

ב"ס

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# Beyond All Reason



*An adaptation of the discourse*  
Chayav Inish L'bsumei  
*found in Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi's*  
Torah Or

The classic *ma'amar* referred to  
by the *Tzemach Tzedek* simply as "the Purim discourse"

בס"ד

**FOREWORD**

With humility and gratitude to the Al-mighty, I am pleased to offer the public this English adaptation of the *ma'amar* (discourse in Chassidic philosophy), *Chayav Inish L'bsumei*, which appears in the original in *Torah Or*, beginning at p. 98a.

The present adaptation (formerly called “The Pith of Purim”) is one of a set of selected *ma'amarim* from *Torah Or* and *Likutei Torah* by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, of blessed memory (known as the *Alter Rebbe*), which *Hashem* has graciously enabled me to complete. These are now being readied for publication, with G-d’s help.

Chassidic tradition considers *Torah Or* and *Likutei Torah* the “Oral Torah” of Chassidus, for they expand and elaborate the principles of Jewish mysticism set forth by the *Alter Rebbe* in more concise form in his masterwork, *Tanya*—the “Written Torah” of Chassidus.

A unique and important—indeed, historic—aspect of these adaptations is that they are, in a very real sense, a “primary source”: explanation and background material is very liberally included within the text, to be sure, but the work remains, essentially, representative *ma'amarim* from *Torah Or* and *Likutei Torah* rendered into English for the first time anywhere.

This is therefore a work for the serious student—in the sense that any philosophical work is for “serious” readers—but it does not require any background at all in either Chassidic philosophy or even Jewish knowledge. I have attempted to convey the *Alter Rebbe's* original teachings to even the utterly uninitiated, provided they 1) understand English and 2) are willing to think about what they are reading.

Needless to say, mistakes are inevitable in human undertaking, and I take full responsibility for any found within. I would very much appreciate if they would be brought to my attention at [ywagshul@hotmail.com](mailto:ywagshul@hotmail.com).

I dedicate this booklet to my wife Leah, to my parents, and to my children. Hashem knows so well all our sorrows and troubles; all our needs and desires: May He, in His great mercy, permanently change the former into joys and ease in this time of “change...from sorrow to joy,” and may He grant the latter unto us and all *K'lal Yisroel* in a manner “beyond all reason,” *ad d'lo yada*—including the strongest need and desire of all, the immediate redemption by *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*.

Yitzchok Dovid Wagshul  
יצחק דוד בן ר' מנחם מענדל וואגשאל  
Crown Heights, Brooklyn, NY  
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B"H

*T'tzaveh/Purim*

**Chayav Inish L'bsumei (#2)**

*An adaptation of the  
ma'amar found in Torah Or*



Summary

*In Likutei Torah, Vayikra 4c, the Tzemach Tzedek makes an editorial comment to the Alter Rebbe's ma'amar there, in which the present ma'amar ("Chayav Inish L'bsumei...") is referred to simply as d'rush Purim, "the Purim discourse."*

*The Rebbe, in Likutei Sichos (sicha of Vayikra 5730, published in Vol. 7, p. 27, note 55), points out that the reason this ma'amar is called "the Purim discourse," despite the fact that numerous other ma'amarim also deal with Purim, is that the subject of this particular ma'amar (namely, the requirement that on Purim, one drink to the point that one no longer knows the difference between "cursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai") expresses the central theme of Purim.*

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# 1

*Purim: a time of unbridled  
joy and dedication to Torah*



THE HOLIDAY of Purim, celebrating the miraculous salvation of the entire Jewish people from annihilation in the times of the ancient Persian Empire, is such a joyous occasion that, as the Talmud teaches,<sup>1</sup> “A person is obligated to become so inebriated on Purim that they cannot distinguish between ‘cursed be Haman’<sup>2</sup> and ‘blessed be Mordechai.’”<sup>3</sup>

*Purim is so  
joyous that we  
traditionally  
become  
inebriated.*

Yet this is truly puzzling, for why is Purim considered even more joyous than the major Jewish holidays known as *Yom Tov*? *Yom Tov* holidays, such as Passover, Shavuot and Succot, are actually mandated by the Torah,<sup>4</sup> and even greater miracles happened on those holidays than on Purim. On Passover, for example, G-d split the Sea for us; on Shavuot, we received the Torah. Furthermore, *Yom Tov* is endowed with a greater degree of sanctity than Purim: on *Yom Tov* we are not allowed to engage

*Why is Purim  
more joyous than  
Yom Tov,  
when it is  
forbidden to  
drink to excess?*

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<sup>1</sup> *Megilla 7b*

<sup>2</sup> the evil schemer behind the plot to annihilate the Jews

<sup>3</sup> the holy saint and leader of the Jews of that time

<sup>4</sup> i.e., they are not of Rabbinic origin as is Purim

in the category of activity known as *m'lacha*,<sup>5</sup> whereas no such prohibition exists on Purim. (Interestingly, Mordechai sought to legislate such a prohibition, but his proposal was not accepted. Nevertheless, it is proper not to conduct business on Purim.) To be sure, there is a requirement to celebrate *Yom Tov* with joy, but nothing approaching the degree described above. In fact, as Maimonides writes in his compendium of Jewish law,<sup>6</sup> it is forbidden to drink to excess on *Yom Tov*.

*At Mount Sinai, there was an element of coercion; On Purim, the Jews accepted the Torah freely.*

*Why was the commitment of Purim any more "voluntary" than that of Mount Sinai?.*

The above will be understood after a discussion of the teaching<sup>7</sup> that although the Jews accepted upon themselves the commitment to observe the Torah when it was originally given at Mount Sinai, it was only later, during the events of historic Purim, that they fully ratified this commitment. The Talmud elaborates<sup>8</sup> that there was an element of coercion at Mount Sinai, as though G-d had (allegorically speaking) suspended the dome of an uprooted mountain over their heads and threatened, "If you accept the Torah, fine; if not, this will be your grave." Although the Jews did accept the Torah willingly at that time, it was not until the events of Purim that their commitment was considered one hundred percent voluntary. Yet this too needs explanation. On Purim, the Jews were faced with genocide, and consequently fasted and prayed to G-d, sincerely repented and reaffirmed their dedication to G-d's Torah. Inasmuch as this

<sup>5</sup> commonly translated "work" but actually a highly technical term

<sup>6</sup> Laws of *Yom Tov* 6:20

<sup>7</sup> Shavuot 39a, interpreting Esther 9:23

<sup>8</sup> Shabbos 8a

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resulted under pressure of impending death, why was the commitment of Purim any more “voluntary” than that of Mount Sinai?

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## 2

### *The essential quality of Torah*



For the answer, we must in turn examine the nature of the Torah itself, and of its being given to the Jews at Mount Sinai. To do this, we must clarify the following two points:

First, there is a teaching that it is said of souls ascending to their Heavenly reward,<sup>9</sup> “Happy is he who arrives here with his Torah study in hand [*talmudo b’yado*].” This Hebrew expression specifically connotes study of practical Jewish law (*halacha*); yet it requires some explanation why study of practical law is the most important requirement for admission to Heaven, where the souls engage not in detailed legal investigation, but abstract mystical revelations.

*It is said of souls ascending to Heaven, “Happy is he who arrives here with his Torah study in hand.”*

Second, another Talmudic teaching<sup>10</sup> has it that anyone who could have spent some time in Torah study but did not do so is a fitting object of the verse,<sup>11</sup> “He has despised the word of G-d ... that soul shall be utterly cut off.” However, this seems astonishing when one considers that, under Jewish law, a person who

*One who neglects even a small amount of Torah study is said to have “despised the word of G-d.” This seems severe.*

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<sup>9</sup> *P’sachim* 50a

<sup>10</sup> *Sanhedrin* 99a; see *Tanya* ch. 1

<sup>11</sup> Numbers 15:31

finds it impossible to engage in much Torah study satisfies their obligation with only one chapter in the morning and one chapter in the evening. If it is “technically” all right to get by on such a small amount of study, why should someone who may very well study much more than that, but who merely neglected a single opportunity for study, be considered so culpable as to deserve to be “utterly cut off”?

The explanation of all this is as follows:

*The Torah is called m'shal hakadmoni, “the parable of the Predecessor.” G-d composed the Torah as a great parable by which His creatures could understand Him.*

The Torah is called<sup>12</sup> *m'shal hakadmoni*, “the parable of the Ancient One,” or “the parable of the Predecessor [i.e., G-d, the ‘Predecessor of the world’].” Similarly, King Solomon said,<sup>13</sup> “To understand a parable and a figure.” A parable is a device for conveying a concept which, because of its depth or because it is wholly outside the hearer’s experience, cannot be directly related. By reformulating the idea as a parable, the hearer can extrapolate and arrive at some understanding of what is meant. G-d is certainly inaccessible to human understanding – in fact, to any understanding, even that of the loftiest angels – and He composed the Torah, in a sense, as a great parable by which His creatures could gain some conception of Him.

Specifically, the expression “Predecessor of the world” refers to that aspect of G-d which totally transcends all relation to the universe. As explained elsewhere, G-d relates to the universe on various levels: on the one hand, He is

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<sup>12</sup> I Samuel 24:14; see Rashi’s commentary to *Makkos* 10b

<sup>13</sup> Proverbs 1:6

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immanent within creation (*memaleh kol almin*) and invests each particular creature and entity with just the right amount of spiritual life force to bring that thing into being in its unique form. On the other hand, it is equally true that G-d Himself is above relating to each specific item individually, and instead pervades and encompasses everything equally; in that sense, we speak of Him as transcendent over creation (*sovev kol almin*). Both of these concepts, however, relate G-d to creation. They are obviously not truly descriptive of G-d as He is in Himself, as it were, for that is a level that cannot be described in terms of its relation – whether immanent or transcendent – to the world. It is this level of G-d Himself – the blessed *Or Ein Sof* (“Light of the Infinite One”) Itself – that is meant by the “Predecessor of the world,” the level which precedes any relation at all to the universe. This is the level, otherwise utterly inaccessible, to which the Torah is the “Parable of the Predecessor.”

*G-d is at once immanent within creation and transcendent over creation. Both of these concepts relate G-d to creation. The expression, “Predecessor of the world” refers to G-d as He precedes all relation to creation. It is this to which Torah is a parable.*

In fact, there are countless degrees of understanding of G-d, depending on the spiritual level and capacity of the one attempting the understanding. For us relatively lowly people, for example, the Torah may serve as a “parable” to the way G-d is manifest in Heaven; to the spiritual beings of Heaven, however, that very level – which we needed a parable to comprehend – is itself nothing but a parable to a still higher degree of G-dly understanding. Since G-d is infinite, there is no limit to how high this reaches. (This is what is meant, according to the Kabbalistic master Rabbi Yitzchok Luria (known

*King Solomon  
"spoke three  
thousand  
parables": he  
understood the  
Torah on three  
thousand  
successively  
higher levels.*

*The unending  
succession of  
"parables" which  
may be found in  
the Torah's  
infinite depths all  
lead, ultimately,  
to the supreme  
parable of all:  
the spiritual level  
of chochma in  
which the  
"Predecessor of  
the world," the  
Or Ein Sof, is  
manifest..*

as the ARI, of blessed memory) in *Likutei HaShas*, by the Talmud's comment,<sup>14</sup> "The righteous have no rest, neither in this world or the next, as it is written,<sup>15</sup> "They shall go from strength to strength." That is, the righteous do not remain static; instead they are constantly ascending to ever higher levels of G-dly comprehension.) This concept is what is meant by the statement about King Solomon<sup>16</sup> that he "spoke three thousand parables": Solomon's wisdom was so great that, for each concept in Torah, he was able to understand its meaning on fully three thousand successively higher levels.

Now, the Torah itself, that great "parable" to the lofty spiritual level of the *Or Ein Sof*, is said to "come from [G-d's] wisdom."<sup>17</sup> G-d manifests Himself in the universe in ten principal ways, which we identify by analogy to ten principal attributes of the human personality. Of these ten Divine "attributes," known as the ten *s'firos*, the highest spiritual level is called *chochma* (usually translated "wisdom") – just as in a person, the very pinnacle of the personality is the intellect. The Kabbalistic teaching quoted above, that the Torah comes from wisdom, refers to this level. G-d's very "Self," as it were – the *Or Ein Sof* – manifests itself only within the *s'fira* of *chochma*;<sup>18</sup> *chochma*, in turn, is the spiritual source of the Torah. The unending succession of

<sup>14</sup> *B'rachos* 64a

<sup>15</sup> Psalms 84:8

<sup>16</sup> I Kings 5:12

<sup>17</sup> *Zohar* II, 121a

<sup>18</sup> The reason for this has been discussed elsewhere; see, e.g., the synopsis of the discourse *L'havin Inyan Lechem Mishne* on the Torah portion *B'shalach*.

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“parables” which may be found in the Torah’s infinite depths, each level hinting at the one above it, all lead, ultimately, to the supreme parable of all: the spiritual level of *chochma* in which the “Predecessor of the world,” the *Or Ein Sof*, is manifest. In this sense is the Torah the “Parable of the Predecessor,” through which we are enabled to gain some conception of this supremely exalted level.

(Here we should parenthetically explain something which will sharpen our understanding of the above, as well as prove relevant for our discussion later:

The ten *s'firos* are, as mentioned, G-d’s manifestation in the universe, but He Himself utterly transcends all ten. In order for the *s'firos*, and through them, all spiritual and physical aspects of the universe, to come into being out of the Infinite One Himself, there had to be some mediating level in between—the gap, so to speak, between G-d and creation (even the creation of the ten *s'firos*) would simply be unbridgeable otherwise. This intermediate level is known as *kesser*, “crown”; if the ten *s'firos* are analogous to the human personality, wherein the highest level is intellect, *kesser* may be compared to a crown, which sits atop the head and encompasses from above, transcends, even the highest aspects of the person. The sublime spiritual level of *kesser*, then, receives the G-dly life force directly from G-d Himself (something even the highest *s'fira* could not withstand), and passes it on to the *s'firos*.

*Kesser, or  
“Crown,” is the  
intermediate level  
between G-d and  
the s'firos.*

*An intermediary  
between A and  
B functions  
because it has  
aspects in  
common with  
both.*

Now, any intermediary necessarily has two aspects: the lower, or outer, aspect that relates to the recipient, and the higher, or inner, aspect that relates to the source. An intermediary between levels A and B functions because it has aspects in common with both: its inner aspect is more like A; its outer aspect is more like B; the intermediary as a whole can therefore forge a link between these disparate levels.

*Kesser's  
external aspect is  
compared to  
"will";  
Its inner aspect is  
likened to  
"pleasure."*

The same is true of *kesser*, which, in addition to its analogy to a crown, is also compared to the function of "will." A person's will transcends even their intellect, as witnessed by the fact that when one wants something, one wants it—whether the intellect approves or not. The more superficial, or "outer," aspect of *kesser* is called *ratzon*, "wanting," or simply "will"; the "inner" aspect is referred to as *ta'anug*, "pleasure" or "delight." In a person, this reflects the fact that *kesser* is the level that mediates between the body (including even its most sublime faculties like intellect) and the soul itself. The outer aspect, "will"—what one wants—finds common ground with intellect, whereas the inner aspect, "pleasure" is something that relates more to the very soul. (There's no conceivable "reason" why one prefers chocolate over vanilla, for example. That one person takes pleasure in chocolate while another gets pleasure from vanilla is, as it were, an innate characteristic of their respective souls. It is only because of this inherent quality that the person finds themselves "wanting" chocolate, leading, in turn, to thoughts of how to obtain the desired object, and so on.)

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Spiritually, the so-called “outer” aspect of *kesser* is the level that relates to the ten *s'firos* and creation. It is known as *ratzon ha-elyon*, the supernal will, or the Will of G-d. One may think of it as the very highest level, the original first step, toward creation (G-d's will to create the universe was the first step from which all else followed). Indeed, the supernal *ratzon* is the same spiritual level as that referred to above as *sover kol almin*, the transcendent aspect of G-d over creation, just as *kesser*, the “crown,” transcends and surrounds from without.

Yet, as mentioned, even this exalted level relates G-d to creation. G-d Himself cannot be “categorized” that way; He is utterly beyond being even the “source” of creation. By contrast, G-d as He is in Himself is referred to as the *Ein Sof*, the Infinite One. If we can imagine such a thing, the so-called “lowest” aspect of the *Ein Sof* is the innermost aspect of *kesser*: the spiritual level of *ta'anug*, Divine “pleasure.” Thus, *ta'anug* and *ratzon* together, the two aspects of *kesser*, function as the intermediary between G-d—the *Ein Sof*—and creation.

(Of course, all the above can only be understood allegorically. It goes without saying that G-d does not possess human qualities like “will” and “pleasure;” these terms are used by the Kabbalah merely in order to give us something to grasp onto in our attempt to comprehend G-d. The human faculties of *ta'anug* and *ratzon* (as well, indeed, as all human faculties, including those represented by the ten *s'firos*) were created by G-d in their particular form

*Ratzon, the external aspect of kesser, relates to the universe; Ta'anug, the internal aspect, relates, as it were, to G-d.*

specifically so that we could relate to His own holy “faculties” by Torah-guided analogy to them. This is the inner meaning of the verse<sup>19</sup> “Let us make Man in Our image.”)

*Specifically, it is ta'anug, the inner aspect of kesser, that is meant by the “Predecessor” in the expression “Parable of the Predecessor.”*

It is, then, specifically the inner aspect of *kesser*, i.e., *ta'anug*, which is meant by the “Ancient One” and the “Predecessor” in the expression “Parable of the Predecessor or Ancient One.” For it is *ta'anug* that is beyond categorization even as the source of creation; rather, it is that aspect of G-d known as *Kadmono shel Olam*, the Predecessor of the World—i.e., beyond any relation to the world whatsoever, even as the One Who “transcends” the world.

*The Kabbalah refers to this aspect of G-d as Atik Yomin, “Ancient of Days.”*

(The Kabbalah refers to this aspect of G-d as *Atik Yomin*, “Ancient of Days,”<sup>20</sup> which connotes the idea of being separate and apart (*ne'etake*) from “the days of the world” (*y'mos olam*, as in the phrase in our liturgy, *hamisnasei mimos olam* – “[G-d] Who is exalted above the days of the world”). The expression *Atik Yomin* also hints at the fact that the Heavenly level of *ta'anug* derives from the Kabbalistic level known as *Adam Kadmon*, the “Original Man”—which, however, is beyond the scope of this discussion.)

To apply all this to our topic, it is the level of *ta'anug* that the righteous experience in the hereafter, where they “delight” (*ta'anug*) in G-d’s pure light (*tzachtzachus*). The question is, in view of the utter inaccessibility of this spiritual level, which is, after all, *Kadmono shel Olam*, the Predecessor of the World—beyond any relation

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 1:26

<sup>20</sup> see Daniel 7:9

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to the world whatsoever—how can the souls of the righteous possibly experience it? How can they be exposed to such potent G-dliness and not be overwhelmed, ceasing to exist? The Torah is the key. Torah is the *m'shal bakadmoni*, the “parable” to the spiritual level of *Kadmono shel Olam*, by means of which one can attain an understanding of the referent, the concept represented by the parable.

That is what our sages meant when they taught “Happy is he who arrives [in the hereafter] with his Torah study in hand.” The Torah one studied in life is absolutely necessary, essential, for experiencing the hereafter, since it is utterly impossible to relate to the potent revelations of that world except through the “parable” provided by Torah. If one has not understood all aspects of the parable, one just cannot benefit from the corresponding aspects of the referent revealed in the hereafter—it’s as simple as that. Thus, “Happy is he who arrives [in the hereafter] with his Torah study in hand.”

We are now also in a position to understand why, although one who truly cannot engage in any more Torah study satisfies their minimum obligation with only one chapter in the morning and one chapter in the evening, this concept is irrelevant for someone who did have the opportunity to study more, but neglected to do so—even if, quantitatively, the amount the second person actually studied (even without the neglected portion) was far more than “one chapter in the morning and one chapter in the evening.” Instead, that neglectful person’s “soul

*It is the level of ta'anug that the righteous experience in the hereafter. How can they withstand such potent revelations? Through the Torah, the “Parable of the Predecessor.”*

*That is what our sages meant when they taught “Happy is he who arrives [in the hereafter] with his Torah study in hand.”*

shall be utterly cut off” because they “despised the word of G-d.” Why this double standard?

The explanation lies in what we now understand about the spiritual nature and function of the Torah as the “Parable of the Predecessor.”

*Some things are so profound that they require many levels of parable before a person can understand them.*

If a concept is not especially profound, it may be conveyed to another person directly, with no need of a parable. If the idea is more difficult, it may require embodying the concept in a parable in order that the student grasp its meaning. And, some things are so profound that they require many levels of parable before the student can understand them: one needs the first parable to understand some logically necessary prerequisite before one can move on to the next level, itself only attainable through another parable, etc.

*Not all people are equal in their capacity to understand Torah. This does not reflect on the person's “worth” or virtue.*

Now, not all people are equal in their capacity to understand Torah. This does not reflect on the person's “worth” or virtue, for all Jews are equally dear to G-d, and someone who understands as much Torah as they personally can is considered just as meritorious as someone else who, endowed with greater capacity, understands much more. Rather, for His own inscrutable reasons, G-d created some people tall and some short; some smart and some dull; some strong and some weak, etc. In the case of Torah, one's capacity for understanding has to do with the spiritual root of his or her soul.

The point is that, since G-d does not ask the impossible of us, we can take it for granted

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that a person who legitimately (that is, they are not just deluding themselves) cannot possibly study any more than a chapter every morning and evening, is in that situation because that is the limit of their capacity anyway; they are not losing out by missing something they could otherwise have acquired. G-d would not have “prevented” them from learning if they could have absorbed any more. Thus, this category of person—someone whose Jewish legal obligation for Torah study is genuinely satisfied by such a small quantity of learning—needs no more than that amount to derive the full benefit of his or her place in Heaven: their soul’s place in the hereafter is commensurate with its spiritual capacity, and those daily chapters provide all the “parable” they personally need to appreciate the revelations destined for them.

*Someone who cannot learn a lot of Torah needs no more than that amount to benefit from their place in Heaven, for this is commensurate with their spiritual*

(Alternatively, it is possible that the person does have more capacity for Torah understanding, but G-d really has prevented them (by financial constraint, illness, exile in Siberia, or other insurmountable obstacle) from achieving their potential. In such a case, G-d sees to it that the person not lose out in the hereafter, by bypassing the normal channels, as it were, and filling in what the person is missing.)

On the other hand, greater capacity for Torah study is a sign of a greater capacity soul, one destined for greater revelations in the hereafter. To be able to experience these, that person must prepare by studying the amount of Torah necessary to serve as a “parable” for all those revelations. Studying less will leave one

*Greater capacity for Torah implies greater revelations in the hereafter. Such a person must prepare by studying more Torah; any less will leave them short.*

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*By neglecting  
Torah study, one  
forfeits the  
opportunity to  
relate to G-d to  
that extent. That  
is the meaning of  
“their soul will  
be utterly cut  
off.”*

short, and they will miss out on whatever revelations of G-dliness they would have been granted had they only taken the trouble to prepare for the experience. By neglecting even one bit of Torah study, they have forfeited the opportunity to relate to G-d to that extent. That is the meaning of the statement that their soul will be “utterly cut off”: that soul will have no possibility of connecting with G-d to the extent it lacks the Torah needed to do so. Since we are talking about someone who could have engaged in study, but chose not to do so, it is appropriate to say that they thereby “despised the word of G-d.”

To summarize, then, we have seen that the Torah is a precious and miraculous gift bestowed by G-d upon the Jewish people. It is nothing less than the means by which we mortal Jews can nevertheless bridge the unbridgeable gap between Creator and creation; it is the key, the “parable,” through which we can connect with the Ancient One, the Predecessor of the World—the *Ein Sof* Himself.

### 3

#### *The Jewish commitment to Torah at Mount Sinai and its voluntary ratification on Purim*



The Jews merited this invaluable gift as a result of the Egyptian exile and of their willingness, upon redemption, to put G-d's will before their own. This attitude was exemplified by their response<sup>21</sup> to the prospect of receiving the Torah, "We will do [whatever the Torah says] and we will understand [it]." The significance of this declaration was that the Jews put "we will do" before "we will understand," implying that they were committed to the Torah on a level independent of whether they understood or agreed with it. If it was good enough for G-d, so to speak, it was good enough for the Jews, and they would live by it, period. Nevertheless, within that context of unconditional acceptance and commitment to Torah observance, the Jews would make every effort to understand the Torah as well, since that, too, is what G-d wants. But under no circumstances would "we will do" be dependent on "we will understand"; the Jews' commitment to the Torah was a given.

*The Jews merited  
the Torah by  
their willingness  
to put G-d's will  
before their own,  
declaring "we  
will do" before  
"we will  
understand."*

This reflects the *bitul*, or self-nullification, of the Jews before G-d. It is impossible for there to be a genuine manifestation of G-dliness, a

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<sup>21</sup> Exodus 24:7

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*If one takes the attitude that one is "something" in one's own right (but G-d "also" exists), one is essentially rejecting G-d's unity.*

revelation of the *Or Ein Sof*—the “Light of the Infinite One”—absent this quality of *bitul*. If one takes the attitude that one is “something” in one’s own right (but G-d “also” exists), one is essentially rejecting G-d’s unity. In reality, there is no true existence but G-d. If one truly internalizes this concept, one will naturally put aside all one’s own desires in deference to G-d’s will, as though, in fact, there is but one will: G-d’s. That is what is meant by the command<sup>22</sup> “And you shall serve Him” – i.e., as a servant who simply carries out their master’s will and has none of their own. It is only where this *bitul* exists that the *Or Ein Sof* will be manifest, which is why, in fact, the *Or Ein Sof* is expressed exclusively within the *s’fira* of *chochma*, as alluded to earlier<sup>23</sup>—for this *s’fira* alone is characterized by *bitul*, as explained elsewhere.

*One cannot cause oneself to understand something; one either “gets it” or not. To understand Torah, one must first subjugate oneself to G-d.*

And this concept brings out a deeper meaning of the phrase, “we will do and we will understand” (*na’aseh v’nishmah*): the word *nishmah*, “we will understand,” literally means, “we will hear,” in the sense of one who says, “I hear you; I hear what you are saying.” Hearing is not an active sense, one does not actively hear things, but passively detects whatever sound reaches the ear. In the same way, one cannot actively cause oneself to understand something. The thing to be understood is outside the person, it either “penetrates” or it doesn’t; one either “gets it” or not. One cannot simply “read” or “study” the Torah as though it were a book or a subject area and thereby “acquire” its spiritual benefits. In order to “hear,” understand, Torah—*nishmah*—

<sup>22</sup> Deuteronomy 13:5

<sup>23</sup> see *Tanya*, gloss to chapter 35

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one must first come into a state of total *bitul*, absolute deference and nullity before G-d—*na'aseh*—or the awesome spiritual light of Torah, the *Or Ein Sof* it contains, will not be revealed to one's understanding. *Na'aseh* precedes *nishmah* because *na'aseh* is literally a prerequisite to *nishmah*.

*Na'aseh precedes nishmah because na'aseh is literally a prerequisite to nishmah.*

When the Jews were enslaved in Egypt, they were subjected to the debasing influence of that immoral, idolatrous culture, and sank to a very low level of spirituality. On redemption, the Jews were still in that state;<sup>24</sup> G-d rescued them just in time, as it were, to prevent what spiritual spark they still retained from going out altogether. If so, how did the Jews succeed in reaching the exemplary level of *bitul* implied by the declaration *na'aseh v'nishmah*? They could not have achieved this on their own so soon after leaving Egypt.

*How did the Jews, barely free of Egyptian influence, succeed in reaching the level of bitul implied by na'aseh v'nishmah?*

And in fact, they didn't. G-d, in His gracious love for the Jewish People, helped us out, so to speak, He “pulled us up” so that we could move forward on our own. This was accomplished by G-d's open revelation to the Jews at the Decalogue. In the face of this direct manifestation of G-dliness, the Jews were utterly overwhelmed by spirituality and the natural, inextinguishable love of a Jewish soul for G-d brought to the fore. Then the Jews wanted nothing but to be united with G-d Himself, so much so that, as our sages teach,<sup>25</sup> their souls

*In the face of G-d's direct manifestation at the Decalogue, the Jews were overwhelmed by spirituality.*

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<sup>24</sup> see *Torah Or*, discourse beginning *Zachor Eis Asher Asa L'cha Amalek*

<sup>25</sup> *Shabbos* 88b

literally left them and returned to Him with each word G-d spoke. This was the *bitul* needed for receiving the Torah.

*The Jews were  
compelled to  
accept the Torah  
not so much by  
fear as by love.*

And this is what is meant by the teaching that G-d “suspended a mountain over their heads” and forced them to accept the Torah. The Jews were compelled to accept the Torah not so much by fear as by love: the inconceivable love of G-d for the Jews and His direct revelation to us on Mount Sinai literally overwhelmed us, reviving that surviving Jewish spark and igniting it into its natural state, a roaring flame; “forcing” us automatically into the state of utter nullity that allowed the *Or Ein Sof* to manifest itself within us.

*The symbolism of  
G-d's  
“mountain”  
above the Jews is  
that He revealed  
His  
overwhelming  
love for us. This  
brought out our  
own love for  
Him.*

For “mountain” is used in Jewish mysticism as a symbol of G-d’s love for the Jews, as we find regarding Abraham (the embodiment of G-d’s attribute of *chesed* and love), who was called “mountain”; and regarding Aharon (who also represented G-d’s loving *chesed*), whose Hebrew name contains the word *har*, “mountain.” The symbolism of G-d’s “mountain” above the Jews is that He revealed His overwhelming love for us, as explained above, and the characterization of this mountain as “like a dome” alludes to the all-encompassing nature of the love—like a dome surrounding us from all sides. In other words, G-d’s love for us literally encompassed us from all sides and automatically, inevitably, brought out our natural love for Him in return. (The verse,<sup>26</sup> “[G-d’s]

<sup>26</sup> Song of Songs 2:6; 8:3

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right hand [another symbol of love] embraces me” can also be interpreted in this sense.)

This idea of G-d’s stimulating the Jews’ love for Him by first bestowing His own overwhelming love upon us, is hinted at in the verse,<sup>27</sup> “I have loved you, says G-d.” It is possible to understand the phrase, *ahavti eschem*, “I have loved you,” as though “I have loved” were a transitive verb, that is, as though it meant, “I have caused you to love,” or “I have ‘enloved’ you.” This refers to what we have just been discussing: by G-d manifesting Himself to us at Mount Sinai—by first bestowing upon us the “mountain” of His overwhelming love for us—He awakened our own love for Him in response.<sup>28</sup>

*The verse, “I have loved you, says G-d” can be interpreted, “I have caused you to love.”*

(As an interesting aside, this provides an answer to a famous question concerning one of the blessings recited at a marriage ceremony. The text of the blessing in question praises G-d who “sanctifies His nation, Israel, through *chuppah* [literally, the marriage canopy spread over the bride and groom] and *kiddushin* [marriage].” It is asked, Why is the marriage canopy mentioned before marriage itself (especially in light of the implication of *chuppah* as the consummation of the marriage)? Surely, the proper sequence ought to have been, “through *kiddushin* and *chuppah*,” not the other way around. However, “*chuppah*” symbolizes the same transcendent, encompassing

*The foregoing sheds light on one of the blessings at a marriage*

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<sup>27</sup> *Malachi* 1:2

<sup>28</sup> (See also the interpretation of “I have loved you, says G-d” given in *Torah Or*, discourse beginning *V’Asisa Vigdei Kodesh*.)

(*makif*) level as the “mountain” suspended like a dome over the Jews at Mount Sinai. The giving of the Torah is often compared to the “wedding” of G-d and the Jews. Just as at that original wedding, it was necessary to first experience the canopy, the mountain above our heads, before we could achieve *bitul* and genuine commitment to G-d, so in all Jewish weddings (which also symbolize G-d’s wedding to the Jews), do we mention the canopy before the marriage itself.)

Finally, then, this is how we are to understand the concept of the Jews’ recommitment to Torah (renewing our vows, so to speak) during the historic Purim episode. G-d’s suspending a mountain over our heads and “forcing” us to accept the Torah was not, as we have explained, compulsion on pain of death, but instead compulsion by love. It was a result of G-d’s open revelation to the Jews at Mount Sinai, on the order of “His right hand embraces me.” By contrast, the situation in the time of the Purim story was radically different, as hinted in the verse,<sup>29</sup> “a time to refrain from embracing.”

*The Jews’ recommitment to Torah during historic Purim, by contrast, was made in a context of hester panim, “concealment” of G-d’s presence.*

G-d’s conduct toward the Jews at the time of the Purim episode was in a manner known as *hester panim*, “concealment.” G-d hid Himself behind the “mask” of natural events and did not show Himself at all (which is one reason we wear masks on Purim—to show that things are not as they outwardly appear; G-d is behind it all). This concealment of G-d’s providence is so much a part of the Purim incident that our sages teach,<sup>30</sup> “Where [can we find an allusion to]

<sup>29</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:5

<sup>30</sup> *Chullin* 139b

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Esther in the Torah [i.e., the Pentateuch]? As it is written,<sup>31</sup> “And I will strongly conceal (*baster astir*) My face on that day.” In keeping with this “pose,” as it were, G-d allowed the wicked Haman to gain the upper hand and decree annihilation upon the Jewish People (G-d forbid)—this could hardly be called an open revelation of Divine love!

Nevertheless, even under those dire circumstances, the Jews sincerely repented and recommitted themselves wholeheartedly to G-d and His Torah. This was considered a superior commitment, in a sense, to that of the Jews at Mount Sinai, for the Jews’ commitment on Purim was not “forced,” by love or any other overwhelming factor, but was fully voluntary. The Jews could not even see the guiding hand of G-d in their lives, but they still chose allegiance to Him over all else—and were willing to sacrifice their very lives for His sake. That is why the commitment of Purim “completed,” in a sense, the commitment of Mount Sinai, expressing as it did our own genuine, unreserved dedication (as opposed to something “imposed” upon us from without) to G-d and the Torah.

*The Jews’  
commitment on  
Purim was not  
“forced” by  
irresistible love,  
but fully  
voluntary. It was  
thus superior to  
the commitment  
at Mount Sinai.*

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<sup>31</sup> Deuteronomy 31:18

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## 4

### *Mordechai and Haman: bitul vs. arrogance*



To fully understand all the above, we need to consider the Jewish quality of *bitul*:

Mordechai, the saintly leader of the Jewish People during the Purim era, was called<sup>32</sup> *Ish Y'hudi*. Today, the Hebrew word *Y'hudi* simply means “Jew,” so that *Ish Y'hudi* would mean, “a Jewish man,” but in Biblical times—when the Book of Esther was written—this was not necessarily the case. The word *Y'hudi* could also have referred to Mordechai’s tribal lineage, in which case it would be translated, “a man of [the tribe of] Judah.” Likewise, the word *Y'hudi* is found in the plural, as it is written,<sup>33</sup> “to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the *Y'hudim* [G-d forbid].” Yet clearly, in neither case is tribal affiliation meant, since Mordechai himself was of the tribe of Benjamin, not Judah;<sup>34</sup> and as for the Jewish People as a whole, obviously, the entire nation was targeted by Haman, not only those of one tribe. If, however, the word *Y'hudi* is used to mean Jew, then, since other words were available in those days, the question becomes: Why did the

*Mordechai was called Ish Y'dudi, and the Jews, Y'hudim. What does this term signify?*

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<sup>32</sup> Esther 2:5

<sup>33</sup> Esther 3:13

<sup>34</sup> see Esther 2:5

Bible choose the word *Y'hudim* to characterize the Jews? To be sure, we take this usage for granted nowadays, but how did it get started?

*Y'hudi comes from the word hoda'ah, "acknowledgment."*

*The Jews are literally the nation of those who acknowledge G-d's unity and our own insignificance, bitul, before Him.*

The answer lies in the literal meaning of the word, as we find<sup>35</sup> with reference to our Matriarch Leah naming her son "Judah" [*Y'buda* in Hebrew]: "This time, I will acknowledge [or "thank"] G-d." The name *Y'buda*, as well as the word *Y'hudi*, comes from the word *hoda'ah*, which means "acknowledgment" (and, by extension, "thanks"). This is an essential characteristic of *bitul*: the recognition and sincere acknowledgment that although, from our limited mortal perspective, the world is "something" and G-d is like "nothingness," the truth is just the opposite—it is G-d Who is the only true existence, and the world, ourselves included, that is like "nothing." The word *Y'hudim* was applied to the Jews precisely because it sums up our essential quality of *bitul* before G-d; the Jews are thus literally the nation of those who acknowledge, who concede, the reality of G-d's unity and omnipresence and our own insignificance in deference to Him. Mordechai was described as *Isb Y'hudi* because, as the Jewish leader, he personified this characteristic: he was the very "man of *hoda'ah*" and the source from which all other Jews derived this spiritual trait. Even today, each and every Jewish person has this uniquely Jewish quality of *bitul*, at least in potential; we are all *Y'hudim*.

*(Note: It is characteristic of Torah that it contains potent spiritual*

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<sup>35</sup> Genesis 29:35

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*content, and is beneficial for our souls independent of whether or not we understand it—although, of course, understanding is the ideal. Certainly, the Alter Rebbe was mindful of this in composing these ma'amarim, and included every point for profound spiritual reasons. Nevertheless, at least superficially, the following italicized section (and those appearing later) is not critical to the flow of this ma'amar, and may be skipped (and, preferably, revisited for later study) if one finds it difficult.)*

*The above is reflected in a dispute among classic Torah commentators. Our sages teach,<sup>36</sup> “Where [can we find an allusion to] Mordechai in the Torah [i.e., the Pentateuch]? As it is written,<sup>37</sup> mar dror [‘pure myrrh’].” The Aramaic translator Onkelos renders this, meira dachya, and it is identified by Maimonides<sup>38</sup> and several other commentaries with the moshk [“musk”] referred to in the Talmud.<sup>39</sup> The blood of this animal, when congealed within the hump in its neck, was made into a spice called mar.*

*This symbolizes the spiritual goal of transforming “bitter into sweet,” i.e., evil into good. Blood represents the physical, animal life of the body and its capacity to lust after worldly desires. When one refines one’s character and transforms one’s worldly desires into*

*(“Where [can we find an allusion to] Mordechai in the Pentateuch? As it is written, ‘mar dror.’” This symbolizes the spiritual goal of transforming “bitter into sweet.”)*

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<sup>36</sup> Chullin 139b

<sup>37</sup> Exodus 30:23, in connection with the spices to be offered in the Sanctuary

<sup>38</sup> Hilchos K’lei HaMikdash 1:3

<sup>39</sup> B’rachos 43a

*yearning for G-d exclusively, one has made “blood” into sweet “spice,” suitable for offering on the altar of the Sanctuary.*

*Along these lines, one can understand a dispute among the Halachic (Jewish legal) authorities with respect to the spice, mar. Rabbeinu Yona permits it even for eating, whereas other authorities forbid it as food, on the ground that only its aroma has been transformed but its physical substance remains unkosher. Rabbeinu Yona, however, rules that it has been transformed completely into good.<sup>40</sup>*

*This dispute can be understood according to Chassidus as being the same as that mentioned in the Talmud<sup>41</sup> concerning the effect of repentance. One opinion is that when a person repents, their intentional sins are considered as though they had been committed unintentionally; the other opinion holds that a penitent’s intentional sins are actually transformed into merits. All of this revolves around the same theme: the degree to which evil is transformed into good.*

*(The opinion that mar is kosher corresponds to the intentional sins of a penitent counting as merits: in both cases, the evil has been fully transformed into good.)*

*As explained elsewhere, the effect of repentance depends on the quality of the repentance itself. If a person has repented in the manner known as t’shuva me’ahava, “repentance motivated by love [for G-d],” their intentional sins are so thoroughly transformed as to count as merits. (This is the degree of repentance referred to in the well-known teaching,<sup>42</sup> “In the place penitents stand, [even] complete saints [tzaddikim g’murim] cannot stand.”) This corresponds to the opinion that mar*

<sup>40</sup> see *Tur, Orach Chaim* 216

<sup>41</sup> *Yoma* 86b

<sup>42</sup> *B’rachos* 34b, *Sanhedrin* 99a, *Zohar* I: 39, 129b, II:106b, *Vayikra* 16b

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*is kosher (even as food); in both cases, the evil has been fully transformed into actual good.*

*On the other hand, if one's repentance was of a relatively inferior quality, not motivated by ahava rabba, "great love" of G-d, their intentional sins, although forgiven, are only considered unintentional. This corresponds to the opinion that mar, despite its aroma having been transformed, is not kosher for eating because its transformation only went so far, it was inadequate to convert also the physical substance into good.*

Mordechai, whose name is alluded to by the phrase *meira dachya*—pure myrrh—was the very source of *bitul*. His spiritual root was in the Heavenly *s'fira* of *chochma* (specifically, that aspect of *chochma* known as *yesod abba*) which, as stated earlier, is characterized by *bitul*. Indeed, as explained elsewhere, the "nothingness" quality of *chochma* is alluded to by the fact that this word can be read, *koach ma*, "an indefinable force," or "the force of *ma*."<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, Mordechai was the saintly leader who channeled this capacity for *bitul* into the entire Jewish People, and it was he who was therefore described as *Ish Y'hudi*, the "man of *boda'ah*," the embodiment of *bitul* in deference to G-d.

*Mordechai's spiritual root stemmed from the Heavenly source of bitul, and he transmitted this quality to the Jews. He was therefore described as Ish Y'hudi, the very embodiment of bitul.*

Haman, by contrast, personified the very opposite of *bitul*. He represented arrogance, conceit, self-importance (*gasus ha-ruach*), as exemplified by his thinking,<sup>44</sup> "To whom would

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<sup>43</sup> Literally, "the force of 'what'"—i.e., something whose existence in its own right is so tenuous that it cannot be separately identified, and is only referred to as "what."

<sup>44</sup> Esther 6:6

*Haman's spiritual root was from the source of pride and arrogance—the opposite of bitul. He therefore sought to eradicate the Y'hudim, the nation of bitul.*

the king wish to do honor more than to myself?” This quality of Haman’s reflected his own spiritual root: he was a descendant of the nation of *Amalek*, of whom it is written,<sup>45</sup> “*Amalek* is first among nations.” The “nations” are the seven nations native to the land of Canaan (the Canaanites, the Hittites, etc.); each symbolized one of seven major character flaws (lust, murder, and so on). *Amalek* represented arrogance, the first among them all, for arrogance (the feeling of pride and self-importance) is the source of all others. Thus, Haman, the personification of pride and arrogance, sought to wipe out all the *Y'hudim*—the people embodying utterly selfless dedication, absolute nullity, *bitul*, to G-d.

*The Jews were prepared to give up their lives for the unity of G-d. This was the ultimate bitul.*

Had the Jews renounced their allegiance to G-d (Heaven forbid), that would have satisfied Haman, for it was specifically their being *Y'hudim*, the people of *boda'ah* and *bitul*, he could not abide. Yet they did not choose to save themselves at the expense of their religion; they would not even consider that. Instead, the Jews remained steadfast, prepared to give up their very lives for the unity of G-d. This was the ultimate *bitul*.

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<sup>45</sup> Numbers 24:20

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## 5

### *Jewish bitul transcends all reason*



In fact, every Jewish person, even in our times, and even the most superficial among us, possesses this unique capacity for true *bitul*, even to the point of actual self-sacrifice. No Jew would separate themselves from G-d's blessed unity under any circumstances whatsoever. (Indeed, it has been our sorrowful experience throughout the generations that many of our brothers and sisters have willingly accepted martyrdom (may G-d avenge their blood) rather than do so.)

In that case, a question naturally arises: how is it possible for any Jew to sin at all? If a Jew cannot tolerate any separation from G-d even at the pain of death (G-d forbid), surely we should be able to resist any temptation that may arise in the course of everyday life—when threat of death is not a concern.

However, unfortunately, a person's impulse to evil (*yetzer hara*) makes full use of our capacity for self-delusion. A person can delude themselves into believing that they can commit some sin or other and still remain fully attached to G-d. Yet in truth, by definition, even the so-called "smallest" transgression of G-d's will separates one from Him, and if the person truly

*No Jew would separate themselves from G-d's blessed unity. In that case, a question arises: how is it ever possible for a Jew to sin?*

*The Yetzer Hara can delude one into believing that they can sin and remain fully attached to G-d.*

realized that, they would in fact never sin, even in contexts not calling for martyrdom.

*It is virtually impossible to delude oneself into thinking that one can convert to another religion, yet remain attached to the G-d of Israel. That is why even confirmed sinners have chosen martyrdom rather than do so.*

Martyrdom is unique, though, in that it is virtually impossible for a person to delude themselves into thinking that if they convert to another religion, they remain attached to the G-d of Israel. Therefore, if confronted with such a choice (G-d forbid), the Jews have always chosen martyrdom—even those who, one would think, are not religious and do not care about connection to G-d. This is because the Jewish attachment to G-d, the capacity for self-sacrifice in the name of His unity, stems from a level that transcends reason. No matter what the person believes or what “rationale” they have for a less than fully committed religious life, the challenge of martyrdom sweeps past all that and touches something at the very core of the Jewish soul: the hidden love (*ahava m'suteres*) of a Jewish soul for G-d.

*No reason is given in the Torah for self-sacrifice.*

That is why no reason is given by the Torah for self-sacrifice. We are told<sup>46</sup> “to love G-d, your L-rd...because He is [the source of] your life.” If a person understands that all he or she loves in life, even life itself, comes from G-d, they will naturally love G-d at least as much as they love their life. This reason for loving G-d does not extend to self-sacrifice: after all, that entails giving up one’s life, so one cannot be motivated to do it because one loves life!

Considering this point in greater depth we find that loving G-d as the source of life is

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<sup>46</sup> Deuteronomy 30:20

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really a love of G-d as He manifests Himself in the universe—the life one experiences—not G-d as He is in Himself. As explained earlier, G-d relates to the universe as immanent within creation (*memaleh kol almin*), in which sense He invests each particular creature and entity with its “custom-tailored” amount of spiritual life force, and as transcendent over creation (*sovev kol almin*). Both of these concepts, however, relate G-d to creation, and any love one has for Him that stems from love of life, love of the world, is really directed at these levels.

By contrast, the attachment of a Jew to G-d, that dedication that would compel self-sacrifice—*forfeiting one’s life*—if necessary, is an attachment to G-d as He transcends *memaleh* and *sovev*. For G-d Himself is certainly not defined by the fact that the universe is His creation. Rather, the universe and all its contents are as utter nothingness before G-d, as we recite in our morning prayers,<sup>47</sup> “You are He [who existed] before the world was created; and You are He [unchanged] after the world was created.” Creation did not even cause a change in G-d’s unity, since creation is literally nonexistent from G-d’s perspective. (It is only because we limited mortals are unable to perceive that G-d is everywhere and everything that it appears otherwise to us.) Self-sacrifice stems from the refusal to cut oneself off from G-d’s very Essence and Being, as it were; G-d as He cannot be described in relation to the universe. For the Jewish soul itself is attached to G-d on this level,

*Loving G-d as the source of life is really a love of G-d as He manifests Himself in the universe—the life one experiences—not G-d as He is in Himself.*

*Self-sacrifice stems from the refusal to cut oneself off from G-d’s very Essence, G-d as He cannot be described in relation to the universe. For the Jewish soul itself is attached to G-d on this level.*

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<sup>47</sup> see also *Yalkut Shimoni* 836, citing the Jerusalem Talmud

*Our bond with G-d is a natural characteristic of the Jewish soul and transcends all reason. This was what led the Jews of Purim to remain steadfast, even if it meant annihilation.*

and our bond with G-d is thus a natural characteristic of the Jewish soul and transcends all reason. It is this which every Jew possesses and which accounts for our capacity for martyrdom throughout history: an unreasoning, unthinking, *bitul* to G-d that supercedes and preempts, once it is accessed, any ideas the person might previously have harbored about their relationship with G-d. Likewise, it was this capacity, and this supra-rational attachment to G-d's very Self, that led the Jews of the Purim story to spurn the idea of renouncing Judaism, even if it meant annihilation.

That is why the Book of Esther refers to<sup>48</sup> “the word of Mordechai” being carried out: it was Mordechai, as discussed above, who was the source of Jewish *bitul*, the channel through which this quality flowed to the Jewish souls, the *Isb Y'hudi*.

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<sup>48</sup> Esther 2:20

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## 6

### *Superiority of Purim's revelations over those at Mount Sinai*



We can now appreciate a nuance in the verse,<sup>49</sup> “And the Jews undertook [*kibel*] to do what they had begun [*heicheilu*].” As stated at the beginning of this discourse, the Jews of Purim finalized or ratified in their day what their predecessors had begun at Mount Sinai. The wording of the present verse sheds additional light on this, because the word *kibel* connotes receiving a complete thing, bestowed upon them from above. Even the awesome revelations granted the Jews at Mount Sinai at the giving of the Torah were only the beginning, as expressed by the word *heicheilu*, compared to the fuller and more complete revelation the Jews merited on Purim.

*Even the awesome revelations at Mount Sinai were only the beginning, heicheilu, compared to the fuller and more complete revelation on Purim.*

This is consistent with the spiritual principle that G-d wants us to take the initiative in our relationship with Him. We are to try to approach G-d on our own (known in Aramaic as *is'arusa d'l'sata*, arousal from below), rather than wait to first be inspired from above (*is'arusa d'l'eila*). When we do so, G-d responds with revelations we would not have been able to achieve otherwise. If G-d has to “wake us up”

*G-d wants us to take the initiative in our relationship with Him. When we do, He responds on a deeper level.*

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<sup>49</sup> Esther 9:23

*The Jews of  
Purim did take  
the initiative.*

from a state of spiritual insensitivity by sending us inspiration, the revelations are not as lofty as those we draw down through our own initiative.<sup>50</sup> Since the Jews of Purim did take the initiative and, despite the prevailing “concealment” of G-dliness, returned to G-d on their own, as explained above, the holiness they received was superior even to that of the Decalogue, which was bestowed only after G-d aroused the Jews to love Him through the “mountain” over their heads—and which was therefore called *heicheilu*, a mere beginning, compared to the superior revelations of Purim.

*This is hinted in  
the verse, “and  
what [ma] they  
had seen of the  
matter and what  
[ma] had  
befallen them.”*

(This is hinted as well in the verse,<sup>51</sup> “and what [*ma*] they had seen of the matter and what [*ma*] had befallen them.” For “*ma*” alludes to that exalted spiritual level discussed earlier, the very source of the Torah, which comes from *chochma*—*koach ma*. *Ma* may be contrasted with another spiritual level known as *ban*. *Ban* represents G-d’s directing His creative spiritual energy into the world, concealing His overwhelming unity in order that a physical world, seemingly independent of Him, could be created. *Ma*, on the other hand, represents just the opposite: *bitul*, the acknowledgment of G-d’s unity and that nothing does exist but Him. While it is true that at Mount Sinai, the Jews reached the level of *bitul* that enabled them to put *na’aseh*, “we will do,” before *nishma*, “we will understand,” this *bitul* was stimulated, aroused, by G-d first. It must therefore be associated with the spiritual level of *ban*, whose function is to

<sup>50</sup> (See the adaptation of the discourse, *Isha Ki Sazria* on the Torah portion *Tazria*.)

<sup>51</sup> Esther 9:26

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descend into the world.<sup>52</sup> This does not mean that the Jews did not really achieve *bitul* at Mount Sinai, for *ban*, too, has a quality of *bitul* to it, but since G-d had to initiate the process, it was a lesser order *bitul* than that associated with *ma*.

*The Jews' bitul at Sinai was associated with the spiritual level of ban; that of Purim with the relatively higher level of ma.*

(Alternatively, one can associate even the Jews' *bitul* at Sinai with *ma*, but it was the “*ban* aspect of *ma*,” while the *bitul* of Purim stemmed from the “*ma* aspect of *ma*.”)

At any rate, the revelation of G-dliness bestowed upon the Jews at Purim was superior even to that of Mount Sinai, because on Purim the Jews initiated the process themselves. As in all such cases of *is'arusa d'l'sata*, however, even though the initiative came from below, nothing ever really happens—even our own initiative—without G-d so willing it. Thus, we may speak of G-d having previously “laid the groundwork” for the Jews' initiative itself. We can now interpret our verse with respect to both of these concepts:

*Nothing ever really happens—even our own initiative—without G-d so willing it.*

On one level, “what [*ma*] they had seen of the matter” hints at the sublime prior stage, the enabling Divine groundwork, as it were, to the Jews' *bitul* on Purim. Then, “what [*ma*] had befallen them” is a reference to the fact that the Jews' *bitul* was, as stated, of the superior order of *ma*.

*Two levels of interpretation*

And on the second level, we can take the first part of the verse, “what [*ma*] they had seen of the matter,” as itself referring to the Jews'

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<sup>52</sup> (although, to be sure, that descent is for the purpose of subsequent ascent)

superior level of *bitul*, achieved on their own initiative, on Purim. And it was because of this initiative, the Jewish *is'arusa d'l'sata*, that the revelation of Purim was of a superior order to that of Sinai; the G-dliness revealed on Purim stemmed from the sublime level of *ma* (alluded to by “what [*ma*] had befallen them”)—the final completion of the acceptance of the Torah, which comes from *chochma*, *koach ma*, the Parable to the Predecessor of the World.)

# 7

## Ad D'lo Yada: *joy without limit*



**A**rmed with the above insights, we are finally in a position to understand the questions posed at the very beginning.

It was asked, Why is the joy associated with Purim greater than that of the major *Yom Tov* holidays? *Yom Tov* is a joyous occasion, to be sure; in fact, we are Biblically commanded to rejoice at these times. Nevertheless, we are expected to “outdo ourselves” on Purim, to the point we no longer know the difference between “cursed be Haman” and “blessed be Mordechai.” Moreover, the sanctity of *Yom Tov* requires refraining from *m'lacha*. If Purim is superior to *Yom Tov*, how is it that we are permitted to perform *m'lacha* then?

The *Zohar* states<sup>53</sup> that we recite the psalm<sup>54</sup> beginning “Rejoice, O righteous ones, in G-d” on Shabbos and *Yom Tov* because this theme is especially appropriate then. The meaning of this lies in the fact that the word for “G-d” in this verse is the Tetragrammaton, the ineffable, four-letter Divine name. The

*We are finally in a position to understand the questions posed at the beginning.*

*The Psalm, “Rejoice, O righteous ones, in G-d” is especially appropriate on Shabbos and Yom Tov.*

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<sup>53</sup> *T'ruma*, 137b

<sup>54</sup> Psalm 33

Tetragrammaton is spelled with the four Hebrew letters *yud* and *hey* and *vav* and *hey*, and is pronounced (outside the context of prayer or communal Torah-reading) as an anagram of these letters: “*Havaye*.” (When praying or reading the Torah in synagogue, it is pronounced *Adonoy*.)

*The Divine name Havaye represents G-d channeling His creative energy into the universe.*

*Chassidus* explains that the Divine name *Havaye* represents G-d channeling His creative energy into the universe; it signifies, not G-d as He is in Himself, but G-d as Creator. Each of the four letters of the name *Havaye* symbolizes one general stage in the progressive transmission of G-dly life-force into the universe.<sup>55</sup>

*“Rejoice, O righteous, in Havaye” hints that the righteous should infuse additional vitality into the universe created with this name.*

The verse “Rejoice, O righteous ones, in Havaye” hints that the righteous [*tzaddikim*] should infuse joy into “*Havaye*,” i.e., into the ordered universe [*sefer ha-bishtalshelus*] brought into being through this Divine name. That is, they should draw holiness from the lofty spiritual plane which transcends *sefer ha-bishtalshelus*, and invest it within *sefer ha-bishtalshelus*. A similar interpretation can be applied to the verse,<sup>56</sup> “I will greatly rejoice [*sos asis*] in Havaye.”

Now, on Shabbos and *Yom Tov*, this additional Divine revelation from above *sefer ha-bishtalshelus* is limited in extent, since, although transcendent, it nevertheless has a connection

<sup>55</sup> See, e.g., the adaptations of the discourses *L'va'er Inyan HaMasa'os Bamidbar* (on the Torah portion *Masei*); *Be'etzem Hayom Hazeh Nimol Avrohom* (on the portion *Lech-L'cha*); and *Ha'azinu* (on the Torah portion of the same name).

<sup>56</sup> Isaiah 61:10

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with the limited, fixed order of creation. It is not at all comparable to revelation of G-d's very Essence and Being, so to speak, utterly beyond relation to *seder ha-bishtalsbelus*. This is expressed by the various limits and specific dimensions associated with our celebration of these occasions. For example, the Biblical command,<sup>57</sup> "You shall rejoice in your holiday" was fulfilled, in the times of the Holy Temple, by bringing the *shalmei simcha*, the joyous sacrifices offered up on the holidays, as our sages teach,<sup>58</sup> "Joy' [such as that required on *Yom Tov*] cannot be had except with meat." Now that the Temple no longer stands (may it be rebuilt immediately!), we express the requisite holiday joy in other ways, as our sages likewise teach,<sup>59</sup> "Joy' cannot be had except with wine." And the amounts are specifically prescribed: according to Jewish law, one fulfills one's obligation of holiday joy with a *r'vi'is* (a unit of measure, 86 cc or about 3 fl. ounces<sup>60</sup>) of wine.

*This additional vitality nevertheless relates to the fixed, limited order of creation. We therefore celebrate Shabbos and Yom Tov in fixed measure*

All this is because the heavenly "excess" of Divine revelation elicited into *seder ha-bishtalsbelus* on Shabbos and *Yom Tov* invests itself within the highest levels of *seder ha-bishtalsbelus*, namely the "intellectual" *s'firos* of *chochma* and *bina*. (That is appropriate; recall that *chochma* is the *s'fira* that serves as a vessel for the manifestation of higher G-dly revelations.) Correspondingly, in our physical world as well, the practical expressions of these spiritual

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<sup>57</sup> Deuteronomy 16:14

<sup>58</sup> *P'sachim* 109a

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

<sup>60</sup> See *Shiurei Torah*

concepts are contained within rationally comprehensible, measurable quantities; they are guided by *da'as*, sensible standards.

*The Jews' self-sacrifice on Purim surpassed all reason. It merited a Divine response likewise transcending reason.*

On Purim, by contrast, the spirituality elicited by the Jews was of a far superior order. It was, as explained above, merited by the Jews' self-sacrificing commitment to G-d, a commitment that surpassed all "reason," all sense, all *da'as*. The Jews thereby brought upon themselves a corresponding revelation far beyond intellectual comprehension, far beyond expression in terms of G-d's relation (whether "immanent" or "transcendent") to *seder hishtalshelus*, but of G-d's very Essence and Being, His very "Self," as it were—a manifestation of G-dliness that, like the Jews' commitment, surpassed all *da'as*.

*This explains why Purim is celebrated with a joy that transcends reason, da'as—to the point we do not distinguish between "cursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai."*

That is why we celebrate Purim with a joy that also surpasses all reason, all *da'as*, as expressed in the requirement that we drink wine, but more than merely a *r'vi'is*: we are to drink "*ad d'lo yada*," until one does not know [*yada*, a form of the word *da'as*] the difference between "cursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai." On the level of G-d's very Self, there is in fact no distinction between what we experience as "bad" and "good," darkness or light, as it is written,<sup>61</sup> "Even darkness is not dark for You," and,<sup>62</sup> "If you are righteous, what do you [thereby] give Him," since to G-d Himself, it's all the same. This is the supremely rarified level of G-dliness we "tap into" on Purim.

<sup>61</sup> Psalms 139:12

<sup>62</sup> Job 35:7

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## 8

### *Permissibility of m'lacha on Purim*



This also explains why *m'lacha* is permitted on Purim.

The true meaning of Shabbos as a day of “rest” from “work” (*m'lacha*) is that, just as G-d, Who ceased creating on the seventh day, thereby allowed all the spiritual energies He had poured into creation to rise up and return to their Divine source, so do we and the universe at large experience a spiritual elevation up to our G-dly Source on Shabbos.<sup>63</sup>

This is applicable, however, only insofar as it concerns the G-dly energies invested within creation. These rise up to the higher level of their Divine source when the added spirituality of Shabbos or *Yom Tov* is manifest in the world. But this implies that “higher” and “lower” are valid concepts, and this implication is only true to a point: there is, as we have explained, a level of spirituality beyond which “higher” and “lower” (and all such distinctions) are meaningless to G-d. The spiritual ascent that takes place on Shabbos and *Yom Tov* is the elevation of G-dliness that had been invested within the created universe—*seder ha-hishtalshehus*—up to its

*The meaning of “rest” from “work” (m'lacha) is that the spiritual energies of creation ascend to their Divine source on Shabbos. This is applicable, however, only insofar as it concerns the G-dly energies invested within creation.*

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<sup>63</sup> See, e.g., the adaptation of the discourse *L'havin Inyan Lechem Mishne* on the Torah portion *B'shalach*.

*The revelations of Purim utterly transcend the order of creation. Therefore, refraining from m'lacha would have no meaning then.*

source; we therefore refrain from creative activity (*m'lacha*) because the G-dly creative forces have risen above our realm. All this does not apply, however, to G-dly revelations of the order utterly transcending *hishtalsbelus*, of the order of G-d's very Self—the revelations bestowed upon us on Purim. At that level, there is no “higher” or “lower” to begin with. Refraining from *m'lacha* would not symbolize anything meaningful under those circumstances, and there is no spiritual benefit in doing so.

*(The Midrash<sup>64</sup> relates that a certain heretic once challenged Rabbi Yehoshua (according to some versions, it was Rabbi Akiva): The Torah says that G-d rested on Shabbos, yet apparently, He doesn't. Does He not send down rain on Shabbos, sprout grasses, etc.? Rabbi Yehoshua answered by comparing the entire universe to a r'shus hayachid, a place characterized by Jewish law as a “private domain.” Just as one may carry objects (an otherwise forbidden activity) within a private domain on Shabbos, so may G-d do what He does, since the entire universe is but His own “private domain.”*

*(This is the meaning of a Midrash characterizing the universe as G-d's “private domain.”)*

*This answer appears inadequate, though: it is only the single m'lacha of carrying that is permitted within a private domain; all other m'lachos, including threshing, planting and the like, are forbidden even in a r'shus hayachid. How, then, did this answer the heretic's question?*

*What Rabbi Yehoshua meant, however, was along the lines we have just said. Refraining from m'lacha (no matter which) is only appropriate with respect to the Divine energies invested within seder ha-*

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<sup>64</sup> *B'reishis Rabba*, ch.12

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hishtalshelus. For G-d Himself, however, utterly beyond relation to the created universe, all is one single "domain," without distinction between higher or lower or anything else. On that level, there is no meaning to elevation of life-force or refraining from m'lacha, and G-d's own activities (allegorically speaking) are no contradiction to Shabbos.

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## 9

*Purim vs. Yom Tov:*  
*Hislavshus vs. Hisgalus;*

*Purim and Yom Kippur*



We are now confronted with an apparent difficulty: If, indeed, it is spiritually unnecessary, even inappropriate, to refrain from *m'lacha* on Purim,<sup>65</sup> why did Mordechai seek to proclaim Purim a *Yom Tov*, complete with proscription of *m'lacha*?

Also, in many places we find an equivalence between Purim and *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement), which is referred to in the Torah as *Yom ha-Kippurim*—a phrase that can be interpreted as “the day that is like Purim.” On *Yom Kippur*, the sacrificial service included drawing lots (to determine which goat was to be sacrificed for what purpose); similarly, Purim itself (which means “lots,” as in “lottery”) is so named to commemorate the lots drawn by Haman (to determine when to annihilate the Jews, G-d forbid). This equivalence is further

*If, indeed, it is spiritually inappropriate to refrain from m'lacha on Purim, why did Mordechai seek to proscribe m'lacha then?*

*Purim and Yom Kippur are often compared. Yet m'lacha is forbidden on Yom Kippur*

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<sup>65</sup> (although, as mentioned above, it would still not be proper to conduct one's business affairs then)

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underscored by the teaching<sup>66</sup> that, in the Messianic “Future to Come,” all the holidays will be nullified except Purim and *Yom Kippur*. Now, *Yom Kippur* is more stringent in its prohibition of *m'lacha* than any other *Yom Tov*. How is this consistent with the fact that *m'lacha* is actually permitted on Purim?

*In a certain respect, the sanctity of Yom Tov is superior to that of Purim.*

The answer is that, while it is true that Purim brings a higher Divine revelation than does *Yom Tov*, there is nevertheless a certain respect in which the sanctity of *Yom Tov* is superior to that of Purim.

*This is related to the difference between hidden and open miracles.*

This will be understood by first explaining why, in times of exile, most miracles and Divine wonders are “hidden” within the natural order of things (as was the case with the Purim story), whereas in the times of the Temple, openly supernatural miracles were the rule.

We mentioned above that G-d manifests Himself in the universe in ten principal ways, known as the ten *s'firos*. These ten spiritual levels are divisible into the three highest—the “intellectual” attributes of *chochma*, *bina* and *da'as* mentioned above—and the lower attributes, referred to as the “emotional” attributes, or *middos*. All are present (as explained in detail elsewhere) in each of the four broad categories of successively lower Divine manifestation, known as the realms of *Atzilus*, *B'riah*, *Y'tzirah* and *Asiyah*. While the Holy Temple stood, the

<sup>66</sup> *Midrash Shmuel* 9:2; see also *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* 46; also Jerusalem Talmud, *Ta'anis* 2:2, *Rosh Hashana* 19b

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*middos* of *Atzilus* were openly revealed, actually perceptible in the world. This unimaginable degree of G-dly revelation allowed for open miracles and wonders that transcended the limits of the natural order.

The Temple's destruction and the consequent state of exile meant a departure of the *middos* of *Atzilus* from open manifestation within the world. Under those circumstances, G-d's conduct of the universe could no longer be accomplished through these attributes, since they were no longer openly present. Instead, the world had to be directed from a higher vantage point, as it were, a spiritual plane so lofty that it was unaffected by the worldly circumstance of the exile. However, as a consequence of this, miracles could no longer be perceived, since these higher spiritual levels were themselves too high for open revelation. G-d's influence could now only be concealed within the seemingly natural flow of events.

It thus develops that each state of affairs has an advantage in one respect. In one sense, the miracles and Divine Providence "en clothed" [*bislansbus*] within nature actually stem from a loftier spiritual plane than revealed miracles, and are therefore superior. In another sense, though, there is clearly an advantage to being able to directly perceive G-dliness, the hand of G-d, as it were, in our affairs, as is the case with miracles that are openly revealed [*bisgalus*].

This parallels the distinction between the sanctity of *Yom Tov* and Purim. Jewish mysticism

*While the Holy Temple stood, the middos of Atzilus were manifest, allowing for open miracles.*

*With the Temple's destruction, the middos of Atzilus departed. G-d began conducting the universe from a loftier plane, one unaffected by exile. Yet this level was so sublime it could not be manifest in the world. Miracles were disguised in natural form.*

*Each state of affairs has an advantage in one respect.*

*This parallels the distinction between the sanctity of Yom Tov and Purim. On Yom Tov, we benefit from open revelation of spirituality. The holiness of Purim is too great for this, and must be concealed.*

teaches that on weekdays, the spiritual life-force of the universe comes by way of investiture within the realm of *Asiyah*, while on *Yom Tov*, it flows from a relatively higher realm of G-dly manifestation, that of *B'riah*. In other words, on *Yom Tov*, when the entire universe experiences an elevation in spirituality, as discussed above, we directly experience (in the manner of *hisgalus*) G-dly “transmissions” from the elevated plane of *B'riah*. This is the advantage of *Yom Tov* over Purim, when no perceptible increase in holiness is felt. In keeping with this, we refrain from *m'lacha* on *Yom Tov*, for this symbolizes this spiritual elevation. Even so, the increased holiness manifest on *Yom Tov* is still a feature of *seder ha-hishtalshelus*. The spirituality of Purim, though, stems, as explained, from that sublime level of G-dliness elicited by the Jews' unconditional, supra-rational self-sacrifice; on Purim, the holiness derives from the *Or Ein Sof*, G-d's very Self, far above the *seder ha-hishtalshelus*. This is Purim's advantage. Accordingly, *m'lacha* is permitted on Purim. Since this level cannot be directly perceived within creation, G-d's conduct at that time was likewise hidden (in the manner of *hislavshus*) within the natural order.

*Still, the concealment is not total. Anyone can recognize the hand of G-d behind the Purim story.*

(Actually, even on Purim, the concealment was not total. Although G-d did not openly reveal Himself, any reasonably perceptive person could recognize His hand in the amazing string of fortuitous “coincidences” that made up the Purim episode. This not-quite-totally-hidden revelation of the *Or Ein Sof* itself is bestowed upon each and every Jew on Purim.)

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*A similar idea may be found in the teaching of the ARI of blessed memory,<sup>67</sup> to the effect that a talis possesses even greater holiness than the tzitzis attached to it. According to Jewish law, tzitzis are considered holy and may not be used for everyday purposes, whereas a talis has no such restriction. Yet the talis embodies a holiness of such a lofty degree that it cannot be contained within a physical item. This is what accounts for the fact that the physical talis is not itself holy and thus not restricted to mitzvah-related use. The physical tzitzis, by contrast, are endowed with sanctity; they stem from a level that is able to be contained by a physical object.*

*(A similar idea may be found in a teaching of the ARI of blessed memory.)*

Mordechai, in proposing that Purim be declared a *Yom Tov*, sought to endow Purim with both advantages. For *Yom Kippur*, which is indeed compared to Purim, has both qualities. Its holiness stems from a level that transcends *sefer ha-bishtalshelus*; this is alluded to by the lots drawn on *Yom Kippur*. The symbolism of the lottery is that the items from which one will be selected are absolutely equivalent: there is no rational basis for distinguishing one from the other, and only by random lottery is a choice made. This is characteristic of *Yom Kippur*, when that aspect of G-dliness is manifest regarding which there is no difference at all between high, low, good, evil, etc. Our sins, even the most heinous (G-d forbid) can be utterly eradicated by sincere repentance on *Yom Kippur*, for to G-d Himself, even the worst transgressions are of no consequence and can be looked upon as actual merits if G-d so wills it. At the same time, *Yom Kippur* possesses openly revealed sanctity such that *m'lacha* is strictly forbidden.

*Mordechai sought to endow Purim with both advantages, similar to Yom Kippur.*

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<sup>67</sup> see *Torah Or*, end of *Sh'lach*

*Mordechai's  
suggestion could  
not be accepted  
for several  
reasons.*

However, Mordechai's suggestion was not accepted by the *Sanhedrin*, the Supreme Court of Torah law. There were several reasons for this. One, *Yom Kippur* and its aspects are ordained by the Bible itself, and nothing, not even the seeming incompatibility of the two qualities we have been discussing, can contradict that. This cannot be said of Purim, which was Rabbinnically ordained. Second, *Yom Kippur* is observed only after intense spiritual preparation during the preceding Ten Days of Repentance, and on the holiday itself we fast and otherwise live a totally otherworldly existence. We do not possess the ability to draw down the same level of holiness in a revealed manner on Purim. Finally, the events of Purim occurred during the period of exile, which, as noted above, by definition entails concealment of G-d's providence in the manner of *hislaushbus*, i.e., within the order of nature.

*Mordechai's  
rationale,  
however, was  
plausible.*

*There is a  
difference between  
the nature of the  
revelations in  
their heavenly  
"native" state  
and as they are  
finally expressed  
to us.*

Still, one should not wonder how Mordechai could have thought it was even possible to have "the best of both worlds." For although, as explained above, it is not meaningful to speak of prohibiting *m'lacha* on Purim, since its revelations stem from that level at which there are no distinctions—we nevertheless find that it is meaningful to prohibit *m'lacha* on *Yom Kippur*, which is spiritually comparable to Purim. This is because while the revelations of both days are indeed too lofty for *m'lacha*, there is a difference between the nature of the "light," the revelations, in their "native" state within their heavenly source and as they are finally expressed to us. The sublime holiness of *Yom Kippur* must take the forms appropriate to each successively lower

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stage of spiritual manifestation before it finally ends up illuminating the holiday of *Yom Kippur* as celebrated by us mortals. The light itself is just as lofty as we have said, but by the time it reaches us all the way down here, so to speak, it can be observed by refraining from *m'lacha*. After all, *Yom Kippur* is a *Yom Tov*, and in that respect, it is characterized by manifestations from the realm of *B'riah*. In the end, though, *m'lacha* was not prohibited on Purim, because then, we do not experience open revelations from *B'riah*, as already discussed.

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## 10

### *No Divine names in the Megillah; Greater holiness than other Prophetic books*



Finally, in light of all the above, we can appreciate why the name of G-d is not mentioned in the entire Book of Esther. This does not indicate any lesser sanctity to the *Megillah* (as the Book of Esther is called); on the contrary, the *Megillah* of Esther is even holier than the other books of the Prophets, even though these are replete with Divine names—consistent with the teaching,<sup>68</sup> that the [books of the other] Prophets will be nullified in the Future to Come, but Esther will not be nullified.

*The name of G-d is not mentioned in the Book of Esther. Nevertheless, the [other books of the] Prophets will be nullified in the Future to Come, but Esther will not be nullified.*

This paradox is explicated by the parable related in the *Zohar*<sup>69</sup> concerning a bridegroom whose bride resided near a tannery (a vile-smelling place). Although he would not otherwise have gone there for worlds, he visited her there anyway out of love for his bride.

*The Zohar relates the parable of a bridegroom whose bride resided near a tannery.*

The Divine Presence (*Sb'chinah*) is identified with the *s'fira* of *malchus* within the realm of *Atzilus*, and in times of exile, this G-dly attribute descended from on high and enfolded

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<sup>68</sup> Jerusalem Talmud, *Megillah* 1:5

<sup>69</sup> end of *B'chukosai*, 115b

*The Zohar's parable means: out of love for the Sh'chinah, which is here with us Jews in the "tannery" of worldly exile, even the Divine "Bridegroom" descends to this level. This condition of exile means, however, that the resulting holiness is unable to shine forth openly.*

itself within the non-holy forces of this world,<sup>70</sup> as it is taught,<sup>71</sup> “[When the Jews] were exiled to Babylon, the *Sh'chinah* accompanied them.” In Jewish mysticism, the *Sh'chinah* is allegorically compared to G-d's “Bride,” and the Divine attribute of *chesed* (kindness)—the highest of the “emotional attributes” of *Atzilus*—is, in this context, compared to her “Bridegroom.” As a general rule, G-dliness is transmitted to us through the various *s'firos* only as they are first “packaged” within the *s'fira* of *malchus*. Thus, for Divine benevolence to reach us mortal Jews in exile, even the higher attribute of *chesed*—the Bridegroom—must descend to the level of the *Sh'chinah*, *malchus*, as it is found with us in the murky depths of this lowest world. This is what is alluded to by the *Zohar's* parable: out of love for the Bride, which is here with us Jews in the vile “tannery” of worldly exile, even the Divine “Bridegroom” descends to this level. This condition of exile means, however, by definition, that the holiness invested within is unable to shine forth openly, but is hidden away within the world.

The same can be said of the *Megillah* of Esther. Mystically, Esther herself represented *malchus* of *Atzilus* (as concealed within the highest level of *B'riah*). The *Megillah* contains no Divine names, not because it lacks the holiness they represent, but, on the contrary, because these names represent the various higher attributes—and, as just stated, these *s'firos* have descended

<sup>70</sup> i.e., *k'lipas nogah*, a “neutral” state between good and evil—and even beyond

<sup>71</sup> *Megillah* 29a, *Bamidbar Rabba* 7:10, *Sifri*, *Masei* 35:34

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into the very depths of exile to be with the *Sh'chinah*, *malchus*, the Bride, and are thus utterly imperceptible. The apparent lack of holiness in the *Megillah* is thus far from indicative of Divine “disinterest,” so to speak; just the opposite, it is itself a poignant expression of G-d’s love, His willingness to descend to wherever the Bride is.

This is why it is said that the *Megillah* contains even greater G-dly light than the books of the other Prophets, and why it will never be nullified. Although the form of the *Megillah* is that of a mere “story,” that is just its “Purim mask”: in reality, the Divine light hidden within that form is of an order far superior to any Divine name. A name is merely descriptive; it is not the actual thing. But on Purim, the Jews’ total devotion and self-sacrificing *bitul* brought down upon them a corresponding response from G-d’s actual Self, the Essence of the Blessed *Ein Sof*. Reading the *Megillah*, which we do twice every Purim (in the evening as Purim begins, and the following morning), is called *ke’riah* in Hebrew, which also means “calling”—because by reading the *Megillah*, we call forth the revelation of this holy light.

*Esther represented the Sh'chinah, and the absence of Divine names in the Megillah is itself a poignant expression of G-d's love, His willingness to descend to wherever the Bride is.*

*The form of the Megillah is that of a mere "story," but that is just its "Purim mask."*



## לזכות:

ר' מנחם מענדל בן חיי  
אסתר בת מינא רבקה

דוד מאיר בן עטל

עטקא בת סטלא

יצחק דוד בן אסתר  
לאה בת עטקא  
אברהם דובער ליפא בן לאה  
דבורה לאה בת רחל  
שלום ישראל בן לאה  
שלמה בן מרים  
חיי שרה בת לאה  
נחמה דינה בת לאה  
שושנה טובה בת לאה  
רחל מרים בת לאה  
יוסף חיים בן לאה

## שיחיו



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