SANCTIFYING THROUGH THE PHYSICAL

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

> *These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 186, Shalach Monos and Other Purim Issues. Happy Purim!*

Sanctifying Oneself Through The Physical

There is a very significant difference between Judaism and other religions. Many religions, particularly Catholicism, believe in a basic dichotomy between the physical and spiritual. That is why they believe that their holy people must remain celibate. They hold that if a person really wants to reach spirituality, he must separate himself from physical things. The more separate a person can become, the more holy he can become. Judaism teaches us just the opposite. Torah teaches that the highest form of holiness can come through material matters.

[This concept will be discussed further when we reach Parshas Vayikra; this shiur was given during a leap year, and Vayikra fell before Purim.]

It is perhaps appropriate to stress this idea as the holiday of Purim approaches. On Purim there is a mitzvah to eat and drink. These are, obviously, basic physical activities. But the mitzvah is to transform these activities into a higher form -- not just filling one's stomach or using drinking as an excuse to act inappropriately. These are concepts that someone following another religion would find very hard to understand. They see a dichotomy between the physical and spiritual, a divide that cannot be bridged. But a Jew is asked and is able to eat and drink and -- even in that state -- sanctify the name of Heaven. That is Purim!

Chazal tell us that Yom Kippurim is a day like Purim, [k(mo) Purim]. The day before Yom Kippur we feast, and on Yom Kippur we fast. On Purim it is just the opposite. The day prior to Purim (Ta'anis Esther) we fast, and on Purim we feast.

Chazal phrased their statement in such a way that Yom Kippur -- which is being compared to Purim -- seems to be secondary, and Purim seems to be primary. The reason for this is that on Purim we can achieve a higher level of spirituality than on Yom Kippur! On Yom Kippur, we achieve a

spirituality that comes through fasting and abstention. On Purim, the preparation comes through fasting but the goal is to sit at our Purim Seudah [Purim Feast], and achieve spirituality through feasting!

Haman: The Perennial Malcontent

The Gemara [Talmud, Tractate Chulin 139b] asks, "From where do we see a Biblical allusion to Haman's name?" To which the enigmatic answer is given, "Hahmin ha'eytz hazeh..." ([Did you eat] from this tree?) [Bereishis 3:11]. Without vowels, the Hebrew letters of the word Hahmin are the same as the Hebrew letters in the name Haman. This is a type of Gemara that cannot be understood on a superficial level. The Talmud is certainly not merely playing a word game!

The Gemara is saying the following: "Where does the Torah allude to the concept represented by Haman?" The answer is that the essence of Haman lies in the verse "[Did you eat] from this tree?" Rav Bergman explains that Haman was an individual who had everything. Our sages say he was one of the wealthiest people in the world. He was second in command to the King. He had all that one could ask out of life -- money, power, family -- everything! And yet, what did Haman say? As long as Haman saw "Mordechai, the Jew sitting at the gate of the king" (refusing to bow down to him - [Esther 3:2]), Haman said, "all this is worthless to me" [Esther 5:13]. Because Haman was lacking one thing, everything else became worthless to him.

Such a person will never be happy. In order for a person to be happy, one must be pleased with his lot in life. Haman represents the antithesis of one who is happy with his lot. Haman represents the perennial malcontent. He represents the one who is never happy. He can have money, power and prestige and yet declare it all worthless.

The Gemara asks, where do we see this attribute in the Torah -- that one can have everything and yet still not be satisfied? The answer is that we find it by Adam in the Garden of Eden. Adam had literally everything -- spirituality, physical luxury, angels to serve him -- everything! He lacked only one thing: access to the Tree of Knowledge. Adam was not satisfied, and he succumbed to the sin that led us down the path to the world as it exists today. Haman personified the same character trait: that of not being satisfied even when one has most everything.

This is a particularly important lesson for us to learn before Purim. The mitzvah of Purim is one of those difficult mitzvos, which escapes modern man. The mitzvah is to be happy. One would think the mitzvah of Simcha (to be happy) is an easy mitzvah, but we know from experience that it is not so easy. Happiness does not come to us easily. We always have so many things to worry about, that it is very difficult to be happy.

What is the 'key' to happiness? A person becomes happy by being a "sameach b'chelko" -- one who is happy with his portion. We must think about that which we have, rather than that which we lack. If a person -- thank G-d -- is living, is surrounded by his family... has his health... lives in a country where he can perform mitzvos... he has so much! If only we would learn to not be like the Hamans of the

world. We must get away from the attitude of "all this is worthless to me." That is the challenge of Purim -- to think about what Haman represented and about what a miserable life that is, to never be happy and satisfied. We must contemplate how rotten and disgusting and depressing such an attitude and such a life is. We must rise above that attitude, and instead dwell on and think about that which we do have. Then we can truly fulfill the Mitzvah of the day. "For the Jews there was light, happiness, joy, and honor" (La'yehudim Hoyso Ora Vsimcha Vsosson Veykor) [Esther 8:16].

Happy Purim!

Glossary

sameach b'chelko -- happy with one's lot in life

Sources and Personalities

Rav Bergman -- contemporary, Ponnevich Yeshiva, Bnei Brak, Israel

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