



**BADERECH**

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# Purim: Inner Light

To hear the great *Tzadik*, Reb Shalom Rockeach, *Der Ershter Rov*, the ‘First Rebbe’ of Belz (known also as the *Sar Shalom zy’a*), *lein* the Megillah was an unforgettably uplifting experience. When he was a young man, still an unknown budding student of the Chozeh of Lublin, he was called upon to read the Megillah in the Chozeh’s Beis Medrash of Lublin. Those assembled didn’t recognize the young scholar, but sensed that they experienced something special. At the completion of the *leining*, the Chozeh remarked: “The (Purim) story... I have heard many times, but I’ve never heard it told quite like this.”

Once on Purim night, Reb Elazar, the oldest of the Sar Shalom’s five sons, and Reb Yehoshua, his youngest brother, were stranded far from home. For the first time in their lives, they would miss out on Megillah reading with their

illustrious father, which was replete with Kabalistic intentions, in the spiritually-charged atmosphere of the Beis Medrash in Belz.

Reb Elazar was deeply disappointed that they were stuck at a roadside inn hearing an ordinary *balabus*, a community member, read the Megillah. His younger brother, Reb Yehoshua, who would ultimately become the successor and next Rebbe of Belz, felt differently:

“On the contrary, my dear brother. Each year we hear the Megillah from our righteous father and enjoy his other-worldly *leining*. With every word sweet as honey, I too am swept up by our father’s greatness, and my mind wanders from the story of Mordechai and Esther into the upper spheres of Divine perception. There is so much pleasure in it, but truthfully, I fear that my focus has not been on the basic details or the mitzvah of the Megillah, *per se*.

This year, when we hear the Megillah, I will have no other motivation or *kavannah* than to hear the story, and fulfill the Mitzvah *lishmah*, for its own sake. And I will have to find new meanings and depths in it on my own!

*Megillas Esther* describes how the Jews celebrated upon hearing of Haman’s downfall and the miraculous turnabout of Purim. *LaYehudim hayesa ora v’simcha v’asson v’yikar*, “The Jews experienced light, happiness, joy and honor.” (8:16)

The Gemara in Megillah (16b) explains the four terms in this verse: *ora*, “light” alludes to Torah, *simcha*, “happiness” alludes to Yom

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Tov, *sasson*, “joy”, alludes to Bris Milah, and *yekar*, “honor”, alludes to Tefillin.

However, this explanation seems to miss a basic point in the narrative of the Megillah and the experience of the Jews of Shushan, namely that the *Gezeira* of Achashveirosh and Haman against Am Yisrael had nothing to do with the mitzvos described here! In the Purim story, the goal was clear: *l'harog, l'abeid* — to annihilate us physically, *chas v'Shalom*, regardless of religious observance or Jewish expression.

It was Antiochus, the villain of the Chanukah narrative, who outlawed Milah, Moed and Shabbos. And it was the Roman Era persecution which forced Jews into hiding to ‘illegally’ study Torah. There is no indication in the Megillah that Haman or the Persian authorities interfered with our observance of Mitzvos.

Another *drasha* in the Gemara (Megillah 10b) explains the Haman’s description of the Jews: *Yeshno Am Mefuzar uMefurad*, “There is a people that is spread out and set apart...” *Yeshno*, our Yidishkeit was ‘sleepy’; our mitzvah observance had become stale, lacking *chiyus*, vitality. We were distracted, pulled in all sorts of directions away from what truly mattered.

Reb Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin zy’a offers a moving interpretation: We did learn Torah, but by rote, lifelessly turning pages as if studying a secular text. There was no “light” in our *limud haTorah*. In the days of the Persian exile, Jews kept Shabbos and Yom Tov, but our experience of those exalted, holy days lacked the main ingredient: *simcha*. Even *Bris Milah*, circumcision, became just another lifecycle event, lacking *sasson*, the deep joy of appreciating what our covenant with Hashem means. Wrapping Tefillin day in and day out had become labor-intensive in our eyes, our daily prayers a heavy ‘obligation’.

The miraculous salvation and turnabout of

Purim was a spiritual jolt that woke us out of this state of sleep (*yeshno*). It put the *ora* back in Torah, restored the *simcha* of the Yamim Tovim, and revealed the *sasson* of our Covenant and the “honor” of wearing Tefillin. Mitzvos that were taken for granted and had become perfunctory ‘observations’ were filled with life once again.

May this Purim be one that we experience with attunement to real inner growth and renewal. In the spirit of the Chozev of Lublin, may we say, ‘It’s a celebration that I have enjoyed many times, but I’ve never enjoyed it quite like this.’

Wherever we may be, and from whomever we hear the Megillah, may we listen and internalize the story like never before — *lishmah*. And may Purim and our mitzvah-observances all year round be drenched with this light, happiness, joy and honor! ■

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