which is derived from the term Pur - lottery. The name of a holiday should reveal the essence of the miracle which the holiday celebrates; however, the fact that Haman used a lottery to determine the date for destroying the Jews does not appear to be the essence of the miracle of Purim. Furthermore, the Gemara in Megilah 13b states that Haman rejoiced when the lottery (Pur) fell on Adar because Moshe Rabbeinu had died in Adar. (Haman thought the death of Moshe was a bad omen for the Jews) However, what Haman did not know is that Moshe was also born in Adar. This needs to be explained. (How is it that Haman knew the date of Moshe's death but did not know the date of his birth?)

It appears to me that because of the false beliefs of the other nations, there are certain individuals who they (the other nations) consider holy. (Meaning, that the criteria they use to determine holiness is founded on false values and premises.) Because these individuals are considered holy, they dress in special clothes, and are subject to other restrictions unique to their holiness. These restrictions are of course invented by the people themselves and therefore false; however, they are also potentially destructive.

Common folk, the masses, the followers, look to those whom they consider holy as role models of godliness and morality. However, they also believe that the affected mannerisms and restrictions of the holy individuals are a reflection of their holiness. (Judaism believes that restrictions are aids to attaining holiness.) On the other hand, they themselves, the common folk, the masses, the followers, have no obligation to act accordingly. Instead, they consider themselves as any other living creature, able to do whatever their hearts desire. They feel no obligation to emulate the individuals they consider holy.

Moreover, if one of their holy people is evil, the common folk learn from him that it is okay to be evil. They do not have a value system beyond the words and actions of their priests that by contrast allows the common folk to judge the priests themselves. Their entire value system depends on the priest's determination of what is right and wrong. As a result, the priests will change the rules and values of the religion to suit their own needs and desires.

The Torah on the other hand stated that there is but one law for all, and that intrinsically there is no one person more holy than another, except in regard to Torah scholarship, character, and behavior.

All of humanity, including Moshe Rabbeinu, were born through the process of birth - the product of a man and a woman - a mother and a father. As such, Moshe and every other person have the same basic needs and there are no laws that are incumbent on one person more so than another. The greatest person and the simplest person are absolutely equal to each other in so far as the basic values are concerned. Therefore, the simplest person is able to observe the greater person and learn from him what their own potential and obligations are. They know that if they also devote themselves to studying Torah and working on their characters, they too can be as great as the greatest and holiest person. They understand that even the greatest person started as a simple person like themselves. If he or she could do it, so can they!

We now understand why the Torah always uses the term "Tisah - lift up" when commanding a census to be taken. Many people fall into the trap of a false humility in regard to their own potential to attain personal greatness. They believe that they are incapable of studying Torah or exerting the necessary discipline to be great and holy. This results in their not studying Torah and not attempting to grow in character and spirituality. However, the Torah states that when counting the Jewish nation they are to be "lifted." Whether a person is as great as Moshe or the simplest of the simple, each of them is only counted as one. Each of them is only as valuable as the other. As such, the census teaches all that they can be as great as each other - but only if they desire the greatness - only if they are willing to work at being great. It "lifts" them up by encouraging their inherent greatness and holiness. This is also evident in the fact that a minyan - a community is comprised of ten adults, regardless of their individual greatness or lack thereof. Each member knows that he is valuable and capable of greatness. In fact, they should be jealous of each other's greatness and therefore motivated to work at being greater and holier.

There is another benefit to realizing that each of us is inherently equal and that greatness is the product of individual effort and the potential of all. It is clear that greatness is the result of devotion to a set of laws and values that are not determined by any one individual or group. Instead, the values and laws are the determination of a force above and beyond any one person or even generation. As such, everyone knows that a person who has gained the reputation of greatness and holiness is as subject to the laws and values as anyone else. If he should falter or fail in his personal behavior it is himself who he has failed and compromised not the truth of the values and laws. He loses his standing of greatness and holiness and the common folk will look down upon him. The Torah remains unscathed by his personal failings.

I heard a similar approach to this concept from Hagaon Rav Yechezkel Abramsky Shlita (Zt'l). Rav Abramsky wondered why Haman first wanted to kill Mordecai and only later did he want to kill all the Jews when he was told that the Jews were the "nation of Mordecai." Haman certainly knew that Mordecai was a Jew and if his desire was to kill the nation of Mordecai along with Mordecai why

didn't he say so from the start? Rav Abramsky answered that Haman always knew that the Jews were Mordecai's nation; however, he believed that if he could get Mordecai to bow down to him all the Jews would follow suit and bow down to him as well. Mordecai was the Gadol Hador (leader of the generation) and what he would do everyone else would also do! However, when Haman was told that the nation of Mordecai was the "Jews" it meant that different than any other nation the Jews held their leadership to the same standards as everyone else. What was false for one was false for all and what anyone did, even the Gadol Hador, would not change that standard! Haman then knew that even if he managed to get Mordecai to bow down to him the rest of the Jews would not follow suit; instead, they would degrade and despise their "leader" rather than follow him because the Torah is the standard for everyone - no matter how great or little! Therefore, Haman decided to kill all the Jews!

We can now understand why Haman rejoiced when the Pur - lottery fell on the month of Adar. He knew that Moshe died in the Adar and assumed that with his death the Jewish commitment to the Torah was forever weakened. He assumed that our commitment to Torah and Mitzvos was because of the person Moshe and not because every Jew has a personal sense of commitment and obligation. As such, the death of Moshe meant that the subsequent commitment to Torah and mitzvos was more the product of tradition and custom than personal belief and obligation. He felt that the "luck of the draw" being Adar indicated that he would be victorious in destroying the Jews whose commitment was to culture and history rather than G-d. However, the opposite was true!

The Gemara in Megilah tells us that although Haman knew that Moshe died in Adar he did not know that Moshe was born in Adar. Of course, if Haman knew that Moshe had died he also knew that Moshe was born in Adar; however, what he did not know is the significance of the fact that Moshe had been born in Adar! The fact that Moshe died also meant that he had been born. If Moshe had been some mystical figure deposited on earth without the benefit of the normal natural process of birth then he would not have died either! Instead, the fact that he died proved that he was no different than any other human of flesh and blood. He was born, he lived, and he died. The difference being that in the interim between birth and death Moshe worked on himself to become the holy person he became. He became the person to bring Torah to the world and to become the greatest of all prophets. His death proved that he was just a person and if he could become the man he became then it was possible for each of us to do the same! That doesn't mean that anyone else will ever attain Moshe's greatness. His greatness was unique to him and his mission just as each of us has a greatness that is unique to us and our mission. Instead of Moshe's death weakening the Jew's commitment to Torah and mitzvos it had the opposite effect. Everyone realized that with Moshe's death the obligation to study and attain greatness, the responsibility for teaching G-d's word and exemplifying the meaning of service and commitment was incumbent upon each and everyone.

Therefore, the truth of Torah was unaffected by Moshe's death. Haman mistakenly thought that the

lottery falling on the month of Adar foretold his eventual success against Mordecai and his nation because it underscored their weakness rather than strength. However, the opposite was true. The fact that each of us must shoulder the responsibility for spreading the word of G-d from generation to generation has strengthened us and provided for our continued scholarship in Torah and commitment to doing mitzvos. Because Moshe was just a human, being born and dying, we knew that survival did not depend on Moshe the man. We have survived the destruction of our temples, the exile and dispersion of our people, and the millennia of persecution because we are committed to studying the Torah and perfecting our performance of mitzvos. More than anything else it has provided us with the ability to remain a nation regardless of time and distance from each other. As such, it is impossible to destroy us. We are as eternal as the Torah as ever-present as history itself.

The name Purim comes from Pur which means "lottery." In the end, it was the fact that Haman's lottery fell out on Adar that strengthened our resolve to survive by providing the understanding that the miracle of our survival and the destiny of our people is as eternal as the Torah. So long as we study G-d's word and commit ourselves to doing His will we will merit the continued destruction of Amalek's evil and the coming of Mashiach.

#### Maftir Zachor

This week, in addition to the regular Parsha, we read Parshas Zachor. Parshas Zachor is the 2nd of the four special Shabbosim preceding Pesach when additional portions are read from the Torah. The first special Shabbos was Parshas Shekalim. This week we read Zachor, and in a few weeks we will read Parah and Chodesh. There are set rules which determine when each of these additional Parshios is to be read. Parshas Zachor is always read on the Shabbos before Purim.

On Parshas Zachor, we read the additional Parsha found in Divarim, 25:17. As a nation, we were commanded to destroy the nation of Amalek. This nation came into existence at the same time as we did. Eisav's son Elifaz had a son Amalek. Eisav and Elifaz's legacy to Amalek was an undying hatred against the children of Yakov. At the time of the exodus from Egypt, Amalek traveled hundreds of miles to ambush the newly freed nation in the hope of destroying them. We, as a nation, did not pose any threat to their sovereignty. They lived to the east of Canaan and were not among the Seven Nations occupying Eretz Yisroel. Nevertheless, their irrational hatred against Hashem and us compelled them to attack a harmless and seemingly defenseless nation. In the aftermath of their attack we were commanded to always remember the evil that is Amalek. It is the reading of this Parsha that is the fulfillment of this Biblical commandment. This mitzvah, according to most authorities, is not restricted by time and must be fulfilled by men and woman. The Rabbis selected the Shabbos before Purim for the fulfillment of this Mitzvah because Haman was a direct descendent of Amalek, and Mordecai was a direct descendent of King Saul. The entire story of Purim is directly linked to this Mitzvah and the missed opportunity of King Saul that we read about in the Haftorah.

## Haftorah Zachor - Shmuel I - 15:2

This week's Haftorah takes place 2,883 years ago. In the year 2883 - 878 b.c.e. King Shaul was sent by G-d to destroy the nation of Amalek. Agag was their king, and it was a singular moment in history when every member of Amalek was in one place at the same time. Shaul, as per Shmuel Hanavi's instructions, was successful in destroying Amalek. However, as the Haftorah clearly states, Shaul had mercy and allowed the king, Agag, to remain alive, as well as the captured cattle. The commentaries state that in the interim, Agag was able to impregnate a maidservant, from which the nation of Amalek would survive. Hashem told Shmuel that Shaul's neglect of His command to totally destroy Amalek must result in Shaul losing the right to be king. Despite Shmuel's prayers for mercy, Hashem didn't relent, and Shmuel went to tell Shaul of G-d's punishment. The connection to Purim is well documented. Haman is called, "the Agagi". He was a direct descendent of Agag. In ascertaining Hashem's mercy and justice, we are forced to acknowledge our limited understanding. The notion of killing men woman and children is thankfully foreign and abhorrent to us. Nevertheless, Shaul was commanded to eradicate the entire nation. The Haftorah identifies Shaul's sin in not fulfilling G-d's commandment as misplaced mercy. Had he known that, 521 years later, his merciful act would result in the potential extermination of the entire Jewish people, Shaul would not have had mercy on Agag and the cattle. It is the responsibility of a king to think beyond the immediate and do what has to be done to guarantee the future of his nation. Being that no single human can ever guarantee the future, he has no choice but to listen to Hashem's commandments and do as he is told. That insures the future. The message of Purim is the story of our Haftorah. Hashem works His miracles through the normal passage of time. Actions done today set in motion ripples in time that radiate far into the future. May today's celebration of Purim set in motion the redemption of tomorrow!

### Rabbi's Purim Notes

1. The Purim period begins with the Four Parshios: Shekalim, Zachor, Parah & Chodesh. This Shabbos is Zachor. All men and women should hear Zachor read from the Torah.
2. On Purim, Al Hanisim is added to the Amidah and Benching.

### The Four Mitzvos of Purim

1. Reading of the Megilah: Men, women, and children who can listen and not disturb, must hear the Megilah being read twice: once on the night of Purim and once during Purim day.
2. Mishloach Manos: Each adult should deliver at least one Mishloach Manos. It should consist of two different foods requiring no further preparation for eating and must be delivered on Purim day.
3. Matonos L'Evyonim: Money or food must be given on Purim to at least two recipients. Tzedaka can be given to the Rabbis in advance of Purim for delivery on Purim.
4. Seudas Purim: A festive meal must be eaten during the day of Purim (before sunset). Even if it continues into the night Al Hanisim should be recited in Benching.

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