

Parshas Tetzaveh 5772

AD D'LO YADA: ASSISTING THE “ASSISTANT”

One of the most familiar of Purim practices is at once one of the most difficult to understand. Sages throughout the centuries have grappled with the issue of *ad d'lo yada*; how could there be an obligation to become inebriated “to the point where one does not know the difference” between “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordechai”? In what way is such conduct in keeping with the sacred nature of the day and the spirit of Torah in general?

Perhaps the exposition below could add some dimension to our understanding and appreciation of this most intoxicating topic.

EVERYONE’S INVITED

At the outset, it is edifying to compare this particular celebratory ritual with the specifics of another well-known festive spectacle. In Temple times, a major event was staged during the Sukkos festival: the *Simchas Beis Hasho'eivah*, an elaborate performance marking the special water-libation offered during the holiday. The festivities were punctuated by decorations of gold, abundant lighting, song, dance and music, as outlined in Tractate Sukkah. The Mishnah (*ibid.* 5:3) mentions the following additional detail:

חסידים ואנשי מעשה היו מרקדים לפניהם באבוקות של אור
שבידיהן, ואומרים לפניהן דברי שירות ותשבחות.

“The pious ones and men of deeds would dance before

them with lighted torches in their hands and recite words of song and praise.”

As the *Even Sheleimah* points out, this arrangement stands in contrast to the Purim celebration. Whereas regarded individuals and men of great stature were singled out in the Sukkos performance, the Purim festivities are the domain of every man. For this reason, the *halachah* uses the generic term when referring to the drinking mandate: מִיִּיב אִינִישׁ לְבִסוּמֵי בְּפוּרֵינָא “A man (i.e., even the common man) is obligated to become drunk on Purim” (*Megillah 7b*).

The fact that *all* individuals are enjoined to participate in the Purim celebrations may account for the seemingly “unorthodox” form that this celebration takes. The idea may be understood in light of a beautiful parable recounted by R’ Asher Weiss, drawing on a real-life story:

“GIVE THIS MAN A DRINK”

There was a certain pious individual who longed to serve his Creator with great fervor and strength. Unfortunately, this person suffered from a form of paralysis, and his legs were completely useless. When Simchas Torah rolled around, he was particularly crestfallen: how he longed to join the circle of dancers and rejoice with the Torah – but alas, he could do no more than observe wistfully from the sidelines.

Suddenly, he had an idea. He turned to his gentile attendant and made the following request: “Please, lift me up on your shoulders and join the celebrations. If

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you do so, I will increase your wages to whatever you wish.”

Acceding to the man’s offer, the attendant proceeded to lift him and sauntered onto the dance floor. But lacking the fervor and conviction of the Jew in his care, the attendant merely swayed dryly back and forth. Disappointed, the man called from above, “You call this ‘dancing’?” But the attendant showed no sign of changing his tempo. “What do you want from me?” he responded.

The crippled man realized that – lacking a true feeling for the essence of Torah – his gentile assistant would be unable to truly capture the spirit of the day’s celebration. But he did not give up just yet, as a realization suddenly

dawned on him. He figured that his end might be achieved if he simply dealt with his companion on his own level. After being returned to his seat, the Jew addressed his attendant with another offer.

“You see that schnapps cabinet over there?” he said to his helper. “Go ahead; help yourself to whatever and however much you want.” The attendant didn’t need much prodding. He proceeded to empty the contents of the cabinet into his insides in relatively short order.

That did the trick. The newly rejuvenated attendant swept up the crippled man, whisked him onto his shoulders and with a spring in his step and warmth in his heart, he joined the festivities with gusto and glee. And while the drunkard below reveled in his own ecstasy, his Jewish charge on his shoulders was on top of the world. He was finally able to participate fully and properly in the Torah celebration, with his heart full of joy and directed toward Heaven.

So, too, is the nature of the Purim celebration. Purim is actually a Simchas Torah of sorts, commemorating the Jews’ newfound acceptance of the Torah from love (*cf. Shabbos 88a*). As such, the time is ripe for forging a joyous connection with Hashem. However, as mentioned above, the Purim festivities are geared to every man. While the extremely righteous are able to achieve spiritual joy with relative ease, the common man finds it somewhat harder to attain. The pressures and shortcomings of the physical trappings prevent us from attaining these spiritual “highs.” And so Chazal proposed the solution: deal with the “helper” on his own level. Through the medium of “spirits,” the physical body can be coaxed into the festivities, freeing one’s inner soul to attain and enjoy spiritual heights (*K’motzei Shalal Rav, pp. 192, 194-5*).