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Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi's Shiur

Purim

Editor: Yikrat Friedman



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Shabbat Zachor is behind us and we are getting closer and closer to Purim. This time we'll talk about Ta'anit Esther, Purim eve and Purim itself. **S'gulot**, customs, what we do and don't do.

↻ Taanit Esther: Opening the Gates of Mercy ↻

Let me read to you about Taanit Esther from the book *Kav HaYashar* (The Straight Line):

"The Fast of Esther is especially auspicious for the acceptance of prayers. Anyone who needs mercy in any matter should set aside time on the day of the fast and first say Psalm 22 ("the gazelle of the dawn"). Then make the request. Then invoke the merit of Mordechai and Esther, through which God will answer and open the gates of mercy, accepting the prayer willingly."

Let's say you have a list of three things you really, really want: to get married, have a baby, and get rich, for example. What do you do on Taanit Esther?

You say Psalm 22, make your request of God ("I want to get married") and then say, "in the merit of Mordechai and Esther, answer me from heaven."

Then to the second request.

Say Psalm 22 again, make your request ("God, I want righteous children") and say once more, "In the merit of Mordechai and Esther."

On to the third request.

So says the *Kav HaYashar*. Whatever request you have, precede it with Psalm 22, make your request and say, "In the merit of Mordechai and Esther."

Don't be lazy about it! It's a tremendous day for the acceptance of prayer.

Second, before noon on the fast day give three shekels to three different poor people: three shekels each. It is very meritorious to do so before *mincha* time ¹.

Women are not required to fast, but it is auspicious for atonement to fast on Taanit Esther regarding forbidden foods you may have eaten. The people sinned by eating and drinking at Ahasverosh's party, and their fast atoned for them. The same thing goes today, says the Chida. Whoever ate,

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¹ *Kaf Hachayyim*, 1934, sec. 24.



ever, any non-kosher food can fast on Taanit Esther; its power can achieve atonement. It's a fast that cleanses the body as well as the soul.

And gather women in groups for prayer. Men, of course, have to pray in a *minyan* of ten. A man praying alone does not have the same force as communal prayer. But women – that's not required of us. A woman who *davens* alone in her kitchen has the same power as a *shul* full of people.

That's aside from gatherings for women in general during the days leading up to Purim. This is the time for such gatherings, such conventions: לָךְ כְּנוּס – “Go, gather all the Jews...and fast for me,” says Esther to Mordechai. גם אני ונעֲרָתַי אֲצוּם – “I and my maidservants will fast as well”². Queen Esther had seven maidservants that Ahashverosh gave her. She converted them and taught them the laws of purity; they became very righteous. When she goes to Ahashverosh, weakened by fast and prayer, they accompany her and tear open the heavens for her³. Since then, women's prayer groups have had awesome power in the days before Purim.

🕊️Mystical Times: Purim Eve and the Megillah Reading🕊️

Purim eve. **One should return home to find the candle lit, table set and bed made**⁴.

And I would add: seeds and nuts.

Before you go out to hear the Megillah, spread a white tablecloth out and light two candles – one for Mordechai the Righteous and the other in memory of the righteous Esther.

Then you come home to a nice house with the munchies on the table. **It is the Jewish custom to eat seeds on Purim eve**, writes the Chida, commemorating Esther's diet. All those years in the palace she subsisted on seeds so she wouldn't have to eat non-kosher food.

² Esther 4:16

³ Megilla 2a

⁴ Moed L'chol Hai 31:18; Seder HaYom

There must not be any fighting or argument in the house that night. God forbid, that's a sign there will be no peace in the house the rest of the year. Please, please don't fight. And of course, dress up nice. Purim is the most exalted holiday⁵.

Megillah reading.

The key to unlocking the abundance, writes Rav Yosef Karo, lies in the blessing before the reading: ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם אשר קידשנו במצוותיו וציוונו על מקרא מגילה – “Blessed are You, Lord, our God, king of the universe, who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us regarding the reading of the Megillah.”

Why?

Because when the reader says the words, “the reading of the Megillah” you call out for a huge discovery in your life. The word “megilla” comes from the Hebrew root of גלה (discover/reveal). In the merit of this reading and the “Amen” you say after the blessing, God will bring you some revelation about your life and about the struggles you face.

The author of the *Or HaMeir* writes: “For Esther sought to write the Megillah story so that later generations until the coming of the redeemer could find respite for their souls.” You will feel what great comfort you get when you read the Megillah.

And how do you read the Megillah? According to Rabbi Ziskind, you don't *read* the Megillah; you *pray* the Megillah.

Pray Megillat Esther, and the intent is the main thing. Every time you say, “Haman,” think of your greatest troubles. When he rises to greatness, worry; when they hang him, rejoice.

And the climax – when they hang Haman's ten sons. The Hasidim say that in Haman's ten sons we hang our faults and flaws: being judgmental; poverty, deprivation – here's the full list:

Parshandata – Being judgmental. You start to interpret (*paresh*): “That guy's not *frum*. Those

⁵ Mo'ed 'L'chol Hai, 31:18



people are strong. These people are slackers. She's lazy. That one's fervent" – who died and made you the judge of people's religiousness? We live in a world of concealment, of disguises, and there's no way to know who's who. Only God knows who each of us really is.

We also distort the interpretation of *mitzvot*; we make up *halachot*; we twist existing *halachot*.

At Parshandata have this in mind: "Hang for me on the tree the commentary I give to religious people – and religion. God, hang my judgmentalness."

Dalfon – Poverty. Poverty is a huge black cloud over couplehood. When a woman comes to me crying, "I want *sh'lom bayit*" I immediately wish her husband economic success, since they're closely related. At Dalfon, have in mind, "God, I don't want to be involved in economic worries."

Aspata – Being easily offended. We collect insults as if they were diamonds. "They ate my food" They drank my stuff" "They put me with the 'wrong' people."

Porata – lack of charisma. How many pretty, talented, intelligent girls are there among us who just don't have the magnetism to attract a guy? It can be so hard. That charm is a gift from heaven; at Porata have in mind, "Please, God, hang my lack of charisma on the tree." Listen to something wonderful: You know what charm is? Not being judgmental.

That was Esther. The Midrash calls her "Istahar, the crescent moon, because she was like the moon: reflecting each person's own light, beauty and greatness. Each person saw **the beauty of his own nation** in her. Everyone was positive she was part of his people.

That charisma – **חן** *chen* in Hebrew – means to give **חנינה** – clemency to the person facing you. Don't judge him or her to life imprisonment the moment you see her.

Adalya – Cheapness.

At Adalya have in mind the ability to get out of the poverty of your thinking, and to be a thankful person. The Midrash in Esther Rabba says that when they put Mordechai on the horse he said

Psalm 30, **אָרוּמִימְךָ ה' כִּי... דִּלִּיתָנִי** – "I will exalt You, Lord, for you have raised me up" – as opposed to **דל** – lowly.

Aridata – The desire to be a religious achiever. You take on the daily recitation of Psalms, *Perek Shira*, *Pittum HaK'toret* and *Sh'mirat HaLashon* – in the end you'll drop it all. Don't bite off more than you can chew.

Arisai – Cutting yourself off from transcendence. Have in mind to be connected to God all the time; **וְאִירֶשֶׁתִּיךָ לִי לְעוֹלָם** – **I shall betroth you to Me forever.**

Aridai – The desire to demand, to control. Oh, how much do we want to control things, only to see them control us!

Parmashta – Immodesty. *Prum-shet* – "bare backside". "Help me be modest," you should ask God when they hang Parmashta; there's no such thing as a Jewish girl who doesn't want to be modest (it's just Parmashta confusing things).

Vayzata – Feeling small. I'm worthless" "I'm not a good mother" "I'm not a good religious person." I believe we should all be so happy when they hang Vayzata; feeling small is one of the most terrible situations.

🔗 Transforming Everything From Bad to Good: Midnight 🔗

Let's talk about midnight on Purim. It's the time when the heavens are open for all your prayers to transform everything from bad to good.

At that hour Mordechai stood with all the little Jewish children who refused to eat or drink, and together they shouted and cried for the annulment of the decree.

At midnight God heard their prayer and asked the angels: What is that sound I hear, lambs and kids? "No," answered the angels, "it's the voice of the children of Your people Israel crying for the annulment of the decree."



Do they not know that Haman **cast lots – that is their lot/fate** ⁶?

They know. But they don't believe in fate. They believe in God.

In their merit I'm tearing up the decree, said God ⁷. At midnight stand up and ask God for *everything*, especially transforming bad decrees to good. "God, in the merit of my little children, the merit of all the little Jewish children, cancel the decree for us. They're so innocent, so pure; help my children see the Messiah." That's how you should pray at midnight.

↪ Mishloach Manot. Matanot Le'evyonim. The Feast and the Children ↪

Purim morning. Which is greater, Purim or Yom HaKippurim? The sages say, unanimously: Purim.

Yom Kippur is a day for stepping on the brakes. No eating. No drinking. No touching between men and women. We keep away from vices. We separate. Every day, Amalek wants you to be such an aloof woman. That way he can knock you down most easily. When you say, "I'm never going to gossip ever again," or "I'm not interested in a relationship anymore" – boy, are you in for a fall.

When you withdraw from desires, that doesn't make them go from bad to good. So what do we do on Purim? Instead of withdrawing from all the worldly pleasures, all those things that can be done impurely, we do on Purim in the purest way: eating, drinking, dress, music, romantic relationship – a great mitzvah on Purim night (if you can, of course), since it's a remedy for immodesty. On Purim everything is a switcheroo for all the base desires – you now engage in them with transcendence – the added value of Purim beyond Yom HaKippurim.

Yom HaKippurim is Ki-Purim – "like Purim" – but not on as high a level, because on Yom Kippur

you're in disguise: dressed in white, white head covering, white shoes, white face, the neighbor to whom only yesterday you hoped something bad would happen you suddenly wish that she be sealed in the book of life and ask forgiveness.

Whereas on Purim there are no disguises. On Purim **a person is identified**.

You know that person's ID is printed on Purim? Because a person can be known through **his wallet, his cup, his anger - and his laughter** ⁸.

In other words:

Tell me what makes you laugh and I'll tell you who you are.

Tell me what swear words you use and I'll tell you your ethnicity.

Show me how you spend or save your money and I'll tell you who you are.

Show me what happens when you drink and I'll tell you who you are.

A person is known through his wallet – On Purim we give gifts to the poor, i.e. two gifts to two paupers, or the cost of a serving of fast food, according to Rav Ovadia (it varies: in Jerusalem, a falafel costs about fifteen shekel; In hipster Tel Aviv neighborhoods, forty-five; and in Lod, a shekel and a half ;-). You must give twice: a fast food serving's worth to two people.

If you don't know how much to give, give the smallest bill twice. Don't be stingy. **Anyone who extends his hand - is given!** (Yes, it's OK for your husband to give the gifts to the poor, but he always thinks you're taking care of it and you think he's on it...)

Mishloach manot, as well: Each of us must send to one friend, preferably someone you don't get along with so well, a package that required some effort, with two kinds of food.

No, you may not buy fifteen identical packages for everyone. Buy fourteen of the same thing and one other that you put your heart into, because the mitzvah is **each to his friend**. More than food, people need friendship, companionship.

⁶ Esther 9:24

⁷ *Otzar HaMidrashim* (Eisenstein) Esther p. 56

⁸ Eruvin 65b; *Otzar HaMidrashim* (Eisenstein) Chupat Eliyahu p. 167



Please, give warmly. No revolving doors (“Thank you, Levy family; you’re welcome, Cohen family; here, take this, Suissa family...”). Someone told me that one year she marked a wafer package and saw that it came back to her four times.

I’ve also given a halachic ruling, you know: In my *Shalchan Aruch* I forbid – with a capital F – repackaging Tu Bishvat fruit. Anyone who sends grapefruit and pomelos with raisins and dried cherries shoved in there somewhere – woe betide the person who sends me that!

Also stop with the silly shredded paper at the bottom of the bowl. It’s only function is to make the package look bigger. It always reminds me of those restaurants that give you a salad containing a few cherry tomatoes on a bed of an entire package of lettuce. You say, “Baaaa,” then run home and make yourself a huge grilled cheese sandwich.

Two kinds of food – that’s all that has to be in your mishloach manot. It doesn’t have to be cooked; who needs that crushed kugel anyway? I told you already, nobody lacks food. They lack attention. Give them a greeting card you put some effort into.

A person is known through his anger. Who’s more pathetic in Purim than the children, who are supposed to be the stars of the day – and in whose merit we had this great miracle – and what do we do to them the whole time? Sweep them under the rug.

We already know you must not get angry on Purim, especially not at kids. Even when you see them in their costumes: as brides, while you’re divorced; as pirates, while you’ve been robbed; as doctors, while you’re sick; and all those Dora costumes, while you’re feeling Dorky. By the time Purim ends, the poor kids!

Another stern warning: be wary of those finger-amputating firecrackers. We have to keep a close watch on our kids.

Drink? Only if you want a donkey.

A person is known through his cup. And as you know, **חיב איניש לבסומי** - **a man must get intoxicated**⁹ on Purim. So let’s talk about that.

A man can drink on Purim, but only if he’s righteous. If you’re not an **איניש inish** – a *mensch* – spare us. Don’t drink.

Why? **Wine goes in, secrets come out.** All those *baalei t’shuva* who drink – better they keep their secrets locked away in the closet (besides, I don’t understand this tendency that’s become so common recently to come out of the closet. Stay in the closet; who asked you to come out? Whoever brings messes out of the closet had better internalize the rule: “Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace...”).

So a man can drink.

And a woman? No. Just orange juice. Fresh squeezed.

Here’s why.

The Gemara says: One cup is good for a woman. Drink one cup; it’s great for you, especially if you’re nursing or pregnant.

Two cups – **that’s already ugly.** You forget how you look, and it’s not nice.

Three cups – **you start propositioning.** Your speech becomes immodest.

Four cups – **you even proposition donkeys; you’re not particular**¹⁰.

What do you think of us, dear Sages? Isn’t this outrageous?

Hold your horses. They’re coming to teach us something profound. **Wine goes in, secrets come out** – and the word for “secret” in Hebrew - סוד - also means a gathering of people (as we say in *Kedusha*, **sod siach sarfei kodesh**...). “Sod” is a connection to someone close.

The **sod** of a person that comes out when he gets drunk is his ability to connect to his surroundings.

⁹ Megillah 3b

¹⁰ *Kallah Rabbati* 2:8



A man can drink because his deepest **sod** is his desire not to connect to anyone. That's how he is by nature, ever since he was created, alone, from the earth; when Eve came along he engaged in slander and alienation. So when a man gets drunk in the end he sinks into himself, embarrasses himself inside and that's it.

But a woman? Her deepest **sod** is her desire to connect to someone. Eve was created from a part of Adam's body; when she was made, she immediately looked for him. Eve's loneliness is very strong – she works constantly to fix that.

When you drink, your terrible loneliness goes into action – **you even proposition a donkey; you're not particular.** There are infinite donkeys out there willing to take advantage of your loneliness.

I can't describe to you how many letters full of pain I get from girls like that, when all they were looking for was connection, and they got lies.

Be very, very careful.

Aside from that, you have to remain clear-headed. The Purim feast is the highest of the whole year. The Rebbe of Slonim says that any request a woman makes at the time of the Purim feast is accepted; **And the king said to Esther at the wine feast, "What is your petition, Queen Esther, and what is your request; up to half the kingdom, it will be done."**

The Rebbe of Slonim says:

"And the king said" – that's God.

"To Esther" – that's you.

"At the wine feast" – that's the Purim feast.

"What is your petition?" – what do you lack?

"And what is your request?" – whatever luxuries you'd love to have; some time in a Jacuzzi, say.

Ask for *anything*, says the Maharal ¹¹. At the Purim feast it's *all* fair game.

The Rebbe of Lachovitch would sit at his Purim feast and announce, "Ask me for anything you want; I'll give you a blessing and it will happen." Truly, the blessings we give one another at that feast have a tendency to come true.

¹¹ Maharal, Ibid.

I remember sitting one year at the Purim table of a righteous friend, and there was also a terminally single person there. A group of drunken guys came in from some yeshiva and started singing and dancing. "Bless me that I'll get married," asked the single guy, and they did. Today he's married, and has a son and daughter (he's even getting divorced soon, but that's not part of this story).

What's the most important think to ask for during the Purim feast? I've seen it, and it's the sweetest thing: ask that your Pesach cleaning go smoothly.

Thirty days prior to a festival we inquire and explore the laws of the festival¹². The *Kav HaYashar* writes: Thirty days before Passover is the Purim feast. Ask God for the strength and joy to do the mitzvah of Pesach cleaning. After the prayers you offer at the Purim meal, you will see with God's help that the Seder night will be one great redemption – for you, your family and the whole neighborhood.

May it be God's will that our leaders gain the power to lead

That the daughters of Israel find the joy that they need

That Israel stop curling up in solitude

That we stick to the path like Mordechai of Jude

That we accomplish our mission – like Esther

And like Charvona, too – he was also there!

Purim Sameach!

Translation: Rabbi David Swidler

¹² P'sachim 6a