4.25. What is the significance of singing Shoshanas Yaakov following Megillah reading?

1. The Megillah tells the story of the salvation of the Jewish people from the hands of Haman. The Torah hints that, many years before, Yaakov Avinu prayed for the Purim salvation when he was about to meet his brother Eisav, Haman’s progenitor. Yaakov prayed, ‘סלאי, אם ארכי, אמי יאר.uk— “Please save me from my brother, from Eisav” (Bereishis 32:12). The first letters of the words סלאי, אם ארכי, אמי יאר.uk spell out the name וית. In other words, when Yaakov Avinu was praying to be saved from Eisav, he was also praying for the salvation of his great-grandchildren from Eisav’s great-grandchild, Haman.

It is for this reason that we sing Shoshanas Yaakov immediately following the reading of the Megillah, which is the miraculous account of our salvation from Haman. We, “Shoshanas Yaakov,” Yaakov’s grandchildren, rejoice together with Yaakov at our salvation.

(Sfeer Tzanei HaHamishigim U’Mekor HaDinim 877)

2. The Shnechun Aruch (Orach Chaim 690:16) requires that on Purim each person say:

ורים, קרבא רכיב, יראמ יראמק סלע, זכרו יאשושן, זכרו סלע, קרובא יראמק, קרובא יראמק סלע, זכרו יאשושן, זכרו סלע, קרובא יראמק, קרובא יראמק סלע.

Cursed is Haman, cursed is Mordechai, cursed is Zeresh, blessed is Esther, cursed are all the idol worshippers, blessed is all of Israel, and Charwnah should also be remembered for good.

Since these phrases were beautifully incorporated into the Shoshanas Yaakov section of the piyyut, liturgical poem, when recited, we recite it immediately following the completion of the Megillah reading, to waste no time in fulfilling this mitzvah.

The following is recited after both Megillah readings.

ן The rose of Jacob was cheerful and glad, when they jointly saw Mordechai robed in royal blue.

ן You have been their eternal salvation, and their hope throughout generations.

ן To make known that all who hope in You will not be shamed; nor ever be humiliated, those taking refuge in You. Accursed be Haman who sought to destroy me, blessed be Mordechai the Yehudi. Accursed be Zeresh the wife of my terrorizer, blessed be Esther Jutoh sacrificed for me — and Charwnah, too, be remembered for good.
In other words, according to the Rambam, a primary role of the institution of Purim—if not the primary role—is to establish and reinforce the principle laid down in the Torah that Hashem is close to the Jewish People when they call out to Him in prayer.

Moreover, the prayers of the Jewish People at that time are commemorated by us in our Purim observance every year! As we know, the Megillah is read twice during the course of Purim—in the night and in the day. However, this actually makes the mitzvah of Megillah reading unlike all the other mitzvos of Purim, which are done only in the day. What is the basis of reading the Megillah at night as well?

Interestingly, the source of this mitzvah is not found in the Megillah, but in Tohilim. The Gemara derives this obligation from the verse:

My God, I call out and You do not answer, and in the night I am not silent.
What does this verse have to do with reading the Megillah at night, or with Purim at all, for that matter? Rashi explains that the verse refers to the fact that the Jewish People were crying out to Hashem day and night to save them from Haman’s decree. Thus, we see that the entire obligation of reading the Megillah at night is to commemorate the prayers of the Jewish People at that time.
בְּכֵלָּה מִכְּלָלָה, שָׁפָרְשׁוּ כְּבֵאלָּה מִכְּלָלָה. שָׁפָרְשׁוּ כְּבֵאלָּה מִכְּלָלָה.
Rabban and Rav Zeira were having the Purim feast together and
they became intoxicated. Ravban then arose and slaughtered Rav
Zeira. The next day, Rabban prayed for mercy on Rav Zeira’s behalf
and revived him. The following year, Rabban asked Rav Zeira, “Let
Master come and we will have the Purim feast together.” Rav Zeira
answered him, “Not every time does a miracle occur.”

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are we to understand this story? Did Rabban
actually kill Rav Zeira? If so, then why did he wait until the following
day to try to revive him? Why not pray for mercy immediately? Also,
how could Rabban have even entertained the possibility that Rav Zeira
would want to join him again the following year for the Purim feast?
There are so many seemingly puzzling pieces to this cryptic story.

A number of commentators explain that this passage in the Gemara is
not to be taken literally. Some propose that Rabban wounded Rav Zeira
very severely, and that the Gemara describes it as a shehitah because of
the seriousness of the wound. Others understand that Rabban
given Rav Zeira too much wine to drink, which caused Rav Zeira
to become deathly ill. One commentary opines that Rabban merely
created a perception or illusion that Rav Zeira was dead, when in fact
he was not.

Whatever the interpretation, however, why does the Gemara use the
terms מתחית (slaughter) and הנייה (revive), which clearly imply that he
actually killed him and then later revived him. What would be the point
of the Gemara using such hyperbole if in fact those words are not to be
taken literally? And, certainly according to those commentators that do
understand this passage in a literal sense, how could the righteous Sage
Rabban, even in a drunken state, ever come to commit such an act?

Perhaps we can try to gain a better perspective on this Talmudic passage
by taking a closer look at what we are meant to be celebrating every year
at the Purim feast. The Mishnah Berurah writes in the name of the Levush
that the reason this is a mitzvah to celebrate on Purim in a physical
manner (with food and drink, in contrast to Chanukah, in which there is
no such obligation to have a feast), is because on Purim there was a
decree that placed the physical lives of the Jewish People in jeopardy,
while Chanukah was more of a spiritual danger and not a physical one.

On Purim, therefore, we are commemorating that the physical lives of
the entire Jewish nation were miraculously spared. Consequently, the
celebration is one of a physical nature.

This physical danger on Purim was, however, much more than just a
risk to the lives of the Jewish People. Rabbi Yaakov m’Lisa writes that
it is noteworthy that in describing the reaction to Haman’s decree, the
Megillah records that Mordechai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth
with ashes. Similarly, the Megillah describes that “there was great
mourning among the Jews...most of them lying in sackcloth and
ashes.” Generally, mourning practices only commence when someone
actually dies, not when there is only a risk to a person’s life. This leads
us to conclude, therefore, says Rabbi Yaakov m’Lisa, that this decree
by Haman against the Jews was more than merely a human decree—it
was actually a death sentence that was already signed and sealed in the
Heavens.
"So that my soul may sing to You"—regarding those times when the obligation to sing to Hashem is evident, i.e., the good times.

"And not be still"—regarding those times for which we may have thought there is no notion of thinking Hashem, i.e., the difficult times.

On that day, Hashem will be One.15

The Gemara asks, "Is Hashem not One even today?" To this, it responds by referring to the different blessings we make over good and bad tidings. The meaning behind this response is that while of course Hashem is One even now, we do not always see how everything He does is directed toward one unified purpose. It is only on "that day" in the future that we will come to understand how He was acting as One throughout world history.

This brings us to Purim, a day that is dedicated to appreciating Hashem's role in directing history and world events. As such, it is certainly appropriate for Purim to focus on this central idea that Hashem is constantly guiding events toward their ultimate purpose. However, there is more to it than that, for Purim is about appreciating those events not from the vantage point of "today," but from the vantage point of "that day".

5. LOOKING FORWARD TO LOOKING BACKWARD

We have previously mentioned that a prominent feature of the Purim story is "n'hafoch hu, seeing how everything Haman tried to do in order to harm us ended up rebounding on him. Anyone witnessing Haman's actions as they occurred in real time would undoubtedly classify them as "bad," yet the miracle of Purim gave us the hindsight with which to appreciate how these actions themselves all contributed to our ultimate salvation and Haman's downfall.

This brings us to a very profound idea. The miracle of Purim did not "just" lead to our deliverance; it also provided us, in hindsight, with a way of viewing our troubles in a fundamentally different way than we may have viewed them at the time. In this respect, the events of the Purim were a model for the way in which all world events will retrospectively be viewed in the future.16

The miracle of Purim and the festival that resulted from it were introduced in order to help get us through the exile. This involves not only providing us with lessons that are crucial to our national survival in the exile itself, but also with a vista from the point of view of the final redemption. There is nothing more empowering for the Jewish People in exile than providing them with a glimpse of what it will look like once they have finally been redeemed.

This vision of "the present from the future" is what we are looking to reconnect with each year on Purim.

However, there is a small problem: we are not in the future. Our current mindset does not allow us to identify every bad event as good, nor is it meant to! Until evil has been eradicated it is essential for us to maintain a clear sense of boundary between good and evil. This begs the question: How does one living with a "today" mindset see things from the vantage point of "tomorrow"?

Enter ad d'al yada.

A mindset cannot impose itself on a mind that isn't there. By drinking on Purim and sending our da'as on a brief vacation, we loosen the grip of our current frame of vision, allowing us to shift into "Feast Forward" model! The mitzvah of ad d'al yada enables us to bridge the gap between the vision of "today" in our present condition and the vision of "that day" in the future. As such, for a brief while on this holy day, we allow ourselves to touch a time when we cannot distinguish between the good that accrued to us from the accrued decree of Haman and that which came from the blessed deeds of Mordechai.

In other words, on Purim we look forward in order to look backward in order to move us forward.

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When we lift up our wine glasses during the Purim seudah and exclaim "L'haim!" we should reflect on the fact that the Jewish People were brought back to life on Purim. While we shouldn't try to reexperience the techiyas hameisim as Rabbah did, we should revive our spirits and souls with songs and praises to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for literally saving us from death to life.

3. THE MEGILLAH READING AS HALLEL

This brings us back to the Megillah reading. According to the opinion of Rav Nachman cited in the Gemara, the festival of Purim carries with it an obligation of reciting Hallel just like other festivals. However, unlike the other festivals, the fulfillment of this mitzvah takes place through the reading of the Megillah. As the commentators point out, reciting Hallel in this form is most appropriate for the day of Purim. Since the miracle it commemorates was concealed in nature, the Hallel itself is also not explicit, but "concealed" within the reading of the Megillah. As we know, the concept of "night" in Jewish thought generally symbolizes a time of danger, while "day" symbolizes a time of salvation. Based on the above discussion, we will appreciate that the idea of reading the Megillah at night as well as in the day represents the obligation to thank Hashem not only for the jubilant times when we were redeemed, but also the trying times when we were under threat of destruction!

The different names of Hashem represent different attributes through which He interacts with the world. The name נ-ה-נ-נ-נ represents the attribute of mercy, while the name ו-ב represents the attribute of justice. Going back to the verse that the Gemara cites as the source for reading the Megillah at night, we read it as follows: